

11

Dylan Thomas's 18 Poems and Auden's Strictures

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ABSTRACT

Dylan Thomas's vicarious voice in 18 Poems for the suffering of the poets of the thirties could be attributed to the influences of the skeptical poets Thomas Hardy and W.B. Yeats. To W.H. Auden's historic sense and amoral aesthetic tone Thomas's voice of moral disinterestedness should appear as a profanation, a desecration of the mystery. In the study of Thomas's 18 Poems the critics, focusing more on obscurity and musical structure, have hardly analysed Auden's strictures on Thomas's self-orientated poetic voice. Hence, this paper, adopting a figurative study, strives to unfold the meaning of Thomas's skeptical poetic voice and of Auden's strictures.

Keywords: strictures, skeptical, myth, magnanimity, amoral, dogmatic, discourse, and vagueness.

INTRODUCTION

The poets of the thirties, W.H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice, after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, returning to the human world found that it was equally alien: "Gave unaccustomed sunshine,/Prelude to who knows/What dead end or downfall... (MacNeice Collected Poems 109). The victims were death-pale as they could no longer participate in life. However, Auden's contemporaries distrusted systems and dogmas and held incertitude as a value. He ascertains:

The earth turns over, our side feels the cold,
And life sinks choking in the wells of trees.... (Look Stranger! 25)

And in their agony and despair the contemporaries thought that they were under the spell of a pitiless and cold-hearted Auden. Day Lewis observes:

For they took the land and the credit,
Took virtue and double-crossed her;
They left us the scrag-end of the luck
And the brunt of their disaster. (Collected Poems 187)

Expelled from both time and art, pity and fancy, Spender lived in miserable isolation: "... was so much expenditure justified ... on the death of one so young and silly ... lying under the olive trees, O world, O death?" (The Still Centre 59). Finding "that the heart lives ..by self-betrayal, by circumspection is killed" he hates "this cold and politic self-defence ... hardening arteries and nerves ... grown dull with time-serving" (DCP 185). The experience of MacNeice was even more withering:

Rampant on Europe headlines
Herald beasts of fable;
Backward the eyes to ancient
Codes – vellum and roseleaf;
From the moving train of time the
Fields move backward. (MCP 110)

The Apocalyptic poet Dylan Thomas's 18 Poems, "soundlessly collateral and incompatible" (86), anti-religious and anti-intellectual, asocial and ahistorical in its implicit rebellious voice, points to the paradoxical structure as the animating force and the harmonising factor, "collateral and coeval" between Thomas and the lost poets of the thirties. MacNeice defends

And now the soldier
Tightens belt and outlook,
Eyes on the target,
Mind in the trigger-finger,
And a flight of lead connecting
Self and horizon. (111)

What Thomas experiences in 18 Poems is the ecstasy of love-passion representing poetry and cynical pity, not the torment of loneliness and grief:

One wound, one mind, spewed out the matter,
One breast gave suck the fever's issue;
From the divorcing sky I learnt the double,
The two-framed globe that spun into a score;
A million minds gave suck to such a bud
As forks my eye;
Youth did condense; the tears of spring
Dissolved in summer and the hundred seasons;
One sun, one manna, warmed and fed. (Poems)

18 Poems, though paradoxically structured on the pattern of death and birth, "the florid music praise ... the flute and the trumpet," is consoling and sustaining to the fallen poets of the thirties "beauty's conquest of your face" (LS 18) while negating "the imperial standards," the influence of metaphysic tradition. Auden explains:

O love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven,
Make simpler daily the bearing of man's heart; within,
There in the ring where name and image meet.... (LS 11)

Thomas projects, besides his own articulate poetic voice, the inner reality of the fallen poets of the thirties and their own creative perplexities and his chief ancillary interest is the emphasis placed on literary ancestry:

Some let me make you of the vowelled beeches,
Some of the oaken voices, from the roots
Of many a thorny shire tell you notes,
Some let me make you of the water's speeches. (Poems 53)

Myths and nature still continue to play their roles, but the focus is shifted to the need for assimilating the past heritage. And this recognition gives a new orientation to his early poems. What 18 Poems suggests is human predicament and human reality while questing for a system of individual myth as a

substitute for collective mythology and intellectualism according to Vernon Watkins:

