# The Unassuming Sky

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# The Life and Poetry of Timothy Corsellis

By

Helen Goethals

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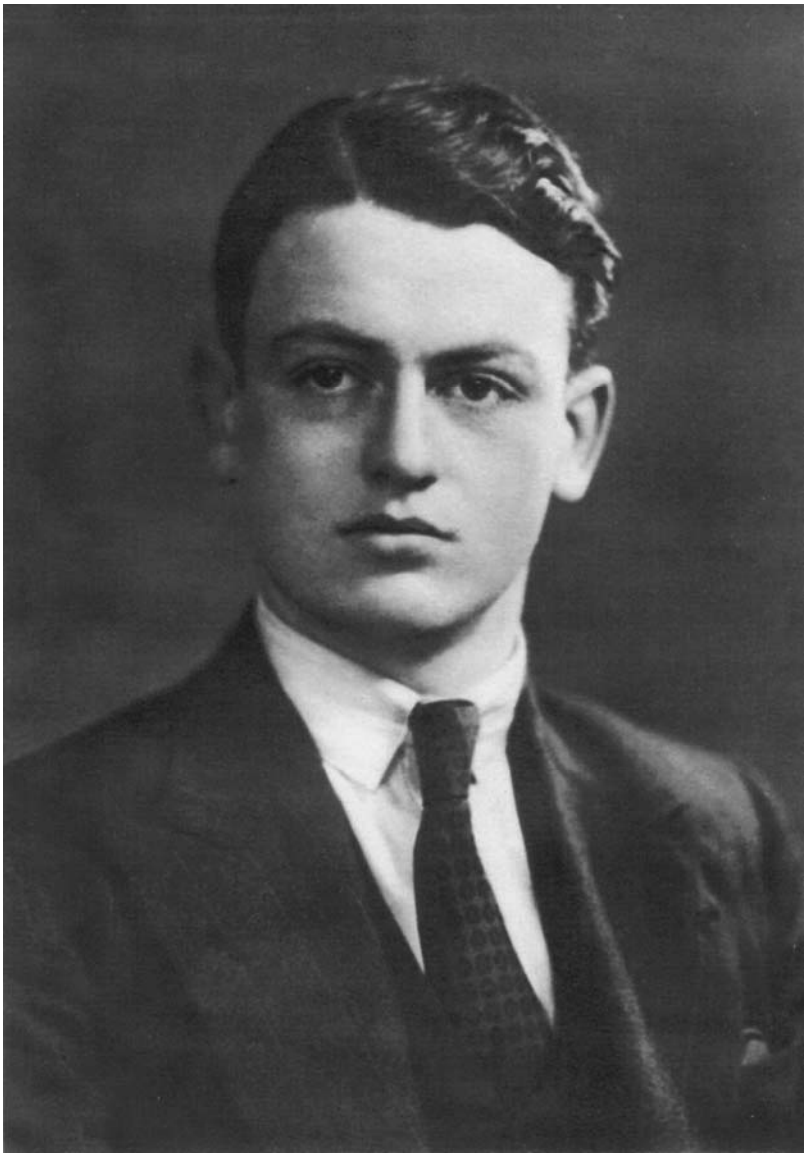
I will not sing the song of others
In other people's words;
I will not see the world of others
Through other people's eyes.
But blue, far into space,
I'll hurl my judgment of the human race
Upwards to the unassuming sky,
Farther than any bird can fly.



Timothy John Manley Corsellis
1921-1941

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# FOREWORD

The decision to publish the *Collected Poems* of Timothy Corsellis originated with his younger brother, John Corsellis. After reading the moved, and moving, account of Timothy's life written by Ronald Blythe for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, John felt that the time had come to make public more of his brother's work than the dozen poems that had appeared in the various anthologies of the poetry of the Second World War, though these in themselves had manifestly been sufficient for Timothy to deserve a place in the *ODNB*. Because, as part of my university work on poetry and politics, I had put online a *Brief Lives* of the poets of the Second World War, John Corsellis contacted me, to ask me if I would be interested in going through his brother's work in order to select the poems that, as a specialist of war poetry, I thought were worth publication. In July 2009, he entrusted me with his brother's embossed and battered leather suitcase, containing two handwritten books of poems (over 240 in all), a handwritten book of schoolboy essays, the typescript of an unfinished autobiographical novel, drafts of political essays and debates, and dozens of letters from and (mainly) to Timothy, all written between 1938 and 1941.

The publication of a poet who died young is always a delicate matter, particularly since it has long been a dogma of literary criticism that poetry, being timeless, should be seen to survive on its own intrinsic merit. It follows that poems should be published naked, standing alone without contextual adornment. John and I felt that such a course would run the risk of the early poems being dismissed as mere juvenilia. Wanting to pre-empt such prejudice, and convinced that the reasons for publishing the poems went far beyond the usual "promising poet whose life and work were cut short by war", we decided to organize the book in such a way that the poems were read within the wider context of the ideas which shaped them.

