

Tambimuttu and the *Poetry London* Papers at the British Library: Reputation and Evidence

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The present context

On 31 March 1949, M. J. T. Tambimuttu (1915–1983), poet, editor and publisher from Sri Lanka,¹ synonymous by surname and reputation with the magazine *Poetry London*² since its first issue some ten years before (February 1939), was dismissed by the Board of Editions Poetry London Ltd. The Minutes of the Board Meeting record, in terms not unlike an unfavourable entry in a school report, that Tambimuttu was dismissed because of his ‘extremely unsatisfactory behaviour’. But this was not Tambimuttu’s only dismissal. His second dismissal – the dismissal of his reputation as an editor and publisher – has been an incremental matter, in which the repetition over time of colourful anecdote has substituted for serious consideration of his achievements,³ and unsubstantiated innuendo has littered partisan histories and memoirs of the period. As A. T. Tolley observed, in *The Poetry of the Forties*, Tambimuttu’s ‘decided achievements deserve to be disengaged from the legends that have come to surround him.’⁴ This paper will adopt an evidential approach to Tolley’s challenge, through a review of newly available *Poetry London* archive papers at the British Library. It will consider the exotic presentation of Tambimuttu in the memoirs of Julian Maclaren Ross, the context of Tambimuttu’s sacking, and endeavour to separate fact from fiction in respect of Tambimuttu’s literary reputation, particularly with regard to the posthumous publication of *The Collected Poems of Keith Douglas* by Editions Poetry London (1951) which provoked the circulation of considerable mis-information.

Tambimuttu’s case is not, however, an isolated instance of misfortune: it keeps company with a dismissed decade of poets whose work has been, until very recently, unfashionable, neglected, largely invisible, and, in some cases, unavailable for almost half a century. A sign that attitudes to British poetry of the 1940s were shifting – at least in the reading habits of some contemporary poets – was the publication, in 1996, of Iain Sinclair’s anthology

¹ Ceylon was renamed Sri Lanka in 1972, which designation I have used throughout (except where ‘Ceylon’ appears in quotation).

² I have used the name *Poetry London* throughout, although the first two issues were simply called *Poetry*. Another early variant title is *Poetry (London)*. Reference in this paper to a particular issue of the magazine is made by the abbreviation ‘PL’ followed by its sequential issue number only (volume numbers are eccentric and unhelpful). Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914–1984* (New York, 1986), pp. 358–64. David Miller and Richard Price, *British Poetry Magazines 1914–2000: A History and Bibliography of ‘Little Magazines’* (London, 2006), p. 41. For a detailed bibliographical history of *Poetry London*, and the imprint Editions Poetry London, see Alan Smith, ‘Poetry London 1939–1951’, *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review*, vi (1979), pp. 134–47 and pp. 192–203, reprinted in Jane Williams (ed.), *Tambimuttu: Bridge Between Two Worlds* (London, 1989), pp. 275–90.

³ An exception to this observation is Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (Oxford, 2007), which draws upon Tambimuttu’s papers at the British Library.

⁴ A. T. Tolley, *The Poetry of the Forties* (Manchester, 1985), p. 122.

Conductors of Chaos,⁵ a mass-market paperback gathering of the late twentieth-century British avant garde. The editor invited five of its contributors ‘to nominate significant figures from previous generations’⁶ and introduce a small selection of their work. Each of the poets selected is generally associated with the 1940s, although their work was not confined to that decade: J. F. Hendry, W. S. Graham, David Jones, David Gascoyne, and Nicholas Moore, who was for several years Tambimuttu’s editorial assistant.⁷ Other forgotten or neglected poets linked to the 1940s might have served with an equal claim the intended affirmative purpose: F. T. Prince, for example, whose later books were published exclusively by small press publishers and whose celebrated war poem ‘Soldiers Bathing’ was first published in *Poetry London*;⁸ or Lynette Roberts, the Welsh modernist poet who corresponded with Robert Graves about Celtic myth during the writing of *The White Goddess*, and who was published by Tambimuttu, and by T. S. Eliot at Faber & Faber, and whose poetry was not re-introduced into circulation until 2005.⁹

The disengagement of achievement from legend that Tolley urged has been hindered by the absence of a *Poetry London* archive that would form the basis of an informed and balanced case: that archive, hitherto assumed lost, is now available to researchers at the British Library for the first time.¹⁰ Its appearance in the midst of a period of critical reappraisal of the decade is timely. Interest shown of late in the literature of the 1940s has not been restricted to the backward gaze of the contemporary avant garde – which has been steadily re-evaluating the poetry of W. S. Graham,¹¹ and pursuing apocalyptic hoofprints in the poetry of J. H. Prynne¹² – but has embraced other writing from the period, stimulating, for example, the re-publication of the memoirs of Julian Maclaren Ross.¹³ Polished by years of telling and re-telling from his habitual corner in the saloon bar of The Wheatsheaf, before fountain pen was put to paper in 1964, Maclaren-Ross’s stories of the writers and artists who frequented the public houses of wartime Soho and Fitzrovia are written with an assured

⁵ Iain Sinclair (ed), *Conductors of Chaos* (London, 1996).

⁶ Sinclair, op. cit., p. xix.

⁷ The pairings were: Andrew Crozier/J. F. Hendry; Tony Lopez/W. S. Graham; Drew Milne/David Jones; Jeremy Reed/David Gascoyne; and Peter Riley/Nicholas Moore.

⁸ PL 9 (1943), a version that was moderately revised before re-publication later that same year, in the text on which Prince settled, in Keidrych Rhys (ed.), *More Poems from the Forces: A Collection of Verses by Serving Members of the Navy, Army, and Air Force* (London, 1943), pp. 209–11.

⁹ Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems* (Manchester, 2005), and *Diaries, Letters and Recollections* (Manchester, 2008) which includes (pp. 165–88) Roberts’s letters to Graves (1943–49). Roberts, *Gods with Stainless Ears: A Heroic Poem* (London, 1951) was published in a decade unreceptive to its experimental aesthetic, and quickly disappeared without trace. For a discussion of cultural references contemporary with the poem’s composition, see Nigel Wheale, ‘Beyond the Trauma Stratus: Lynette Roberts’ *Gods with Stainless Ears* and the Post-War Cultural Landscape’, *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, iii (1997), pp. 98–117.

¹⁰ Divided between the Papers of M. J. T. Tambimuttu, Add. MS. 88907 (8 boxes) and the Papers of Richard March, Add. MS. 88908 (4 boxes and 2 volumes of press cuttings). Several poetry journals and volumes from Tambimuttu’s library, received together with his papers, have been given the shelfmark ‘Tambi’ (British Library General Reference Collection).

¹¹ Tony Lopez, *The Poetry of W. S. Graham* (Edinburgh, 1989); Ralph Pite and Hester Jones (eds.), *W. S. Graham: Speaking Towards You* (Liverpool, 2004); and Matthew Francis, *Where the People Are: Language and Community in the Poetry of W. S. Graham* (Cambridge, 2004).

¹² See, for example, James Keery, “‘Schönheit Apocalyptica’: An Approach to *The White Stones* by J. H. Prynne”, Jacket 24 (November 2003), available at: <http://jacketmagazine.com/24/keery.html#a3>

¹³ Julian Maclaren-Ross, *Collected Memoirs* (London, 2004). Paul Willetts, *Fear and Loathing in Fitzrovia* (Stockport, 2003, rev. edn. 2005), a biography of Maclaren-Ross, is an evocative account of the bohemian world of wartime Soho and Fitzrovia that Tambimuttu shared.

economy and fluency.¹⁴ The narratives are paced and spliced by the cinematic grammar of his beloved film noir and coloured with minimal flashes of plausible dialogue, recalled, as the author insisted, with absolute accuracy. Unfinished at the time of his sudden and premature death (3 November 1964), *Memoirs of the Forties* was published by Alan Ross in 1965,¹⁵ and it included a striking portrait of Tambimuttu that, unfortunately, has remained the most enduring likeness of him. In this artful exercise in autobiography, vividness, memorableness, and a sureness of comic narrative touch appear to guarantee truthfulness. It is notable, however, that when Derek Stanford published his memoirs of the period, *Inside the Forties* (1977), he was obliged, or felt obliged, to insert a ‘Postscriptum’ slip acknowledging Tambimuttu’s objections to his portrayal (Stanford had sent him advance proofs of the book). Stanford conceded that his representation of Tambimuttu was, in large part, second-hand, derived from Maclaren-Ross’s writing and from conversations he had had with poet and journalist Charles Hamblett.

The latter source was unlikely to have impressed Tambimuttu as disinterested: in 1941, Tambimuttu’s first wife left him to live with Hamblett, provoking a dark period of depression.¹⁶ As for Maclaren-Ross, although there is a detectable measure of affection in his narrative, Tambimuttu is nevertheless portrayed as a manipulative, shallow and self-serving comic figure. He is a ‘Holy Fakir of Poetry’¹⁷ – for ‘Fakir’ read ‘fake’ – who practises his deceptive art on poets and financial backers alike. Maclaren-Ross professed himself to be immune to these powers of persuasion, as he was immune to the mesmerism of Tambimuttu’s eyes: ‘I could never be persuaded to join him in any business scheme. I’ve always been proof against anything of the hypnotic order.’¹⁸ Maclaren-Ross emphasized Tambimuttu’s otherness, his difference. His hair ‘bobbed like a woman’s and curled up at the corners’. His physiognomy had animal qualities: ‘his extraordinary hands, with fingers that bent right back, apparently boneless and like a lemur’s only longer, flickered mesmerically as he talked in rapid tones with an accent that on the wireless sounded Welsh, white teeth and eyeballs flashing meantime in the dusk of his face’.¹⁹ The task of editing was presented as more a matter of instinct than reading – ‘my instinct told me your work was good’,²⁰ Tambimuttu told Maclaren-Ross – and when they walked along together between public houses, Tambimuttu ‘loped’²¹ with an animal stride. At the close of the chapter, Maclaren-Ross wishes him well in America (Tambimuttu sailed to New York in 1952) ‘with fresh patrons, poetesses and a new poetry review at his disposal.’²² Tambimuttu’s survival skills, his resilience, his ability to raise cash from thin air, dodge creditors, and hold quasi-court in Fitzrovia, were all, in fact, qualities Maclaren-Ross shared with the ‘Prince of Poetry Pundits’,²³ and in portraying Tambimuttu, he was, as Paul Willett’s biography of

¹⁴ ‘Each anecdote would be told again and again, every retelling accruing embellishments and carrying it further from its source. Bit by bit, it would gain authority as well, the drama becoming more distilled, the dialogue terser and more incisive. Eventually it would reach a point where it stopped evolving, at which it was ready to be transcribed in his obsessively neat handwriting [...]’ (Willetts, op. cit., p. 122.)