Lovers speak of Venus, and the white doves,
Jubilant, the white girl, myth's whiteness, Jove's,
Of Leda, the swan, whitest of his loves.
Lust imagines him, web-footed Jupiter, great dawn
Of thundering light.... (Modern Verse 367)

Day Lewis, stressing the relevance of "the myth of the individual" as the poet's vehicle in the post-war poetry, writes:

Emerging from the collective mind and illuminating it during the centuries when there was no other light, their task nevertheless was to get man on his own feet, teach him to walk by himself, think and feel for himself, no longer one unit in a living aggregate but an individual human being. So the poetic myths are dead and the poetic image which is the myth of the individual, reigns in their stead. (Poetic Image 32)

In 18 Poems, the poet's mind is partly abstracted under the "autumnal spells" of John Donne and "the heartless words" of Auden, and in such a state of tranced aloofness, "by the sea's side hear the dark-vowelled birds," he is unable to respond fully to the reality of the situation. Thomas explains:

With fists of turnips punishes the land,
Some let me make you of the heartless words.
The heart is drained that, spelling in the scurry
Of chemic blood, warned of the coming fury. (Poems)

The perspective of Thomas Hardy helped Thomas to dramatise his personal situation and afforded the necessary nourishment; W.B. Yeats also produced a sense of urgency. Thomas acknowledges:

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

The experience with Hardy's Poems of the Past and Present, however, is not in any way painful compared to Donne's songs. Then, the metaphysical aesthetic of Donne forces the paradox of death-in-life as the poet's way of knowledge, and Thomas rightly notes that the vehemence of pain is undone: "My fuses timed to charge his heart ... he blew like powder to the light ... and held a little Sabbath with the sun ... he drowned his father's magics in a dream" (Poems 148).

When Thomas read Yeats's *The Tower*, he found many of Yeats's poetic ideals were identical to that of Hardy. Hardy's rustic character from Wessex home, "his homely Northern breast and brain ... grow up a Southern tree ... and strange-eyed constellations reign ... his stars eternally" (Collected Poems 80), "the spell of inner themes and inner poetries" (140) struck Thomas's imagination pointing to Yeats's poem "The Tower" in which the poet mutters:

Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
And further add to that
That, being dead, we rise,
Dream and so create
Translunar paradise. (YCP)

Yeats's celebrated observation "whatever flames upon the night ... man's own resinous heart has fed" (YCP 181) shows an identity of approach to Hardy's approach to life and poetry, and it may be relevant here to refer to Hardy's remarks in the poem "A Reverie" that influenced Thomas much recounting his enforced skeptical mind hounding for free energy, freeplay and free voice:

"Let one be born and throned whose mould shall constitute
The norm of every royal-reckoned attribute,"
No mortal knew or heard.

But in due days the purposed Life outshone-
Serene, sagacious, free;
– Her waxing seasons bloomed with deeds well done,
And the world's heart was won.... (HCP 75)

Thomas bearing the axioms of spontaneity, intensity and magnanimity in mind could accept Hardy's lyrical voice as Donne's formulations were not quite precise and unambiguous, "how deep the waking in the worlded clouds."

Yeats's generosity combined with keen sensibility helped Thomas to release his creative energy and finally to get over Hardy's mannerisms through continual experimentation. Thomas admits:

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks. (Poems 127)

However perverse Hardy's own poetic practice may have been, he was undoubtedly a tireless experimenter, and he was able to instill into his young disciple what he needed most at that time – enthusiasm and a sense of mission. Thomas acknowledges Hardy as his introducer and it was his stimulating encouragement that spurred him to renewed creative endeavour. He was profoundly moved at the meditative lyrics of Yeats's *The Tower* and emulated Yeats as his poetic image while renouncing the metaphysical guidance of Auden. He states in the poem "In the Beginning":

In the beginning was the word, the word
That from the solid bases of the light
Abstracted all the letters of the void;
And from the cloudy bases of the breath
The word flowed up, translating to the heart
First characters of birth and death. (Poems 83)

In *18 Poems*, what the readers note particularly in Thomas's comments on Yeats is receptivity rather than "recollection," and

the reality of architectonic, paradoxical structure born of labouring overpowers him completely that he sees Yeats's watchful eye directing his own creative enterprise. "And learns at last that it is self-delighting ... self-appeasing, self-affrighting ... and that its own sweet will is Heaven's will" (YCP). He proudly and loudly trumpets the process of spinning a paradox:

In the beginning was the pale signature,
Three-syllabled and starry as the smile,
And after came the imprints on the water,
Stamp of the minted face upon the moon;
The blood that touched the crosstree and grail
Touched the first cloud and left a sign. (Poems)

In 18 Poems, Thomas repudiates Auden's poetic process as paradox of death-in-life envisioned in the Eliotian historic sense of "surrender to the invaluable tradition" and "extinction of personality" (Eliot 171), "its military silence, its surgeon's idea of pain," in choice of the Yeatsian paradox of life-in-death, "some possible dream" of love and kindness and "comforted" the sorrowful contemporaries of Auden "long coiled in ammonite's slumber" (LS 12). He speaks of his skeptical and anti-intellectual poetic origin:

In spring we cross our foreheads with the holly,
Heigh ho the blood and berry,
And nail the merry squires to the trees;
Here love's damp muscle dries and dies,
Here break a kiss in no love's quarry.
O see the poles of promise in the boys. (Poems 72)

This sensitive young poet Thomas's devotion to the poetic ideal and moral disinterestedness of Yeats is almost religious in tone and intensity in contrast to the aesthetic, amoral disinterestedness of Auden. He explains:

Especially when the October wind
With frosty fingers punishes my hair,
Caught by the crabbing sun I walk on fire
And cast a shadow crab upon the land,

By the sea's side, hearing the noise of birds,
Hearing the raven cough in winter sticks,
My busy heart who shudders as she talks
Sheds the syllabic blood and drains her words. (Poems 53)

Thomas's vicarious voice in 18 Poems for the suffering of Auden's contemporaries could be attributed to the influences of the skeptical poets Hardy and Yeats, "as through a child's rash happy cries ... the drowned voice of his parents rise ... in unlamenting song" (16). Auden explains:

Now the leaves are falling fast,
Nurse's flowers will not last;
Nurses to the graves are gone,
And the prams go rolling on. (24)

It is no wonder that to Auden's historic sense and amoral aesthetic tone the voice of moral disinterestedness should appear as a profanation, a desecration of the mystery, and his remarks, sometimes humorous, sometimes sharp and pungent, are withering in their effect.

REVIEWS, METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

Analysing the poetry of Thomas, Linda M. Shires says that Thomas in "some of his early poetry is overtly self-conscious and wildly rhetorical, much of what seems drunkenly abandoned is really very structured" (45). To Walford Davies, Thomas's early poetry offering "the reader only an impenetrable enigma" is "difficult and obscure in an individual way" (26). John Ackerman in his study of Thomas's poetry states that "the early poems are the product of a young, obsessed mind and have a unity of theme, technique, and attitude" (38). He explains that the paradoxical attitude of Thomas in 18 Poems "occasions much of the obscurity ... the images, however, are usually grouped by a sturdy advancing rhythm and an elaborate sound structure – that is the imposed formal control" (55). Stephen Spender estimates that Thomas "is a master of language who in his earlier poems at times let language master him. He writes in an

extremely rhetorical style with a pleasure in the sound and colour of words which is intoxicating" (45). In the study of Thomas's 18 Poems the critics, focusing more on obscurity and musical structure, have hardly analysed Auden's strictures on Thomas's self-orientated voice under the influences of Hardy and Yeats. Hence, this paper, adopting a figurative study, strives to unfold the meaning of Thomas's sceptical poetic voice and of Auden's strictures.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Contrary to the metaphysical directions of Donne and Auden, "the swaying sound of the sea" Thomas's 18 Poems, under the sceptical setting of Hardy and Yeats "without a change in their orders," "thrills the ear" with its "drumming, drumming" (Poems 20), progresses in the identical direction, "the blood moves strangely in its moving home... diverges, loops to travel further" (28), while working for the salvation of the fellow-poet's pains in a distinterested manner. Auden explains the discovery of Thomas's "delight" in vicariousness:

Cold, impossible, ahead
Lifts the mountain's lovely head
Whose white waterfall could bless
Travellers in their last distress. (LS)

Auden's Look Stranger! shows Thomas at the worst reared up in the poetic tradition of Hardy and Yeats:

Who nurtured in that fine tradition
Predicted the result,
Guessed love by nature suited to
The intricate ways of guilt?
That human ligaments could so
His southern gestures modify,
And make it his mature ambition
To think no thought but ours,
To hunger, work illegally,
And be anonymous? (17)