The poems have been placed so that they may be read in consecutive groups, each with an introduction which places them against the background of (1) a Suffolk childhood in the 1920s, school at Winchester in the 1930s and the Munich crisis (2) social work in the East End, the Federal Union movement and other ideas of a Christian society (3) R.A.F.

training (4) ARP work in London during the Blitz and (5 and 6) the death of a ferry-pilot and entrances into the literary world.

Running as a connecting thread between these varied experiences is the need to understand what should be seen as *the* historic event in the short life of Timothy Corsellis: in January 1941, at the height of the Blitz and after six months' training in the R.A.F., his decision to refuse to be trained as a bomber pilot, since that would mean the bombing of civilians. Where did he find the courage for such a choice and what were the consequences?

The six roughly chronological chapters which form the main core of the book are preceded by a prelude and followed by a fugue which draw attention to what allows the poetry to escape from the historical time it originally inhabited, since they draw attention to the literary meetings which the poetic form sets up. The prelude focuses on the moment in September 1941 when, just weeks before his death, Timothy Corsellis had a rendezvous with Stephen Spender. The poetic dialogue between the older and the younger poet is the underlying theme of these *Collected Poems*. In the final chapter, the prelude finally becomes a fugue, in which it is suggested that a meeting of such individual talents, as T.S. Eliot long ago observed, cannot but alter our view of the whole tradition of modern English poetry.

I have been content to suggest rather than to argue the importance of the literary connections that may be made between the newly-discovered work of Timothy Corsellis and the modern tradition. Readers will, I hope, make their own connections and they should be left free to single out whatever voices they please in what the philosopher Michael Oakeshott called "the conversation of mankind". Our job, as John Corsellis and I saw it, was to throw open the doors of critical discussion by making the poems available, in as reader-friendly a form as possible. Only so would the title chosen for this collection, the "unassuming sky" become a metaphor not just for the death of a poet-pilot who deserves wider recognition, but also for the life-giving force transmitted by all true poetry, when it extends, even fractionally, the horizons of each individual reader's expectations.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the sketching in of the themes on which the work sheds a brief but, I believe, vivid light, I have had the kind help of many people. Taking time out from the publication of his own important postwar experience in refugee camps in Austria John Corsellis has been unfailingly helpful in providing the family background to details gleaned from his brother's letters, and has reread and corrected this edition at every stage of its writing. He put me in touch with the two surviving members of the family who had known Timothy when he was alive: a not-too-distant cousin, and his sister Gillian, whose conversation and unpublished wartime memoirs not only gave glimpses into her brother's life but also contained insights into women's wartime history in their own right. Two other family members, Susan Howatch and Simon Watney, were kind enough to read the final manuscript and offer welcome encouragement.

Ronald Blythe, to whom John and I paid separate and memorable visits, was wonderfully kind and encouraging in his enthusiasm for a young poet whom he had always personally admired. Suzanne Foster, archivist of Winchester College, was extremely helpful in providing Moberly Library records, school reports, copies of the *Wykehamist* and memoirs of the masters of the 1930s, as well as managing to get hold of a copy of Ian Leslie's 1984 typescript history of the Crown & Manor Club where Timothy worked. Thanks are also due to the librarians of the London School of Economics, which houses the Federal Union archives.

# PRELUDE

## 1. Stephen Spender

I had expected
A shrewd continental nose
And precision and confidence
In your eyes.
I had expected
That your body would have been small
Indeed it was necessary for you to be small
Stature in contrast with ability.
You should have been able to express
In rapid words and flowing fingers' gestures
All those subtle things outside my grasp.
And had you come to me as this
I should have said to myself
"Corsellis, this is the very thing you expected
"Here is your paragon of the present
"A personified critique of the nineteen thirties"
And I would have been bitterly disappointed.

But you were diffident
And I had built up strength to meet you.
You were more sensitive than sure
And I had prepared to be definite.
You were tall, ungainly tall
And your fingers were thin and arched.
I thought
"Perhaps I am mistaken,
"Perhaps this man is more the poet than philosopher
"Perhaps there is more music than I know in his words
"And more observation than dictation in his thoughts."
Before, I could see you sit down
And put unworthy words to great ideas:
Reform the wretched world with your mind
And interest a few men with your pen
I had expected an overwhelming greatness.

Now I see you much as I am
You sit with a disturbance in your mind
An unknown energy
An embryo beating the walls of a womb
And your pen scrapes the paper
And your mind knows relief
As an idea is born by expression
And an unknown power is mobilized
And out of your repressed and hidden ideas
That have been neglected and battened down
Springs to song a consummation
And the worried mind is rested
And the hot eyes are cold again
You sigh
You read out what you scarcely knew
And what you have discovered
Lying hidden and unacknowledged
Pleases your conscious
And is put to print.[1]

"Stephen Spender" was written by Timothy Corsellis, a twenty-year old pilot on September 26, 1941, a fortnight before his death in a plane crash near the Scottish border.

