

Original Research Article

Dylan Thomas: “A Refusal” to be a Poet of Love, Pity and Peace

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Abstract: Dylan Thomas’s poem “A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London” focuses on the problem of the allotted role of the war time poet involved in choice-making. The agonizing tension, the climate of the global war and the creative fear and anxieties continue to harass the poets of the thirties and the war poets of the forties. One may readily agree with the view that in stylistic maturity the poem surpasses anything Thomas has written before, and it is also true that, at the formal level, the early poem *18 Poems* sets the pattern for this later poem. Literary critics interpret the poem within the perspective of death and religion. However the poem, dramatizing the socio-politico-historical functioning of the war poets of the forties and the more ironic complex attitude of Auden and the pitiless attitude of the lost poets of the thirties, brings out the inadequacy of the poet’s power of comprehension and the pain inherent in human perception. Thomas talks about his own asocial, apolitical, ahistorical functioning and his certainty about future as well as the contemporary poets’s religious, patriotic philosophical resignation in the context of the global war and the child’s death and their uncertain future. Hence this paper adopting a figurative approach, endeavours to decipher the essential statement and to decode the much compressed, obscure meaning of this popular poem as the main objective of the existing critical study on the poem is confined more to stylistic and paraphrasal levels.

Keywords: apolitical, envisage, alchemize, grandeur, articulate, existential, adapt, empathy, pragmatic and divination.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the surrealistic Dylan Thomas as a popular poet and a godhead of his own imagination, “pure being, shadow-shape-divine,” “the long vistas of celestial calm,” “rapture where self and not-self meet” (Day Lewis, *Collected Poems* 299) the climate of the global war and the creative fear and anxieties, “disavowed, its range of blessings unbought or unpaid for ... all our time lost, profitless, misspent” (273), continue to harass the poets of the thirties and the war poets of the forties. W.H. Auden explains the fervor of Day Lewis’ condition of the poet:

And even our uneliminated decline
To a vita minima, huddling for warmth,
The hard-and the soft-mouthed together
In a coma of waiting, just breathing.... (*New Year Letter* 186)

The realistic poets, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice who “long had ceased to believe ... in any Utopia or in Peace-upon-Earth,” who had lost hope for poetry in Auden’s historical intensity and Owen’s pity find their career prospects in Thomas’s *18 Poems*, “friends would find in his death neither ransom nor reprieve ... but only a grain of faith” (MacNeice, *Collected Poems* 235), “all open to these shining spaces,” breathe their “future’s emanation” (*DCP* 300).

Day Lewis speaks of the fall out of the political poets of the thirties, their loss and profit, depression and freedom, unhope and hope “though it was her own doing if all humanity shunned her ... yet a happy release to be done with living ... an outcast from the world” (*DCP* 297). In *Poems 1943-1947*, he admits of Thomas’s early poem *18 Poems* offering hope and happiness, tragic joy and heartsease to the fallen poets:

On a day when the breath of roses
Plumpened a swooning breeze
And all the silken combs of summer

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Opened wide their knees,
Between two sighs they planted one—
A willed one, a wanted one—
And he will be the sign, they said, of our felicities. (263)

In "Overtures to Death," he celebrates the pleasures of intimate companionship with Thomas, his vicarious impersonal art and his pragmatic functioning in *18 Poems*:

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)

The beauty of the natural world embodied in *18 Poems* serves as continuing link between the past and the present, and among the audience that Thomas desires is listed the small circle of his intimate friends. Living experience is intenser than the reality of the art-world, however vividly portrayed. This real world rich in human affections offers no immutability, but it offers its own security according to Spender:

Across the white sheet of the day
Twisted iron black realities
Broken boulevards through which humanity's
Sprawling river Styx
Of corroding shadows crawled.
Oh but our love was the Phoenix. (*Poems of Dedication* 56)

The memory of the securer haven as provided by Thomas's vital spirit in *18 Poems* quickens the pace of recovery. MacNeice perceives that *18 Poems* is free from any trace of Auden's historical consciousness and his contemporaries's time-spirit and Thomas has succeeded in expressing the perfect mood of "adaptability" and "a twitter of inconsequent vitality," the cyclic process of birth-in-death and the paradoxical theme of vicarious impersonal art in harmony with the sceptic poetic tradition:

And I would praise our inconceivable stamina
Who work to the clock and calendar and maintain
The equilibrium of nerves and notions,
Our mild bravado in the face of time. (*MCP* 96)

Auden urgently needs some way out as he is disgusted with his contemporaries shifting their love to Thomas and defending his *18 Poems*, "their pinches of detritus to the ... nutritive chain of determined being" (*NYL*). "In a darkness of tribulation and death ... while blizzards havoc the gardens and the old ... folly becomes unsafe" (*NYL*), he migrates to America in January 1939. MacNeice breaks out:

He always broke off so, abrupt but shy
In knowledge of his mission, veered and tacked
To his own breezes—till as a variation
His explanation cracked and threw the words awry.... (*MCP* 233)

Day Lewis, while diagnosing the condition of the transitional Auden as "infirm and grey ... this leaden hearted day ... drags its lank hours," "his fall is short of pride, he bleeds within ... and paler creeps to the dead end of his days" (*DCP* 169), views his migration from England to America as a transitional moving from the metaphysical art of self-annihilation to the existential art of dread and anxiety, "as a child picking flowers near home from flower to ... flower enticed, will find ... himself the next moment lost in another country." He explains metaphorically the escapism of Auden as an existential showing to ensure the continuity of his pilgrimage of dying and to see that the perpetuation of his impersonal art is assured:

As, when a hill's undermined
A windowframe jammed or a door flying open tell one
The hill has invisibly moved.... (275)

Day Lewis perceives that the early poetry of Auden establishes him as a poet of aesthetic amoral metaphysical art, "the singing words of pine" (204) and "graceful ghost" and his transitional poem *Another Time* reinforces his task and his commitment to metaphysical "beyond reach of sense or reason ... his life walks in glacial sleep ... for ever" under the direction of the French symbolist R.M.Rilke:

He's one more ghost, engaged to keep
Eternity's long hours and mewed
Up in live flesh and with no escape
From solitude. (207)

Fortunately, Thomas's *18 Poems*, transforming the sufferings of the fallen poets of the thirties into tragic joy, "manhood ... spat up from the resuffered pain" (Dylan Thomas 66), focuses on the joys of vicarious impersonal art and the asocial, apolitical and ahistorical functioning as a poet of harmony and co-existence. Thomas outlines his dramatic success:

All all and all the dry worlds lever,
Stage of the ice, the solid ocean,
All from the oil, the pound of lava.
City of spring, the governed flower,
Turns in the earth that turns the ashen
Towns around on a wheel of fire. (DT 26)

MacNeice commends Thomas for his inner explorations of memories, his paradox of life-in-death and magnanimous impersonal art vis-à-vis the paradox of death-in-life and aesthetic amoral impersonal art:

From camp to camp, from Eocene to chalk,
He lives a paradox, lives in a groove
That runs dead straight to an ordained disaster
So that in two dimensions he must move
Like an automaton, yet his inward stalk
Vertically aspires and makes him his own master. (225)

The truth about the process of vicarious impersonal art in *18 Poems* free from the influences of power-centric metaphysical tradition, "strange-eyed constellations reign ... his stars eternally" (Thomas Hardy 80), "out of the forest loam ... out of dark night where lay ... the crowns of Nineveh" (Yeats, *Collected Poems* 182) that Thomas tells the fallen poets of the thirties is learnt from the moral disinterestedness and the tragic joy of Hardy in *Poems of the Past and the Present*, "his homely Northern breast and brain ... grow up a Southern tree" (TH) and of Yeats in *The Tower*. "the death of friends, or death ... of every brilliant eye ... that made a catch in the breath ... seem but the clouds of the sky ... when the horizon fades" (YCP). Thomas indicates his love for the dramatic lyrics of Hardy and Yeats and their process of alchemizing sorrowful experiences into tragic joy that leads him to achieve the impersonal art identical to Auden's impersonal pattern:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever. (DT 127)

Thomas calls Auden "the crooked rose" because he saddens blisses and makes the process of impersonal art historical and painful, purely aesthetic and amoral and he fails to offer a congenial living atmosphere because of his several contrasting and dogmatic and philosophic ideas. In *18 Poems*, he explains that the poetic process of life-in-death, transfiguration, warm impersonal art and tragic gladness involves much laboring, "I dreamed my genesis in sweat of death, fallen ... twice in the feeding sea, grown ... stale of Adam's brine until, vision ... of new man strength, I seek the sun" (DT)

The early Thomas functions as discreet, magnanimous and impersonal as the paradoxical later Yeats, "from the divorcing sky I learnt the double ... the two-framed globe that spun into a score," in contrast to the metaphysical Auden's discrete functioning for sound pattern, "one wound, one mind, spewed out the matter ... one breast gave suck the fever's issue." Recalling his functional role in *18 Poems*, "what has been one was many sounding minded." he explains his inclusive mind working on the cyclical pattern for the vicarious impersonal art to offer salvation to the afflicted political poets of the thirties:

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. (DT 58-59)

The area of his paradoxical functioning includes not merely heaven, but also the spheres of the physical world—the sea and the earth. Hardy is here linked with Yeats having threefold influence over heaven, earth and underworld, but association with Donne and Auden is also suggested. The allusion to the sun, a favourite image of Hardy, helps to establish a parallel between Yeats and Hardy, the poets of light and cyclical pattern. The mention of the three spheres suggests that Thomas's deification does not alienate Hardy from Yeats, the life-centric poets of the physical universe; his early poem *18 Poems* mediates between earth and heaven, Hardy and Yeats, and draws them together into unity.

Thomas's *25 Poems* commemorates the progressive maturity of his paradoxical structure, his gentle impersonal art, his transfiguring mind that transforms the tragic sorrows of Auden's lovers who have "mishandled, ruined" (*DCP*) the yearning "for a being beyond us" (274) into joyful song pattern. While explaining the contradistinction between Yeats's vision of paradoxical impersonal art

and magnanimity and Auden's Eliotian vision of ironic impersonal art and magnanimities of musical pattern, the cyclic process of life-in-death, "death more natural" and the metaphysical process of death-in-life, "the natural peril," he underlines "the natural parallel," the parallelism between *18 Poems* and *25 Poems*, the identical functioning of his moral disinterestedness, his asocial, apolitical and ahistorical consciousness:

This is the fortune of manhood: the natural peril,
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.... (DT 73)

In the transitional poem, *The Map of Love*, Thomas remembers his early vision of paradoxical structure, noble disinterestedness and his sceptic poetic tradition of Hardy and Yeats, "my nest of mercies in the rude, red tree" (DT 38). He explains his own unified sensibility and his disinterested goodwill, "an enormous man alone by the twigs of his eyes, two fires ... camped in the drug-white shower of nerves and blood" (DT 40) in contrast to the war poets's Wordsworthian lyrical sensibility "fumed like a tree, and tossed a burning bird," "the terrible world my brother bares his skin" and Auden's ironic sensibility, "mild as pardon from a cloud of pride" on the eve of the World War II:

Now in the cloud's big breast lie quiet countries,
Delivered seas my love from her proud place
Walks with no wound, nor lightning in her face,
A calm wind blows that raised the trees like hair
Once where the soft snow's blood was turned to ice.
And though my love pulls the pale, nipped air,
Prides of to-morrow suckling in her eyes,
Yet this I make in a forgiving presence. (DT 70)

Thomas emulates Yeats's *Last Poems*, his empirical vision of vicarious impersonal art and his asocial, apolitical and ahistorical pragmatism to persuade the dilemmatic and anxious romantic war poets of the pre-war time, "the grain that hurries this way from the rim of the grave ... has a voice and a house, and there and here you must couch and cry" (DT 78), and the experience acquires the character of a reminiscence of his early poetry of noble impersonal art, "stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more ... then stumbling to the kill beside the shore ... the cleaning out and bandaging of wounds ... and chants of victory amid the encircling hounds" (*YCP* 290) in sharp contrast to the transitional Auden emulating the existential art, "the anguish and carrion" of the French symbolist Rilke as an extension of the metaphysical art of his early phase influenced by Walter de la Mare and Eliot. Moreover in the transitional poem, Thomas's articulate voice stands up to keep his self-identity as self-assertive and self-sustaining as Yeats and self-restorative and self-regenerative as Hardy. Hardy sings:

Perhaps Thy ancient rote-restricted ways
Thy ripening rule transcends'
That listless effort tends
To grow percipient with advance of days,
And with percipience mends. (TH 168)

The aesthetic implicit in the pre-war poems of F.T.Prince, Roy Fuller, Alan Rook and Keidrych Rhys does not explain the main direction of the war poet's thought and work. Their return to the Wordsworthian simplicity and wide expanse of his early poetry may be satisfying experience, but the return would mean a denial of the complexity of contemporary sensibility, but the newly-gained historical consciousness of Sidney Keyes and Alun Lewis impel them to face this complexity, and not to flinch from it. MacNeice recasts:

Hearing the gasfire breathe monotonously
She waits for words but no words come, she lifts
A soapstone hand to smooth her hair and feels
The hand is someone else's—the scene shifts
To a cold desert where the wind has dropped
And the earth's movement stopped and something steals
Up from the grit through nerve and bone and vein
To flaunt its iron tendrils in her brain. (*MCP* 229)

What Thomas does in the transitional poem is awakening the pre-war romantic poets to emulate the empirical vision of vicarious disinterestedness of his early poetry, "and whose tongue feels around and around but cannot taste ... that hour gone sacrament of drunkenness" (*MCP*) that can broaden their scope of poetry and make them great poets. He tells them that he emerges as a great poet just because he has emulated the anti-metaphysical perspective of the life-centred Hardy, "the purposed Life ... serene, sagacious, free" (TH 75) and the empirical poetic process of Yeats, "a drunken man's praise of sobriety," his active functioning

as a poet of impersonal art, "that I may stay a sober man ... although I drink my fill" for "a drunkard is a dead man ... and all dead men are drunk" (YCP 268).