The focal point of Auden's *Look Stranger!* is his harsh strictures on the central concerns of Thomas's 18 Poems and his quest for personal salvation, "this point in time and space ... is chosen as my working place." Auden's lines "point to" the thematic focus of an amateur:

Where the sexy airs of summer,
The bathing hours and the bare arms,
The leisured drives through a land of farms,
Are good for the newcomer. (13)

In *Look Stranger!* Auden, too, speaks of the miraculous structure as "the image of our sorrow" in contrast to the image of skeptical sorrow of Thomas:

Till You, the seed, to which he was a mother,
That never heard of Love, through Love was free,
While he within his arms a world was holding,
To take the all-night journey under sea,
Work west and northward, set up building. (62)

Auden censures Thomas's poems for portraying human passion and for the absence of poetic justice for "their secretive children walk ... through your vigilance of breath ... to unpardonable death" (18). This judicial weighing of Thomas's virtues and weaknesses Auden takes as facetious charlatanism, and what irritates Auden most is Thomas's tone of condescension. He evaluates that 18 Poems expressive of personal experiences is highly romantic and visionary:

But no one but myself is loved in these,
And time flies on above the dreamer's head,
Flies on, flies on, and with your beauty flies.
All things he takes and loses but conceit,
The Alec who can buy the life within,
License no liberty except his own,
Order the fireworks after the defeat. (LS 26)

In Thomas's early poetry "what is remarkable is the originality and intensity with which" the themes of "sex and death, sin and redemption, the natural processes, birth and

decay” are articulated. (Ackerman 43). However, Auden perceives that the skeptical poets believing in “personal regeneration” and empathy are bound to die and repeat the precedents of history:

Others have tried it, all delight
Sustained in that ecstatic flight
Could not console
When through exhausting hours they'd flown
From the alone to Alone,
Nothing remained but the dry-as-bone
Night of the soul. (36)

Auden critiques the paradoxical structure of 18 Poems “enchanted as the flowers” (13), “churches and power stations lie ... alike among earth's fixtures” (14) promising hope for poetry to the fallen poets:

Which cannot see its likeness in their sorrow
That brought them desperate to the brink of valleys;
Dreaming of evening walks through learned cities,
They reined their violent horses on the mountains,
Those fields like ships to castways on islands,
Visions of green to them that craved for water. (LS 22)

Auden comments on Thomas's 18 Poems as an “unlamenting song,” a poem steeped in light, colour, music and poetry, in which even the dull mechanicals look a little insubstantial, “a child's rash happy cries” and are woven into the texture of fancy, “the drowned voice of his parents,” the “swift motions” of “the tigress.” He notes the rebellious sound:

But when the waters make retreat
And through the black mud first the wheat
In shy green stalks appears;
When stranded monsters gasping lie,
And sounds of riveting terrify
Their whorled unsubtle ears.... (15)

Thomas's impatience with such arid pedantry of Auden is manifest in 18 Poems and this anticipates his love of sensation throughout his poetic career:

In the beginning was the secret brain.
The brain was celled and soldered in the thought
Before the veins were shaking in their sieve,
Blood shot and scattered to the winds of light
The ribbed original of love. (Poems 83)

In censuring 18 Poems as "nurse's flowers," "forests of green have done complete ... the day's activity," Auden confuses the probable with the possible and demands empirical validity in art. But what enrages Thomas most is Auden's complete lack of perception, his judicial air; for the young Apocalyptic poet who extolled sensation as a cult this sterility of response in a critic, "harvest ... of hemlock and the blades," "rust ... my blood upon the tempered dead," "metal ... of suns in the man-melting night," "muzzled ... death on the mouth that ate the gas" betrays his lack of taste and denies him access to the realm of imagination. Thomas speaks:

I dreamed my genesis in sweat of sleep, breaking
Through the rotating shell, strong
As motor muscle on the drill, driving
Through vision and the girdered nerve (Poems 66)

Thomas qualifies Auden as "shrapnel ... rammed in the marching heart, hole ... in the stitched wound and clotted wind," "second ... rise of the skeleton and ... rerobing of the naked ghost."