To a friend he gave a more prosaic account of what to a young poet was a momentous meeting:

> The only clever thing I have done is to get Stephen Spender a job in A.R.P. which means I can blackmail him into an introduction to my next work of art. He and a row of my girl friends are now running a control room in Wandsworth! [2]

More surprisingly, perhaps, Stephen Spender also left several accounts of the meeting. It is briefly mentioned in an essay entitled "Poetry and the English":

> A few weeks ago I met an Atlantic ferry pilot who was going to hear a poetry reading the same evening. Since then I have learned that he himself is a poet. His name is Timothy Corsellis.[3]

Ten years later, in *World within World*, Stephen Spender gives a more moved, and moving, account:

> Another pilot, whose gentleness and courtesy impressed me, was Timothy Corsellis. Corsellis was a fighter pilot, who protested, when he was switched to bombing, on the grounds that he wished only to fight against destruction, not to destroy. He was directed to pilot planes across the Atlantic, which he continued to do until he died in an accident. At this time, I was trying to get work in Civil Defence, and Corsellis, who had been an air raid warden for a few weeks, spent a day taking me to his old headquarters.
>
> All I remember of that day was meeting Corsellis in a bar off Piccadilly where he sat talking to a platinum blonde, and then our bus ride to a large A.R.P. headquarters beyond Hammersmith, where I was introduced to officials. Some years later, I came upon a poem by him addressed to myself, in an anthology of war poets, in which he described our meeting. It concluded with the words: 'Now I see you much as I am.' I was moved by reading this, and I have in my note-books numerous sketches for a poem in which I endeavoured to thank Corsellis. But I never succeeded in writing anything which seemed adequate.[4]

Spender did in fact succeed in writing something that could be thought more than adequate to the occasion, but only many years later, when he himself was very close to death. Published in the *London Magazine* in July 1995, "Timothy Corsellis" was the last poem of Spender's to appear while he was still alive. The poem in which Spender finally thanked the long-dead Timothy Corsellis not only discharged a debt but became Spender's swan song, and the note on which John Sutherland chose to end his authorized biography.[5] As the magnificent penultimate poem of *New Collected Poems* (2004) the definitive edition of Spender's work, it formed, according to reviewer Paul Binding, a most "appropriate coda for a writing life of some 65 years".[6]

**Timothy Corsellis**

No gift this Christmas, Timothy Corsellis,
- Transport Transatlantic pilot –
Could equal this, your poem that reached me
Here, but with news that you were dead –
Shot down or lost mid-ocean … Drowned …

You write of that one time we met –
First and last meeting in a pub:
Outside, the Black-Out street with rubble
From last night's raid: within,
The stench and glamour – glass and brass –
Of the bar's proppers-up: grimaces,

Gesticulating in a mirror
Behind the barmaid's taps and bottles.
At tables in hushed corners, lovers
Whispering futures to each other.

Standing side by side together,
Out of that clamourous place, we hewed
A silence where the dead poets joined us
- Angel of Rilke, Keats's nightingale,
Spirit with us where we stood under
Shakespeare's white cliffs.
Then we bade
Farewells outside. And you walked on
To join companions on the airfield:
Bill Sipprel, Michael Jones, Jim Mason –
Pilots, mind and purpose one –
Passionate wills identified
With wings and power of their machines:

Who flew into their deaths above
Us with the dead weight of our lives.[7]

Who was this Timothy Corsellis, who made such a lasting impression on Stephen Spender? Intrigued by the fifteen poems separately available in the modern anthologies of Second World War poetry, and the short but highly sympathetic account of his life written by Ronald Blythe for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, many have been led to ask that question. *Ars longa, vita brevis*. The aim of this first-ever edition of *Collected Poems* is to introduce the modern reader to the pilot-poet whose "gentleness and courtesy" impressed not only Stephen Spender but, as we shall see, so many others.

# CHAPTER ONE

# SOME VERSIONS OF PASTORAL

Timothy John Manley Corsellis was a child of the Peace, one of a generation for whom the 'long weekend' between two world wars was to be cut tragically short. His father, Douglas Henry Corsellis, had served as a captain in the machine-gun corps during the Great War. Having lost a fore-arm at Gallipoli, he returned to England to become a machine-gun instructor. After the war and despite his injury, Douglas Corsellis was determined to live life to the full. He became an excellent skier and learned to fly a plane. Entering the legal profession, he went on to pursue a highly successful career as a barrister. In 1917 he married Helen Mary Bendall and, within five years of the Versailles Peace Treaty, they had a family of four children: Mary, Gillian, Timothy and John.

