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"THE ASCENDING BOY": THE ROMANTIC CHILD IN DYLAN THOMAS'S POETRY

by

A. DANIEL G. MACISAAC

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Ascending Boy": The Romantic Child in Dylan Thomas's Poetry

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.....
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.....

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Abstract

Images of the child form an important pattern of imagery in Dylan Thomas's poetry. As Thomas develops as an artist, his depictions of childhood become less self-regarding and more objective. This thesis examines various evolving perspectives of the child in the context of the romantic literary tradition, which extends from Blake and Wordsworth to Yeats and Auden.

The Introduction outlines the objectives of the thesis, and gives the romantic background to Thomas's child, focusing on descriptive examples of the four dominant romantic views of the child: highly sentient being, monarch living at the centre of his world, a quasi-divine creature, and innocent victim.

Chapter I reveals that in The Notebooks, the child imagery, although often complex, tends to be self-obsessed. In the early works, the womb is a central environment, and the affirmation of faith in the creative self is an important goal.

Chapter II points out how in the Collected Poems the fetus enclosed by the womb is superseded by the imaginative child's exploration of the external world. Adapting romantic models for his own purposes, Thomas makes his portrayals of childhood more intricate, objective, and believable. But although the significance of self diminishes, the poet's faith expands. Thomas's last poems

espouse belief in an enduring mystical order.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Keats once held that a poet "has no identity -- he is continually . . . filling some other Body -- The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women."[1] Dylan Thomas asks, "Am I not father, too, and the ascending boy,/ The boy of woman and the wanton starer . . . ?"[2] The Welsh poet chose often to fill the child's body. His child became legion; the poetry offers a host of fetching portraits of children, drawn from the prenatal period to prepubescence. Frequently, Dylan Thomas presents the child as a victim -- of time, of sin, and/or of violence. He also explores the child's experience of death, sexuality, and aggression. More positively, Thomas depicts the child as a quasi-divine creature, a vital monarch living at the centre of the world, a possessor of heightened sentience, and a kinetic being. As well as portraying these views of the child, the poet expresses the significance of the child's real and imagined environments, such as the womb, the island, the garden, and the park. In these spheres of childhood, parents and guardians are often important figures. Also, fascinated by children, Thomas investigates their behavior, including their aggressive acts and displays, mischief, questioning, role-playing, and "naming." Thus, he considers and communicates the child's imagination -- even its attraction to colour, movement, and metamorphosis. In fact, the author complicates his image of the imaginative

child until the child is, at times, not just a figure of the romantic poet, but an emblem of the artifact, the poem.

This thesis will delineate some of the kaleidoscopic patterns of Thomas's child. And, in order to trace the evolving variations of these patterns, my thesis will examine the poems in a more or less chronological order -- from The Notebooks to the Collected Poems. Generally, as the poet matures, the child is depicted with greater objectivity as an active creature. A basic dual vision, encompassing the ironic adult's meditative point of view as well as the impulsive child's perspective, emerges about mid-point in Thomas's career, becoming more cleverly integrated in later poems. Unlike the enclosed embryos of the earlier poems, the ascending children of the later works interact intensely with the external environment -- the world without the womb -- becoming enhanced expressions of the poet's faith, his commitment to art and life.

To understand the implications of the child imagery, however, we must examine the influence of the romantic literary tradition. Peter Coveney informs us:

> With Blake's The Chimney Sweeper and Wordsworth's Ode on Intimations of Immortality from recollections of Early Childhood, we are confronted with something essentially new, the phenomenon of major poets expressing something they considered of great significance through the image of the child. . . . Within the course of a few decades the child emerges from comparative unimportance to become the focus of an unprecendented literary interest, and, in time, the central figure of an increasingly significant proportion of our literature.3

The literary historian adds that "It seems inescapable that the appearance of the modern literary child was closely related to the revolution in sensibility which we call the 'romantic revival.'"[4] A continuation of this romantic revival, Thomas's work was deeply influenced by the romantic tradition that extends from Blake and Wordsworth to De la Mare, Auden, and beyond. Other critics have declared Thomas a neoromantic and noted the impact of nineteenth century writings on quite a number of his individual works;[5] but, apparently, a sizeable study of specific patterns of Thomas's child imagery -- in the context of the romantic tradition -- has not yet been published. Thus, a major aim of this thesis is to indicate how many of the characteristics of Thomas's child were promoted or intimated by earlier romantic authors. And, occasionally, as a corollary to its exploration of romantic influences on Thomas, this thesis will consider the effect of nursery rhymes and fairy tales, which were collected and circulated widely during the nineteenth century, the age of romanticism.[6] To a great extent, the concerns and views of romanticism characterize Thomas's multivalent child.

Before beginning to discuss Dylan Thomas's poetry, I will provide some descriptive examples of the four most strongly-delineated romantic perspectives of the child. Basically, the romantics present the child as a highly sentient being, a vital monarch figure living at the centre of the world, a quasi-divine creature, and/or, in contrast,

an innocent victim.

Extraordinary sentience and a related remarkable intuition are important traits of the romantic child. Of the prominent romantics, perhaps Rousseau is most restrained, declaring in the "Preface" to Emile that "Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling peculiar to itself."[7] For Thoreau, "the senses of children are unprofaned."[8] A later romantic, Yeats, praises an ancestral garden because there "Childhood" is free to realize its capability to experience "a delight for every sense."[9] Thoreau idealizes the child's abilities even further when he declares:

> I suspect that the child plucks its first flower with an insight into its beauty and significance which the subsequent botanist never retains.[10]

And Blake insists, "Innocence dwells with Wisdom, but never with Ignorance."[11] According to the romantics, the child's perception remains holistic until analysis is learned. Wordsworth goes so far as to refer to the preschooler as an "Eye among the Blind."[12] Once schooled in analytical thought, "We murder to dissect" ("The Tables Turned," 28). The poet believes, however, that the blissful condition of childhood is not forever lost to a sensitive artist because a remnant of heightened sentience remains with the impressionable adult. Very aware of this belief, Harold Bloom argues persuasively that, for Wordsworth, if "the apocalyptic power of hope" is to endure, if the poet is to

regain the joy of the childhood state, "a synaesthetic blend of seeing-hearing must return, as once it existed for the young child."[13] Hope persists because of the intensity of the innocent vision. Coleridge writes, "I saw in early youth, as in a dream, the birth of the planets, and my eyes beheld as one [sic] what the understanding afterwards divided into [many]."[14]

This heightened sentience is observed by artists other than literary romantics. Yehudi Menuhin, a twentieth-century interpreter of that most transcendental of arts -- music -- and a former child prodigy, comments:

> Nature is still full of mystery: we see but we don't see . . . . To be creative, we need to regain a child's way of seeing -- with eyes that are not blasé, not blinkered by habit, not blinded by concepts, notions, interpretations.[15]

A narrow intellect prevents creativity. Menuhin's statement leads us quite naturally into the next view of the child -- as innocent and unself-conscious king. And such pure sentience certainly makes a special relationship with the environment for the child.

Intimately connected with the world by his senses, the romantic child becomes a kind of monarch living exuberantly at the centre of his world. Wordsworth proclaims that "Our childhood . . . sits upon a throne/ That hath more power than all the elements."[16] Whitman pronounces that Earth evolved for his enjoyment:

> Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
> My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could

overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
. . .

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,[17]

Admiring the activities of his three-year-old son, Coleridge exclaims, "he moves, he lives, he finds impulses from within & without -- he is the darling of the Sun and of the breeze!"[18] In Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, a child is the Spirit of the Earth, a divine king figure.[19] This view of the child, however, may be most poignant in Blake's "Laughing Song" where the entire landscape reverberates with laughter initiated by children:

When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy
And the dimpling stream runs laughing by,
When the air does laugh with our merry wit
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it.

According to Northrop Frye, Blake believes that "the child is born civilized," that is, the child "assumes the world he is born into has a human shape and meaning and was probably made for his benefit."[20] In a way, these romantics gained insight into a belief that cognitive psychologists verified decades later. Jean Piaget established that "before the age of eight, the majority of children believe that the sun and the stars follow them"; the Swiss psychologist identified this belief as "participation of action and purpose."[21] Such a belief characterizes what Sylvia Anthony calls the child's "solipsist position"; "things exist only to the extent that

they are perceived by" the perceiver.[22] Indeed, these commentaries of psychologists and critics are learned; but the "solipsist position" is best expressed by the romantic Tennyson:

> The baby new to earth and sky,
> What time his tender palm is prest
> Against the circle of the breast,
> Has never thought that 'this is I':
>
> But as he grows he gathers much
> And learns the use of 'I' and 'me'
> And finds 'I am not what I see,
> And other than the things I touch':[23]

The unconscious egoism of the infant is preeminent; he lords over all because he experiences everything as himself.

More exalted than the regal egoist, the divine child expresses sanctifying faith and the ideal relationship with the cosmos. Writers such as Wordsworth, Emerson, Schiller, and Blake all elevate the child, transforming him into an emblem of holy faith and/or divinity. Florence Marsh maintains that in Wordsworth's poetry, especially in the early verse, "the child is a supreme symbol" of "the life of the spirit"; the child becomes "an agent of redemption."[24] According to Emerson, "Infancy is the perpetual Messiah which comes into the arms of fallen men, and pleads with them to return to paradise."[25] Thus, the Emersonian infant redeems and reconciles. Schiller, the German romantic, argues that "The child is . . . a lively representation . . . of the

ideal . . . ."[26] The poet adds, "To a moral and sensitive person a child will be a sacred object . . . ."[27] In "The Lamb," Blake asserts that Christ who "calls himself a Lamb . . . became a little child" (14-16). Blessed by God, innocent child and lamb are exemplars of faith; the poem reflects a romantic interpretation of Mark 10:15-16:

> Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

Lloyd Demause, the famed psychohistorian, argues that Christ's action of blessing the children is actually "the customary Near Eastern practice of exorcising by laying on of hands, which many holy men did to remove the evil inherent in children."[28] William E. Lynch's commentary on this passage is also illuminating:

> In rabbinic teaching the child was almost despicable. In Roman law a child is without rights. Neither by nature nor in the Jewish thinking of the time was a child truly either simple, humble, docile, "innocent" or "pure." Only maturity could win these virtues . . . . Jesus saw the lack in a child as good example of the ahauim, the "poor," the "needy" person of the Old Testament.[29]

According to the evidence of the previous paragraph, the view of the child as divine and/or paragon of virtuous faith seems to be a romantic construction rather than a Biblical tradition. But perhaps, in depicting the child as divine, the romantics express a profound, although paradoxical truth, which is expounded by Jung:

> It is a striking paradox in all child-myths that the "child" is on the one hand delivered helpless

> into the power of terrible enemies and in continual danger of extinction, while on the other he possesses powers far exceeding those of ordinary humanity. This is closely related to the psychological fact that though the child may be "insignificant," unknown, "a mere child," he is also divine.30

Before Jung began dissecting dreams, the romantics were portraying the child as divine -- and also as victimized.

The victim is the most emotionally-charged depiction of the romantic child. Coveney maintains that the romantics discovered that "In childhood lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation, fear and bewilderment, vulnerability and potential violation."[31] Coleridge calls a crying baby "Poor stumbler on the rocky coast of woe."[32] Shelley describes how the ancient Egyptians, howling "hideous praises to their Demon-God . . . tore from the mother's womb/ The unborn child" (Queen Mab II, 150-151). He documents how under the despotic pharoahs children were pressed into building tombs, pyramids. Thus, "The choicest days of life" (147) were ruined. In "London," Blake protests against a pitiless society that oppresses innocent children. Here, the "Charter'd street" (1) is not designed to accommodate innocence; infants are full of terror, not delight; young boys are pressed into service as chimney-sweepers. And, most terribly, in this "midnight" city, "the youthful Harlot's curse/ Blasts the new-born Infant's tear" (13-15). Social disease ravages the innocent. Basically, Songs of Experience as a whole portrays the child as a victim, supplying the contrary to the vision of

the child as divine that dominates Songs of Innocence. Wordsworth also views the child as social victim. In the Prelude (1805-6), he admits that he

> recoiled
> From showing as it is the monster birth
> Engendered by these too industrious times,
> Let few words paint it: 'tis a child, not child,
> But a dwarf man; in knowledge, virtue, skill.
>
> (V. 292-295)

Corrupted by formal education, the boy's "discourse moves" like a "prison door"; "Rank growth of propositions overruns" his "brain" (V. 320-324). Paraphrasing the English poet's position on education, Emerson writes, "Schools do no good. Tuition is not education."[33] Shelley, hearing a schoolmaster abuse his charges, complains that such instruction "were but one echo from a world of woes -- / The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes" ("Dedication," The Revolt of Islam, 26-27). More disturbing strife occurs within the family. In at least one poem, Wordsworth portrays the child brutalized by his father: "Provoked" by "a simple freak of thoughtless play," the father, "As if each blow were deadlier than the last,/ Struck the poor innocent" ("Guilt and Sorrow," 472-475). The child, according to Wordsworth, also falls prey to Time:

> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy.
>
> ("Intimations of Immortality," 66-68)

Most histrionically, Barrie announces, "[Age] Two is the beginning of the end."[34] "The power of terrible enemies" endures. Vicissitude eludes these victims.

Like the other romantics, Thomas does not restrict himself to exposing the suffering of children. In the manner of any reputable artist, he paints from the imagination, as well as from life. He attempts many studies of works by the romantic masters; and eventually, he produces art that is unmistakably his own. Nevertheless, if a critic is to understand the Welsh poet's work, he must examine Thomas's portraits of the child in the light of the romantic school. —

The ascending boy rises from the ranks of romantic children. Remarkably, his emergence parallels the development of the artist. As Thomas becomes more able to adapt romantic models for his own purposes, he loosens the links his child imagery has with the mother, the womb. Thomas's child grows more complex, involved, and independent, more lordly in time and space. But never can his origins be denied. He belongs to a romantic aristocracy.

Chapter I

THE MUTABLE CHILD OF THE NOTEBOOKS

As Thomas develops as a poet, his child imagery becomes more multivalent and inclusive. The poetry begins with self-obsession, and moves toward greater objectivity. We can see the beginnings of these trends by examining The Notebooks. In this early work, the womb is a central environment, and the assertion of a distinct, creative self is a key theme. Such egoism puts Thomas in the mainstream of the romantic tradition; Ball argues that "in particular the [romantic] poets are very ready to serve the phenomena of the creating self."[1] But although the notebook poems tend to be self-obsessed, book by book, from the unrefined studies of the 1930 Notebook to the "nearly-polished" pieces of the August 1933 Notebook, Thomas displays a varied, vibrant treatment of the child.

i

1930 Notebook

In the 1930 Notebook, the child has not yet emerged as an important figure. Here there are only two poems, "Based upon themes from Mother Goose" and "Oh, the children run toward the door," that feature some prominent child imagery.

"Based upon themes from Mother Goose" offers three creative selves, a trio of poet figures, who propel the

theme of creative identity. The major influence on these selves, as well as on the poem as a whole, is announced by the poem's very title. "Mother Goose" is a formative influence on the self-promoting poem and the poet himself. In a written reply to one of a graduate student's questions, Thomas discloses that nursery rhymes were crucial in the development of his poetic sensibility:

> The first poems I knew were nursery rhymes, and before I could read them for myself I had come to love just the words of them, the words alone. What the words stood for, symbolized, or meant, was of very secondary importance; what mattered was the sound of them.2

"Based upon themes from Mother Goose" is replete with references from these "first poems."

One series of lines is especially vivid:

> Beat the white sea thin,
> Little miss,
> Flatten the planted waves,
> Plane them fiercely,
> Be felt,
> Mary, Mary, chop them with your garden axe.3

"Little miss" echos "Little Miss Muffet"; but Thomas's little lady is instructed not to be timid -- not to be anxious about arachnids -- and is pressed to be aggressive. Taking arms against a sea of troubles, she cannot be labelled a Blakean innocent. She does not keep a little lamb. But although his Mary is obviously anti-pastoral, Thomas borrows the phrase, "Mary, Mary," and adapts the garden setting from a delicate nursery rhyme:

> Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
> How does your garden grow?
> With silver bells and cockle shells,

And pretty maids all in a row.

Still, Thomas departs from the gentle questioning and setting of the rhyme, insisting that Mary assert herself, yoking sea and garden imagery violently together. Moreover, he urges Mary to be contrary to the point of savagery. She would harrow to destroy, not to cultivate. A monarch, she must not concern herself with mere "cockle shells." According to The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, "popular tradition has it that the original Mary of the nursery rhyme was Mary Queen of Scots" (p. 301). In his poem, however, Thomas may be recalling an earlier queen, Mary Tudor, who earned the appellation, "Bloody Mary," by ordering the systematic executions of Protestants. He values energy over passivity. His Mary, like her "Bloody namesake," uses an axe, not a child's hoe, as her instrument, pitting the self against the cosmos, suggested here by the sea. Combatting the elements, she is an image of a rebellious romantic poet, the sort who would advocate, "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Proverbs of Hell," 67).

A more obvious poet figure is the poem's speaker, who, we may assume, is youthful in age or spirit because he alludes to nursery rhymes. His creativity has aggressive qualities: "The lion fruit goes from" his "thumb" (1). A monarch, he stands at the centre of his cosmos, where he calls on Mary to declare herself. A master, he controls

his creation, symbolized by the "peacock chained" to his "wrist" (19).

This masterful speaker borrows much of his imagery from nursery rhymes. The first wonder of one rhyme is seeing "a peacock with a fiery tail" (p. 342). In fact, the whole lyric brings to mind the peculiar visceral yet cosmic egoism of Thomas's work:

> I saw a peacock with a fiery tail
> I saw a blazing comet drop down hail
> . . .
> I saw a pismire swallow up a whale
> I saw a raging sea brimfull of ale
> . . .
> I saw the sun even in the midst of night
> I saw the man that saw this wondrous sight.

Other nursery rhyme allusions and associations cluster around Tom, the third poet figure, who is less glorious than the speaker, and more pastoral than Mary. The editors of the ODNR observe that "'Tom' has, apparently, long been the familiar name for pipers" (p. 409). I have enough space to cite only one example:

> Tom, he was a piper's son
> . . .
> Tom with his pipe made such a noise,
> That he pleased both the girls and the boys
> And they all stopped to hear him play,
> 'Over the hills & far away.'
>
> (p. 408, ll. 1, 7-10)

The piper can be equated with both bard and poet.

But the piper is not a simplistic character. Addressing him, the speaker in Thomas's poem says,

> If you snatch the flashing snow,
> Or the foam of the golden sea,

> Or the forests from the brown soil,
> You accomplish the great and the good
> Like a god from the stars
> Flying their angled flags,
> Tom, Tom.
> What is the body of a pig
> Compared with the body of the earth
> Which gives you water, and sweet fruits to eat,
> Which loves you in return for a little love? (43-53)

Tom, the poet, is a quasi-divine earth-worshipper. Analogous to a star-god, he is drawn irresistibly, like a shooting star, to earth. But Tom also seems to be a child derived from a nursery rhyme: "Tom, Tom, the piper's son/ Stole a pig and away he run" (p. 411). Dylan Thomas also addresses the bard in himself, the Tom in Thomas:

> Hammer your verses
> On the grounds dark crust,
> Print them on the sky's white floor. (54-56)

The poet becomes a Vulcan figure; his power, his imagination forges words that inform both heaven and earth, sky and ground. This hammering, along with the earlier snatching, expresses violent energy that allies Tom with Mary.

This aggressively creative energy, an important part of Thomas's early poetic, is akin to Blake's depiction of creative furnace-force. In The First Book of Urizen, Los, the frustrated blacksmith-artist and figure of imagination, struggles to renew fallen creation by hammering an "Incessant beat" (IVb, 17).

All three poet figures combine to champion the cause of self-fuelled creative energy. Deeply affecting the depiction of this power at work, Blake and nursery rhymes

are integral influences on "Based on themes from Mother Goose."

Contrasting with the dynamic force of "Based upon themes from Mother Goose" is the poem, "Oh the children run toward the door," in which elfin energy is released in an exuberant celebration that recalls a number of Blake's Songs of Innocence, including "Laughing Song." Like Blake's Songs of Innocence, this poem is very lyrical, and traces the shadows of experience -- a most poignant threat -- looming near bright innocence.