In the later poem *Deaths and Entrances*, Thomas has been continuously progressing as a successful poet of paradoxical structure and moral disinterestedness identical to that of *18 Poems*, "dressed to die, the sensual strut began ... with my red veins full of money ... in the final direction of the elementary town ... I advance for as long as forever is" (DT 140) under the influence of A.E. Houseman's *Last Poems* and his disinterested human love, "tall in their midst the tower ... divides the shade and sun ... and the clock strikes the hour ... and tells the time to none" (AEH 25). Thomas persuades the confused war poets of the forties to explore how far they are able to grasp and present Houseman's comic vision of empathic disinterestedness and dissolve the apparent dichotomy of the solemn and the gay, of the serious and the trivial, of profundity and levity:

'Rest beyond choice in the dust-appointed grain,
At the breast stored with seas. No return
Through the waves of the fat streets nor the skeleton's thin ways,
The grave and my calm body are shut to your coming as stone,
And the endless beginning of prodigies suffers open.' (DT)

In the later poem, Thomas quickens in a disinterested manner the romantic war poets drawn by the philosophic currents of Wordsworth, Owen and Auden to hearken to the poetic process of transfiguration, tragic joy and vicarious impersonal art to become poets of greatness, "the road one treads to labour ... will lead one home to rest ... and that will be the best" (AEH 89). He helps the bewildered war poets, the poets of love, pity and war, "duty, friendship, bravery" to refuse the appeal of the death-centric poets of the historic tradition, "sleep away, lad ... wake no more" and emulate the life-oriented moral disinterestedness of the war poet Houseman, "clasp our cloak of earth about you ... we must man the ditch without you" (AEH 84), whom he emulates in the later poem *Deaths and Entrances* as his helping "hand" that fastens with the "hands" of Hardy and Yeats, the early models of his moral disinterestedness, "hands that gave ... a grasp to friend me to the grave" (AEH 9). He explains:

Unluckily for a death
Waiting with phoenix under
The pyre yet to be lighted of my sins and days,
And for the woman in shades
Saint carved and sensual among the scudding
Dead and gone, dedicate forever to my self
Though the brawl of the kiss has not occurred
On the clay cold mouth, on the fire
Branded forehead, that could bind
Her constant.... (DT 141-42)

Thomas perceives that Houseman's pagan vision of ahistorical, asocial and apolitical poetry, his disapproval of the poets of love, pity and peace and his defence of productive, pragmatic poetry "their shoulders held the sky suspended ... they stood, and earth's foundation's stay ... what God abandoned, these defended ... and saved the sum of things to pay" (AEH 16) are in harmony with Hardy's archetypal vision of poetry of amelioration, harmony and co-existence in contrast to the poetry of dreams, pride and power, "the quay recedes. Hurrah! Ahead we go! ... it's true I've been accustomed now to home... and joints get rusty, and one's limbs may grow ... more fit to rest than roam" (TH 76) and with Yeats's Homeric vision of paradoxical poetry defying the poets of lyricism, history and irony, defending altruistic functioning and refusing to "fix" his "attention ... on politics" as he is "a travelled man that knows ... what he talks about ... and there's a politician ... that has read and thought ... and may be what they say is true ... of war and war's alarms" (YCP 297).

Thomas's gentle disinterested functioning in the later poem is identical with his procreative and proactive role and kind impersonal performance in the early poem, "I followed sleep who kissed me in the brain ... let fall the tears of time; the sleeper's eye ... shifting to light, turned on me like a moon" (DT 67). In *18 Poems*, he directs the afflicted political poets of the thirties to transmute their tragic failure into tragic joy:

I see that from these boys shall men of nothing
Stature by seedy shifting,
Or lame the air with leaping from its heats;
There from their hearts the dogdayed pulse
Of love and light bursts in their throats,
O see the pulse of summer in the ice. (DT 71)

Thomas's promise of hope in the later poem to the dilemmatic war poets, "now to awake husked of gestures and my love like a cave ... to the anguish and carrion, to the infant forever unfree ... o my lost love bounced from a good home" (DT), is parodic of his disinterested care and hope offered to the realistic poets of unhope and doubt in the early poem. He compares and contrasts:

Dig no more for the chains of his grey-haired heart.

The heavenly ambulance drawn by a wound
Assembling waits for the spade's ring on the cage.
O keep his bones away from the common cart,
The morning is flying on the wings of his age
And a hundred storks perch on the sun's right hand. (DT 30)

In the later poem, the situation and the experience involve the insensitive attitude of the Wordsworthian passive war poets of the forties, Prince, Fuller, Rook and Rhys, "when the morning was waking over the war ... he put on his clothes and stepped out and he died," the erstwhile faithful friends of the politically insensitive Wordsworth, Lewis and Keyes, becoming morally conscious poets of pity, the active war poets, "he dropped where he loved on the burst pavement stone ... and the funeral grains of the slaughtered floor," the grief stricken poets of the "lost" thirties remaining more complex and dilemmatic, "the locks yawned loose and a blast blew them wide" and the existential Auden oppressed by thoughts of mutability hoping for immortality through the Christian idea of the Grace and commanding the poets of the war time to adhere to the metaphysical, historical sense of his early poetry and to the principle of aesthetic, amoral functioning, "tell his street on its back he stopped a sun ... and the craters of his eyes grew springshots and fire ... when all the keys shot from the locks, and rang" (DT).

While commending Thomas on his growing commitment to the sceptic poetic tradition of moral disinterestedness, his adaptation of warm impersonal art for the salvation of the contemporary poets in contrast to Auden's increasing commitment to the metaphysical tradition of aesthetic amoral disinterestedness, his adoption of existential tradition for his immortality, the war poets's self-indulgent, self-deceiving and self-seeking functioning and the fallen realistic poets's functioning for their own survival, MacNeice brings out the myths of unselfishness and selfishness, the rising sun, the setting sun and the mackerel:

But then look eastward from your heart, there bulks
A continent, close, dark, as archetypal sin,
While to the west off your own shores the mackerel
Are fat—on the flesh of your kin. (MCP)

MacNeice attributes the waxing popularity of Thomas to his magnanimous impersonal art offering salvation, "fermenting rivers" to the suffering fellow-poets, his paradoxical structure "intricacies of gloom and glint" and his comic vision of art that transforms the tragic failures into tragic joy, "ducats of dream and great doubloons of ceremony" (MCP 224). Day Lewis also vouchsafes for the reality of Auden's falling greatness as a poet committed to the tragic vision of existential immortal art and Thomas's rising greatness as a poet committed to the comic vision of life-centric gentle impersonal art:

Ride to love's beam like a barque at her anchorage,
Glide on the languorous airs of the past,
For fast as the pride of our reason is waning,
Old follies returning grow wise at last. (DCP)

Day Lewis perceives that Thomas's ahistorical, apolitical and asocial functioning contrasts with the functioning of the contemporary poets of the forties and evokes the felicitation of the defeated poets of the thirties and the complimentary reviews of the romantic war poets of the forties. He attributes Thomas's literary reputation to his pragmatic functioning and his sceptic poetic tradition and Auden's declining appeal to his dogmatic functioning and his metaphysical existential tradition, "facts beyond price" (DCP 295), "he wore a long black cutaway coat ... which should have been walking by blackthorn-fleeced ... hedges to church," "the same rude ... rightness of instinct which then had brought him ... so quaintly dressed ... in his Sunday best ... for the first step along the Calvary road..." (DCP).

Though there is self-parody of *leit-motif* between *18 Poems* and *Deaths and Entrances*, the later poem is obviously distinctive in craftsmanship and free from the obscurity and complexity, "winter completes an age ... with its thorough levelling" (Auden, *Collected Poems* 271). Day Lewis finds a self-parody between *18 Poems* and *Deaths and Entrances* in the underlying self-indicating, self-vindicating, self-dedicating process, the life-inducing process of cyclical pattern, transfiguration and tragic happiness:

Once again it is summer:
Wildflowers beflag the lane
That takes me away from the golden lands,
Heart-wrung and alone.
The best I can look for, by vale or hill,
A herb they tell me is common enough – self-heal. (DCP 271)

The early poem reveals Thomas as an obscure and a vague poet, more compressed and more ambiguous, a bolt from the blue throwing an implicit challenge to Auden's poetry and the later poem showing him as a poet of greatness, an established poet of kind impersonal art obscuring the popularity of Auden, "something large ... is barging up beyond the down ... chirruping, hooting, hot of foot" (MCP 251) according to MacNeice:

Beyond that wall what thing befall?

My eye can fly though I must crawl.
Dance and dazzle --- Something bright
Ignites the dumps of sodden cloud,
Loud and laughing, a fiery face.... (252)

The *modus operandi* and the *modus vivendi* of Thomas's early, transitional and later poetry as well as his art songs are one and the same. His Yeatsian altruistic impersonal art alchemizes the "half-conjectured and half-divined" organic disorder of the political poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice, "the intrusions ... of value upon fact" and the dramatic romances of the dilemmatic war poets, "that blew out ... from people's hands and faces" into occasional art songs deemed as a comic relief in the tragedy of organic disorder "undesigned ... evidence of design," a play within the play to suggest the ways and means to the afflicted and the affective poets to create art songs. He brings out the focal point of his art songs that wins him laurels and obscures the greatness of Auden:

Good luck to the hand on the rod,
There is thunder under its thumbs;
Gold gut is a lightning thread,
His fiery reel sings of its flames,
The whirled boat in the burn of his blood
Is crying from nets to knives.... (DT 35)

In the three later dramatic songs, "A Refusal...", "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill", Thomas disapproves of the non-committed role of his contemporary poets of war time, the functioning of the impassive war poets, Fuller, Rook and Rhys aspiring for the Wordsworthian love and immortality, the active war poet Lewis fighting for the eternity of Sassoon's satirical pity, the heroic war poet Keyes for the eternity of Owen's pity, and the passive war poet Prince worshipping Auden's aesthetic amoral impersonal art and dreaming of his own immortality. But at the same time he stoutly defends his own paradoxical, vicarious impersonal and sagacious functioning as a poet committed to the life of co-existence, birth and death, night and day, past and present in coherence with the sceptic poetic tradition of Hardy, Yeats and Houseman without any concern for future, dream or expectation or aspiration of immortality. He explains:

Myself
The grievors
Grieve
Among the street burned to tireless death
A child of a few hours
With its kneading mouth
Charred on the black breast of the grave
The mother dug, and its arms full of fires. (DT 44)

As a matter of fact, Thomas's art songs that disapprove of the contemporary poets's insensitivity, escapism, love, pity and peace, their stout refusal to commit themselves to the sorrows of war, their indirect commitment to the socio-political-historical reality, their wild love of the immortal art and their functional disorder project his own organic functioning as a poet of paradoxical structure and lyric impulse totally committed to the process of transfiguration, gentle impersonal art, tragic happiness and sceptic poetic tradition.

The representative poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" of *Deaths and Entrances*, while disdaining the tragic aspects of the survival-conscious poets of the thirties and the war poets of the forties, their anxious desire for eternity, demonstrates the inner nature and inner reality of the asocial, apolitical and ahistorical poet Thomas. Thomas, repudiating the myths of escapism of the poets of war time, explains the *leit-motif* of the paradoxical song "A Refusal..." sung in praise of pragmatic functioning, empathic impersonal art and the pagan poetic tradition:

He who blew the great fire in
And died on a hiss of flames
Or walked the earth in the evening
Counting the denials of the grains. (DT 37)

The readers are made simultaneously aware of two areas of experience, the one enriching the other by parallelism and contrast, and Thomas's self-dramatization gives a special intensity to the effect of his distinctive poetical character of disinterested goodwill and action.

Thomas sings of his pagan poetical character, his vicarious disinterestedness, his sober functioning similar to that of Yeats and identical to that of Hardy and Houseman in contrast to the contemporary poets's inhuman and indifferent attitude towards the reality of war. Auden's unlamenting ironic sermon on death, his mortal dread and his unconcern about the poetry of pity is rather indiscreet about his strong refusal and insensitivity to the casualty of war, his exclusive commitment to aesthetic amoral impersonal art, and the refusal of the realistic poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice to the elegiac voice of pity to lament the death of the child is implicit of their nonchalance, their commitment to survival in the light of their disastrous failures in the past. The refusal of the

romantic war poets, Fuller, Rook and Rhys to mourn the death of the child, their continuous insensibility to the pity of war suggests their fear of war being destructive to their socio-personal comforts; the refusal of the dilemmatic soldier poet Prince to partake human sorrow is as evasive and indifferent as his contemporaries; the refusal of the active war poets, Lewis and Keyes to play the "cowardice" role of their contemporary war poets is their commitment to have their fair share of sufferings of war and their heroic death in the war for the eternity of pity of war and pacifism is sentimental and nostalgic, political and patriotic although a problem shared is a problem halved. The poetical character of the poets of war time can be transpositionally commented with a passage from Yeats which remains equally effective in a different context and even acquires an added depth of meaning:

Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain
'Or driven from home and left to die in fear.'
They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,
Though all was done in common as before;
They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds. (YCP 299).

What is more significant, the transposition to a different context gives a metaphoric and symbolic character to a word, phrase or passage, is the evocation of "comfort" in Thomas's use of the Yeatsian functioning.

On the whole, the topic of conversation between Thomas and his contemporary poets in "A Refusal..." is on the task of a poet looking at the death of the child, the sorrows of war, "and truly he ... flows to the strand of flowers like the dew's ruly sea ... and surely he sails like the ship shape clouds" (DT). Thomas, while rejecting the pride and prejudice, the philosophic resignation and the worldly-wise attitude of his contemporary poets, disapproving their response and refusal to the sorrow of war as either vacillating or violent, extremes of sensitivity and insensitivity, pity and peace, evasion and escapism, establishes himself as a poet of ahistorical, apolitical and asocial functioning, impersonal art empathizing with the death of the child in the war. His vision of the poet's task and responsibility during war time, his sense and sensibility is parodic of his life-centric poetic vision of co-existence in the early poem, *18 Poems*, "the people's fusion" vis-à-vis the death or power-centric metaphysical, intellectual vision, "light in zenith, the coupled bud ... and the flame in the flesh's vision" (DT 26).