¹⁵ Julian Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs of the Forties* (London, 1965). Chapters of the book were serialized in the *London Magazine* between November 1964 and March 1965.

¹⁶ Tambimuttu’s first wife was Jacqueline Stanley. See Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs*, p. 142. Stanford, op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁷ Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs*, p. 146.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141. Repeated, with further animal emphasis, by Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-1945* (London, 1977), p. 100: ‘he was said to be able to smell the quality of a poet’s work without reading it’.

²¹ Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs*, p. 139.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Maclaren-Ross amply demonstrates, also describing something of the hand-to-mouth nature of his own life.²⁴

Tambimuttu called Maclaren-Ross's account 'a highly coloured book of misrepresentations and fairy tales'.²⁵ Indeed, an earlier version of 'Tambimuttu and the Progress of *Poetry London*', to give the chapter its title, was published in *Punch*, in 1955, as a thinly-veiled satirical entertainment.²⁶ It tells the story of the rise and fall, and flight, of a certain editor of poetry called Tenebroso, King of Madagascar. As a name, 'Tenebroso' associated Tambimuttu with the night – and evoked 'the dusk of his face' – as it also alluded to his reputed tendency to dark and intemperate moods (which would later play a role in his dismissal). But the attribution of royalty was not an invention by Maclaren-Ross: it reflected the royal ancestry Tambimuttu pretended to, and alluded to, when he arrived in London. Maclaren-Ross's contribution in this regard was only to elevate Tambimuttu from Prince to King, and to substitute kingdoms, Madagascar for Sri Lanka. That the fabrication of such a family tree was felt by Tambimuttu to be useful or necessary, and furthermore that it was widely believed to be true, are of some interest in understanding the impact that Tambimuttu made, particularly during the war years, and in understanding the trajectory of his subsequent reputation. The matter is complicated by the fact that the construction of an exotic persona for Tambimuttu was a co-operative undertaking, in which Tambimuttu himself was complicit, although the persona has been differently interpreted and differently employed by its many constructors. The King of Madagascar was a 'master of evasion' and 'never so evasive as when questioned about his kingdom or country of origin'.²⁷

Strange creatures and fabulous encounters are the stuff of fairy tales, and in a remarkable passage in Stanford's memoir, recounting the first encounter between Irish poet and editor Robert Greacen and Tambimuttu – who quickly proved not to be the bland and efficient middle class professional Greacen had been expecting – the question is asked, with Tambimuttu in mind: 'Was this a species of indigenous deviation or was it to be counted a Ceylonese import?'²⁸ Unfortunately, the subject – objectified by the pronoun 'it' – is reduced either to an evolutionary mutant or to a colonial commodity, neither of which advances understanding, but both of which are, in the social attitudes they reflect, evocative of a period of colonial relations. We can also recall in this regard the distanced suggestion by Maclaren-Ross ('there was garbled talk' – implicitly, by others, but repeated all the same) that Tambimuttu had arrived from Sri Lanka in 'an open boat'.²⁹ In the model of cultural translation, or cultural migrancy, developed by Ruvani Ranasinha in a recent study of South Asian writers, Tambimuttu is presented as an assimilator who 'adopted a self-consciously "Asian" cultural identity that embodied ideas about the East produced in the West'.³⁰

²⁴ When Maclaren-Ross (*ibid.*, p. 137) wrote of the December cold forcing an exotic Tambimuttu to sleep at a Turkish Baths, he was writing from first-hand experience: many years later, in the 1960s, homeless and short of money himself, he sometimes slept at the Turkish Baths in the basement of the Imperial Hotel, in Russell Square. See Willetts, *op. cit.*, pp. 251–3 (including a photograph of the Turkish Baths at the Imperial Hotel).

²⁵ Tambimuttu, 'Fitzrovia', in Williams (ed.), p. 223.

²⁶ Julian Maclaren-Ross, 'The Man from Madagascar', *Punch*, ccxxviii (25 May 1955), pp. 637–9. A devotee of crime fiction, and an habitual borrower, Maclaren-Ross may have taken his title from Francis D. Grierson, *The Man from Madagascar* (London, 1937), a story in which a young man tries to placate his creditors.

²⁷ Maclaren-Ross, 'The Man from Madagascar', p. 637. Maclaren-Ross might be forgiven for being sceptical, since Tambimuttu was not the only member of the Soho circles of mis-rule who claimed aristocratic or royal lineage: as well, there was 'New Zealand born Count Potocki of Montalk [...] the rightful heir to the throne of Poland', and John Gawsworth (Terence Armstrong) who boasted of being heir to the throne of the uninhabited Caribbean island of Santa Maria la Redonda. See Willetts, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–4 and pp. 156–7.

²⁸ Stanford, *op. cit.*, p. 156. Although the question appears to be Greacen's, the manner of its presentation in Stanford's prose suggests a shared perplexity.

²⁹ Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs*, p. 136.

³⁰ Ranasinha, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

In other words, Tambimuttu's assimilation into metropolitan literary circles was assisted by managing an expectation of difference and not by disguising it. His assimilation 'depended on his ability to adapt and respond to the desire for certain forms of cultural difference, particularly his capacity to appear to represent the exoticism and wisdom of the Other world'.³¹ The irony in such a construct was that although Tambimuttu was a Tamil, from the village of Atchuvely, near Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, he was raised as a Catholic and educated in English at a Roman Catholic College in the busy southern capital and port of Colombo. At St Joseph's College, speaking Tamil was punished, although Tambimuttu would not have found the rule a hardship since, for this exotic, English was his first and only language.³² For many contributors, however, to the commemorative festschrift *Tambimuttu: Bridge Between Two Worlds* (1983), Tambimuttu's exoticism – feigned or exaggerated – was as fundamental to their memory of him and their interpretation of the past as it has been to the critique of Tambimuttu's detractors.

Poetry London lost and regained

The *Poetry London* archive that is now made available is a fractured body of evidence. Its provenance is divided between the papers of Tambimuttu and the papers of author Richard March,³³ who became the sole backer of the publishing enterprise in 1947, and a 51% shareholder in the publishing company he then formed, Editions Poetry London Ltd. Although papers from Tambimuttu's American and later years have been available for some time at Northwestern University, Evanston,³⁴ papers from the 1940s, when his editing had the greatest impact, were long considered lost. Following Tambimuttu's dismissal at the end of March 1949, and before his return to Sri Lanka at the end of that year, he left various papers from his ten years in London in the safe-keeping of a friend, who kept them undisturbed, if not forgotten, and eventually passed them to the British Library, in 2005.³⁵ Richard March's papers were purchased by the British Library from a private dealer in 2003, and include everything that has survived of *Poetry London* from 1947–51, complementing Tambimuttu's records. Whilst Tambimuttu's papers are exclusively

³¹ Ibid., p. 111.

³² During his time in India, following his second marriage, to Safia Tyabjee, Tambimuttu began to learn Sanskrit. Safia Tambimuttu, 'My Life with Tambi', Williams (ed.), op. cit., p. 129: 'Mrs Rao, who taught him, gave lessons while she was exercising on Marine Drive in her tennis shorts.'

³³ Richard March (1905–1955), author and publisher, took a degree in modern languages from Oxford (1926), and taught German literature at Columbia University, New York (1928). Returning to the UK in 1930, he worked as stage manager and actor in experimental theatres (e.g. *The Everyman*, 1931) and as a literary journalist, contributing to the *TLS* and to *Scrutiny*. After wartime service with the RAF, he was briefly literary editor of *The New English Weekly*, assisted Ronald Duncan with his journal *Townsmen*, and worked for the BBC European Service. Source: 'Richard March: curriculum vitae' (Add. MS. 88908/1/1). Ronald Duncan, *Obsessed: A Third Volume of Autobiography* (London, 1977) refers to March as his 'oldest friend' (p. 140). In an earlier autobiographical volume, *How to Make Enemies* (London, 1968), Duncan described two visits with March to Berlin in the immediate aftermath of the war, and recorded that March was 'an Intelligence Officer in the R.A.F.' (p. 100).

³⁴ McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois: <http://findingaids.library.northwestern.edu/fedora/get/inu:inu-ead-spec-0120/inu:EADbDef11/getBiographicalHistory>

³⁵ For an account of the reappearance of Tambimuttu's papers from the 1940s, and an overview of their highlights, see Christopher Fletcher, 'Found: The Secrets of the Little Prince Still Alive', *The Independent* (6 March 2005), available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/found-the-secrets-of-the-little-prince-still-alive-527435.html>. See also, Fletcher, 'Tambimuttu, Meary James Thurairajah (1915–1983)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60672>).

concerned with *Poetry London* matters, reflective of a certain single-mindedness of mission pursued through the editing of two subsequent magazines modelled on *Poetry London*,³⁶ March's papers, although dominated by Editions Poetry London Ltd, are strong in other material: an extensive run of more than a hundred letters (1938-52) from poet and playwright Ronald Duncan (who was to join the Board of Editions Poetry London Ltd, in 1949 – decisively, as we shall see); ten autograph letters from F. R. Leavis (March had contributed a number of notes and reviews to *Scrutiny* before the war);³⁷ and William Empson's 'The Face of the Buddha', a substantial essay of more than a hundred typescript pages. According to yet another memoirist, Empson's manuscript was rumoured – 'terrible tales' – to have been left carelessly by Tambimuttu in a London taxi, and was, with reported dramatic finality, 'lost forever'.³⁸ Whilst rumour raged, however, and terrible tales were told, if told they were, the manuscript slept where it belonged, resting like the implacable stone faces of the Buddha that Empson described, amongst Richard March's *Poetry London* papers.³⁹

The apparently orderly run of twenty-three issues of *Poetry London* in six volumes (1939-51) belies a more irregular publication chronology. An examination of publication dates of the magazine reveals a pattern of stops and starts that can be matched to the intermittent availability of funds from a succession of financial backers. The principal backers of *Poetry London* were: Anthony Dickins, a student of music who formed an immediate friendship with Tambimuttu on his arrival in London and who co-founded the magazine and subsidized the first two issues that appeared in 1939;⁴⁰ the publishers Nicholson & Watson which provided the magazine with its first office and gave Tambimuttu a free hand in establishing the innovative imprint Editions Poetry London, between 1942 and 1946; and Richard March, who committed and lost substantial personal resources from

³⁶ *Poetry London – New York* (four issues, 1956-1960) and *Poetry London / Apple Magazine* (two issues, 1979, 1982).