Unaware, at first, of any threat, the children shout, "Clap hands! Clap hands! Father has cherries/ And mother a violin" (6-7). Similarly, the bard of "Laughing Song" cries out:

> When the painted birds laugh in the shade
> Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread
> Come live & be merry and join with me
> To sing the sweet chorus of Ha, Ha, He.

Blake's lyric expresses a giddy, gleeful atmosphere of song and sensation, feasting and merry festivities. Read in isolation, the vision of sensory celebration in Thomas's "Oh! the children run toward the door" may seem to be absolute:

> Each glass its note,
> A corner's sound,
> Full for their throats,
> And for their ears,
> The cherry and the violin
> That eat and play in one (21-26).

However, forces of darkness -- salamanders -- appear to

imprison innocence. Aspects of experience -- shame and guilt -- ruin the vision: "the violin/ Has made the wine-glass fall/ Upon the unpierced earth in shame" (30-32). Bounty is banished, harmony unstrung.

Along with "Little miss" Mary, the salamanders and mole are quite contrary to Thomas's Blakean innocents, the children. Maud, considering The Notebooks as a whole, finds this Blakean dualism to be a distinguishing feature:

> It would not be far wrong to say that Blake's notions of "Heaven and Hell" and of "Innocence and Experience" have acted as authority for Thomas' dualistic view of the world and his antithetical mode of expressing it.5

The influence of Blake was early and, as we will see, enduring.

Despite Blake's influence. the presence of child imagery in the 1930 Notebook is limited and undeveloped -- as the final poem in the manuscript indicates. "How shall the animal" does not convey the sense of an energetically kicking fetus or force of self, unlike the revised version of 1934, "How shall my animal," where even the shift from the article "the" to the possessive "my" connotes personal involvement. Moreover, the draft lacks the gripping and clarifying conclusion: "You have kicked from a dark den, leaping up the whinnying light,/ And dug your grave in my breast" (43-44). The notebook version trumpets "the animal" as an expression of a dark phallic art, without communicating a definite child image. In 1930, Thomas still needed to intensify his art, including the vital

imagery of the evolving artistic child.

ii

1930-1932 Notebook

Like the earlier exercise book, the 1930-1932 Notebook has little child imagery. And when this imagery does occur -- in "The hunchback in the park" and "Children of darkness," -- it is neither precise nor polished. The notebook version of "The hunchback in the park," unlike the fully achieved "finished product," does not communicate the dramatic ambivalence of the truant boys. In "Children of darkness," the epithet, "children of darkness" applies to "ordinary men" (12) who, fraught with desire, skulk about in a night of despair. This phrase does not create an image of childhood but suggests an adult condition of deprivation. Since these ordinary men "got no wings" (1), no romantic powers of imagination, they are unable to transcend their miserable existence.

In one poem of this notebook, however, child imagery is central, attesting to a romantic legacy. The children of "Being but men, we walked into the trees" have heightened sentience; moreover, they possess the imaginative capacity that adults (except for poets, presumably) have lost:

> If we were children we might climb,
> Catch the rooks sleeping, and break no twig,

Thrust out our heads above the branches
To wonder at the unfailing stars. (6-10)

Sensitive caretakers of nature, they "break no twig." Such children are akin to Wordsworth's juveniles as "Nature's priests." Also, in these lines of verse, the clarity of the imagery, the relaxed rhythm, and emphasis on wonder suggest the influence of De la Mare:

Green in light are the hills, and a calm wind
flowing
Filleth the void with a flood of the fragrance of
Spring

. . .

Daybreak is come; and life from the darkness of
being
Springs, lie a child from the womb, when the lon
one calls.6

These lines exemplify what Daniel Jones discovers in the early poetry, and commends as "the simple lyricism reminiscent of . . . De la Mare."[7] Singing in praise of these children, Thomas insists that their way of moving about the world promises harmony instead of cacophony:

Out of confusion, as the way is,
And the wonder that man knows,
Out of the chaos would come bliss. (10-11)

Tragically, the way of wonder that becomes "the aim and the end" (16), a kind of existential Alpha and Omega, is shunned by ~~adults~~, who have lost the spontaneity, receptivity, and quasi-divinity of youth. Adults may recognize wonder and "lovliness" [sic] (14), but are "Afraid" (2) of these emotions and the blissful world of innocence, "a world of wings and cries" (5). The blunt final sentence, which repeats the opening line, intimates

that adult fear and experience have enclosed, repressed, even trapped childhood innocence. And the separation of this concluding line -- "Being but men we walked into the trees" -- from the rest of the stanzas reinforces the notion of adult isolation.

iii

February 1933 Notebook

In quite a number of the poems of the February 1933 Notebook, the child imagery is as important as it is in "Being but men, we walked into the trees." Admittedly, the imagery of childhood is not developed in the notebook version of "After the Funeral"; but poems such as "Light, I Know, treads the ten million stars," "The first ten years in school and park," "Pass through twelve stages," and "Ears in the turrets hear" offer child imagery that contributes significantly to the poetic message. The perspectives that are explored here include the child as victim -- of time, original sin, sexual abuse, and generally, the world of experience. And these views reveal, in one poem, a pessimism more puritanical and profound than that suffered by earlier romantics. In other poems, however; Thomas allies himself with other romantics by protesting vigorously against "false religion" and other agencies of repression. Also, the child's fear of darkness and death is investigated; and juvenile behavior including role-playing and sexual impulses receives attention. But

although Thomas reveals an interest in the whole span of the self's development -- from womb to tomb -- his major concern remains the fetus and child.

Focussed on "the phenomena of the creating self," and employing child imagery to highlight emotion, "Light, I know, treads the ten million stars" deals with the fear of the dark -- the unknown and the unconscious. The poet declares, "I am a timid child when light is dead./ Unless I learn the light I shall go mad (11-12). Basically, he states that as a poet he must gain some sort of control over the dark aspect of life, the unconscious, or it will overwhelm him, driving him mad. He "must learn to love" the "night's terrors" (13) to be a true artist. Unable to exploit the unconscious, he cannot be touched by poetic inspiration; "lunar light will not glow in" his "blackness" (22). To express this deadness of imagination, Thomas employs the symbol of "a tiny corpse" that "Turns to the roof a hideous grimace" (24-25). "Tiny corpse" suggests a dead child, an emblem of exhausted imagination. Hope of artistic enlightenment and/or rejuvenation lies in the unconscious; Thomas refers to "night's light" (30). Perhaps this poem can be read as anticipating the poet's remarks about the influence of Freud on his work:

> Poetry, recording the stripping of individual darkness, must, inevitably, cast light upon what has been hidden for too long, and, by so doing, make clean the naked exposure . . . . Benefitting by the sight of the light and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag further

> into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realize.[8]

A poet cannot illuminate darkness without exploring it. "Light, I know, treads the ten million stars" is an early survey of such exploration.

This poem may also remind readers of Thomas's early story, "In the Garden." At first, the boy protagonist of the story is "more afraid of the dark garden than of anything else in the world";[9] but he overcomes his fear and becomes fascinated by the colours of vision. Although "Light, I know, treads the ten million stars" uses child metaphor to disclose potential threat and diminishment, the child remains a metaphor for the artist -- as it does in Thomas's early story.

The child is much more more than a metaphor for t artist in "The first ten years in school and park." In this recollection of childhood, readers discern an evolving vitally creative self, an aggressively imaginative role player. The poem should be read as Thomas's brief, semi-autobiographical poetic discussion of "the growth of the poet's mind" over the first twenty years. And, considering this interest in the growth of a poetic sensibility, the discovery of echoes and influences from Wordsworth should not surprise us.

Thomas continues the Wordsworthian sensitivity to the child's vitality. Although they do not echo Wordsworth directly, the opening lines exhibit vigorous activity: "The

first ten years in school and park/ Leapt like a ball from light [and] dark" (1-2). Apt because it suggests an orbiting microcosmic sphere, the vital, concentrated world of childhood, the ball simile also implies the persistent energy of memory -- as it does in the prose piece "A Child's Christmas in Wales":

> All the Christmases roll down toward the two-tongued sea . . . . In goes my hand into that wool-white, bell-tongued ball of holidays.10

For Thomas, a source of energy and inspiration, a model worthy of emulation, is found in Book one of The Prelude (1850), where Wordsworth describes how he, "a five year's child" (285), behaved "as if" he "had been born/ On Indian plains, and from" his "mother's hut/ Had run abroad in wantonness" (297-299). Then the English romantic provides illustrative examples of various reckless activities that he had engaged in before he "had told/ Ten birthdays" (306-307), such as when he had "hung/ Above the raven's nest by knots of grass/ And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock (330-332). For Wordsworth, such activities are an important part in the "Growth of a Poet's Mind," both the poem and the process; if these actions were insignificant, they would not have been included in the autobiographical work. Following Wordsworth's lead, Thomas rediscovers sense

> on the coal tips near the engines
> Where children played at Indians, scalps
> Littered the raven Alps. There was meaning in this.
>
> (15-17)

The Prelude is not the only potential literary presence in the lines just quoted. Referring to Thomas's own stories enlarges the reader's understanding of lines fifteen to seventeen. These lines are part of the scene surveyed by the confused poet Marlais -- of the short story, "The Orchards" -- who sees "a circle of coal table-hills where the children played Indians," continuing his search for meaning.[11] But meaning exists in the notebook poem because children play so exuberantly. Full of self-abandon, these possessors of heightened sentience learn as they live, play and be. In a way, "Their whole body is one sense."[12] Part of the meaning, however, derives from learning about the body -- its adrenalin-driven force -- which urges an identity in life and art. At greater length, Thomas describes this type of discovery in an autobiographical story:

> I felt all my young body lie an excited animal surrounding me, the torn knees bent, the bumping heart . . . the blood racing, the memory around and within flying, jumping, swimming and ready to pounce. There, playing Indians in the evening, I was aware of myself in the exact middle of a living story, and my body was my adventure and my name.[13]

According to Thomas, the body expresses itself by releasing creative energy through role-playing activity such as playing Indians.

This recognition of aggressive role-playing corresponds with a passage written by Twain. Like the children of Thomas's poem, Tom Sawyer's gang pretends to be

ignoble savages:

> By and by they separated into three hostile tribes, and darted upon each other from ambush with dreadful war-whoops, and killed and scalped each other by thousands. It was a gory day. Consequently, it was an extremely satisfactory one.14

For both Twain and Thomas, boys' imaginations can be brutal. As we have seen, "The first ten years in school and park" contains a number of echos from nineteenth-century works, and promotes attitudes popularized by nineteenth-century authors. Also, Thomas refers to Blakean contraries when discussing "the next five years" which "Hung between hell and heaven,/ Plumbed devil's depths, reached angel's heights" (18-20). The poem, concluding at age twenty, pronounces that "this year/ Has found a cure" in art, "New music, from new and loud, sounds on the air" (64-66). Undoubtedly, however, the music of the poem involves some dynamic variations on old nineteenth-century themes. Melodic subjects advanced by earlier romantics are reworked conscientiously and effectively by Thomas in "The first ten years in school and park."

In contrast with "The first ten years in school and park," "Pass through twelve stages" deals with conception, prenatal development, and birth. The self restricted and then expelled by the womb is the figure of interest. And arguably, the poem betrays a puritanical and deterministic outlook, a dark augmentation of the romantic view of the child as victim.

The stanza focussing on the prenatal period and birth, which evolved into the second stanza of "If I were tickled by the rub of love," introduces the despondent mood:

> Shall it be male or female? say the cells.
> The womb deliberates, spits forth manchild
> To break or to be broken by the world,
> A body cursed already by heredity. (15-18)

A world of experience destroys any innocence evident in the child. Moreover, the child is the "Victim of sire's vices" (30); the sins of the father are visited on the son. Original sin overwhelms all; our inheritance consists of corruption.

Obviously, this extreme view of the child -- as victim polluted by sin -- is at odds with the image of the child as quasi-divine, which is common elsewhere in Thomas's canon. Rather than mining gold, the poet picks a seam of black coal. Thomas worsens the pessimism of his romantic antecedents by concentrating here on a doomed, degenerate state of childhood; "Pass through twelve stages" belongs to the shadowy strain in romanticism, which is documented by Clubbe and Lovell:

> Shelley in Prometheus Unbound has man himself responsible for the evil Jupiter, whom he empowers and thus in effect creates. The Triumph of Life depicts a defeated and fallen race, without an effective Saviour, and the 'curse imposed on Adam' lives on in A Defence of Poetry, where we also learn that there is 'an inexplicable defect of harmony in the constitution of human nature.' Keats's Vale of Soul-Making letter describes a 'System of Salvation' for 'a World of Pains and troubles' - obviously in need of it. 'Man is originally "a

> poor forked creature" subject to the same
> mischances as the beasts of the forest.'15

Thus, Thomas's poem counters one of the most powerful figures of romanticism: the child pure in heart and spirit.

The purity of the romantic child is exemplified by Wordsworth's "Address to My Infant Daughter," in which the poet refers to his offspring's "sinless progress" (46), and, extending his comparison of her to the moon, states that "both are free from stain" (51). Furthermore, in "Epitaph," a poem commemorating a dead child, the English romantic writes: "Six to six years added he remained/ Upon this sinful earth, by sin unstained (1-2).

A sharp contrast to Wordsworth's idealism, Thomas's emphasis in "Pass through twelve stages" on original sin should be seen as part of his Puritanism, as well as an extension of his romantic perspective of the child as victim. His wife Caitlin observed that "there was a very strong puritanical streak in him."[16] Also, according to Brinnin, Thomas once pronounced, "'I am a Puritan.'"[17] This severe side of Thomas portrays the world as a sphere of debauchery in which sexual abuse, parental neglect, and time ravage the child:

> A one legged man ascending steps
> Looks down upon him with regrets
> That whips and stools and cistern sex
> Have yet to add to that that mother strips
> Upon her knee and shields from metal whisper
> Of wind along the cot,
> Sees cool get cold and childmind darker
> As time on time sea ribbon rounds
> Parched shires in dry lands. (20-28)

Then, using Eliotesque understatement (cf. "Grishkin is nice"[18]), Thomas notes the sexuality of the child:

> The child on lap is a nice child,
> Has learnt, through cold, to love the heat,
> On female knees takes a warm seat (38-40)

Earlier, Blake applauded infant sexuality as a sign of innocence: "Infancy! fearless, lustful, happy, nestling for delight/ In laps of pleasure: Innocence!" (Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Plate 6. 4-5). The austere, immature Thomas, in contrast, believes child sexuality to be an indicator of corruption through original sin, evidence that the child is "The victim of grandfather's/ Unwise desires, or even earlier's" (42-43). Like the infants of Blake's "London," this child is plagued by social disease: "Unclean Round Robin" (46) continues to canker. Clearly, however, such absorption in the child as vitiated victim does not sever the poem from the romantic tradition.

Despite this conspiracy of the cosmos, the child has grounds for faith. Thomas's poem ends on a note of hope. Somehow the child may "find wings as airman," transcend the stigma of sin, "And parachute old scabs and branded spots," marks of the pox (48-49). Some type of salvation appears to be possible. But characteristically, the adolescent poet does not or cannot provide details of a liberating creed to his readers.

Likewise, in "From A Play," the note of hope is delayed until the poem's end. A malevolent deity, a "God of Carnage" (15), persecutes humankind. Into the sin-

ridden world, "the fingers from the sky" descend and "Strangle the little children in their beds" (43-44). Through the mother's voice, the poem speaks of the terrible trauma of still-birth, the legacy of God-cursed Eve: "Since the first womb spat forth a baby's corpse,/ The mother's cry has turned about the winds" (50-51). Infants pay the wages of hereditary sin with their lives. And their mothers' sorrows multiply. Through the maternal voice, Thomas protests against Puritan doctrine but cannot deny it fully. This voice is as tormented as that of Shelley in The Revolt of Islam; there Shelley records "a mother's desolate wail/ O'er her" dead "child" who was "polluted" by tyranny (743-744). But near the end of "From A Play," Thomas's heroine invokes the deified earth rather than the heartless Sky-god:

> Palm of the earth, O sprinkle on my head
> That dust you hold, O strew that little left;
> Let what remains of that first miracle
> Be sour in my hair. That I may learn
> The mortal miracle, let that first dust
> Tell me of him who feeds the raging birds. (58-63)

These lines should be interpreted as a reaction against a cruel, Puritan God, and a romantic promotion of "mother earth." Like "Pass through twelve stages," this poem concludes with more than a glimmer of hope.

In "Matthias spat upon the lord," Thomas's poetic approach to religion is far more savage. His protest approaches the intensity of Blake's and Shelley's condemnations. Although not as broadly censuring as

Shelley, who, in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," complains that when a boy he was hoodwinked into calling upon "poisonous names with which our youth is fed" (53), Thomas does launch an incisively satirical strike against "false religion." And, as well castigating hypocrisy, Thomas attacks the sexual abuse of children carried out under the guise of love:

> The Reverend Crap, a holy pimp,
> Reads the bible and loves children,
> Loves to pat a choirboy's rump,
> And, following the band of hope,
> To stroke the girls behind the organ. (8-12)

Blake's "Infant Sorrow" makes a similar protest:

> My father then with holy look
> In his hands a holy book
> Pronounced curses on my head
> And bound me in a mirtle shade
>
> Like to holy men by day
> Underneath the vines he lay
> Like a serpent in the night
> He embracd my blossoms bright (21-28)

These perverts, promulgators of "false religion," corrupt in the name of love. Furthermore, in both Blake's and Thomas's poems, the child imagery represents innocence threatened by experience, and depicts the child as victim. "Matthias spat upon the Lord" evinces an energy of protest in keeping with the concerns of Shelley and Blake.

The child as victim is also a major concern in "Children's Song." But the enemy here is not "false religion" but the inevitable force of death. A child speaks lyrically and simply:

I think of a night when the owl is still
And the moon is hid and the stars are dim,
And that is the night when death will call,
And the night when I must fear him.

We enter the child's mind. The tendency to personify natural forces and objects -- an inclination shared by children and many poets -- is evident; the child refers to death as "him." Because Death becomes such a manifest threat, the child speaks a kind of prayerful lyric to keep his fears at bay. The poem serves as a "children's song"; it can be pronounced by any timid child who fears death is soon to have dominion over him. Read in the context of the whole poem, the ending suggests the child's attempt to negate death by uttering a verbal denial of it: "Death shall not enter in west wind and rain,/ Let the wind blow." Such faith in the power of words to distance death's threat will be elaborated and developed in later poems such as "A Refusal to Mourn." At this stage, however, the adolescent poet lacks the maturity to produce an extensive meditation on the death-defying power of words. Thus, the refutation of mortality made in "Children's Song" cannot be very convincing.

Death receives different treatment in "This is remembered when the hairs drop out." According to this poem, death cannot be denied; it is inexorable. The child becomes victimized by time -- in a Wordsworthian sense that maturation involves increasing forgetfulness: "Half is forgotten since your mother's milking,/ And half the span

of threescore years and ten" (25-26). Thomas implies that the most precious memories are prenatal. And, when it is almost too late, in old age "when the hairs drop out," one recalls "the first womb" (8). Such memories are crucial because one is closest to the experience of creation during the prenatal period. Closely associated with creativity, the child becomes both the Word and the word: "In the beginning/ Was the word" (34-35) (see John 1:1). And like the coming of a baby into the world, the birth of the word cannot be predetermined; it arrives according to the rhythm of its own clock: "the word began/ In sleep no clock or calendar could time" (35-36). Here, the noun "sleep" is ambivalent, connoting both the swift "sleep" of generation ("sleeping with" someone) and the endless slumber of death. Womb and tomb cohere. The old man, however, cannot recapture the purity of prenatal existence -- through memory or otherwise. Although half is remembered, half remains forgotten. The closing unrhymed couplet, which conveys the turbulence of birth, implies, in the context of the poem as a whole, that the precarious postnatal life cannot compensate for the security of the tranquil womb: "Half is remembered since your halfhand's knocking,/ And ten teredo fingers bored the womb" (32-33). Inevitably, all are thrust or pulled from the womb, and all must enter "the darkness of the grave" ("Intimations," 118).

In "This is remembered when the hairs drop out," "ten teredo fingers" invade the birth canal, aiming to seize the

fetus and drag it into the deathly world. The hands of the "deliverer" are also very threatening in "Ears in the turrets hear" where the hands "grumble on the door" (2) of the womb. Fearfully, the fetus asks, "Hands, hold you poison or grapes?" (9) Cozy and comfortable in its idyllic environment, the fetus is reluctant to be born. Clearly, the womb-world is ideal. The house, a womb metaphor, intimates comfort. Its white colouring connotes innocence and purity.

