

DYLAN THOMAS'S 18 POEMS: HIS RULE AND ENERGY

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Abstract

The Apocalyptic poet Dylan Thomas, in his admirable study of the defeat of the poets of thirties, shows in 18 Poems how the collapse of an external frame of reference led him to seek the principle of order within the individual, within himself, to write of man and of the world in terms of his own inner life. Recognizing the dilemma of the fallen poets, Thomas observes that the widely held modes of ordering experience having broken down, each poet had to work out his own pattern. Auden's poems demonstrate a deepening perplexity, and the development in his thought is marked by a shift from "the language of moderation" to "the language of learning and the language of love," from the vocabulary of assertion to the vocabulary of doubt and conflict. Another thought implicit in Auden's poetry is that it is not enough for a poet to construct an order by means of his imaginative power. In the deepest sense, Thomas lived his theories and the patterns that he continually builds up and rejects evolve out of his sensuous responses to situations. The challenge that he faces confronts all humanity, and his answer to the problems of existence has universal bearing. Hence, this study unravels and unveils the pattern of rule and energy, form and content and the underlying poetic images in Thomas's 18 Poems.

KEYWORDS: Pattern, Surrealism, renunciation, craftsmanship, and cohesion.

Introduction

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the poets of 1930's, W.H.Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice, having lost their future, introspected over their life, on the whole, within a framework accepted as imperfect and incoherent. Day Lewis says:

The bells that signed a conqueror in
Or franked the lovers' bed, now mean
Nothing more heavenly than their
Own impulse and recoil of air. (*Collected Poems* 177)

Reflecting over "the downward graph of natural joys, ... Imagination's slump, the blunted ear" (185), Day Lewis remembers:

I hate this cold and politic self-defence
Of hardening arteries and nerves
Grown dull with time-serving. I see that the heart lives

By self-betrayal, by circumspection is killed. (*DCP*)

The Apocalyptic poets felt a compulsive urge to build their own patterns of poetry. MacNeice observes:

They had built it up—but not for this the lean
And divinatory years,
The red-eyed pioneers

Facing the dark and making the desert green. (*Collected Poems* 199)

The Apocalypics, in contempt for logic and traditional form, advocated “semi-automatic writing” based on subjective and romantic impulses “and an associative process of creation ... to support an increasing distrust in the failures of the rational, socio-political mind...” (Linda M. Shires 28-29)

MacNeice, in his admirable study of the “debacle” of the poets of thirties, shows how the breaking down of an external frame of reference led the Apocalyptic poet Dylan Thomas to seek the principle of order within the individual, within himself, to write of man and of the world in terms of his own inner life:

For every static world that you or I impose
Upon the real one must crack at times and new
Patterns from new disorders open like a rose
And old assumptions yield to new sensation;
The Stranger in the wings is waiting for his cue,
The fuse is always laid to some annunciation. (217)

Moreover, Auden demonstrates the “ conquest” of Thomas’s surrealistic “Beauty”:

In that land of flesh and bone,
Where from citadels on high
Her imperial standards fly.... (*Look Stranger!* 18)

Both Auden and MacNeice agree that the Apocalyptic poets in working out their individual patterns achieved a positive vision:

Vision and sinew made it of light and stone;
Not grateful nor enchanted
Their heirs took it for granted
Having a world—a world that was all their own. (*MCP*)

The Apocalypics, while giving importance to “inner logic,” subjectivity and objectivity, “preferred to impose form on subconscious material, to give it a distinct shape” (Shires 29-30).

The dilemma of the poets of thirties is also recognized by Thomas who observes that the widely held modes of ordering experience having broken down, each poet had to work out his own pattern. He comments:

I see that from these boys shall men of nothing
Stature by seedy shifting,
Or lame the air with leaping from its hearts;
There from their hearts the dogdayed pulse

Of love and light bursts in their throats.