Timothy was born on January 27th, 1921 in Eltham. Though the family remained only a few years in this prosperous south-eastern London suburb, the time and place of Timothy's birth, interestingly, contained the seeds of many of the themes that were to occur in his later writing. Like many urban areas at the time, Eltham was dividing into the old and the new. Old Eltham had grown up on the road leading out of London towards Maidstone, and was on the old Pilgrim's Way leading from Winchester to Canterbury. 'Hazelwood', the house in North Park where Timothy spent the first few years of his life, had been the home of the early pacifist William Philips (1825-1911), a social reformer who had been involved in the enlightened ribbon development of New Eltham, which took place before and after World War I.

The family moved to Suffolk when Timothy was five, with the father commuting by plane between a flat in New Cavendish Street and houses in the country, the first in Blythburgh and the second in Nayland. There are no direct references in the later poetry to the Constable country in which the Corsellis children grew up, but it is clear that the freedom and fun of a country life would later make Timothy receptive to other rural landscapes. Meanwhile, the children were sent to preparatory schools in Walmer, Kent: Mary and Gillian to Sheen House, Timothy and John to St. Clare. By a curious coincidence, St. Clare's was the school attended by another

pilot-poet: John Magee, whose poem "High Flight" was quoted by President Reagan in the speech he gave after the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger in 1986.[8] Gillian remembers that she saw her brothers every Sunday as they went in crocodile fashion to the same church, where they sat pews apart and not able to talk to each other.

The upward ascension and comfortable life of the Corsellis family came to an abrupt end on November 1st, 1930 when Timothy's father's plane crashed in bad weather, killing him outright. Because he was under-insured, his widow and four children were left in just the 'shabby-genteel' situation which George Orwell describes as not only his own, but that of an entire class:

> I was born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class. The upper-middle class, which had its heyday in the eighties and nineties, with Kipling as its poet laureate, was a sort of mound of wreckage left behind when the tide of Victorian prosperity receded. Or perhaps it would be better to change the metaphor and describe it not as a mound but as a layer —the layer of society lying between £2000 and £300 a year: my own family was not far from the bottom. […] Probably there are countries where you can predict a man's opinions from his income, but it is never quite safe to do so in England; you have always got to take his traditions into consideration as well. A naval officer and his grocer very likely have the same income, but they are not equivalent persons and they would only be on the same side in very large issues such as a war or a general strike—possibly not even then.[9]

Writing in 1937, Orwell went on to remark, "Of course it is obvious now that the upper-middle-class is done for."

Like many others after the 1929 crash, the family found itself in straitened circumstances. Timothy's mother, unqualified for any professional life of her own, did her best to keep up appearances, relying on the influence and generosity of friends and relatives as much as on the relatively meagre income that remained. The house in the country was relinquished, and the family went to live in Marylebone, close to Regent's Park, with its lake and swans and other delights for children. 7 Park Road, at the north end of Baker Street, was a three-storeyed terraced house, in which John and Timothy shared a basement bedroom. Timothy's sister Gillian remembers a number of pranks and escapades from this London period: Timothy staring intently up at the sky until he attracted a crowd, Timothy holding up traffic by walking with deliberate slowness on the new pedestrian crossings with 'Belisha' beacons,[10] Timothy holding forth on a soap-box on Speakers' Corner.

When it became time for the children to attend secondary school, Timothy's sisters and younger brother became day pupils: John at Westminster School, and the girls at Francis Holland School. It happened that a family friend taught at Winchester College and, partly through his influence, a place was obtained for Timothy. Thus, at the age of thirteen, he left home to board at the oldest and one of the most prestigious of English public schools.

Winchester College was founded in 1382, in conjunction with New College, Oxford, by William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester. It is attended by seventy "scholars" who are housed in the mediaeval heart of the school, while the "commoners" board in various outlying buildings. Timothy arrived at a school of some 470 boys, of whom about 40 were in his own House, Cook's. In an unfinished autobiographical novel, Timothy says of his alter-ego:

> At the age of fourteen he was kitted out in all the necessary but grotesque paraphernalia and sent miserable from home to his new school. For days he was wretchedly unhappy until he started to find his way about the complicated routine of school life.[11]

In the late 1930s and throughout Timothy's time there, the atmosphere of the school was modulated by the personality and interests of Spencer Leeson (1892-1956), who had been appointed headmaster in 1935. Leeson would be ordained deacon in 1939 and, resigning from his post at Winchester in 1946, would end his career as Bishop of Peterborough. In an increasingly secular age, Leeson continued to see the Anglican church as the conscience of the nation, and sought to strengthen the Christian ethic in the school he ran. Winchester College had from the first been built on the association of Church and State and is famous not only for its church buildings and choral music, but also for being the home of the Winchester Bible. Just as the English language is shaped by the cadences of the King James Bible, so public school life was punctuated by Church rituals and the weekly learning by heart of the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer. In letters that can sound priggish to modern ears, but not to those of his contemporaries, Timothy recommends to friends that they turn in time of weakness or irresolution to the Book of Job or the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. The latter was a much-appreciated confirmation gift in 1936; the former he claimed to have read three times.