In contrast, the other metaphor for the womb, the island -- "Ears in this island hear" (16) -- seems rather peculiar at first. But because of the associations this image carries from the romantic tradition, it is particularly apt. The romantic conception of island suggests an ideal retreat. Shelley's "The Islet" is quite edenic:

> There was a little lawny islet
> By anemone and violet,
> Like mosaic paven
> And its roof was flowers and leaves. (1-4)

Tennyson writes of "Summer isles Eden lying in dark-purple spheres of sea" ("Locksley Hall," 164). In Tom Sawyer, Jackson's Island is a haven for boys seeking escape from regimentation and responsibilities. To Tom and his companions, "It seemed glorious sport to be feasting in" a "wild free way in the virgin forest of an unexplored and uninhabited island, far from the haunts of men" (p. 102). The boys, moreover, move uncomfortably close to their

blazing campfire -- although "they could have found a cooler place" -- because "they could not deny themselves such a romantic feature as the roasting campfire" (p. 102). On this unspoiled island, Tom is free to observe "The marvel of Nature shaking off sleep and going to work" (p. 106). Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" may also be included in this tradition. And in "An Island," De la Mare portrays a dying man's visionary dream of "An island, lit with beauty" (5) According to the dreamer, it seemed to be "A heart, all innocence and innately wise,/ wellspring of very love" (9-10). But the nurse of this poem, caught up in the world of work and duty, does not have time to attend to her patient's revelation. De la Mare would have agreed with J. M. Barrie's cautionary words to adults that although they "can still hear the sound of the surf," they "shall land no more" on the reef-ringed island of childhood make-believe (p. 20). Barrie also declares that "the Neverland," the ideal childhood place of fantasy and play, "is always more or less an island" -- an island off limits to adults. The only adult trespassers, it seems, on this type of dreamy isle are romantics.

Thomas is among these elect intruders. Obviously overcome by the romantic resonances of words and images, he exclaims in a letter, "What beautiful words are 'legend' & 'island.'"[19] The fetus's sphere in "Ears in the turrets hear" is a variation of the romantic island.

Within the island-womb, the fetus is secure but the external world is alien, the realm of "the stranger" (29-32). In romantic literature, the island, when emblematic of the external world, takes on ambivalent qualities. Thomas's poem is no exception: an unknown, menacing island lies beyond the mother's "thin sea of flesh" and "bone coast" (10-11). Its inhabitants offer poison or, perhaps, grapes. This tension between contraries is consistent with the romantic outlook: childhood can be marvelous or miserable; the romantic child is both victim and monarch. As easily as he promotes the island as the ideal childhood ambience, Barrie takes the contrary perspective in his introduction to Coral Island: "To be born is to be wrecked on an island."[20] And De la Mare uses the island metaphor to intimate the isolation of innocent childhood memories in the seething sea of adult experience:

> And again we are reminded of the treasure [childhood] beyond price that is sunk beyond salvage in the submarine valleys of the ocean of the forgotten of which such revivals are merely islanded peaks.[21]

However, the richness of imagery in "Ears in the turrets hear," as well as in the February 1933 Notebook as a whole, prove that Thomas recovered quite a bit of this sunken argosy.

Indeed, the poems from the February 1933 Notebook revive precious childhood experiences. But, as we have seen, many of these experiences, ruled by the view of the child as victim, are pessimistic, rather than precious.

And, developing such imagery of the child, Thomas does not work in isolation. He is not an "island unto himself" but is part of a romantic archipelago of artists.

iv

August 1933 Notebook

Of Thomas's Notebooks, the last extant one, the August 1933 Notebook, is most obsessed with the womb. Nevertheless, the contents of this notebook develop the child's relationship to the outside world with greater complexity and intensity than the earlier poems do. And it is not surprising that the depiction of the child as monarch figure becomes more frequent, when we consider this emerging importance of the larger environment. Also, the child's relationship with the universal life and death process becomes more significant. Indicative of the increased attention paid to this process is the use of the Christ child in several poems. Thomas, however, rejects faith in the otherworldly, abstract spiritual and invests belief in the body, the physical. But his faith is neither small nor trite; it remains expansive, inclusive and spiritualized, fitting Tillich's definition of faith:

> It is religious and transcends religion, it is universal and concrete, it is infinitely variable and always the same. Faith is an essential possibility of man, and therefore its existence is necessary and universal.22

And insistently, this faith intensifies the view of the

child as artist and artefact.

The child represents the poem in the second work of the August 1933 Notebook. The opening sentence indicates an artistic process:

> Let for one moment a faith statement
> Rule the blank sheet of sleep,
> The virgin lines be mated with a circle. (1-3)

"Sheet" implies paper as well as bedding; "lines" suggests verse and, "mated," "the lineaments of gratified desire." Here, Thomas is playing with what he refers to in a letter as "the womb of the pen."[23] Words such as "mated" (3), "spins" (4), and "nightseed" (5) also connote both creation and procreation. Faith in the artistic process becomes crucial if "virgin lines" are to cohere into an unity, a whole, if raw "nightseed" material is to "curdle" (5) into a concrete artistic product. Through this process, the artefact, the child testifies to the holistic nature of reality; he "tells, when the trembling cord is cut, / God shall be gods and many deaths be death" (14-15). With the poet as midwife, the poetic offspring is born complete and independent. Thus Thomas's mind expresses poetic images "of the type that Freud termed 'transference upward': as the woman give birth from the womb, so the father from his brain."[24]

The sixth poem, "Shiloh's seed shall not be sewn," develops the notion of "God shall be gods," claiming that Christ is born and reborn everywhere. Maud informs us:

> Surely it was after reading Blake's epigram "On the virginity of the Virgin and Johanna Southcott" that Thomas wrote poem Six on 29 August 1933 . . . saying that Christ is not to be born to one person but everywhere.25

The critic adds:

> Thomas's own footnote refers us to Johanna Southcott (1750-1814), a domestic servant who identified herself with the "woman clothed with the sun" of Revelations. Although sixty-four she promised to give birth to a son, the Shiloh of Genesis 49:10.26

For the record, Blake's epigram reads:

> Whateer is done to her she cannot know
> And if youll ask her she will swear it so
> Whether tis good or evil none's to blame
> No one can take the pride no one the shame.

Both Blake and Thomas deny the exclusiveness of the divine incarnation. Thomas writes:

> Shiloh's seed shall not be sewn
> In the garden of the womb
> By a salty dropsy sipping. (1-3)

Rather than being a deity made incarnate once in history, Christ, being reincarnated perpetually, is always incarnate: "From the meadow where lambs frolic/ Rises every blade the Lamb" (8-9). Like Blake, Thomas affirms that "every thing that lives is Holy" (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Conc.). Moreover, if we view this divine force as the Word or the word made flesh, we may assume that art exists everywhere. And this raw art is refined into the purity of a poem.

According to Maud, "Before I knocked and flesh let enter," the next poem, "is even more audacious, depicting the gestation and birth of the actual Christ."[27] But tragically,

"born of flesh and ghost," this being "was neither/ A ghost or man, but mortal ghost" (43-44). This alien was never a true child. He was alienated from the very beginning, before conception:

> As yet ungotten, I did suffer;
> The rack of dreams my lily bones
> Did twist into a living cipher,
> And flesh was snipped to cross the lines
> Of gallow crosses on the liver
> And brambles in the wringing brains. (19-24)

An outsider, he remains thirsty, unable to drink from "the well" of physical life "where words and water make a mixture" (32-33). Four lines were omitted from the final published version:

> A virgin was my sad-faced dam,
> My sire was of wind and water.
> Get thee behind me, my blood's tempter,
> I cried out when the blood was dumb. (49-52)

Maud makes some additional helpful observations:

> The spiritual ("wind and water") joins the animal ("dam") to make a Christ in conflict with his own physique, a conflict climaxed by the temptation in the wilderness. Perhaps another literary ancestor D. H. Lawrence (of "The Man Who Died" and "The Risen Lord") is behind this concept: that Christ was wrong to starve his physical body. His "blood was dumb" -- implying that the body wanted to respond fully to the temptation. Thus, Christ is to be pitied in that, taking on a body, he did not really become a man.28

As I pointed out earlier, he did not really become a child either. And although victimized by time, this Christ is more of a victimizer; he "double-crossed" his "mother's womb" (72) by not accepting his own physical nature.

Clearly, Maud's interpretation -- which I have adapted

and extended -- is meaningful. But the embryo carries other associations. Stating that the father who swings the phallic "rainy hammer" (11) is "a kind of god, in this case, Jupiter Pluvius," Dodsworth implies that the embryo is one of the sons of the gods, not necessarily Christ and/or The Chosen One.[29] Also, this metal worker may have some link with Blake's Los, a figure of imagination, who, by hammering away at fallen creation (including man), attempts to restore it but shapes mental chains:

> The Eternal Prophet heard the dark bellows,
> And turn'd restless the tongs; and the hammer
> Incessant beat, forging chains new & new.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Chpt. IV(b), 15-17)

Los's pounding leads only to stronger fetters; the metaphysical father's hammering is also futile. It produces a mutant creature who betrays the flesh -- and thus, in Thomas's scheme, art, the product of imagination.

The Christ figure receives a very different king of treatment in "Take the needles and the knives" where it is linked with the Mother, physical reality. And notably, the influence of Blake is even more prominent.

A prophetic voice dominates the poem:

> Take the scissors and the pan,
> Let the tiny armies lap,
> And the heralds of decay,
> At the labyrinthine pap, (9-12)

The prophetic world is wild; within it, birth becomes death:

> And a child might be my slayer,
> And a mother in her labour
> Murder with a cry of pain. (17-19)
> 30

The child is a potential murderer. Equally disturbing, the mother delivers death.

This prophetic voice seems to be influenced by Blake. The diction, rhythm, and tone are Blakean:

> In the wilderness they go
> Flesh and spirit, babe and dam,
> Walking in the evening's cool
> With the leper and the lamb. (29-32)

Although exact correspondences cannot be made, this stanza is written in a style similar to Songs of Innocence and Experience:

> Farewell, green fields and happy groves,
> Where flocks have took delight.
> Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves
> The feet of angels bright;
>
> ("Night," 9-12)

> Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
> In the forests of the night
> . . .
> Did he smile his work to see?
> Did he who made the Lamb make thee?
>
> ("The Tyger," 1-2,19-20)

The stanza also contains contraries -- "Flesh and spirit," "the leper and the lamb" -- which Blake insisted were necessary for "progression" (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 3). And, like Blake, Thomas voices prophetic concerns that are cosmic as well as personal:

> In the darkness dam and babe
> Tremble at the starry stain,
> And the ruin of the sky;
> Darkness is the dam of pain (29-32)

Heard as a pun on damn, the word "dam" heightens the sense of impending doom. Also, the word "starry" is one of Blake's favourite adjectives used to specify doom-dealing Urizenic force. "A Song of Liberty" describes how Urizen, the jealous "starry king" (8) "hurl'd the new born wonder thro' the starry night" (10), the debased Newtonian universe. Clearly, the prophetic voice speaks in a Blakean manner.

Although the speaker of Thomas's poem is prophetic, he distinguishes himself from God: "God and I will pay the sniper" (24). Nevertheless, he seems to be a son of God: "And my father was the lord" (44). This voice belongs to a Christ figure -- but one tied to the Mother, the physical principle, rather than to the Father, the metaphysical presence. The tree of Jesse turns into the "Mother root" 41). In this poem, the messianic figure is not nailed helplessly to a tree but is linked organically to one: "Mother root that shot me forth,/ Like a green tree through the sward" (41-42). Still, this figure prophesizes his death: "Slay me, slay the god of love; God is slain in many ways" (55-56).

But death can be defeated. To do so, faith in the physical is essential:

> Question: When shall root-dam die?
> Answer: When her babe denies her.
> Question: When shall root-dam grow?
> Answer: When the green leaves prize her. (61-64)

The dominion of death can be circumscribed by the expanse

of faith. Birth succumbs to death only to succeed it. The cycle can be perpetual; progression occurs because of faith in the physical contraries of birth and death.[31]

According to Thomas, this faith must be invested in the physical. Poem Twelve, "Our sun burns the morning," concludes: "For the price of Christ is paid in pain,/ And a labouring mother pays twofold" (14-15). The poet denies the concept of the fortunate fall, which holds that the fall was a blessing in disguise because it resulted in the coming of Christ. For Thomas, supposed metaphysical reward cannot compensate for physical pain -- especially that of the woman in labour who, because of the curse recorded in Genesis, will "in sorrow . . . bring forth children" (Gn. 3:16). Without metaphysical compensation, the physical becomes the centre of value, the Alpha and the Omega.

Poem Nineteen, "The girl, unlacing, trusts her breast," advances this material value, declaring that belief in the physical is fundamental on both the human and cosmic levels. Such belief changes the environment into a material sphere, one similar to those described by Wordsworth and Shelley.

For the girl's body to remain real and undefiled, she must believe in it: "Faith in her flesh maintains its shape/ From toe to head" (3-4). But if she should doubt, "a sallow ring/ Would rim her eyes and sphere her breast" (9-10). The same law governs celestial bodies:

> If the moon doubts, her dew is dust;
> If day lacks faith, it turns to night,
> And light is done. (13-15)

Here, Thomas supports Blake's claim that "If the Sun & Moon should doubt/ Theyd immediately Go out" ("Auguries of Innocence," 109-110). In Thomas's poem, mistrustful creation becomes subject to the ravages of time; death gains ascendancy. And the girl, part of creation, cannot be exempted from the dire consequences of skepticism. Should she lose conviction, her faithless "cheek" will be scarred by "time's venom" (17-18). Betrayal of the body, the physical, is unforgivable. Implacable Time will not be dodged.

Trust, in contrast, maintains a promised land, a paradisal bounty of milk and honey:

> Trust, in the first, the desert hills,
> And milk will flow along their udders;
> Let the hilly milk sit sweet
> Upon the tongue,
> And honey quiet every gut. (25-29)

As well as alluding to the land of Canaan (see Ex. 3:8,17; 13:5; 33:3), this passage describes a fusion of topography and lactating breasts, an ideal maternal world. Such a beneficent sphere sustains innocence -- as Wordsworth's Nature and Shelley's fanciful earth do. Shelley plays with a metaphor similar to Thomas's in the second part of "The Daemon of the World." There, "the fertile bosom of the earth gives suck/ To myriads" (345-6). In "Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth states that Earth has "something of a Mother's Mind" (80) and is a kind of "Nurse" (82).

Thomas's domain of innocent faith, which nourishes its trusting children with aliments of life, should be viewed as the contrary to the world of experience that poisons mother and child with "the food of death" ("From a Play," 31).

Given this vision of faith, youthful physical innocence is retained. Even if the body fails, even if "the flesh falls" (32), "Lips shall be smiling, always young" (31). The faithful one becomes united eternally with the creative cycle: "The girl, unlacing, trusts her breast:/ Forever shall the breasts give milk" (33-34). And ending with an image of an orgasmic emission, the poem insists that physical indulgence leads to metaphysical status:

> You who believe the stony hand,
> And, groaning, trust the needles' stroke,
> Shall be star-fathered on the air
> And Jack of Christ. (37-40)

When trust is placed in the physical, sensual acts are sacred, and the initiators are divinely innocent. In Poem Nineteen, the promises of the physical do not disappoint.

Like Poem Nineteen, "From love's first fever" is preoccupied with environment, innocence, and faith. Analysis of "From love's first fever" reveals that here the child is depicted as king, extremely sentient being, and poet -- figures of innocence. And however the glory of innocence is dimmed by Time, faith in renewal shines on.

From conception, "the soft second" (1), to weaning,

"the hanging famine" (5), the child lives at the centre of his world. This crown prince is doted on by an intensely maternal environment: "All world was one, one windy nothing,/ My world was christened in a stream of milk" (5-6). Even the cosmos seems to bow down to the child: "earth and sky" appear "as one airy hill" (8), which may also be a breast, and "The sun and moon shed one white light" (9), a sign of innocence and unity.

Soon, however, this precious innocence diminishes. The fall occurs when the child begins to actively explore his environment -- "From the first print of the unshodden foot" (10). With the fall, the child's world breaks up into contraries: "The sun was red, the moon was grey" (14). The sun's fire burns; the moon's has burnt out. And contraries collide: "The earth and sky were as two mountains meeting" (15).

Still, the child retains heightened sentience. This boy is receptive to the synesthesia of sensory input from the fallen world:

> And the four winds, that had long blown as one,
> Shone in my ears the light of sound,
> Called in my eyes the sound of light. (19-21)

The naturalness of the boy is exemplified by the reference to him as "The plum" his "mother picked" (25), the same metaphor used in "If I was tickled by the rub of love": "Shall it be male or female? say the cells,/ And drop the plum like fire from flesh" (8-9) of the womb.

This naturalness shifts to more of an aesthetic interest in stanzas five and six. Here, the fetus represents the poet: "And from the first declension of the flesh/ I learnt man's tongue, to twist the shapes of thought" (31-32). And, a creative poet, he reconciles death and life, finding his calling as he learns "To shade and knit anew the patch of words" (34). But not only must he come to terms with death, he must also deal with the unconscious; after all, "The code of night tapped on" his "tongue" (40).

A poet, the fetus is conscious of unity ("One womb, one mind" [42]), contraries ("From the divorcing sky I learnt the double" [44]), and multiplicity ("The two-framed globe that spun into a score" [45]). But most importantly, he is very aware of the ultimate unity of opposing realities. Rilke writes, "Never believe fate's more than the condensation of childhood."[33] Thomas concludes:

> Youth did condense; the tears of spring
> Dissolved in summer and the hundred seasons;
> One sun, one manna, warmed and fed. (48-50)

Youth may fade into old age and oblivion; but one ruling sun promises new life.

All things are reconciled under the sun. "From love's first fever" pronounces the poet's confidence in creation's ability to harmonize and unify. Despite the challenge of Time, innocence endures.

In "From love's first fever," we discover a child, who, although experiencing the outer world from the womb,

is deeply involved with universal forces. Increased intimacy with the outside world, of course, is a trend in the August 1933 Notebook, and the Notebooks as a whole. Such intimacy with the external environment requires commitment -- faith which Thomas invests in the physical. Throughout this trend, the romantics continue to inspire and influence Thomas, encouraging greater complexity of child imagery, further variations of the creative self.

Chapter II

THE PROTEAN CHILD OF THE COLLECTED POEMS

In the Collected Poems, Thomas's obsession with the womb diminishes and is replaced by an exploration of the outside environment. The child figure and voice indicate this trend; the child's [illegible]nt questioning and augmented energy mark this process. Thomas's focus begins to shift from the embryo enveloped by the womb to the imaginative child interacting freely and often fiercely with an external landscape. Gradually, the poet starts to speak more as a thoughtful adult and parent, rather than merely recreating the convoluted world of himself as embryo. Thomas's portraits of the child become more complex, more objective, and, arguably, more convincing. Depicting a complex child at home in the outside world requires trust in that world. Consequently, the fact that the poetic concept of faith initiated in The Notebooks stays important does not come as a surprise. And this theme of belief becomes more powerful and profound with the shifts in focus from womb to outer world to, eventually, an external sphere charged with a mystical Presence. Romantic models are adapted to promote these shifts; Thomas's art becomes more assuredly his own. But despite these changes, Thomas's child remains quintessentially romantic. In the Collected Poems, we discern an unique line of evolution for the romantic child, and the unique maturation of a poet's mind.

