



# Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill": The Poets's Passion for Auden's Greatness

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## Abstract

The poem "Fern Hill" is interpreted as autobiographical and reminiscent of Dylan Thomas's boyhood holidays. A reading of the figurative language of the poem, the process of playing with its tropes can be the basis of right interpretation independent of the poet's life or an historical context. As the poem seeks to be persuasive and objective, it relies more on rhetorics suggesting the sufferings of the fallen poets of the thirties and the war poet of the forties owing to their wild love of the transcendental art of W.H.Auden's *Poems* (1930) considered as touchstone of great poetry and a hope for self-advancement in life. However, it is the paradoxical poems of Thomas and his vicarious poetical character that have rehabilitated and revamped the depressed poets. "Fern Hill" reaffirms and reassures the continuation of the same sceptic poetic tradition and culture which Thomas has cherished in all the preceeding and the succeeding poems. What this paper, keeping the contemporary poets's passion for Auden's greatness and glory, their dreams and destinations as focal point, strives to convey is the liberating power of Thomas's moral disinterestedness, his vicarious comic vision and his poetic process of life-in-death contrasted with the amoral aesthetic disinterestedness of Auden, his historic tradition and his poetic process of death-in-life.

**Keywords:** stylistic, nostalgic, transcendence, paradox, juvenile, mutability, and charlatanism.

## 1. Introduction

The fact that the poem "Fern Hill" is written in an adopted style, however perfect, conditions the reader's response; its paradoxical structure and its ambiguous language further hinder right appreciation. The experiment with the symbolic form of paradox -- and the poetry of Dylan Thomas is, indeed, in the nature of an experiment -- still continues to fascinate critics and poets. Cecil Day Lewis outlines the paradoxical structure and moral disinterestedness underlying the poem: "Into the crowd of your haunting fancies ... the streams, the airs, the dews ... the soldier shades and the solacing heartbeams ... you melt, and fame pursues" (*Collected Poems* 282). He disagrees with the general sentiment and compliments Thomas on the feat of Audenesque musical structure in "Fern Hill" when he says that "the whole as gracefully formed and charactered ... as a poem of your own," "that a true poet's age is truthfully reckoned ... not in years but in song," "here is a loving-cup made from verse ... for verse is your favourite of metals..." (*DCP*). What strikes the reader most is the stylistic advance achieved in a remarkably short period, the technical excellence, the magnificent rhetorical diction and versification that is evident in the poem.

Throughout his poetic career Thomas continues his search for the proper vehicle, and in the later poem *Deaths and Entrances* this search is intimately connected with his appraisal of the poetry of the past. His most favourite poem, A.E. Houseman's *Last Poems*, seems to achieve the necessary fusion of largeness and depth, but Thomas still feels an inward compulsion to attempt the Audenesque manner although his *18 Poems* is an indirect repudiation of W.H.Auden's elegant art. His renewed study of Auden's *Poems* (1930), while conceiving the later poem *Deaths and Entrances*, the grandeur "of a hawk's vertical stooping from the sky" (Auden, *Poems* 70) to which he responds with gusto, helps to revive the urge. His speculations on co-existence and fellow-feelings may have re-orientated his ideal poetic character, but his experiences during the war and the need to extricate himself from the deepening shadows of depression prompt a return to Auden. Again, as Thomas suggests, he wants at least to try to attain the artistic stature of Auden even if his poetry is to follow a different direction:

On almost the incendiary eve  
Of several near deaths,  
When one at the great least of your best loved  
And always must leave  
Lions and fires of his flying breath.... (*Poems* 47)

The question that inevitably arises is whether and how far the germinating conception is modified and alters as a result of his inward cogitations about his own poetic destiny and by the pressure of events in the intervening months.

Thomas's imitations of the grave unhurried rhythm, the deep, grand organ tone and the religious tenor are sustained especially in the first five stanzas of "Fern Hill" "to hold and interpret ... rightly" the sound and meaning of Auden's musical structure of the early poems, "the ringing pole of summer days" (*DCP* 216), "a secret look in a landscape's eye" (294). Day Lewis comments on the greatness of syntactic structure of "Fern Hill": "The whole stood up ... antique and clear ... as a cameo, from the vale. I swear ... it was not a dream" (*DCP*). The adaptation is brilliant, and a student of rhetoric and versification would find it a worthwhile exercise to watch the process closely and note where and how two styles, two contrary minds coalesce. The reader would realize also the force of the struggle through which the severe magnificence is maintained. The pattern, however, soon breaks and it is finally abandoned. The voice in the sixth stanza is very much unlike Auden's. In "Fern Hill," Thomas is not speaking with his own voice in the first five stanzas; his own voice may be heard in the isolated last stanza. But does Thomas leave the song structure of Auden unfinished like the poets of the thirties because of sheer exhaustion, or because the elegant manner of Auden and his metaphysical framework prove inadequate to his purpose? MacNeice, identifying Thomas with the comic character Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, establishes Thomas's greatness as a poet of paradoxical structure:

O master pedlar with your confidence tricks,  
Brooches, pomanders, broadsheets and what-have you,  
Who hawk such entertainment but rook your client  
And leave him brooding, why should we forgive you  
Did we not know that, though more self-reliant  
Than we, you too were born and grew up in a fix? (*Collected Poems* 256)

This takes the readers to the perplexing problem of "Fern Hill": the fellow-poets's dreaming about Auden's aestheticism and their hope for lasting song. Thomas himself answers that his dramatic narrative of a strange monologue, the *Bildungsroman* of his desolate contemporaries concludes with the fifth stanza of "Fern Hill":