REVIEWS, METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

Critics have been struck by the quiet reserve of power of *18 Poems*, its rich resonance that anticipates the complex harmonies of the later poem *Deaths and Entrances*. While evaluating the later poetry of Thomas, Linda M. Shires maintains that "the interest and special beauty of this poem lie in its treatment of the finality of death in terms of eternity" (46) and that "death is not to be grieved but remains a secret part of the universal rhythm of remembrance, an entrance, not an exit" (48). John Ackerman holds that "the language and ideas to be found in Thomas's work had little in common with the imagery and ideas in the work of, say, Auden, T.S. Eliot or Yeats. Neither did it derive, to any great extent, from the nineteenth-century romantic poets" (18). One may readily agree with the view that in stylistic maturity the poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire of a Child in London" surpasses anything Thomas had written before, and it is also true that, at the formal level, the early poem *18 Poems* sets the thematic pattern for this later poem. Walford Davies, commenting on the poem, writes that "by omitting the hyphens and commas, Thomas creates ... the impression of unity and one-ness that governs his approach to the tragedy" (69). The poet refuses to mourn the death, according to Ackerman, because he "wishes to accept the natural and inevitable processes of life. He is the religious artist who celebrates life" (118). However, this poem is about Thomas's optimism in human possibilities for progressive enlightenment in the world rather than about a religious certainty that comes right in the earnest.

The reader engaged in the textual analysis of the poem, when focuses on the "multiplicity" of the text," could find the core meaning of the poem as "the total existence of ... a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation" (Barthes 150) as "a text is ... a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (149). The suffering of war and the death of a child provokes multiple reactions of multiplicity of meaning of multiple dimensions and multiple tissues of culture. Thomas's refusal to lament the death of a child in the London air-raid testifies to his refusal to be political, social and historical in his functioning as he has been committing himself to empathize with the tragic sufferings of the fellow beings since the beginning of his poetic career. His commitment to disinterested goodwill and action is quite distinct from the non-committed functioning of his contemporary poets who refuse to mourn the death of a child due to their being committed to function as poets of their own choice, love, pity and peace, their being adopted to work for the romantic, political, patriotic and historical traditions. The contemporary poets dissociate themselves from lamenting the death of a child, the image of grief of war as they associate their functioning with the concerns of their safety, survival and immortality whereas Thomas associates his pragmatic functioning with the poetic images of empathic impersonal art, the poets of asocial, apolitical and ahistorical sceptic poetic tradition as he dissociates himself from the concerns of metaphysical art, survival, and immortality. Hence this paper, adopting a figurative approach, endeavours to decipher the essential statement and to decode the much compressed, obscure meaning of this popular poem as the critics's focus on the poem is limited more to paraphrasal and stylistic levels.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Thomas's ambiguous poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London," occasioned by the background of the terrible nightly bombardments of the city of London by fire bombs and rockets during the Second World War, brings out the inadequacy of the poets's power of comprehension and the pain inherent in human perception. The opening lines of the poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" made of four stanzas, convey the inactive, intuitive state in which the war poets, Fuller, Rook and Rhys dream of the Wordsworthian greatness, "an eye made quiet by the power ... of harmony, and the deep power of joy ... we see into the life of things" ("Tintern Abbey" 568) while articulating their refusal to take note of the atmosphere of war, their refusal to the setting of the immediate contemporary poets -- Auden's metaphysical process of aesthetic art, his paradox of death-in-life and his historical idea of art song, Thomas's poetic process of empathic impersonal art, his paradox of life-in-death and his sceptic poetic tradition and Owen's pacifistic pity and Sassoon's satirical pity. The dilemmatic Prince worships Auden's impersonal art, "all humbling darkness," the active war poets Lewis and Keyes disbelieving in the poetic vision of Wordsworth, Auden and Thomas, express their earnest belief and love in the poetic vision of Sassoon and Owen, eternal pity and peace "the still hour." The impassive, the heroic and the passive war poets, "the mankind making bird beast and flower ... fathering" take on a strange appearance, looking both near and distant, both familiar and unreal. The thought of mourning the death of a child annuls the conscious self and induces the reverie among them. Thomas presents metaphorically the war poets's love of romanticism, intellectualism, patriotism and pacifism and their tone of refusal to mourn the death of the child in the war, the sorrow of war:

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness.... (DT 18)

Any slight alteration by giving any punctuation marks to the first two stanzas from the first to the thirteenth line in the established text would alter the meaning of the poem, particularly that of the second stanza. The topography is like the Second World War corpse. The climate is severer and sharp and everything is seen as being dead. The thought that the poet is destined to suffer, that art or imagination demands a commitment that results in a deprivation of ordinary human happiness is implicit in the war poems of Fuller, Rook, Rhys, Prince, Lewis and Keyes.

Initially before the outbreak of the war, the earlier war poets remain self-conscious worshippers of Wordsworth's romantic theory of poetry and admirers of his greatness, "birds and clocks and cross bells ... dinned aside the coiling crowd" (DT 147). Fuller is skeptical about time conscious poetry as he is conscious of sufferings of the political poets of the thirties and of "adorning" the Wordsworthian poetry, Rook resolves to be Wordsworthian rather than a poet of pity, and Rhys represents the general mood of the war poets's loud refusal to be the virtual war poets like the Great War poets. Prince stands divided between the influences of Wordsworth and Auden, "lie still, sleep becalmed, sufferer with the wound ... in the throat, burning and turning." The Wordsworthian lovers Lewis and Keyes, having "heard the sound" of pity from Sassoon and Owen, resolve to be heroic, "open a pathway through the slow sad sail." Thomas recasts their self-indulgent mood of the inactive war poets:

Under the mile off moon we trembled listening
To the sea sound flowing like blood from the loud wound
And when the salt sheet broke in a storm of singing
The voices of all the drowned swam on the wind. (DT 93)

Thomas's poem "When All My Five and Country Senses See" in *The Map of Love* throws light on the direction of the Second World War poets's insensibility caught in "five ... senses," "and when blind sleep drops on the spying senses ... the heart is sensual, though five eyes break" (DT 146). The phrase "five ... senses" becomes increasingly associated with the pleasures of life, The early Wordsworth as a poet of serene natural beauty appeals to the young war poets to suit their moods of self-comfort and self-complacence in the midst of tense atmosphere and uneasy calm. To relax in comfort is to deaden one's sensibility; in such a frame of mind one is prone to be satisfied with over-simplified intellectual formulations that are deterrent to a genuine pursuit of truth. In the fourth stanza of "Poem in October," Thomas comments:

But all the gardens
Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales
Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud. (DT)

Day Lewis evaluates that the young war poets remain indifferent and impervious to the atmosphere of war, "our youthtime passes down a colonnade ... shafted with alternating light and shade ... all's dark or dazzle there" (DCP 217). Linda M. Shires in her survey of poetry of the Second World War writes that "Brooke's typically naïve patriotism could hold no meaning for the young poets of the early forties. It interfered with more important and enduring interests: love, art, and for some, the pleasures of university life. As war stole their youth, so it also destroyed the intellectual communities which might have served their common aims" (57).

After the outbreak of the war the young war poets, while stressing the feasible and life-concentric poetic form, exhibit their parallel quest for identity as poet which involves a weighing of several alternative choices, “two sand grains together in bed ... head to heaven-circling head” (DT). Thomas remembers:

It was sweet to drown in the readymade handy water
With my cherry capped dangler green as seaweed
Summoning a child’s voice from a webfoot stone,
Never never oh never to regret the bugle I wore
Now shown and mostly bare as I blasted in a wave.
Lie down, lie down and live
As quiet as a bone. (DT 108)

Having defied the aesthetic, amoral impersonal art of Auden and recognized the vicarious impersonal art of Thomas, Fuller, Rook and Rhys continue to accept Wordsworth’s definition of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity” (“Preface” 180). In *Poems* and *The Middle of a War*, Fuller is “anonymous” and lonely “singly lie with the whole wide shore ... the covering sea their nightfall with no names” (DT). In *Soldiers* and *This Solitude*, Rook explains his passivity to the modernistic formative forces, “a she bird sleeping brittle by ... her lover’s wings that fold to-morrow’s flight,” Rhys, in *The Van Pool and Other Poems*, perceives the mood of his contemporary war poets as dreamy, impervious and insensitive to the terrors of war “a blade of grass longs with the meadow ... a stone lies lost and locked in the lark-high hill” (DT). Day Lewis attributes the romantic war poets’s problem of communication to their care for social and sociable love, “beyond our powers and our time ... behind the pinnacle stars, the horizon sleep ... beneath the deepest kiss of heaven’s azure ... and the roots of Atlantis flowers” (DCP).

Again, although the war poets Lewis and Keyes express in the early war poems their trust in the stability of the anchorage of Wordsworth, their memory of the war poetry of Sassoon and Owen, the historical sorrow of Auden, the grandeur of his aesthetic impersonal art and the vicarious impersonal art of Thomas -- of the dark chasm that both fascinates and frightens the mind—persists, “the shy is torn across ... this ragged anniversary of two ... who moved for three years in tune ... down the long walks of their vows” (DT 104). Day Lewis comments on their aspiring for the poetry of pity:

Unfelt, unseen, unheard
So much that would have ripened
An open heart, and left a sweet taste there
After its blossomy aura was dispelled. (DCP)

In *Raider’s Dawn*, the active war poet Lewis struggles in love between Wordsworth and Sassoon, and in *The Iron Laurel*, Keyes wrestles with his divided love of Wordsworth and Owen. Both of them are “bound by the curse of man ... to live in his future, which is to live surely ... in his own death” and “endure the embrace of the present” according to Day Lewis (DCP). In sharp contrast to the inactive contemporary war poets, Day Lewis sees Lewis and Keyes moving under the spell of Sassoon and Owen respectively: “all that time there was thunder in the air ... our nerves branched and flickered summer lightning” (DCP).

Prince, in *Poems*, continues to lie “alone and still” and divided between personal love and impersonal love of Auden’s art, “with the incestuous secret brother in the seconds to perpetuate the stars ... a man torn up mourns in the sole night” (DT). His dilemma between the sense of pure art and the obscure love overbalances the final assurance, “one gesture of the heart or head ... is gathered and split ... into the winding dark.” He performs as a worshipper of Auden and an indiscriminate severe critic of Thomas as well as the poets of the First and the Second World Wars. Thomas evaluates his insensibility in a disdainful manner:

Like the sun’s tears,
Like the moon’s seed, rubbish and fire, the flying rant
Of the sky, king of six years.
And wicked wish,
Down the beginning of plants
And animals and birds,
Water and light, the earth and sky,
Is cast before you move,
And all your deeds and words,
Each truth, each lie,
Die in unjudging love. (DT 137)

Prince “after a water-face walk” makes his *Poems* ironic, “as though ... it were a wand or subtle bough” in the midst of conflicts between “good and bad,” great poetry and personal comforts identical to the concerns of his young contemporaries, “the death-staggered scatter-breath ... mammoth and sparrowfall ... everybody’s earth” (DT). Day Lewis finds Prince as *incommunicado* for he fails to project the greatness of Auden’s impersonal art, “into the blue we project ... our dreaming shadows ... and is the hope forlorn that in them we may be reborn, that our images ... more masterful are...” (DCP).

In the poem "The Bards," the heroic war poet Keyes evaluates the groping mood of his contemporaries, Prince, Fuller, Rook and Rhys, their songs of innocence and personal experience, life and death, hope and unhope. Echoing Owen's perception as revealed in the poem "Insensibility," "whatever mourns when many leave their shores ... whatever shares ... the eternal reciprocity of tears" (*Contemporary Verse* 122), Keyes censures the morbid element in his contemporaries's poetry:

... tongues' confusion; slow
Beat of the heated blood in those great palaces
Decked with the pale and sickled mistletoe;
And voices dying when the blind bard rises
Robed in his servitude, and the high harp
Of sorrow sounding, stills those upturned faces. (CV 320)

In the poem "Insensibility" Owen, commenting on the sensual and sentimental language of his five contemporary war poets, Rupert Brooke, Julian Grenfell, Charles Hamilton Sorley, Isaac Rosenberg and Ivor Gurney who "by choice ... made themselves immune ... to pity and what moans in man ... before the last sea and hapless stars," defines what is not poetry:

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones;
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity. (CV)

In the posthumous collection of poems *Ha!Ha! Among the Trumpets* Lewis, refusing to heed to Auden's paradox of death-in-life, his aesthetic, amoral impersonal art, "thin air above the clouds" and Thomas's paradox of life-in-death, his moral disinterestedness, "vain divination of the sunless stream" (*DCP* 219), articulates his oneness with Sassoon's satirical and sentimental pity in contrast to his incommunicative contemporary war poets:

The valleys crack and burn, the exhausted plains
Sink their black teeth into the horny veins
Stragglers the hills' red thighs, the bleating goats
--Dry bents and bitter thistles in their throats--
Thread the loose rocks by immemorial tracks,
Dark peasants drag the sun upon their backs. (CV 294)

Lewis declares his faith in Sassoon's patriotic pity as a contrast to Wordsworth's "moral being" ("Tintern Abbey" 570): "Death strikes their house / The windows pour into their heart / And the doors burn in their brain" (DT).

In *The Cruel Solstice*, published posthumously, Keyes while rejecting Auden's historic tradition and Thomas's poetic tradition, "the veiled Word's flesh, a near annunciation" (*DCP* 218), as unrealistic and irrelevant, "there is no virtue now in blind reliance on place or person or the forms of love ... the storm bears down the pivotal tree, the cloud ... turns to the net of an inhuman fowler ... and drags us from the air," expresses his faith in Owen's pacifistic patriotic pity in contrast to his contemporary war poets confronting the problem of communication, "our wings are clipped yet still our and luck lies in our parting ... those cries and wings surprise our surest act" (*Modern Verse* 421). He glorifies Owen's pity of war as "cold Aegean voices (*MV* 420), "a stormy day, granite peak ... spearing the sky" in contrast to his contemporaries's insensibility, "words flower like crocuses in the hanging woods ... blank though the dalehead and the bony face" (CV 321). Keyes incarnates Owen as "a saviour ... rarer than radium ... commoner than water, crueller than truth" (DT). Thomas, explaining the gradual change of heart in Lewis and Keyes, comments, "our own true strangers' dust ... ride through the doors the unentered house ... exiled in us we arouse the soft unclenched, armless, silk and rough love that breaks all rocks" (DT 135). The love of Lewis and Keyes, Day Lewis observes, is very much with the sentimental poet, Sassoon and the pacifistic poet, Owen respectively, "dead youth, forgive us if, all but defeated ... we raise a trophy where your honour lies" (*DCP*). However, Thomas scorns on the nationalistic, patriotic poetry of Lewis and Keyes as well as their forbears, "prisoners of wishes locked their eyes ... in the jails and studies of his keyless smiles" (DT). Auden, being satirical about Lewis's resolve to fight actively and die for the patriotic sensibility of Sassoon and Keyes's commitment to combat and die for Owen's pacifistic sensibility, "instruments ... to take the measure of all queer events ... and drugs to move the bowels or the heart," comments:

A watch, of course, to watch impatience to fly,
Lamps for the dark and shades against the sun;
Foreboding, too, insisted on a gun,
And coloured beads to soothe a savage eye. (NYL 164)

Thomas, commenting on the heroism of Lewis and Keyes, perceives that their active functioning strikes a contrast to the inactive war poets Fuller, Rook, Rhys and Prince. Tracing the inactive war poets's innermost feelings of fear of war and escapism, Thomas sees that their functioning as complete sociopaths strikes a contrast to the sensibility of the poets of the World War I. He adjudges that it is something of a misnomer to refer to them as war poets as they sound concern for their own comforts and immortality:

Turns in the dark on the sound they know will arise

Into the answering skies from the green ground,
From the man on the stairs and the child by his bed.
The sound about to be said in the two prayers
For the sleep in a safe land and the love who dies.... (DT 126)

However, the functioning of the war poets as a whole as poets of fear and death, pity and pathos, love and hatred, war and peace stands incongruous to the sensibility of the poets of life and death, magnanimity and altruism, "and the second comers, the severers, the enemies from the deep ... forgotten dark, rest their pulse and bury their dead in her faithless sleep" (DT 88).