O see the pulse of summer in the ice. (*Poems* 71)

However, while this thesis may be applied, with certain reservations, to the poetry of Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice, it hardly defines Auden's response to the challenge of his time and of his contemporaries's personal predicament. Auden explains:

Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys,
Seeing at end of street the barren mountains,
Round corners coming suddenly on water,
Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for islands,
We honour founders of these starving cities,
Whose honour is the image of our sorrow. (*LS* 22)

Auden's poems thus demonstrate a deepening perplexity, and the development in his thought is marked by a shift from "the language of moderation" (*LS* 26) to "the language of learning and the language of love" (52), from the vocabulary of assertion to the vocabulary of doubt and conflict. Day Lewis traces:

Nearing the watershed and the difficult passes,
Man wraps up closer against the chill
In his familiar habits; and at the top
Pauses, seeing your kingdom like a net beneath him spread. (*DCP*)

Another thought implicit in Auden's poetry is that it is not enough for a poet to construct an order by means of his imaginative power:

With all his honours on, he sighed for one
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;
Did little jobs about the house with skill
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still
Or potter round the garden; answered some
Of his long marvelous letters but kept none. (*LS* 33)

To Auden the surrealistic art of Thomas's *18 Poems* is formless, "forests of green" (*LS* 13), "the straight flood-lit tracks of memory" (26), "the irresponsible beauty" (55). He adds:

But in my thought to-night you seem
Forms which I saw once in a dream,
The stocky keepers of a wild estate. (29)

He is also doubtful about its future for it is "conceited":

Your beauty's a completed thing.
The future kissed you, called you king,
Did she? Deceiver!
She's not in love with you at all
No feat of yours can make her fall,
She will not answer to your call
Like your retriever. (35)

Auden's historical consciousness is well aware that "others have tried it, all delight ... sustained in that ecstatic flight ... could not console" during their "exhausting hours" (36) and finally remained barren and hopeless.

In the deepest sense, Thomas lived his theories and the patterns that he continually builds up and rejects evolve out of his sensuous responses to situations. He writes:

We summer boys in this four-winded spinning,
Green of the seaweed's iron,
Hold up the noisy sea and drop her birds,
Pick the world's ball of wave and froth
To choke the deserts with her tides,
And comb the country gardens for a wreath. (*Poems* 71)

The challenge that he faces confronts all humanity, and his answer to the problems of existence has universal bearing. "What is remarkable is the originality and intensity with which" his themes such as birth and death, process and decay, sex and redemption, are introduced. "Difficulty occurs when the density of image embodies a depth and subtlety of emotional and sensory perception that the mind, in conceptual terms, cannot follow" (Ackerman 43). Hence, the objective of this study is to unravel and unveil the rule and energy, the form and content and the underlying pattern of poetic images in Thomas's *18 Poems*.

Discussion

In the beginning, the young poet Thomas recognizes his own ignorance, his inability to comprehend the mystery that John Donne's poetry represents:

All all and all the dry worlds couple,
Ghost with her ghost, contagious man
With the womb of his shapeless people.
All that shapes from the caul and suckle,
Stroke of mechanical flesh on mine,
Square in these worlds the mortal circle. (*Poems* 26)

But the phrase " the caul and suckle" gives this ignorance a purposiveness. Here ignorance is synonymous with wise passiveness; the mind disengages itself from the active world, "the ghost with her ghost" and through solitary meditations conditions itself for the creative quest. But the phrase also carries the pain and bafflement, and the mental state is analogous to Yeats's "troubled heart" in the poem "The Tower":

Never had I more
Excited, passionate, fantastical
Imagination, nor an ear and eye
That more expected the impossible— (*Collected Poems* 164)

The poem "Before I Knocked" dramatizes Thomas's situation. The poet's predicament parallels Auden's as envisaged in the early poem "The Engine House":

It was quiet in there after the crushing,
Mill; the only sounds were the clacking belt

And steady throb of waters rushing
That told of the wild joy those waters felt
In falling. (*Lions and Shadows* 186)

Thomas explains in the opening stanza:

Before I knocked and flesh let enter,
With liquid hands tapped on the tomb,
I who was as shapeless as the water
That shaped the Jordan near my home.... (41)

The reference to Jordan calls up the Jerusalem image, Jerusalem being the birth-place of Jesus Christ. The womb represents the mystery that is yet to be probed, the vast domain of poetry that has not been explored. The womb as a symbol of poetry and of the ultimate mystery recurs in Thomas's poems.