And the bird descended.  
On a bread white hill over the cupped farm  
And the lakes and floating fields and the river wended  
Vales where he prayed to come to the last harm  
And the home of prayers and fires, the tale ended. (*Poems* 23)

The fellow-poets's quest for impersonal art and timeless existence reminds the readers of the lines from Houseman's *Last Poems* that has sustained Thomas in moments of distress: "What are those blue remembered hills, / What spires, what farms are those?" (Houseman 31). Moreover, the very theme underlying the poem "Fern Hill" is identical to that of Yeats's lines:

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

The central focus in Thomas's "Fern Hill" is the poets's wild love of the transcendental significance, the song pattern of Auden "who climbs to his dying love in her high room" (*Poems*). What Auden concentrates in *Poems* (1930), "prolonged drowning shall develop gills" (12), "steps forward, greets, repeats what he has heard ... and seen, feature for feature, word for word" (*English Auden* 14) and "to destroy the efflorescence of the flesh" is "to intricate play of the mind, to enforce ... conformity with the orthodox bone ... with organized fear, the articulate skeleton" (Auden, *Poems* 66), is the very emphasis that T.S. Eliot has underscored in his early poems and his critical essay: "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" (*Waste Land* 21), "a continual surrendering before the invaluable," "a continual self-sacrifice" ("Tradition" 171) and "the significant emotion" (176). Day Lewis explains Auden's elegant art of death-in-life, "that is the land of lost content ... shining plain" (*AEH*), his art of self-annihilation ascending the heights of aesthetic distance:

: A world seems to end at the top of this hill.  
Across it, clouds and thistle-clocks fly,  
And ragged hedges are running down from the sky,  
As though the wild had begun to spill  
Over a rampart soon to be drowned  
With all it guards of domesticated ground. (*DCP* 283)

In "Fern Hill," Thomas has defamiliarized the descriptive language by transfiguring the ordinary hill-climbing into a symbolic pilgrimage of pain leading to salvation and permanence. The figurative title suggests that the impact of the poem can be attributed to the effective permutation and combination of various dramatic elements into poetic unity,

“farm house in a fold ... of fields” (*Poems* 21). The phrase “fern hill” sheds its facetiousness and receives a new metaphysical import indicating both exhaustion and spiritual rejuvenation and also the force of the struggle through which the architectural structure is climbed to attain greatness. The Metaphysical poet John Donne sings: “To stand inquiring right, is not to stray; / To sleepe, or runne wrong, is. On a huge hill, / Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will / Reach her, about must, and about must goe...” (50).

During the thirties, Auden’s contemporaries, Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice are passionate towards Auden’s art song “year after year” but they “never have fathomed what instinct rides them ... round heaven’s dome like a frozen pond.” Day Lewis portrays the ordeal of their passion, their pains and tears of mortality:

They are earth-souls doomed in their gyres to unwind  
Some tragic love-triangle wherein they had mortally pined,  
When you hear those phantom, famishing cries.  
But birds are birds. No human key  
Of fond frustration unites the haunting three. (*DCP*)

In *Poems*, the Second World war poet Prince seems to be equally steeped in Auden’s poems, as it is a common practice among the war poets to quote Auden’s aesthetic distance of *Poems* as touchstone of great poetry, “your judgement ... just” and “your opulence in promises” (Prince 13). For him, Auden’s *Poems* is almost a sacred text, “pale stone tablets” both esoteric and human, offering guidance, inspiration and comfort, and answering his deepest questions in moments of crisis. The young war poet dreaming of eternal poetry under Auden’s poetic design, “like smouldering fuse, anxieties ... blindwormed his breast,” and “like a premature memory prising ... through flesh” (*DCP* 286) tries to reassure passionately, “warm the winter’s cold,” Auden’s riven heart and thoughts, “horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation” (*AEH* 10). Day Lewis points out the “bond” of “good wishes” between Auden and Prince:

It was silent here on the slope of the hill.  
But now, now, as if the wild grass  
And the wild sky had found their voices at last  
And they were one voice, there comes a shrill  
Delirious mewling, thin as air,  
A wraith-like rumour, nowhere and everywhere. (*DCP*)

Tempted between “joy” and “guilt,” “craving the sensation” and “ignoring the cause,” “self-reflection” and “some great suffering,” “prayer” and “evil,” “form” and “force,” and “the happy morning” and “the night of agony,” Prince cries “machines to keep in repair ... irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem ... from insignificances” (Auden, *Collected Poems* 308).

Auden also offers a parallel to the dying moments of Prince, his struggles to climb the aesthetic transcendence. Commenting on a poet’s “brief moment of intersection” of “the positive and negative ways through time,” Auden explains:

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

Thomas underlines “the conversation of prayer” between Auden and Prince, “dying love” and dreaming love:

The conversation of prayers about to be said  
By the child going to bed and the man on the stairs  
Who climbs to his dying love in her high room,  
The one not caring to whom in his sleep he will move  
And the other full of tears that she will be dead.... (*Poems* 126)

Of the many paradoxes that characterize the literary efforts of the poets of the thirties, one is, as MacNeice points out in the poem “The Drunkard,” the tendency to compose art song to achieve Auden’s glory. The introspectiveness that the readers note in much of their what may be called romantic poetry conflicts with Auden’s musical and objective ideals, and turns their socio-political poems into interior monologues: “Instantly and it would be permanently / God was uttered in words and gulped in gin.” Again, during the forties the war poet Prince is also haunted by visions of Auden’s structural art, “whose tongue feels around and around but cannot taste ... that hour-gone sacrament of drunkenness” (*MCP* 258). Thomas’s huge canvases of “Fern Hill” are, as it were, symbolic of an urge that the most creative poets of the thirties and the forties exhibited in varied media. MacNeice comments on Thomas’s singular, kindred spirit, his empathy with the poets’s passion for Auden’s impersonal greatness and their sufferings:

And he is separate too, who had but now ascended  
Into the panarchy of created things  
Wearing his halo cocked, full of goodwill

That need not be implemented; time stood still  
 As the false coin rang and the four walls had wings  
 And instantly the Natural Man was mended. (*MCP*)

So it is Thomas's moral disinterestedness and his comic vision, the "art of minding one's own business magnanimously" (*DCP* 41), the "human key" that "unites" the "fond frustration" of the poets of the thirties and the forties; their "lust ... becoming" his "love," his "Fern Hill." Day Lewis explains:

Something touched him. Always the scene  
 Was to haunt his memory—  
 Not haunt—come alive there, as if what had been  
 But a flowery idea took flesh in the womb  
 Of his solitude, rayed out a rare, real bloom.  
 I know, for I was he. (*DCP*)

In "Fern Hill," an art song, there is a bond of poetic empathy that effects a fusion between the "rising" poet Thomas and the fallen poets's anxieties, "fretting" and "gaunt regretting," there is a felicitous coincidence with the articulate rule and energy of Thomas's preceding poems and the defeated contemporary poets "consuming in youth's slow ordeal," the "undying fall" and "broken years." So, "Fern Hill" is "a full gamut of setting and rising" (*DCP*) according to Day Lewis.

Just as Thomas's early volume *18 Poems* is misread as a musical song of Christian vision of Creation, so his later volume *Deaths and Entrances*, especially "Fern Hill" is misinterpreted as musical structure seeking Christian Salvation for his early sacrileges. Day Lewis recasts this speculative theory:

Love enmeshed in his own folly—  
 Mischance or folly—  
 Expiates a deed for ever undone,  
 Weeps for all that it could have won  
 Of living together wholly. (269)

What is unmade and undone in the early poems is no longer regretted in the later poem. There is no paradox of wonder or surprise in the later poem but it is "a heavenly fact," according to Day Lewis, that in "Fern Hill" Thomas has "neither invoked nor faked ... any church in the air ... and little I care" (*DCP*) for the Christian parable of suffering and salvation. Contrarywise, what Thomas has made and done in the later poem *Deaths and Entrances* is a persevering quest for the redemption of his fellow-poets which has been the persistent focal point of his early and transitional poems, *The Map of Love*, *25 Poems*, and *18 Poems*. Thomas makes it clear: "In the fire of his care his love in the high room" (*Poems*). In *Deaths and Entrances* especially in "Fern Hill," he reaffirms his faith in what he has cherished the poetic tradition of Thomas Hardy, W.B.Yeats and A.E.Houseman: a relentless pursuit of parable of personal salvation and moral disinterestedness.

## 2. Reviews, Methods and Objectives

Literary critics approach "Fern Hill" with a certain hesitancy and mental reservation as the poem is a specimen of paradoxical structure, rhetorical language and a *tour de force* of the high order. All would share the unanimous verdict that the poem is "an independent major achievement" (Davies 77), a "major contribution to the development of technique in English poetry" (Ackerman 122-23), and there is no sharp disagreement over the interpretation that the poem is autobiographical, nostalgic, and reminiscent of Thomas's boyhood holidays spent in the Fern Hill, the farmhouse of his aunt Ann Jones at Laugharne in Carmarthenshire. Davies, considering the poem as "a nostalgic view of innocent childhood," "a child's psychology seems enacted in the ... very style," holds that it suggests "a floating, merging, and mixing world" (79). Elder Olsen states that Thomas recaptures "in the charming natural world of Wales, something of the lost Eden and something of a foretoken of Heaven" (20). Pointing out that the theme of the poem is "the innocence and holiness of Eden, with no consciousness of sin or death," Ackerman writes on the "pattern of sounds" (123): "a complex structure of assonance and alliteration, internal rhyme, recurring rhythms, and an elaborate consonantal harmony, provided the technical framework of the poem" (122). "The entire poem" according to Mary C. Davidow, "is autobiographical" and "tells ... of the physical, emotional, and spiritual development of the artist from childhood to young manhood" (78). And in a critical analysis, C.B.Cox remarks that in "Fern Hill" "Thomas is celebrating the divine innocence of a child" (134). On the other hand, the poem can be analysed as a self-contained unit, a symbol of conflict, ambivalence and instability as it offers simultaneous awareness of two areas of experience, the one enriching the other by parallelism and contrast, and Thomas's self-dramatization in the last stanza of the poem gives a special intensity to the effect. The poem "Fern Hill" is a self-deconstructive verbal icon in which the literal level is subverted by the figural. A reading of the figurative language of the poem, the process of playing with its tropes can be the basis of interpretation independent of the "Blue-book knowledge" ("Tradition" 297), the poet's life or an historical context. The poet's meaning is best understood when a reader concentrates on the graphic dimension of the language, "the seminal adventure of the trace" (Derrida 102), the verbal dexterity having a range of references beyond itself. A text "is a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash," "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes 149). As the poem seeks to be persuasive and