³⁷ Discussing, variously, contemporary art, psychology and criticism, Wyndham Lewis, and Rainer Maria Rilke, March appeared in the following pre-war issues of *Scrutiny*: v:1 (June 1936); v:3 (December 1936); vi:2 (September 1937); vii:1 (June 1938); vii:2 (September 1938); and viii:2 (September 1939).

³⁸ 'Of course, when P.L. became widely known, manuscripts poured in; many of them piled up in the office and were left to moulder for months or years, while aspiring poets wailed in the wilderness outside London. There were terrible tales of manuscripts left in taxis and lost forever, including one of William Empson's with no copy'. Paddy Fraser, 'G. S. Fraser: A Memoir', *Jacket* 20 (December 2002), available at: <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/fraser.html>.

³⁹ Subsequent to the purchase of March's papers by the British Library, Empson's manuscript was returned to the Empson estate. By agreement, a surrogate has been made (Add. MS. 88908/11). March's papers include a letter from Empson to Tambimuttu (30 August 1948), written aboard SS Narrandera as he returned to China from America where he had been lecturing, informing Tambimuttu that 'John Davenport is holding the manuscript of a little book about Buddhas with a lot of photos which I wrote before leaving England. He thought he could get it published, but I haven't heard from him, and if he doesn't want it you might care to have a look at it yourself.' (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/6). However, although Tambimuttu was not responsible for the 'loss' of the 'The Face of the Buddha', the smoke of rumour was not without some fire: there are several examples in Tambimuttu's editorial correspondence of other manuscripts mislaid.

⁴⁰ Tambimuttu, 'Fitzrovia', in Williams (ed.), op cit., pp. 226-7. Also, Dickins, 'Tambimuttu and *Poetry London*', *London Magazine*, v:9 (1965).

1947 until the demise of the publishing project in 1951.⁴¹ Although Tambimuttu's powers of persuasion were evidently considerable (attested to by the succession of patron-led publishing ventures that shaped his career, in London, in New York, and in London again in the 1970s), in the case of each investor a certain readiness to invest seems to have weighed far greater than any fabled mesmeric powers. In Dickins's case, an investment of modest proportions was supplemented by willing enthusiasm and a personal loyalty to Tambimuttu that never wavered, and was fed by an enthusiasm for Indian culture.⁴² Tambimuttu's rising reputation as an editor in the magazine's first three years – in 1942, circulation rose to 10,000⁴³ – came with an implicit endorsement from T. S. Eliot following success in editing the popular anthology *Poetry in Wartime* (1942) for Faber & Faber.⁴⁴ His reputation was further enhanced by involvement in the BBC radio wartime series 'Talking to India'. Produced by George Orwell, the primary purpose of the programmes was to deliver 'soft' cultural propaganda to English speakers in India. Tambimuttu used the opportunity to discuss some of the modern poets he published – Dylan Thomas, George Barker, and David Gascoyne – and he also gave more general talks, describing aspects of everyday life as the capital adapted to war.⁴⁵ It was, however, in editing the poetry component of Reginald Moore's anthology *Selected Writing* [1942],⁴⁶ in the autumn of 1941, that a door of opportunity opened. A change of management at Nicholson & Watson, publishers of the anthology, a supply of scarce paper, and a desire to expand business at a time when magazines and books of all kinds were selling well, led new managing director John Roberts

⁴¹ In addition, A. T. Tolley, op. cit., p. 119, and Alan Smith, in Williams (ed.), op. cit., p. 278, refer to a gift of £100 from James Dobie, and Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs*, p. 149, suggests that funds were also provided by Harold Musson. Dobie does not appear in the *Poetry London* records, but in Tambimuttu's papers there is a letter from Capt H. E. Musson that implies a history of support: 'You ask me to give you details of how I propose to collaborate with you in the future and very nice too. I only wish I could.' (Letter dated 10 February only, but written no earlier than 1944, when Musson was promoted to Captain; for the letter, see Add. MS. 88907/1/3).

⁴² 'The magazine was founded jointly by T. and myself, on our mutual capital, being the sum of £5 backed by faith and confidence' (Dickins to March, 25 November 1949, Add. MS. 88908/7/1/4). During the war, Dickins was stationed for a period (1944-45) in Sri Lanka and took the opportunity to visit Tambimuttu's family and friends. Tambimuttu's papers include eight letters from Dickins written from Colombo and Kandy (see Add. MS. 88907/1/2).

⁴³ Alan Smith, in Williams (ed.), op. cit., p. 279. PL 7 (October 1942) was the first issue under the auspices of Nicholson & Watson. Smith notes (p. 278) that the previous number, PL 6 (June 1941), was produced in an edition of 2,200 copies.

⁴⁴ *Poetry in Wartime*, ed. Tambimuttu (London, 1942). Tambimuttu's papers include the original typescript manuscript for the anthology and Tambimuttu's contract with Faber & Faber Limited, signed by Geoffrey Faber (Add. MS. 88907/4).

⁴⁵ Ranasinha, op. cit., pp. 34-9, and pp. 121-4. Tambimuttu's papers include three notebooks (Add. MS. 88907/3) that contain drafts for several broadcasts, including an account of the use of London Underground stations as air-raid shelters, the chipper tone of which stands in marked contrast to the haunting drawings by Henry Moore of sleeping Londoners sheltering in the Underground, subsequently published by Tambimuttu: Henry Moore, *Shelter Sketch Book* (Editions Poetry London, 1945). Williams (ed.), op.cit., following p. 140, reproduces a group photograph taken in a BBC studio in 1942 that includes Tambimuttu, other Asian broadcasters, T. S. Eliot, George Orwell and William Empson.

⁴⁶ Reginald Moore (ed.), *Selected Writing* (London, [1942]). Moore, Foreword (15 October 1941), p. vi: 'The poems in this issue have been selected by Tambimuttu, editor of *Poetry* (London). This magazine, now approaching its third year of publication – a remarkable feat in itself for a magazine wholly devoted to verse and verse criticism – has been consistently praised both for its catholicity and the editor's invigorating Letters.'

to view Tambimuttu's fresh editorial approach and his extensive network of contacts across the arts as an asset worth acquiring.⁴⁷

The final backer, Richard March, elected to invest in *Poetry London* at a time when the volatile business of publishing was rapidly contracting following the boom years of the war.⁴⁸ His decision to invest against the run of trade seems to have been based more upon personal post-war literary ambition, which included the publication of his own writing, than upon business opportunity (although he was to complain frequently that Tambimuttu had little business sense). In 1946, following Watson and Nicholson's decision to cease funding *Poetry London* and Editions Poetry London, so bleak were the prospects of securing another backer in London that Tambimuttu decided to see if he could run the magazine from Sri Lanka, utilizing family money and reviving at the same time the family's publishing business, S. Tambimuttu & Sons. 'It was grand-father's great wish,' Tambimuttu wrote to Ralph Pieris, 'that one of his grand-children should carry on the work at Atchuvely and that is why I am reviving the firm with a London and Colombo branch.'⁴⁹ But the plan fell through. On 7 March 1946, Augustine, Tambimuttu's brother, wrote to say that the family was opposed to the idea because the money was needed to send Augustine himself to England to pursue his studies.⁵⁰ As Tambimuttu faced an uncertain future in London, his reputation amongst his Sri Lankan contemporaries continued to rise, along with their belief in his sphere of personal influence, to judge from several letters received during this period. As Tambimuttu contemplated the prospect of departure and return, one contemporary wrote to him: 'You have arrived, dear Tambi, and we are proud of you [...] I hear that your "Poetry" is going great guns.'⁵¹

The archive does not inform us how Tambimuttu and March first met, although we know from March's papers that it was in the summer of 1947.⁵² Initial communication between Nicholson & Watson and Richard March was, as might be expected, through Tambimuttu. After visiting a solicitor to discuss company formation, he reported by letter to March (19 August 1947) that the publishers had asked if Tambimuttu and March could raise £6,000 (although it was clear to all that Tambimuttu had no capital to contribute). In the same letter, Tambimuttu agreed to March owning 51% of the company, 'since you are putting up all the present capital'.⁵³ Wishing to clarify whether certain overheads (book-keeping, rent, despatch and invoicing) were included within this figure, March wrote a week later to John Roberts at Nicholson & Watson: 'I do feel very strongly that we should get the figures and

⁴⁷ Alan Smith, in Williams (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 279.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of British publishing during the war years, see Hewison, *op. cit.*, Chapter 4, pp. 76-94.

⁴⁹ Tambimuttu to Ralph Pieris, 22 April 1947 (Add. MS. 88907/1/3) combines a rather formal account of Tambimuttu's career ('to hand over to Crowther') with fond anecdotal family memories, omitting reference to *Poetry London's* uncertain future. The letter refers to Tambimuttu's introduction to E. E. Cummings by Justin Pieris (brother) and to the dedication of Tambimuttu's first 'slim volumes' of poetry (typeset by Tambimuttu himself on his grandfather's hand press) to Miriam Pieris (sister). Ralph Pieris was the author of a number of studies of Asian social and political development.

⁵⁰ Augustine Tambimuttu to Tambimuttu, 7 March 1946 (Add. MS. 88907/1/1). See also, in the same file, other family letters that refer to, or imply, various business arrangements that would have combined *Poetry London* with the revival of a family publishing (and printing) tradition. The file includes a draft prospectus for S. Tambimuttu & Sons Publishers, listing projected publishing plans and staffing (Tambimuttu is listed as an 'Adviser').