Donne's "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse" is concerned with the whole drama of quest and salvation. His painful ignorance signifies the state of necessity preceding final realization, "the amorousness of an harmonious Soule" :

We thinke that Paradise and Calvarie,
Christs Crosse, and Adams tree, stood in one place;
Looke Lord, and finde both Adams met in me;
As the first Adams sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adams blood my soule embrace. (*Metaphysical Poets*
90)

But the description of the redemptive process contains an ambiguity. The statement in "A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany" suggests the arbitrary intervention of God in the process before attaining to immortality. "And to scape stormy days, I chuse/ An Everlasting night." Donne hopes:

Scale then this bill of my Divorce to All,
On whom those fainter beams of love did fall;
Marry those loves, which in youth scattered bee
On Fame, Wit, Hopes (false mistresses) to thee.
Churches are best for Prayer, that have least light.... (89)

While exploring the mighty expanse of the sea representing the vast idea of poetry, Thomas discovers from the poems of Donne life as a mystery and man as ignorant of the source of life and of his ultimate destiny. He hardly knows where he moves, what is his purpose, why should he agonize, what aches in him. Donne demands greater physical hardship, and there are moments of fatigue. Thomas thinks that poetry is "thin air above the clouds, / Vain divination of the sunless stream / Mirror that impotence... (*DCP* 219). He records:

As yet ungotten, I did suffer;
The rack of dreamy lily bones
Did twist into a living cipher,
And flesh was snipped to cross the lines

Of gallow crosses on the liver
And brambles in the wringing brains. (*Poems*)

According to Donne, Time or Chance, whatever may be the Supreme Power that moves the Cosmos keeps man in “helpless bondage,” tears him wide apart, leads him to agonize and makes his joy sublime. Donne is free because he is non-involved, and his non-involvement springs, as Thomas observes, from his renunciation of earthly possessions:

Especially when the October wind
(Some let me make you of autumnal spells,
The spider-tongued, and the loud hill of Wales)
Some let me make you of the heartless words.
The heart is drained that, spelling in the scurry
Of chemic blood, warned of the coming fury.
By the sea’s side hear the dark-vowelled birds. (53)

Such poetry, Thomas felt, could annihilate all sense of time and space and resolve all the antinomies that had so long disturbed and perplexed him. Only from such experience of sublimity, he thought, could great poetry be born.

However Donne’s poetry unblooms his best hopes, Thomas perceives, obstructs the sun and rain, costs a moan and makes blisses painful. Commenting upon the experience of Thomas, Day Lewis wonders as “symbols of gross experience!” “the veiled World’s flesh, a near annunciation” (219), and “ennui of youth!” Thomas’s youthful love of Donne’s poetry recalls the nocturnal experience that Donne describes in the poem “A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day”: “ ‘Tis the years midnight, and it is the days,” “the Sunne is spent,” “the worlds whole sap is sunke,” “ life is shrunk,” “I am dead every dead thing,” “a quintessence even from nothingnesse,” and “I am re-begot ... of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not” (*MP* 71). To Donne, man, like the flowers of the field or the birds of the air, becomes dust. In this constant and continuous mutational process of life and death, man is a part of the general Will. Thomas’s poem “My Hero Bares His Nerves” records his immediate impressions of having read the poems of Donne:

And these poor nerves so wired to the skull
Ache on the lovelorn paper
I hug to love with my unruly scrawl
That utters all love hunger
And tells the page the empty ill. (*Poems* 97)

The vision of death-in-life, cruelty to mortal nature that terrified him in the poems of Donne is replaced by Thomas Hardy’s vision of harmony:

My hero bares his nerves along my wrist
That rules from wrist to shoulder,
Unpacks the head that, like a sleepy ghost,
Leans on my mortal ruler,
The proud spine spurning turn and twist. (*Poems*)

According to Walford Davies, “the ‘hero’ of ‘My hero bares his nerves’ is the poet’s inner, conscious identity, described by the body it controls and operates” (48).

The young Thomas feels the presence of a mysterious, benign power as revealed in Hardy’s second book of verses *Poems for the Past and the Present* interpreting mortal phenomena. He responded eagerly to the melodious lyric impulse of Hardy’s poetry and took great interest in the variations in human conduct; the experience was exhilarating:

Behind a pot of ferns the wagging clock
Tells me the hour’s word, the neural meaning
Flies on the shafted disk, declaims the morning
And tells the windy weather in the cock.
Some let me make you of the meadow’s signs;
The signal grass that tells me all I know
Breaks with the wormy winter through the eye.
Some let me tell you of the raven’s sins. (*Poems*)

To annul the self is to achieve freedom from the divisions of space and time, Thomas learnt. In the preface to *Poems for the Present and the Past*, Hardy writes that his poems are a series of feelings and fancies. In this regard, he says, “the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change” (*Collected Poems* 73).