objective, it relies more on rhetorics suggesting the sufferings of the fallen poets of the thirties and the war poet of the forties owing to their wild love of the transcendental art of W.H.Auden's *Poems* (1930) considered as touchstone of great poetry and a hope for self-advancement in life. However, it is the paradoxical poems of Thomas and his vicarious poetical character that have rehabilitated and revamped the depressed poets. "Fern Hill" reaffirms and reassures the continuation of the same sceptic poetic tradition and culture which Thomas has cherished in all the preceding and the succeeding poems. Thus to understand the poem by Thomas, the reader has to have the knowledge of the poets and works that have influenced Thomas and the poets and poems that have thrown light on Thomas. This study, aiming at contributing the first metaphorical analysis of "Fern Hill" to the existing literature on Thomas's poetry, is a movement forward and backward from the poem, a participation in the movements of the signs under erasure. What this paper, keeping the contemporary poets's passion for Auden's greatness and glory, their dreams and destinations as focal point, strives to convey is the liberating power of Thomas's moral disinterestedness, his vicarious comic vision and his poetic process of life-in-death contrasted with the amoral aesthetic disinterestedness of Auden, his historic tradition and his poetic process of death-in-life.

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

The contemporary poets's glorification of the "structural power" of Auden's *Poems*, their wild love of Auden's greatness which is the central theme of the poem "Fern Hill" involves a study of poetry of the thirties and the forties, the irreconcilable warring ideas of realism and art song, subjectivity and objectivity. The first five stanzas cover the analysis, argument and discussion of the well-documented thesis on Auden's objective poetic form leading to endless interpretations of his greatness as an amoral aesthetic poet, his "magnanimities of sound" (*YCP* 160) and the last stanza, striking an antithesis, sums up Thomas's greatness as a poet of paradox and moral disinterestedness, his "deep considering mind ... into the labyrinth of another's being" (166). The first stanza introduces the working hypothesis of Prince's *Poems* cast in visionary mould, "the apple boughs" promoting the elegant structure of Auden's *Poems*, "the apple towns" (*Poems* 54) in contrast to the paradoxical structure of Thomas's *18 Poems*, "the lilting house" and its "play of structure." Prince, the soldier poet drolling in his loneliness and deriving the necessary comfort in his intoxicated love of Auden, his "patron" and "Lord" (Prince 16), in the aesthetic structure of Auden's ambiguous *Poems*, persuades the contemporary war poets, "the frozen hold ... flocked with the sheep white smoke of the farm house cowl," to snap out their love of Thomas's *18 Poems*, "the smell of hay in the snow" and his skeptical disinterestedness, "a simple and indecorous sweetness" (17) to resurrect the fallen spirit of Auden, "the stars falling cold," and not "to throw ... cypress, somber on the snow ... in this timeless grave," "snap not from the bitter yew ... his leaves that live December through" and warns them "break no rosemary, bright with rime ... and sparkling to the cruel clime ... nor plod the winter land to look ... for willows in the icy brook ... to cast them leafless round him." A creative adaptation from Houseman's *Last Poems* gives richness of meaning to many of Prince's poems, specifically a passage from "Bring, in this Timeless Grave to Throw" serving as a starting post towards all the twenty-four poems of Prince's *Poems*:

--Oh, bring from hill and stream and plain  
Whatever will not flower again,  
To give him comfort.... (*AEH* 12)

During the middle phase of his poetic career, Auden becomes more poignant and existentialistic, "fresh loves betray him," "to fresh defeats he still must move ... to further griefs and greater ... and the defeat of grief" (*Another Time* 16), "our uneliminated decline ... to a vita minima, huddling for warmth," "just breathing ... in a darkness of tribulation and death ... while blizzards havoc the garden" (*NYL* 186), "the damp tired delta where in her season of glory our ... forefathers sighed in bondage" (*ACP* 307) and "what we shall become ... one evaporating sigh" (341). The greatness of Auden declines, "his doomsdays crawled" with the emergence of popularity of Thomas, "the most powerful antidote to Auden" (Henry Treece 107). Day Lewis speaks of Auden's uncertainty and hopelessness: "All impulse clogged, the last green lung consumed, / Each outward step required the sweat of nightmare, / Each human act a superhuman strength..." (*DCP* 292). Auden's personal situation is "as depressing as" the warring outside world for there is no ray of hope for the remembrance of his poetry, "the sea drained off," "revealing, shrivelling all" and "a stranded time, neap and annihilation ... of spirit" (*DCP*). However, Prince's fervent prayer for peace and permanence of Auden's poetry stands divided between transcendental art and romantic love, passion for Auden's aesthetic heights and wildness for his own eternity, "youth's brief agony can blaze ... into a posthumous joy" (*DCP* 287).

The opening stanza of "Fern Hill" proclaims the young war poet Prince's pride of becoming a "groom" of Auden, his dream of eternal poetry "the night above the dingle starry" under the influence of Auden while his contemporaries clustering round Thomas's paradoxical structure of *18 Poems* "about the lilting house and happy as the grass was green" (*Poems*). But what the romantic reader Prince misses in his contemporaries's adaptations is their depth of speculation in Thomas's *18 Poems*. What inspires the war poets is an awareness of high destiny signifying the urgency and solemnity of the task. From the dreaming perspective Prince a young defender, "... honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns," of Auden's "structurality of structure" (Derrida 90) among his peers appears as a comic counterpart of the band of young war poets, Roy Fuller, Alan Rook, and Keidrych Rhys and it is a piece of dramatic irony and more comical still is the highfalutin invocation of fame. The rhetoric of pomp and glory, reversed in meaning and tone, is employed to convey the sense of a noble pursuit:

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs  
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,

The night above the dingle starry,  
 Time let me hail and climb  
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes.... (*Poems*)

