

CHAPTER - I

Self and Reality

Dylan Thomas answered a set of questions about his attitude to poetry. This was printed in New Verse in October 1934. He has said that his poetry "is the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light." In answer to a question whether he has been influenced by Freud, he has observed, "whatever is hidden should be made naked. To be stripped, darkness is to make clean. Poetry, recording the stripping of the individual darkness, must, inevitably, cast light upon what has been hidden for too long, and, by so doing, make clean the naked exposure. Freud cast light on a little of the darkness he had exposed. Benefiting by the sight of the light and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag further into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realise."¹

This progress from darkness to light may mean several things. One of them is certainly the emergence of a clearer perception of self through doubts and sufferings from an amorphous state of understanding. The struggle is the gradual process of enlightenment casting out inhibitions and social taboos. This involves an agonizing inner and outer conflict, a conflict within the self as well as conflict between self and reality. His struggle brings experience, and he moves gradually through the accession of newer experiences to wisdom, to light.

On the physical level, it is the birth of a child, the recurring theme in Thomas's poetry, from the darkness of the womb to the light of day. Cosmologically, the movement from darkness to light means "the creation, by fortuitous concurrence or by fiat; biologically, the

working out of evolutionary process; aesthetically, the inception and growth of a poem; weatherwise, the progress of the seasons². Thomas's struggle for light is a struggle for the attainment of a vision of the significance of life, a vision that comprehends and reconciles the contradictions of life. It is the perception of unity in diversity, the assertion of the identity of self.³ It is a position that makes painful existence acceptable.

The awareness of time and mortality underlies all his poems. Thomas strives to overcome the tyranny of time and death through an unclouded vision that makes life meaningful and all creative efforts significant. Thomas's struggle for light pervades his poems and this struggle takes multiforms according to the meaning that 'light' assumes in the context of different poems. Creation, both physical and poetic, itself is a way of vanquishing time and death. But creation is an agonizing process. As a creator Thomas is poet or God or both, or any man. As a poet or God the tool he uses is the word. He battles with word, and traces the "wizard shape" of a poem out of the darkness of the "cavernous skull" (CP 91). As any man the tool the creator uses is phallus. Sexuality involves conflict with the inner self and social prejudices. Thomas struggles to take a clear view of sex, to strip it of darkness associated with it. Creation includes world, poem, and child. Through a gradual process of physiological transformation the child grows up from fluid seminal stage to manhood. This growth involves the struggle for the attainment of self-identity which is a form of light that Thomas strains to achieve in many of his poems. In the evolutionary process of growth from the indistinguishable larval state to full manhood man overcomes many internal and external obstacles. The child

does not experience any difference between cause and effect or between the self and the other. The child's identification with nature breaks down when he realizes that nature is not always responsive to his wishes. The tension for the child begins immediately after his birth. In the state of innocence there is no conflict between self and other and no repression. The division occurs when the child enters the state of experience in which man's instinctive and spiritual nature is at odds with his material surroundings. For the child there is no division among five faculties. He makes sense - transferences. The consciousness of the child makes no distinction between real events and dreams. But gradually he moves from harmony to disharmony, from union to disunion. Gradually he learns to connect disparate elements and then finally attains a unitive vision in which all discords seemingly vanish. This is clearly exemplified in From love's first fever to her plague (CP 20-21).

From love's first fever to her plague (CP 20-21) is a poem which shows the growth of consciousness and activity with the developing body from conception to maturity. The poem was first published in Criterion, October 1934. The maturing body's developing consciousness is seen inseparable from the external world which appears in different forms at different stages of development. To the infant's unitive vision 'All world was one, one windy nothing'(CP 20). "All thoughts and actions emanate from the body".⁴ With the growing body comes the power of discrimination. The wind 'that had long blown as one' becomes the 'four winds' (CP 20).

Love, according to Thomas, is a pleasurable physical passion. It is a 'fever' and the fruit of love is a 'plague'. The intimations of sexual power, 'the rumour of senseed/Within the hallowed gland' (CP 20), makes the growing child take a sexual view of the world:

Each golden grain spat life into its fellow,
Green was the singing house. (CP 20)

With the growing body comes the greater power of discrimination. The multiple vision of the adult emanates from the body. Mind gains conceptual powers 'from the first declension of the flesh' and learns 'to twist the shapes of thoughts/Into the stony idiom of the brain/To shade and knit snow the patch of words/Left by the dead' (CP 21). A metaphor of grammar and images taken from gardening and tailoring express the ideas. 'The shapes of thought' are physical sensations turned into 'the stony idiom of the brain.'

The poem can also be read as a metaphorical account of the mysteries of poetic creation. Like the child, the poem proceeds from unity to diversity and then again to unity. Poetic powers also develop with sexuality.

I learnt the verbs of will, and had my secret;
The code of night tapped on the tongue;
what had been one was many sounding minded. (CP 21)

Will here stands for the passions and also for the selected verbs of poetry.⁵ 'My secret' may be sexual knowledge, or the awareness of individuality. 'The code of night' is the dark unconscious expressed in a code language which conceals and reveals. 'The code of night tapped on my tongue' relates physical act and mental response. The differen-

tiation and even disintegration in consciousness begin with growing sexual awareness. The emergence of sexual and poetic powers make poetry 'many sounding minded.' 'The two-framed globe' becomes 'a score' (CP 21). Finally, human consciousness discovers unity in diversity.