It was from Hardy’s lyrics like “Drummer Hodge,” “Architectural Masks,” “I Said to Love,” “The Bedridden Peasant,” “God Forgotten,” “The Milkmaid,” “The Mother Mourns,” and “An August Midnight” Thomas learnt that man, in his most optimistic mood and management, can develop “inner lives of dreams” (*HCP* 144), “the spell ... of inner themes and inner poetries” (140) as he wishes them. Hardy illustrates the young Hodge the drummer “whose landmark is a kopje-crest / That breaks the veldt around” (80) as an exemplary hero:

Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow up a some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally. (*HCP*)

In connection with human will Hardy’s idea can be compared with that of Yeats in the poem “The Choice”:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all that story’s finished, what’s the news?
In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,

Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse. (YCP 209)

When Thomas read Yeats's *Last Poems*, he found many of Yeats's ideas were identical to that of Hardy. The rustic character from Wessex home struck Thomas's imagination pointing to Yeats's poem "Under Ben Bulbin" in which the poet mutters:

Swear by those horseman, by those women
Complexion and form prove superhuman,
That pale, long-visaged company
That air in immortality
Completeness of their passions won.... (301)

This poem, exemplifying Yeats's vivid dramatic imagination, expresses his faith in "what his great forefathers did" to "bring the soul of man to God" and "make him fill the cradles right." The Italian painter Michael Angelo has "left a proof" of the "might" of art, "measurement" and "forms" "on the Sistine Chapel roof" as a contrast to Quattrocento who "put in paint ... on backgrounds for a God or Saint ... Gardens where a soul's at ease." Besides quoting from Palmer that "Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude, / Prepared a rest for the people of God" (303), Yeats finds "proof" of "forms a stark Egyptian thought, / Forms that gentler Phidias wrought" in Michael Angelo:

proof that there's a purpose set
Before the secret working mind;
Profane perfection of mankind. (302)

Yeats as a poet and an artist of human "hearts and heads" knows that the benchmark of his poetry, his poetic soul and his poetical character is "perfection of the life" rather than "of the work" "a heavenly mansion, raging in the dark" (YCP).

The poem "My Hero Bares My Nerves," besides rendering the experience of a harmonious principle, illustrates the vivid dramatic and radical thinking of Hardy as expressed in the novel *Jude the Obscure* exposing the flaws and mysteries of reality. The character Sue Bridehead, while representing a new articulate woman seeking retribution from the external force for all her human activities such as learning, labouring and loving, is truly a Goddess Venus of human cultivation. Hardy as a maternal Goddess Venus stands as a sharp contrast to Donne, the damsel without mercy, whose self is "a Nunne,tyed to retiredness," "a chaste fallownesse" where Satyrique thornes are growne ... where seeds of better Arts, were early sown" (MP 81-82). But what strikes Thomas most about Hardy's poetical character is his intimate kinship with nature of "master Venus" and his freedom from human bondage. He illustrates in a metaphorical manner:

My hero bares my side and sees his heart
Tread; like a naked Venus,
The beach of flesh, and wind her bloodred plait;
Stripping my loin of promise,
He promises a secret heat. (*Poems*)

In Yeats's archetypal poetic image, quite identically, Thomas notes a perfect congruity between nature and human life, between the natural world and the supernatural:

Shut, too, in a tower of words, I mark
On the horizon walking like the trees
The wordy shapes of women, and the rows
Of the star-gestured children in the park.
Some let me make you of the vowelled beeches,
Some of the oaken voices, from the roots
Of many a thorny shire tell you notes,
Some let me make you of the water's speeches. (*Poems*)

MacNeice's poem "The Precursors" affirms the shaping influences of Hardy and Yeats on the energetic mind of Thomas:

O that the rain would come—the rain in big battalions—
Or thunder flush the hedge a more clairvoyant green
Or wind walk in and whip us and strip us or booming
Harvest moon transmute this muted scene. (*MCP*)

In the poem "Before I Knocked," the ignorant poet seeks Yeats's grace, and Yeats is here imaged as the giver of light and the lyric poet of song. The reference to Donne and Yeats in the same context further suggests Yeats's deification, "felt thud beneath my flesh's armour". Thomas explains:

I who was deaf to spring and summer,
Who knew not sun nor moon by name,
Felt thud beneath my flesh's armour,
As yet was in a molten form
The leaden stars, the rainy hammer
Swung by my father from his dome. (*Poems*)