To facilitate an orderly discussion of the Collected Poems, the poems selected for critical attention in this chapter will be divided into five sections: poems of energy, poems of transition, poems of dualities, "Fern Hill," and poems of intensified faith. Of these groups, the poems of energy are the most preoccupied with the child's world, quest, and point of view. Parental perspectives enter strongly in the two poems of transition. Poems of dualities are usually characterized by a "double-vision" of adult and child, and/or a tension between contraries effected by keen observation. Thomas's consummate work, "Fern Hill," reconciles and balances dualities most ingeniously. Lastly, the two poems of intensified faith advocate an expanded belief -- trust in ultimate love and visionary order. But despite the varied foci of these groups, scrutinizing the poems proves a basic development of Thomas's child imagery -- from an excitable fetus fixed in an uterine retreat, to a doomed boy king sensitive only to the self and splendid offerings of his domain, to the sleeping daughter served with a mystical summons.

i

Poems of Energy

Five early poems -- "My world is pyramid," "Why east wind chills," "Altarwise by owl-light" (iv), "How shall my

animal," and "Today, this insect"-- all portray children as energetic creatures. These children are, for the most part, vociferous questioners, seeking knowledge about larger truths such as mortality. And, arguably, they are more inquisitive than the lordly children of later poems such as "Fern Hill." Furthermore, here, as in the August 1930 Notebook, these children often make their inquiries from the relative security of the womb. Many of the questions deal with aesthetics; indeed, the child often represents an artefact, the poem. And, because various contraries are also investigated by these questioners, identifying the impact of Blake becomes an important objective. Finally, to back up my assertion that Thomas's treatment of the child becomes more objective, I will present examples of conscientious distinctions made by the poet between himself and the subject, between the author and central image.

"My world is pyramid," a poem Maud estimates was written between April 1934 and December 18, 1938,[1] raises questions about the external environment. In part one of the poem, the poet speculates about mortality and aesthetics. The embryo's queries, in part two, are based on the same themes but deal with vivid Blakean contraries. Through his dynamic language, the fetus reveals himself to be a king and an artefact. Also, the embryo's questioning, which marks his first forays beyond the womb, has, by its nature, an aggressive quality that helps assert an

independent identity. Canetti affirms rather bluntly that "All questioning is a forcible intrusion."[2]

The poet does the questioning in the first part of the poem, "What colour is glory? death's feather?" (25) Then, apparently, he declares that glory and death

> The halves that pierce the pin's point in the tremble air
> And prick the thumb-stained heaven through the thimble. (25-27)

Given the references to mortality -- "death's feather" -- and resurrection -- "glory" -- one could assume that these questions are anxiety-ridden, potentially futile cries reflecting a mind troubled by the odds and conditions of precarious survival. Canetti comments on this disturbing type of inquiry:

> Perhaps the most important question of all is about the future; certainly it is one charged with tremendous urgency. But the gods to whom it is directed are not obliged to answer.[3]

On another level, however, the questions posed by the poet are concerned with aesthetics. I interpret "colour" to mean, roughly, "artistic quality," following the apparent meaning of the opening and entitling line from another poem, "Once it was the colour of saying." For Thomas, such colour can imbue a world. And glory is the end of the artist. Falling from the vaulting body, "death's feather" implies the inevitable, although perhaps ephemeral, loss of imagination. It is as emblematic as a plume from Icarus's wings. The line, "The halves that

pierce the pin's point in the air," suggests artistic as well as biological conception. As an unit and independently, these aesthetic and inquiring lines explore and emerge from creative ferment.

But relentlessly, conception leads to degeneration. Alluding to the children's fairy tale, "The Sleeping Beauty," Thomas adds that the agencies that inspire the "halves" to combine to form a whole also "prick the thumb-stained heaven through the thimble" (27). There is no invulnerable guard against death. But the quasi-comatose princess of the fairy tale regained life. Through this allusion, Thomas, the neoromantic and friend to fantasy, intimates the possiblity of renewal. And perhaps the poem could be a sleeping beauty to be awakened by an attentive reader.

Death and life continue to be contrasted and combined in the second part of the poem. Korg argues that the second section "identifies conception with death . . . through the speech of the embryo."[4] Since, on one level, the child represents the poem and art generally, the poem speaks in a very dramatic way to the readers. This aesthetic interpretation becomes more meaningful when we remember that in a letter of 1934, Thomas refers to "the womb of the pen,"[5] and that his romantic predecessor, Shelley, likens art to "a child in the mother's womb."[6]

Aesthetic and ambivalent language opens the second

part. The embryonic poem pronounces, "My world is pyramid" (31). "Pyramid," of course, means tomb; Shelley calls his son's grave a "pyramid" ("To William Shelley" [1819], 6). But the word also implies eternity. Also, its very shape suggests creative or "phallic" energy. A sort of womb-tomb, this pyramid brings to mind the ambivalent Egyptian monument that preserves a kind of life-in-death. And housed in this structure, the fetus establishes himself as mortal/immortal pharaoh, a sacred king.

Ensuing lines add to the ambiguity, exhibiting Blakean contraries. Line thirty-four, "My Egypt's armour buckling in its sheet," is particularly well-handled. "Buckling" carries the dual meanings of "falling apart" and "joining together," degeneration and union. "Sheet" intimates page, bedding, and burial wrap. Insinuating amorous as well as martial arts, "armour" bolsters the line's ambiguity. The values of Venus, Mars, Pluto, and Vulcan intertwine. An aggressive generative force combats the contrary power of decay. Simply, the influence of that master of contraries, William Blake, can be read in a word, "starry" (35) [see p. 42 of this thesis]; but the most balanced line of Blakean contraries is "My world is cypress and an English valley" (37). Cypress suggests death; English valley, as womb symbol and image of "green," implies fertility, new life.

The "dead house garden" (45) maintains the symbolic value of the cypress: death. Ironically, however, this garden, connected to a house, also symbolizes the womb.

Also, like Eden, it seems to be placed at the centre of a larger world. But although irrigated by "the crossing Jordan,/ The Arctic scut, and basin of the South" (43-44), this environment is not rejuvenated. Death has entered the garden, making it a "grave" (43). Entombed in the womb, the child cries out.

Interpreted aesthetically, the garden metaphor is not as pessimistic: it intimates the withdrawal of the imagination from the poem. As the parental imagination "dies," its offspring, the work of art, is being born. A poem, like a child, must stand on its own. And, to help support this type of interpretation, I should point out that elsewhere Thomas granted an aesthetic value to his garden metaphor, such as in the early short story, "A Prospect of the Sea," where the boy has a marvellous dream: "the pages were gardens, the built words were trees, and Eden grew above him into Eden.[7]

Still, life persists; the embryonic artefact's questions reveal its energy: "Who blows death's feather? & What glory is colour?" (55) Questioning, the child prepares to move from womb-tomb to outside world, which is also vulnerable to death. Similarly, the poetic process is poised on the point of completion, a sort of death, that may also bring a kind of perpetuity as a work of art. This balancing of contraries -- death and life, old environment and new condition -- continues right up to the end of the

poem: "The secret child, I shift about the sea/ Dry in the half-tracked thigh" (59-60). In "My world is pyramid," the child's energetic questioning leads to an apprehension of difficult contraries.

Questioning is also an important theme in "Why east wind chills," a poem written on December eighteenth, 1930, but revised extensively sometime in 1936. Unlike the embryo of "My world is pyramid," however, the children of "Why east wind chills" live outside the womb -- and their questioning seems futile. Only all-immolating death -- not life -- offers some sort of answers to crucial questions: "Why east wind chills and south wind cools/ Shall not be known till windwell dries" (1-2). Also, the concern with aesthetics found in "My world is pyramid" is not apparent here. The children's questions deal more with the natural forces that affect natural phenomena: "Why silk is soft and the stone wounds" (6). But the main point of the poem may be that childhood remains a time of intense inquiry: "The child shall question all his days" (7).

One query -- concerning mortality -- is particularly powerful. The children ask: "When cometh Jack Frost?" (7) This reference to Jack Frost, an autumnal figure of death present in nursery rhymes, makes the attempt to reproduce the childish imagination more convincing. And, like Hopkins writing tenderly of young Margaret grieving over falling mundane leaves and fallen mortal self,[8] Thomas enters into the darker preoccupations of childhood.

Posing a related question, Thomas wonders if the children can or will control their own destinies: "Shall they clasp a comet in their fists?" (11) But the possibility of them determining their future appears to be highly conditional. Emphasizing the dependent condition is the prominent placement of "Not till" at the beginning of line twelve.

Indeed, the poem's vision of the hereafter seems dubious at best, illusionary at worst:

> Not till, from high and low, their dust
> Sprinkles in children's eyes a long-last sleep
> And dusk is crowded with the children's ghosts
> Shall a white answer echo from the rooftops. (13-15)

It has much in common with Tom's dream recorded in one of Blake's Songs of Innocence, "The Chimney Sweeper":

> And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
> And he open'd the coffin & set them all free.
> Then down a green plain leaping laughing they run
> And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.
>
> Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
> They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
> And the Angel told Tom if he'd be a good boy,
> He'd have God for his father & never want joy.
>
> (13-20)

The irony of both Blake's and Thomas's lines is that the children must die to supposedly "gain" some kind of answer. This irony suggests that answers about reality discovered through death would be meaningless since a dead self would lack the vital force of life necessary to preserve knowledge for itself. A dying self has the power to "know" only briefly -- while in transition from existence to

death. In both poems, the visions of the afterlife are delusory. The "white answer" (13) is not a triumphant affirmation of sacred innocence but a beguiling distortion of the "black reply" (9), the reminder of the reality of death. Negation cannot be bypassed. The "white answer" should be viewed as an illusion as deceptive and damaging as Tom's dream of the "naked & white" (17) resurrected chimney sweepers.

A note of optimism does seem to enter with the third stanza: "All things are known" (16). But Thomas qualifies this statement drastically, intimating that knowledge of personal fate and cosmic consequence cannot be preserved or used in any lasting way. Enduring knowledge, like the fires of remote constellations, burns beyond our reach. From modern astronomy we have learned that the pale light of distant stars reaches earth aeons after its effulgent sources have expired. Perhaps Thomas uses this tidbit of modern astronomical lore to blacken his already pessimistic message:

> Though what the stars ask as they round
> Time upon time the towers of the skies
> Is heard but little till the stars go out.
>
> (18-20)

These are not stars to wish or worship by but mere illusions of illumination. Thus, nothing is truly known. The message is subtle -- certainly more ambiguous than the theme of cosmic malevolence present in notebook poems such

as "Take the needles and the knives,"

The lines cited above are indebted to a bleak romantic outlook found in the work of various authors, including Dickens and Frost. Such a gloomy attitude is revealed briefly and powerfully by young Pip, whose creator Dickens maintains his reputation as a "great master of child's vision."[9] Great Expectations, presumably one of Dickens's novels "to which" Thomas was loyally devoted,"[10] contains a very startling reflection by the narrator:

> I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude.11

The sentiment is as disturbing as that evoked by Frost in "Stars":

> And yet with neither love nor hate,
> Those stars like some snow-white
> Minerva's snow-white eyes
> Without the gift of sight.12

Stars leave us with agonizing questions:

> A voice said, Look me in the stars
> And tell me truly, men of earth,
> If all the soul-and-body scars
> Were not too much to pay for birth.13

For the romantics, creation can have a most callous face.

Not only is heaven indurate, according to "Why east wind chills," but the terrible question -- about fate, about future -- remains unanswerable. Dissolving into various echoes, the message darkens:

> And 'know not answer' and I know
> No answer to the children's cry
> Of echo's answer and the man of frost
> And ghostly comets over the raised fists. (23-26)

Reinforcing the reader's experience of echoes are: the repetition of the phrase, "know no answer"; the homophones "know" and "no"; and the long "o" sound that extends through these lines. Subject to time and bewildered by death, these children do not receive significant replies to their most searching questions. Each "Child shall question all his days." Even their counterpart, the inquisitve and imaginative poet, cannot enlighten them.

The concern with aesthetics, absent in "Why east wind chills," returns in the fourth poem of the sonnet sequence, "Altarwise by owl-light." Here, the child's questions also raise other issues. Tindall infers that "young Thomas troubles mother with embarrassing questions about sex and obstetrics."[14] Death is yet another contentious topic.

The persona, the boy Thomas, opens with a query about art: "What is the metre of the dictionary?" The next two questions deal with conception and sex: "The size of genesis? the short spark's gender?" And this talk of generation is related to the notion of poetic conception. Although such yoking may be more evident in the fourth line of the seventh sonnet -- "Genesis in the root, the scarecrow word" -- it is present in the earlier poem. For Thomas, "genesis" implies all aspects of creation. And in sonnet four, as in other works, meditation on genesis leads to morbid thought: "Shade without shape? the shape of Pharaoh's echo?"

The fourth line of sonnet four is even more puzzling than the previous lines. Tindall interprets Thomas's "'shape of age' must be four or five by now" that the "'wounded whisper' seems mother, wounded by bearing Thomas and his questions" (p. 133). Also, "wounded whisper" suggests the "hush hush" of a harassed parent trying to dissuade a vociferous boy from prolonging his interrogation. But the mother cannot stifle the child's aggressive questioning, his dynamic exploration of reality -- including genesis and aesthetics. Eventually, his questions, in their search for answers, become "hunchbacks to the poker marrow," pregnant with conceived meaning, the spark of life.

The questions continue to accumulate, leading to the assertion: "My camel's eye will needle through the shroud." Gifted with heightened sentience and a zealous desire for truth, the boy Thomas searches for answers. A Biblical allusion -- "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mt. 19:24) -- enhances the idea of rarefied perception. And the references to photography, that close the poem, seal the general impression of young Thomas as a sensitive artist who is intrigued with the broad essential issues of art/reality: creation and disintegration.

Clearly, the boy is a creator. The choice of language in this sonnet, including harsh-sounding words such as "nagging," "needle," and "snapped," strengthens the

communication of the aggression manifest in the boy's pursuit of knowledge. Such aggression indicates the surge and impulse of creative energy.

Similar creative vitality overflows in "How shall my animal," a poem based on an early notebook draft but revised extensively in 1938. Here, the environment is the mind, the womb, and a lair simultaneously; but the poem concentrates on the energetic movement of the animal from interior shelter and origin to exterior environment and expression. A child, of course, is an animal; this animal, however, also represents the poem. The question implicit in the poem's first two lines make this aesthetic value evident: "How shall my animal/ Whose wizard shape I trace in the cavernous shell . . . . ?" Thomas declares that his art, this poem, this animal, "should be furious" (6). It should be exploring the external world, "Roaring" and "crawling" (8); it ought to "quarrel/ With the outside weathers" (9). Instead, the poem is buried "under the spelling wall" (4), lost in the labyrinths of the brain. And, as the lines of poetry accrete, the fact of poetic birth cannot be denied. Thomas's poetic beast-child arrives, screaming and kicking: "You have kicked from a dark den, leaped up the whinnying light" (43). But inevitably, a violent birth becomes an omen of death; by the next (and final) line, the animal has "dug" its "grave in" the poet's "breast" (44).

The poetical child assumes the metaphorical shape of a

beast in "How shall my animal"; but the transformation of the child of "Today, this insect" is even more remarkable -- it metamorphoses into an arthropod. Analysing this poem, Tindall states that it continues the author's "constant theme: the parallel creation of world, child, and poem -- here especially the last of these" (p. 90). Founded on Tindall's basic insights, my argument also points out how this poem reflects the influence of Blake, and, like "How shall my animal," indicates a division between poet and product.

Tindall provides a meaningful entrance into this poem through the key image -- the insect. His exegesis refers to other poems:

> This insect is the problem. Thomas's "wooden insect" ["I, in my intricate image," 28], "timeless insect" [Here in this spring," 16], and "sorcerer's insect" ["It is the sinner's dust-tongued bell," 23] suggest that insect is poem; for wood is word, poetry is beyond time, and the poet is magician. (p. 90)

Also, "the insect is an intricate image, articulated, segmented . . . the result of metamorphosis" (p. 90). Korg offers a similar view:

> If we take the subject of the first two stanzas to be the process by which the Bible elevates ordinary tales into religious parables, it is possible to see the insect (which was, in the earlier version, a butterfly) as a symbol of this metamorphosis. The images of the shell and the chrysalis in the second stanza participate in this theme. (p. 92)

Tindall and Korg concur in a perspective of the insect as symbol of a literary process. But Thomas's emphatic use of

the first person pronoun, "I," which occurs three times in the first five lines, and the possessive adjective, "my," in line two, indicates that the poem is about a personal poetic process. The opening line encourages such an interpretation, insisting on a particular time, "Today," a particular poem, "this insect," and a particular environment of a particular poet, "the world that I breathe" (11). And this poetic process is centred symbolically on the metamorphic insect.

The poet does, however, separate himself from the poem, the insect. Although "This story's monster," the insect, "has a serpent caul" (10), Thomas refuses to identify himself with the embryo. Rather, he is more of a midwife; he knows how "to nudge the sentence" (4) into creative life. Distancing himself from his work, he has "divided sense" (5). But not surpisingly, the convoluted 1930 Notebook version of this poem does not make such a distinction between poem and poet. Most telling is the absence of the "insect." For Thomas, clarity and objectivity improve as he matures.

And, more objective, Thomas also accentuates contraries. When the poet initiates the poetic process, the "Murder of Eden and green genesis" is the grave result. But although "The insect . . . is the plague of fables" (9), this art is not merely destructive. It destroys to renew. A "monster" with a "serpent caul" that "breaks" its "shell" (13), it "blows Jericho on Eden" (17) to establish

a new Eden, itself. Therefore, "The insect fable is the certain promise" (18) of contraries -- death and renewed life. The growth of the poem, the insect's metamorphosis, spells death for earlier literary works including Don Quixote ("An air-drawn windmill," 20), The Iliad ("a wooden horse," 20), and the Gospel of John and/or Book of Revelation ("John's beast," 21). Finally, "the ageless voice" (22) of the poet enters directly, and promises rejuvenation. His "'madmen's love is endless'" (23). Hung on his "'cross of tales'" (26), he sacrifices himself through his poetry. Thus, directed by the author, poetry, and, more specifically, "this" particular "insect," constitute the renewal.

Further elucidation of the parallel creation theme takes place when correspondences between "Today, this insect" and poems by Blake are considered. Tindall, presumably, would support my effort: "If the insect is . . . a child, other interpretations of creator, creature, reality, and myth are possible" (p. 91). Blakean interpretations are encouraged by Ruthven Todd's assertion that "Thomas not only read Blake deeply but read S. Foster Daman's study of Blake's ideas and symbols as well."[15] Admittedly, substantial and convincing evidence that Thomas's work reflects the subtleties of Blake's ideas and symbols has not yet been gathered.[16] Still, [illegible] that I will establish between "Today, this insect" [illegible]'s

poetry suggest that Thomas consciously crafted a poem about the artistic process, and particularly, the expression of romantic imagination.

In Blake's works, the child-insect figure is not uncommon. The frontispiece engraving to For The Children: The Gates of Paradise depicts a child-larva mutation. Plate four of The Book of Thel contains a similar engraving,[17] illustrating the text:

> Then Thel astonish'd viewed the Worm upon its dewy bed.
> Art thou a Worm? image of weakness. art thou but a Worm?
> I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lillys leaf:
>
> . . .
>
> Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless & naked weeping,
> And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mothers smiles (III, 1-3,5-6).

The Blakean worm-child requires a doting mother, namely Imagination, to nurture it; Thomas's insect needs similar attention -- by the caring poet -- to achieve its metamorphosis into a complete work of art. Metamorphosis is also a key operation in The First Book of Urizen, where Enitharmon "Felt a Worm within her womb" (Chap. VI, 20). And, eventually, Enitharmon, in travail, "Produc'd a man Child to the light" (Chap. VI, 40). We recall that Thomas writes that "this story's monster," which "has a serpent's caul" (10), is identified later, when transformed, as a "children's piece" (16). Thomas's creature follows Blakean patterns of transformation.