Youth did condense; the tears of spring
Dissolved in summer and the hundred seasons;
One sun, one mama, warmed and fed. (CP 21)

In any quest for identity man faces the problem of dealing with the ancestors, both literal or blood and the spiritual. Both can devour him. In I see the boys of summer the old man exhorts the young boys to follow the life-denying traditional path. He glorifies hereditary continuity and speaks of the impossibility of departing from the past.

I am the man your father was. (CP 3)

But the boys refuse to submit to the non-creative sameness of life. They affirm life.

We are the sons of flint and pitch. (CP 3)

They are the sons of ageless sparks of life. Life eternally wells up, and the boys will assert themselves by participating in the life - creating activity.

I followed sleep (CP 26-27) shows the growing individual's effort to realize himself, to overcome the domination of parents and achieve his human identity. The poem was written in November or early December 1934. It was written for inclusion in Eighteen Poems,

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published in 1934. The poem shows some resemblance to two earlier poems in 'August 1933 Notebook'.⁷

Growing individual's struggle for independence, for emancipation from the influence of the parents, for self-assertion, is eternal. But dreams that enslave and prevent the comprehension of waking reality should be blown back. 'Phantoms are 'grave - gabbing' (CP 25), and they suck 'the sleeper of his faith' (CP 15).

I blew the dreaming fellows to their bed
Where still they sleep unknowing of their ghost. (CP 26)

Now all the living air speaks to him and he understands the vital unity of all matter.

... climbing on the words,
I spelt my vision ... (CP 26)

The poet attains his independent vision:

There grows the hours' ladder to the sun,
Each rung a love or losing to the last,
The inches monkeyed by the blood of man.
An old, sad man still climbing in his ghost,
My fathers' ghost is climbing in the rain. (CP 27)

Time is a ladder leading to the sun. Rungs are 'love' or 'losing to the last' or life and death. Man, with the past in his blood is advancing towards the future, towards the light of reality. In the evolutionary process the ancestors present in the blood congeal

the upward movement through the rain. The upward movement is retarded by the foolish ideas, evil propensities of man. It is 'monkeyed by the blood of man' slowly 'grows the hours' ladder to the sun'. W. S. Howlin reads a different there in the poem: "I followed sleep" is a visionary poem about uncreated ghosts, the dream which the world climbs always to create. If the dream, the uncreated ghosts, are unrelated to life and reality, they should better be shot at. Dreams must not be such dreams.

In his quest of self-identity, in the effort to come to terms with life, the poet in I see the laws of nature (CP P-3) offers a vision of adolescents which the present world in the mother's womb will become in future. Life finds its meaning in being. In a letter Thomas says, "There is too much doing in life, and not enough being. Proof of life lies in the answer to one question, and that question is not troubled with the mechanics of living, with the function of living, or with the appearance of living — but with the vast verb, To Be. Self-realization demands commitment. The adolescents must make positive commitment to sex. But this they fail to do. "The medieval laws of this corrupted hemisphere have dictated a more or less compulsory virginity during the period of life when virginity should be regarded as a crime against the dictates of the body. During the period of adolescence, when the blood and seed of the growing flesh need, for the first time and more than ever again, communion and contact with the blood and seed of another flesh, sexual relationships are looked upon as being unnecessary and unclean. The body must be kept intact for marriage, which is rarely possible before the age of twenty + " As a

result they practice masturbation, 'lay the gold tithings barren' and 'in their best the winter floods/Of frozen loves they fetch their girls' (CP 1). This is a negation of self, and this is due to the inner inhibition which prevents self-assertion. This may be due to the poet's puritanical upbringing.¹² Thomas said to Elizabeth Mitchell, "I am a Puritan".¹³ Society also forbids the commitment to sex since it practices asceticism. The self is fed with 'the frigid threads of doubt and dark' (CP 1) which are the legacies of the puritan society. The poet in his search for identity finds life constricted by the restrictive forces within and without. The poet feels the conflict between impulse and morality, self and reality. 'Here love's deep scale drags and dies' (CP 2). "The phallic potential of the secular unborn"¹⁴ will also come to nothing. Life demands commitment; but the poet is afraid. Yet the practice of orgasm is a mode of experience, and Thomas's struggle with doubts and fears prepares him for his movement towards light. In a letter Thomas writes, "I see the unborn children struggling up the hill in their mothers, beating on the jailing slab of the womb, little realising what a sugar prison they wish to leap into."¹⁵ The unborn children in the womb struggle to be born into light to attain their identity. But the poet is apprehensive about their future since he finds the world a 'poison', full of unknown terrors, uncertainties, and senseless social taboos that frustrate self-fulfillment. 'Men in his maggot's barren' (CP 3). Yet the boys in I see the boys of error can attain self-identity by challenging the notions and life-denying forces. In this early poem Thomas offers a unitive vision of life which reconciles all contraries and thus enables the achievement of self-

identity.