The second stanza of the poem "A Refusal...." projects figuratively the sorrowful Auden as the priest-poet entering the great Cathedral of the Zion mountains and mourning, and moving to the Christian social order and the Church in which that order is codified. Standing beside the grave of Immortal Spirit, he can only reflect on the tragic destiny of Christ, the Child, and his own:

And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn.... (DT)

The implication of Thomas's ironic statement brings out the driving force behind Auden's poetry and his refusal to mourn the death of the child in the war. Auden's existential prayer and his sermon drives his message home that the birth of Christ holds out great hope to human race and His Crucifixion underlining the value of physical sacrifice to attain spiritual heights. The time being i. e. the human life between birth and death, occasions the possibility of forging the severed links with God. The advent of Christ is seen as the advent of truth, a truth which in its transcendence of all other truths upsets man's easy assumptions concerning the nature of reality. In this sense Auden's Christian vision of order, his faith in the penitential way to redemption is a significant achievement, the consummation of a long, sometimes arid and fearful, journey. Thomas's perception of Auden's refusal to mourn the child's death and his functioning committed to the historical process of death-in-life, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection conveys that Auden in the existential art of the French poet Rilke recaptures the pure, tragic vision of amoral, aesthetic impersonal art and immortality of his early ancestors de la Mare and Eliot.

In the earlier poems, Auden finds comfort in de la Mare, "to us the world-face is glowing and flag-starred ... lit by a vision" and sings for "Parson unvests and turns to his home ... duty done ... little enough stays musing upon ... the passing of one of the masters of things" (*New Verse* 5). de la Mare's poem "Never To be" transposes the amoral, aesthetic concerns of Auden:

Grey-capped and muttering, mad is he—
The childless King of Never-to-be;
For all his people in the deep
Keep, everlasting, fast asleep;
And all his realm is foam and rain,
Whispering of what comes not again. (123)

Suffering and death, the historic sense and the Crucifixion are inseparable in Auden's poetry from the beginning of his career and to him life is always in a state of flux. In *Poems* (1928), Auden appears committed to Eliot's anti-romanticism and clinical-mindedness, "consider if you will how lovers stand ... in brief adherence, straining to preserve ... too long the suction of good-bye" (*NV* 7), "the future shall fulfil a surer vow ... not smiling at queen over the glass rim ... nor making gunpowder in the top room ... but with prolonged drowning shall develop gills" (*ACP* 31). In *Poems* (1930), he forwards the Eliotian historical sense of impersonal art, the paradox of death-in-life that a rising poet needs to forget the old romanticism and "to destroy the efflorescence of the flesh," "needs death, death of the grain, our death ... death of the old gang," "the intricate play of the mind, to enforce ... conformity with the orthodox bone ... with organized fear, the articulate skeleton" (66). In *Look Stranger!*, during the time of socio-political crisis in the post-war world, Auden maintains his pure aesthetic, amoral concerns "knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for islands ... we honour founders of these starving cities ... whose honour is the image of our sorrow" (22). In *Another Time*, he "sustains" his "effort to be ill" (32), "to fresh defeats he still must move ... to further griefs and greater ... and the defeat of grief" (16) and refuses to "slip out of our position" and keeps himself in "an unconcerned condition" of "believing" in Rilke's "grieving" identical to the grief of de la Mare and Eliot about the absurdity of time, "no wonder then so many die of grief ... so many are so lonely as they die ... no one has believed or liked a lie ... another time has other lives to live" (62). There is, however, an added realization in *New Year Letter* that there is a higher mode of knowledge the attainment of which liberates the mind from pain and death. Auden learns the Kierkegaardian way of attaining salvation through voluntary suffering:

And death is probable. Nevertheless,
Whatever the situation and the blame,
Let the lips do formal contrition
For whatever is going to happen.... (NYL)

Christianity in *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio* carries the argument of *New Year Letter* one stage further. Though converted to Christianity, Auden appears to be an earnest theologian like Simeon who offers a rational explanation of his experience and does not allow it to be shrouded in vagueness. His meditation takes on the form of Sermon capable of infusing similar conviction in his contemporaries in search of viable alternatives of faith. In *For the Time Being*, Simeon defines:

Our redemption is no longer a question of pursuit but of surrender to Him who is always and everywhere present. Therefore at every moment we pray that, following Him, we may depart from our anxiety into His peace. (ACP 301)

Auden's *For the Time Being* indicates the mortality of the fellow-poets without Christ and the necessity of Incarnation for their salvation, for pure poetry and immortal art. The advent of Christ renews itself perpetually in spite of man's attempt to avoid the renewal. Thomas observes:

The conversation of prayers about to be said
By the child going to bed and the man on the stairs
Who climbs to his dying love in her high room,
The one not caring to whom in his sleep he will move
And the other full of tears that she will be dead.... (DT)

Auden goes back to the state of childhood, and the child-shape may represent the paradox of death-in-living, the ironic mental states of de la Mare and Eliot according to Day Lewis:

Then I thought of our Christmas roses at home – the dark
Lanterns comforting us a winter through
With the same dusky flush, the same bold spark
Of confidence, O sheltering child, as you. (DCP)

Auden's refusal to mourn the child's death in the war is, in turn, foreshadowed in the refusal of de la Mare and Eliot to see the miseries of the First World War. In *The Veil and Other Poems*, de la Mare articulates:

O restless fingers—not that music make!
Bidding old griefs from our the past awake,
And pine for memory's sake. (247)

In "Ash Wednesday," Eliot affirms "before the world":

Wavering between the profit and the loss
In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying
(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings.... (Waste Land 63)

Auden, acknowledging de la Mare and Eliot as his proud ancestors of amoral aesthetic transcendence, denies the comfort of the political world and its "seductive outskirts," "nectarious ... flowers with venom sweet," "thick-juiced with poison," "sick phantasmal moonbeams" and "the ark enemy" (de la Mare 244) "between the rocks ... in the last desert between the last blue rocks ... the desert in the garden the garden in the desert ... of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered appleseed" (WL 62-63).

MacNeice, commenting on Auden's aching oblivion and his prayer, "from Bethlehem the sheep-bells ... grew to a steepled peal ... the joists of the stable ... spread an ashlar chill," "the wrinkled, whimpering image ... wrapped in his mother's shawl" in *For the Time Being*, foresees his downfall:

The doors opened before him
In every holy place
And the doors came to behind him,
Left him in cold space. (MCP 261)

Auden journeys towards the last phase of his tragic pilgrimage; this beatitude is denied to his contemporary friends of the thirties, Day Lewis, Spender, and MacNeice, and it is part of their tragic destiny to grope in a blind Purgatory. Their pain is born of involvement, of a gnawing self-consciousness that associates Auden's metaphysical art, his process of self-annihilation, his process of death-in-life with horror of hell: "Hell is not here nor there / Hell is not anywhere / Hell is hard to bear" (AT).

In the third stanza of "A Refusal ...," Thomas concentrates on the refusal of the disgraced political poets of the thirties to pity the child's death in the war. The poets's withdrawal from the warring world gives them freedom from earthly bondage, "to live the present, then, not to live for it ... let this be one of today's ... resolutions" (DCP 277) but this deliverance also means a severance of

the moorings that have sustained it, “and time and mind a tegument, therefore swore ... to hazard it as one lot” (*MCP*). That the new insight provides no adequate recompense for the sudden loss of assurance is evident in Thomas’s lines:

The majesty and burning of the child’s death.
I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth. (DT)

After the nightmarish experience of love’s labours lost, “lie entangled, severing, stronger far ... barbed relics of love’s old war” (*DCP*), the Left-leaning poets’s estrangement from Auden’s pure art and Owen’s pity, the pull of the anchor of Thomas’s disinterested vicariousness proves strong enough to bring their mind back to the reality of life, but the assurance carries no certitude. Day Lewis feels, however, a momentary exultation in Thomas’s *18 Poems* as he experiences the sensation of annihilation of time spirit:

The sea rolled up like a blind, oh pitiless light
Revealing, shriveling all! Lacklustre weeds
My hours, my truth a salt-lick. Love recedes
From rippled flesh bared without appetite. (*DCP* 291)

In *Poems 1943-1947*, several questions are implicit in Day Lewis’s observations on his functioning as a poet during the time of war:

So many words to unsay,
So much hue and cry
After a wisp of flame,
So many deaths to die
Ere the heart runs dry. (290)

How far can one separate the creative self from the human self of a poet? Can the power of imagination provide sufficient nourishment and sustain the spirit? Or, is suffering an inescapable part of a poet’s destiny? In the intensity of his pity for the dead child, Day Lewis thinks of his own doom as a pure aesthetic poet of the song “A Time to Dance,” “a frost came in the night and stole my world ... and left this changeling for it – a precocious ... image of spring, too brilliant to be true” (*DCP*). The ecstatic state is regarded as an aberration, as a retreat from reason. Day Lewis, having known “only my heart was shaking ... within me, and then it stopped” (*DCP*), sets the rising and falling of his pity for the London child died in the war:

Instinct was hers, and an earthquake hour revealed it
In flesh – the meek-laid lashes, the glint in the eye
Defying wrath and reason, the arms that shielded
A plaster doll from an erupting sky. (*DCP*)

Human existence is worn out by cares, but it is preferred to the shadow-world that takes one beyond the “snow-set fields” and at the same time deprives one of sanity.

In the case of Spender, the context becomes increasingly private, and the faces of his friends crowd back into memory. In recalling the bond that unites man with his fellow-beings, the ties of brother and sister in love and affection, the actual pains of human existence are forgotten. He maintains that the sensuous warmth of human emotions admits of no substitute:

... all prayers are on the side of
Giving strength to innocence,
So I pray for nothing new,
I pray only, after such knowledge,
That you may have the strength to become you. (*Ruins and Visions* 73-74).

The influence of Thomas produces a strange dislocation in Spender, a split between his mind and body. While the body exults in the sensation of extending a space to Thomas, the mind is bewildered and abstracted. The cause of this dislocation is the poet’s divided response, “I see the tigrin in tears ... in the androgynous dark” (DT), between “the aspiring” and the “renouncing.” Spender thinks of the transcendental glory of Auden’s immortal genius and sees Auden’s *Poems* as part of the mystery. The poet Spender retraces his steps from the verge of chaos:

Shut in himself, each blind, beaked subject kills
His neighbour and himself and shuts out pity
For that one winging spirit which fulfills. (*Ruins* 45)

Day Lewis, commenting on Spender’s loneliness as “a stranded time, neap an annihilation of spirit” (*DCP*), explains the confused state of Spender.

No argument for living could long
Sustain these ills: it needs a faithful eye, to have seen all
Love in the droop of a lash and tell it eternal
By one pure bead of its dew-dissolving chain. (*DCP*)

MacNeice whose poetry is “a freeborn air of the downland, ... a peace of deep combs ... no world-anger consumes ... marked him off from the herd to be branded for soldiering” (*DCP*) in which the readers can “read the common ... theme for all time appointed ... to link our variations” (278), is not merely “fortunate” for he “never has burned or bowed ... to popular gods” but “modestly melts ... into the crowd of” his contemporaries’s “haunting fancies ... the streams, the airs, the dews, ... the soldier shades and the solacing heartbeat” (282). Thus, partaking of the lyric impulse of Thomas’s early poem is an exhilarating experience to MacNeice who has tried the sound pattern of Auden and undergone the excruciating experience. In imaginatively placing himself in the freer world of Thomas, MacNeice also expresses his resolve to function in line with the empathic impersonal art of Thomas. During the time of war, he could refuse the message of Owen’s pity and see the meaning of the devastating influence of Auden’s pitiless amoral aesthetic disinterested character. He presents the time-conscious poets’s agonized search for light, “a liberating arm” (*DCP*), for their bewildered mind and their refusal to pity the child’s death:

For whom, if the ocean bed should silt up later
And living thoughts coagulate in matter,
An age of mainlanders, that dare not fancy
Life out of uniform, will feel no envy-- (*MCP* 250)

The large canvas of his contemporaries’s poetry, the glory, “the luminous cathedrals,” the horror, “the weathercocks’ molten mouths,” the boredom, “the dead clock burning the hour,” and the beautiful, “the golden pavements laid in requiems” (DT 45) is suggested, but the chief focus is on their pathetic condition of the time-conscious poets, their critical dilemma and their “stiff” “awakening:

Yea, we wake stiff and older; especially when
The schoolboys of the Thirties reappear,
Fledged in the void, indubitably men,
Having kept vigil on the Unholy Mount
And found some dark and tentative things made clear,,
Some clear made dark, in the years that did not count. (*MCP* 240)

The fallen political poets of pity, while continue to be dilemmatic about their role in the war-torn world of the forties, function as ironic as Auden and as evasive as Prince, “with the incestuous secret brother in the seconds to perpetuate the stars ... a man torn up mourns in the sole night” (DT 88), making running commentaries and wild speculations on their contemporaries’s poetry and their aspiration for immortality according to Thomas:

Will be the same grief flying. Whom shall they cal?
Shall the child sleep unharmed or the man be crying?
The conversation of prayers about to be said
Turns on the quick and the dead, and the man on the stairs
To-night shall find no dying but alive and warm.... (DT)

The mind of the disgraced poets of pity is suddenly assailed by a strange morbidity, the fear of approaching insanity. The apparently impersonal statement of Thomas carries the stress of personal anxiety of the political poets of the thirties:

Never shall my self chant
About the saint in shades while the endless breviary
Turns of your prayed flesh, nor shall I shoo the bird below me.... (DT 141)

The lines convey poignantly the dread of the void, and the poet Day Lewis no longer prays for the prolongation of the trance; he wants to return to actuality, although he knows that the world is both sweet and bitter. Human existence is worn out by cares, but it is preferred to the shadow-world that takes one beyond the “snow-set fields” and at the same time deprives one of sanity.