For Auden, the locus of principles for literary evaluations is nature, "love like a mist or fire through the bed of eels" (Poems 75), and in reducing art itself to nature, "for what by nature and by training ... we loved, has little strength remaining" (LS 15), he misses the fictional, figurative character of the poetical world and blurs the distinction of probability and possibility according to Thomas:

And in the pincers of the boiling circle,
The sea and instrument, nicked in the locks of time,
My great blood's iron single
In the pouring town,
I, in a wind on fire, from green Adam's cradle,
No man more magical, clawed out the crocodile. (Poems)

In 18 Poems, the word imagination is mostly associated, under the influence of Hardy and Yeats, with "sleep," "all the matter of the living air" and "manhood ... spat up from the resuffered pain." He explains:

I followed sleep who kissed me in the brain,
Let fall the tear of time; the sleeper's eye,
Shifting to light, turned on me like a moon.
So, planning-heeled, I flew along my man
And dropped on dreaming and the upward sky. (Poems 67)

This explains Thomas's poetic process of life-in-death, "how light the sleeping on this soily star ... how deep the waking in the worlded clouds," and his substitution of the world-concentric Hardy and Yeats for the Word-centric Donne and Auden in 18 Poems:

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

Thomas emphasizes Auden's lack of imaginative response and scoffs at his temerity to kill the symbols of poetry. "The insect certain is the plague of fables" (Poems 139). The line shows how Thomas transmutes the meaning of the original passage of Hardy and Yeats whose poetry has the symbolic quality of the Chrysalis in the Aesop fable "The Ant and the Chrysalis." The caviling pedant Auden is like the Ant that disdains and pities the freedom of the Chrysalis to disturb the evolving butterfly in the shell. Thomas, celebrating the "birth of

natural order and love" (LS 27), freeplay of free energy, unfolds the moral that appearances are deceptive:

This story's monster has a serpent caul,
Blind in the coil scrams round the blazing outline,
Measures his own length on the garden wall
And breaks his shell in the last shocked beginning;
A crocodile before the chrysalis,
Before the fall from love the flying heartbone,
Winged like a Sabbath ass this children's piece
Uncredited blows Jericho on Eden. (Poems)

The lines are adapted from the fable of Aesop and are taken out of the original context. Thus using Auden's ironic mode in a different context, what Thomas means is that a literary critic must be receptive before attempting at any evaluation.

Hardy's meaning is that through this receptivity alone can the critic restore the poet's vision and intention:

Someone said: "Nevermore will they come: evermore
Are they now lost to us." O it was wrong!
Though may be hard their ways, some Hand will guard their
ways,
Bear them through safely, in brief time or long. (HCP 78)

Understanding precludes judgement from without and here the readers may recall Yeats's comment that the critic can never be precise fully about the beauty of a literary work until he has undergone the same ways as the poet:

So like a bit of stone I lie
Under a broken tree.
I could recover if I shrieked
My heart's agony
To passing bird, but I am dumb
From human dignity. (188)

The thrust becomes all the more effective as the readers hear Hardy's own voice, "hold we to braver things ... wait we, in trust, what Time's fullness shall show" (HCP 77), "and blended pulsing life with lives long done ... till Time seemed fiction, Past

and Present one" (89) and Yeats's singing of "out-worn heart ... in the dew of the morn" and "in a time out-worn ... heart ... in grey twilight":

For there the mystical brotherhood
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood
And river and stream work out their will;
And God stands winding his His lonely horn,
And time and the world are ever in flight;
And love is less kind than the grey twilight,
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn. (YCP 46)

Thomas notes the same lack of perception in Auden's strictures on skeptical poets and he also scores through the following remark in the poem "And death shall have no Dominion":

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane.
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion. (Poems)

Thomas perceives that Auden's poems are a rather bewildering document of the Eliotian taste, revealing at once flexibility and rigidity, catholicity and narrowness, sanity of judgement and dogmatic frigidity. He explains:

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

Auden finds in 18 Poems an absence of fine discriminating sense, but he praises the poetry of Eliot for its mythical elements, defends Walter de la Mare for the improbabilities as a warning against vain and illusive predictions and asserts the amoral, aesthetic purposiveness of the end:

Lost if I steer. Gale of desire may blow
Sailor and ship past the illusive reef,
And I yet land to celebrate with you
Birth of natural order and of love;
With you enjoy the untransfigured scene,
My father down the garden in his gaiters,
My mother at her bureau writing letters,
Free to our favours, all our titles gone. (LS 27)

