George "Dadie" Rylands

Shakespearean Scholar and Cambridge Legend

Peter Raina

Peter Lang

Just once in a while, actors and performers change the whole way in which they approach the words in their scripts. Such a change happened in the early-to-middle years of the twentieth century; and the person behind it was "Dadie" Rylands. He was a man with an ear acutely attuned to the nuances of poetry, and he insisted that it was the ear and not the eye that mattered most in productions of Shakespeare. It was Rylands who taught an exceptional generation of Shakespearean actors how to speak. Gielgud, Olivier, Ashcroft, Redgrave – all owed their superb diction to him. Moreover, they adored him as a person.

Amazingly for a man with such influence, Rylands was not ensconced in the established Theatre. He taught undergraduates at Cambridge and his own productions were with the amateur Marlowe Dramatic Society there. Nor was his life confined to dramatics and the academic world. He was a fringe member of the Bloomsbury set – firm friends with Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf and John Maynard Keynes, all regular correspondents. And his circle of notable friends stretched to a wider group of literati including Maurice Bowra and T. S. Eliot.
Rylands died, aged 97, in 1999. We no longer have his irrepressible presence, but he left a palpable legacy in gramophone recordings of all Shakespeare's plays in which he directed star-studded casts. Now that legacy is augmented by Peter Raina's study, with its admirable selection of Rylands' marvellously lucid radio talks (hitherto unpublished) and its sampling of the multitude of letters he wrote and received.

Peter Raina read Modern History at St Catherine's College, Oxford. Later he worked on various aspects of British history in Oxford, as Senior Research Associate, the Graduate Centre, Balliol College; Honorary Member of High Table and Member of the Senior Common Room, Christ Church; Associate Member of Nuffield College; Honorary Member of the Senior Common Room, Magdalen College; Visiting Research Scholar, Faculty of History; Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research, School of Advanced Studies, London, and at the Centre of International Studies, Faculty of History, Cambridge. He was granted High Table Dining Privileges at Peterhouse and at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He is a life Member of Clare Hall, Cambridge. His publications include a monumental six volume history of the House of Lords reforms, and classic biographies: *The Seventh Earl Beauchamp: A Victim of His Times*, and *John Sparrow, Warden of All Souls College, Oxford.*

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To
the memory of
MY PARENTS

Nessuno, che veramente è amanto, sará mai morto
Ernest Hemingway

Contents

List of Illustrations

Section A

Preface

The present work is not a full life of George "Dadie" Rylands. Any attempt to accomplish that would entail detailing the minute particulars of his character, and we make no attempt at such an undertaking here. Nor do we intend to mention his faults. That, as Dr Johnson reminds us, must fall to the care of a man's intimate friends. Only those "who live with a man can write his life with any genuine exactness and discrimination," Johnson once told Boswell.

For Rylands, there was such a man in Noel Annan.[1] He and Rylands got to know each other when Annan came up to King's College, Cambridge in 1935 to read History. Annan "became platonically devoted" to Rylands "for the rest of his life". Much later, after the latter's death, Annan wrote a twenty-two-page biographical essay about him. It is a masterpiece.[2] In the essay Annan covers every aspect of Rylands' life: his childhood, his academic career, his work as an actor and producer of plays, and his love affairs with both men and women. Annan appears to have had a deep understanding of his subject in all the phases he went through. He tells us how Dadie imbibed English poetry with his mother's milk and describes how, in 1928, "he began a series of productions that made the Marlowe Society renowned as the nursery where those who were to become famous in the theatre learned to speak Shakespeare's verse". Nor did Dadie confine himself to Shakespeare: he produced and directed plays by George Bernard Shaw and T. S. Eliot, as well as Ancient Greek drama. Annan describes how Dadie brought poetry to a wider audience by holding recitals all over the country: he had "a light resonant voice; he never dramatised or used elocutionary tricks and was always intelligible, taking care never to drop

1 Noel Annan (1916–2000), Provost of King's College, Cambridge, 1956–66, Provost of University College, London, 1966–78.

2 Noel Annan, "The Don as Performer – George Rylands" in *The Dons. Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 170–92.

the voice at the end of a sentence". Dadie also gave lectures. These, "though packed with material, were original in their effect, their delivery and their arrangement rather than in the argument itself or the method of analysis". Dadie was "not a great orator: he did not move well; but he had a stage presence and he could hold an audience by his voice alone."

It was Dadie's mother, Annan tells us, who "possessed his soul". She "disciplined him strictly" and "spoilt him by encouraging his waywardness". Between the two "there arose strong emotions of love and hate",[3] for, ever after, between "him and his desires came the curse of his mother".[4] Rylands' life, Annan asserts, "was tragic. Guilt denied him any happiness or love that he might have found in his sexual encounters. Drink alone released him from this sense of guilt, but when it operated it released other evil potencies which ran like rats among his guests. He became quarrelsome, pettish and jealous [...], he used his tongue as his mother had taught him, to sting those about him."[5] Rylands "did not believe that sex and love were compatible. He would deny that affectionate, trusting, adoring married couples really experienced sexual love. [...] He fell in love only three times and suffered much; and he was so racked by guilt and a sense of physical shame he sometimes became impotent. He identified sex with lust, not love, with danger and with frenzy. Someone who went to bed with him described it as "like being in a rugger scrum".[6] Yet, no matter how miserable Dadie's sexual life may have been, his troubles do not seem to have affected his literary scholarship. His private life lies outside the sphere of our study. Whether he liked men more than women, or whether he fell in love with men alone does not concern us. We have not even felt any need to investigate what Virginia Woolf observed when she first met Rylands: "Dady" [*sic*], she wrote, "has an ingratiating manner of pawing ladies old enough to be his mother."[7]

3 *Ibid*., p. 181.
4 *Ibid*., p. 182.
5 *Ibid*., p. 182.
6 *Ibid*., p. 182–3.
7 Entry 11 September 1923. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Anne Olivier Bell, assisted by Andrew McNeillie. Volume II: 1920–1924 (The Hogarth Press: London, 1978), p. 268.

Our main intention is to draw a portrait of a great Shakespearean scholar. This we have attempted to do through the medium of Rylands' BBC talks, his essays, and his books. Whatever is "peculiarly solemn" in their contents increases the insights we get into his mind. We have reproduced letters to Dadie Rylands from distinguished men and women, all of whom conveyed not only their affection and devotion, but also acknowledged the rich contribution Rylands made both to Shakespearean literature and to practical performance in the British theatre.

George Rylands was already relishing the beauty of Shakespeare's plays while he was at Eton College, where he was also trained in public speaking. He won College prizes for acting and for rhetoric. When he came up to King's College, Cambridge, he first read Classics, but then switched to English Literature, in which he was tutored by the well known Cambridge classicist Frank Lucas. Lucas instilled a love of English poetry in Rylands, who became obsessed with Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson. Later, when he read *The Wasteland*, he developed an equal admiration for T. S. Eliot. Rylands wrote his own poems too, first in blank verse, then in rhyme. But theatre became his greatest passion, and he involved himself passionately in the Cambridge Marlowe Dramatic Society, and performed in several of the plays it put on. Primarily he acted in female roles. His voice was melodious, and fascinated the audiences. Among those who took a fancy to Rylands was Lytton Strachey. This led to a very close friendship and deep affection between the two. Strachey introduced Rylands to the Bloomsbury group, and he got to know Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, Duncan Grant, and Vanessa Bell. These Bloomsbury figures were to become lifelong friends.