The Yeats-thought continues in the rest of the poem, the image serving a twofold function. The poem, after indicating the evolutionary process, establishes identity between Hardy and Yeats as well as between Yeats and the aspiring poet Thomas. The completion of the journey achieved by Yeats affords the young poet the assurance he needs. Thomas maintains:

And time cast forth my mortal creature
To drift or drown upon the seas
Acquainted with the salt adventure
Of tides that never touch the shores.
I who was rich was made the richer
By sipping at the vine of days. (41)

Thomas's poem "From Love's Fever to the Plague" extends the area of his vision of poetry and of his faith:

One wound, one mind, spewed out the matter,
One breast gave suck the fever's issue;
From the divorcing sky I learnt the double,
The two-framed globe that spun into a score;
A million minds gave suck to such a bud

As forks my eye;
Youth did condense; the tears of spring
Dissolved in summer and the hundred seasons;
One sun, one manna, warmed and fed. (58-59)

The area includes not merely heaven, but also the spheres of the physical world—the sea and the earth. Yeats is here linked with Hardy with his threefold influence over heaven, earth and underworld, but association with Donne is also suggested. The allusion to the sun, a favourite of Hardy, helps to establish a parallel between Yeats and Hardy, the poet of light. The mention of the three spheres suggests that Yeats's deification does not alienate Hardy from Thomas, the young poet of the physical universe; his poetry mediates between earth and heaven, Yeats and Hardy, and drew them together into unity.

Thomas himself pertinently points out the unity brought out by poetry in which man is the dancer:

And what's the rub? Death's feather on the nerve?
Your mouth, my love, the thistle in the kiss?
My Jack of Christ born thorny on the tree?
The words of death are dryer than his stiff,
My wordy wounds are printed with your hair.
I would be tickled by the rub that is:
Man be by metaphor. (76-77)

MacNeice defines the tautology involving the poetic form and tradition of Hardy, Yeats, and Thomas in a plain speaking manner:

Which when caught between the beginning and end
Turn other than themselves, their entities unfurled,
Flapping and overlapping—a tree becomes
A talking tower, and a woman becomes world. (209 -10)

The thought recurs in the opening stanza of the poem “Especially When the October Wind,” and the idealized primitive-figure is projected as an archetypal image of poet, freedom and disinterestedness. Thomas articulates:

Especially when the October wind
With frosty fingers punishes my hair,
Caught by the crabbing sun I walk on fire
And cast a shadow crab upon the land,
By the sea's side, hearing the noise of birds,
Hearing the raven cough in winter sticks,
My busy heart who shudders as she talks
Sheds the syllabic blood and drains her words. (53)

The ideas and images presented in the two poems, “Before I Knocked” and “My Hero Bares My Nerves” are amplified and resolved into unity in the six lines of the poem “When Once the Twilight Locks No Longer”:

My fuses are timed to charge his heart,

He blew like powder to the light
And held a little sabbath with the sun,
But when the stars, assuming shape,
Drew in his eyes the straws of sleep
He drowned his father's magics in a dream. (148)

The striving and struggling and the miracle of Thomas having structured the Surrealistic construct and poetic vision—"imposing ... on flux an architectonic"—(*MCP* 181) exemplifies a universal truth, and the truth is both terrifying and assuring.

In the poem "Plant and Phantom," MacNeice explains that Thomas's vision of poetic structure and content has a clarity denied to the sufferer, "shadow" in the cave, the Metaphysical poet Donne, "Mirage, a spider dangling ... over chaos and man a chaos." The light-imagery, "a prism" suggests a resplendence in contrast with the chaos of darkness, "a shaking of hands with hallucinations, ... hobnobbing with ghosts" (*MCP*). He comments on the surrealistic beauty of Thomas's artifact:

Who cheats the pawky Fates
By what he does, not is,
By what he makes, imposing
On flux an architectonic—
Cone of marble, calyx of ice,
Spandrel and butterss, iron
Loops across the void,
Stepping stones in the random. (*MCP*)

He thinks of the "Sibyl's Cave" of Quietude in which the sufferer suddenly experiences a benumbing happiness at the moment of utmost misery and despair and the suddenness of the moment of illumination, "midnight Echo" and "mirage," but the evolutionary process indicated in the poem is more emphatic in affirming the regenerative character of the final vision of Thomas:

Who felt with his hands in empty
Air for the Word and did not
Find it but felt the aura,
Dew on the skin, could not forget it,
Eversince has fumbled, intrigued,
Clambered behind and beyond, and learnt
Words of blessing and cursing, hoping

To find in the end the Word itself. (182)

In terms of the allegory of the soul's journey it may be said that while the experience in the cave is purgatorial, Thomas ascends to a much higher plane of realization and enjoys divine felicity.