Winchester College was part of the Anglican renaissance of the first three decades of the twentieth century, a movement which sought to reconcile High Church forms of worship with the needs of modern society. Much of its success was due to the hymns of the *English Hymnal* chosen

by the Christian socialist Percy Dearmer and set to music by the agnostic composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. In 1906 their eclectic choice had caused considerable controversy, for it included American Quaker hymns, as well as poems by Herbert, Donne and Milton. One member of the original committee resigned over the inclusion of William Blake's "To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love", on the grounds that Blake could hardly be considered an orthodox Christian.[12] The more general acceptance of the revised edition of 1933 recognized that the hymnal offered a new *form* of Anglican worship, one which joined a sacramental view of the natural world given by God to a commitment to alleviating the evils of the social world developed by man. It was a vision that was to inspire not only Timothy Corsellis, but generations of schoolchildren like him.

Two works which Timothy read at this time and which deeply influenced his thinking were *The Philosophy of the Good Life* (1935) by Charles Gore[13] and *Nature, Man and God* (1934) by William Temple.[14] Bishop Gore was a Christian Socialist who presented the moral teaching of Christ not as irrefutable dogma but as the practical culmination of the best that was previously thought by well-known moral leaders, such as Zarathustra, the Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, Socrates, Plato, the Stoics, and the Jewish prophets. William Temple, the Archbishop of York, who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942, also argued for a philosophical theology in which Christ was seen more as a supremely good man than as the Son of God. To the works of such ecumenical thinkers, Timothy added Spinoza's *Ethics*, which preached toleration of other ideas on the grounds that our ideas of 'good' and 'bad' could not (logically) be anything but relative. Thus, by the time he left Winchester Timothy was able to write:

> I think my religion is waning now-a-days because I'm beginning to sympathize with Confucius' views and put them alongside Christ's, treating the two far more impersonally and far more as social and moral codes than religions. However I'll never be an atheist; no one who thinks a lot ever has. It is only scientists who are atheists. Thinkers are agnostics.[15]

As one of the nine schools defined by the Public Schools Act of 1868, Winchester College sought to combine, in the words of the title of an article by Spencer Leeson, "Christianity and Citizenship". The mid-Victorian tradition of education for public service, inspired by Arnold and Ruskin, was still very much alive, instilling in young Wykehamists the idea that the privilege of an excellent education had to be repaid in an equally lofty sense of the debt of leadership owed to those less privileged.

Timothy spent much of his free time walking by himself in the hills surrounding Winchester:

> I wander over lonely country alone shouting into the wind bits of easy poetry. A few days ago, up on Parkers Gallop I recited 'I vow to thee my country all earthly things above".[16]

Like all of his generation, and indeed many of the previous one, Timothy was largely, though never completely, seduced by Cecil Spring Rice's patriotic poem, the words of which, set to the music of Gustav Holst, suggested that war would inevitably be followed by peace. To this quasi-mystical vision of what war was about should be added a peculiarly public school tradition of classical education and Christian outlook, serving to prolong a certain idea of social Sacrifice which, despite its having been savagely indicted by the generation of Wilfred Owen, was to prove all too effective in persuading a second generation of lambs to the slaughter of total war.

Timothy's life at Winchester was an often uncomfortable fit between this Established tradition of communal service and his own independence of spirit. His academic performance was poor, but his school reports consistently attributed this not to lack of ability but to an obstinate waywardness. As the headmaster put it, he was "able but wild". His delight in playing pranks was expressed in ways for which he would have been expelled if he had been found out. Classroom clowning and daring impersonations might be overlooked; not so a bout of stealing to which he confessed in a letter to a friend, nor the incident, recounted to his sister Gillian, of the smuggling-in of a pirated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. These, as he himself freely admitted, were proof of a reckless streak in his personality:

> I liked excitement, I loved trouble and risk and the sensation of fear and indeed I still do.[17]

Nevertheless, as three volumes of letters, poems and essays attest, his last year at Winchester was an extremely happy and productive one. Excellence at public school was measured by success in team sports, and in 1938 Timothy's fencing career blossomed. Certain prefects, and in particular Nigel Watson, encouraged him, seeing his playfulness and disarming candour in a less disapproving light than did his housemaster, Murray Hicks. These prefects, having left for Oxford, began in January 1938 a correspondence with Timothy which gave him a new confidence in his own abilities.