Blake's human insect found in the epic works Jerusalem

and The Four Zoas also may have had some impact on "Today, this insect." Most succinctly, Rose paraphrases Blake's message:

> Man the human insect can never escape the womb-tomb he has woven round himself in the nightmare sleep of space-time and history, can never be hatched from the mundane egg unless the artist broods over that womb-tomb-egg in order to bring forth the winged life according to the image of imagination or divine vision.18

If man does not respond to the mental or visionary life, he is spineless: "The Human is but a Worm" (Jerusalem, Pl. 64, 12). Unimaginative "Man is a Worm" (The Four Zoas, ix, 627). Thomas, of course, does not equate his insect or serpent with unrefined man, but these symbols still represent something crude and unachieved -- namely, unfinished products of the unfulfilled imagination. For Thomas, like Blake, the artist must "awaken," enliven his work so it will realize its potential as "an image of imagination." When in "Today, this insect," Thomas affirms the poet as a redemptive force, as the overseer of imaginative metamorphosis, he is following "the path of Blake."[19]

Clearly, in "Today, this insect," the poet, as overseer, cannot be identified with the poem, "the insect." As we have seen, the artist also is pointedly separated from the artefact in "How shall my animal," "Why east wind chills," and even "My world is pyramid." In "My world is pyramid," the adult poet's voice is assigned to part one,

and the voice belonging to the child, who on one level represents the poem, dominates the second part. Throughout "Why east wind chills," the poet documents the mortal cry of the children -- who are not emblematic of anything as lasting as art. And the poet of "How shall my animal," as creator and owner of the bestial child-poem, struggles to hold himself apart from the anarchic creature. The battle, in the end, is not successful; eventually, the beast digs its "grave" in the author's chest (44). Indeed, "How shall my animal" exemplifies Thomas's laborious progress toward objectivity. As the energetic questioners of these poems of energy seek to break free of the womb and discover the contrary outside world, so Thomas, the creator of these interrogators, attempts to escape the shackles of subjective art and learn a more studied, impartial poetic.

ii

Poems of Transition

"A saint about to fall" and "If my head hurt" are both poems of transition. In these two poems, Thomas, now a father, tugs free of self-obsession. The real concerns of the parent override the fanciful fixations of the creative self. Thomas recognizes the most severe menaces to the child: war and poverty. Abstract threats are absent. "A saint about to fall" verifies the social tragedy of the child victim. And in "If my head hurt," a loving relationship between parent and child becomes the inspiration necessary

for combatting the cruel conditions in the world and for ameliorating the image of the child.

The concerns of a poet -- and those of a parent -- are reflected in "A saint about to fall." This poem, however, is more about Thomas's unborn child Llewellyn than about itself; it was once entitled "Poem in the Ninth Month" (Tindall, p. 170). Written in October, 1938, in a year plagued by economic depression and ominous with signs of approaching war, the poem expresses Thomas's anxiety about his child's future. The image of the child as quasi-divine, as saint secure in the heavenly womb, shatters here as the child falls into the impoverished, war-torn world. He is victimized by violence, drawn into "A thundering bullring" from his "silent and girl-circled island" (51). Undeniably, Thomas's art has evolved. Here the external world's threat is apparent, unlike the ill-defined "menace" of the outside sphere in "Ears in the turrets hear." A more mature poet, Thomas comes to terms with the climate of anxiety and poverty while continuing a romantic pessimism like that voiced by Emerson: "When each comes forth from his mother's womb, the gates of gifts close behind him."[20] The Welsh poet does not retreat from reality.

Increased realism is also evident in "If my head hurt," written in March, 1939, about two months after Llewelyn's birth (Tindall, p. 173). Although the poem consists of a highly stylized and rhetorical dialogue

between fetus and mother, it is still faithful to reality. It recognizes the pain endured by the mother in labour as well as the shock suffered by the child being born, avoiding the almost hysterical reaction we find in the notebook poem "From A Play." Tindall points out that the portrayal of the mother in "If my head hurt" "is a step forward -- from impersonal organ to person" (p. 173). Also drawing attention to the maturity of the poem, Korg declares that this work "has a realistic moment not at all typical of" the earlier womb poems when its "embryo offers to forgo entering the 'clouted scene' of the discordant household, and adding to" the household's "problems" (p. 106).

As well as being empathetic, the embryo is playful and energetic. Emphatic rhythm, alliteration, and repetition reinforce the sensation of energy. Spondees or near-spondees dominate the first sentence: "If my head hurt a hair's foot/ Pack down the downed bone." Conveying the fetus's fretful voice are the alliterative phrase of "head hurt a hair's," and "b" alliteration extending from "bone" at the end of the opening sentence to the "ball," "breath," "bump," and "bubbles" of the second sentence, as well as the repetition of "It," "my," and the "down" root. The unborn child's playfulness may be most evident in its paronomasia such as the fowl puns in the second stanza: "game phrases," "cockfight," "comb," "peck," and "duck."

Replying, the mother speaks in the taut, compressed

style of Hopkins -- a style that complements and helps communicate an idea of arduous self-sacrifice. Lines and phrases including "No. Not for Christ's dazzling bed" (16), "there is none, none, none" (19), and "To the anguish and carrion" (22) recall phrases from the Jesuit poet's "terrible sonnets," such as "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort" ("[Carrion Comfort]"), "there is none" ("No worst, there is none"), and "Christ not near" ("To seem the stranger"). Most willing to give fully of herself, this woman lives for her offspring. Also, she does not attempt to deceive her child about the "forever unfree" (22) state that comes with birth, but offers future refuge "At the" lactating "breast stored with seas" (27). She is able to console and comfort the "fallen" child.

Considering this dedicated nurturing by the mother, as well as the vitality of her child, thoughtful readers should expect that the fetus, despite the pain of birth, will enter the world insistently and energetically, undaunted by "the endless beginning" (30). Although suffering is inevitable, it can be overcome through exuberance. Yes, Tindall is correct to call this poem "a celebration of child and mother" (p. 173). Both voices are vital and compelling. And, through the mother's devoted care, the child becomes an initiate -- not a victim -- of the outside world.

"A saint about to fall" and "If my head hurt" should

be viewed as transition poems. Korg asserts that with these two poems

> Thomas begins the descent to earthly subjects found in "After the Funeral," in most of the poems of Deaths and Entrances, and in most of his later work generally. (p. 107)

It should be pointed out here that "After the Funeral" underwent radical revisions in March, 1938, before the transition poems about Llewelyn's birth were written. Also, the poems discussed thus far in chapter two show that "the descent to earthly subjects," especially the intensification of the child's relationship with the external environment, begins earlier than Korg maintains. Still, as we will see, a different kind of poetry emerges with the revised "After the Funeral." And "A saint about to fall" and "If my head hurt" certainly signal -- and reinforce -- a shift of priorities in Thomas's poetic. Mature perspective begins to master the provocative self. Objectivity supercedes obsession.

iii

Poems of Dualities

About the poetry "following" the two pivotal works, Korg argues that "visible realities rival cosmic vision as sources of truth" (p. 107). Stephens comments on a related binary quality of these later poems, namely, a "double-vision that unites 'child' and 'adult,' innocence and experience.[21] But in spite of unity, a marked tension of

ambivalence often remains; rival realities contend. This type of tension, however, is not a sudden and inexplicable literary phenomenon. In earlier poems, the double-vision exists in a more primitive form. The cultivated division between the adult poet and the child-poem found in the poems of energy comes first to mind. More recently, the dialogue of "If my head hurt" presents a double-vision since the two speakers are united by empathy. Therefore, with the exception of the latter poem, the dual perspective is not managed effectively by Dylan Thomas until the 1938 revision of "After the Funeral." And despite dualities such as the increase of contrary vision, correspondences with the romantics continue. Focusing on the child image of selected later poems, I will elucidate romantic influences as well as the binary qualities.

Stephens provides the most meaningful introduction to "After the Funeral," a poem that he calls "a key illustration" of the dual vision:

> The 'I' of the poem contains both the boy and his idiom, and the adult poet and his. But they are subtly inter-involved, as is the boy with the adult, the past with the present, in the continuity of experience. The 'monstrous' images look both ways, back to the wide-eyed extravaganzas of the childish imagination, forward to the deliberately used but checked rhetoric of the adult.22

Korg maintains that the poem is "a dialogue which arrives at a working agreement between the realistic and the cosmic imaginations" (p. 108). Basically, the poem consists of two alternating perspectives or imaginations -- one fanciful

and childish, the other more factual and adult. But whether the two imaginations are harmonized or not remains a critical question.

The child's sensibility animates the first nine lines. Exhibiting heightened sentience, young Thomas noticed the shape of the mule's ears, and the tapping and smack of the burial spade. His apprehension of sensory details was so acute that these memories haunt his sleep and adulthood. Because of the child's hyperactive imagination, however, the lines are phantasmagorical as well as factual: "muffle-toed tap/ Tap happily of one peg in the thick/ Grave's foot" (2-4).

From lines ten to twenty, the poet vacillates from the puerile perspective to a matter-of-fact outlook. Lines eleven to thirteen are a factual appraisal of the room in which the poet meditates:

> In a room with a stuffed fox and a stale fern,
> I stand, for this memorial's sake, alone
> In the snivelling hours with dead, humped Ann.

The drab ornaments of that dismal room reflect and reinforce the commonness of Ann's death and corpse. We must accept the reality of Ann's death. But this sober pondering inflates into a vision of her heart as a fountain flooding arid Wales (14-15). Then, in parenthesis, the more temperate adult voice interjects and alleges that the inundating heart of Ann "is a monstrous image blindly/ Magnified out of praise" (16-17). The adjective,

"monstrous," however, is not entirely negative. Like the reference to the aesthetic insect as "This story's monster" (10) in "Today, this insect," the adjective "monstrous" connotes the idea of artistic energy, the creative quality of metamorphosis, as well as the concepts of distortion and destruction. Similarly, although the adult voice claims that Ann's "death was a still drop" (17) rather than a "holy/ Flood" (18-19), it does not deny her significance; in fact, she stays significant because her death was quiet and ordinary, unavoidably real, and, in a way, sacred. After all, in "A Refusal to Mourn," Thomas discovers holiness in "the round/ Zion of the water bead" (7-8). To see eternity in a drop of water is not improbable. For Thomas, the commonplace can be transfigured through art.[23]

Transfiguration occurs in lines twenty-one to twenty-six when the young bardic Thomas invokes creation to celebrate Ann. As the invocation intensifies, the imagery expands outward. The dingy room ornaments metamorphose into "ferned and foxy woods" (24). High-flying birds bless the death of Ann.

The next eight lines check the rhetorical onslaught. Thomas contrasts the sanctified Ann with the actual woman:

> Her flesh was meek as milk but this skyward statue
> With the wild breast and blessed and giant skull
> Is carved from her in a room with a wet window
>
> (27-29)

Most compelling and direct is the image of Ann's hands:

"her scrubbed and sour humble hands" (31). Seized with rigor mortis, those hands "Lie with religion in their cramp" (32). "Lie," here, is a "loaded" word. A witty pun, it questions religious consolation and the sacrosanct aspect of Ann. Thus, adult irony brings Ann down to earth.

For its conclusion, however, the poem returns to a rhetorical/ rapturous mode. Ann is established as grandly statuesque. Her hands become monumental -- "cloud-sopped" and "marble" (36). This image of Ann assaults the poet's senses until mundane objects are transfigured by the imagination, "until/ The stuffed lung of the fox twitch and cry Love/ And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill" (38-40). Like the Blakean "Seeds of Beauty" (Jerusalem, pl. 85, 9), these spores indicate the resurgence of imaginative life. Through Thomas's two-fold imagination, Ann's death becomes an occasion for the birth of exuberantly elegiac art.

The danger that remains, however, is that with the highly stylized conclusion, the death of Ann may appear to be but an event exploited for the promulgation of the wildly creative self. Thus, the elegy would end up being just another poetical platform for a puerile artist carelessly magnifying reality beyond the range of decency and praise. But this egocentric ending may simply be the legacy of the February 1933 version of the poem, which Maud calls "a coldly generalized refusal to mourn."[24] There is a cold quality to the polished poem's rhetoric. Still, the

poem has very admirable qualities, most notably, the double vision, which, although not completely unified, allows both adult and child points of view. The notebook version, in contrast, offers only a rather snide adolescent voice, mouthing some quite vague and ignorant platitudes such as, "Death has rewarded him or her for living,/ With generous hands has slain with little pain" (14-15). Also, about a month before composing the notebook poem, Thomas, thinking idly about his dying aunt, wrote:

> She is dying. She is dead. She is alive. It is also the same thing. . . . There must be something lacking in me. I don't feel worried, or hardly ever, about other people. It's self, self, all the time.25

The Thomas of 1938 has come a long way. No longer is it "self, self all the time." Through memory, Thomas reaches back to recreate an Ann with the loftiness of stature which he, when a child, believed she had; and, with an observant eye, he documents her common fortitude, evident even in death. In the revised "A Refusal to Mourn," the adult and child perspectives alternate tidally, one seeking ever higher levels, the other pulling back.

Like "After the Funeral," "The Hunchback in the Park" was recovered by the poet from his Notebooks. In the revised version of July, 1941, Thomas, now a keen, more objective observer, exhibits the aggression of school age children, producing a fundamental tension between contrary views of the child. Here, the pure yet pitiless "truant

boys from town" (16) tease the slow and ponderous outcast. Essentially, these boys are like Barrie's children: "gay and innocent and heartless" (p. 220). According to the mature Thomas, as well as Barrie, innocence and hostility are both major qualities of the child's psyche. Pure gaiety and heartlessness are combined in the child. Actions expose these traits:

> And the wild boys innocent as strawberries
> Had followed the hunchback
> To his kennel in the dark. (40-42)

These innocents are not on a mission of mercy. And, because the boys are images of real children, their antagonistic stalking is all the more disturbing. Moreover, Thomas probes the dark side of the juvenile mind. The reference to the boys making "the tigers jump out of the eyes/ To roar on the rockery stones" (28-29) suggests the aggressive fantasies common among children.

The view of the child as aggressive, however, should be considered in the context of the romantic tradition. Earlier romantics such as Coleridge and Wordsworth sometimes commented on aggression in children but rarely focussed on it. Coleridge's "Fears in Solitude" states that "a child" will "Pull off an insect's leg" (105-106); but the poet does not point out any causal relationship between this behavior and war -- the bloody affair of nations that he protests against at such length. In one poem, Wordsworth provides psychological insight into juvenile belligerence -- that children are taught to be

violent and are not born assailants. The author deduces that the boys of the brutish Mr. Jones "Will all be trained to waste and pillage" ("Andrew Jones," 31-32). And, in Book One of The Prelude (1805-06), Wordsworth recalls, almost in passing, that when indulging in bird catching, "ere" he "had seen/ Nine summers," he "was a fell destroyer" in "thought and wish" (310-311, 31[illegible]). Auden, a modern romantic, is more direct, em[illegible] Blakean metaphor of predation similar to that [illegible]y Thomas in line twenty-eight of "The [illegible]ack in the Park": "At five you spring, already a[illegible] the garden."[26] Hence, Auden, a modern, shakes off [illegible]listic romanticism to the nt that he returns to the realism of Augustine, an expounder of original sin, who observed that "if babies are innocent, it is not for lack of will to do harm, but for lack of strength."[27]

The portrait of the child as aggressive also appears in other works by Thomas. As early as October 1938, Thomas was writing about violent impulses among actual children: the young rascals of "Once it was the colour of saying" "stoned the cold and cuckoo/ Lovers. In a radio talk, "Reminiscences of Childhood," that was first broadcast in 1943, Thomas recalls how he "carried a wooden rifle in the park and shot down the invisible unknown enemy like a flock of wild birds."[28] He then proceeds to read all of "The

Hunchback in the Park" to his audience. Also meditating on childhood, the father of "Lament" (1950) views his offspring as "Harpies" (56) as well as occasional "angels" (55). Furthermore, aggression among juveniles appears in Thomas's play for voices, Under Milk Wood. Because little Dicky refuses to kiss Gwennie,

> the shrill girls giggle and master around him and squeal as they clutch and thrash, and he blubbers away downhill with his patched pants falling, and his tear-splashed blush burns all the way as the triumphant bird-like sisters scream with buttons in their claws.29

A child is victimized by other children. Dicky is physically tormented by a gang of frenzied "mini-maenads." The boys, in contrast, restrict themselves to abusing him verbally; they

> hoot after him his little nickname and his mother's shame and his father's wickedness with the loose wild barefoot women of the hovels of the hills.30

And, in a matter-of-fact tone, the "Author's Prologue" (1952) refers to "boys/ Stabbing" (15). Basically, it is in the later writings that Thomas attempts to depict accurately the real behavior of children, including their aggression. The combative energy of children from Thomas's earlier poems, such as "Based on themes from Mother Goose," and even "My world is pyramid" and "How shall my animal," suggests the vitality of the symbolical offspring, the poem, more than the truculence of actual children.

"Ceremony After a Fire Raid" (1944) deals with a different romantic conception of the child -- as quasi-

divine. This poem may be viewed as an extension of Wordsworth's treatment of the child as "a supreme symbol" of "the life of the spirit."[31] But unlike "After the Funeral" and "The Hunchback in the Park," "Ceremony After a Fire Raid" does not offer a sustained realistic perspective. It is an immature product weakened by a lack of input from what Korg calls "the realistic imagination."

Initially, death is a strong presence:

> 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. (4-8)

A grandiloquent promise of renaissance, however, begins all too quickly. The poet, in confusion, celebrates "Darkness kindled back into beginning" (12). Furthermore, Thomas announces that "the dust shall sing like a bird" (22); and thus dust turns into a harbinger of holiness. Meaning is abandoned in such logically indefinite although high-sounding language. Here, Thomas's language lacks the precision of Wordsworth's proclamation, "Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows" (The Prelude (1850), I. 340).

Before continuing the rhetoric of renewal, Thomas laments the consequences of Adam and Eve's Fall:

> O Adam and [illegible] together
> Lying in t[illegible]ull
> Under the sad breast of the head-stone
> White as the skeleton
> Of the garden of Eden. (41-45)

Los, Blake's figure of Imagination, makes a similar lamentation: "For Adam, a mouldering skeleton/ Lay bleach'd on the garden of Eden" (The Song of Los, Pl. 7, 20-21). Vulnerable to the effects of the Fall, Thomas's babe seems to be one of the innumerable "dead infants" (49) -- but only momentarily.

The poet asserts that his subject is "the one/ Child who was priest and servants" (50-51). This affirmation inserts this baby firmly into the romantic tradition of the child as quasi-divine, and recalls Wordsworth's celebration of the youth as "Nature's priest" ("Intimations," 73); the conjunction "and" implies the infant's mystic inclusiveness. Also, the divine aesthetic "Word" (52) is contained in the child's being. Celebratory creation -- "Singers and tongue" (52) -- resound in his skull. And although "Beginning crumbled back into darkness" (57), new life emerges. To express this resurrection, the poem's language becomes liturgical, creating a rhythm of faith:

> The masses of the sea
> The masses of the sea under
> The masses of the infant-bearing sea. (71-73)

And spiritual deliverance overwhelms all:

> Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter for ever,
> Glory glory glory
> The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.
>
> (74-76)

With its crashing cadences, the final line summons up the flamboyant grand style Milton employs when describing the Holy Ghost, the dynamic Spiritual, as "bright effluence of

bright essence increate."[32] The infant is assumed into an unseen revivified Eden; genesis succeeds apocalypse as the poem ends with a surge of the "cosmic imagination."

Through the rhetorical language of faith, Thomas hopes to encourage belief in a redeeming life cycle. After all, as that ancient vitalist Heracleitus warned, "(Most of the divine) escapes recognition through unbelief."[33] Indeed, Thomas's art urges the recognition of regeneration. But it is difficult for the readers of "Ceremony After a Fire Raid" to make the necessary leap of faith since, to propel themselves upward, they must find a solid base of realism. No such foundation exists in this poem. Perhaps a more sustained view of the child as victim would supply the crucial contrary to rhetorical fancy, the essential grounding in realism, which would allow readers to participate more fully in the poem. Nevertheless, readers will continue to enjoy "Ceremony After a Fire Raid" as rhetorical liturgy if not as convincing poetic testimony.

Faith in regeneration, and the image of the child as quasi-divine are not as absolute in "A Refusal to Mourn." The poet appears to deny the finality of the young girl'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. (14-18)

Suggesting her heightened status are the declarative pulpit

tone of "I shall not," and the religious terminology, "blaspheme" and "stations" (as in stations of the cross). Thomas argues that a veritable elegy would desecrate her passage, and annihilate the cherished sense of her living presence in memory and creation. Somehow, she endures:

> Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
> Robed in the long friends,
> The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
> Secret by the unmourning water
> Of the riding Thames. (19-23)

Moving water, of course, connotes continuity, the flow of life, the eternal cycle of existence. Tindall writes, "Here is water to put fire out and bring seed to life" (p. 182). But at the end of the poem Thomas does not produce a puerile "spell" to counteract death as he did in "Children's Song." "A Refusal to Mourn" closes ambivalently: "After the first death, there is no other" (24). Tindall's commentary clarifies the contraries condensed in this line:

> That "there is no other" death after the first means, as the context demands, that death is followed by perpetual life: Christian heaven or natural rebirth in bird or flower. In either case "death shall have no dominion." But, whatever the demands of context and the elegiac tradition, this line is ambiguous. "After the first death, there is no other" can mean that death is death. There is no other because, once dead, you are dead for good. (p. 182)

"A Refusal to Mourn" presents only a qualified faith in renewal; but the poem's communication of the fundamental tension between the demands of death and the prospects of hope should strike the readers as honest, granting them

faith in the poem's integrity.