This is a sermonist's discourse, "split words ... that spill such acrid blood," not the language of one who shares the mystery of creative process and grapples with the problem of pain of his fellow-poets according to Thomas:

Were that enough, enough to ease the pain,
Feeling regret when this is wasted
That made me happy in the sun,
How much was happy while it lasted,
Were vagueness enough and the sweet lies plenty,
The hollow words could bear all suffering
And cure me of ills. (112)

Thomas's distrust of normative standards is equally apparent in his rejection of Audenesque vocabulary, of the notions of probableness in the sense of verisimilitude, propriety and poetic justice. The very success of 18 Poems among Auden's friends, their praise, "there's more than dying ... lose the great pains or stuff the wound" and their prediction that the young Thomas, a promising poet, would certainly emerge as a "perpetual" threat to Auden's greatness, "He'll ache too long."

Auden who has "knocked down" Thomas's 18 Poems recognises his 25 Poems, "a little comes, is tasted and found good ... there must, be praised, some certainty ... if not of loving

well" (Poems), as an almost perfect structure having musical pattern. In *Another Time*, Auden ironically praises Thomas, "enormous beauties round him move ... for grandiose is his vision ... and grandiose his love" (18). He distinguishes the meritorious features of 25 Poems "set against our size and timing ... the almost neuter, the slightly awkward perfection" (21) from 18 Poems:

Wrapped in a yielding air, beside
The flower's soundless hunger,
Close to the tree's clandestine tide,
Close to the bird's high fever,
Loud in his hope and anger,
Erect about his skeleton,
Stands the expressive lover,
Stands the deliberate man. (15)

Auden's remarks on Thomas's 18 Poems – "vagueness enough and the sweet lies plenty ... the hollow words" – leads Thomas to "cure ... the ills" of 18 Poems and structure his next book 25 Poems as paradox and make it as an art song claiming greatness on a par with Auden and questioning the jurisdiction of Auden's critical activity itself. Thomas's comic sense gives way to exasperation:

Were that enough, bone, blood, and sinew,
The twisted brain, the fair-formed loin.... (Poems)

Thomas's 25 Poems in which he resuffers the painful desolation of Auden's friends who made vain attempt to emulate Auden's art song, "all sway forward on the dangerous flood ... Of history, that never sleeps or dies ... and, held one moment, burns the hand" (LS 66), firmly crosses out Auden's remark and adapts a comic query about Auden's greatness as a poet of art song and as a critic of his contemporaries' poetry. Auden perceives that the young Apocalyptic poet Thomas as an imminent challenger and competitor to his eminence among his contemporaries:

Fresh loves betray him, every day
Over his green horizon
A fresh deserter rides away,
And miles away birds mutter
Of ambush and of treason;
To fesh defeats he still must move,
To further griefs and greater,
And the defeat of grief. (AT)

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

In 18 Poems, Thomas rejects the metaphysical concept of sorrow and creation as envisaged in the poems of Donne and Auden, “out of the Future into actual History” and “passed ... into the undared ocean swung north their prow” for the sake of personal redemption of human sorrow, “for the virgin roadsteads of our hearts an unwavering keel.” Thomas explains:

For we shall be a shouter like the cock
Blowing the old dead back; our shots shall smack
The image from the plates;
And we shall be fit fellows for a life,
And who remains shall flower as they love,
Praise to our faring hearts. (Poems 111)

In response to the dramatic poetry of Hardy and Yeats, Thomas exults over the “vision ... of new man strength,” over the force of “manhood” and “man’s enterprise”:

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. (Poems)

That Thomas quickly outgrew his influence is an indirect tribute to Hardy. It is indeed a common phenomenon in the lives of all great men and creative artists that they outstrip their preceptors whom they once happened to emulate and adore; but their later maturity does not cancel their debt to their former teachers. Yeats’s *The Tower* releases and gives direction to

Thomas's creative ferment in 18 Poems. Thomas speaks of the androgynous image of a poet:

Beginning with doom in the ghost, and the springing marvels,
Image of images, my metal phantom
Forcing forth through the harebell,
My man of leaves and the bronze root, mortal, unmortal,
I, in my fusion of rose and male motion,
Create this twin miracle. (73)