In *Look Stranger!*, the poet Auden holds that Thomas feels lost in the presence of Donne's mysterious beauty:

And love that makes impatient

The tortoise and the roe, and lays
The blonde beside the dark,
Before the evil and the good
How insufficient is
The endearment and the look. (41)

But here in Hardy the purgatorial experience is seen as a necessary intermediary stage:

The real world lies before us;
Animal motions of the young,
The common wish for death,
The pleased and the haunted;
The dying master sinks tormented
In the admirers' ring,
The unjust walks the earth. (*LS*)

There is the realization, on the part of Thomas, that comes with added years that life, instead of being something swiftly and romantically experienced, is something slowly and painstakingly lived. He lays down the principle of organic structure underlying his *18 Poems*:

A process in the weather of the heart
Turns damp to dry; the golden shot
Storms in the freezing tomb.
A weather in the quarter of the veins
Turns night to day; blood in their suns
Lights up the living worm. (17)

Growing up, maturing, developing—whatever one may call it—has two aspects according to Thomas:

A process in the weather of the world
Turns ghost to ghost; each mothered child
Sits in their double shade.
A process blows the moon into the sun,b'
Pulls down the shabby curtains of the skin;
And the heart gives up the dead. (*Poems*)

Whatever sense of loss follows, the disillusionment is to some extent offset by the other aspect of growth, the enriching realization of the self, not as a completely isolated and self-contained identity, but as the product of innumerable creative forces. The morning is hidden in the deepest darkness, "a process blows the moon into the sun."

That the chaos of night contains in itself the seeds of a new germinating power shows that the whole process must be undergone. Thomas demonstrates:

Sleep navigates the tides of time;
The dry Sargasso of the tomb
Gives up dead to such a working sea;
And sleep rolls mute above the beds
Where fishes' food is fed the shades

Who periscope through flowers to the sky. (*Poems*)

Thomas's lack of comprehension must have caused him much pain; but it helped him to concentrate all his efforts on his creative work and also sharpened his perceptions. He states:

When the galactic sea was sucked
And all the dry seabed unlocked,
I sent my creature scouting on the globe,
That globe itself of hair and bone
That, sewn to me by nerve and brain,
Had stringed my flask of matter to his rib. (*Poems*)

The assurance that there is light on the shores of darkness, that midnight would be followed by dawn, takes away much of the horror of the process and reconciles the explorer to his immediate predicament. Spender observes that the "acceptance of that sun which hews the day from night" (*The Still Centre* 77) is part of the process of growth.

The midnight agony, the terror of the precipices and the declivities, and the torturing uncertainties are real in the journey of Thomas; but the prospect of ultimate recovery brings hope and comfort and gives meaning to his suffering. Day Lewis comments:

Now, beyond reach of sense or reason,
His life walks in a glacial sleep
For ever, since he drank that cup
And found it poison.
He's one more ghost, engaged to keep
Eternity's long hours and mewed
Up in live flesh with no escape
From solitude. (207)

Day Lewis finds relief from personal suffering in the larger reality around him, and Thomas's *18 Poems* , with its massive integrity, offers him a retreat away from the human world with its pettiness and strife:

Dying, any man may
Feel wisdom harmonious, fateful
At the tip of his dry tongue.
Seems now but the moon's fitful
Sleep on a clouded bay,
Swan's maiden flight, or the climb
To a tremulous, hare-bell crest. (224)

Gradually, however, the old questionings return, and the imposing pyramids symbolize for him the unresolved enigma of existence. Day Lewis is, by turns, gullible and suspicious. The poem "The Image" conveys this sense of awe:

From far, she seemed to lie like a stone on the sick horizon:
Too soon that face, intolerably near,
Writhed like a furious ant-hill. Whoever, they say, set eyes on
Her face became a monument to fear. (222)

But, to Spender, Auden is privileged to have an insight into the mystery. This insight is, however, denied to him in other moments:

My single pair of eyes
Contain the universe they see;
Their mirrored multiplicity
Is packed into a hollow body
Where I reflect the many, in my one. (81)

In the two poems “The Separation” and “Darkness and Light,” Spender’s dilemma—“to break out the chaos of my darkness ... into a lucid day” and “equally to avoid that lucid day ... and to preserve my darkness, is all my will” (77)--is left unanswered. The magnificence of the images in *18 Poems* had an overwhelming effect on Spender during the War time. The confusion has expanded into a poem “The Uncreating Chaos” as he was “flooded by a sense of future ... the bursting tide of an unharnessed power” (33) and the poem ends with a question:

Shall I never reach
The field guarded by stones
Precious in the stone mountains
Where the scythless wind
Flushes the warm grasses:
Where clouds without rain
Add to the sun
Their lucid sailing shine? (34)

The immediate effect is self-annulment; the sympathetic identification is so intense that the consciousness of self dissolved.