So it is the fusion of the language of irony and fantasy and the language of metaphors, fancy and fact, “obtuse and old” and “young and supple” in the opening stanza that modifies and qualifies the meaning to demonstrate the exemplar of “Life apart from lives” (*MCP* 245), “the sympathetic pulse” and the syntactical greatness of “Fern Hill” which MacNeice acclaims as “self-explained, unexplained ... the cromlech in the clover field.” The merger and the mingling of “hands” is not due to “an abstraction” or “a given glory,” “not mere effects of a crude cause ... but of themselves significant ... to rule-of-brain recalcitrant.” (246). This is what Allan Tate writes that “good poetry is a unity of all the meanings from the furthest extremes of intension and extension” (379). It is this kind of “tension,” “a configuration of meaning” (373), “unified meaning” of the language of complexity and simplicity, the literal and the “littoral” (*MCP*) that becomes more and more obvious in the following stanzas of “Fern Hill.”

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the young poets Prince, Fuller, Rook, and Rhys heeding to the verbal melody and message of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, “... once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves,” articulate “a slave’s dream on ... bivouac hearth,” autobiographical poems as “emotion recollected in tranquility,” “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 180). Day Lewis comments on their adolescent performance:

But look, the old illusion still returns,  
 Walking a field-path where the succory burns  
 Like summer’s eye, blue lustre-drops of noon,  
 And the heart follows it and freshly yearns.... (*DCP* 219)

Though conscious of their lack of poetic pattern, their “limited objective” and future, they stand divided between the modernistic poets Auden and Thomas, “trail with daisies and barley” in choosing their model of perfection. “Lost the archaic dawn wherein we started, / The appetite for wholeness” (*DCP*). The half-satisfied lovers of romanticism remain “half-hearted” followers of modernism. Day Lewis evaluates their changeover:

Summer burns out, its flower will tarnish soon—  
 Deathless illusion, that could so relay  
 The truth of flesh and spirit, sun and clay  
 Singing for once together all in tune! (220)

After the outbreak of the Second World War Prince’s yearning for freedom, despite his unambiguous choice of Auden’s historic sense and ironic structure, is between personal love and impersonal art, between “the sighing distances beyond... each height of happiness” and “the vista drowned ... in gold-dust haze.” But his contemporaries confirm their faith in the paradoxical structure of Thomas’s *18 Poems* “as succory holds a gem of halcyon ray...” and prepared themselves to “cast image” of their joys ... beyond” their “senses’ reach” (217). In “Fern Hill,” Thomas reconciles this dramatic and dynamic movement of the war poets, the conflict of opposite experiences in a picturesque manner: “Down the rivers of the windfall light” (*Poems*). Fuller’s *The Middle of a War*, Rook’s *Soldiers*, *This Solitude*, and Rhys’s *The Van Pool and Other Poems* mimic the metaphorical patterns of Thomas’s *18 Poems* and can see little visuals, their attempt to glorify Thomas’s poetic “theme” and “his casual gems” makes a mimicry. In *Poems*, Prince’s desperate efforts to emulate Auden’s “witty taste” and “urban levities” create a pantomime. Imitating the metrical patterns of the verbal melody of Auden’s *Poems*, a legato, Prince can hear just an oral effect of staccato rhythm. Day Lewis’s paradoxical statement dramatizes the oneness of the war poets’s experience and its diversity, the fusion of heterogeneous images of verbal sounds and signs: “They are the lisping rushes in a stream-- / Grace-notes of a profound, legato dream” (*DCP*).

In the second stanza of “Fern Hill,” a similar transformation of the ludicrous into the sublime is effected in Thomas’s adaptations of the phrases of Walter de la Mare and Thomas Hardy to render the formative influences of the two different compositions of music in Auden’s juvenile poems. Thomas triumphs over the apparently conflicting elements in the experience of the juvenile Auden by unifying them into a new pattern through irony and ambiguity:

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,  
 In the sun that is young once only,  
 Time let me play and be  
 Golden in the mercy of his means.... (*Poems*)

Auden’s juvenile verses are “talking of ” the “aesthetic drills” (*EA* 194) obliterating all sense perceptions, dying into life, dissolving one’s self to attain to a higher and richer plane of existence. “So under it stand we, all swept by the rain and the wind there... (*New Verse* 5). His earlier poems “Allendale” and “The Carter’s Funeral” repeat the generality between Hardy’s “world face” and de la Mare’s “Nature ... thither” :

Little enough stays musing upon  
 The passing of one of the masters of things,

Only a bird looks peak-faced on,

Looks and sings. (*NV*)

de la Mare confesses that he can scarcely express adequately what he only dimly perceives: "When music sounds, all that I was I am / Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came..." (199) and to him life on earth is a dream and that death or extinction of personality is an awakening into reality. Whereas Hardy asserts that he cannot accept the Christian doctrine, "voices haunting us, daunting us, taunting us," "hint in the night-time when life beats low," that man can be redeemed from his miserable existence only through divine grace as it fails to recognize the positive significance of human experience and endeavour: "Hold we to braver things, / Wait we, in trust, what Time's fullness shall show" (Hardy, *Collected Poems* 78).