O see the poles are kissing as they cross. (CP 3)

The poet is aware of the presence of potential life in the boys'

O see the poles of promise in the boys. (CP 3)

Sexuality is, in adolescence, the main force which makes for independence. Thomas, like H. H. Lawrence, feels that Christ was wrong to starve his body. Christ denied his being 'born of the sensual root and sap' (CP 30). In his story, The Man Who Sings, Lawrence describes the self-fulfillment, wonder, and ecstasy involved in sexuality. Christians have followed the life-denying asceticism through ages, or affirmed sexuality with a sense of guilt. Thomas is conscious of the need of sex. But he could never shed the fear and guilt associated with it. The process of self-realization partly consists in discarding inherited or conventional beliefs and attitudes which hinder the development of self. The integration of sexuality with our being, its acceptance in all its richness, are signs of maturity and separation from the parents.

When all my five and country senses see (CP 81) speaks of the gradual enrichment of senses through experience. When all my five and country senses see, O when we are a man, Not far this year and The Spire crane were first published in Poetry, Chicago, in August 1932. The loss of innocence is involved in self-knowledge. The 'singing senses' in When all my five and country senses see bring awareness of reality in differing forms which are unified by the

sensual heart into a vision of reality based on love. The slanderous tongue kills love. 'The whispering ears' watch 'love drummed away'. Love is an agonizing experience that evokes sharp cry. Love is a passion that burns 'like a bush'. The heart, basing on the partial reports of different senses, realizes that love endures though 'five eyes break'. There is a gradual enrichment of experience through sensual enjoyment. 'The heart is sensual'.

Thomas's poetry shows his concern to come to terms with himself. There is a conflict in him between his animal and human self, a frantic effort to comprehend rationally and emotionally the reality of man with all that attracts and repels. If I were tickled by the rub of life (CP 12-13), first published in New Verse, August 1934, shows this. No single phase of life is all-sufficing to man. However attractive one aspect of life may be, total absorption in it is productive of fear, frustration, and death. The real problem is the unhesitating acceptance of man in all his various aspects.

I would be tickled by the rub that is:

Man be my metaphor,

(CP 13)

Man, living a full life with all his senses and moving from conception to grave, is man which Thomas accepts.

To attain the fullness of life there should be a proper balance between flesh and spirit. Man is compounded of flesh and spirit. The poet suffers from the conflict between the two. A proper harmony of the two is what is desired. I, in my intricate image (CP 35-38), first published in New Verse, August - September 1936,

states ---

I, in my intricate image, stride on two levels,
Forged in man's minerals, the brassy orator
Laying my ghost in metal,
The scales of this twin world tread on the double,
My half ghost in armour hold hard in death's corridor,
To my man - iron side. (CP 35)

Man is not himself and at peace unless he harmonizes all the contra-
ries of which he is compounded. ¹⁷

'Manhood' is man's goal the attainment of which is atten-
ded by fears, 'the natural peril' (CP 35).

A steeplejack tower, bonerailed and masterless,
No death more natural;
Thus the shadowless man or ox, and the pictured devil,
In seizure of silence commit the dead nuisance:
The natural parallel. (CP 35)

Climbing a tower is sexual experience, and the alternative to sexual
experience is committing 'the dead nuisance' which serves death. The
end of natural man is death. The 'shadowless man', 'ox' (infertile),
'pictured devil', solitary nuisance, body uniformed by spiritual acti-
vity, are in the service of death, 'the natural parallel'.

The rivalry of flesh and spirit in man weakens both. The
'invalid rivals' make their humdrum voyage of life through time
('Clockwise') off the 'symboled harbour' (CP 36) of timelessness. They
are 'consumptives' (CP 36). They make the 'departing adventure' (P 36)
for a future union.

The poet exhorts the voyagers to attain the oneness of
mist or fire:

Give over, lovers, locking, and the seawax struggle,
Love like a mist or fire through the bed of eels. (CP 38)

The miracle happens. There is a loving unity of the two. 'My great
Blood's iron' (CP 38) is made single. Life is a 'boiling circle' (CP 38),
caught in the cycle of life and death ('sea and instrument', CP 38),
'nicked in the locks of time' (CP 38). It is in the 'nick of time' the
preacher discovers adult sex and attains fullness of life.

I, in a wind of fire, from green Adam's cradle,
No man more magical, clawed out the crocodile. (CP 38)

'Crocodile' is described as 'Tail, Mile, and Snout' (CP 38).

Moynihan points out that Egypt is 'the cradle of civilization and there-
fore an image of antiquity and, by analogy, the mummified world of
propriety and convention. This is one reason why the "crocodile" is
described as "Tail, Mile, and Snout"; its body is human civilization,
and mankind weeps for the lost Eden — "All - hallowed man wept for his
white apparel".¹⁸ By clawing out the crocodile and revealing reality,
life is fully realized.

My ghost in his metal neptune
Forged in man's mineral.
This was the god of beginning in the intricate seawhirl,
And my images reared and rose on heaven's hill. (CP 38)

In the Collected Poems of Thomas we find his struggle for self-definition and his ceaseless quest for finding the significance of life in the context of inevitable death. In poems after poems Thomas seeks to explore his self and solve existential problems of birth, sex, death, human relationship, and the relation between the self and the external world. The resolutions of the dilemmas of the individual's life emerge through conflicts and tumults in the soul. Thomas seeks his self-identity, the resolutions of his existential problems, by an inward process passing through conflicts and agonies of the soul.