The problem of the allotted role of the poet during war time involves a choice, and the agonizing tension of the poets of war time is summed up in the last stanza of the poem “A Refusal...” Poetry is no longer seen as the vehicle of truth; it clouds the perspective and destroys clarity of vision and understanding. And imaginative experience is contrasted with the concrete, sensuous experience of human affections, which alone is considered real. In the last stanza that appears as “the conversation of prayer” (DT 126), Thomas contraposes in a paradoxical manner his empathic disinterested functioning and his contemporaries working implicitly for the structurality of love, pity and peace, for the centre of individualism, political patriotism and historical power and pride, war and death:

Deep with the first dead lies London’s daughter,
Robed in the long friends,

Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames
After the first death, there is no other. (DT)

The passage indicates the various attitudes of the poets towards the harsh reality of war, death and suffering, the reality of love, pity, peace and life. Thomas, having functioned as an asocial, apolitical and ahistorical pragmatic poet, as an artist of altruistic impersonal art since the beginning, establishes himself as an open-hearted, open-minded and open-ended popular poet and a successful artist. Auden has been functioning diametrically opposite to the concerns of all his contemporary poets as an ironic poet endeavouring to make the historical structure and song pattern permanent. Lewis and Keyes as soldier poets of open-handed heroic functioning lay down their lives for the cause of perpetuating the political pity and the pacifistic pity of war and identify themselves with the dead war poets of pity, Sassoon and Owen. The open-mouthed worldly-wise poets, Fuller, Rook and Rhys who remain indifferent to the war of death and sorrow find in Thomas's *18 Poems* of vicarious impersonal art an open-sesame for the mystery of great poetry and survival just as the fallen realistic poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice have perceived the rising promise of poetry, amelioration and happiness in the early poems of Thomas. Fuller in *A Lost Season*, Rook in *These are My Comrades* and Rhys in *Poems from the Forces*, rejecting the cold aesthetic distance Auden's impersonal art, accept Thomas's warm impersonal art as a hope for their survival, "the man on the stairs ... to-night shall find no dying but alive and warm" (DT). The war poet Prince's refusal to see the reality of war and his rejoice in functioning as poet of his own dream and love is identical to the escapism and un pity of his contemporaries. The Second World War started "as a war of nerves ... stunned the imagination instead of liberating it. There was no development from initial optimism about war to rejection of it, a development clearly evident in the poetry of the First World War" (Shires 53).

The song "A Refusal..." stands symbolic of the objective estimation of the monochromatic poets of the forties and apocalyptic of the lyric impulse and the functioning of Yeats as a pagan poet of altruistic impersonal art the in the poem "A Prayer for My Daughter." In the conversation with his contemporary poets, Thomas uses Yeatsian phrases and images of beauty, love, pity and kindness not merely to convey a mood, a vision, or an intense personal experience, but also in his exposition of pragmatic pagan poetical character vis-à-vis the ideal inactive character of his counterparts. The poem "The Conversation of Prayer" that works as an epigraph for Thomas's later poem *Deaths and Entrances* presents certain archetypal situations, and the readers witness in them a re-enactment of Yeats's experiences in the poem "A Prayer for My Daughter" indicating both exhaustion and spiritual rejuvenation and also the force of the struggle through which the assurance is achieved:

In the fire of his care his love in the high room.
And the child not caring to whom he climbs his prayer
Shall drown in a grief as deep as his made grave,
And mark the dark eyed wave, through the eyes of sleep,
Dragging him up the stairs to one who lies dead. (DT 126)

It is this creative adaptation of the Yeatsian merciful impersonal art and his functioning as a pagan poet, "when the worm builds with the gold straws of venom ... my nest of mercies in the rude, red tree" (TCP 38) that gives a richness of the meaning to Thomas's sonnet sequences "Altarwise by Owl-light," the early art song serving as a starting post towards all the art songs.

Thomas prays that Auden "may ... be granted beauty and yet not ... beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught" as his metaphysical art "being made beautiful overmuch" and being viewed "a sufficient end" loses "natural kindness and ... the heart revealing intimacy ... that chooses right, and never find a friend" and incurs loss of appeal to the readers, influence and popular image among the fellow-poets. He appeals to the self-indulgent war poets Fuller, Rook and Rhys in dream of immortal greatness and the self-deceptive war poet Prince in dream of personal love to work for unified sensibility and kind impersonal art, "a glad kindness" under life-oriented influence, "rooted in one dear perpetual place" as they "have no business but dispensing round ... their magnanimities of sound," as their search for identity is not steady and steadfast but an irresponsible mockery, "nor but in merriment begin a chase ... nor but in merriment begin a quarrel" (YCP 159). He perceives that the realistic poets Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice regret for their political involvement and for their half-sound desire for Auden's immortal art leading to loss and depression as they come to know "that to be chocked with hate ... may well be all evil chances chief" (159-60). Then, Thomas understands that the active war poet Lewis fights and dies in the war for the eternity of patriotic pity as his contemporary war poets's mild criticism of Sassoon's nationalistic pity and his death in the war does not change his independent mind, "assault and battery of the wind ... can never tear the linnets from the leaf," and that the resolute poet Keyes, while rejecting Auden's "intellectual hatred" of the poetry of pity as "the worst" and his deterministic "opinion" on Owen's death as "accursed," meets heroically death in the war for the immortality of pacifistic pity. Identifying himself with Yeats, Thomas wishes the poets of the forties learn that pure poetry of perfect craftsmanship and aesthetic amoral impersonal art would not fetch immortality to the poet but paradoxical poetry of life of birth and death and "a glad kindness," poets working on the paradox of breath-in-death and altruistic impersonal art, the transmutation of tragic tears into tragic joy would be blessed with eternity, "hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned ... by those that are not entirely beautiful." Finally, he desires that their work of art be paradoxical "where all's accustomed, ceremonious" as self-indicating, self-vindicating, self-dedicating, as impersonal and magnanimous as Yeats's poetry "that it is self-delighting, self-appeasing, self-affrighting" (YCP 160) instead of being a critique of contemporary poet's performance, being "opinionated mind" of anger and hatred, scowl and howl, irony and satire "for arrogance and hatred are the wares ... peddled in the thoroughwares." A work of art means metempirical vision of paradoxical pattern,

a continuous line of dramatic song of introspection and progression rather than a metaphysical vision of historical sound pattern, a continuous line of art song of retrospective regression, a paradox of death-in-life or a romantic vision of sound living, a long line of retrospection, a paradox of beauty-in-rich life, "ceremony's a name for the rich horn ...and custom for the spreading laurel tree" (YCP 160). In Yeats's poem, Thomas finds a dramatic rendering of his own experience, the parallelism and contrast giving it both intensity and a relative impersonality, "trespasser and broken bride ... celebrating at her side ... all blood-signed assailing and vanished marriages in which he had no lovely part" (DT). For Thomas this means a release from immediate experience and also a heightening of experience.

In "A Refusal...", Thomas's pragmatic functioning as an artist of altruistic pagan tradition is symbolic of the role of Yeats who neither accepts "the miracles of the saints" nor sanctifies "a pre-destined part" of the poets "much alike" Von Hugel but plays the exemplary role of "Homer ... and his unchristened heart" (YCP 215). Yeats's work of art "Byzantium," his life-centric vision works oracle on Thomas's first dramatic song, "Altarwise by Owl-light" and makes him a successful artist. Thomas acknowledges:

Clings to her drifting hair, and climbs;
And he who taught their lips to sing
Weeps like the risen sun among
The liquid choirs of his tribes. (DT 37)

The same Yeatsian artistic influence works wonders on Thomas's organic functioning with his later and last dramatic art songs and plays havoc with the popularity of Auden whose existential suffering is identical with his disgraced political contemporaries of the thirties, "and taken by light in her arms at long and dear last ... I may without fail ... suffer the first vision that set fire to the stars" (DT 96).

Michael Roberts comments on Thomas's asocial, apolitical and ahistorical functioning as an artist in "A Refusal..." identical to his role in the early poem *18 Poems*:

Silent, invisible, the bombs explode,
The dead and wounded walk the cancelled streets,
Colour and form run through the brittle pages,
And Time can crumble all, but cannot touch
The book that burns, faster than we can read. (MV 364)

Moreover, Thomas's sober functioning in the later art song is in harmony with his *18 Poems* in which he functions as a poet of free love, free play that is symbolic of the sceptic poetic tradition of Hardy, "serene, sagacious, free" (TH 75) and of Yeats, "sobriety is a jewel ... that I do much adore ... and therefore keep me dancing ... though drunkards lie and snore" (YCP).

The song "A Refusal..." that attributes the declining popularity of Auden to his immortal, timeless sound pattern, his "supersession of breath" (198), his anxious contemporaries of the thirties to their time-conscious half-sound pattern of "exacting breath" (223) and the war poets of the forties to their romantic unsound pattern of "ecstatic breath" (71) represents the image of Thomas as a successful poet as well as a great artist and his functioning in harmony with the pagan poetic tradition of Yeats. In "Vacillation," Yeats underscores his role as a pagan paradoxical poet who "runs his course" of breath and death, pleasure and pain, heart and mind, share and sharealike, "through winter-time we call on spring ... and through the spring on summer call ... and when abounding hedges ring ... declare that winter's best of all" (YCP 179), tragic joy and altruistic functioning "between extremities" of romanticism and intellectualism, self-expression and selflessness, selfishness and self-sacrifice "a brand, or flaming breath" that destroys "all those antinomies ... of day and night," all the life-centric self-exploring, self-transcending and self-illuminating ways:

A tree there is that from its topmost bough
Is half all glittering flame and half all green
Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;
And half is half and yet is all the scene;
And half and half consume what they renew,
And he that Attis' image hangs between
That staring fury and the blind lush leaf
May know what he knows, but knows not grief. (212)

On the whole, Thomas's refusal to lament the child's death means his disapproval of the philosophic, existential and dogmatic functioning of the poets of the thirties and the forties, "the roaring of the lions, the howling of the wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of the man" (Blake). His refusal of Auden's tragic vision of "the greatness of the world in tears," his aesthetic amoral impersonal art and immortality "the brawling of a sparrow in the eaves ... the brilliant moon and all the milky sky ... and all that famous harmony of leaves" that have "blotted out man's image and cry" means his total commitment to pragmatic functioning adapted from the sceptic poetic tradition, his transfiguring mind to "compose man's image and his cry" and his pagan vision of the empathic impersonal art on the fellow-poets's tragic sufferings, "on the instant clamorous eaves ... a climbing moon upon an empty sky ... and all that lamentation of the leaves" (YCP 32). So, in the song "A

Refusal..." structured as a dramatic monologue, Thomas listens to the arguments and conversations of the phonocentric and logocentric contemporaries functioning as poets of pity and pathos, love and fear, anger and anguish, hatred and arrogance, war and peace and introspects over his own functioning as a poet of altruistic impersonal art, "all wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap ... bring out number weight and measure in a year of dearth ... no bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings" (Blake125) and his "heart's truth" of the pagan poetic culture underlying his poetry, "man was made for joy and woe ... and when this we rightly know ... thro' the world we safely go" (Blake).

Findings and Interpretations

In the parodic art song "A Refusal..." Thomas focuses on the theme of the poet's task in time of war, "the man on the stairs ... to-night shall find no dying but alive and warm" (DT) and contraindicates the functioning of the contemporary poets whose "conversation of prayers about to be said ... turns on the quick and the dead" (DT). The later dramatic song epitomizes Thomas's paradoxical poetry of the thirties and the forties, his transfiguring mind, his poetic process of kind impersonal art, his tragic joy and his exemplary refusal of the epistemological, structuralistic love of the contemporary poets and their conditional functioning, "but the oil and bubble of the moon ... plunging and piercing in his course ... the lured fish under the foam ... witnessed with a kiss" (DT). Thomas explains that the cynosure of the song is empathic impersonal art and pragmatic functioning of the poet in harmony with the sceptic poetic tradition which is opposed to his contemporary poets's alienation and estrangement and their functioning in line with the socio-politico-historical tradition:

In the memory worked by mirrors,
With unforgettably smiling act,
Quickness of hand in the velvet glove
And my whole heart under your hammer,
Were once such a creature, so gay and frank
While you displaced a truth in the air. (DT 138)

The paradoxical structure of the dramatic song "A Refusal..." while accomodating within it the lyrical and the song patterns of the poets of the forties as well as the thirties without any sound of hate or complaint or bitterness, vindicates Thomas's functioning as a poet of adaptability and vicarious disinterestedness.

Structurally as a dramatic monologue, the song has an abrupt and dramatic, but very arresting opening followed by self-introspection on the part of the speaker, and the whole gamut of his moods, emotions, reflections and meditations is given. The first stanza enacting, the impassive war poets's love, the performance of a non-performer, the passive war poet and the active, heroic war poets's pity, the performers of high performance, is a prologue to the poem. The second stanza that works in conjunction with the first stanza narrates the epiphany of Auden as historical performer of a repeat performance of musical interludes and operates as a brief episode of Christian interlude to the poem. The third stanza especially its first line, briefing the complete meaning in congruence with the preceeding and the succeeding stanzas and dramatizing the romances of the war poets and the performing arts of the disgraced realistic poets, the performers of socio-politico-historical art, acts as an epigraph to the poem. The last stanza that plays the role of a chorus and speaks of Thomas's active suffering, his empathic impersonal art and his performance of dramatic songs works as an epilogue to the poem written as a modern poetic drama. The poem that begins with the self-complacent lyrical design and moves through the selfless, objective sound pattern and the self-centred sing-song pattern concludes figuratively with soundless pattern implicit of inclusiveness, disinterested goodwill and action.