What is in Thomas's impersonal perception is metaphorically rephrased in the second stanza of "Fern Hill" suggestive of the juvenile Auden moving in between Hardy's personal salvation and de la Mare's Christian salvation, between "the huntsman and herdsman," between Nature's prayer sounds, the Word-centric symbolic sounds and gestures of "the pebbles of the holy stream," the slow ringing "sabbath" and the life-centric signs and sounds, the striving and stirring sounds of huntsman and the activities of actual world figured as the "singing ... farm ... home," the singing "calves," the "clear and cold" barking of "foxes on the hills" but the essential statement of Auden's juvenilia is not difficult to find:

And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves

Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,

And the sabbath rang slowly

In the pebbles of the holy streams. (*Poems*)

The young Auden emulates de la Mare's model of poetry as pilgrimage of pain, the ironic motif of death-in-life that is recurrent in his Oxford poems as well as the subsequent mature poetry in defiance of Hardy's paradox of life-in-death. Day Lewis, bringing out the death-centric and aesthetic-oriented juvenile Auden and his needs, portrays him "as a child setting out to colour a black-and-white picture book, / A priest entering into the spirit of dead ceremonial..." (*DCP* 314).

Auden, in Oxford poems written under the influence of de la Mare, "nightly under the simple stars," devotes himself to the language of gestures symbolic of the Passion and ironic aesthetic structure, "the owls were bearing the farm away." In the third stanza of "Fern Hill," Thomas depicts the Oxford Auden playing the role of a priest interpreting Christ's Crucifixion as an archetype of self-sacrifice, suffering and elegance, a commemorative symbol of prayer and concentration and persuading his friends aspiring for aesthetic distance and great poetry to consider "climbing the hill". The tone of Auden is in common with what de la Mare does in the poem "The Unchanging" pointing to the way out "in nodding cavalcade ... starred deep hill" for perfect poetry:

All that glamour, peace, and mystery

In one grave look.

Beauty hid your naked body,

Time dreamed in your bright hair,

In your eyes the constellations

Burned far and fair. (202)

In the third stanza of "Fern Hill," Thomas designs the metaphoric symbol, "all the sun long" implicit of Auden's Oxford contemporary, Rex Warner's life-oriented personal freedom in contrast to Auden's idea of death-oriented impassive aesthetic freedom, "all the moon long." He brings out the agony, an ecstasy of an intensely felt personal experience as suggested in the Oxford poems of Warner:

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay

Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air

And playing, lovely and watery

And fire green as grass. (*Poems*)

In "Spring Song" Warner, while sounding the discordant note, reflects on his hope for song pattern transmuting personal sorrow into joy:

and made me listen to the rattling rhythm

of air in quaking sedge,

see towers of ice

behind the dancers on the first of May.

My reach of hope contracted to a ledge;

mist marred the main: that mist was despair. (Warner 13)

Warner's paradoxical song, thus, gives a new bearing to what appears an empty literary flourish in Auden's irony. The young poets at Oxford, Day Lewis, MacNeice, and Spender, the admirers of Auden's transcendental art, "the nightjars ... flying with the ricks," being inspired by Warner's spine tingling poem assuring them that they, too, may achieve

freedom to structural art songs, “blessed among stables” become his ardent friends, “the horses ... flashing into the dark.”

After the failure of the early poem *Beechen Vigil and Other Poems* (1926), “the birth of the simple light” for “it was all shining” Day Lewis, “like a wanderer white ... with the dew,” while rejecting Auden’s poetic of raving and wailing “in a most somber suit of black,” “most melancholy Nightingale” and his “vast sorrow,” “music for sorrow’s sake,” “the sill of words to sweeten despair ... of finding consolation” (de la Mare 190-91), heeds to Warner’s poetic ideal of poetry-making and self-realization and consequently, his second volume *Country Comet* (1927) is made a success. He admits:

Later we lit a fire, and the hedge of darkness—  
Garnished with not a nightingale nor a glow-worm—  
Sprang up like the beanstalk by which our Jack aspired once. (*DCP* 15)

Spender feels like experiencing the joy of working with a grate in “Come, let us praise the gasworks” (*Nine Experiments* 13). The poem “Appeal” is marked by a romantic strain and shows the poet’s gift for the subjective impression of moods:

Yet not their grief, again  
Can beat so hard as I  
Upon one stone, sepulchered gate  
With dumb temerity.... (8)

In the poem “Poussin,” MacNeice recognizes the impact of Warner’s influence on Auden’s contemporaries at Oxford:

And thus we never reach the dregs of the cup,  
Though we drink it up and drink it up and drink it up,  
And thus we dally and dip our spoon. (*MCP* 60)

The fourth stanza of “Fern Hill” is a symbolic glorification of Warner’s parable of personal salvation. Thomas explains: “In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm / Out of the whinnying green stable / On to the fields of praise” (*Poems*). Apart from praising Warner as their spinning man, “the sun grew round that very day” in the poems published in *Oxford Poetry* (1927), the young poets Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice place reliance, on the other hand, on man’s inward strength and affirm their faith in the potential divinity of each individual human being. They perceive that Warner has not merely a picturesque quality. The sun, the sea and the earth are telescoped in a single vision of beauty: the sea appears as a mighty minstrel playing hymns of despair of Auden, “the winter chill of what was hot and hale” before the earth; the music of ocean recalling Warner’s songs dispelling the spine chilling “unmirth” and “the frozen sleep” of Auden. Warner comments on the glorious rise of “the sun,” “the native of the earth,” the adolescent poets: “Birth breaks / from dark and pain to light and liquid joy ... when all was wonderful and all was good ... wonder is like a swift and flowing bird” (16). However, the sea-hymn and the ocean-music, associated with the poetry of Auden and Warner respectively, haunt Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice continually. Warner speaks in the poem “Light and Air”:

even the pale of pearl, clip of dawn  
on cold coasts curling over the grey waves,  
dim icy glow through scurrying legs of waders.... (19)

The sea reveals the eternal mystery of nature and creation, a mystery recaptured only by Auden, and the continually beating waves bring back to his contemporaries’s mind the rhythmic richness of the poems of Auden’s *Poems*.