⁵¹ Bernard [first name] to Tambimuttu, 1 August 1946 (Add. MS. 88907/1/1). Bernard has met Anthony Dickens, stationed in Sri Lanka: 'I was very surprised and pleased too to see that Major Dickins was familiar with the name Bernard.'

⁵² Reported in the narrative statement prepared by March (dated 2 December 1949) that describes Tambimuttu's conduct and performance during the course of their partnership (Add. MS. 88908/3/2).

⁵³ Tambimuttu to March, 19 August 1947 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/1).

estimates absolutely clear and precise, so that I can look ahead for the next 12 months and work and budget accordingly. It is obviously useless, both for Tambi and myself, to begin this project on such an unsound and uneconomical basis that we should have to file a petition for bankruptcy in six months time. Certainly I have no intention of entering on a business partnership with such a prospect before me.⁵⁴ And yet that was precisely the prospect that lay just over the immediate horizon. Meanwhile, shortly before Editions Poetry London Ltd was formed (1 October 1947), March wrote to The Fortune Press to buy back the copyrights of his first novel, *The Darkening Meridian* (1943), and *The Silver Net*, a collection of short stories then awaiting publication: 'I have lately acquired an interest in a publishing firm, and am naturally anxious to bring out the novel myself, and might possibly re-issue the short stories later.'⁵⁵

As 1948 began, only three months into the partnership, the business was already in financial difficulty. Tambimuttu's time was divided between attempting unsuccessfully to raise further funds, travelling around the country to improve the company's distribution network – he found Scotland to be particularly dispiriting – and struggling alone with publishing affairs in London: 'It is difficult to carry on all these projects without at least a secretary,'⁵⁶ he complained to March (once upon a time there had been two secretaries, an editorial assistant, and a production manager). March was frequently abroad in Monaco during this time, visiting his father whose health was declining. By early summer, March was writing to John Roberts (8 June 1948) with news that his worst fears had been realized: 'the position of PL is now so precarious that we shall be compelled to stop the publication of books altogether. We have no capital resources left, and all the books we have so far published have been relative failures [...] I have told Tambi that we shall probably have to close down altogether in September. I am considering that we shall have to go into liquidation.'⁵⁷ By 4 August, March had informed Tambimuttu unambiguously: 'I do not want to continue in partnership with you,'⁵⁸ giving him free scope to find another backer and estimating that £10,000 was required.

Another year brought a new strategy, devised at a distance as March attended to family affairs following the death of his father in Monaco in the first week of 1949. 'In a little over a year,' he wrote soberly to his partner, 'I have now spent £9,000 most of which is irretrievably lost.'⁵⁹ On 26 January 1949, March wrote to his solicitor about the company's forthcoming Annual General Meeting, proposing certain changes in the shareholding: Mr Ronald Duncan 'wishes to purchase 10 shares [...] which I could let him have. In this connection perhaps you would confirm that a holding of 10 shares makes a person eligible to become a director of the company?'⁶⁰ In the same letter, March stated that 'two other persons' also wished to purchase shares. The two persons were Ronald Bottrall, who does

⁵⁴ Richard March to John Roberts, 28 August 1947 (Add. MS. 88908/7/3/2).

⁵⁵ Richard March to R. Caton, The Fortune Press, 17 September 1947. *The Darkening Meridian* (revised) was republished by March in 1951 (under his subsidiary William Campion imprint). Other books by March published by himself were: *The Mountain of the Upas Tree* (Editions Poetry London, 1948) and a playscript, *The Sentinel* (William Campion, 1951). It would appear, however, that March did not re-acquire the rights to his earlier fiction: in 1952, he received a letter (6 August 1952) from solicitors acting for The Fortune Press Ltd who claimed his re-publication of *The Darkening Meridian* was a gross infringement of their rights. March wrote a long defensive letter in reply (13 August 1952), but The Fortune Press was not swayed (1 September 1952), and March resolved to 'fight the case to the last ditch' (3 September 1952). For all letters, see the file: Contractual Correspondence Concerning Publications (Add. MS. 88908/2/4).

⁵⁶ Tambimuttu to March, 10 January 1948 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/2).

⁵⁷ March to Roberts, 8 June 1948 (Add. MS. 88908/7/3/2).

⁵⁸ March to Tambimuttu, 4 August 1948 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/2).

⁵⁹ March to Tambimuttu, 2 January 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3).

⁶⁰ March to Graham T. W. Mould, Freeman & Sons, Solicitors, 26 January 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/3/2).

not seem to have been present at the meeting, and Nicholas Moore, Tambimuttu's former editorial assistant, who had by this time given up literary work in London and was pursuing his other passion, horticulture.⁶¹ Moore replied to March's overtures – from Cornwall, where he was working on a rock garden in Polruan-by-Fowey – to say that he was unable to play 'any very active part in a reorganised PL' but would be 'delighted to become a director, if that can be of assistance to you'. Moore could 'quite see that you might have to force Tambi's retirement as a director' but he 'should be sorry if it had to be so.'⁶² With all the pieces of his plan in place, March then wrote to Tambimuttu and gave warning of his wish to expand the Board and welcome as new directors Duncan, Moore, and 'perhaps Bottrall'. He suggested to Tambimuttu that he should 'retire as Director, at least for the next twelve months' but remain as 'editor-in-chief'.⁶³ Tambimuttu was in Paris when he received the news. His mood was such that March's proposal of additional Board members was received with enthusiasm, as a sign of momentum, and he suggested that March might also consider asking Lawrence Durrell to join. Tambimuttu's spirits were high because he was preoccupied in Paris, pursuing love and business opportunity bundled together in the person of American artist Buffie Johnson (1912–2006). The sudden and improbable bubble of an impulsive wedding was announced – in the midst of strained relations, Tambimuttu asked March to be his best man⁶⁴ – and the episode was to add emotional counterpoint to the deeper notes of the imminent loss of a magazine. In a series of excited letters, written in February and March 1949, Tambimuttu's distracted imagination quickly projected a transatlantic *Poetry London* empire of art and literature predicated upon the union of his forthcoming marriage, with offices in Mayfair and New York. It was not, however, a dream that March shared, and nor was it realized.

At the Annual General Meeting (24 March 1949), March was re-elected and two new Directors were elected, Nicholas Moore and Ronald Duncan. When, however, Tambimuttu's re-election was put to the vote, it failed to find support. 'This caused Mr Tambimuttu to address the meeting in very abusive terms,' wrote March in a narrative statement he prepared subsequently, 'and before there was time for further discussion regarding his further functions or employment, Mr Tambimuttu left the meeting uttering threats against all present and especially Mr March.' The occasion had been stage-managed and we may surmise that Tambimuttu's fiery reaction – the intemperance of Tenebroso⁶⁵ – had been foreseen, just as the strategy to remove him by adding further members to the Board had been carefully plotted. It was but one step from retaining Tambimuttu as an editor, as a paid employee, to dispensing with his services altogether, and the step was quickly taken. March wrote to 'Ronnie' Duncan (3 April): 'I have just sent a Minute of the Board Meeting we had at Hill Street the day after the famous Annual Meeting. You will remember that it was on your advice that we more or less decided to fire Tambi, though I,

⁶¹ March, Duncan, Moore and Bottrall are listed as Directors on a specimen of company letterhead that does not appear in the archive but was featured in a publication compiled by The Society of Industrial Arts: *Designers in Britain, 1851–1951*, vol. iii (London, 1951), p. 82. For an outline of Moore's life and relative obscurity following the demise of *Poetry London*, see Iain Sinclair, *Downriver* (London, 1991), which incorporates an interview with Peter Riley concerning Moore (pp. 307–15). Riley edited (and facilitated) Moore's last poems, *Lacrimae Rerum* (Hebden Bridge and Cambridge, 1988).

⁶² Moore to March, 27 January 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/12).

⁶³ March to Tambimuttu, 8 March 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3).

⁶⁴ Tambimuttu to March, without date [February 1949], from Hotel Palais D'Orsay, Paris: 'We are getting married soon and I should like you to be our best man!' (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3).

⁶⁵ Tambimuttu to March, 16 April 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3): 'To return to that awful Friday. You surely didn't think I meant anything of what I said. I wrote to you immediately from Paris. Helen Irwin will tell you I get very often into these unreasonable rages, where I live a sort of nightmare, which passes after a few hours when I always apologise.'

personally, was reluctant to do so'.⁶⁶ But all reluctance to act soon evaporated as the situation became intolerable – 'pure hell in the office,' wrote March – and the conflict seems to have come to a rather ragged Friday confrontation, March insisting their 'association was at an end' and Tambimuttu 'muttering about handing in his resignation and slinging accusations' as he left, for Paris and for Buffy Johnson. 'But I am afraid his calculations are wrong there,' March observed in the same letter to Duncan: Tambimuttu was to discover that March had communicated directly with her.⁶⁷ The following day, Saturday 2 April, March advised Tambimuttu, at an address in Paris, that he was dismissed (the archive contains a dated copy message in pencil on a postcard). It included a request that would go unheeded, and cause further friction: Tambimuttu should not attend at the office again. Following a formal letter of dismissal (3 April) sent to his London home address, another letter followed (4 April), referring to salary and National Insurance matters, with an incongruously familiar salutation – 'Dear Tambi' – that added to the engulfing sense of unreality.⁶⁸

A protest followed Tambimuttu's dismissal, a groundswell of indignation from a number of his closest supporters, led by Dickins and Kathleen Raine. March described the movement against him to his solicitor – his concern was sufficient to warrant legal advice – as a 'pity campaign'⁶⁹ instigated by Tambimuttu himself before he departed for Sri Lanka. The protest took the form of a circulated letter ('Open Letter to Richard March') expressing dismay at March's quiet revolution: 'We observe with some surprise that your sixteenth number, while no longer including the name of Tambimuttu on the editorial board, does not even appear to contain any reference between its covers to the absence of its creator [...].'⁷⁰ March had also continued to use a lyrebird design on the magazine's front cover, an emblem long associated with Tambimuttu's editorship.⁷¹ 'You trade under Tambi's banner,' wrote Roy Campbell.⁷² In the end, Dickins withdrew the threat to publish the letter, but Raine nevertheless independently sent a muted version of the letter to *The New Statesman and Nation* (21 January 1950) in which she marked Tambimuttu's silent return to Sri Lanka: 'curiously enough, there has been no reference to the departure of Tambimuttu or tribute to his work in *Poetry (London)* itself.'⁷³ A display of attitudes, considerable misinformation, and

⁶⁶ March to Ronald Duncan, 3 April 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/3/2).