The sensation of having anticipated the empirical vision of empathic impersonal art and asocial, apolitical and ahistorical functioning in the early poem *18 Poems* is part of Thomas's pragmatic functioning in "A Refusal..." He explains his poetic process of life-in death, his sceptic poetic tradition as well as his moral disinterestedness in the early poem

Light breaks where no sun shines
Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart
Push in their tides;
And, broken ghosts with glowworms in their heads,
The things of light
File through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones. (DT)

Thomas's *18 Poems* bears upon it the stamp of truth and sincerity of the metempirical vision of Hardy and Yeats beyond praise rather than the metaphysical vision of Donne and the ironic sensibility of Auden "waiting" for immortality. Commenting on the organic adaptability of the early Thomas, MacNeice explains the magnanimous impersonal art and the asocial, apolitical and ahistorical poetical character of the early poem *18 Poems*:

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. (MCP 217)

In *18 Poems*, Thomas emerges as a poet of vicarious disinterestedness as the gentle disinterested Hardy and the noble, objective later Yeats disapproving the song pattern of “ancestral Houses,” the sound pattern of the metaphysical poet and the ironic pattern of the intellectual poet, “and blended pulsing life with lives long done ... till Time seemed fiction, Past and Present one” (TH 89), “surely among a rich man’s flowering lawns ... amid the rustle of his planted hills ... life overflows without ambitious pains” (YCP 169). In *25 Poems*, he functions as a poet of magnanimous and impersonal art and a successful craftsman of dramatic art song identical to the “sullen art” of Auden, “it stirred me as I stood, in Caesar’s house ... raised the old routes Imperial lyres had led” (TH), “and rains down life until the basin spills ... and mounts more dizzy high the more it rains” choosing “whatever shape it wills ... and never to stoop to a a mechanical ... or servile shape, at others’ beck and call” (YCP). Thomas explains the practicality of his functioning as a poet of kind impersonal art in the early poetry offering a hopeful promise to the fallen socio-political poets of the thirties for their prospective future:

In my craft or sullen art
Exercised in the still night
When only the moon rages
And the lovers lie abed
With all their griefs in their arms,
I labour by singing light
Not for ambition or bread
Or the strut and trade of charms
On the ivory stages
But for the common wages
Of their most secret heart. (DT 82)

In the transitional poem *The Map of Love*, Thomas articulates his poetic licence and his good-natured and good-hearted poetical character and reasserts his asocial, apolitical and ahistorical functioning like Yeats of *Last Poems*, “his eyes fixed upon nothing ... a hand upon head” while disapproving the sensitive war poets being susceptible to Owen’s pacifistic pity and Sassoon’s nostalgic patriotism, the insensitive war poets’s dreams of comfortable life and greatness, their love of the Wordsworthian theory of spontaneity and tranquility, the Audenesque historical sense of impersonal art, the historical canons of self-expression and self-exploration, poetic impassiveness and poetic passiveness, “that civilization may not sink ... its great battle lost ... quiet the dog, tether the pony ... to a distant post” and the Eliotian Auden’s historic sense of self-extinction and poetic justice, “our master Caesar is in the tent ... where the maps are spread” (YCP 287). In *Deaths and Entrances*, Thomas relentlessly sings of Houseman’s poetic rule and energy for great poetry to the voiceless contemporary war poets dreaming of immortality and his refusal to function as a socio-politico-historical poet, “wake not for the world-heard thunder,” “stir not for the soldier’s drilling ... nor the fever nothing cures” for “throb of drum and timbal’s rattle ... call but men alive to battle ... and the fife with death-notes filling ... screams for blood—but not for yours” and his commitment to moral disinterestedness is parodic of the war poet Houseman’s role, “times enough you bled your best ... sleep on now, and take rest” (AEH). Houseman’s functioning is identical to the practicality of Hardy and his sceptic poetic functioning, “and I am projected from thee ... one that out of thy brain and heart thou causet to be ... extern to thee nothing. Grieve not, nor thyself becall ... woo where thou wilt: and rejoice thou canst love at all” (TH 91) and to the sober functioning of Yeats, “no ups and downs, my pretty ... a mermaid, not a punk ... a drunkard is a dead man ... and all dead men are drunk” (YCP). Thomas underscores the *leitmotif* of his transitional and later poems revealing the underlying the vicarious disinterestedness under the influences of the poets of sceptic poetic tradition, Hardy, Yeats and Houseman:

Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Nor for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art. (DT)

In the later dramatic songs, “A Refusal...,” “Poem in October” and “Fern Hill,” Thomas has been working on the very same *leit-motif* of his poetic *oeuvre* that speaks of his continuous commitment to functioning as a poet of noble impersonal art, his working for the well-being of the contemporary poets in contrast to Auden’s functioning as an alienated and estranged poet, “the proud careless notes live on but bless” (YCP) anxious about the fate of his existential art and immortality, pride and power.

Kathleen Raine perceives that Thomas who has established himself as a poet of success with his sceptic poetic process of birth-in-death, his life-centric gentle impersonal art emulating the cyclic pattern of Yeats and his altruistic pagan tradition perpetuates the same life-centric Yeatsian pattern in his later and last dramatic art songs, “The perfection of man is the pride of death ... the crystal

skull is the perpetuity of life ... the power of the god is the taking of love” in contrast to Auden’s metaphysical artistic process and death-centric poetry and his Eliotian Word-centric art songs that incur him loss of literary reputation, “the perfection of light is the destruction of the world ... death and love turn the faces of day and night ... the illumination of the skull of the god” (*MV* 373). Yeats attributes his progressive success as a paradoxical poet as well as a parodic artist to his empirical, comic vision of cyclic process, his magnanimous impersonal art, his tragic joy and his altruistic pagan tradition “of man’s enterprise” casting “passion, piety or affection” (*YCP* 184) in contrast to his contemporary poet D.H.Lawrence’s primitive vision of naturalism and lyricism, ecstatic art and timelessness and Eliot’s tragic vision of metaphysical idealism and immortal song, historical knowledge and amoral aesthetic impersonal art, suffering and death, logocentric tradition of crucifixion, resurrection and church bells:

When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest. (*YCP* 199)

In the dramatic song “Altarwise by Owl-light,” Thomas functions in accordance with the articulate energy of the pagan poet Yeats and teaches Auden’s disgraced lovers lacking “articulate speech” that they should undergo the poetic process of birth and death, joy and sorrow, blood and soul to be a paradoxical poet of kind impersonal art and success, “hurried through the smooth and rough ... and through the fertile and waste ...protecting, till the danger past ... with human love” (180) and sings as Yeats who insists “that we must labour to be beautiful ... it’s certain there is no fine thing ... since Adam’s fall but needs much laboring” (*YCP* 64), “labour is blossoming or dancing where ... the body is not bruised to pleasure soul ... nor beauty born out of its own despair ... nor bleak-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil” (*YCP*). Thomas’s empirical vision of song pattern in the transitional art song “After the Funeral” is parodic of Yeats’s metempirical vision, “in a breath ... a mouthful held the extreme of life and death,” his kind impersonal art, “propinquity had brought ... imagination to that pitch where it casts out ... all that is not itself” and his functioning is as pagan and paradoxical Yeats despite Auden’s stylistics, “no dark tomb-haunter once; her form all full ... as though with magnanimity of light ... yet a most gentle woman....” (289).

Thomas’s disinterested goodwill and action in the three self-parodic songs, “A Refusal...,” “Poem in October” and “Fern Hill” written during the era of World War II are parodic of Yeats’s purposive role as an artist of dramatic structure similar to Michael Angelo’s working “on the Sistine Chapel roof” for “profane perfection of mankind” (302) and identical with his persistent functioning as a poet “with no more sound than the mice make ... his hand moves to and fro ... like a long-leggedfly upon the stream ... his mind moves upon silence” (287) in time of the Great war in contrast to “the secret working” of contemporary poets for “a God or a Saint ... gardens where a soul’s at ease” (303). Thomas’s inclusiveness and sober functioning in these three songs is similar to that of Yeats in “Three Marching Songs”:

Remember all those renowned generations,
Remember all that have sunk in their blood,
Remember all that have died on the scaffold,
Remember all that have fled, that have stood,
Stood, took death like a tune
On an old, tambourine. (284)

Thomas’s distinctive moral disinterestedness as evident in the song “A Refusal...” remembers the Yeatsian singular performance in the war-torn era. Yeats sings:

‘Money is good and a girl might be better,
No matter what happens and who takes the fall,
But a good cause’ – the rope gave a jerk there,
No more sang he, for his throat was too small;
But he kicked before he died,
He did it out of pride. (286)

Thomas’s refusal to lament the death of London’s child, to the pity of war does not mean death of his sensibility but implies his commitment to the pagan tradition to keep his “team ploughing,” to preserve his ahistorical, apolitical and asocial functioning as a poet, “the goal stands up, the keeper ... stands up to keep the goal” (*AEH* 32).

Notwithstanding the continuous refusal of Fuller, Rook, and Rhys to be sensitive to the terrors of war, there has been a perceptible improvement in their repudiation of the amoral aesthetic art of Auden’s *Poems* and their approval of the kind impersonal art of Thomas’s *18 Poems*. MacNeice reports of their tonal shifts from Wordsworth to Auden and to Thomas:

Away, and the blood dried in the sand. The bored
Soldiers that played for the leavings but even they,
Though trained to carve up continents with the sword,
Approved the weaver who had made night and day. (*MCP*)

Their insensibility to the environs of war and their stout refusal to lament the death of the child in the war means their incapability to revive the idealistic tradition of the poetry of the World War I, the patriotism of Rupert Brooke and Isaac Rosenberg or to revivify the nationalistic and pacifistic pity of Sassoon and Owen or to resurrect the philosophic tradition of Charles Hamilton Sorley as their chief concern is to remain continuously undisturbed and unperturbed in their comforts and to escape from the grief that the socio-political poets of the thirties have suffered in the past. Day Lewis comments on their ignorance of the truth behind great war poetry:

The holly fire unfelt,
The snowmaid left asleep,
The cheap, the rare joy thrown away half-eaten,
The nimbus round each truth-pang unacknowledged. (DCP)

Thomas, disapproving the war poets's inaction and their sensuous love, "lucklessly she must lie patient ... and the vaulting bird be still," "all love but for the full assemblage in flower ... of the living flesh is monstrous or immortal ... and the grave its daughters" (DT), describes them figuratively as "the hunchback in the park":

All night in the unmade park
After the railings and shrubberies
The birds the grass the trees and the lake
And the wild boys innocent as strawberries
Had followed the hunchback
To his kennel in the dark. (DT)

The romantic and the visionary war poets's role during war time is skeptical, elemental and evasive, "a continual farewell" (YCP 11) which reminds the readers of Lawrence's refusal to involve himself in the issues of politics and war as he could not "bear" passion for time-spirit which he considers a danger to his passionate poetry, "the passionate disquality of men," "never ... to be a bolshevist ... with a hibiscus flower behind my ear ... in sign of life, of lovely, dangerous life" (Lawrence 30). Lawrence is more conscious of his "rosy delicate" role as a sensuous poet of personal memories and the extinct primitive tradition being skeptical about the functioning of the poets of philosophic, pacifistic, patriotic tradition, war, peace, pity, love and mercy. In *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, Lawrence distinguishes his skeptical role from his contemporaries's committed role:

In sign of dauntless, silent violets,
And impudent nettles grabbing the under-earth,
And cabbages born to be cut and eat,
And salvia fierce to crow and shout for fight,
And rosy-red hibiscus wincingly
Unfolding all her coiled and lovely self
In a doubtful world. (DHL)

However, the war poets, Fuller, Rook, and Rhys heave a sigh of relief as they find a hope for survival in Thomas's *18 Poems* after having fumbled around Auden's "foreign-looking luggage" and "the unheard-of constellations wheel" (MCP 193), his historic consciousness involving "a perception" of "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country" ("Tradition" 294). They perceive "like wavering antennae feel ... around the sliding limber towers of Wall Street ... into the hinterland of their own future ... behind this excessive annunciation towers"; while "tracking their future selves through a continent of strangeness," they move like "the liner ...to the magnet" (MCP). MacNeice points out the rationale underlying the war poets's choice of Thomas:

With prune-dark eyes, thick lips, jostling each other
These, disinterred from Europe, through the deck
To watch their hope heave up in steel and concrete
Powerful but delicate as a swan's neck.... (MCP)

This explains why Thomas's de-idealized poetic culture is deeper than Wordsworth's philosophic transcendentalism, Sassoon's nostalgic nationalism, Owen's patriotic pacifism and Auden's existential idealism. The earth-centric tradition of Wordsworth, Sassoon, Owen and the Word-centric historic tradition of Auden can be learnt through study and intellectual effort, but Thomas's de-centred, ex-centric poetic tradition demands a different kind of understanding—the reader must be able to experience his empirical vision.

In the pre-war poems, Prince's memory of Auden's void continues to deride Thomas. However, his *Poems* written possibly during the pre-war time eschews his contemporaries's dream-fantasy and is related more closely to the central direction of Auden's thought in *Poems*. Prince reconstructs the pilgrimage of Auden from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge. Auden's process of impersonal art in *Poems* demonstrates for Prince the nature of the journey that he too will have to undergo, "what laws we are permitted to obey." Prince's cluster of images in the early phase widens to include the image of Auden's existential art, a metaphysical poet's insight receiving a new dimension from the Kierkegaardian faith in suffering. Auden vouchsafes for this: "there are no birds, the predatory ... glaciers glitter in a chilly evening" (NYL). Prince's emphasis is on the moment of final illumination which Auden recalls:

That the orgulous spirit may while it can
Conform to its temporal focus with praise,
Acknowledging the attributes of
One immortal, one infinite Substance.... (NYL)

But Auden has a vision also of the dark night of the soul straining for light, Prince's frantic attempt to diagnose the problem of the freedom of will in *Poems*:

And the shabby structure of indolent flesh
Give a resonant echo to the Word which was
From the beginning, and the shining
Light be comprehended by the darkness. (NYL 188)

Day Lewis, deriding the failure of Prince, finds a parody in the poems of Hamilton Sorley, the philosophic minded poet of the World War I, "merciless god, to mock your failures so...", observes on Auden's lover:

That it should end so!—
Not with mingling tears
Nor one long backward look of woe
Towards a sinking trust,
A heyday's afterglow;
Not even in the lash and lightning
Cautery of rage!
But by this slow
Fissure, this blind numb grinding severance
Of floe from floe. (DCP 260)

The anti-romantic strain is more explicit in the pre-war poems of Lewis and Keyes, "a woodnote rill unheard through afterdays" (DCP), "faintly roars" (DCP), and in inventing the normal order, they also make fun of the accepted order itself. In the poems of war time, Lewis and Keyes bring out the discordant note of comprehension of the pity of Sassoon and Owen respectively among the cotemporary war poets, "in the groin's endless coil a man is entangled" (DT 69).