MacNeice, in the poem “Plant and Phantom,” celebrates “the raking flight” of *18 Poems*:

The luck and pluck and plunge of blood,
The wealth and spilth and sport of breath,
And sleep come down like death above
The fever and the peace of love—
This is on me and these are yours. (191)

We may here think ahead of the MacNeice’s lines from the same poem focusing on Auden’s pursuit of irony:

Whose life is a bluff, professing
To follow the laws of Nature,
Conspiracy and usurpation,
Smuggling over the frontier
Of fact a sense of value,
Metabolism of death,
Re-orchestration of world. (182)

But the close interrelatedness between nature and man as envisaged in Thomas’s *18 Poems* is in Auden absent. MacNeice compares and contrasts:

Bulge in the wind, a prism,
Organ-pipes in the sunset,
Orgy of brains and glands,
Thunder-crackle and the bounce of hail,
Wink of wings and fog's delusion,
A rampant martyr, a midnight
Echo, a forest fire. (*MCP*)

Analysing the themes of Thomas's poetry, John Ackerman observes:

Thomas's poetry is also informed by the perception of a radical relationship between human and natural life. This sometimes leads to a mystical sense of the unity between all forms of life, a sensitivity towards animal and vegetal life much more profound than the conventional 'love of nature'. A related concern in his poetry is the attempt to fit this sense of the unity of human and natural life into the developing pattern of religious thought and feeling. (41)

Auden discovers that Thomas's surrealistic art as hyper-modernism is attributed to the past examples of A.E.Houseman, Thomas Hardy, and W.B.Yeats:

But I must bless, I must praise
That you, my swan, who have
All gifts that to the swan
Impulsive Nature gave,
The majesty and pride,
Last night should add
Your voluntary love. (*LS* 60)

While recalling the absurd and incoherent beauty of the fashionable ultra-modernism of the 20 th century poets, "fish in the unruffled lake" wearing "the swarming colours," "swan in the wintry air" having "a white perfection," and "the great lion" walking "through his innocent grove," Auden complains against their moving "upon Time's toppling wave" (*LS*):

We still shadowed days are done,
We must weep and sing
Duty's conscious wrong,
The Devil in the clock,
The Goodness carefully worn
For atonement or for luck;
We must lose our loves,
On each beast and bird that moves
Turn an envious look. (*LS*)

MacNeice rightly observes that Auden's satire on the trend of post-modernism sinks into flat triviality:

When I saw him last, carving the longshore mist
With an ascetic profile, he was standing
Watching the troopship leave, he did not speak

But from his eyes ther peered a furtive footsore envy
Of these who sailed away to make an opposed landing—
So calm because so young, so lethal because so meek. (224)

Auden's satire *Look Stranger!* also narrows down the thought maintained in the preceding verses that the presence of mortals is a profanation of the divine sanctuary.

Certainly our city—with the byres of poverty down to
The river's edge, the cathedral, the engines, the dogs;
Here is the cosmopolitan cooking
And the light alloys and the glass. (67)

A gulf separates man and nature, the human sphere and the divine in Auden's poems. MacNeice points out:

Never to fight unless from a pure motive
And for a clear end was his unwritten rule
Who had been in books and visions to a progressive school
And dreamt of barricades, yet being observant
Knew that that was not the way things are:
This man would never make a soldier or a servant. (MCP)

To Auden, the poet Thomas, like other mortals, is also an intruder, and not a crusader. "Behind his eyes are shadows of a night" and "his mind long since refused ... to let that time intrude on what came after" (227).