It is by an absolute commitment that man realizes himself. Thomas finds himself in a dilemma whenever he confronts a problem of choice. His moral, poetical, religious uncertainty is a major thematic concern in his poetry. In I have longed to move away (CP 64) shows Thomas's position of moral and poetical uncertainty. The poem was first published in New Verse, December 1935. The Christian interpretation of moral questions, the conventions of the civilized society, he finds unsatisfying. He longs to move away from conventional piety, prevalent conventions of society and his own poetic past. The rational mind finds conventional religions to be 'the hissing of the spent lie', 'the old terrors' continual cry', 'night's ancient fear'. The 'repetition of salutes', 'the parting of hat from hair', 'pursed lips' at the telephone receiver, are meaningless, empty, social gestures. In April 1934 he wrote, "Life passes the windows, and I hate it more minute by minute. I see the rehearsed gestures, the correct smiles, the gray calls revolving around nothing under the godly bowlers". He longs to move away from these 'rehearsed gestures', 'correct smiles',

'ghostly echoes on paper', meaning his early poems, and dead conventions, but is afraid.

Some life, yet unspent, might explode
Out of the old lie burning on the ground,
And, cracking into the air, leave me half-blind. (CP 64)

"The convention, necessary though it is to a civilized community, is nevertheless an artificial and ultimately stultifying experience. To that extent it is a lie, a betrayal of the impulse that first engendered it." But the poet feels that these conventions are "only the partial petrification of once vital and lovely impulses. . . . They may still possess power and significance".²⁰

The poet is equally tormented by his feelings of uncertainty about his poetic attitude. I have longed to move away may be taken as a piece of poetical self-criticism. He seeks light which will guide him his future poetic creation. But he is afraid to make a departure from the past which may contain 'some life, yet unspent', and may help in attaining a life-giving poetic vision.

I make me a mask (CP 85) is another poem, published in Life and Letters To-day, September 1938, which gives us a glimpse of the poet's self-awareness of the nature of his poetry and the external reactions to it. The prayer for a protective mask involves a conscious relationship of the self with the external world. The prayer for protective mask reveals more the poet's understanding of reality than a desire to evade reality. The unsympathetic critics are ravenous with

'sharp, enameled eyes ^{and} the spectacled claws'. He wants to hide his 'glistening brain' in 'old armour and oak' of stupidity. The poet will assume the wooden 'countenance of a dunce' to 'blunt the examiners'. Let 'a tear-stained', sentimental, 'widower', affected and hypocritical grief, veil 'belladonna' (poison) and 'dry eyes'. 'O make me a mask' 'to shut from your spies' 'Rape and rebellion in the nurseries of my face'. According to D. Holbrook, "the rape and rebellion are the extravagance of verbal babble and sexual allusion, and the verbal baby-protest against the acceptance of reality." 'Rape and rebellion' are more likely to be the physiological process described in his poetry and the revulsion he feels against the social restrictions that thwart self-expression.

Many of the poems of Twenty-Five Poems are ridden with doubts, uncertainties, and questioning. My East Wind Chills and Was there a time were both published in 1919 in The New England Quarterly on 16 July and 3 September respectively. There is a pessimistic note in Was there a time (CP 50). Time was when children found diversion in fiddles, circuses, and books. 'But time has set its maggots on their track'. Future is uncertain and menacing:

'Under the arc of the sky they are unsafe.'

Ignorance is the best antidote to despair:

'What's never known is safest in this life.'

Experience corrupts and murders the Edenic innocence of childhood.

Under the skysigns they who have no arms
 Have cleanest hands, and, as the heartless ghost
 Alone's unhurt, so the blind man sees best. (CP 50)

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To see little and ask no question is not to get hurt. This is one way of coming to terms with life.

In Why east wind chills (CP 53) the children's questions about the nature of things find no answer.

Why east wind chills and south wind cools.

...

Why silk is soft and the stone wounds. (CP 53)

There can be no final answer to the ultimate questions about the inexplicable nature of things. Life and nature are mysteriously formed. Still the question will be asked, 'When cometh Jack Frost?' The ultimate questions will find ultimate answers in death. There may be doubts and uncertainties in life but death is an end, and there is no end more certain than this. There may be an answer known only to the stars but which is beyond the comprehension of human reason. So 'be content' with ignorance. The unquestioning acceptance of life and nature is the best way of coming to terms with life. Man must acquiesce in the scheme of things. Revolt is vain. So Thomas says in Find seat on bones (CP 65-66), published in Furze, April-June 1936 (Vol. VIII, No.2):

Black night still ministers the noon,

And the sky lays down her laws,

The sea speaks in a kingly voice,

Light and dark are no enemies

But one companion.

(CP 66)

The futility of knowledge is a major theme of Thomas's earlier work. 'Should lanterns shine' (CP 63), published in How Verse,

December 1935, shows the conflict between intuition and reason and the inability of either to bring any lasting conviction. The problem Thomas faced is the problem of reconciling reason and faith. Does truth depend on intuitive vision, or on objectively verified facts? Pragmatically considered, all intuitive private judgments are found worthless and delusive:

The features in their private dark
Are formed of flesh, but let the false day come
And from her lips the faded pigments fall,
And many cloths expose an ancient breast. (CP 63)

Heart and head also mislead.