The realistic poets of the thirties are identically oppressed by the memories of their failure in the past and their fear of future, "in haunts of friendship and untruth ... the Cities of the Plain of Youth," "our fear makes myths of the future, even as our love does ... of the past.... (DCP) as they cannot resolve the contradiction between art and life, between private and public elements, between triumphant release in Auden's "pattern of inhuman good" and Owen's mortality with accompanying pain in "fierce impersonality." On the whole, MacNeice sums up:

Now we are older and our talents
Accredited to time and meaning,
To handsel joy requires a new
Shuffle of cards behind the brain
Where meaning shall remarry colour
And flowers be timeless once again. (236)

Day Lewis perceives that the death of a child forces the lost poets of the thirties to gloomy introspection on their "spiritual accountings" in terms of loss and profit, and to remain inactive "for the present." He affirms:

No, not here
Amid this flounce and filigree of death
Is the real transformation scene in progress,
But deep below where frost
Worrying the stiff clods unclenches their
Grip on the seed and lets our future breathe. (DCP 284)

Spender perceives that friendship and natural beauty are all that the modern age can still provide, and his expressions like "lost" and "without that ghost within" contain an implicit reference to the treatment meted out to Auden by his contemporaries. In *Poems of Dedication*, he reflects:

Without that ghost within, lives are lost
Fragments' haunting the earth's rim.
Unless we will it live, that ghost pines, dim,
Lost in our lives: its life, our death, the cost. (44)

MacNeice's poem *The Springboard* picturizes the horror, the terrifying sense of vacuum that yawns before the mind when it is carried beyond mortal bounds to the height of exultation or the depth of despair. And even when the mind returns to its proper sphere and regains equilibrium, it is still haunted by the thought of the blank, dreadful hour "for it is true, surprises break and make..." (MCP 218). Certain unanswered questions continue to disturb them. What is the value of poetry, and how far can it transcend the barriers of mortality? And what is the value of fame if one has to pay such a terrible price to achieve it? MacNeice clinches the argument:

We were the past—and doomed because
We were a past that never was;
Yet grant to men that they may climb
This time-bound ladder out of time
And by our human organs we
Shall thus transcend humanity. (MCP)

The nonchalant, hopeless and pitiless functioning of the time-conscious poets of the thirties in time of war is in tune with Yeats's fear and doubt about the hope offered by the socio-politico-historical poets:

What can books of men that wive
In a dragon-guarded land,
Paintings of the dolphin-drawn
Sea-nymphs in their pearly wagons
Do, but awake a hope to live
That had gone
With the dragons? (YCP 98).

Neither imagination nor speculative inquiry can provide any satisfying answer to the riddle of the socio-political poets, and their initial exultation gives place to an ironic contemplation of their fate. The distress of poets of pity whose "falseness made farcical" (LS) have made themselves the objects of pity and pathos find relief and regeneration in the empathic impersonal art of Thomas's *18 Poems* according to Auden:

Never hope to say farewell,
For our lethargy is such
Heaven's kindness cannot touch,
Nor earth's frankly brutal drum;
This was long ago decided,
Both of us know why,
Can, our falsehoods are divided,
What we shall become,
One evaporating sigh. (ACP 341)

Auden has been, eversince he starts writing poetry, pilgrimaging for aesthetic, amoral impersonal art. Day Lewis perceives:

Beyond our powers and our time,
Behind the pinnacle of stars, the horizon sleep,
Beneath the deepest kiss of heaven's azure
And the roots of Atlantis flowers. (DCP)

In the early phase of post-war socio-political and economic crises and the Spanish Civil War, Auden remains ironic and silent spectator in his functioning as an intellectual poet critically skeptical about his contemporaries's rebellious, active and involved functioning, "when I saw him last, carving the longshore mist ... with an ascetic profile, he was standing ... watching the troopship leave, he did not speak" and in the transitional and middle phases of war time, he continues to function in an ironic and odd manner, "always be non-combatant ... being too violent in soul to kill ... anyone but himself, yet in his mind ... a crowd of odd components mutter and press ... for compromise with the fact" while the left-leant defeated poets of the thirties remain as half-hearted and half-sound as the war poets of the forties, "longing to be combined ... into a working whole but cannot jostle through." MacNeice attributes Auden's "highmindedness" as "the permanent bottleneck" to pity the death of the child:

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)

As Auden has been jostling for the unification of sensibility and immortality of his song pattern through the metaphysical process of death-in-life, he perceives that time-spirit, any involvement in the issues of politics and war would be detrimental to his pursuit of pure poetry.

Day Lewis, describing the earlier Auden as “death mask of a genius unborn,” the early Auden as “tragic prince of a rejected play,” the transitional Auden as “soul of suffering that bequeathed no myth,” and the middle phase Auden as “a dark tower and a never-sounded horn,” comments on Auden’s “doomsdays” in the context of Thomas’s rising popularity, “call him what we will, words cannot ennoble ... this Atlas who fell down under a bubble.” He contrasts Auden’s tragic vision of aesthetic, amoral impersonal art and Thomas’s comic vision of vicarious impersonal art:

In free air captive, in full day benighted,
I am as one for ever out of his element
Transparently enwombed, who from a bathysphere
Observes, wistful, amazed, but more affrighted,
Gay fluent forms of life weaving around,
And dares not break the bubble and be drowned. (DCP 292)

Auden’s tragic vision has been conscious of his functioning as an esoteric, aesthetic, amoral impersonal artist, he has “no business but dispensing round ... their magnanimities of sound” whereas Thomas’s comic vision has been laboring for unified sensibility and magnanimous impersonal pattern through the poetic or cyclic process of life -in-death, he has been helpful and persuasive in offering salvation, hope and prospective future life to the suffering fellow-poets and mortal beings, “nor but in merriment begin a chase ... nor but in merriment a quarrel” (YCP). So, Auden is destined to suffer, as de la Mare and Eliot were. The disquieting thoughts and the pain of de la Mare and Eliot return too soon, but Day Lewis perceives that Thomas as a paradoxical poet of empathic impersonal art, tragic joy and the sceptic poetic tradition as illustrated in the poetry of Hardy, Yeats and Houseman thrives on against the “drowned” Auden fallen “in the large illusion of freedom, in love’s net ... where even the murderer can act and the judge regret.” MacNeice brings out the distinctive poetical character of Thomas, his disinterested goodwill and action, his paradoxical structure standing as a striking contrast to the aesthetic, amoral disinterestedness of Auden and his existential art and the self-interested and self-centred time-conscious poets of the thirties and the forties, the poets of pre-war time and the poets of war time:

And he is separate too, who had but now ascended
Into the panarchy of created things
Wearing his halo cocked, full of good will
That need not be implemented; time stood still
As the false coin tang and the four walls had wings
And instantly the Natural Man was mended. (MCP 258)

As a matter of fact, the refusal of the poets of thirties and the forties to mourn the death of London’s child implies intensification of their secret passion for divinity. The early Yeats underlines the *leitmotif* of the socio-politico-historical poets, their dreams of immortality:

Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose
Enfold me in my hour of hours; where those
Who sought thee in the Holy Sepulchre,
Or in the wine-vat, dwell beyond the stir
And tumult of defeated dreams; and deep
Among pale eyelids, heavy with the sleep
Men have named beauty. (YCP 56)

The early romantic war poets, as their dream of immortal art keep on teetering on the edge, they keep on changing their sauntering love from Wordsworth to Auden and to Thomas, “into the bread in a wheatfield of flames ... into the wine burning like brandy.” Thomas compares their entry-level process of making the Wordsworthian immortal art with Auden’s entrances into the metaphysical process of de la Mare as a way out for a way in to immortal art, to Mass or Communion:

The masses of the sea
The masses of the sea under
The masses of the infant-bearing sea
Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter for ever
Glory glory glory
The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis’ thunder. (DT)

While the war poets have been increasingly vociferous of the Wordsworthian immortality, Auden has been historically functioning for his immortality and Communion. However, both of them have been insensitive to the child’s death and the pity of war as they have been taking care of their future. “And the mystery ... sang alive ... still in the water and singing birds” (DT 116).

Prince, having moved into his conflicting fanciful love of the Wordsworthian art and the Audenesque song pattern, his passion for Auden’s pure poetry and his own personal love, his desire for “the vibrations of the sun” and “miraculous virginity,” his ironic dream of perpetuating Auden’s grandeur and his own poetry that causes ripples of unease among his wayward contemporaries,

ends as a vain passionate lover, "waking alone in a multitude of loves when morning's light ... surprised in the opening of her nightlong eyes ... his golden yesterday asleep upon the iris ... and this day's sun leapt the sky out of her thighs." His dilemmatic love, his tragic failure is identical to the weather-beaten realistic poets's divided love for the Audenesque immortal art, "a miracle," "lips catching the avalanche ... of the golden ghost" and their debacle, "who under the lids of her windows hoisted his golden luggage ... for a man sleeps where fire leapt down and she learns through his arm ... that other sun, the jealous coursing of the unrivalled blood" (DT 106).

The heroic war poets Lewis and Keyes, ceasing to care for the historical tradition of Auden and the sceptic poetic tradition of Thomas, dream of immortalizing the pity of war and end as dead soldiers of patriotic and political tradition, "though the evil Past is ever present ... and the happy Present is past indeed" (*MCP*). Thomas explains the sad end of their death-wish to immortalize the pity of war:

Into the dead clock burning the hour
Over the urn of sabbaths
Over the whirling ditch of daybreak
Over the sun's hovel and the slum of fire
And the golden pavements laid in requiems.... (DT)

The heroic poets's choice of death in the war similar to that of Sassoon and Owen for the eternity of pity of war, though strikes a contrast to the realistic poets of pity becoming poets of mortal concerns, "though old men's lives and children's bricks ... spell out a Machiavellian creed" (*MCP*), vindicates the defeat and futility of the pity of war and marks the triumph of the political, patriotic and historical tradition, "but the Happy Future is a thing of the past and the street ... echoes to nothing but their crawling feet." Describing the heroic poets's functioning and their resolve to die, "stand up better to bombs than a granite monolith," their refusal to remain insensitive like his contemporaries, MacNeice comments on their meaningful death, "perhaps there is something in them" as "whit Monday." However, he perceives that there is not a whit of sense in Thomas's cock-sure functioning or in Auden's cock-eyed functioning or in his realistic contemporaries's cock-and-bull story about their being non-committal in their functioning or in Prince's cockayne functioning as a poet of "death my christening and fire my font" or in his contemporaries's cock-a-hoop functioning to cock a snook at the poets of the World War I, "their feet on London, their heads in the grey clouds ... the Bank (if you call a holiday) Holiday crowds ... stroll from street to street, cocking an eye ... for where the angel used to be in the sky" (*MCP* 223).

The anxious desire of the realistic poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice and the war poet Prince for Auden's elegant immortal art have the same wave length and their failure has had the ripple effect of a melodrama, "see wavelets and wind-flown shadows of leaves on a stream ... how they ripple together ... as life and death intermarried – you cannot tell ... one from another" (*DCP* 221) Day Lewis admits of the realistic poets's loss and their refusal to return as poets of pity in the wake of war, "since death is on the wing ... to blast our seed and poison everything," "the heavy angels, carrying harm in ... their wombs that ache to be rid of death" (*DCP* 170). Their bitter memories of artistic failure hedges against the rising prospect of immortality, "intellectual disgrace ... stares from every human face ... and the seas of pity lie ... locked and frozen in each eye" (*AT* 109). Thomas compares metaphorically their identical loss:

Word, singers, and tongue
In the cinder of the little skull,
Who was the serpent's
Night fall and the fruit like a sun,
Man and woman undone,
Beginning crumbled back to darkness
Bare as nurseries
Of the garden of wilderness. (DT)

Both the realistic poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice and the war poet Prince fail to get their dreams of immortal art realized as they are in dread of getting their teeth into, as the voice of their private needs or love annoy them very much. They escape from the elemental power of pity as the dread spectre of their survival looms over them, "and there could I marvel my birthday ... away but the weather turned around ... and the true ... joy of the long dead child sang burning ... in the sun" (DT). MacNeice compares their failure, "though loves languish and sour ... fruit puts the teeth on edge ... though the ragged nests are empty of song ... in the barbed and blistered hedge..." (*MCP* 234). Auden, hearing the poets's sounds of dejection and hatred, "the weather smells of their hate" (*ACP* 273) towards their bygone spirit of pity and art song, points out their escapism and evasion from the process of divination:

That their children dare not revisit, to the time
They do not care to remember; hide from our pride
In our humiliation;
Fly from our death with our new life. (307)

More obviously Auden right from the beginning of his poetic career, having incarnated the metaphysical and existential ancestors, de la Mare, Eliot and Rilke as his "immortal friends" (DT), has been endeavouring for the immortal greatness of his own poetry and satirizing the poets of sceptic poetic tradition and the worshippers of the Wordsworthian tradition, the contemporary poets

of the thirties and the war poets of the forties working under the influences of the sceptic poets and their sorrowful wisdom. Thomas, wearing the mask, enumerates the myths of Auden's metaphysical and existential idea of historical suffering and immortal art:

I know not whether
Adam or Eve, the adorned holy bullock
Or the white ewe lamb
Or the chosen virgin
Laid in her snow
On the altar of London,
Was the first to die
In the cinder of the little skull,
O bride and bridegroom
O Adam and Eve together
Lying in the lull
Under the sad breast of the head stone
White as the skeleton
Of the garden of Eden. (DT 44-45)