His housemaster, noticing his love of books, unusual in the generally philistine atmosphere of a public school, employed his talents as an assistant in the Moberly Library. Pleased with this new responsibility, Timothy wrote:

> The Housemaster and I have chosen a Van Gogh print for library. It is a bold and crude touch which should liven the place up: *The Painter Going to his Work*. I am glad he agreed to buying a picture from library funds and still more that he chose the one he did, though I would have preferred *The Sower*. Even if it would be more difficult to appreciate, familiarity would soon bring about its popularity I'm sure.
>
> […] Hicks has paid me a visit this minute and has consented to my getting a large volume of Impressionist pictures for library table so that culture will be hurled at the heads of future Cookites. […] I expect people will laugh at me and accuse me of preaching 'high brow muck' at them and they will think I am misusing my position for selfish aims. Be damned! Someone will like it.[18]

Timothy's receptivity to modern art was precocious, and no doubt helped by living in London. He describes to his older friend Nigel Watson how his taste in art and poetry progressed in an unforced way from the Pre-Raphaelites and Kipling to 'abstract art' and T.S. Eliot. In an essay on "The Art of Appreciation", written in July 1938, he quotes some verses of Cecil Day Lewis to explain his impatience with socialites who make no attempt to understand modern art:

> Few things can more inflame
> This far too combative heart
> Than the intellectual Quixotes of the age
> Prattling on Abstract Art.[19]

He may well have attended the International Surrealist Exhibition held from 11 June to 4 July 1936 at the New Burlington Galleries. Certainly Salvador Dali's stunt of lecturing in a diving-suit suit would have appealed to Timothy's sense of humour, and there are echoes in his work of Herbert Read's lecture on "Art and the Unconscious". The modern artists who are most often cited in his letters are Cézanne, Picasso, and de Chirico. Whether he is looking at the colour in a painting or the words of a poem, he pays attention to "the richness, the bluntness or the delicacy" and the "balance and rhythm in the lines". It is just such ideas that are expressed, visually as well as musically, in the poem "Tänzerin by Edgar Degas" (11).

In his last 'half' Timothy was invited to join Essay Soc., an unofficial gathering which he described to Nigel Watson as "the only height in Win Coll I really coveted."[20] To his mother he wrote:

> Talking about essays I've been elected to "Essay Club" here. It is all very mysterious and consists of about a dozen intellectuals who discuss literature and philosophy without any minutes and in secret from the school. I only heard of it by mistake last term and frightful secrecy is kept in respect to the school. Harold Walker my div.don of last term is in charge of it but we haven't had a paper read yet. He tells me there are only about two or three members who aren't in college.[21]

Evidence from Sir Jeremy Morse (later Chairman of Lloyd's Bank and Chancellor of the University of Bristol) corroborates Timothy's account:

> By the time I joined it in 1945-6, it was run by Harold ("Sponge") Walker. The Society consisted of a dozen or more boys at the top of the academic ladder. It met two or three evenings a term in Walker's study at Cook's, and one of the members read an essay, after which there was a discussion. The essays were specially written for the occasion.[22]

What were the subjects debated? In an age tormented by the misuse of science, philosophers and would-be philosophers were above all concerned with moral philosophy: how to go beyond the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter so that scientific means might be made essentially inseparable from ethical ends. Put simply, the question being asked by post-Darwinian thinkers, young and old, was this: what was the place of the creative human will in an apparently amoral and random universe? Such a question was of eminent interest to alert young minds of an introspective nature.

Timothy was of an age and intellectual generation that was Idealist: to Plato and Aristotle, he preferred Berkeley and Hume. The Idealists of the 1930s were adapting their arguments to the pragmatic need of the political moment: specifically, the avoidance of war, both nationally and internationally. Two philosophers who were popular because they addressed this problem in terms that were both rigorous and readable were C.E.M. Joad (1891-1953) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970). The 1936 *Guide to Philosophy* set forth a pragmatic moral programme that appealed to an entire generation anxious, not just to define but actually to lead, the good life. The philosopher's task, according to Joad, was a simple one: to find the moral precepts that would be conducive to the pursuit of what Joad defined as the four essential values: truth, beauty, goodness, and happiness.

Timothy alludes more than once to his appreciation of Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* (1912), but for someone whose last term at school was spent in a science division, the more recent *Religion and Science* (1935) probably struck a deeper chord. In its important last chapter, entitled "Science and Ethics", Russell argues that ethical values give expression to emotions, not to facts which would still be true if our personal feelings were different. The 'good' is a question of judgment, not of truth; it is in fact 'what is desirable' and since the desires of one person or one group can easily enter into conflict with the desires of other people or groups, it is not a scientific matter of distinguishing the true from the false, but a social debate on what is desirable and what is not. Ethics is closely related to politics, in being either the attempt to bring the collective desires of a group to bear upon the wayward desires of the individual, or the attempt by an individual to cause his desires to become those of the group. The legislator may be able to bring about an artificial harmony of desires, by constructing a code of conduct and a system of moral instruction in accordance with his own desires. Everyone else will have to be content with being a preacher, whose success, though it may refer to proven evidence, will rely mainly on an ability to move his audience:

> His only method is to try to rouse in others the same desires that he feels himself, and for this purpose his appeal must be to the emotions. Thus Ruskin caused people to like Gothic architecture, not by argument, but by the moving effect of rhythmical prose. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped people think slavery an evil by causing them to imagine themselves as slaves.[23]

The evidence suggests that, following Russell, who is referred to in "Scattered Political Thoughts" (29), Timothy took the moral function of art to heart. In his work, his letters, and even in casual conversation, in all modesty and with great charm, he was ever keen to persuade others to see the world from his own ethical point of view.