I have been told to reason by the heart,
But heart, like head, leads helplessly. (CP 63)

Lawrence's blood equally brings frustration. ('I can't shout like
Lawrence, of the red sea of the living blood').²²

I have been told to reason by the pulse,
And, when it quickens, alter the actions' pace
Till field and reef lie level ... (CP 63)

Traditional moral teachings are futile:

I have heard many years of tellings,
And many years should see some change. (CP 63)

The final decision remains suspended like the ball thrown by Thomas in the Cwsonkin Park in his childhood.

The ball of I threw while playing in the park
Has not yet reached the ground. (CP 63)

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Man is born in a "human universality of condition." In this condition the unvarying necessities of being are to be met. Man is to be born, to labour, to copulate, and to die. Thomas tells his son Llewelyn in This Side of the Truth (CP 105-106), first published in Life and Letters To-day, July 1945, that heaven is amoral and by death

... all is undone

Under the unmindful skies,
Of innocence and guilt
Before you move to make
One gesture of the heart or head. (CP 106)

Moral certainty is not within man's power of comprehension. There is no moral judgment in nature. The concepts of good and bad do not determine life. 'Good and bad' are 'two ways/Of moving about your death' (CP 105). Everything is predetermined by nature.

And the wicked wish,
Down the beginning of plants
And animals and birds,
Water and light, the earth and sky,
Is cast before you move. (CP 106)

Death passes no judgment on wishes or actions of men.
The poet feels that everything is actuated by the power of love. Love

is the moving force in nature.

And all your deeds and words,
Each truth, each lie,
Die in unjudging love. (CP 106)

The sense of alienation from society poses a problem for Thomas. In his effort to achieve light he strives to overcome this sense of isolation. Man need each other in order to be themselves. The greatest degree of maturity and independence can be achieved only by having satisfactory relationships with others. Thomas desires to overcome his sense of alienation by having productive relatedness to others, but he is afraid and uncertain of himself. The productive relationship of love with others helps the realization of one's self. The poet acutely feels that his social alienation impedes his self-realization, but he is not sure of his position. 'The term "social" is ambiguous, ... can mean "societal" and "interpersonal". "Social isolation" can thus be construed both in the sense of the absence of positive interpersonal relationships, and in the sense of disassociation from the norms, values, and culture of one's society.³ Both the senses are true of Thomas.

The isolation of the individual, one characteristic theme of Twenty-five Poems, is expressed in Days in the turrets hear (CP 53-59). The poem was originally published with the title "Dare I?" in John O'London's Weekly, May 1934 (Vol. XXXI, No. 786). The isolated spirit is described in the form of a tower which is resisting the onslaught of the outside world. There is no community between the

self and the outside world. The self finds isolation painful while the external world is unknown and full of doubts and fears. From the tension between the self and the world comes the question --

Shall I unbolt or stay
Alone till the day I die. (CP 58)

The self seeks to come out of isolation into light.

All nerves to serve the sun,
The rite of light. (How soon the servant sun, CP 56)

The poet is tormented by a feeling of uncertainty. He is undecided whether to move away from his solipsistic attitude or to accept the objective social world. Before taking any decision he must know whether hands hold 'poison' of death or 'grapes' of life.

Hands of the stranger and holds of the snipe,
Hold you poison or grapes? (CP 59)

The sense of isolation and a longing for relationship, found in Sara in the turrets hear, have bred the beautiful lyric He lies by sea and (CP 32), published first in Maag, Autumn 1937 (No.3). The incomprehensible nature of the universe overwhelms the heart that longs for creative relationship with others or release in death. Two lovers lie in the 'yellow grave of sand and sea', 'a sovereign strip' cut off from the land by high tide, and call for 'one coloured calm' that 'should' cure their ills and reconcile all disharmony. 'Should' speaks of a state of uncertainty in the mind of the lovers. This is a general tragic condition of man in the face of impenetrable mystery of existence. "He feels that the only cure for his 'ills of the water'

is the 'one-coloured calm' of death. On the other side is his living resistance to this impulse, his 'calling for colour', his capacity to hear 'the heavenly music,' to know love and beauty within pain and conflict, to find for himself a meaningful relation with existence which will not annul his identity in death.²⁵ The lovers lie watching the 'golden weather', 'wish for wind to blow away/The strata of the shore and drown red rock'. The 'red rock' is the symbol of sterility, human suffering, and death. Temporarily the 'golden weather' may come. But we cannot 'fend off rock arrival'. There are forces beyond the control of man. The inability to solve the mystery of existence induces the desire to lie 'by seasand, watching yellow/ And the grave sea, mock and deride/who follow the red rivers' (CP 82).

One way of overcoming alienation is creativity, another commitment. Thomas's poetic creation is a way of coping with it, a means of coming to terms with the world, a means of mastering death. Before a poem takes birth, the poet undergoes great agony. He writes poems about poetry, about the poetic process of creation. This effort brings greater self-awareness.²⁶

The theme of Especially when the October wind (CP 16-17) is poetry and the writing of a poem. The poem was written when Thomas was twenty. Thomas celebrates creative act, and this creativity is a defiance of death. This birthday poem reminds the poet of death. External nature gives intimations of death to him. He views everything in terms of words, vowels, and speeches.