Early on, Rylands realized that his talent lay not in writing his own poems, but in interpreting the works of the great poets before him. He established himself as a remarkable critic, especially in expounding the meaning of Shakespeare's works. In 1928 he published his major study *Words and Poetry*. Here he discussed "word values" and "ornament" in poetry. Poetry, he argued, was not written with ideas, but written with words. He noted three special features it possessed. Simplicity was the key one – poetry should be direct. The next to be prized was brevity – poetry had wit as its soul, with metre lending grace. The third feature was thought, with similes

and metaphors beautifying the language. Rylands illustrated his thesis with ample citations of Shakespeare's diction and style.

Rylands elaborated further in a series of lectures aired on the BBC. Speaking on *Shakespeare and His England*, he maintained that Shakespeare was not a philosopher, not a politician, not a sectarian; rather a man who espoused tolerance, sympathy, and humour. And in *Shakespeare Yesterday and Today*, Rylands observed how the task and method of acting had changed. Acting should be more true to the original; above all it should be "better spoken": "Speak the Speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you." As an illustration of the art of acting Shakespeare, Rylands talked at length with John Gielgud on the radio. And, reviewing a performance of *Othello* in 1930, he complained: "the phrasing was slurred; the poetry disappeared." The dramatist must borrow "our ears"; as an artist, his "pigments and clay are flesh and blood, his instrument the human voice".

In 1939 Rylands brought out an anthology of Shakespeare's works: *Image of Man and Nature*. The anthology uses passages of Shakespeare to mirror how we react to the various circumstances of life, and the general passions by which all minds are agitated. Rylands explores the idiom, the rhythms, even single words of Shakespeare's language. His stress is on two elements: the thing said and the way in which it is said. He is interested not so much in the forms of the verse and prose, but in the content and the style. He highlights the sheer poetic energy in Shakespeare: figurative language, flights of imagination, and rollercoasters of dramatic effect all need to be noted and absorbed.

Rylands himself enjoyed directing plays. He soon showed how remarkable a director he could be. The Theatre world sought his advice. Celebrities like Peggy Ashcroft, John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, and Michael Redgrave often wrote asking him to help them. For the outstanding contribution Rylands made to the arts he was appointed CBE in 1961 and Companion of Honour in 1987.

The close friendships Rylands maintained with an enormous number of distinguished men and women were ties he cherished. He admired these talented friends, and they admired and loved him back. The letters Rylands received are most enchanting. Peggy Ashcroft wrote:

> When the actors drive you mad,
> Darling Dadie don' t be sad.

Maurice Bowra confided in him. T. S. Eliot expressed thanks "for your review which seems to be excellent. In some ways it is like your poetry." John Gielgud wrote:

> I must tell you, by the way how enormously I admired your anthology. ... I am doing a lecture which includes many of the quotations which you have. Also I hope one day to have the pleasure of seeing a Shakespeare production of yours. I hear *Macbeth* was magnificent. Perhaps we may work on one of the plays together.

Peter Hall replied to a message: "Your letter is one to treasure, thank you so much." A couple of months before his death, Maynard Keynes sent a touching goodbye: "Farewell dear child ... minion of the Muses." Vivien Leigh wrote: "Dearest Dadie, your letter touched and encouraged me more than I can tell, thank you." Also in a reply, W. Somerset Maugham exclaimed: "Your letter was a most joyful surprise ...". Laurence Olivier confided:

> I have *never* been clear about the pronunciation of Latin in Shakespeare and as I am about to launch *Love's Labour* I had better know what I am about in this particular ingredient. Is it 'old' or is it 'new'? For instance for: *veni*, *vidi*, *vici*.

After a reunion, Michael Redgrave wrote to say: "I couldn't let a day go by without letting you know how happy I was to meet you again, and how grateful." Lytton Strachey's letters indicate the warmth of his particular friendship with Rylands – we have reproduced 110 of these in the present study. Virginia Woolf was a correspondent too, on one occasion writing:

> I suppose you are writing a novel and a poem and carrying on a vast complicated [mass] of affairs. I go on plodding with my poor nose to the grindstone. So please come and be charming to your poor drudge.

George Rylands was a charming host: "Thank you so much for your enchanting hospitality," declared Maurice Bowra. Rylands was also a delightful guest. Somerset Maugham, whom Rylands often visited, tells us that he belonged to the guests:

> who are happy just to be with you, who seek to please, who have resources of their own, who amuse you, whose conversation is delightful, whose interests are varied, who exhilarate and excite you, who in short give you more than you can ever hope to give them and whose visits are only too brief.[8]

Such a guest was George Rylands.

Rylands was a brilliant scholar, generous, and devoid of envy. He was sensitive but displayed perfect frankness in his contacts with people. He was endearing to everyone he met, and always good company. When he celebrated his ninetieth birthday, he received more than a hundred letters and cables congratulating him. He reached the ripe old age of 97, and retained his charm and composure till the very end.

Samuel Johnson maintained that "if a man is to write *A Panegyrick*, he may keep vices out of sight; but if he professes to write *A Life*, he must represent it really as it was." Perhaps the following pages will show what he means.

Peter Raina

8 W. Somerset Maugham, *The Vagrant Mood* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952), pp. 217–18.

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There has been a copyright problem with regard to three authors. No one knows who owns Peggy Ashcroft's copyright. I have consulted the testament (probate registry) – there is nothing in there. I have tried to locate Ashcroft's son and granddaughter in Canada – no response. I tried to contact two other granddaughters in Paris (one a singer, the other a journalist), contacting them through their agents, who forwarded my request – again no response.

With Michael Redgrave the situation is similar. I attempted to contact Vanessa Redgrave through her agents several times and the request was forwarded to her, but there has been no response.

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CHAPTER 1

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.

These are opening lines of a passage in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It.* The passage was chosen by George Rylands himself to be recited at his funeral service. And indeed Rylands did play "many parts" in his life: as a Shakespearean scholar, poet, essayist, college tutor and theatre director.

Neither business nor politics ran in George Rylands' family, although his paternal grandfather had been a Lancashire manufacturer and a Liberal MP. His father Thomas Kirkland Rylands, was a land agent in Gloucestershire; his mother, Bertha Nisbet Wolferstan, was the daughter of a Marlborough College housemaster, named Thomas. He was born on 23 October 1902 at the Down House, Trockington, Gloucestershire and was christened George Humphrey Wolferstan.

He received his primary education at the preparatory school in Durnford,[1] where he soon showed his precocious mental qualities. He learned the art of declaiming, but as a child he mispronounced "baby" as "Dadie", thus earning his affectionate nickname – throughout his life his

1 Later, in an interview, George Rylands recollected that he "was taught first at home, by a village schoolmistress – a very gifted woman. At eight I was sent to Dorset, where my mother's sister and her husband had started a preparatory school. My uncle had been a master at Marlborough, and the prep school they set up became very successful. They had a daughter who was two years older than I and, being a girl, much more advanced. We were deeply devoted to one another and my education owed much to her – and my happiness. As you know, she became a famous historical novelist and biographer: Hester Chapman." Shusha Guppy (interviewer), "Recollections: George Rylands", *The Paris Review*, No.108, 1988.

friends addressed him as "Dadie". After finishing at preparatory school, he sat for the unique College Foundation Scholarships at Eton, which are limited to seventy candidates. Successful entrants via these scholarships are distinguished as King's Scholars, called Collegers, and are entitled to a reduction in fees and the privilege of living in the College buildings. George won his scholarship, and joined the school in the Lent Half of 1916, remaining at Eton till the Michaelmas Half of 1920. In 1916 Dr Lyttelton was still the headmaster, but a year later he was succeeded by Dr Alington. George's tutor was Aymer William Whitworth. The Great War was in its second year, which created various problems for the school: the feeding was poor, and almost twenty masters were serving at the front, of whom four had been killed. The replacement of the absentee masters created further problems. The school curriculum underwent a few changes, especially in the instruction of classical languages. Latin had to be dropped for a while, but Greek was kept up. Nevertheless, Dr Alington felt that the boys should receive a balanced education. Those boys who had no scientific or mathematical inclinations should be taught only rudimentary principles, as it would be folly to force a scientific and mathematical bent on boys who showed literary and linguistic proclivities. Dr Alington put an emphasis on the art of essay-writing and encouraged extensive reading of literature to instil a sense of correct English. A total of seven or eight hours a week should be spent in reading a good amount of prose and poetry. And for those boys who displayed literary interests, the reading of history was compulsory. It had "the additional advantage of lending itself to instruction in the art of writing clear, grammatical English and arranging facts and ideas in their proper sequence".[2] Alington encouraged his boys to learn poetry by heart. In 1908 he had published an entertaining anthology *Poets in Pupil Room Poetry*. Acting on the stage became an important part of the school's recreational activities. Performing in Shakespeare's plays and in French drama gave much literary and linguistic stimulus to the boys.[3] Alington frequently preached at the end of evensong: his melodious voice

2 L. S. R. Byrne & E. L. Churchill, Changing Eton: A Survey of Conditions based on *History of Eton since the Royal Commission of 1862–64* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 121.