And Auden having mimicked what he has "heard" as "Nature's laws" (NV) from de la Mare and Eliot and made his *Poems* (1928) impersonal, finds himself recognized as a great impersonal artist, "the hill" among his contemporary poets. In *Poems* (1930), he sounds the unsound and sceptic contemporaries, "anarchic men" to bank upon the process of death-in-life of his early poem as a hope for immortality and his poem *Look Strangers!* that witnesses the continuous growth of his impersonal art records his cold war with the sceptic poet Thomas influencing the fallen poets of the thirties, "the hill grows and grows ... and the gravity conquers still" (MCP). With the emergence of Thomas as a popular poet among his contemporaries celebrating the empathic impersonal art of *18 Poems*, Auden's hope for immortality dwindles in the transitional phase and he emulates the existential art of Rilke to continue his pilgrimage of impersonal art and ensure his immortality. Day Lewis comments on Auden's transitional images of landscape and existential art of alienation and anxiety:

Light drops, the hush of fallen ash, submission
Of a dying face now muted for the grave:
Through mansion, lake and the lackluster groves
We see the landscape of their dissolution. (172)

During the middle phase of his declining popularity, Auden prays for God's Grace to triumph over the uncongenial climate of the rising popularity of Thomas and directs his worshipper Prince to adhere to the laws of his early poem *Poems* to impersonalize personal experiences, "and now tight sound-buds ... vibrate," "through the vague morning, the heart preoccupied ... a deep in air buried grain of sound ... starts and grows, as yet unwarning ... the tremor of baited deepsea line" (DCP). Being satirical about his contemporaries posing a challenge to his continuous pursuit of permanence, he prays in the midst of adversity in time of war:

Elegance, art, fascination,
Fascinated by
Drab mortality;
Spare me a humiliation,
To your faults be true.... (ACP 341)

Auden finds himself forlorn and hopeless lover of immortality, a poignant and pathetic lover of the Passion, "the Sorrow of Love" who "had blotted out man's image and his cry" (YCP). MacNeice foresees the imminent fall of Auden, "though ever sandcastle concept ... being *ad hoc* must crumble again" (MCP), who has been since the earlier phase "conscious of waste of labour, conscious of spite and hate ... of dissension with his neighbours, of beggars at the gate ... but conscious also of love and the joy of things and the power ... of going beyond and above the limits of the lagging hour" (MCP 266). Moreover, Auden's hoping against hope for eternity while working in an ironic, non-committed manner in time of war "ruins" remind the readers of the concluding lines of Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down.... (43)

What Thomas gives in *18 Poems* as the main reason for his repudiation of the grand impersonal art of Auden is his death-centric three dimensional metaphysical perspective and his striving for a place in the nether world, "bisected shadows on the thunder's bone ... bolt for the salt unborn" as he is in the race for a place in the space:

What colour is glory? Death's feather? Tremble
The halves that pierce the pin's point in the air,
And prick the thumb-stained heaven through the thimble.

The ghost is dumb that stammered in the straw,
The ghost that hatched his havoc as he flew
Blinds their cloud-tracking eye. (DT 98)

In *Deaths and Entrances*, especially in the three art songs Thomas imputes his success and greatness among the contemporary poets to his continuous working on the life-centric multidimensional graphocentric pagan tradition and his polygonal vicarious impersonal art while attributing Auden's alienation and estrangement from the contemporary poets in the transitional and middle phases to his continuous concentration on the death-centric three dimensional logocentric tradition, his alienation from the war-torn contemporary world, his estrangement from the contemporaries's sorrows, his pursuit of phonocentric immortal art and to the influence of the existential poet Rilke identical to the metaphysical influences of de la Mare and Eliot:

Of your immortal friends
Who'd raise the organs of the counted dust
To shoot and sing your praise,
One who called deepest down shall hold his peace
That cannot sink or cease
Endlessly to his wound
In many married London's estranging grief. (DT 47)

In contraposition to the contemporary poets's clamouring for immortality and their subsequent downshift and downbeat, Thomas, in spite of his remarkably comfortable, blessed and envious position since the beginning of his career, has never been conscious of according divination to his ancestors of sceptic poetic tradition or dreaming of his own immortality but has been ever conscious of his own poetic process of vicarious impersonal art, his art of transforming tragic suffering into tragic joy for the salvation of sorrowful mortal man and his disinterested functioning as an apolitical, asocial and ahistorical poet of lyric impulse till the last poem *In Country Sleep*. Thomas's pragmatic functioning that offers fertile and "kind relief" to the sterile contemporaries's "grief" points to Yeats's functioning, the "art ... of minding one's own business ... magnanimously" (*DCP* 23), as an asocial, apolitical and ahistorical poet offering tragic happiness, hope for poetry and living rather than dreams of immortal art and immortality. Yeats observes:

A man in his own secret meditation
I lost amid the labyrinth that he has made
In art or politics;
Some Platonist affirms that in the station
Where we should cast off body and trade
The ancient habit sticks,
And that if our works could
But vanish with our breath
That were a lucky death,
For triumph can but mar our solitude. (*YCP* 178)

Further, both the pagan poets Hardy and Yeats whom Thomas emulates as poetic images of soft impersonal art and tragic gladness in his early poem *18 Poems* have underscored life-centric transfiguration and kind impersonal art rather than the dreams of immortality. Hardy functions as an impersonal poet of "seeds of crevice sympathy" (*TH* 86) and mortal life, harmony and co-existence, tragic joy in tragic loss while sympathizing with the sufferings of the inarticulate "seasonal" contemporary poets and persuading them to bear "the hard ... ways through safely," to face life of birth and death with no desire for immortality:

I looked there as the seasons wore,
And still his soul continuously upbore
Its life in theirs. But less its shine excelled
Than when I first beheld. (*TH* 127)

With the death of identity as an impersonal poet Yeats functions as a man of altruism empathizing with another man's sorrow, "I gave my soul ... and loved in misery ... but had great pleasure with a lad ... that I loved bodily" (*YCP* 234) in contrast to the poets of socio-politico-philosophical system functioning for immortality, "Magnus Annus at the spring," perpetuation of structure of power and peace, the metaphysical abstract tradition "all Platonic tolerance ... all Doric discipline," war and pity, "man's darkening thought ... in Galilean turbulence," fanciful love and individualism, "the Babylonian starlight ... a fabulous, formless darkness." He contradistinguishes the altruistic functioning of man, his empirical vision of unified sensibility and paradoxical structure, his comic vision of parodic art song, his pagan tradition and his contentment from the socio-politico-philosophical resignation of the contemporary poets, their inhuman functioning and the tragic failure of their dreams of immortality:

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day.
Love's pleasure drives his love away,
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread

Exhaust his glory and his might:
Whatever flames upon the night
The resinous heart has fed. (181)

Moreover, Yeats explains that his contemporary poets's process of art is death-centric, Eliot's metaphysical process of impersonal art is Word-centric, "exacting breath" (223), death-in-life and Lawrence's process of personal poetry is "ecstatic breath" (71), death-in-blood, and their philosophic vision of poetry differs from Yeats's empirical vision of poetry which is life-centric, the paradox of life-in-death, "a catch in the breath" (168), "for wisdom is the property of the dead ... a something incompatible with life; and power, ... like everything that has the stain of blood." Their very idea of pure poetry or a work of art or immortal art grounded on the consciousness of timelessness, power and pride, and hate and lust, "no stain can come upon the visage of the moon ... when it has looked in glory from a cloud" stands in contrast to Yeats's parodic art songs of disinterested poetical character of a man, "a property of the living" (200), his inclusive mind of life and death, philanthropic impersonality and tragic joy, hope and survival. Yeats makes it very obvious that he would not aspire for immortality like the metaphysical poet and make himself a "fool," "that I may seem, though I die old ... a foolish, passionate man" as he has been establishing himself as a poet of cyclical pattern, life of birth and death vis-à-vis the poets of historical sound pattern and immortality, "God guard me from those thoughts men think ... in the mind alone ... he that sings a lasting song ... thinks in a marrow." (243).

Houseman assures of incarnation to the poets of "warm and breathing through the street," the poets of paradox, philanthropic disinterestedness and life of birth and death in contrast to poets of extremities, egotism and misanthrope:

If the heats of hate and lust
In the house of flesh are strong,
Let me mind the house of dust
Where my sojourn shall be long. (AEH)

Blake, underlining the fatal end of the poet who has pursued aesthetic, amoral structure and immortality, "every tear from every eye ... becomes a babe in Eternity" (Blake), as his way of functioning, foresees that the poet who accepts vicarious impersonal art and comic vision as his way of functioning is assured of eternity, "he who binds to himself a joy ... does the winged life destroy ... but he who kisses the joy as it flies ... lives in eternity's sun rise" (47). Again Edwin Muir perceives that it is the Yeatsian pagan poetic process and his altruistic impersonal art and tragic joy that makes him popular and deprives Auden of greatness and immortality would bless him with immortality, "then he will come, Christ the uncrucified ... Christ the discrucified, his death undone ... his agony unmade, his cross dismantled," and it is the Eliotian amoral timeless aesthetic distance and his immortal art of sound pattern, "and blossoms for itself while time runs on" that makes Auden unpopular, estranged and alienated from his contemporaries, "all that radiant kingdom lies forlorn ... as if it had never stirred; no human voice ... is heard among its meadows, but it speaks ... to itself alone, alone it flowers and shines" (MV 359).

Thomas's refusal to mourn the death of the child stands as a testimony to his commitment to empathic disinterested functioning as a poet of life-centric poetic process "and I am struck as lonely as a holy marker by the sun" while Auden's refusal to mourn the child's death testifies to his faith in historic tradition of power and pride, war and peace, pure poetry and eternity, the refusal of Lewis and Keyes to comply with the contemporary poets's way of functioning means their faith in the perpetuation of the heroic tradition of pity, "and wounds and houses," the insensitive Prince's refusal implies his fear and love, "I climb to greet the war in which I have no heart but only ... that one dark I owe my light" and the refusal of the inactive war poets, Fuller, Rook and Rhys and the insensibility of the lost political poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice are suggestive of their sentiments, their love of comforts and survival, "call for confessor and wiser mirror but there is none ... to glow after the god stoning night" (DT 63). The refusal of the poets of love, pity and peace to lament the sorrows of war is implicit of their faith in the functioning for the death-centric tradition of historical powers such as philosophy, politics, and religion, "he who blew the great fire in ... and died on a hiss of flames" (DT), and their seeking of immortality is symbolic of their adoption of the logocentric forces of transmigration and transubstantiation, tranquil and transcendental beauty, poetic myth and poetic justice, aestheticism and pleasure, "and prophets loud on the burned dunes ... insects and valleys hold her thighs hard" (DT). In Thomas's refusal the converse applies, "if here to-day the cloud of thunder lours ... tomorrow it will hie on far behests ... the flesh will grieve on other bones than ours ... soon, and the soul will mourn in other breasts" (AEH 58). His refusal to adopt his contemporaries's way of functioning underlines his faith in the pragmatic asocial, apolitical and ahistorical functioning, the life-centered sober functioning, "or walked the earth in the evening ... counting the denials of the grains" (DT), emblematic of the pagan poetic tradition of Hardy, "souls have grown seers, and thought out-brings ... the mournful many-sidedness of things ... with foes as friends, enfeebling ire ... and fury-fires by gaingivings..." (TH 86), the Homeric functioning of Yeats, "he it has found shall find there in ... what none other knows ... and give his own and take his own ... and rule in his own right" (YCP), and the philanthropic functioning of the pagan poet Houseman, "now to your grave shall friend and stranger ... with ruth and some with envy come" (AEH 52).

CONCLUSION

Thus the dramatic song "A Refusal..." though Audenesque in structure and stylistics, stands as a microcosm of his poetic *oeuvre*, the macrocosm, and it is a self-parody of his own paradoxical poetry and parodic of Yeats as a pagan poet of cyclical pattern,

altruistic impersonal art and asocial, apolitical and ahistorical functioning, “the strength that gives our blood and state magnanimity of its own desire ... everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire” (YCP) in contrast to the functioning of his contemporaries as seasonal poets of socio-politico-historical vision or reality which sounds an ambition or aspiration for immortality, “and prophets loud on the burned dunes ... insects and valleys hold her thighs hard ... times and places grip her breast bone ... she is breaking with seasons and clouds” (DT). It is due to this explicit enunciation of his own philanthropic character, his sagacious functioning and poetic truth about the poetry of war time that the poem “A Refusal ...” could be adjudged as the *locus classicus* of Thomas’s empathic impersonal art and his disinterested goodness and action that “should do good to heart and head ... when your soul is in my soul’s stead ... and I will friend you .. in the dark and cloudy day” (AEH 56), his process of transforming “cramps, black humours, wan decay, and baleful blights ... distress into delights” (TH 102), his pagan poetic tradition, “what’s the good of an escape ... if honour find him in the wintry blast...” (YCP 199), “nor name nor race ... know I, or can ... I said, of man ... so commonplace” (TH 166), “turn safe to rest, no dreams, no waking ... and here, man, here’s the wreath I’ve made ” (AEH) his comic vision of art song, “time held me green and dying ... though I sang in my chains like the sea” (DT 55). The dramatic art song “A Refusal...” is apocalyptic of his functioning as a comic artist of life of birth and death, merciful disinterestedness and success, “love seeketh not itself to please ... nor for itself hath any care ... but for another gives its ease ... and builds a Heaven in Hell’s despair” (Blake 62) in contrast to Auden’s tragic vision of aesthetic, amoral impersonal art and immortality and his loneliness and anxiety, “love seeketh only Self to please ... to bind another to its delight ... joys in another’s loss of ease ... and builds a Hell in Heaven’s despite” (63). Blake sings that “excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps” (126). Thomas’s refusal to identify his functioning with the foreclosed and foredoomed contemporary poets of love, pity and peace is emblematic of Yeats’s functioning as an altruistic pagan artist, “through winter-time we call on spring ... and through the spring on summer call ... when abounding hedges ring ... declare that winter’s best of all” (YCP 179) and he also foresees the magnanimous vision of “another’s grief” (Blake) as his poetical character, “smiles on thee, on me, on all ... who became an infant small ... infant smiles are his own smiles ... heaven and earth to peace beguiles” (Blake 50) in the last art song “Over Sir John’s Hill.” The dramatic song, “A Refusal...,” so, projects the massive success of Thomas as an artist of disinterested goodwill and action, as the Yeatsian artist casting “a cold eye ... on life, on death” (YCP 304) in contrast to the tragic failure of his contemporary poets ignorant of the process of kind impersonal art but conscious of their desire for power and pride, war and peace, success and immortality, “nor know that what disturbs our blood ... is but its longing for the tomb” (YCP).

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