⁶⁷ [...] but I had to explain to her when she read your cable. I was ill for a week in Paris after she left.' Tambimuttu to March, 16 April 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3).

⁶⁸ Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3.

⁶⁹ March to T. Graham Mould, Freeman & Son, 1 December 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/3/2).

⁷⁰ 'An Open Letter to Richard March' (Add. MS. 88908/7/3/2). The 'signatories' to the typescript, listed in March's copy were: Anthony Dickins, Kathleen Raine, Anne Ridler, Roy Campbell, John Craxton, Lucien [sic] Freud, David Gascoigne [sic], John Irwin and Keidrich Rhys.

⁷¹ The first cover to feature a lyrebird (by Lucian Freud) was PL 3 (1940). Subsequent issues featured lyrebird cover designs by Henry Moore and Graham Sutherland. The tradition continued with cover designs for *Poetry London – New York* (Alexander Calder) and *Poetry London / Apple Magazine* (Sutherland).

⁷² Campbell to March, without date [1949] (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/2). The front cover of PL 16 (September 1949) remained a lyrebird ('Tambi's banner'), despite the change in editorship. It was the last issue to have a lyrebird cover. To add further insult to injury, March's editorial in PL 16, the first to appear under the editorship of March, Moore and Duncan, celebrated the tenth anniversary of the magazine without a single reference to its previous editor.

⁷³ Kathleen Raine, letter to *The New Statesman and Nation* (21 January 1950), p. 66. March kept a cutting (Add. MS. 88908/9/3). Raine likened Tambimuttu to Comus: 'Tambimuttu was a dionysiac figure, and at his Comus-like touch restrictions certainly went to the winds. Many frightened young poets were grateful for Tambi's generous enthusiasm after the policy of stern editorial discouragement of the *Criterion* and the strictness of *New Verse*.' The comparison evidently stuck: in an earlier letter to March (26 September 1949), she refers to 'his flair for young poets and his ability to gather them round him like Comus' troop, in a kind of poetic revelry' (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/14).

a dance of compromise, can be read in the protracted correspondence about the matter between March and Dickins, Raine, and Campbell.⁷⁴

Given the differences between March and Tambimuttu at their parting, it is surprising to discover that an intermittent correspondence continued between them. Unfortunately, March's papers contain very little of his side of the correspondence, but there are seventeen letters from Tambimuttu that span 1950 to 1955. The letters are of considerable interest in providing information about Tambimuttu's prodigal reception in Sri Lanka (7 December 1949)⁷⁵ and his subsequent sojourn in Bombay in 1951 where he married his second wife, Safia Tyabjee, with whom he would travel to New York in 1952. Many passages in the letters from Sri Lanka exhibit bravado and humour, as Tambimuttu plots with cold calculation his progress between married women and dowries, weighing attractiveness, age and wealth, in the pursuit of his goal of a return to publishing (with the support of 'a rich ravisher').⁷⁶ On 15 September 1951, Tambimuttu wrote: 'I thought it might be possible to continue PL with an Indian branch [...] and get the capital from Indian and Ceylonese people who may be interested [...] I find that PL is the central thing that absorbs my attention.'⁷⁷ He envisaged March as a co-editor, and offered him half of the (imagined) business, free of investment. In the same letter, Tambimuttu informs March of his marriage to Safia, and admits to adopting a new religion – expediently: 'She is from one of the most important Muslim families, and between you and me I had to become a Mussalman in order to marry her which means I believe in Allah, a plurality of wives and divorce by repeating "Sister" thrice.'⁷⁸ Tambimuttu's period of convenient Islamic faith is not mentioned in *Bridge Between Two Worlds*, which presents his exoticism as exclusively Hindu, and not as a matter of convenience but as a fundamental essence: 'how utterly and essentially Hindu he was,' wrote Robin Waterfield.⁷⁹

In the meantime, *Poetry London* continued its terminal progress. On 26 February 1950, March wrote to Tambimuttu to say he was going to 'liquidate the Company forthwith', offering Tambimuttu £25 for his 'worthless' 4,900 shares.⁸⁰ Tambimuttu accepted ('the price you offer is ridiculous') on the condition, as he put it – raising again the vexed and nice question of magazine ownership – that March returned the magazine to him.⁸¹ Following the last issue of *Poetry London*, in September 1951, March enabled the restoration of Tambimuttu's 'property' by transferring the magazine title to his Mandeville imprint and selling the shell of Editions Poetry London Ltd as a vehicle for tax avoidance.⁸² March's letter on the matter has not survived, but we have Tambimuttu's letter (30 March 1952) in which he expresses his gratitude and feels empowered: 'I must make plans.'⁸³ By then,

⁷⁴ For correspondence with Dickins, see Add. MS. 88908/7/1/4; for Raine, see Add. MS. 88908/7/1/14; for Campbell, see Add. MS. 88908/7/1/2.

⁷⁵ The *Ceylon Daily News* (8 December 1949) reported his return and included a photograph of Tambimuttu 'greeting his father at the jetty after a separation of eleven years.' See Add. MS. 88908/9/3 for this and other cuttings that Tambimuttu sent to March.

⁷⁶ Tambimuttu to March, 1 July [1950], a candid letter. See also Tambimuttu's subsequent letter to March, 8 August 1950. Add. MS. 88908/7/2/4.

⁷⁷ Tambimuttu to March, 15 September 1951 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/4).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Robin Waterfield, 'Introduction', Williams (ed.), op. cit., p. 21.

⁸⁰ March to Tambimuttu, 26 February 1950 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/4).

⁸¹ Tambimuttu to March, 14 April 1950 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/4).

⁸² Smith, in Williams (ed.), op. cit., p. 282, states: 'All that remains in the Public Records Office is a note to the effect that Editions Poetry London changed its name to The New Fiction Press – a publishing house that was to gain notoriety in 1954 when Lord Chief Justice Goddard sent the owners to prison for having the audacity to publish a handful of pulp-fiction titles by Hank Janson!'

⁸³ Tambimuttu to March, 30 March 1952 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/4).

March's health was already declining. In 1950, he had had an operation to remove an eye,⁸⁴ and between then and his death from cancer in 1955, his health continued to diminish, as Tambimuttu's engine of ambition alternately idled and re-charged. In the last months of his life, March received several excited letters from Tambimuttu, then living in Greenwich Village and about to launch the first issue of *Poetry London – New York*. The new magazine was financed on the strength of an American publisher's advance (against which Tambimuttu would not deliver): 'since I have just sold my first book of short stories to Houghton Mifflin for an advance of 1,500 dollars, I am able to revive [*Poetry London*], under a new title.'⁸⁵ The exuberant tone of the letters and their urgent requests for stray *Poetry London* manuscripts and old contracts (Lorca translation rights, for example, and a contract with Dylan Thomas for *Adventures in the Skin Trade* – 'I believe PL bought it while in Craven House in 1942'⁸⁶) suggest that Tambimuttu was not aware of the grave seriousness of March's physical condition. In the same prepossessed letter, he wrote: 'I hear there was something about me in *Punch* of April 13 by J. Maclaren Ross. If you could remember off hand, I would love to know, what if anything was written about me after I left England. Perhaps you have the cuttings?'⁸⁷

'A certain editor who shall be nameless ...'⁸⁸

The judgement that Tambimuttu was a charlatan who owed more to good fortune than to critical judgement had become, in certain quarters, a settled point of view some years before Maclaren-Ross wrote about Tenebroso, the Holy Fakir of Poetry: the bite of the satirical piece for *Punch* derived from a recognition and reformulation of observations and judgements already aired in public, in literary reviews and in conversations in the saloon bars of Soho and Fitzrovia. A point of view that persisted was that Tambimuttu's success, and the large circulation of *Poetry London*, were simply the product of the particular economic and social circumstances of the years of war, and the exploitation of an opportune gap in the market following the demise of Geoffrey Grigson's journal *New Verse*.⁸⁹ Tambimuttu's open and catholic approach to editing was likened to 'a vast junk shop, or oriental bazaar, in which you may pick up – among the curios – odd bargains, simple pots, and genuine Birmingham brass.'⁹⁰ In a critical letter of 1947 – published in *Poetry London*, and replied to in the same issue by Tambimuttu – Grigson observed: 'The axis which runs

⁸⁴ See Tambimuttu to March, 21 August 1950 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/4). At the time, March had been struggling with the protest of Dickens, Raine et al., against Tambimuttu's departure. For another perspective on the personal dynamics then operating, see the sympathetic letters to March from Lynette Roberts, then going through a difficult divorce from Keidrych Rhys, and who found in March a friend in adversity – see Add. MS. 88908/7/1/15 for five autograph letters of some length (1949-53), including comments on Tambimuttu and Raine.

⁸⁵ Tambimuttu to March, 12 April 1955 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/5).

⁸⁶ Tambimuttu to March, 22 May 1955 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/5).

⁸⁷ Tambimuttu to March, 22 May 1955 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/5). Tambimuttu's request was premature: Maclaren-Ross's piece for *Punch* did not appear until 25 May, as noted above.

⁸⁸ Wrey Gardiner, referring to Tambimuttu. See n. 118 below, where the remark is discussed in context.

⁸⁹ Hewison, op. cit., p. 99: 'The rise of both *Poetry (London)* and *Poetry Quarterly* to the important positions they held was almost entirely accidental. A gap had been left by the collapse of Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse* and Julian Symon's *Twentieth Century Verse*; the demand for poetry caused circulation to expand. Neither magazine achieved the critical status of its predecessors. Both Tambimuttu and Gardiner preferred catholicity to critical dogmatism, for which they have been criticised by the doctrinaire, though they may have done more for poetry by giving it space in which to develop rather than forcing it down fixed channels.' The final issue of *New Verse* appeared in May 1939, three months after the first issue of *Poetry London*.