3 *Ibid*., p. 104.

and "theatrical tricks" impressed the pupils greatly.[4] He and his wife Hester kept open house, where both the housemasters and the pupils were affectionately welcomed. Alington knew many boys very well, was kind to them and won their confidence. He took an especial interest in George Rylands when he learned that Rylands' mother was the daughter of a Marlborough housemaster. Alington had been a scholar at Marlborough.

It seems that George made the best of the reforms advanced by Dr Alington. Not only did he master the ancient languages but he began to acquire a thorough facility in using English. George came to love Shakespeare. And it was in Shakespeare's dramas that he acted on the stage – very happily. Here is a fragment recorded in *Eton College Chronicle*:[5]

> The performance of "Twelfth Night", given by the Collegers in College Hall on the 15th, 16th and 17th, was a bold effort crowned by an unqualified success. [...] the female characters [...] were probably very much like those of a troupe of Shakespeare's day. All three of those female characters were admirably taken. Upon Viola fell the chief burden, and Rylands' comprehension of the part seemed really to be complete. His singularly sympathetic voice (in spite of situations which might have induced the fault) never became too plaintive, and always managed to give the sense of bewilderment. Much more might be said of him, but there is no room to say it. [...]

George was awarded the Loder Declamation Prize twice. The prize was set up by Gerald W. Loder and was awarded for declamation, education and reading. Loder outlined his aims for the prize in a letter to the College, stating that his aim was to encourage talent in public speaking. The prize was divided, so that there was a Fifth Form and a Sixth Form prize. In 1919 Rylands won the first, and in 1920 the second. In 1919 he also won the Strafford Shakespeare Medal. The donor of the medal was George Steven Byng (1806–1886), later Earl of Strafford. Byng had not been to Eton himself, but his sons had been Etonians, and the endowment deed had stated that he was founding the prize "out of regard toward the said College [...] and desiring to promote the study in the said College of the works of Shakespeare". On 26 July 1880, on receipt of his his letter of

4 See "Doctor Alington" in Tim Card, *Eton Renewed: A History from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: John Murray, 1994), pp. 146–9.

5 *Eton College Chronicle*, No. 1739, Thursday July 22, 1920, pp. 855–6.

offer, it had been "unanimously resolved that the Governing Body gratefully accept the liberal proposal of Lord Strafford to found a Shakespeare Prize for Eton".[6]

The most popular Eton games included football, cricket and boating. All boys took part in these games except those exempted on medical grounds. George enjoyed playing the Wall Game, which is unique to Eton. It is a game played on a strip of ground five or six yards wide, bounded on one side by a high brick wall. The wall extends from Weston's to Fifteen Arch Bridge, and serves as a boundary between the Slough Road and College Field, hence the name Wall Game (or Wall Football). The game is normally confined to the Collegers, but on St. Andrew's Day the Oppidans[7] join the contest. The *Eton College Chronicle* registers one such event:[8]

> St. Andrew's Day
>
> Programme of the Day
>
> Collegers v. Oppidans 12:30 pm
>
> The task for a prophet of the result of to-day's match is rendered even more difficult by the exact correspondence of the results of practice matches played by each side: the Collegers have won three matches, drawn two and lost one; each side, incidently, has scored one goal in a match. College, with a greater number of old choices, have been an unaccountably long time in finding their form, but have shown a somewhat reassuring improvement lately; this remark applies equally to the Oppidans, whose three victories have been won in the last three matches played. Hence the prospect of a more than usually even game seems to be offered, and spectators may look confidently forward to witnessing a well-contested match.
>
> Collegers
>
> [...]
>
> G. H. W. Rylands, 11st. 6lb. (2nd second), Big for a second, but extraordinarily tenacious: must remember not to lie back too much.[9]

6 Courtesy of Joshua Insley, Interim Archivist, Eton College.
7 Boys at Eton who are not Collegers are described as Oppidans.
8 *Eton College Chronicle*, No. 1752, Tuesday, November 30, 1920, p. 925.
9 *Eton College Chronicle*, *Ibid*., p. 925.

George played in another match at the Wall: College versus Mr W. G. Tatham's XI. This game was played on the day after Long Leave. College walls "were not quite as alarming as usual, perhaps owing to the ill effects of leave. *Rylands* was a very tenacious second, but he should learn not to lie back so much, and to go in more with his head".[10] George was later congratulated on receiving his "College Wall".[11] In his last year at Eton, George tried his hand at writing a play, *Pitch and Toss*, a love episode between a boy and a girl. It is a sketch, incomplete (three sheets), and incompetently done, indeed almost incomprehensible.[12] George never tried to write a play again, perhaps realizing that he was no good at it. His interests lay elsewhere.

George left Eton in 1920 and went up to King's College Cambridge in 1921 to read Classics, but he switched courses to read English in 1922. F. L. Lucas, who had just joined the College, was appointed his English tutor. Frank Laurence Lucas (1894–1967) had read for the Classical Tripos at Trinity College, Cambridge, and after serving in the war, was elected to a Fellowship at King's as a Classics lecturer in October 1920. A year later, in 1921 he took to teaching for the English Tripos. Rylands was one of his first students. Lucas subsequently became a versatile author: English classical scholar, literary critic, poet, novelist, and playwright. His literary interests ranged from the ancients, Aristotle and Euripides, to the modern – Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekov. He is also remembered today for the scathing review he gave to T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1923). Eliot called Lucas "the perfect annotator".

Lucas tutored George for nearly three years. This must certainly have disposed the young man's mind into one that appreciated literature. Here at Cambridge strong emotions arose, and George began to write and publish his own first poems. He was keenly aware of the beauty of nature and valued

10 *Eton College Chronicle*, *Ibid*., p. 928.

11 *Eton College Chronicle*, *Ibid*., p. 927. George was not entirely happy at Eton. "It was not," he remembers, "a happy period, being during the First World War, and in college we were rather starved and ill. Then my older brother was killed flying, just before the war ended, which broke my mother's heart. But I was wonderfully taught, particularly by George Lyttleton, who was absolutely marvellous. He taught me all I know about English literature, and I loved him. He found an eager response in me." Shusha Guppy, *op. cit.*

12 Reproduced in facsimile. See under "illustrations".

aesthetic qualities. He was also, by his own admission, obsessed by Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, and T. S. Eliot. And, having been "put through the old discipline of Latin and Greek verse composition", he recognized, that "trochees, spondees, anapaests – classical metres and their English imitations and equivalents – buzz like bees in my bonnet".[13] They did indeed buzz. His two poems published in 1923 in the American periodical *The Living Age* testify to this state of mind. The first poem, "Time", is in blank verse. It depicts George's early days in beautiful Cambridge, perhaps even his solitary moods – for instance in: "The mind and sun play fast and loose with time", and in "Spring days that gleam through rain; midsummer days / And days of sorrow that go slow; long days".