Auden who has hinted at God's Grace as an essential thing for the emergence of poet as hero to his contemporaries in *Poems* (1930)--whose "divided face / Has no grace, / No discretion, / No occupation" to attain "the easy knowledge ... of the virtuous thing" (*Poems* 1930 48-49)-- clearly believes in *Look Stranger!* that "the defeated and disfigured figures" (*LS* 63) by simplifying "all sorrow" and by constructing and emulating the poetic model of Thomas would not ensure their recoverability and regeneration and "their dreams of freedom," of alchemizing their "hero skull, Cadaver in the hangar" (*Poems*) into immortals for "that hopeful falsehood cannot stem with love ... the flood on which all move and wish to move." What is essential, according to Auden, is contrition, "sighs for folly said and done ... twist our narrow days", for atonement or for luck" (60) "to take the all- night journey under sea, ... work west and northward, set up building" (62).

But Thomas, rejecting Auden's optimism in God's grace and his modernism, his "predestined need" to voice "our design", advocates to the cramped poets a self-orientated and human life-centred post modernistic ideal, imaginative model and method to execute their will, to "invest, ... measure and frame our mortal best" (DCP). Thomas persuades the Auden school to be surrealistic and self-oriented to generate hopes for poetry and immortality, by learning the models of the immortal poets " the living clay" to know "the value of our stay", "the order of our day" to "distil" from life "rare personal good" and ensure their being footed as "the honoured clay" (DCP 182-83). He remembers the system of poetic values as enshrined in the true images of Hardy and Yeats:

Everything ends, the tower ending and,

(Have with the house of wind), the leaning scene,
Ball of the foot depending from the sun,
(Give, summer, over), the cemented skin,
The action's end. (149-50)

MacNeice holds that Auden's imputed purpose ... is a foregone design--" in contradistinction to the purposeful human "prototypes" of Thomas. He conveys the poetic origin and the final phase of Thomas's postmodernism and his creative exploration in *18 Poems*:

And ours is not. For we are unique, a conscious
Hoping and therefore despairing creature, the final
Anomaly of the world, we can learn no method
From whales or birds or worms;
Our end is our own to be won by our own endeavour
And held on our own terms. (217)

But Thomas, according to MacNeice, apart from finding his own vision of art and content, rule and energy, form and faith, works for co-existence and fellowship with the other poets:
yet in his mind

A crowd of odd components mutter and press
For compromise with fact, longing to be combined
Into working whole but cannot jostle through
The permanent bottleneck of his highmindedness. (MCP)

A professed classicist, Auden naturally insists on formal cohesion and perfect form:

Greed showing shamelessly her naked money,
And all Love's wondering eloquence debased
To a collector's slang, Smartness in furs,
And Beauty scratching miserably for food,
Honour self-sacrificed for Calculation,
And Reason stoned by Mediocrity,
Freedom by Power shockingly maltreated,
And Justice exiled till Saint Geoffrey's Day. (LS 65)

However, Auden "wooded perfection" at the expense of life as he's bedded deep in the glacier, perfect ... and null, the prince and image of despair." Day Lewis explains:

One the rare air made dizzy renounced
Earth, and the avalanche took him at his word:
One wooed perfection-- he's bedded deep in the glacier, perfect
And null, the prince and image of despair. (185)

But Thomas's creativity is marked as much by a search for form as by a fresh exploration of reality. DayLewis maintains:

The best, neither hoarding nor squandering
The radiant flesh and the receptive
Spirit, stepped on together in the rhythm of comrades who
Have found a route on earth's true reckoning based. (186)

This exploration becomes especially pertinent in the historical phases when the accepted and traditional systems no longer appear satisfying and adequate at the close of the 1920's and the beginning of the 1930's. Day Lewis points out:

They have not known the false humility,
The shamming-dead of the senses beneath your hunter's hand;
But life's green standards they've advanced
To the limit of your salt unyielding zone. (DCP)

Conclusion

In *18 Poems*, thus, Thomas thinks that he has succeeded in creating, by his power of imagination and self-intuition, a system of images conducting truths, or what may be called the vocabulary of assertion thanks to the poetic reinforcement and the postmodernism, the rule and energy derived from his poetic ancestors, Hardy and Yeats.

For we shall be a shouter like the cock,
Blowing the old dead back, our shots shall smack
The image from the plates;
And we shall be fit fellows for a life,
And who remains shall flower as they love,
Praise to our faring hearts. (110-11)

The most remarkable in *18 Poems* is that "the style so triumphantly established in *18 Poems* remained fundamentally the same throughout his life—though of course there was development of theme and technique. His work does not show the kind of development found, for example, in Shakespeare or Yeats, where there is a real change in the style of the poet: though Thomas's later poetry is generally more lucid" (Ackerman 39).

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