⁹⁰ Hugh Gordon Porteus, cited in Julian Symons, *Notes from Another Country* (London, 1972), p. 65.

through *Poetry London* is that all poems are poems and equally worth printing. The only axis is to have no axis, beyond that faith in muddle and contradiction which has made *Poetry London* the most foolish (if representative) periodical of its time.⁹¹ The fresh (and representative) virtues of catholicity that had seemed to Reginald Moore in his Foreword to *Selected Writing* (1941) to be exciting and desirable came to be viewed, as the decade progressed, as an abdication of editorial responsibility. In fact, what was being objected to was diversity and modernity: Tambimuttu published, quite deliberately side-by-side, the out-moded but still widely-read Georgian poetry of Walter de la Mare, European poetry in translation (Hölderlin and Rilke), and work from young poets whose work impressed (Keith Douglas, Charles Causley, R. S. Thomas, Alan Ross); he championed the virtues of minor poetry, published Americans abroad (Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin) and welcomed English surrealism (Philip O'Connor and David Gascoyne). Above all, Tambimuttu welcomed modernity, even if for some readers the poetry of W. S. Graham proved to be quite incomprehensible.⁹²

Critical discrimination was a responsibility of central (and moral) importance to emerging critics raised on F. R. Leavis: D. J. Enright wrote at the time: 'the most influential verse magazine extant has consigned "the critic" to an unpleasant death and openly disclaimed any principle other than catholicity; what little criticism is permitted has to remember that we are all poets, and poets ought to be one happy family [...]'.⁹³ The sober and academic tone that would come to be associated with Movement poetics dominant in the 1950s and beyond was already emerging during the early post-war years. Ronald Duncan's words of editorial advice to March, following Tambimuttu's departure, emphasized craft and prosody over inspiration (an emphasis derived from his mentor, Ezra Pound): 'I'm sick of this myth that every periodical thinks it can unearth a bevy of new talents every number,' he wrote to March, alluding to Tambimuttu's encouragement of new writers. 'Ask 20 poets to write a sestina – then admit only Ezra & two others can do it. Establish the craft.'⁹⁴ Moore was unimpressed by Duncan's ideas to re-vitalize the magazine (themed issues, competitions and commissioned work) and thought his remarks 'a bit pompous'.⁹⁵ Yet much of the sentiment of Moore's letter (passages are marked in pencil) found its way into the 'Comment' that prefaced the 17th number of *Poetry London* (January 1950), the first to appear following Tambimuttu's departure for Sri Lanka. Classical references to Caedmon and Demetrius (March's addition) buttressed the advocacy of 'a renewal of *style*' (an echo of Pound on Remy de Gourmont). The editorial endeavoured to put distance between March's magazine and *Poetry London* under Tambimuttu's editorship, when the magazine had 'addressed itself to a particular situation in poetry' associated with the years of war: in 'this post-war decade [...] "profound" stanzas full of high-flown, vague

⁹¹ Geoffrey Grigson, letter to the editor (11 December 1947), PL 13 (1948), p. 46.

⁹² D. Lee to Tambimuttu (5 January 1944): 'My friends and I have always prided ourselves on our appreciation of modern poetry and we were annoyed when confronted with this poem to find we understood not one word of it. Some of these friends are in possession of an Arts degree which may admittedly have hampered their efforts to elucidate the poem, but having made due allowance for the disadvantage incurred, we decided that we might select nouns, verbs and adjectives at random from the nearest dictionaries, string them together in a carefree fashion with a few conjunctions and prepositions, and achieve a poem as inspired as "The Fifth Journey"' (Add. MS. 88907/7/13/5).

⁹³ D. J. Enright, 'The Significance of *Poetry London*', *The Critic*, no. 1 (Spring 1947), pp. 3-10.

⁹⁴ Duncan to March [1950], sheets 171-2 (Add. MS. 88908/3).

⁹⁵ Moore to March, 26 December 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/12): 'In spite of this, I should be quite willing that Ronnie should have his head in this matter, if only he would (for this specific performance) take over the reins himself & give an illustration of how the race is to be run. I have a suspicion he'll come off going round Tattenham Corner – that is if he ever does get to the starting point.'

emotion and undigested philosophy are not likely to be the most successful ones.⁹⁶ With a front cover designed by Seán Jennett in the form of a decorative roundel – detached in quality, appropriately *uninspired*, and without the emblematic resonance of the familiar lyrebird – the issue comprised only thirty-two pages and appears undernourished. With only fifteen pages of poetry, the remainder was devoted to commentary and reviews, reflective of the change in editorial temperament. March's subsequent editorial remarks in the final issue of *Poetry London* aligned the magazine with a formalism associated with New Criticism ('In composing poetry the author makes an object which acquires an existence in its own right') citing Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* as a worthy model, rejecting 'the over-enthusiastic apostles of "living speech"', and repeating the charge that 'Many of our poets rely too much on vague subjectivity.'⁹⁷ In doing so, he sought to embrace the emergent literary mood of a new decade, whilst underlining the distance travelled from the magazine's first editorial, in which Tambimuttu had boldly affirmed that 'Every man has poetry within him.'⁹⁸

In contradiction of the accusation of indiscriminate acceptance, Tambimuttu's editorial correspondence contains many examples of the exercise of editorial judgement. Alan Ross, for one, then a young and aspiring poet from the Royal Navy who Tambimuttu first published – and who himself would later publish Maclaren-Ross's memoirs – would certainly have known so: 'Many of your latest poems read like chunks out of a newspaper,' Tambimuttu wrote to him (17 December 1945), 'a flock of words streaming on and on, and one wonders when it will stop. When will you stop overloading your poems with similes to concoct some Rossian lines? You seem to think visually all the time, and, although the poetic feeling is there, a good poem won't happen unless you select your imagery.'⁹⁹ Other serving members of the armed forces received a sharp reply. Captain Hamish Henderson was told, bluntly (18 December 1945): 'I am sorry I don't like this poem. Too full of blood and snot'. Most replies to poems submitted were, however, more constructive: 'A poet should select his images and present them in a condensed language that is easily memorable.'¹⁰⁰ Young Drummond Allison, submitting twenty poems to Tambimuttu in 1943, the year in which he was later killed in action in Italy, requested an informed opinion from an editor whose judgement he respected: 'Even if none of the poems are good enough for "Poetry (London)," could you let me have an opinion on them, and any suggestions for how I can become a better writer?'¹⁰¹ There is ample evidence in the archive of a decisive editorial hand, a hand strong enough, for example, to return work for revision to regular

⁹⁶ 'Comment', PL 17 (January 1950), pp. 3-4. Although the sentiment accords with Ronald Duncan's views, the source of many turns of phrase and the emphasis on style over inspiration derive specifically from a letter from Moore to March written in [December] 1949, with passages marked by March in pencil: see letter dated 'Tuesday' only, beginning: 'I could, if you like, come up again on Friday' (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/12).

⁹⁷ March, 'To Make and Counterfeit', PL 23 (1951), pp. 3, 4. In 1948, March had re-published Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Editions Poetry London).

⁹⁸ Tambimuttu, 'First Letter', PL 1 (1939). Tolley comments on March's editorial (op. cit., p. 122): 'This was the voice of the fifties, and virtually a refutation of the periodical's initial stance'.

⁹⁹ Tambimuttu to Ross, 17 December 1945 (Add. MS. 88907/7/18/10).

¹⁰⁰ Tambimuttu to Richard Garrett, 12 September 1945 (Add. MS. 88907/7/9/6). C. S. M. Sheldon, stationed in Nairobi, was advised: 'Your early poems are too literary for inclusion in PL, but your later poems show a definite advance and you seem to be writing from genuine poetic experience. I would advise you to read some of the contemporary poets since you still seem steeped in poetic language of the past. Nowadays, readers seem to expect a condensed, precise poetic language which is free from poetic clichés. We are, no doubt, creating our own modern clichés, but they have not yet worn thin and are still evocative.' Tambimuttu to Sheldon, 4 March 1946 (Add. MS. 88907/7/20/10).

¹⁰¹ Allison to Tambimuttu, 24 March [1943] (Add. MS. 88907/7/1/8). Allison was killed in action in Italy, 2 December 1943, aged 22.

contributors, as Kathleen Raine, Michael Hamburger, Ruthven Todd and Vernon Watkins discovered when they contributed to a festschrift for T. S. Eliot, edited by Tambimuttu and March, to celebrate Eliot's 60th birthday.¹⁰²

The same editor was responsible for the remarkable list of first editions published by Editions Poetry London.¹⁰³ Between 1943 and 1951, sixty-two books were published (forty-five of which were published between 1943 and 1947), many of which are striking in typography and design. Amongst them were volumes of poetry by Nicholas Moore (jacket and drawings by Lucian Freud), Kathleen Raine (jacket and drawings by Barbara Hepworth), and David Gascoyne (jacket and drawings by Graham Sutherland). Henry Moore's *Shelter Sketch Book* (1945), showing a variety of anonymous human forms – at once vital and sepulchral – crowding London Underground stations during the Blitz, was produced to a minimal design by Tambimuttu, lending the book the appearance and intimacy of an actual sketchbook. There was also new prose and fiction by Vladimir Nabokov, Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell and Anaïs Nin, as well as Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*. Various Editions Poetry London covers and jackets were designed by Cecil Collins,¹⁰⁴ Anthony Froshaug, Gerald Wilde, Eric Ravilious, Vivian Ridler and Franciszka Themerson, and the first two publications of the imprint, by Raine and Hamburger in 1943, were designed by Berthold Wolpe, then working for Faber and Faber.¹⁰⁵

A book that typified Tambimuttu's attention to design and an inclination to include illustration whenever possible was Keith Douglas's war memoir, *Alamein to Zem Zem*. Published posthumously in 1946, and illustrated by Douglas's sketches and watercolours, the first edition remains the only edition to reproduce Douglas's paintings in colour.¹⁰⁶ Its publication in the engaging form it has was due entirely to Tambimuttu, who encouraged the inclusion of Douglas's sketches and paintings at an early stage in their discussions.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Tambimuttu's encouragement of Douglas as a poet, following the rejection of his poems by Eliot on behalf of Faber and Faber,¹⁰⁸ was immensely motivating to Douglas: 'Thank you for your letter and for publishing my poems – I had given up all idea of writing in the Army

¹⁰² Richard March and Tambimuttu (eds.), *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium* (Editions Poetry London, 1948). For Tambimuttu's editorial correspondence with Raine, see Add. MS. 88908/8/6/3; for Hamburger, see Add. MS. 88908/8/5/1; for Todd, see Add. MS. 88908/8/7/2; and for Watkins, see Add. MS. 88908/8/7/4.