Time[14]

There are days long and short, days without ending,
Days that die middle-aged and days stillborn,
The mind and sun play fast and loose with time,
Bringing their seasons on. They vary and move
In harmony or rivalry. Each hour
Is measured out for man on these two dials.

There are days long and short: December days
That are but a watch in the night – and then are gone;
Spring days that gleam through rain; midsummer days
And days of sorrow that go slow; long days
Of friendly laughter and sea-voyaging,
And love's short days tumbling on one another;
Days that are snatched from the hand; days that lie cold.
All days are measured out by sun and mind.

Another poem, a little longer, bears the title: "Midsummer".[15] The verse is written in rhyme; and there are traces of both assonance and dissonance.

13 See George Rylands, *Shakespeare: A Personal Experience*. BBC talk transmitted on 8 October 1967. Printed below.

14 George Rylands, "Time", *The Living Age* (1897–1941), vol. 318, 25 August 1923, p. 378.

15 George Rylands, "Midsummer", *Ibid*., vol. 319, 29 December 1923, p. 624.

Along the sun-baked undercliff
The white bloom of the blackberry blows:
The sea shimmers: a salt sea whiff
Hangs between the high hedgerows.

The lane climbs up from yellow sand
Through fields of yellowing corn: but steep
The honeysuckle hedges stand.
We tunnel through a world asleep,
Winding a narrow way, until
A wave of sweet, hay-scented air
Breathlessly lands us on the hill.

Never stood such a lovesick pair
In such a place: love never yet
Paid pleasure such small recompense.
On a March morning here we met
Three months ago; and three months hence
On a September evening we
Shall part with but one glance of pain.

Within the foxglove bell the bee
Noisily honey-hunts. Up the lane
Flashes a dragon fly. Too soon
The hours rest even in the scale
And forenoon tilts to afternoon;
Pale evening weighs down morning pale.

The twelve strokes of the midday chime
Ring through the silence of my brain;
And folded on the dial of Time
The hands point heavenward again.
High at the zenith burns the sun,
Deep at the nadir night lies drown'd:
And half the course of love is run:
Midsummer passes without sound.

I turned a bend and came on you
In this same lane three months ago,
Suspended in a gulf of blue:
Ocean and Heaven planned it so.

Three months hence, when we hear the hum
Of threshing up the combe and see
Across the stubble gleaners come,
Let us part gladly, silently,
And standing in the autumn haze
Let fall the gathered sheaf of hours,
And children after long, bright days
Turn home and scatter drooping flowers.

Theatre became George's passion. In 1921 he performed as Electra in *The Oresteia*. His undergraduate years were devoted not only to the study of English literature, but in abundant time spent with the Cambridge Marlowe Dramatic Society, founded in 1907 by Justin Brooke and his fellow students. The Society's namesake Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), poet, playwright, and translator of the Elizabethan era, had been overshadowed by his contemporary Shakespeare. The Cambridge Society aimed at vindicating Marlowe. The objects of the Society were to:

present Christopher Marlowe in his true light as a great poet and playwright, the innovator of blank verse drama;

encourage the performance of his plays;

discuss and study Elizabethan and Jacobean literature with particular attention to Marlowe's place in it;

publish historically valid information about him based on research.

In the early years the peculiarity of the Cambridge theatre lay in the female roles played by men. Here George Rylands excelled; his melodious voice fascinated the audience.[16]

In 1924 George graduated with a starred first. He left Cambridge to work in London at the Hogarth Press, which was owned by Virginia and Leonard Woolf. George had come to know them when he joined the Bloomsbury group.

16 And yet George had other worries. He "had got into the usual deep waters as an undergraduate", and although his godfather, the Earl of Moray had left him £150 in his will, "which was wonderful, because it enabled me to pay off my debts", George was still obliged to sell his Eton gold Shakespeare medal.

CHAPTER 2

THE BLOOMSBURY EFFECT

George was very good looking. His thick canary-coloured hair, deep blue eyes, and "pussy-cat smile" captivated many hearts. This corporal beauty, enriched with mental qualities, invited first the attention and then the affection of a man who himself appreciated aesthetic accomplishments. Lytton Strachey belonged to the intellectual elite at Cambridge. This elite was grouped in a set that became famous as The Apostles (originally founded as the Cambridge Conversazione Society in 1820 by George Tomlinson, a Trinity man, who later became the Bishop of Gibraltar). Both the proceedings and the names of the members of the society were secret. Election to The Apostles was for life. Every Apostle (whether undergraduate or don) was obliged to attend every meeting when he was resident in Cambridge. He could be released from this obligation by "undergoing the ceremony that came to be called 'taking wings', after which the Apostle became an 'angel' and was free to come to meetings whenever he liked. The introduction ceremony was called 'birth', and the new member's sponsor sometimes referred to as his 'father'. The Apostles were a typical undergraduate debating club and typically silly. This group was distinguished from all other such societies by the outstanding intellectual capacities of its members. Tennyson and Hallam were among the Society's most celebrated members."[1]There were seventy-two members elected in the 1920s. The society was "militantly non-Christian". Yet of the first twelve members of 1820, nine took holy orders. The members of the Society were mainly from Trinity College, but later King's College men were elected to it. At the beginning, the members mostly came either from

1 For more on the Apostles see Paul Levy, *Moore: G. E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979).

the British aristocracy or from the upper middle class. Later men from sophisticated bourgeois families were recruited. The Apostolic debates were held on Saturday evenings. The members had to be sincere in their relations, and the discussion rational and dialectical. Henry Sidgwick, the Cambridge philosopher, elected in 1856, wrote later in his memoirs that the members were guided by "the spirit of the pursuit of truth with absolute devotion". They were "perfectly frank with each other, and indulged in any amount of humorous sarcasm and playful banter, and yet each respect[ed] the other".[2] Oscar Browning described it as "a cultivated society devoted to intellectual aims, respecting each other and themselves, courteous, affectionate, and dignified".[3] The members called each other "Brothers".[4]

A wide variety of themes was discussed at the meetings. For instances A. N. Whitehead read twelve papers which formed the basis of his classic *Principia Mathematica*. J. McTaggart read a paper on "Violets or Orange Blossom", a defence of homosexual love. He was regarded as the "pope" of the Apostles. Roger Fry talked on "Must a Picture be Intelligible?". G. E. Moore's papers on aesthetic questions gave birth to his classic *Principia Ethica*. Other prominent members who read papers were: Bertrand Russell, G. M. Trevelyan, E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, and J. M. Keynes.

George Rylands was not yet an Apostle. But he and Lytton Strachey became lovers. Strachey introduced George to the Bloomsbury group. What was this group like? An insider has preserved a full picture for us.[5] Its origin goes back to the Midnight Society, one of the student societies in Cambridge, where Thoby Stephen and Clive Bell, Trinity men, became friends with other Trinity men, Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey and Saxon Sydney Turner during the autumn of 1899. Thoby Stephen was the eldest son of the Cambridge don, Leslie Stephen. Thoby had a brother, Adrian

2 Quoted in *Ibid*., p. 75.

3 *Ibid*., p. 78.

4 Virginia Woolf, a woman and not a Trinity or King's "man", and thus not fit to be an Apostle, observed that the Apostles were: "the society of equals enjoying each other's foibles, criticising each other's characters, and questioning everything with complete freedom [...]".