In his last term at Winchester, and for some months afterwards, Timothy wrote several drafts of an essay variously entitled "The Need" or "Manleyism", which was submitted to various friends for their comments, before being added to the navy-blue notebook of twenty handwritten essays which he compiled in 1939. "Manleyism" was a personal statement[24] which drew on all the above-mentioned influences and added yet another that was typical of the times: Carl Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul (*1933).[25] Indeed, one version of Timothy's essay has, as an epigraph, a quotation from the tenth chapter of Jung's work, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man":

> It is from need and distress that new forms of existence arise, and not from idealistic requirements or mere wishes[26].

Jung postulated a type of "modern man" who possessed two distinctive qualities: he was acutely conscious of the present, and he was fascinated by psychology. His consciousness of the present as a time of transition between the past and the future estranged him from those of the common herd who were unable to break free from the ties of custom and tradition, and from the pseudo-moderns who were merely adrift in the present. Modern man had become fascinated by Freudian psychology because his faith in organized religion and in science had been bitterly disappointed. A catastrophic world war had been followed by a false peace:

> What are we to think when the great cities today are perfecting defence measures against gas attacks, and even practice them in dress rehearsals? It can only mean that these attacks have already been planned and provided for, again on the principle "in time of peace prepare for war". Let man but accumulate sufficient engines of destruction and the devil within him will be unable to resist putting them to their fated use. It is well-known that fire-arms go off of themselves if only enough of them are together.[27]

Psychology was seen by Jung as a sound basis for political judgment, because it did not rely on blind faith, but on knowledge. Personal intuition had a political context: what was individually felt to be good, true or beautiful was also generally so. Psychological knowledge made men aware of a fundamental unity between mind and body, between subjective and objective worlds, between the individual unconscious and the collective unconscious. Moreover, in measuring the progress of the material world of the ego against the unexplored potential of the super-ego and the id, psychology paved the way for a better understanding of Eastern religious thought.

Jung's ideas founded the poetics of an entire generation of poets writing in the 1930s and early 1940s, from the elderly Yeats to the youthful Philip Larkin, Timothy's contemporary. One of Timothy's essays is entitled "Reality, Causation and Free Will", and it is within these forbiddingly abstract categories that Timothy develops his own empirical theory of poetry. He begins with his own experience:

> During the day some thought pushes itself upon me with considerable strength. I am never at the time thinking of poetry and it is very rarely that I realize that I am going to use it in a poem. My conscious mind forgets the thought and up to the moment I put my pen to the paper I have not the slightest idea what I am going to write. I usually write in the evening with

> the hum of conversation in my ears and usually on thoughts that originally occurred to me between two days and a fortnight ago and I often find myself quoting words from a poem I have lately read without any conscious knowledge of so doing. The pleasure I derive from writing them down is infinitely greater than I get from reading the works of the greatest poets.[28]

Having explained the nature of poetry in terms of his own psychological experience, he goes on to explain the function of poetry in terms of the categories of psychology. Poetry cannot be defined, because it is not connected to the ego, that part of the mind responsible for logical inference. On the contrary, the purpose of aesthetic pleasure is to hold the ego in abeyance so that there may be a fleeting fusion of the id and the super-ego, that part of the brain which desires good. Thus the main function of aesthetic sensibility is to provide a bridge between the reasoning mind and God or ultimate reality.

In a later letter to Nigel Watson he developed this hypothesis along historical lines:

> I have lately been rather wrapped up in a nice bright new set of thoughts. Belief in another world comes from a frustrated search for an ultimate cause. Ideas about beauty, truth etc. are incomprehensible phenomena stopping in our id. Throughout history morality has passed from one basis to another. By reason we saw that if we did not allow everyone to steal or kill we would be better off so, by use of proper collective security, the code of the "ego" was drawn up. Next came a code for the "super-ego" which had been helping the ego along with its code by providing energy of a kind. The code of the "super-ego" was a code of conscience; it was Christianity, Mohamedanism etc. It affected the 'law' as I am learning now.
>
> And yet the super-ego is not the most exalted part of the mind. The "id" as I explained above is in closer communion with God or ultimate reality. There will come a rule of the aesthetic and a morality more strict than the past ones. [29]