¹⁰³ For a detailed bibliography, see Alan Smith, 'Poetry London 1939-1951', in Williams (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 275-90. For Nicholas Moore's account of his supportive editorial role, see 'Tambi the Knife', in Williams (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 57-64.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas Moore, *Buzzing Around with a Bee*. PL Pamphlet No. 4 (London, [1941]). Moore's pamphlet, and the three PL pamphlets that preceded it (by Scurfield, Ridler, and Fraser), were distinguished by 'beautifully designed typographical covers by A. D. Nightall of Diemer and Reynolds'. Moore, 'Tambi the Knife', Williams (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 59. These four pamphlets were originally to have been published by Moore himself, although he lacked Tambimuttu's distribution network and brought the pamphlets with him by agreement when he began to work with Tambimuttu.

¹⁰⁵ Tambimuttu's interest in publishing well-designed books was in accord with, if not in advance of, a trend in British publishing during the decade to reconsider mass-market books as objects of design. Notable examples are the enduring work of Jan Tschichold at Penguin Books, who transformed the design of their paperbacks between 1947 and 1949, and Berthold Wolpe, who devised the ubiquitous Albertus typeface in 1934, was responsible for striking jacket designs at Gollancz in the late 1930s, and who joined Faber and Faber in 1941 (remaining there until 1975), where he developed a distinctive jacket style and typography.

¹⁰⁶ Keith Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem* (Editions Poetry London, 1946).

¹⁰⁷ Desmond Graham, *Keith Douglas 1920-1944: A Biography* (Oxford, 1974; rev. paperback edn., 1988), pp. 231-2. See also, Tambimuttu, 'Tenth Letter: In Memory of Keith Douglas', PL 10 (December 1944), without pagination (sixth page, first column).

¹⁰⁸ Graham, *Keith Douglas*, pp. 138-9.

until your efforts and John Hall's nerved me to try again.'¹⁰⁹ Early in 1944, during a period of leave (swiftly followed by intensive training exercises in the New Forest with amphibious tanks in preparation for the forthcoming Normandy invasion), Tambimuttu contracted with Douglas to bring out a volume of his more recent poems.¹¹⁰ Douglas became a frequent visitor to the Poetry London office, discussing in some detail the publication of both books. Following Douglas's death at Normandy (9 June 1944), the volume of poems was, in time, re-conceived as a collected poems, although, as March's company began to fail, the preparation of the book was not the most pressing priority. In the meantime, Tambimuttu regularly published Douglas's poetry in *Poetry London*.¹¹¹ However, when the book appeared (September 1951) as the last volume of the Editions Poetry London imprint, far from being the climax of a remarkable run of publications, the *Collected Poems of Keith Douglas* marked instead the nadir of Tambimuttu's reputation. 'It has been shockingly edited,' he wrote to March from Sri Lanka when he received a copy.¹¹² The matter was to reverberate to Tambimuttu's discredit in the years that followed.

Edited at March's request by John Waller and G. S. Fraser, both of whom had known Douglas from Cairo,¹¹³ it included a contentious set of notes to the poems, in which Tambimuttu was implicitly attacked: the editors announced dramatically that 'whole poems were found to have been altered and emended by other hands than the author's'.¹¹⁴ Although the editors were careful to use the plural term – 'other hands' – the judgemental tenor of the notes, which included animosity and opinion, spilled over into reviews, and misinformation surrounding the circumstances of publication subsequently found its way into secondary literature, where it has remained lodged. Thus, the critic and editor Ian Hamilton misinformed his readers: 'In the case of Keith Douglas, who was killed in 1944, there were manuscript problems that delayed the publication of his *Collected Poems* until 1951.'¹¹⁵ As we have seen, financial problems and not unspecified 'manuscript problems' delayed publication. William Scammell, whose *Keith Douglas: A Study* (1988) is still the only extensive treatment of Douglas's poetry, wrote that it was Tambimuttu's 'hopeless

¹⁰⁹ Douglas to Tambimuttu, [11 July 1943], Desmond Graham (ed.), *Keith Douglas: The Letters* (Manchester, 2000), p. 291 (letter 279).

¹¹⁰ Graham, Keith Douglas, pp. 231 and 240. The volume of poems was given the provisional title of *Bête Noire* (the title hid a private pun in its reference to Betty Jesse, a member of Tambimuttu's office staff whom Douglas was romantically pursuing at the time, and who gave his visits to Tambimuttu's office a double purpose). A contract for *Alamein to Zem Zem* soon followed (18 March 1944), Douglas preferring the memoir to be published first: 'I don't give a damn how long you take to publish the poems, within reason: publish the Diary first and the poems later (when they'll sell better, I think, as a result of people having read the diary).' Douglas to Tambimuttu [March 1944], Graham (ed.), *Keith Douglas: The Letters*, p. 324 (letter 308).

¹¹¹ PL 11 (1947): four poems; PL 12 (1947): four poems (curiously, repeating a poem, 'Leukothea', from the previous issue); PL 13 (1948): two poems; PL 14 (1948): four poems; and PL 16 (1949): three poems.

¹¹² Tambimuttu to March, without date [late 1951 or early 1952], letter beginning: 'Many thanks for the books...' (Add. MS. 88098/7/2/4).

¹¹³ Tambimuttu had published *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile*, compiled by Robin Fedden (Editions Poetry London, 1945), which included four poems by Douglas: 'Cairo Jag', 'Enfidaville', 'Vergissmeinicht' [sic], and 'Desert Flowers'. For background on Cairo, see G. S. Fraser, *A Stranger and Afraid: The Autobiography of an Intellectual* (Manchester, 1983).

¹¹⁴ 'Editors' Preface', *The Collected Poems of Keith Douglas*, eds. John Waller and G. S. Fraser (Edition Poetry London, 1951), p. v.

¹¹⁵ Ian Hamilton, 'The Forties', *A Poetry Chronicle* (London, 1973), p. 57.

inefficiency that led to the long delay' in publication.¹¹⁶ Although Scammell acknowledged that Tambimuttu 'must be counted amongst those who had some real insight into the quality of Douglas's achievement,'¹¹⁷ he too perpetuated a fog of misinformation. A contemporary review, by Wrey Gardiner, adopted Waller and Fraser's combative manner, which served to give a form of licence to subsequent commentators (including, as we have seen, Maclaren-Ross), and used the occasion to mount a general broadside, writing explicitly where Waller and Fraser had been implicit: 'Keith Douglas, like many other poets of the early war years, suffered at the hands of a certain editor who shall be nameless. This temporary sultan of the world of letters was in the habit of altering whole lines and phrases of the poems he printed to conform with some imaginary theory of modern poetry of which he was the self-appointed midwife.'¹¹⁸ The prince had now become a sultan, self-appointed and wilful, and was no longer in London to defend himself.

What does the archive tell us about the matter? It tells us that March decided to proceed with a collected edition shortly after Tambimuttu was dismissed (2 April 1949). Several letters from Tambimuttu to March written in the months immediately following show him anxious to edit the volume: 'Have you written to Keith Douglas's mother? I should like to edit the book (as I arranged with Keith) & possibly Blunden could supply a foreword & I hope I will be given a fee for the work.'¹¹⁹ Returning from Paris in May, having lost in love and employment, Tambimuttu found himself barred from the office and released from all editorial responsibilities, including the editing of Douglas's poems. An angry letter to March followed: 'You have no right to edit the Keith Douglas since you don't know the history and scope of his work. I found very valuable Keith things scattered & strewn in odd corners & you will never recognize them. You or no one else could ever say whether anything was missing.'¹²⁰ By June, Tambimuttu was resigned to March's decision: 'OK about K. Douglas but for accuracy's sake you'd better let me see a final draft of the book since many of the poems have a case history & Keith left the editing of particular lines to me [...] Keith also gave me final instructions as to their publication & I must see that everything is in order. I would hate it if anything went wrong.'¹²¹

Work on the poems did not start until December 1949, when Waller asked March for 'any original Douglas manuscripts you may have.'¹²² Remarkably, the exercise took the editors only a week or two to complete, as Fraser reported later to March: 'I really don't see why

¹¹⁶ William Scammell, *Keith Douglas: A Study* (London, 1988), p. 195. Endorsing and elaborating upon a fictional Tambimuttu, Scammell continued: 'None the less [Tambimuttu] was a tireless publicist of Douglas's work once he had read it. Perhaps his championship was itself an element in Douglas's tardy recognition, since the literary world viewed his endorsements with understandable suspicion.'

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Wrey Gardiner, 'The Poetry of Keith Douglas', *Poetry* (Autumn 1951), a cutting of which is pasted into a scrapbook of press cuttings (Add. MS. 88908/10/2).

¹¹⁹ Tambimuttu to March, undated letter [April or May 1949], verso p. 6 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3). Blunden, Douglas's tutor at Oxford, did eventually supply an introduction, to Keith Douglas, *Collected Poems*, ed. John Waller, G. S. Fraser and J. C. Hall (London, 1966). In this edition (in effect, a second edition to that of 1951), the texts of the poems remained unchanged but the editors' notes to the poems were revised, losing much of their invective: 'The Notes to the 1951 edition have been revised where necessary' (p. 16).

¹²⁰ Tambimuttu to March, 1 May 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3).

¹²¹ Tambimuttu to March, without date [June 1949], letter beginning: 'It is difficult for a starving man [...]' (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/3).