5 Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968).

and two sisters, Vanessa and Virginia. The family lived in London at Hyde Park Gate. When Leslie Stephen died in 1904 the children moved to 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. "We were left orphans in a sea of half-brothers [...]," Virginia Woolf explained to Ethel Smyth on 6 July 1930.[6]

Thoby Stephen now often felt free to invite his Cambridge friends to his London home in Bloomsbury. The Cambridge men found the whole atmosphere at Bloomsbury casual and free. The guests were astonished at how openly the Stephen girls discussed any topic. The girls were in revolt against parental influence. The young men "found to their amazement that they could be shocked by the boldness and scepticism of two young women". Now orphans, Vanessa and Virginia were escaping from an "extremely depressing Victorian home". In this "uncontrolled, unchaperoned environment", Thoby's friends "might continue the conversations that had begun in Cambridge". Among the Bloomsbury group's original members were: Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, Duncan Grant, E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, and Maynard Keynes. More joined later. There were no "membership" rules. One friend simply introduced another friend to the group. This new friend would happen to be a member of the "intellectual aristocracy" of Cambridge. The members usually met every Thursday evening. Again there was no fixed date. They would read their memoirs aloud and clearly. The proceedings were guided by one principle: it was necessary that a high degree of confident intimacy should prevail amongst them. The "need was for honesty and a new charity in personal relations". Bloomsbury provided this.

Quentin Bell summarizes the character of Bloomsbury:[7]

> [...] Despite tremendous differences of opinion, it talked. Indeed it did more, it talked on the whole reasonably, it talked as friends may talk together, with all the licence and all the affection of friendship. It believed, in fact, in pacific and rational discussion. [...] The peculiar thing about Bloomsbury was the nature of its dialectic. [...] It was absolutely necessary, if charity were to survive in the world, that reason should be continually awake. [...]

6 *A Reflection of the Other Person. The Letters of Virginia Woolf.* Vol. IV: 1929–1931. Editor: Nigel Nicolson. Assistant Editor: Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 185.

7 Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury, op. cit.,* pp. 103–118.

Quentin Bell quotes Keynes, who claimed: "We repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men." He also cites E. M. Forster's saying that one should be "conscious, deeply conscious of the dark irrational side of life but absolutely convinced of the necessity of holding fast to reason, charity and good sense". "Bloomsbury writing and Bloomsbury politics," Bell writes, were of a peaceful disposition, "even when not pacifist". The group "was by no means unconscious of violence, but it reacted against it either by deliberately avoiding it, or by criticism and mockery, or by trying to find a formula to contain it."

> [Bloomsbury] painters shrink from violence. Roger Fry attempts to explain art in other terms; for him violence was something stupid and irrational, a means to pain when clearly pleasure is the end of life. Lytton Strachey and Maynard Keynes both fight it with ridicule, Clive Bell veers between ridicule and evasion, Virginia Woolf finds its origin in the relationship of the sexes and seeks its cure in their fusion. All turn to reason as the one possible guide in human affairs precisely because the forces of violence lie within even the best intentioned men.

"We did not hesitate to talk of anything," remembered Vanessa Bell, "that was literally true." And Quentin Bell continues:[8]

> You could say what you liked about art, sex, or religion; you could also talk freely and very likely dully about the ordinary things of life. [...] it is my impression that Bloomsbury was never promiscuous either in its normal or its homosexual relationships. By modern standards it was restrained in its language and romantic in its attachments. Carnal adventures were justified only by passion, although passion was licence enough. [... The group] shared a taste for discussion in pursuit of truth and a contempt for conventional ways of thinking and feeling, contempt for conventional morals if you will. [...] Women were on a completely equal footing with men. In this sense Bloomsbury was feminist.

Nevertheless, a different view of Bloomsbury was sometimes expressed by those who were not members of the group, but who came as guests. Lord David Cecil conceded that "most of Bloomsbury was cultivated and sensitive", but he did not think "it was exactly poetical, It was a very

8 *Ibid*., pp. 41–42.

solid group and, when I first went to a party there, I was very much aware of this. I don't think it is at all true to call them affected. It was like any close group – it had its mannerisms of voice and phrasing. They had a rather breathless way of talking, and a very solemn face. This was a little alarming. When they shook hands they didn't smile, they just handed the hand. And if you didn't know them, this grave and this limp handshake were not welcoming."[9]

F. L. Lucas took an even more critical view. To him Bloomsbury seemed like a "jungle". The "Society of Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Duncan Grant, Clive and Vanessa Bell, and Lytton Strachey was far from being in the ordinary sense a happy family. They were intensely and rudely critical of each other. They were a sort of people who would read letters addressed to others. They tormented each other with endless love affairs. In real crises they could be generous, but in ordinary affairs of life they were anything but kind [...]."[10] D. H. Lawrence felt equally disgusted: "I feel I should go mad when I think of your set", he wrote to David Grant on 19 April 1915. It "makes me dream of beetles. ... you must leave these beetles.[11] [...] I will not have people like this – I had rather be alone. They made me dream in the night of a beetle that bites like a scorpion [...]. It is enough to drive one frantic. [...] sometimes I think I can't stand England any more".[12] Edith Sitwell regarded Bloomsbury as a "camp". During her time, she wrote, there were several camps in English intellectual society. On the one side there was "the bottle-wielding school of thought to which I could not, owing to my sex, upbringing, tastes, and lack of muscle, belong. On another side was the society of Bloomsbury, the home of an echoing silence. This section of

9 David Cecil, in an interview in the BBC Television film "A Night's Darkness. A Day's Sail". Quoted in: *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Joan Russell Noble (London: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 153–4.

10 Quoted in: Wilfred Stone, "Some Bloomsbury Interviews and Memories", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1997, p. 190.

11 Quoted in: Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994). p. 76.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 333.

society was described to me by Gertrude Stein as 'the Young Men's Christian association – with Christ left out, of course'."[13]

All this criticism infuriated Virginia Woolf – and especially accusations of snobbery and of being a clique. It was unjust, she remarked. Bloomsbury had contributed greatly to English society. She herself had done her best through her books to "reach a far wider circle than a little private circle of exquisite and cultivated people. And to some extent I succeeded. Leonard [Woolf] too is Bloomsbury. He spent all his life in writing books like *International Government* etc., Maynard Keynes is Bloomsbury. He wrote *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Lytton Strachey was Bloomsbury. His books had a very large circulation and certainly influenced a wider circle than any small group. These are facts about Bloomsbury and they seem to me to prove that they have done their very best to make humanity in the mass appreciate what they knew and saw."[14]

George Rylands visited the Bloomsbury set frequently after he had been introduced to the group by Strachey. He was very fond of the Woolfs and and Clive Bell's family, and they reciprocated this fondness. An absolute passion for aesthetics seems to have bound them together. But this did not shut out passion for pleasure. There was, Rylands recollects, "a frenzied kind of excitement and relief from everything" at the end of the First World War. Fancy-dress parties were arranged at Bloomsbury. There "were charades, and people wrote plays for them. They went on absolutely all night, and were very enjoyable."[15] Rylands later regretted that more "nonsense" had been "talked about that maligned and misunderstood group, than about anything in this century. My friendship with Leonard and Virginia Woolf, with Maynard Keynes and with Lytton Strachey and his sisters, was more valuable to me than anything else in my life."[16]

13 Edith Sitwell, *Taken Care of: an autobiography* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1965), pp. 81–2.

14 Virginia Woolf to Benedict Nicolson, 24 August 1940. *Leave Letters Till We're Dead. The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Vol.* VI: 1936–1941. Editor: Nigel Nicolson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), p. 420.

15 George Rylands in an interview in the BBC Television film "A Night's Darkness. A Day's Sail". Quoted in: *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Joan Russell Noble (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 171.