In September 1938, at Winchester and in the country at large, there was one subject, and one subject only, of debate: the Munich Agreement. Timothy complained:

> Since September 10th I have been thoroughly put out by the crisis and the whole thing made me feel sick and ill.[30]

The 'crisis' is more usually dated from September 12th, when Hitler made a violently anti-Czechoslovak speech at a Nuremberg rally of the

Nazi party. Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden on the 15th to persuade Hitler not to match words with action. On the 22nd Chamberlain met Hitler at Bad Godesberg and action was again delayed in return for territorial concessions on the part of Czechoslovakia. On September 26th in Berlin Hitler made another anti-Czechoslovak speech. While Roosevelt sent a telegram reminding the European powers of their agreement, under the Kellogg-Briand pact of 1928, not to go to war, the navies of Great Britain and Germany were mobilized. In a final attempt to prevent war, a conference officially convened by Mussolini and, attended by Hitler, Chamberlain and Daladier, was held in Munich on the 29th and 30th September, 1938. The terms agreed were that the national sovereignty of Czechoslovakia would be guaranteed in exchange for the German-speaking parts of Czechoslovakia being immediately occupied by Germany, with other areas to be conceded to Poland and Hungary. Chamberlain and Hitler signed a paper promising that in the future they would consult rather than quarrel over difficulties. It was this paper promise of "peace with honour", "peace for our time" that Chamberlain so proudly brandished on his return.

The crisis made the possibility of war frighteningly real, and it encouraged people to take part in the testing of civil defence preparations. In a letter home, Timothy provides today's reader with an amusing vignette of early air raid precautions at Winchester:

> I do hope you will be able to get out alright, if they bomb London seriously. […] We were fitted for gas masks today and five men per house are going to fit them together in the castle for the whole of Winchester next week.
>
> As the housemaster has bought two new Minimax's we had a huge bonfire in yard and dosed it alternately with Minimax and the housemaster's petrol. We tried a hose on it too but as the hose fittings are at the far side of the House it had to run through a dining room and other places. Canvas hoses are not watertight until thoroughly wet. The result was obvious and the Housemaster appeared with two old sponges and we mopped with them and rags till it was dry and then he told us they were his bath and face sponges.[31]

Timothy's response to the Munich Agreement can be read in poems 15-29; a group which includes poems which foreshadow the crisis. One of them is, somewhat ambiguously, dedicated to Isaac Rosenberg; in an essay elsewhere he explains that he shares Rupert Brooke's desire to avoid the "grand old ending". The responses to Munich of Corsellis and his generation were written in the shadow of the experience of the soldier-poets of the First World War. They should be read in the context of

historical sources, such as Harold Nicolson's dairies and Anthony Eden's memoirs, and deserve to stand beside other better-known poetic responses to appeasement, such as Louis MacNeice's "Autumn Journal" and Dylan Thomas's "The hand that signed the paper".

By the time that Timothy left Winchester, in December 1938, he had already written nearly 80 poems, of which 32 appear in this selection. Hopeful to the last that "There is yet a chance that a rich aunt will finance me into literature as a living which I would love", he admitted that:

> There is one thing I want to be and one thing I once thought I might be and that is a poet.[32]

When Timothy later copied his poems into two red leather-bound notebooks, he was at pains to point out that as a schoolboy-poet he was not so much despised as treated as an oddity, and he added:

> During four years at a house of 40 boys coming and going in a disturbing and endless stream I was aware of three besides myself writing poetry, one of whom did so fairly extensively; of course it is quite likely that others have been doing so but only allowing the wastepaper basket to share this secret with them. To hazard a guess upon such a number is as mad as calculating the number of murders that pass unsuspected as ordinary deaths.[33]

Timothy's close friend and correspondent Nigel Watson was the person "who wrote fairly extensively"; he went on to Oxford, then into a cavalry regiment which was converted into a tank regiment. Before he was killed in battle, he published a few poems and short stories in a slim volume, privately printed in Oxford. Timothy was also aware that Nigel Weir wrote poetry, and when Weir's poems were published soon after his death in September 1941, wrote him a moving elegy (97). The third poet was his (unpublished) friend Tony Whyte.

Unknown to Timothy, because they were not in his House, two other Winchester pupils were also at that time writing poetry. One was Frank Thompson, the highly-gifted brother of the historian E.P. Thompson. Frank Thompson was killed in 1943 on a secret service mission to Bulgaria, and his poems only came to light in response to the publishing of the Oasis anthologies in the 1980s. The other was Robert Conquest, four years older than Timothy, an historian admired for his work on the Soviet Union, but also well-known as the editor of *New Lines* (1956) and recognized as an accomplished poet, particularly in the vein of light verse.

When to this list of Timothy's contemporaries are added two names from a previous generation - the great poet-critic William Empson and the