Critiquing the formative influences of the skeptical poets, Hardy and Yeats "whose river-dreams long hid the size ... and vigours of the sea" on Thomas's early poems, "inspire them with such a longing as will make his thought ... alive like patterns a murmuration of starlings ... rising in joy over Wolds unwittingly weave...(LS), Auden considers the emergence of the sceptical artist Thomas—"the church clock's yellow face, the green pier light ... burn for a new imprudent year" (28) – as a danger to his survival, "mopping and mowing through the sleepless night" (30). He explains the "perpetual threat" of grapho-centric poetry to logo-centric poetry:

With guns beneath your arms, in sun and wet
At doorways posted or on ridges set,
By copse or bridge we know you there
Whose sleepless presences endear
Our peace to us with a perpetual threat. (29)

Hence, he needs the "power" of his contemporaries" to counter the impact of Thomas who has "health and skill and beauty on the brain" and "love, satisfaction, force, delight" (30).

Moreover, Auden predicts the mutability of 18 Poems, being a poem of cynical pity, as the sceptical poetry aiming at "personal glory," individual myth and symbol, "the barren spiritual marriage of stone and water" (12) has no future at all. He estimates:

Our hunting fathers told the story
Of the sadness of the creatures,
Pitied the limits and the lack

Set in their finished features;
Saw in the lion's intolerant look,
Behind the quarry's dying glare,
Love raging for the personal glory
That reason's gift would add,
The liberal appetite and power,
The rightness of a god. (LS 17)

And Auden's critique on skeptical art is identical to Eliot's confrontation in *The Waste Land*:

O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandolin
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon....

Auden's strictures on 18 Poems is more inclined to the structuralist concerns for "the structurality of the structure." MacNeice endorses that "the tone of words" of Auden is unequivocally Structuralistic and phonocentric:

That criticism, a virtue previously,
Now can only weaken
And that when we go to Rome
We must do as the Romans do, cry out together
For bread and circuses; put on your togas now
For this is Roman weather. (144)

The judgements of professional critics of structuralism often betray a lack of inwardness, and Thomas is not sure that Auden knows what it is like to read and enjoy a play or a poem. Derrida while differing from the Structuralistic concept of structure, "a process of giving it a centre or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin," writes:

The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance, and organise the structure-but above all to make sure that the organising principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. By orienting and organising the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of

a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.
(90)

Again, Thomas defends the mingling of good and evil, joy and sorrow scenes in his 18 Poems with reference to Yeats's skeptical poetry, "O what if leveled lawns and graveled ways ... where slipped Contemplation finds his ease ... and Childhood a delight for every sense, but take our greatness with our violence... (YCP 169) in contrast to Auden's distrust of the deductive method in literary evaluations. He discovers:

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

Thomas at the same time considers it a grave defect in Auden that he writes with no moral purpose. He distinguishes his Yeatsian disinterestedness, "the people's fusion ... the coupled bud ... and the flame in the flesh's vision" from Auden's Eliotian aesthetic disinterestedness, "out of the sea, the drive of oil ... socket and grave, the brassy blood" (Poems). Thomas's vindicates his moral disinterestedness in the paradoxical structure of 25 Poems through rhetoric's of challenge and empathy, "What if those things the greatest of mankind/Consider most to magnify, or bless,/But take our greatness with our bitterness... (YCP 169).

CONCLUSION

Auden's strictures on Thomas's 18 Poems are vitiated by dogmatism and didacticism and Thomas would only smile at their puerility: "Groping for matter under the dog's plate,/Man should be cured of distemper" (Poems). True criticism, according to Thomas, should be free from maladroitness. He notes in Auden a want of taste leading to a confusion of issues, a refusal to yield up to the spell and mystery of sceptical art, a distressing

attempt at imposing mechanical standards from without, and an almost unpardonable temerity and opinionatedness where only passive receptivity can open up the secret. Thomas's impatience with Auden is sometimes in the nature of a mild thrust as in these lines: "For all there is to give I offer: Crumbs, barn, and halter" (Poems). On the whole Thomas in the early poetry, 18 Poems and 25 Poems, having learnt from Yeats that "opinions are accursed," "an intellectual hatred is the worst," establishes himself as a poet of inclusiveness and magnanimity, coherence and co-existence, "if there's no hatred in a mind/Assault and battery of the wind/Can never tear the linnet from the leaf ..." (YCP 160).

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