16 Quoted in: Margaret Ingram, "Literature and Life", *Varsity*, 2 November 1957, p. 9.

CHAPTER 3

A DIALOGUE ON POETRY

George joined the Hogarth Press on 2 July 1924. Earlier in the year Virginia Woolf had invited him to her home to discuss his work. "Dear Dadie," she wrote,[1] "Yes, we are hoping you will come on Saturday, Oct 6th. Is there anybody (within reason) you want to meet? [...] I don't agree with you about Tom Eliot, and I'm sure I'm right; but this we will argue. [...] Leonard is quite ready to buy you a press at any moment. Bring, I need not say, no clothes, except perhaps the cornflour suit." Again in January she wrote that she and her husband had "just come back here, [to Hogarth House, Richmond], after suffering a good deal in the country. [...] We have now some Russian stories, which perhaps you'd like to see. Will you be able to come here and stay the night, or weekend on your way to Cambridge? There is a good deal to discuss. We have some new ideas about domestic arrangements."[2] On 14 April Virginia scrawled another note asking Rylands to suggest "any time to come when you're in London. we're very anxious to show you everything and so on. [...] Did you get a MS by a Trinity or Kings man called Thompson,[3] sent for your opinion to Kings about a week ago?"[4]

On 21 May 1924 Virginia could report to her friend Vita Sackville-West with satisfaction that "We are trying to start young Mr Rylands on his career as a publisher with some good books [...]. He is very keen, and would

1 Virginia Woolf to George Rylands, 30 September 1923. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf.* Volume III: 1923–1928. Editor: Nigel Nicolson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 71.

2 *Ibid*., p. 82.

3 Edward Thompson's *The Other Side of the Medal* was published by the Hogarth Press in November 1925.

4 See *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Wool, op. cit*, p. 97–8.

do his best [...]."[5] Virginia then informed Lady Ottoline Morrell: "Dadie has arrived, very charming, but with no knowledge, naturally, of how to write a bill."[6] But then "We have now undertaken so many responsibilities – Daddie Rylands, a corn-coloured youth, is one of them; and another is Mrs Joad. Both sit in the basement at Tavistock addressing envelopes, and cheered by occasional visits from me. We discuss literature."[7] And there were other amusing moments as well: "[...] Miss Higgs (temporary employee of the Hogarth Press) is driving us frantic with her cheery conversation. [...] Dadie has run out to re-fresh his head by a walk round the square."[8]

George Dadie Rylands stayed for only a few months at the Hogarth Press. He was preparing to compete for a fellowship at King's College Cambridge and Virginia was to lose her "young man in the basement". King's College, she wrote to Jacques Raverat on 23 October 1924, required Rylands "to work harder at his dissertation, and so he will be going after Xmas to write upon Diction in Poetry, and so win a fellowship, and live at Cambridge and teach, which they now insist on – rather a nuisance for us. It makes it necessary for us to reorganise our staff, take in a new partner, engage a new secretary and so on. He is a semi-Neo Pagan perhaps. He is a very charming spoilt boy, sprung of the rich who have no money, and so rather dazzled by London and parties, and perhaps he scents himself; but at heart he is uncorrupted [...]; and all young and oldies, men like Eddie Marsh and so on, fall in love with him, and he dines out every night, and treats his lovers abominably. However, if he don't get his fellowship, he will come back here, if possible."[9]

Rylands failed to get the fellowship at this time, but he did not return to the Hogarth Press. He nevertheless maintained close relations with Virginia and Leonard Woolf. He lived in London, enjoying his life there and often visiting his other Bloomsbury friends. He took time off to read and write some poetry. In 1925 the Hogarth Press published his poem "Russet and Taffeta", which he dedicated to Virginia Woolf. The poem shows the romanticism that preoccupied Rhylands in this phase of his life.

5 *Ibid*., p. 110.
6 *Ibid*., p. 117.
7 Virginia Woolf to Jacques Raverat, 29 November 1924. *Ibid*., p. 126.
8 Virginia Woolf to Marjorie Joad, 20 July 1924, *Ibid*., p. 119.
9 *Ibid*., p. 145.

I crush my hand to my breast, O cultured mistress,[10]
Swearing that infinite misery is fair pay
For the bliss of one improvident summer moon.
Alone by the fire's grey ash,
That night I doze and dream and start awake,
Imagining another's happiness,
Far away, in the house of a doll, a doll, a doll.

The verse has form; the words are not meaningless. Was Rylands in love? Had he in mind Coleridge's lines?[11] –

'Twas partly love, and partly fear,
And partly 'twas a bashful art,
That I might rather feel, than see,
The swelling of her heart.

Again Rylands' "Prodigal Son"[12] shows imagination:

Here I was born and here I lie
In the cowslip fields.
I chafed at the blue unchanging sky
And the quiet of the cowslip fields.
So I sought my fortune beyond the seas
And toiled and travelled and lived at ease
And cheated and begged and starved. And I
Came back to the blue unchanging sky
And the cowslip fields.

The lines are rhythmic. But how much is it an imitation of Wordsworth's "Evening on Calais Beach"?[13] –

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun

10 George Rylands, "Russet and Taffeta" (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 8.
11 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Love" (*The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250–1918*. Chosen and edited by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Oxford, 1955 edition), p. 673.
12 George Rylands, *Poems* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1931). p. 3.
13 William Wordsworth, "Evening on Calais Beach" (*The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250–1918, op. cit.*), p. 615.

Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
[...]

Rylands admired both Coleridge and Wordsworth. Most men and women in their mid-twenties are inclined to an outpouring of emotions, dreams, and flights of imagination influenced by traces of the old masters. Rylands was no exception. And yet if you compare his verse with that of W. H. Auden, born in 1907 and junior to Rylands by only five years, you at once find a greater depth:[14]

Far into the vast the mists grow dim,
A deep and holy silence broods around,
Fire burns beyond the vapour's rim,
And crystal-like the dew bestrews the ground.

Rylands was not destined to be a great poet. His genius lay not in writing, but in interpreting poetry. This quality of genius is what we notice in one of his first forays into the field, "A Dialogue on Poetry", written in 1925 or thereabouts.[15] It is a dialogue that takes place among three lovers of poetry – very probably Virginia, Leonard, and Dadie, and probably too a conversation that took place in the Woolfs' home.

Evelyn: Let us walk through to the second court, Hanmer; Paul has been lecturing on poetry by the statue of David, and we may find one of the disciples ready for a walk or an argument.

Hanmer: How hot it is! I am not exactly anxious for exercise of body or soul just now. The afternoon is the great problem of the day; I wonder how the Lotus-Eaters solved it. There comes upon one a terrible feeling of Eternity, the loveliness of the world hardens and sets and becomes unlovely because it no longer seems transient; the sun

14 The poem was published in December 1922 in the school magazine, *The Gresham* under the title "Dawn". Quoted in: Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), p. 30.

15 G. W. Rylands, "A Dialogue on Poetry, including four original poems". There is a hand-written note by Rylands: "Written, I think, about 1925. GHWR 1987". Archives Centre, King's College, Cambridge. GHWR [George Humphrey Wolferstan Rylands] 1-2-00-15.

gleams on a metalic scene, the green fields are swept and garnished, even the shadows on the hills lose their colour. Nature lies like Cordelia in our arms: no life, no life.

Evelyn: The feeling of eternity delights me; it excuses idleness, and gives our "world enough and time" for the cultivation of a vegetable love "Vaster than empires and more slow". The irises by the pool are in fine array; they must be envying their reflections floating on the surface of the water. Isn't that Vere in the shadow of the arch? Yes, he is coming to us.

Hanmer: Well, Vere, what does the poet think of the lecture on poetry?

Vere: Oh, I don't know. The heat is absurd. After a little we had to move into the cloister, and I could only gaze at David and admire Donatello's foresight in providing him with a sword, a shady hat, and no more. Now the Verocchio is not only hatless but is cursed with a tunic, and in the court this morning would have melted or fallen prone. I wonder, by the way, if and how the statues in the Capitol sweated blood.

Evelyn: And the lecture?