Some let us make you of the vowelled beeches,
Some of the oaken voices, from the roots
Of many a thorny shire tell you notes,
Some let us make you of the water's speeches. (CP 16)

As a poet Thomas tries to bring external reality within the orbit of words. The barriers between the poet and the external world break down and the human and natural objects become interchangeable terms. The emotions of the poet are identified with the world of nature. So the human forms and vegetable world have interchangeable attributes.

On the horizon walking like the trees
The wordy shapes of women, and the rows
Of the star-gestured children in the park. (CP 16)

Each syllable is a drop of heart's blood of the suffering poet struggling for expression. The poet is shut in a 'tower of woods'(CP 16) looking for an outlet. He is aware of the sufferings of other lives and places of which he is an observer and not a participant. He hears the 'notes' that 'the roots/of many a thorny shire tell' (CP 16).

'Thorns' is associated with the ideas of sacrifice and suffering, and is thus relevant to the poet who suffers and sheds "syllabic blood". Intimations of death are in the 'frosty fingers', 'crabbing sun,' raven's 'cough in winter sticks' (CP 16). 'Winter sticks' are trees bare of leaves. The 'wagging clock/tells us the hour's word' (CP 16). Time 'tells the windy weather in the cock' (CP 16), meaning death in the cock which is a life giving, life-awakening symbol.

Some let me make you of the meadow's signs;
The signal grass that tells me all I know
Breaks with the worry winter through the eye.
Some let me tell you of the raven's sins. (CP 16)

'Meadow's signs', 'signal grass' show the process of growth and decay, of the 'coming fury' (CP 17) of winter. This is the significant truth of life which the poet seems to realize and intends to embody in his poetry.

Thomas always questioned the validity of his experience. His questioning mind probed into the truths of art and religion. In The Spire Cranes (CP 86), first published in Walesg, March 1938 (No.4), the poet expresses the relation of self to world, of art to life. The poet tries to find a way out of self-absorption, self-enclosure, and seeks uninhibited self-expression. The image of a spire stands for the creative self of the poet and birds and bells for poems. Kindall suggests that this 'spire', aspiring, and creative, is holy phallus and the poet's holy tower of words and 'carved', 'feathery', and 'throats' make the aspiring birds poems as well as spurs.

From the stone nest it does not let the feathery
Carved birds blunt their striking throats on the salt
gravel. (CP 86)

The poet contrasts the living birds with the artificial, carved birds. 'Carved birds' do not feel the joy and dangers of free flight in nature. Thomas feels a revulsion against any restrictive force, whether moral, religious, social, or aesthetic, that prohibits

free self-expression or unrestricted experiencing of reality. The aspiring, living birds dive from their spire to bite the 'salt gravel' or 'pierce the split sky with diving wing' (CP 86).

These craning birds are choice for you, songs that
jump back

To the built voice, or fly with winter to the bells,
But do not travel down dumb wind like prodigals.

(CP 86)

The ending of the poem offers a clear choice: ²⁹ that his poems either 'jump back to the built voice' of their creator, or fly out escaping the prison of self to the winter of reality in true communication. " 'Prodigals', both wanderers and returners, are private poems, and their wind is 'dumb'.³⁰"

Once it was the colour of saying (CP 89), originally published in Malra, March 1939 (Nos. 6/7), ³¹ announces a change in the style of Thomas's writing of poetry. Henceforth Thomas will not simply be concerned with the aesthetic appeal of words but with concrete human beings and his feelings about them. He does not abandon his early physiological images, but he grows self-conscious about them. There is an expansion of his self-awareness. He will abandon writing solipsistic verse.

The gentle seaslides of saying I must undo. (CP 89)

Then Thomas says ambiguously —

Now my saying shall be my undoing. (CP 89)

The poet will undo his past by writing new poetry. But his future may equally be undone by his new poetic practice.

How shall my animal (CP 91-92), first published in Criterion, October 1938, is another important poem on making a poem. How shall animal shaped in the brain of the 'cavernous skull', the seat of corruption and joy, of horror and ecstasy ('vessel of abscesses and exultation's shell'), 'Endure burial under the spelling wall' (CP 91)? 'Burial' in the printed form is coming into light from a 'dark den' (CP 92). There should be a conflict between the fierce, vital stuff and the 'outside weathers' of reality, between the conscious and the unconscious, between the self and external world, before a poem takes a 'wizard shape' (CP 91). Without a rapport between the invoked, vital, and untamed emotional force, drunken 'as a vineyard snail, failed like an octopus' (CP 91), and the intellect and reality, the microcosmic vision of the 'weird eyes' of a poet cannot comprehend the macrocosm in a poem. Creation involves the union of opposites, of coupling at 'midnight blaze' (CP 91) that melts head and heart, and the union of male and female principles. Union and conflict of opposites, 'Love and labour and kill/In quick, sweet, cruel light' (CP 91) of external reality are necessary for the sprouting and bursting of life from the 'locked ground' (CP 91) and the black sea.