This tension, as advanced by the two contrary views of the child as both quasi-divine and victim, can be found in works by earlier romantics such as Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake. In Wordsworth's "Address to My infant Daughter, Dora," the baby is both an image of the divine, and a very mortal creature:

> But what is time? What outward glory? Neither
> A measure is of Thee, whose claims extend
> Through 'heaven's eternal year.' -- Yet hail to Thee,
> Frail, feeble, Monthling! (13-16)

The poet, a proud father, compares his daughter to "The second glory of the Heavens" (5), the moon:

> parallels have risen,
> Resemblances, or contrasts, that connect,
> Within the region of a father's thoughts,
> Thee and thy mate and sister of the sky.
> And first; -- thy senseless progess, through a world
> By sorrow darkened and by care disturbed,
> Apt likeness bears to hers, through gathered clouds
> Moving untouched in silver purity,
> And cheering oft-times their reluctant gloom.
> Fair are ye both, and both are free from stain.
>
> (42-51)

And attempting to overcome his fears for young Dora's health, and to deny that his child may be victimized, Wordsworth declares that Dora's smiles are "Tranquil assurances that Heaven supports/ The feeble motions of" her "life" (69-70). In Shelley's elegy, "To William Shelley," (1819), the tension produced by these contrary outlooks is agonizing and not merely an indication of parental unease as it is in Wordsworth's poem:

if a thing divine
Like thee can die, thy funeral shrine
Is thy mother's grief and mine. (7-9)

The father strains to believe that his son still lives:

Let me think thy spirit feeds
With its life intense and mild,
The love of living leaves and weeds
Among these tombs and ruins wild. (11-14)

The struggle proves to be excessive; and the poem is truncated, a cut flower. Interplay between opposing views, however, may be most dynamic in Blake's song of innocence, "The Chimney Sweeper." Alicia Ostriker argues that there are two contrary readings of this poem.[34] According to the first reading, society "enslaves children both physically and spiritually, promising heaven hereafter in exchange for obedient suffering here."[35] The street-cry "sweep" is ironically fore-shortened to "weep."[36] These children eat, work, and dream in soot. Society denies children's innocence; Tom's "head/ That curl'd like a lambs back, was shav'd" (5-6). Bitterly ironical is the ending, "So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (24). Duty confuses and kills. According to the second reading, however, the closing line remains positive. The dutiful innocents receive visions of joy and salvation. Through imagination the chimney sweepers transcend the malevolent world of experience. Coffins cannot contain them. Thus, these urchins are quasi-divine as well as victimized. Among the romantics, children inspire antithetical perspectives and intense art.

Tension between death and eternity is also present in "Poem in October." Birthdays, indeed, are often times of tension. Boswell speculates that Samuel Johnson "disliked having his birth-day mentioned" because "it reminded him of his approaching nearer to death, of which he had a constant dread."[37] Another eighteenth-century man, Pope, claims of a birthday that "'Tis but the Fun'ral of the former year."[38] For the romantic Thomas, however, the tension which he creates is far more fruitful -- and complete. He indulges in the same sort of thoughts that Wordsworth recorded in Book One of The Prelude (1850):

> Ere I had told
> Ten birthdays, when among the mountain slopes
> Frost, and the breath of frosty wind, had snapped
> The last autumnal crocus, 'twas my joy
> With store of springes over my shoulder hung
> To range the open heights where woodcocks run
> Along the smooth green turf. (306-312)

As in "Poem in October," the sweet summer of boyhood and the fall of earth coexist. Wordsworth, like Thomas, admits contraries into his world of childhood: "I grew up/ Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (301-302). Although The Prelude and "Poem in October" are nostalgic, both works nurture the presence of opposing forces. Truly, birthdays are not simple celebrations. And despite death's threat, "Poem in October" does not indicate a retreat to the confines of the womb. Tindall observes that in earlier poems Thomas

> revisited Cwmdonkin Park (e.g. "Especially when the October Wind," "Should Lanterns Shine") with its

"star-gestured" children, himself among them. (p. 184) "But," Tindall adds, in "Poem in October," Thomas "emerges from the limits of that park as from those of the womb before it" (184).

"Poem in October," revealing the power of contraries, extolls a vitally real and romantic child who rouses the coastal countryside. But although Thomas assumes the child's point of view, he checks this romantic egoism with an adult appraisal of the child. The poet recalls a regal victim.

A Christian apologist, Sir Thomas Browne, called his own life "a miracle of thirty yeares, which to relate, were not a history but a peece of Poetry."[39] A romantic celebrant of the sacred in self, art, and nature, Thomas proclaims his "thirtieth year to heaven" (1) in "Poem in October." Heaven, for Thomas, means recreating the imaginative life of childhood, when herons stalk sacerdotally (3-4) and water worships (6). The poet returns to the egoism of childhood. Birds "flying" his "name" (12), he becomes a monarch living at the centre of his world. When it rains, it is "a shower of all" his "days" (16). Thus, Thomas continues the tradition of romantic egoism exemplified by Whitman's question, "What am I, after all but a child, pleas'd with the sound of my own name?" ("What Am I After All?, 1). And this sort of self-regard, of course, is also a trait of the child-like poetical sensibility explored in Thomas's earlier poems,

such as "From love's first fever to her plague," and early stories, such as "An Adventure from a Work in Progress" in which the hero rises "like a child" from the original sea and follows "the flight of his name."[40]

In "Poem in October," however, this self-absorption is not consummate. With the tide high, transition appears to be imminent:

> High tide and the heron dived when I took the road
> Over the border
> And the gates
> Of the town closed as the town awoke. (17-29)

The poetic self has disturbed divine creation -- symbolized by the heron --and wanders beyond the walls of the closed human community. The birthday boy presents himself as an outsider. Within these lines, the first insistent tug of the negative contrary can be felt.

But the shift back to festivity is sudden:

> A springful of larks in a rolling
> Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
> Black birds and the sun of October
> Summery
> On the hill's shoulder, (21-25)

Here, "r" and "l" consonance, along with the "ing" sound, especially the participles, intensifies the energy of movement. Lastly, the isolation of the word "Summery" focuses attention on the dramatic transformation. An atmosphere of ecstasy establishes itself -- temporarily.

With the completion of the sentence, joy is checked. Thomas recalls

the rain wringing
Wind blow cold
In the wood faraway under me. (28-30)

The wind and the rain, despoiling forces of the season, imply death. The next three lines build on this intimation of mortality. Reduced by the climate of death, the world no longer is an expansive empire: "Pale rain over the dwindling harbour/ And over the sea wet church the size of a snail" (31-32).

Soon, however, the sanguine sphere is restored with "all the gardens/ Of spring and summer . . . blooming in the tall tales" (35-36) of imaginative memory. Inspiration does not recognize any "border" (37) or limit. At will, the mental traveller crosses even the confines of time. And the "weather" of poetic memory continues to "turn" toward the positive.

In the fifth stanza, the "double-vision that unites 'child' and adult'" becomes apparent. The "wonder of summer/ With apples/ Pears and red currants" (43-45) indicates delighted absorption in the sensory world childhood. By the latter half of the stanza, however, readers are quite conscious of an adult recollecting: "And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's/ Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother" (46-47). The past, although clearly perceived, is distant and somewhat unreal to the adult poet; after all, the child moves

Through the parables
Of sun light
And the legends of the green chapels. (58-50)

Nevertheless, like Wordsworth discovering "spots of time" (The Prelude (1850), XII, 208), the Welsh bard recalls and recreates the innocent ethos of childhood, a time suffused with imagination, when one may play and be in "the exact middle of a living story."[41] Moynihan argues that "Poem in October" depicts "the unfallen state" or "Edenic" state of childhood that is also celebrated in "Fern Hill."[42] And, to many readers, the fallen adult voice speaks most eloquently of dispossession.

The dual vision is more unified in the penultimate stanza. Exchanging energies, contraries are harmonized. The poet meets with his memory; recollected contraries, "the twice told fields of infancy" (51), are re-experienced. Drawing closer to the boy, the adult suffers childhood grief about mutability -- "his tears burned my cheeks" (52) -- and, presumably, is surprised by joy -- "his heart moved in mine" (52). The poet, sustaining the youthful imagination, avows nascent belief in participation. Creation reflects the boy's sense of "mystery" (58) and "joy" (56); "water and songbirds" (60) are among the boy's chorus of celebrants.

But despite these affirmations of mystery and joy, childhood stays alive only in memory; and this highly conditional existence maintains the marked tension between contraries that runs through the poem. The vital boy is "long dead" (63). Time, and climates of world and mind

continue to turn. The fervent wish that concludes the poem is understood as being all the more urgent because childhood survives only through the recollections of poetical memory:

> O may my heart's truth
> Still be sung
> On this high hill in a year's turning. (68-70)

Art captures and contains taut contraries.

Exploiting contraries, double-vision, and the romantic tradition in "Poem in October (1945)," Thomas avoids the static, highly artificial recollected world of earlier works such as "Especially when the October wind," a birthday poem in which the author describes himself as "Shut . . . in a tower of words" (1). Then, his childhood park was populated only by concepts -- "The wordy shapes of women" and "star-gestured children" (11-12). In this birthday poem of 1945, however, Thomas uses "the processes in the weather of the heart and eye" to create a clear and compelling evocation of dynamic childhood.

Perspicuous views of childhood are basic qualities of most of the poems which I grouped under the heading, "Poems of Dualities." Improved clarity, however, also results in greater complexity. Tension between contraries -- including juvenile attitude versus adult outlook, innocent versus antagonist, and child as quasi-divine versus child as victim -- complicates and refines this poetry. Here, Thomas's romantic child is both comprehensive and comprehensible.

iv

"Fern Hill"

Thomas writes most clearly and intricately of childhood in "Fern Hill." Only in part does "Fern Hill" fit the Shelleyan definition of a true poem as "the record of the best and happiest moments."[43] As in "After the Funeral" and "Poem in October," a double-vision is present. Two basic points of view -- the young Thomas's and the experienced adult's -- exist throughout the poem. Only in the final stanza does the adult view of the child as victim seem to overpower the innocent perspective, which presents images of the child as king, role player, sentient being, and kinetic creature. "Fern Hill" recapitulates these images from earlier poems by Thomas and from the romantic tradition, but clarifies and organizes them in an unique way. And, despite these contrary images and points of view, the poem satisfies Blake's maxim: "Every Poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity" ("On Homer's Poetry," p. 771). Arguably, "Fern Hill" exemplifies Coleridge's "one great principle . . . common to all" life and true art since it has the "ever-varying balance, or balancing, of images, notions, or feelings . . . conceived as in opposition to each other."[44] Achieving perfect unity, "Fern Hill" offers a new poetic vision of faith in the perpetual cycle that kills, transforms, and renews childhood.

Even in the first stanza, a degree of tension between the child's point of view and the adult's is apparent. Fowler points out that the first word of the poem, "Now," "establishes the immediacy of the childhood experience."[45] And the first line -- "Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs" -- introduces the sort of scene that George Eliot contemplates in The Mill on the Floss:

> There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in those scenes where we were born where objects became dear to us before we had known the labour of choice, and where the outer world seemed only an extension of our own personality.[46]

The poem's leisurely rhythm and imagery guide us into the innocent realm of childhood where, sovereign of all he sees, ruler of all he reaches out to, the boy reigns joyfully over his highly responsive world. Like young Wordsworth, the boy's "head hath its coronal" ("Intimations," 40); he crowns himself "prince of the apple towns" (6). He is a pastoral prince whose fiefdom consists of country orchards and fields. Indeed, to this noble figure, his principality is an extension of himself:

> I lordly had the trees and leaves
> Trail with daisies and barley
> Down the rivers of the windfall light. (7-9)

Thus, the younger self's egotism and belief in the participation of action and purpose seem to rule the day.

But this ascendancy is not absolute or permanent. "Intertwined" with the child's view and experience are suggestions of an adult perspective, such as an ironical echo:

> "happy as the grass was green" (2) has the base "happy as the day is long." A chilling irony, this; for the day of grass is not long, and "as for man, his days are as grass." (Fowler, p. 231)

as well as implying that the boy will be victimized by time, the reference to grass suggests the perpetual cyclical nature of reality in which the boy lives and has his being, and intimates an image of the boy as q[illegible] divine. This symbolic value of grass -- the denotation of eternity -- derives from earlier romantics such as Whitman, who observes, "the smallest sprout shows there is really no death" ("Song of Myself," 126). In fact, playing with metaphor, the American romantic claims that "the grass is itself a child" ("Song of Myself," ~~105~~), imaginative and exuberant, an intimate part of the cosmos. Clearly, in the context of the romantic tradition, Thomas's reference to grass is two-edged, connoting contrary points of view and imagery of the child.

Contrary values of eternity and death are further advanced by the ambivalent terms, "climb" and "golden," found in lines four and five. The "eternal" value is broached by Sister Joselyn:

> . . . some power beyond temporal activity . . . becomes explicit in the personification of the fourth and fifth lines, "Time let me hail and climb/ Golden in the heydays of his eyes."47

Also, climbing, for Thomas, implies dying. Throughout the "Altarwise by owl-light" sonnet sequence, "The child that sucketh long is shooting up" (II, 2) toward death;

—moreover, Thomas warns of the "climbing grave" (III, 2). And to climb "Golden" is not fully redemptive. As well as implying immortality, it insinuates death, the mowing of hay; "we associate green with growing grass, gold with mature hay" (Fowler, p. 236), ready to be reaped. Reinforcing this interpretation is the fact that "in the context heydey registers also as hay-days" (Fowler, p. 236). Still, for the time being, prepubescent Thomas, like the juvenile Wordsworth, retains his innocence and joy. Wordsworth describes this state thus:

> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy
> But he
> Beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy;
>
> ("Intimations," 67-71)

Thomas's contrary "golden boy," who lives in the shadow of Time, "beholds" his own "light."

Other contrary implications of "Fern Hill" are explicated by Sister Joselyn:

> The child's happy actions when he was "prince of the apple towns" took place "once below a time," obviously a reversal of the fairytalish, "Once upon a time." Here there is perhaps a suggestion that the boy's joyous life is no more substantial than the usual sort of things narrated after the "Once upon a time" beginning.48

I disagree somewhat with the argument quoted above. Rather than making the child's life unsubstantial, this echo of a fairytale opening indicates the activity of the child's imagination. Also, it intimates that until he grows to a critical point, perhaps puberty, the juvenile, lordly in

his innocence, remains beneath, untouched by, ravaging time. And the word "once" connotes the limited duration of the boy's innocence. Thus, to reassert my major point about the first stanza, an ironic adult view both checks and complements the child perspective.

This checking of the "green and carefree" (10) aspect by a golden, ironic outlook is maintained in the second stanza. Lines ten and eleven establish the atmosphere of innocence, of "singing as the farm was home" (11). In this context, the adjective "carefree" recalls the mood and language of Coleridge's "Sonnet to the River Otter" in which the poet, remembering "the sweet scenes of childhood," cries, "Ah! that once more I were a careless Child!" But lines twelve to fourteen of "Fern Hill" dispel this absolute ambience:

> In the sun that is young once only
> Time let me play and be
> Golden in the mercy of his means.

The sun dies daily; and golden, as we have seen, is an ambivalent state. Again, Thomas has expressed the restricted timespan of the fetes and sallies of childhood.

Lines fifteen and sixteen, however, link the poem with insightful romantic depictions of the child as king -- a controlling expression of the innocent imagination at play: "And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves/ Sang to my horn . . . ." Like the innocents of Blake's "Laughing Song," the young Thomas exhibits benign

egotism and belief in participation. Echos of Blake's "The Schoolboy" may also be present:

> I love to rise in a summer morn
> When the birds sing on every tree;
> The distant huntsman winds his horn,
> And the sky-lark sings with me. (1-4)

Both poems have herdsmen and highly-sensitive environments. Another such responsive sphere is described by Cythia in Shelley's "The Revolt of Islam:

> 'Woe could not be mine own, since far from men
> I dwelt, a free and happy orphan child,
> By the sea-shore, in a deep mountain-glen;
> And near the waves, and through the forests wild,
> I roamed, to storm and darkness reconciled;
> For I was calm while tempest shook the sky;
> But when the breathless heavens in beauty smiled,
> I wept, sweet tear, yet too tumultuously
> For peace, and clasped my hands aloft in ecstasy.
>
> (442-450)

A monarch innocent and apart, young Thomas's state is similar to Cythia's. Young Thomas also feels reconciled with his world, and, like Cythia, easily becomes ecstatic. Summing up the romantic position, Auden's "Alone," which was published four years before "Fern Hill" was written,[49] declares that "The child" takes "The universe for granted as" his "own" (10,12). Clearly, part of "Fern Hill" belongs to the romantic tradition that exalts the child as a monarch who claims an edenic world for his court.

Lines fifteen and sixteen, promoting the child as monarch, convey his magnificent egoism and energy. Employing the insights of Freud, Fowler discovers a connection between "huntsman's and cowherd's horns," and

interprets the corresponding lines as "a sadly amused recollection of childish omnipotence" in which the child can be "huntsman and herdsman" (p. 231). Fowler also points out an echo of the nursery rhyme, "Little Boy Blue" (p. 231). Even David Holbrook, a debunker of "Dylan," singles out these lines for praise, admiring the "breathless felicities of the rhythm" here "Where the line break" between "calves" and "Sang" "enacts the breathing into the horn."[50] Through the boy of "Fern Hill," Thomas verifies Huizinga's principle that "All poetry is born of play,"[51] and celebrates what Shelley calls "the infant spirit of melody."[52] The play and melody here, however, are expressed by a regal egoist.

The romantic child often chooses to celebrate his kingship through role-playing. And the types of role-playing illuminate the contrary nature of children. A romantic child is a mimetic artist, a "little Actor" who always "cons another part" in life's drama ("Intimations," 103). Both Barrie's "Lost Boys" and Tom Sawyer's gang pretend to be pirates and Indians. Like Wordsworth, Barrie, and Twain, Thomas reveals the imaginative capacity of the child to play roles. His prince can play any part he wishes -- huntsman and herdsman. Also, like "the truant boys from town" ("The Hunchback in the Park"), and Barrie's and Twain's boys, the holidaying child exhibits aggression in his choice of roles. But, as De la Mare instructs, "Innocence is not only a passive but an active thing, both

sword and shield"[53] Innocence and violence are not mutually exclusive; the innocent's activities, including role-playing, are often aggressive. Before writing "Fern Hill," Thomas examined role-playing -- such as in the notebook poem, "The first ten years in school and park," and the short story, "The Peaches" -- but in lines fifteen and sixteen he communicates this behavior more concisely and eloquently.

Because the noble, omnipotent role-player cavorts, his sensitive domain is roused. Blessed by this high priest, the land becomes as sacred as the autumnal scene depicted in "Poem in October."[54] The poet recalls how "The sabbath rang slowly/ In the pebbles of the holy streams" (17-18). A royal, quasi-divine boy transforms his earth.

Another view of the child arising from the innocent and holy imagination at play is the boy as sentient being. The ways in which the poet portrays the child's sensual interaction with his world suggest correspondences with romantic authors such as Coleridge, Emerson, Barrie, and, recently, Ethel Wilson. As discussed previously, Thomas's declaration,

> In the sun that is young once only
> Time let me play and be
> Golden in the mercy of his means, (12-14)

implies the "bright" qualities as well as the limitations of the "green and carefree" imagination. A passage from Ethel Wilson's novel, Swamp Angel, which was published two

years after Thomas's death, can be used as a kind of gloss on lines twelve to fourteen:

> A child is still one with reality. Nothing intervenes. The light that falls on each day is the first light that ever fell. It has not even a name but it is part of the world of his bright senses.[55]

Indeed, the "unprofaned" senses of the young Thomas are so suffused with sunlight, he becomes "Golden." Like Coleridge's "doted on" son Hartley, he is "the darling of the sun."[56] Moreover, he enjoys the magnified status extolled by Emerson. With a rhetorical flourish, Emerson insists that "the sun illumines only the eye of man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child."[57]

As well as exploring the boy's relationship with light, Thomas continues the romantic notion of the child's delight in bright colours. According to Barrie, the child's ideal world, his "Neverland," always has "astonishing splashes of colour" (p. 19). Seeking to evoke a child's experience of a marvelous farm holiday, Thomas writes of "the farm, like a wanderer white" (28), "the whinnying green stable" (35), the "sky blue trades" (42) of childhood, "the children green and golden" (44), the lamb white days" (46), and the energized world as "fire green as grass" (22). Not surprisingly, in one broadcast, Thomas refers to "the recollections of childhood" as "those every-coloured and shifting scented shoals."[58] Emerson adds, "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit."[59] And the hues here show wonder and joy. The "colour of saying"

shouts.