¹²² John Waller to March, 12 December 1949 (Add. MS. 88908/7/3/1). For a guide to these and other Douglas papers in British Library collections prior to 1972, see Jenny Stratford, *The Arts Council Collection of Modern Literary Manuscripts 1963-1972* (London, 1974), pp. 44-61, 118-30. For a summary of subsequent additional manuscripts at the British Library, see the remarks by Graham (ed.), Keith Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, 3rd edn (London, 2000), p. 138.

[Douglas's] work should have been suppressed for ever to salve Tambi's bad conscience about being unwilling or unable to do the week or two's concentrated work on it that was all that was necessary.¹²³ Fraser's fantastic suggestion of suppression is as striking as the limited amount of time he and Waller seem to have devoted to their task. There is not the scope in this paper to examine textual matters in detail, but a single example is telling. A particularly pointed remark in the notes supplied by Waller and Fraser concerns the poem 'The House' (composed in 1941): 'This is the poem as Douglas wrote it,' the editors unequivocally declare: 'The version published in *Poetry London* contains unwarranted alterations made in the MS text in some foreign hand.'¹²⁴ The inference of the note – wrapped within the term 'foreign hand' – is that the alterations were made by Tambimuttu. Here, perhaps, we may think, is an instance of a whole poem being 'emended', as the 'Editors' Preface' had forewarned. A careful comparison of the text of the poem as it first appeared in *Poetry London* and as it was subsequently printed in *Collected Poems* reveals that Waller and Fraser made several textual changes.¹²⁵ And yet, if we turn to the more recently published definitive text in Desmond Graham's scholarly edition of Douglas's poems, we find that Graham's text of 'The House' agrees exactly with the text published by Tambimuttu (with the exception of the placement of two commas, and a palaeographical preference for 'suspicious' over 'suspicions').¹²⁶ In his letter to March, Fraser borrowed the diction of war from Douglas to suggest, extremely, that *mutilation* had occurred: 'There is very definite and real evidence of altering of some of the poems in handwriting – and for that matter of their being printed in a mutilated state'.¹²⁷ On Graham's authority, the revisions of 'The House' are in Douglas's hand. Yet Fraser's private letter to March is unambiguous in its accusation that the hand of alteration – the mutilating hand – was Tambimuttu's, and the choice of the term 'foreign hand' over 'unidentified hand' in the note to the poem seems to reflect this conviction: since the handwriting had been putatively identified by Waller and Fraser as Tambimuttu's, the latter term, arguably the more common expression, is shunned in favour of a term that has the advantage of suggesting the guilty (and 'foreign') editor in all but name. Significantly, in the subsequent edition of the poems (published, ironically, by Faber and Faber in 1966), in which Waller and Fraser's texts were maintained, the note to 'The House' is trimmed to a less provocative statement, although the editors are still assertive of their judgement: 'Another version appeared in *Poetry London*, but the present version is the correct one'.¹²⁸

¹²³ G. S. Fraser to March, undated letter, probably written in the early months of 1952 (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/7).

¹²⁴ *The Collected Poems of Keith Douglas* (1951), p. 145.

¹²⁵ PL 14 (1948), pp. 2-3. *The Collected Poems of Keith Douglas* (1951), pp. 52-4. Amongst the changes introduced, Waller and Fraser print 'half illusion' for 'unreal', 'curious creative stone' for 'creative stone', 'an obscure feeling of suspicion' for 'an unpleasant prompting of suspicions', 'prompted me to climb' for 'sent me climbing up' and, in the final line of the poem, 'the beautiful stranger, the princess' for 'the beautiful strangers, coming to my house'.

¹²⁶ Keith Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, 3rd edn (London, 2000), pp. 69-70. Graham's textual note to the poem (p. 150) refers to 'autograph revisions' (not to revisions by a 'foreign' hand). For a second and comparable example, consider 'I Listen to the Desert Wind', first published in PL 14 (1948), p. 1. Waller and Fraser's note to the poem refers to 'weakening alterations' by hand that 'were not an author's emendation' (1951, p. 143), and they revise the version they print accordingly. Graham's version in *The Complete Poems* (2000, p. 96) accepts the emendations as being in Douglas's hand and prints a text that, apart from a small difference in capitalization (third stanza), agrees exactly with Tambimuttu's text in *Poetry London*.

¹²⁷ Fraser to March [1952] (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/7).

¹²⁸ Keith Douglas, *Collected Poems* (1966), p. 152.

Over and above textual matters remarkable in themselves,¹²⁹ what is perhaps more remarkable in the Douglas affair is the animosity and the innuendo, the disproportionate accusation and the readiness to discredit in public. ‘When they were not sure’, Tambimuttu wrote to March on receipt of the book, ‘they may have consulted me’.¹³⁰ But there was no communication between Waller and Fraser and the one person who had talked with Douglas on several occasions about the planned book in some detail, the person whose judgement Douglas had trusted sufficiently to decide, in at least one documented instance, between alternate versions of a particular poem: ‘If there are variations between the 2 versions of “L’Autobus” use whichever you prefer.’¹³¹ Just as March had sought, in his editorial remarks in the last issues of *Poetry London*, to draw a line between the literary mood of the coming decade and the broadly romantic temperament characteristic of the horizonless years of war in which Tambimuttu had risen to prominence, so Fraser drew a comparable dividing line in the final remarks of his letter to March, associating the early and heady years of *Poetry London* with immaturity: March is to ‘Tell [Tambimuttu] that we are men now and ought not to behave like children, and give him my love’.¹³² Douglas’s poetry, at odds with the hesitant self-regard and ironical tone of the Movement poetry of the 1950s, remained largely ignored. Five years after the publication of Douglas’s poems, in 1956, Fraser gave the Chatterton lecture at the British Academy, in which he discussed Douglas’s brief life and work. Idealizing his subject as a ‘cavalier’ with ‘aristocratic virtues’ whose ‘heroic attitude’ was not given to ‘intellectual chatter’, nor to the trivia of ‘evening parties in Chelsea’,¹³³ Fraser did not neglect a public opportunity to swell the notoriety of the nameless editor, referring in passing to certain ‘inaccurate texts’ that he and Waller had corrected.¹³⁴

When *Poetry London* was reprinted by the publishers Frank Cass, in 1970,¹³⁵ it was given a prominent and damning review in the *Times Literary Supplement*. The review was anonymous, in accord with editorial policy prevailing at the time, although the author of the review has since been identified as Ian Hamilton, who repeated again familiar criticisms of Tambimuttu and of the poetry of the period.¹³⁶ The accumulative construction of Tambimuttu by his detractors that has been outlined above may be considered as a particular and localized instance of the general occlusion of poetry of the 1940s, and its miswritten

¹²⁹ Many of Douglas’s poems exist in several versions, including copies and mis-copies. The chief difference between Graham’s texts and those of Waller and Fraser resides in the priority that Graham gives to a folio of typescripts Douglas left with Tambimuttu in 1944, some of which Douglas had revised by hand. See Graham, ‘Preface to Third Edition’, Keith Douglas, *The Complete Poems* (2000), p. xi.

¹³⁰ Tambimuttu to March, without date [late 1951 or early 1952], letter beginning: ‘Many thanks for the books [...]’ (Add. MS. 88908/7/2/4). In the same letter, Tambimuttu writes: ‘in view of the fact some of the editors’ remarks will reflect on me I will have to write a letter or something to an English journal. And I hope matters will be righted in a 2nd edition’.

¹³¹ Douglas to Tambimuttu, 12 April 1944. Graham (ed.), *Keith Douglas: The Letters*, pp. 334–5 (letter 315). Prior to meeting Tambimuttu, Douglas reported to his mother, Marie J. Douglas, a negative impression, confusing Senegal with Sri Lanka: ‘Tambimuttu [...] it appears is Senegalese and a complete shit’. Douglas to Douglas (9 June 1943), Graham (ed.), *Keith Douglas: The Letters* (2000), p. 285 (letter 272).

¹³² Fraser to March [1952] (Add. MS. 88908/7/1/7).

¹³³ Lecture given 14 March 1956. G. S. Fraser, ‘Keith Douglas: A Poet of the Second World War’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xlii (1956), pp. 89–108. See pp. 93, 94.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹³⁵ Reprinted in five volumes by Frank Cass and Company Ltd (London, 1970).

¹³⁶ ‘Internment of the Intellectual’, *Times Literary Supplement* (19 February, 1971), p. 206. Author identified as Hamilton by H. M. Klein, ‘Tambimuttu’s Poetry in Wartime’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, xxi:1 (January 1985), pp. 1–18, note 25.

history, that has been remarked upon.¹³⁷ Although the Heideggerian terms in which W. S. Graham's poetry has been addressed of late,¹³⁸ and the recent discussion by Peter Riley of the 'poetical potential of opacity' in Dylan Thomas's poetic language,¹³⁹ – to give two further examples of the engagement of contemporary poets with poetry of the 1940s – are at variance with Tambimuttu's avowed mistrust of an intellectual response to poetry, there is nevertheless a form of implicit editorial testimony in the returning appeal of Graham and Thomas as preoccupations of the present, two poets about whom Tambimuttu was particularly passionate, as there is an implicit testimony in the restored texts of several poems by Keith Douglas. The papers of Tambimuttu and March now available at the British Library provide an opportunity that has been long overdue for the documentary air of evidence to ventilate discussion of the most important poetry publication of the 1940s.

¹³⁷ The seminal paper that set the terms for discussion of this occlusion, and its relationship to the development of the orthodox canon of post-war British poetry (Larkin, Hughes, Heaney), was Andrew Crozier, 'Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism', in Alan Sinfield (ed.), *Society and Literature: 1945-1970* (London, 1983), pp. 199-233.

¹³⁸ Reviewed by Robin Purves, 'W. S. Graham and the Heidegger Question', in Purves and Sam Ladkin (eds.), *Complicities: British Poetry 1945-2000* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2007), pp. 4-29.

¹³⁹ Peter Riley, 'Thomas and Apocalypse', *Poetry Wales*, xlv (Winter 2008/09), pp. 12-16. See p. 13: 'It is difficult to think of any practice prior to Thomas, certainly not in Britain, which recognised so explicitly the poetical potential of opacity, of offering the linguistic surface of the poem as a thing of value in itself, without the reader needing to see "through" it.'