Thomas will engage all his senses and fish ('I with a living skein, / Tongue and ear in the thread', [CP-92] in 'the temple-bound / Curl-locked and animal cavepools of spells and bone' (CP 91) for

the substance of his poetry. Once the fury of the vital stuff or octopus caught in cranial bowl is mastered, the poet applies his cold, sly, critical scissors to it to transform it into a poem. The fury of the beast, 'the rant of the fierce eye', 'the gesture of breath' (CP 92), are lopped and clipped.

Life dry, rest robbed, my beast. (CP 92)

The poem, imaged as 'love hewn in pillars' with 'caved bird, saint, and sun' (CP 92) will drop down. Out of the 'dark den' of the womb we emerge in the sun, and death is implicit in life.

You have kicked from a dark den, leaped up the
whinnying light,

And dug your grave in my breast. (CP 92)

The images of the poem show the progression of the poem's origin from the head to the heart, from darkness to light.

First published in Life and Letters To-Day, October 1945, In my craft or sullied art (CP 123) is an important poem on the writing of poetry. In his ideal devotion to art the poet is a solitary craftsman toiling at his trade. He writes 'not for ambition or bread/Or the strut and trade of charms/On the ivory stages',

But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art. (CP 123)

"Poetry, to a poet, is the most rewarding work in the world,"

Thomas writes. Thomas finds his redemption in the writing of poetry.

Thomas ceaselessly strives to come out of darkness into light. The making of a poem, parallel to the birth of a child, is aesthetically coming to light. Vision and Prayer (CP 137-143), like In my craft or silled art, is a poem of Thomas's mature period. It was published in Horizon, January 1945. With the help of child and poem the poet here struggles to emerge from original darkness to the holy light of nature. 'Venus seems the light to which child, poet, and poem ascend',³³

A child is born 'in the birth bloody room' (CP 137). He is the all consuming flame of love that burns down the barrier, 'the wall thin as a wren's bone' (CP 137), that prevents the blessed light of the 'dazzler of heaven' (P 139). The 'dazzler of heaven' is the sun, and also Son.³⁴

And the winged wall is torn
By his torrid crown
And the dark thrown
From his loins
To bright
Light,

(CP 138)

The child is 'the finding one' (CP 140). The 'finding one' is also he who seeks out the lost souls and saves them through his 'wound'. He dies for the love of the fallen world. The poet flies in terror from the dazzling light but cannot escape 'the children/Of his/Kiss' (CP 139), the kiss of love. He is dumbfounded. The 'high noon/Of his wound/blinds my/Cry' (CP 140). The poet lies 'crouched' 'in the

shrine' of Christ's 'blazing/Breast' (CP 143) waiting for rebirth. His flight will be 'wound-ward' (CP 143), towards Christ, towards sacrifice.

Thomas is reluctant to be saved by light. He requests that the child who 'learns now the sun and moon' be returned 'to the birth bloody room/Behind the wall's wren' before he learns to speak, 'before the lips blaze and bloom' (CP 144). 'In the name of the wanton lost' (CP 144) he prays the child

That in let the dead lie though they roam
For his briared head to insist this
To the shrine of his world's wound

and

awake

No heart home, (CP 145)

since the darkness of death is comfortable. The fourth poem of Part II elaborates the dark world. 'Forever falling night' is a known country 'to the legion/Of sleepers' (CP 146). These sleepers do not want 'to awake and arise/For the country of death is the heart's aim' (CP 146). Though happy in his state, 'common Lazarus' comes on behalf of all the dead, the 'deluging/Light' (CP 146) of resurrection. The poet prays again 'In the name of the unborn/and the undesired' (CP 147) to make the child's martyrdom a natural one.

May the crimson
 Spin a grave grey
 and the colour of clay
Stress upon his martyrdom. (CP 147)

The sun finally finds out the lost poet,

I turn the corner of prayer and lust
 In a blessing of the sudden
 Sun, In the name of the damned
 I would turn back and run
 To the hidden land
 But the land was
 Christian Love
 The sky.

I

as found,

(CP 128)

Thomas submits to the Life force and to the concept of sacrificial Love,

O let him
 Scold me and grow
 No in his world's wound,
 His lightning answers my
 Cry, My voice turns in his hand,
 Now I am lost in the blinding
 One, The sun scorns at the prayer's end, (CP 128)

salvation comes through light or love for which the sun and
 Jesus are proper metaphors. "The 'west-eating' sun of the earlier
 poetry has now become, instead, a metaphor of regeneration and spiri-
 tual grace, an image not of mortality but of salvation."³⁵ The central
 theme of Thomas's poetry is his struggle through darkness to light, his
 progress from dark west to the light of noon. This theme plays its role
 in Vision and Prayer. The poet comes out of the 'known dark' (CP 127)

into the light of day. Jesus's sacrificial love seems to be poet's creative power and his light within. The poet resorts to baptism imagery to express his movement from dark to light, through experience to wisdom, from confused understanding to clearer perception of self, but the process is both agonizing and terrifying.