The child's intimate relationship with his sphere is also expressed through physical action; movement and kinetic sensation are very dominant in "Fern Hill." This boisterous boy races through and "into" his kingdom: "All the sun long it was running, it was lovely" (19). While the boy climbs and calls, the farm house is "lilting," (2) and light flows like "rivers" (9). Through action, child and environment merge. Such energy becomes irresistable, spilling over into the realm of sleep: "As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away" (24). And Thomas's insistence on the intensity of his younger self's kinetic energy recalls Thoreau's assertion about children: "their whole body is one sense; they take a physical pleasure in riding on a rail, they love to teeter."[60] The romantic child's activities are very physical, very immediate.

Although the presence of the boy in "Fern Hill" is immediate, a more detached perspective dominates the final stanza. Davies points out how syntactical usage of "and" indicates the ascendancy of the adult:

> The accumulative framework of the poem's thirty-two <u>ands</u> resurrects the child's hectic voice as an experience, something more than a notion. In the final stanza, the only one in which adult reflection is in complete control, <u>and</u> has become a tamer link-word <u>inside</u> the sentence, whereas throughout the first five stanzas it has been, ironically, a strenuous avoidance of the full-stop.[61]

The ideas expressed by the adult voice merit further examination. A mature evaluation of the boy as as casualty of time overshadows the other images of the child. But while adopting the discerning perspective, the poet is careful to insist that, although a victim, the child gains some sort of eternity through his participation in the continuous and controlling cycle of life.

More than earlier stanzas, the penultimate stanza prepares the reader for resolution. Fowler notices that the phrase, "happy as the heart was long" (38) "replaces 'day' with another suggestion of mutability" (p. 231). Also, although the sun is "born over and over" (39), "time allows" (42) comparatively "few" (43) moments of joy. Furthermore, a possible pun on the word "morning" (43) discloses the adult's lament or mourning for his lost childhood. Inevitably, "the children" transformed "green and golden/ Follow" Time "out of grace," climbing toward the grave (43-45).

The active boy, however, is oblivious to this process. Caught up in his energetic games, he "ran his heedless ways" (40). The adult voice recalls: "And nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me/ Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand" (46-47). We remember Ann's work-hardened hands, signs of the labour that leads to death, which are described in "After the funeral." Those are "scrubbed and sour humble hands" that "Lie with religion in their cramp" (31-32); and the "lie"

of religion is the denial of mortality. With the assumption of labour, the child loses his innocence. He can no longer pursue his "sky blue trades" (42). As haymaker working in the fields of Time, he reaps himself; the perspiration of his brow becomes the feverous sweat of death. By moon-light he grows toward the shadowy loft, entering the "climbing grave." Here Fowler instructs: "The moon is 'always rising' in that the process of death is continuous from birth" (p. 235). Thus, the adult voice concludes that "Time" always "held" dominion over the boy "Though" the poetic child "sang in" his "chains like the" multivalent "sea" (53-54).

The phrase, "Time held me," however, suggests care as well as control. Fowler writes:

> For time in Fern Hill is not only a reaper: he is also a father, who permits, has mercy, who 'allows,' who 'held me . . . dying,' who is feared as well as loved. (p. 241)

More mature, the writer of "Fern Hill" has come to terms with mortality, unlike the sophomoric author of "Then was my neophyte." That early poem, written during the 1930's, recalls the "Child in" the "white blood" of innocence (2), and concludes melodramatically, "I saw time murder me" (48). In contrast, "Fern Hill" exhibits an implicit trust in the processes of time. Maud's interpretation of another late poem, "In Country Sleep," also applies to "Fern Hill": "One sustaining faith is two-edged: life is given security by being bounded by death."[62] Thomas has developed his own

variation of romantic "faith that looks through death" ("Intimations," 186); he believes that the individual's death is soon negated and overwhelmed by the sempiternal cycle of life.

The child stays crucial to this "eternal" understanding of the poem. Discussing general archetypes, Jung claims:

> the child symbolizes the pre-conscious and the post-conscious nature of man. His pre-conscious nature is the unconscious state of earliest childhood; his post-conscious nature is an anticipation by analogy of life after death. In this idea the all-embracing nature of psychic wholeness is expressed.[63]

In the egoistical world of "Fern Hill," psychic wholeness means cosmic wholeness and continuity. Also, the concept of rejuvenation is bolstered by the reference to the sea, which Jung calls "the favorite symbol for the unconscious, the mother of all that lives,"[64] Moreover, a sempiternal force, the ocean was the original environment for evolving life. By affirming faith in the continuity of life, "Fern Hill" clearly has left behind the doubts and disturbing ambiguities of the early poems. The boy of "Fern Hill" was not secretive, and did not "shift about" like a guilty thing ("My world is pyramid," 59). An exemplar of trust, he sang and celebrated in his "chains like the sea."

Art encourages such sustaining faith. Thoreau insists: "the language of poetry is infantile. It cannot talk."[65] And much of "Fern Hill" sings with the green and

dying child. Too highly-charged to merely chat, it laments and lilts, lifting our spirits. But "Fern Hill" does not encourage blind faith in an eternal child. The voice of experience points out the limitations of the child caught in the all-encompassing cycle of Time.

Clearly, this voice belies the wrongheaded contrast Holbrook makes between "Fern Hill" and The Prelude: "Thomas bolts back to childhood on the steps of his rhythm. Wordsworth maturely ponders, recollects in mature tranquillity."[66] Bayley, who believes that an "air of willed simplesse and 'wonder'" pervades "Fern Hill,"[67] also does not appear to have mediated on the adult presence in the poem. Finally, the worldly view counters Rawson's contention that in "Fern Hill" "the childhood vision is nevertheless sentimentalized in a quite unWordsworthian way."[68]

In "Fern Hill," Thomas does not retreat or bolt back into childhood but reenters it imaginatively and directly, reflects on it maturely, and communicates it artfully and intensely. An honest, balanced and sophisticated work, "Fern Hill" enhances the consolation of memory praised by Auden:

> Human beings are blessed with the power to remember; consequently, to grow old means for us, not to discard but to accumulate; in every old man, there still lives a child . . . .[69]

Although sequestered east of green Eden, the adult can gaze back into the garden through the binoculars of art and

memory. George Eliot maintains:

> Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love.70

Such a transformation is recorded in "Fern Hill." With his pastoral and nostalgic poem, Thomas takes up the challenge of George Eliot's question:

> Is there anyone who can recover the experience of his childhood, not merely with a memory of what he did and what happened to him . . . but with an intimate penetration, a revived consciousness of what he felt then . . . ?71

In the process, Thomas "participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one."[72] That pleasure and pain are intertwined is a romantic convention; Keats maintains that "bliss" has for "its neighbour pain."[73] John Shea declares that "We turn our pain into narrative so we can bear it; we turn our ecstasy into narrative so we can prolong it."[74] Poets convert feelings into poetic form. And poets are consummate players. Huizinga propounds, "Frivolity and ecstasy are the twin poles between which play moves."[75] Even if the opening of "Fern Hill" seems frivolous, too "young and easy," at first, the ending is indeed ecstatic. Moreover, Thomas does not ignore the disenchantment and dispossession suffered by the boy ascending into manhood. "Fern Hill" transfigures the pain of loss, and records the joy of recollection. We know the pain expressed by "Fern Hill" to be very romantic. Harold Bloom contends that

"Romance is a journey towards home, the hero's home, though not the reader's."[76] A romance, Thomas's poem magnifies the nostalgic journey of the poet-hero through memory to his childhood holiday home. Grant tells us that "'Nostalgia' itself derives from two Greek words, nostos (return home) and algos (pain); it indicates home-sickness, a kind of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from where one belongs."[77] We belong to innocence. Nostalgia builds the ecstasy of romance which conducts us "singing" faithfully "as the farm was home." Despite what Bloom holds, "Fern Hill" makes the hero's home the reader's retreat.

In my discussion of Thomas's varied depictions of the heroic child, the impact of the romantic tradition has been made evident. The influence of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," however, deserves further attention. Fowler affirms that this ode

> was a primary model, as many echoes in Fern Hill show. The Ode's "starry night" expands into "night above the dingle starry," "The sunshine is a glorious birth" into "the birth of the simple light" and "the sun born over and over." "The young lambs" that "bound/ As to the tabor's sound" rebound in "lamb white days" and resound with calves singing to a horn. (pp. 240-241)

But Fowler's most significant point may be his assertion that "whereas Wordsworth expounds the general idea of childhood from a remove, Thomas delivers it directly and sensuously" (p. 254). Arguably, Wordsworth is philosophically opposed to the idea that the "divine"

sentience of childhood can be re-experienced. After all, for him, "the visionary gleam" has dimmed, "the glory and the dream" have dissipated ("Intimations," 56-57). Essential perceptions of childhood remain closed to the corrupted adult; thus, they cannot be reproduced in poetry. Nevertheless, through the poetic imagination, Wordsworth revives something of the world of childhood; he experiences the same sort of receptive environment that Thomas's boy encounters:

> The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
> And all the earth is gay;
> Land and sea
> Give themselves up to jollity,
> And with the heart of May
> Doth every Beast keep holiday --
> Thou Child of Joy ("Intimations," 28-34)

Wordsworth's art is more direct than both he and Fowler realize.

Other reasons for placing "Fern Hill" within the romantic tradition can be evinced by comparing the "romance" with Shelley's "The Daemon of the World." "Fern Hill" contains contraries of force and colour similar to though more subdued, than those in Shelley's poetry. In part one of the English romantic's poem, the Daemon --who waves a "starry wand" (73) -- holds sway, together with the powers of death, over creation. The colour gold is associated with destruction. Brother to Death,

> The baby Sleep is pillowed:
> Her golden tresses shade
> The bosom's stainless pride,
> Twining like tendrils of the parasite
> Around a marble column. (43-47)

Part two, however, announces the ultimate triumph of a "renovated world" (326). For Shelley, like Thomas, the "reality of Heaven" is the "happy Earth" (302). Regeneration established, "hoary giant Time" must "Render . . . up" his "half-devoured babes" (319-320). The inhabitants of earth become children to doting Mother Earth. It is a world for people: "the habitable earth is full of bliss" (360). The sea reflects the governing harmony: "the placid ocean-deep . . . rolls/ Its broad bright surges" (367-368). Although dramatic, renaissance comes slowly; it is a "gradual renovation" (404). And, as in "Fern Hill," at the centre of this concordant domain, living as monarch is "a babe" -- who readily shares "with the green and golden basilisk/ That comes to lick his feet, his morning's meal" (381-383). Creation pays homage to a sympathetic sovereign. "Golden" connotes the lasting fealty of this relationship; "green" intimates its ardour and freshness. Truly, innocence has returned to deny experience. "Ruddy children," who wear "chaplets" of "green ivy and red wall-flower," play among rusting "chains and gratings" of a ruined prison (485-489). Renewal stimulates faith and hope in the Spirit, symbolic of triumphant life. And, as well as communicating the cycle of contraries in the way of "Fern Hill," Shelley's poem pronounces an abiding faith in love: "All things are recreated, and the flame/ Of consentaneous love inspires all life" (343).

V

Poems of Intensified Faith

Belief in a universal love force is not unusual in the romantic tradition. Clubbe and Lovell instruct us:

> For a while during the summer of 1816, Byron viewed love as the great principle of the universe, and the narrator of Childe Harold III learns temporarily to live not in himself but to become 'portion' of that around him. With that he can 'mingle' and therefore he is 'absorbed' (stanzas 72,73), even as Shelley's child or poet in reverie feels as if he 'were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into' his 'being.' He is 'conscious of no distinction' between the two experiences. Such visionary union assumes a monistic universe, the essence of which is love, Endymion's quest; or as Shelley has the old man in 'The Coliseum' say, love is the 'Power . . . which interpenetratest all things, and without which this glorious world were a blind and formless chaos.'78

Also, Thoreau explains:

> Love is the wind, the tide, the waves, the sunshine. Its power is incalculable; it is many horse-power. It never ceases, it never slacks; it can move the globe without a resting-place.79

In later works such as "This side of the truth" and "In Country Sleep," Thomas considers love as more of a personal and forgiving presence than earlier romantics do. To his children and readers, the poet communicates his faith in a fatherly and exalted force of love.

Like "Fern Hill," "This side of the truth" and "In Country Heaven" encourage a comprehensive concept of faith. But these two poems ask for more than belief in the grand

cycle of regeneration. "This side of the truth" enunciates faith in ultimate love. As well as conveying love, "In Country Heaven" describes a mystical faith in universal order, a belief more declarative than the ideals promoted in "Fern Hill," and far mote profound than the physical trust praised in the early poems such as "Poem Nineteen" from the August 1933 Notebook. Nevertheless, in both "This side of the truth" and "In Country Heaven," the poetic message remains heavily affected by romantic images and understandings of the child. An important change, however, is the less self-obsessed intent of these two works. Perhaps the fact that Thomas addressed these poems to his children helps explain the more solicitous tone. During the 1940's, Thomas started giving in to the gravity of parenthood, the objective tug of reality and responsibility. But this fall was fortunate. It led to a more meditative and mature faith.

"This side of the truth," like "Fern Hill," maintains that the child in his innocence is not aware of the fall and its most terrible consequence -- death. A romantic king figure seized with egoism, the young boy cannot perceive this shadowy part of reality:

> This side of the truth,
> You may not see, my son,
> King of your blue eyes
> In the blinding country of youth. (1-4)

Hoodwinked with self-interest and self-regard in a world which he believes was created for his pleasurable purposes,

this boy, as his father did before him, sees only "the truth of his joy" ("Poem in October," 22). Such extravagant ignorance marks the vaunted freedom of the child.

However, as Thoreau states, "Truth is always paradoxical."[80] Grief must touch Llewelyn. Hence, Thomas argues paradoxically that the oblivious innocent is not free. Llewelyn merely does not know that everything is determined, and he too must die someday. Inevitably, innocence "is undone/ Under the unminding skies"(5-6). The pristine state lacks permanence. God, the unmoved Mover existing outside of Time, does not "mind" or care. Here, as in the early poem "Why east wind chills," the heavens do not grant guidance. And the boy's senses and emotions are of no assistance; he cannot escape the deterministic dictates of Time: "All is undone . . . Before" the boy can "make/ One gesture of the heart or head" (5,8-9).

In another early poem, "Should lanterns shine," Thomas complains about the uselessness of these faculties: "I have been told to reason by the heart,/ But heart, like head, leads helplessly" (9-10). As in "This side of the truth," the poet anticipates some sort of continuity, some sort of control over Time. He advises reasoning "by the pulse" (11), that is, following the impulses of blood instinct and the sensations in order to succeed in "defying time" (14). Through this primitive method, Thomas hopes to recover more

of the untainted, "timeless" condition of childhood. The conclusion to "Should lanterns shine" is a statement of faith in the "pulse" process, coltish energy, the child's kinetic powers: "the ball I threw while playing in the park/ Has not yet reached the ground" (18-19).

The faith advocated in "This side of the truth" is more sophisticated. Without declining into the puritanical pessimism of early work such as "Pass through twelve stages" or succumbing to the reactionary romanticism of juvenilia including "From a Play," Thomas points out that the state of childhood is complicated by the effects of the Fall. Still, for the mature Thomas, his son's naive egotism reflects "the wicked wish" (29) of pride that corrupted creation at the beginning of Time. But although the boy is born in sin, bound to disintegrate into dust, he is not damned:

> And all your deeds and words,
> Each truth, each lie,
> Die in unjudging love. (34-36)

Because the six-year-old does not comprehend evil, he cannot be condemned for his transgressions. Neither God nor his father will judge him. According to Thomas's poetic doctrine of faith, a loving Presence forgives "each lie" (35). The poet returns to the romantic fold; essentially, like Wordsworth's offspring in "Address to My Infant Daughter," his son is "sinless." Thomas has departed from his early Puritanism that presented the child as a brutalized victim, and embraces positive romantic

conceptions of the child. In "This side of the truth," Llewelyn is cherished by a beneficent cosmic force, not victimized by time and sin. The boy is held, not harrowed.

Focusing on the figures of the girl riding to sleep and the invading Thief, "In Country Sleep" expands faith to mystical proportions. Such a demanding task is possible because: "Religious language is not a specific language but the specific use of any language."[81] In part one of the poem, Thomas urges his daughter to believe that creation and imagination are holy, and introduces the ambivalent Thief. Part two intensifies the message of part one, offering vitalized faith in natural grace and cosmic order.

The poet begins by telling his daughter that the world of dreams and imagination does not contain any real threats. The opening phrase of the poem, "Never and never," underlines the fact that the sleeping child is moving through the dream-realm of imagination, a Neverland, and emphasizes that fairytale characters such as "the wolf in a sheepwhite hood" (5)[82] cannot harm her. She is queen of her dreams, a budding "green" poetess, a monarch. Thus, the "hearthstone tales" (2) will not become horror stories. Mistress of her imagination, she need not allow startling or frightening metamorphoses, "no goosegherd or swine will turn/ Into a homestall king or hamlet of fire" (10-11).

Moreover, as queen, she is protected by the subjects of her realm, "shielded by fern and flower of

country sleep" (17-18). Nature -- her sacred trust, her country -- remains a sanctuary: "Out of a saint's cell/ The nightbird lauds through nunneries and domes of leaves" (27-28). It watches over her, prays with the poet for her: "Sanctum sanctorum the animal eye of the wood/ In the rain telling its beads" (30-31). The loving presence in this "country" of natural objects and creatures dear to childhood, (the ferns, owls, and foxes also found in "Fern Hill") stresses the intimacy of the place. Thus, the poet describes one of "the three main types of" most intimate transcendental "experience" -- which Underhill explicates in her study, Mysticism:

> The actual physical perceptions seem to be strangely heightened, so that the self perceives an added significance and reality in all natural things: is often convinced that it knows at last "the secret of the world." In Blake's words "the doors of perception are cleansed" so that "everything appears to man as it is, infinite."[83]

Thomas writes as "A visionary" who "creates or dwells in, a higher spiritual world."[84] Within this domain, "the objects of perception" from what we call reality "have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism."[85] Father and author, Thomas enters the visionary world in which his daughter reigns and rides. The girl is guarded by an environment akin to what Yeats speaks of as "the mystical brotherhood/ Of sun and moon and hollow and wood/ And river and stream" ("Into the Twilight," 10-12). For the innocent, "every thing that lives is Holy" (Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell").

This childhood world is both fact and fiction, both reality and fantasy, a sphere of true visionary imagination. The poet discloses that "the fables graze/ On the lord's-table of the bowing grass." (35). He blesses, exhorts, advises, and comforts his daughter with the words:

> Know the green good,
> Under the prayer-wheeling moon in the rosy wood
> Be shielded by chant and flower and gay may you
>
> Lie in grace. (40-43)

Surrounded by a host of glowing words and transfigured objects, she stays safe.

Within her fantastic world, Thomas's daughter should fear neither the wolf nor the phallic "tusked prince" (37), sexual predators who, gaining power during pubescence, would shatter innocence. She is vulnerable only to the Thief; and the simile, "as meek as the dew" (38), suggests that he grants grace. We call to mind Shelley's avowal that "the soul of all" falls "from Heaven like dew" ("Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills," 316-317). No matter how far she roams, she should know herself to be "held and blessed" (45). In "Fern Hill," "Time held" the boy ambivalently -- lovingly and adamantly. It embraced him with care and complete control. Likewise, the Thief, who appears to move Time, is ambiguous. And Thomas must surrender his cherished daughter to the Thief's singular grip; to the father, she will be a "lost love" (53). Inexorably, "the Thief will seek a way sly and sure/ And

sly as snow" (49-50). Unstoppable as a seasonal force, he will claim the young girl. The sibilant pattern in the lines just quoted reinforces the idea of something relentlessly sinister and intrusive. But the phrase completing line fifty, "meek as dew blown to the thorn," reasserts the notion of the Thief bestowing grace.