Vere: Paul discoursed on the purple patch inspired by the irises, I suppose; anyway, we began with Pindar's infant Iamos:

[A line quoted in Greek]

Purple in the Greek poets seems the natural wear, the Dionysiac element, perhaps; the vine and the fawn-skin; they are always dressed "as if they were going to a feast", garlanded with epithets; and Alcann's

[A line quoted in Greek]

and Sappho's

[Two lines quoted in Greek]

The Romans are rather self-conscious in purple; at any rate, it is a different dye, and Vergil as Arnold after him, wears his similes like crown-jewels, not like flowers.

Evelyn: The whirligig of time and of fashion often reverses the standard of "Penny plain, twopence coloured"; English, I suppose, can boast both styles, but it seldom attains to the natural colouring of the Greek – of the Anthology, for instance, and Theocritus – except in moments of successful and deliberate imitation. In the early work of the more sensuous of the poets, in *Hero and Leander*, in *Venus and Adonis*, in *Endymion*, the paint is laid on too thick.

Hanmer: But the reason is just that it is early work, and, for another thing, because the subject is mythological and bookish; consequently the double remoteness – I mean, of inexperience and indifference – prevents its being alive. Think of the life and the reality of the second and twelfth idylls of Theorcritus: his shepherds are not Dresden

china; they are more comparable to the vagrant rustic figures in Wordsworth, and his Sicily to Housman's *Shropshire*. Oh, no; English can attain to moments of pure poetry with the natural ease of Greek; Perdita strewing flowers, the words of the brothers over Imogen – these recall a passage in Sophocles or Euripides, a moment of choral beauty and relief: the hymn of Hippolytus, the cry to Athens in the *Medea*, the nightingale singing in the many-berried woods of Colonus where the narcissus and the crocus bloom. And Keats, when he learnt the use of his palate and gave up clutching the inviolable rainbow, painted a faultless picture in the *Ode to Autumn*. Besides, *Love in the Valley* is as natural as Theocritus.

Vere: But since, Keats we have had Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites and the flamboyant Francis Thompson and a thousand "cantores Euphorionis". What can the poet do now, poor thing? Hobbs and Nobbs, Nokes and Stokes have done their worst ...

Evelyn: There are as many good molluscs in the sea, Vere, as ever come out of it ...

[Three lines quoted in Greek]

It is true that we seem to be at the end of an era of poetry; one wonders whether future poets will have to know about the calculus and the curvature of space. Poetry and Science have met together – they have not as yet kissed one another. What do you think, Hanmer?

Hanmer: I should like Vere to read us one of his poems; I am rather behind-hand with modern poetry.

Vere: Well, if you like: this one is very Victorian, so it should please you. I was walking up from a bathe a week or so ago, and at the top of Horner Lane – you know it – I imagined someone very tall and slim, looking back, waiting for me. I stood by her and we gazed together at the glittering sea:

Midsummer[16]

Along the sun-baked undercliff
The white bloom of the blackberry blows;
The sea shimmers; a salt sea whiff
Hangs between the high hedgerows.

The lane climbs up from yellow sand
Through fields of yellowing corn; but steep
The honeysuckle hedges stand.
We tunnel through a world asleep,
Winding a narrow way, until

16 The poem was later published in George Rylands, *Poems, op. cit.*

A wave of sweet, hay-scented air,
Breathlessly lands us on the hill.
[...]

Hanmer: I like that; but it is not *very* Victorian, surely? – the situation, I mean, and the artistic dismissal, not the style. I hope all your acquaintances do not follow the path of the parabola; if so, my September must be approaching. But I should have thought from this that you would often be moved by the desire to express your feelings about skies and fields and rain and so on.

Vere: Oh, no; everyone can, has and is doing it: "Nous n'irons plus au bois, les lauriers sont coupés." I want to run up into an ivory tower in my brain, and hide, and spin cobwebs – only sometimes one cannot resist going and telling people that one knows ... one knows ...

Evelyn: That is poetry-knowing, and the power to tell one's knowledge to those who do not know, and to those who know but cannot tell – who are waiting like the Sleeping Beauty for the word of liberation. They do not know the symbol, the "Open Sesame". That knowledge, and not, as Coleridge says, Good Sense, is the body of poetic genius, the

[Four words in Greek]

Hanmer: In what world or worlds has the poet found knowledge? What is the secret?

Evelyn: Behold I show you a mystery! There are two worlds, Hanmer, the real and the unreal; the real world which we share and possess in a different degree – how does that sentence of Traherne go? – "you never enjoy the world aright till the sea floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars."

That is sublime possession. Then, beside that is the unreal world, the world which each man invents for himself, the unknown world of the romantic, the America and untravelled part of the poetic truth.

Lo, God's two worlds immense
Of spirit and of sense.

Vaughan and Marvel, Coleridge and Wordsworth, de la Mare and Housman, you have but to contrast the work of any of these pairs of poets and you will understand my meaning.

Vere: Evelyn, (forgive my interrupting) but isn't the unreal world just as real to the poet himself? What is the distinction between the Leech Gatherer and the Ancient Mariner, between the Listeners and the Shropshire Lad? Are they not equally real to their creator and to us?

Evelyn: you are right, Vere; words trip one up. I should say, perhaps, the real world and the imaginary world. Of course both are equally true in the momentary suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith. With these two worlds at his feet, how does the poet take command? He may content himself with the first, in derision or distrust of that sense of other-worldliness: thus Pindar and Horace and Catullus and Ariosto and Chaucer and Herrick and Browning and Meredith and Housman forego the chilly stars; they see the world we see, but not with our eyes; they love, and tell their love, but not with our lips. They make familiar things new, they make the much-loved earth more lovely. They give us

> Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnes
> Angulus ridet, ubi non Hymetto
> Mella decedunt viridique certat
> Baca Venafro:....
> Ille te mecum locus et beatae
> Postulant arces; ibi tu calentum
> Debita sparges lacrima favillam
> Vatis amici

And

> My true love hath my heart and I have his

And

> Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus

And

> Loveliest of trees the cherry now
> Is hung with bloom along the bough.

They laugh at the world; they cry over it; they damn it, thank God for it, exploit it; they know it, and they ask no more –

> A book of verses underneath the bough
> A jug of wine, a loaf of bread – and thou
> Beside me singing in the wilderness.

Love is enough – and life. In the second world of dream and vision a few poets can breathe and move

> In what ethereal dances
> By what eternal streams

a chosen few: Coleridge, Poe, de la Mare, to whom the air that blows around enchanted castles, radiant palaces and sunny pleasure-domes with caves of ice "nimbly

and sweetly recommends itself". But most readers find the light too dim and the atmosphere too rarefied for a long sojourn. We feel ill at ease with these gay creatures of the element. Achilles in the blessed fields of Elysium cried out that it is better to be bond-slave upon earth than lord over all the strengthless heads of the dead. It is better to be a Shropshire lad than Kubla Khan.

But there is also the mind (and this is the close of my discourse, could I but explain it) – the mind that knows both worlds and always sees one in the other; the mind, as Marvell puts it

> that ocean where each kind
> Does straight its own resemblance find
> Yet it creates, transcending these
> Far other worlds, far other seas.

Now such a one, a Plato, Shelley, Blake, Wordsworth or Keats, is conscious of a feeling of incompleteness and of some indefinite desire,

> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow.

He believes, perhaps, that heaven is about us in our infancy, or that man is an infinitesimal pulse beating in time with the heart of the universe; he believes, say, in immortality or absolute good or the music of the spheres. Or else, thinking that the riddle admits of too wide a solution, and that his sixth sense eludes definition, he may put away all mystical interpretations as mere toys, and follow his will-o'-the-wisp or Belle Dame Sans Merci over the Delectable Mountains in search of the land of lost content.