REFERENCES

1. Constantine Fitzgibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas*, London (Dent) 1966, pp. 151, 152.
2. Clark Henry, *The World of Dylan Thomas*, London (Dent) 1971, p. 7.
3. According to W. E. Reynolds, "it is an attempt to find a position, or an attitude, from which painful existence, and ultimately death itself, may be tolerable". (*The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas*, New York 1966 pp. 127-128).
4. Constantine Fitzgibbon (ed.), *Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, London (Dent) 1966, p. 61.
5. "The verbs of will are both the actions prompted by sexuality (will here standing for the passions) and also the chosen verbs of poetry". (Walford Davies, ed., *New Critical Essays*, London 1972, p. 127).
6. The poem, according to W. E. Tindall, "seems to be the resolution of the Oedipus complex -- growing up, in short, and forgiving father". (*A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas*, Thomas and Hudson, 1968, p. 76).
7. Ralph Hurd (ed.), *Poet in the Making: The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas*, London (Dent) 1968, August 1933 Notebook, Number 27 and 31.
8. Clark Henry observes, "The monkey-blood of man through trial and error (the error is non-love) slowly makes its climb". (op. cit., p. 302).
9. J. H. Brinnin (ed.), *A Casebook on Dylan Thomas*, New York (Thomas Y. Crowell) 1960, p. 61.
10. *Selected Letters*, p. 61.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

12. Caitlin Thomas writes, "There was one part of him that nobody could get at, that was impregnable, untouchable, not of his own making, but handed down from generation of close-tied, practical, family tradition." (Leftover Life to Kill, London, Putnam 1967, p. 35).
13. J. M. Brinin, Dylan Thomas in America, London 1955, p. 33.
14. Walfred Davies, op.cit., p. 147.
15. Selected Letters, p. 103.
16. "He stooped beside her and caressed her softly, blindly, murmuring inarticulate things, ... It was the deep, interfolded warmth, warmth living and penetrable, the woman, the heart of the rose! My aspiration is the intricate warm rose, my joy is this blessing!" (The Tales of R.N. Lawrence, William Heinemann Ltd., London 1934, p. 113).
17. Created in the image of God, "man is himself a reasoning, image-making, comparing being, ... But, unlike the God which he has imaged and to which he compared himself, he is not of one piece and therefore, until he learns to harmonize the contraries of which he is compounded, not at peace, spirit in flesh, death in life, human in animal, female in male, organic in inorganic, liquid in solid -- it is such entanglements that make the ... so perplexing and perplexed an organism." (Theory, op.cit., p. 312).
18. Reynolds, op.cit., pp. 25-27.
19. Selected Letters, pp. 109-113.
20. R. W. Tedlock (ed.), Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet, London (Hercy Books) 1960, pp. 132, 133.
21. David Holbrook, Llangrug Revisited (Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1968, p. 101.
22. Selected Letters, p. 5.
23. Jean Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism; Translation and Introduction by Philip Mairet, London (Methuen & Co. Ltd.) 1948, p. 43.
24. Richard Schickel, Alienation (George Allen and Unwin) 1972, p. 137.
25. Walfred Davies (ed.), op.cit., p. 47.
26. Paul Ford says that Thomas writes "about the business of writing, looking at poetry as his personal means of coming to terms with the world". This becomes "a favourite area, a vein he never tired of working, poems about poetry and himself the poet's more self-awareness". (Dylan Thomas, Horder and Stoughton, London 1977, pp. 50-51).

27. John Ackerman points out, "An important theme developed in The Man of Love, and one that had long troubled Thomas's questioning mind, was the theme of art as illusion, of religion as illusion" (Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work, O.U.P. 1964, p. 84).
28. Tindall, op.cit., p. 169.
29. David Aivas thinks that the theme of the poem is "art as illusion, faith as illusion" and a choice is offered between art and faith. "The poet implies that the choice is none, since both art and faith ('nightingale and psalm' in another poem, the 'voice' and 'bells' here) are illusory when they deny process".
(E.W. Tedlock ed., Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet, London, Mercury Books 1960, p. 200). Against this view Smery rightly observes, "I do not think that the choice is between art and faith but between a daring, unrestricted experiencing and a safe, paternalized narrowness" (Smery, op.cit., p. 154).
30. Tindall, op.cit., p. 169.
31. Vernon Watkins writes that in 1939, Thomas "abandoned the struggling, symbol-charged prose of the intensely subjective early stories and began to write stories about human beings living and behaving exactly as they used to live and behave when he was a child. These were the stories of his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog. Once he had begun to write about real people he found that he did not want to return to the other style. ... Just as Yeats had announced his change to a bare style in his little poem, 'The Coat', so Dylan had already anticipated this change in his short poem about Cwadenkin Park which begins:
- Once it was the colour of saying
Boaked my table the uglier side of a hill.
- ... Both in poetry and prose his work from this time forward moved in the direction of the living voice." (Dylan Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, Vernon Watkins ed. Dent/Faber 1957, pp.20-21.)
32. Dylan Thomas, Quite. Early One Morning, London (Dent) 1964, p.169.
33. Tindall, op.cit., p. 256.
34. "He is the all-consuming flame of love; and this flame consumes the wall of partition, the wren-bone wall, letting in streams of light -- the light of the 'dazzler of heaven', who lighteth every man who cometh into the world. The 'dazzler of heaven' is no doubt the natural sun, but also the son of the Father and of the 'mothering - maiden'". (Anselm Telfan Davies, Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body, London 1964, pp. 43-44).