Like "the thief of night" (3) mentioned in the notebook poem "Twelve," and the "Grief thief of time," this divine presence brings death. But in the work addressed to his daughter, Thomas develops the figure to the point that it implies that the inevitability of death augments faith. We recall Maud's statement that "One sustaining faith is two-edged; life is given security by being bounded by death."[36] Through the Thief, Thomas offers the same sort of reassurance that Shelley supplies in "The Daemon of the World": "Fear not . . . death's disrobing hand" because dying is "but the voyage of a darksome hour/ The transient gulf-dream of a startling sleep" (557,560-561). The English romantic proclaims:

> Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,
> That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
> And happy regions of eternal hope. (547-549)

Two other lines add emphatically: "Death is no foe to virtue: earth has seen/ Love's brightest roses on the scaffold bloom" (564-565). For Thomas, like Shelley, neither can death be a foe to faith in the continuity of life since death leads to love and hope, qualities that do not exist without faith, the first theological virtue.

Faith is the essential gift brought by the deadly Thief. Thus, he, of all the characters in "the hobnail" and holy "tales" (10), remains central. The bondsman, the taker of life, the maker of living belief, he endures. And the tale of his coming is crucial because "Myths are symbols of faith combined in stories about divine-human encounters."[87] Without the Thief symbol, Thomas could not communicate his message "For there is no substitute for the use of symbols and myths: they are the language of faith."[88] Because of this divine figure, the reader apprehends the poetic message: the Thief stimulates the cycle of Time, bringing death "as the snow falls" (56), and, just as faithfully, initiating life "as the winged/ Apple seed glides" (60-61). And undeniably, this strange purloiner has sacred qualities. Tillich affirms:

> The mysterious character of the holy produces an ambiguity in man's way of expressing it. The holy can appear as creative and as destructive.[89]

Paradoxically, the elusive and ambiguous Thief provides certainty. Life can be measured. He should be trusted.

The powers of the Thief become more apparent in part two; and in the context of the romantic/visionary tradition, their significance can be more easily verified. A new vitality enters the child's realm, making it most fervent and intensely fictive:

Night and the reindeer on the cloud above the
haycocks
And the wings of the great roc ribboned for
the fair!
The leaping saga of prayer! . . . . (64-66)

Tales of St. Nicholas and Sinbad are transformed in a visionary night. The tone is almost as apocalyptic as the second epistle of Peter where it is written that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," and that after cosmic destruction "new heavens and a new earth" will result (II Peter 3:10,13). Some sort of purgation seems to be taking place:

And high, there, on the hare-
Heeled winds the rooks
Cawing from their black bethels soaring, the
holy books
Of birds! Among the cocks like fire the red fox
Burning! (66-70)

We recall the mystical transport recorded in Yeats's "The Cold Heaven." Looking with a visionary eye, the poet viewed "the cold and rook-delighting heaven/ That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice" (1-2). As in Thomas's poem, "imagination and heart were driven/ . . . wild" (3-4). Consequently, death is not absolute. Visionary Thomas describes the "Hill of cypresses" (76) as being "surpliced" (75), decked in mystical raiment, spiritualized. In this rapturous state, a reconciliation between the opposites of death and life occurs which is not found in early poems such as "My world is pyramid." An indicative line of that early work is "My world is cypress, and an English valley" (37). Not to be denied, the Thief

makes himself known as the power behind this travail and transformation. The intensified visionary landscape signifies his presence: "All tell, this night, of him/ Who comes red as the fox . . . " (80-81).

Similar transformation, though less sustained and developed, happens in the seminal poem "After the funeral" where, transfigured by art and Ann's bard, the "stuffed fox" (11) of Ann's dingy sitting room cries "Love" (39). In "After the funeral" and "In Country Sleep," faith in continuity actively changes the world. As Tillich promises, "love and action are implied in faith and cannot be separated from it."[90] Actively, through "Illumination of music!" (82), mystical understanding is being shaped in "In Country Sleep." The Thief, lovingly messianic, effects the new "Music of elements, that a miracle makes!" (86) In the romantic/visionary tradition, music and love are linked. Shelley describes the triumphant ideal state thus:

> The inspired soul supplies
> With its own deep melodies,
> And the love that heals all strife
> Circling . . . ("Euganean Hills," 364-7)

Thoreau claims, "In a world of peace and love music would be the universal language," and insists that music is "God's voice."[91] The music in Thomas's poem, however, is quite tumultuous because the Thief is abroad, eradicating and transfiguring.

At the eye of this spiritual storm, Thomas's daughter lies asleep. Maud writes, "Sleep is a small death, and

confirms each night death's presence in the world."[92] Sleep, of course, carries a like symbolic value in the fallen world of Shelley's "The Daemon of the World": "Death and his brother Sleep!" (2) And, in Thomas's poem, the description of the child as "The haygold haired" (88) has the connotations of mortality and glorification also found in "Fern Hill." She remains a kind of sleeping beauty lying at the centre of an enlivened realm. And, as in part one, the poet maintains that she is "held and blessed" (90).

Her condition, however, is not at all static. The Thief will transform her creed along with her world. Both determined and vital, "he comes to" her "like the designed snow,/ And truly he/ Flows to the strand of flowers like the dew's ruly sea" (96-98). Thomas insists that the Thief is not anarchistic: "he/ Comes designed" (99-100). This force delivers a new kind of faith -- a consoling faith in cosmic order and perpetuity. Thomas promises that encounters with the Thief will result in mystical illumination that revitalizes belief: "And you [illegible], from country sleep, this dawn and each first [illegible] faith as deathless as the outcry of the ruled [illegible] 111). His daughter will be transfigured. But [illegible] Thief must purge away false belief. He must "steal" (100) the girl's abberant faith that he comes only to destroy her or abandon "her in the lawless sun" (105). Cleansed of

fear and false belief, the young girl will be able to sleep peacefully and wake renewed, altered by a new vital faith. Her trust in order and continuity will be confirmed again and again. According to the mystical understanding, the sun, a sign of universal order, is "ruled," not "lawless.

To his daughter, Thomas offers the same dynamic emblem of faith that irradiates the declaratory conclusions of two other mature poems. The last sentence of "Vision and Prayer" reads, "The sun roars at the prayer's end." In the penultimate stanza of "Poem On His Birthday," the poet assures himself that "the closer" he moves "To death . . . The louder the sun blooms" (91-93). He has regained the synesthetic sentience of a child. "With more triumphant faith" (97), Thomas believes in the eternal transformation of the world. The self does not come to nothing but enters the on-going cycle of creation.

Thomas's sun symbolism resembles that used by other romantics, such as Whitman, who proclaims that his doctrine of faith involves "saluting . . . the sun," and boasts, "My faith is the greatest of faiths, the best of faiths" ("Song of Myself," 2000,1097). Wordsworth depicts an allied experience in Book IV of The Prelude (1850):

> The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
> Glorious as e'er I had beheld - in front
> The sea lay laughing at a distance; near,
> The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,
> Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light.
>
> (324-328)

To be such "A dedicated Spirit" (337) of transcendental

Nature, faith must be most intense. Like Wordsworth and Whitman, Thomas believed in the sun's promise of renewal.

The chosen language of Thomas's faith throughout "In Counntry Sleep," reflects a loving concern for Creation and the daughter, rather than the promulgation of selfhood. Given this concern, the Thief cannot be "a kind of sexual incubus and reaper and raper of faith."[93] Neither can he be a mere destroyer like "the thief of night" ("Poem Twelve," 3). The Thief of "In Country Sleep" is a universal and personal force that removes false belief, and provides a consoling, rejuvenating faith. Although a monarch, the poetic child retains the fears of an actual girl, who worries that fairytale characters will haunt her. "In Country Sleep," the poem addressed to her, is an expression, reworked poetically, of a father's heartfelt desire to comfort and instruct his daughter. Throughout this poem, Thomas speaks with the voice of a caring parent, and conveys the consolation of the natural, fanciful, and mystical Thief.

Because Thomas died at the early age of thirty-nine, any discussion of the potential further evolution of the faith concept and the chameleon imagery of the child would be pure speculation. This thesis has little room for speculation. It is enough to suggest that Thomas's child would continue climbing toward Mystical concerns, and to assert that "In Country Sleep" exemplifies Thoreau's declaration, "Poetry is the mysticism of mankind."[94]

CONCLUSION

Thomas's imagery of childhood reflects the complexities of romanticism. The readers of The Notebooks and Collected Poems are offered romantic views of the child as: extremely sentient being, monarch reigning and playing at the centre of his realm, quasi-divine creature, and guileless victim. When we consider this literary heritage, the genealogy of Thomas's boy becomes most impressive. The boy's roots are undeniably romantic. Notions of childhood promoted by romantics, including Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Emerson, Whitman, Tennyson, Barrie, de la Mare, Yeats, and Auden, were profound influences on Thomas's poetry. Clearly, correspondences with these authors are strongest in The Notebooks; but as Thomas matures as a poet, he exploits romantic works to fulfill his own artistic intentions.

The maturation of Thomas's art becomes evident when we contrast the preoccupations of The Notebooks with the concerns of the Collected Poems. In The Notebooks, Thomas seeks to establish belief in an actively inquiring and creative self. This self, often represented by a fetus trapped in the womb, is usually challenged by disruptive external forces. Such "islandic egoism,"[1] however, does not persist. The developing child claws his way out of the convoluted womb of The Notebooks, moving toward the emancipating light of the later poems. Certainly, the

Collected Poems introduce a more confident and complex child living in the ambivalent outside world. Although the external sphere remains threatening, the child does not become, in an absolute sense, a casualty of the cosmos. The last poems insist that trust in ultimate love and visionary order sustains child-like qualities in the adult, offering a promise of regeneration. The ascending boy will be reborn; his climb proves to be cyclical.

Evidently, Thomas's artistic maturation and deepening faith result in the transfiguration of the various romantic faces of the child. But despite these transformations, the romantic visage of Thomas's child can always be recognized -- even in a tumultuous crowd of imagery.

NOTES

Introduction

1 John Keats, "To Richard Woodhouse," 27. Oct. 1818, The Selected Letters of John Keats, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), p. 152.

2 Dylan Thomas, "Do you not father me," Collected Poems (London: Dent, 1952)), 9-10. Further quotations of Thomas's poetry (except those from The Notebooks) are drawn from this edition. Line numbers are given parenthetically.

3 Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 29.

4 Ibid.

5 R. B. Kreshner, Jr., Dylan Thomas: The Poet and His Critics (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976), pp. 158-167.

6 Consult the Abbreviations List of Authors and Books in The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, ed. Iona and Peter Opie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. xxv-xxvii. Most of the books listed are late 18th century or 19th century publications. Also, Patrick Grant points out that because of romanticism a "reappreciation of fairy tales and ballads affected the mainstream of nineteenth-century literature . . . " in "Belief in Fantasy: J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings," Six Modern Authors and Problems of Belief (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 99.

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30 Carl Gustav Jung, "The Special Phenomenology of the Child Archetype," Psyche and Symbol, ed. Violet S. de Laszlo (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 135.

31 Coveney, pp. 31-32.

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3 Dylan Thomas "Based upon themes from Mother Goose," The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas, ed. Ralph Maud (New York: New Directions, 1966)20-25. Further quotations of Thomas's notebook poems are drawn from this edition.

4 O.D.N.R. Further nursery rhyme quotations and critical comments are drawn from this edition. Apparently, Thomas's attachment to this first poetry of childhood was not temporary. Daniel Jones relates that when the writer, near the end of his career, was "sketching the first drafts of Under Milk Wood, he showed great enthusiasm for The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, 1951," My Friend Dylan Thomas (London: Dent, 1977), p. 70.

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22 Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 126.

23 Thomas, "To Trevor Hughes," 12 Jan. 1934, Letters, p. 90.

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26 Maud, "Notes," Notebooks, p. 322.

27 Maud, "Introduction," Notebooks, p. 28.

28 Ibid., p. 29.

29 Martin Dodsworth, "The Concept of Mind and the Poetry of Dylan Thomas," New Critical Essays, ed. Walford Davies (London: Dent, 1972), p. 123.

30 Perhaps this child could also be viewed as an Oedipal threat.

31 Curiously, Thomas's concept of a continuing life cycle is not dissimilar to that held by children. Sylvia Anthony, developing Morgenstern's psycho-analytical study of magical thinking in the child, writes: "Among the various magical ideas which children express about death one may discover a certain order. When the death-concept is equated with one of the ideas which link it with the complex of birth . . . there results a belief that the actual pattern of life in time will be symmetrical, with a symmetry suggested by the common aspects of birth and death as union with and separation from the mother," in The Child's Discovery of Death (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1940), p. 167. Anthony adds that "sometimes" the child "will suggest that death is a pre-natal life" (p. 168).

32 For ease of reference, quotations of "From love's first fever" are taken from the Collected Poems. This version is almost identical to the notebook poem and lacks the awkward division into two separated parts.

33 Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Seventh Elegy," Duino Elegies, trans. C. F. MacIntyre (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), 35.

Chapter II

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7 Thomas, "A Prospect of the Sea," Adventures, p. 29.

8 Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Spring and Fall," The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 4th edn., ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 88-89. Further quotations of Hopkins's poetry are drawn from this edition.

9 R. D. McMaster, "Introduction," Great Expectations (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1965), p. xxii.

10 Caitlin Thomas, "From Leftover Life to Kill," Casebooks, p. 247.

11 Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, ed. R. D. McMaster (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1965), p. 48.

12 Robert Frost, "Stars," The Poetry of Robert Frost, ed. Edward Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).

13 Frost, "A Question."

14 William York Tindall, A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 133. Further quotations of Tindall are drawn from this edition.

15 Kreshner, p. 161.

16 Kreshner, pp. 160-161.

17 To view this illustration, refer to the fine reproduction found in William Blake, The Book of Thel: A Facsimile and a Critical Text, ed. Nancy Bogen (Providence, R. I.: Brown University Press, 1971), p. 45.

18 Edward Rose, "Blake's Human Insect: Symbol, Theory, and Design," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 10 (1968), 217.

19 Thomas, "To Pamela Johnson," circa. Sept. 1933, Letters, p. 23.

20 Emerson, "Fate," The Conduct of Life (London: George Routledge, 1886), p. 16.

21 Raymond Stephens, "Self and World: The Earlier Poems," Essays, p. 51.

22 Stephens, p. 52.

23 This belief in the power of poetry to transform is most romantic. Shelley claims: "Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed . . . . It transmutes all that it touches" ("Defence," p. 295).

24 Maud, "Introduction," Notebooks, p. 21.

25 Thomas, "To Trevor Hughes," Jan. 1933, cited in Maud, "Introduction," Notebooks, p. 21.

26 W. H. Auden, "Though aware of our rank," Collected Shorter Poems: 1927-1959 (London: Faber, 1969), 32. Further quotations of Auden's poetry are drawn from this edition.

27 Saint Augustine of Hippo, Confessions, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), I, 7, quoted in Anthony, Childhood and After, p. 106

28 Thomas, "Reminiscences of Childhood," first version, Quite Early One Morning (London: Dent, 1977), p. 6.

29 Thomas, Under Milk Wood (London: Dent, 1977), p. 55.

30 Ibid.

31 Marsh, p. 65.

32 John Milton, Paradise Lost, John Milton: Complete Poetry and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), III, 6.

33 Heracleitus, "Fragments," Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, trans. and ed. Kathleen Freeman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 30.

34 Alicia Ostriker, "Notes," The Complete Poems [of Blake] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 883.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 James Boswell, The Life of Johnson (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 842.

38 Alexander Pope, "To Mrs. M. B. on her Birth-day,"The Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt (London: Menthuen, 1965), 10.

39 Sir Thomas Browne "Religio Medici," The Major Works, ed. C. A. Patrides (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.

40 Thomas, "An Adventure From a Work in Progress," Adventures, p. 156.

41 Thomas, "The Peaches," Portrait, p. 11.

42 William T. Moynihan, The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 243-244.

43 Shelley, "Defence," p. 294.

44 Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, 2nd edn., I, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Dent, 1960), p. 181, quoted in Clubbe and Lovell, p. 154.

45 Alastair Fowler, "Adder's Tongue on Maiden Hair: Early Stages in Reading "Fern Hill," Essays, p. 243. All subsequent references to Fowler's article are indicated parenthetically in the text.

46 George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (London: Collins, 1952), p. 158.

47 Sister M. Joselyn, "Green and Dying: The Drama of 'Fern Hill,'" Renasence, 16, p. 219.

48 Ibid.

49 For these dates see John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), p. 174, and Tindall, 268.

50 David Holbrook, Dylan Thomas and Poetic Dissociation (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 97.

51 Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 129.

52 Shelley, "Fragments Connected With Epipsychdion, Poetical Works, 104.

53 Walter de la Mare, Early, p. 306.

54 These lines exemplify Huizinga's dictum, "The concept of play merges quite naturally with that of holiness" (p.25).

55 Ethel Wilson, Swamp Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 93.

56 Coleridge, Letters, #352, in Plotz, p. 71.

57 Emerson, "Nature," p. 6.

58 Thomas, "Reminiscences," Morning, p. 6.

59 Emerson, "Nature," p. 7.

60 Thoreau, "July 7, 1851," Journal, II, p. 291.

61 Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972), pp. 62-63.

62 Ralph Maud, Entrances to Dylan Thomas's Poetry (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1963), p. 114.

63 Jung, p. 144.

64 Jung, p. 143.

65 Thoreau, "February 23, 1842," Journal, I, p. 323.

66 Holbrook, Dissociation, p. 100.

67 John Bayley, "Chains and the Poet," Essays, p. 67.

68 C. J. Rawson, "Randy Dandy in the Cave of Spleen: Wit and Fantasy in Thomas (With Comments on Pope, Wallace Stevens, and Others)," Essays, p. 81.

69 W. H. Auden, "Introduction," A Choice of de la Mare's Verse (London: Faber, 1963), p. 18.

70 George Eliot, p. 53.

71 George Eliot, pp. 57-58.

72 Shelley, "Defence," p. 279.

73 John Keats, Lamia, The Complete Poems, 2nd edn., ed. John Barnard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), I. 191-192.

74 John Shea, Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography (Chicago: Thomas More, 1978), p. 8.

75 Huizinga, p. 21.

76 Bloom, "Introduction: First and Last Romantics," Ringers, p. 3.

77 Patrick Grant, "The Matter of Roots: Belief, Images, and Bodies," Images and Ideas of the English Renaissance (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 1.

78 Clubbe and Lovell, pp. 149-150.

79 Thoreau, "Paradise (to Be) Regained," Reform Papers, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 47.

80 Thoreau, "June 26, 1840," Journal, I, p. 153.

81 John Shea, Stories of Faith (Chicago: Thomas More, 1980), p. 29.

82 This reassurance becomes even more urgent when we consider Jack Zipes's statement that the fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" is "a narrative about rape in which the heroine is obliged to bear the responsibility for sexual violation," in "A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood's Trials and Tribulations," The Lion and the Unicorn, 7-8 (1983-84), p. 78. This article examines a number of the illustrations accompanying various editions of the fairy tale, developing the basic argument quoted above. Significantly, figure 11 of the article depicts a wolf in a sheepskin coat, p. 97. Figure 11 is a reproduction of an illustration by Walter Crane, Little Red Riding Hood (London: George Routledge, 1870).

83 Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 240.

84 Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 8.

85 Ibid.

86 Maud, Entrances, p. 114.

87 Tillich, p. 49.

88 Tillich, p. 51.

89 Tillich, p. 14.

90 Tillich, p. 112.

90 Tillich, p. 112.

91 Thoreau, "The Service," Reform, pp. 9-10.

92 Maud, Entrances, p. 114.

93 Eric J. Sundquist, "In Country Heaven: Dylan Thomas and Rilke," Comparative Literature, 31, No. 1 (Winter, 1979), p. 72.

94 Thoreau, "Thursday," A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, ed. Carl F. Hovde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 328.

Conclusion

1 Thomas, "To Trevor Hughes," 12 Jan. 1934, Letters, p. 87.

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