Be that as it may, these poets – the poets of both worlds have a unique power of looking at things now through one, now through the other end of the telescope; they toss one to the stars and then flit back to number the streaks of the tulip; they make one little room an everywhere; they wed the worlds of spirit and sense, make new things familiar, and turn the yellow bees in the ivy-bloom into nurslings of immortality.

Take the *Ode to a Nightingale* for instance: at one moment we are with the peasants of Provence, the next with Ruth amid the alien corn; now gazing from magic casements upon perilous seas, now standing entranced in the valley glade. Wordsworth hears a Highland girl singing: at once he is among Arabian sands, or with the cuckoo

> Breaking the silence of the seas
> Among the farthest Hebrides.

and then lost again, full fathom five, in old unhappy far-off things.

The Ancient Mariner yearneth towards the journeying moon; he listens to the lonesome spirit of the South Pole and the voices of the daemons. Yet, one moment since, we saw the bride, red as a rose, and heard the merry minstrelsy; then the hidden brook in the leafy month of June; soon we shall be safe back with the kirk and the weathercock and the hermit's cushion plump.

Like Alice, these poets are on the mantle-piece in a trice, and disappearing through the looking-glass, –

Fade far away, dissolve and quite forget

how like the world is the other side off the glass, and yet how unlike! A reflection of this world? Yes, but the scales have fallen from one's eyes, and there is a different social order of things, so that one *might* become a Queen. Forgive my prolixity, both of you. You, Hanmer, are the critic as I am the lover and Vere the creator of poetry (or hopes to be). You prefer to be silent until the last valediction is over, and then administer the *coup de grace.*

Hanmer: Silence is pleased, Evelyn! But my dull feet are rather failing to walk the cloisters pale. Let us descend to the terrace and sit for a little by the honey-suckle, or, if that is too drowsy for you, we will cross the lawn into the shade of the three poplars, and Vere shall read us another of his poems.

Evelyn: Yes, the bank of moss and tansy and thyme under the poplars. Have you a looking-glass poem, Vere?

Vere: I do not often experience that sensation. Sometimes on a very lovely morning one has a sudden moment of enchantment and proud ecstasy, and a flash of insight into the secret. Once I was walking in a deserted wood at home, rather frightened and lonely, and I saw a fresh hoof-mark on the turf. It was queer – like one's own footsteps meeting one, as Rossetti says. I had an idea and wrote this.

Good Hunting[17]

Very still and moist and grey
On covert, copse, and spinney
Breaks the November day;
Leaves beneath leafless trees
Listen and whisper low.
Stand the firs, sentinels,
Darkling; the red trunks glow.
[...]

17 The poem was later published in: George Rylands, *Poems, op. cit.*

Passes the cavalcade
Redcoated, invisible.
All the sun's banners fade
Hung in the streets of heaven.
The mute and haunting horn
Awakes no echoes. Only
In farthest fields, forlorn,
The ghost of a hound turns home.

It is rather a spoof on de la Mare, I think.

Hanmer: It is and it isn't. To my ear the rhyming of the first and third lines only, of the odd and not of the even, is a trifle unsatisfactory. It makes it feel unfinished.

Evelyn: It is like a wisp of woodsmoke – vague and intangible.

Hanmer: The "red-coated, invisible" contrast provokes me; that is my own fault, I suppose. The part about the horn, and the lost hound are delightful.

Evelyn: Read some more things, Vere.

Vere: sing you two to sleep, I suppose; certainly not, you sepulchral statues.

All day the same our postures were
And we said nothing all the day.

Evelyn: I have said a great deal.

Vere: Well, I will read two epitaphs over you, one a piece. The first is an epitaph on a low comedian.

Hanmer: Is that meant for me or for Evelyn?

Vere: Apply it as you will.

Each day his cheeks grew paler with his pain
Each night he crimsoned them to life again:
Cold jest of tragedy, he lies unsped
By laughter when alive, by tears when dead.

The second is on a prodigal son.

[Quoted above]

Evelyn: Thank you, Vere. That is really what I feel on my return here after seeing many cities and many men. Abroad I used to imagine someone coming to my bedside and saying in my ear

> The poplars are felled: farewell to the shade
> And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade.

Hanmer: It is not hard to understand, Evelyn, why poetry means so much to you; for one thing, you are rich in experience; for another you have something of the poet in you, the sensibility; "the greater promptness to think and feel without external excitement". You have known the loss of friends and fear and unkindness and despair – "The wounds of foe, the bitter wounds of friend". You have spoken everlasting farewells, you have clasped hands in sudden, ardent meetings. Like Othello you have beheld antres vast and hills whose heads touch heaven; like Odysseus you have suffered adventure by land and sea and sojourned in strange countries. But despite all these things, perhaps because of these things, pity still buds and blossoms in your heart. "La pitié," M. le Professeur, "c'est le fond même du genie."

With me it is different, as you know. I love the workmanship of poetry, the technical achievement, the value of words, the sounds and the associations. That sense of other-worldliness is denied me. I love Greek poetry because there the treatment of Nature is direct. Yes, I do not forget the mysteries of Demeter and Dionysus nor their mythology; the last has poetical value. I am content to believe Apollo walks upon the mountains, that Dionysus is in the vineyards and Pan in the woodland, and to

> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Their mythology has coloured poetry for all time; think of Narcissus and Endymion and the Nightingale

> [Two lines in Greek]

Silly sooth, perhaps, of the old age; it corresponds to your other world with this difference: that I no more think it true than when I go to a play and see a great door with THEBES writ over it, I believe myself at the Palace of Oedipus. But I prefer sculpture to painting and the mosaics at Ravenna to the Florentine frescoes. I delight in studying Pindar's architectonics, the perfection of style in Sophocles and Pater, the gradual evolution of Milton's use of the epithet, the imagery in Shakespeare and Jeremy Taylor, the economy in Landor and Housman. That eternal question, too – the distinction between prose and poetry, fascinates me.

Tchekov says somewhere "Cut out all those pages on the moon-light and give us what you really feel – the reflection in a piece of broken bottle." Now that seems to me to solve the problem and show the fundamental difference. Take those lines of Burns:

> The white moon is setting behind the white wave,
> And Time is setting with O!

Or Othello's

> It is the very error of the moon;
> She comes more nearer than she was wont
> And makes me mad.

And

> Upon the bay the moonlight lay
> And the shadow of the moon.

or again

> Yon rising moon that looks for us again -
> How oft hereafter will she wax and wane,
> How oft hereafter rising look for us
> Throughout the same Garden – and for one in vain.

Tchekov's words simply do not apply. The poet makes his appeal by the use of symbols; he depends on single words whose value is made up of associations of sound and sense: as for example in

> Queens have died young and fair
> Dust has closed Helen's eye.

The moon and Time and the sea, the Sirens, the seasons, and Life and Death: with such well-worn yet durable coin does the poet make a bid for our souls. The modern poet, in his desire to break a convention, follows Tchekov's advice; and both metrically and spiritually his work approximates to prose.

One other device is worth noticing in addition to the use of symbols and parallel to it; it is that of the local habitation and a name. Thus in Rose Aylmer, Evelyn Hope, Lucy Gray and

> Sally is gone that was so kindly;
> Sally is gone from Hannaker Hill

he distils, he dramatises the emotions which each man has felt for someone. This is as it were individual symbolism. But enough; the afternoon has passed and you are both drowsy.

[Four words in Greek]

> Let us walk in the valley where the air is cool; for in the evening a breeze blows up from the sea.
>
> *Evelyn:* I have some questions to ask, Hanmer. But let us go down to the valley. Come, Vere.
>
> May 3rd–7th, 1924.

The disputation on poetry in this early dialogue must surely have kindled Rylands' desire to settle down and write what is perhaps his major work on the poets' craft, *Words and Poetry*.