The fifth stanza of “Fern Hill” is both an illustration of Auden’s concept of Eliotian depersonalization and a commentary on his contemporaries’s poetic character. It is in this self-projection, this linkage of personal mood or experience with that of poetic symbols emulated from Eliot that Auden achieves new aesthetic heights in *Poems* (1930). Eliot’s *The Waste Land* brings Auden and his friends at Oxford face to face with a broken world, besides offering a vision to these poets and showing them how the contemporary sensibility can be expressed in imagery and symbols derived from the prevailing gloom which has enveloped the war-torn Europe. The supporters of Warner’s life-centred poetry, Day Lewis, Spender, and MacNeice unheed to Eliot’s voice, “ran” their “heedless ways.” To Auden, Eliot’s new imagery and rhythm, the conversational tone and free association of verse provide devices for an appropriate expression of his thoughts and feelings. Thomas sums up collectively the impact of Eliot on the transcendental Auden and his romantic contemporaries in an impersonal manner:

My wishes race through the house high hay  
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows  
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs  
Before the children green and golden  
Follow him out of grace. (*Poems*)

In Eliot’s early poems, death the chief intensity, represents a liberation from the ignorance attendant on the mortal condition and the beginning of a new phase; it marks a rejection of this existential time and also the consummation of the blisses that the mortal condition can confer only momentarily on man. Auden’s conceptions of depersonalization, the historic sense of his early poetry, “the keys of morning,” “the answering keys ... of hope ... and of memories” (de la



Mare), “pale and sweet” emulated from both de la Mare and Eliot are of the feathers of the same wing. He envisages that “his garden then will be ... denser and shadier and greener... greener the moss-grown tree” (103). To perfect his workmanship and render his vision of contemporaneity he widens the supernatural intensity of de la Mare into the nature-based impersonality of Eliot: “Then instead of the gnomies there came a red robin / To sing of the buttercups and dew” ( de la Mare 3).

Auden aiming at perfectibility of his craftsmanship “cared” more for Eliot’s ambiguous impersonal art of the early poems designing the contemporary reality, “that time allows ... in all his tuneful turning.” In the poems of twenties adjudged as the sacramental symbols of self-dissolution, Eliot’s creative journey is, in the deepest sense of the word, in the nature of a pilgrimage, and yet it is a “pilgrimage as pain” that ends in uncertainty. In “Gerontion,” Eliot suggests that individual mind can attain to such heights of hill or discover its aesthetic identity as death or “nothing” only through crucifixion of the earthly existence:

I have lost my sight, smell, hearing taste and touch:  
How should I use them for your closer contact? (*WL* 25)

In the early poems, Eliot grapples with the riddle of existence, “wind, shoveller of seas, shuffler of leaves, wind ... swaying the creaking trunks, puffing the distracted sedge” and “scattering them in smoky cloud like ashes of burnt paper.” A strain of music conducts Eliot to contemporary reality, “looser of leaves’ luxury, laying a bed for spring ... marrer of miles of dead wood, fanner into fire ... heaven’s hound, panting, overrunning the fugitive world.” Warner explains how Auden is “resistless” in his choice of the early Eliot while his Oxford friends are “restless”:

Listen to bang of shutters, whistle in the iron  
of air aiming at lungs, running through rotten timbers,  
rocking the roof, whistling a wintry air,  
that we may make way for ruin and rebuild  
houses to welcome air, ready for the light of spring. (20)

The light and air images, again, in Warner’s poem “Light and Air,” suggest the historic tradition in which Auden’s uncertain and conflicting mind moves between the contemporaneous sensibility of Eliot and the archaic sensibility of de la Mare. It is this quality of doubt, this courage to face uncertainties that gives Auden’s quest a strange intensity and determines the texture and thought of his Oxford collection *Poems* (1928). Auden’s *Poems* (1928) conveys no sense of release and he has to be tutored by Eliot’s early poems to bear the load of contemporary reality and pain to transform his “sky blue trades” into blue sky research to become a great poet of *Poems* (1930).

Auden’s *Poems* (1928) published as a private edition by Spender at Oxford House makes him “honoured” among his contemporaries. Day Lewis, Spender, and MacNeice whom Thomas images as “foxes and pheasants,” felicitate Auden’s modernistic ambiguous art, “the new made clouds.” The supporters of Warner’s lyrical structure, “the gay house” yearn for Auden’s ironic aesthetic structure, “the house high hay.” In “Fern Hill,” Thomas brings out:

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house  
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long.... (*Poems*)

Warner’s phrase “alighting among curlew” in the “perfect formation over the marsh” is suggestive of Auden’s “orderly” distinctive artistic sensibility different from his Oxford friends’s romantic sensibility:

Squawking they rise from reeds into the sun,  
climbing like furies, running on blood and bone,  
with wings like garden shears clipping the misty air,  
four mallards, hard winged, with necks like rods  
fly in perfect formation over the marsh. (12)

The poetic image “this architecture” in Day Lewis’s *Transitional Poem* is similarly employed in a different context to indicate Auden’s art of self-annihilation and his intrinsic structure:

Let figs from thistles fall  
Or stars from their pedestal.  
This architecture will stand. (14)

MacNeice’s phrase “a blue-veiled Madonna” in the poem “Evening Indoors” is, in Auden’s context, points to the infinite variations of mood that he chooses to assume to please his friends — an oblique reference to the notion that an ideal poet has no identity:

Like the calm marriage of the sky and sea,  
Or a blue-veiled Madonna beaming vacancy,  
See that Madonna snuff out the shaded light  
And stroke with soothing hand asleep the night. (61)

In a subsequent poem “River in Spate,” MacNeice adapting Warner’s phrase in “Sonnet” --“fearing for my fellows, for the murder of man” -- repeats the same idea:

The river falls and over the walls the coffins of cold funerals  
 Slide deep and sleep there in the close tomb of the pool,  
 And yellow waters lave the grave and pebbles pave its mortuary. (*MCP*)

And, in the poem "Ovation for Spring," Spender is at pains to subordinate romanticism to his awareness of Auden's grim vision of art and reality:

She cannot stir me with her sound,  
 Her light no longer makes me burn.  
 I only see earth wake and turn  
 Again in penitential round. (*NE* 19)

The poems of Warner's friends responding to Auden's impersonal pattern, thus, articulate the mixed reactions of love and fear, yearning and sadness.

Before the publication of Auden's *Poems*, Day Lewis, Spender, and MacNeice find a parallel in Warner and they seem to enact the poetic character of Warner sharing his ecstasy and agony. Warner writes in "Lapwing":

Leaves, summer's coinage spent, golden are all together whirled,  
 sent, spinning, dipping, slipping, shuffled by heavy handed wind,  
 shifted sideways, sifted, lifted, and in swarms made to fly,  
 spent sunflies, gorgeous tatters, airdrift, pinions of trees. (17)

But after the emergence of Auden as a poet of art songs, the friends of Warner identify themselves equally or at the unconscious level with Auden. Warner conveys from the half-serious cogitation Auden's unchanging "music flow" and his contemporaries's wringing an unexpected tenderness from Auden's aesthetic disinterestedness, their jesting supplication for "continual uphill journeying":

See them fall wailing over high hill tops with hue and cry,  
 like uneasy ghosts slipping in the dishevelled air,  
 with ever so much of forlorn ocean and wastes of wind  
 in their elbowing of the air and in their lamentable call. (Warner)

Day Lewis writes from the half-humorous mood:

And think, the first wind rising  
 Will crack that intricate crown  
 And let the daylight down. (*DCP*)

And Spender's agonized speculations on human suffering and contemporary world weigh very heavily on his consciousness:

Walking beside a stenchy black canal,  
 Regarding skies obtusely animal,  
 Contemplating rubbish-heaps, and smoke,  
 And tumid furnaces, obediently at work. (*NE*)

MacNeice's half-jesting thinking suggests:

The spider pendulously waits  
 Stranded in the unroaded air,  
 The spider's belly-mind creates  
 Thoroughfare on thoroughfare. ( 65 )

The spellbound followers of Warner's "delight," subjectivity and architectonic art, are in the process of becoming the inspired lovers of Auden's objectivity and architectural art, his "sorrowful ... music." Thomas explains their change of love:

Turns in the dark on the sound they know will arise  
 Into the answering skies from the green ground,  
 From the man on the stairs and the child by his bed.  
 The sound about to be said in the two prayers  
 For the sleep in a safe land and the love who dies.... (*Poems*)

In Auden's language of music Day Lewis finds a dramatic rendering of his own experience, the parallelism and contrast giving it both intensity and a relative impersonality in *Transitional Poem*. For Day Lewis this means a release from immediate experience and also a heightening of experience. "So from a summer's height ... I come into my peace" (*DCP* 50). Verbal echoes from *From Feathers to Iron* and *The Magnetic Mountain* do not have this configurative and associative richness—the symphony *A Time to Dance* is an exception—but they show how Day Lewis invariably recalls Auden's *Poems* to express a significant mood or thought:

Is past the clutch of caution, the range of pride.

Speaking from the snow

The crocus lets me know

That there is life to come, and go. (57)

Day Lewis, as it were, lets Auden speak for him for Auden sums up matters of great poetry in an impersonal manner: "Here's no meaning but of morning ... naught soon of night but stars remaining" (58). Because in Auden alone he discovers the meaning of his poetic career, of his deepest aspirations, convictions and speculations. "Their spirits float serene ... above time's roughest ... reaches ... but their seed is in us and over ... our lives they are ever green" (142). In *Overtures to Death*, Day Lewis oscillates between buoyancy and depression, a sense of power and an awareness of limitations, Thomas and Auden:

From the gashed hills of desolation

Our life-blood springs to liberty,

And in the callous eyes we see

The landscape of their dissolution. (175)

Spender attains a glimpse of the mystery of Auden's art in *Poems* and his descriptions, metaphorically used, thus bring out appositely the tension in his mind and his conflicting emotions regarding the worth of his creative endeavour, the influence of Auden, again, both fascinates and unnerves him:

After continual straining

I should grow strong;

Then the rocks would shake

And I should rest long. (*Poems* 25)

He reads in Auden's *Poems* the strange working of destiny: the mystery that is only grasped by one who has transcended his temporal plane. Like Auden, Spender employs allegory to express the sense of man's struggle towards intellectual advancement. Auden's patronizing gesture simply sharpens his sensibility but it does not suppress his essentially romantic temperament which Spender retains throughout his poetic career. The resolution of the poem *The Still Centre* is Spender's acceptance of both Auden and Thomas in the whole circle of the self:

The world, my body, binds the dark and light

Together, reconciles and separates

In lucid day the chaos of my darkness. (78)

MacNeice remembers Auden, "man from his vigil in the wintry chapel ... will card his skin with accurate strigil" (*MCP* 81) in moments of lonely exile, in joy and in sorrow and he underlines Auden's fundamental truth about human existence, the reality of his contemporaries's poetry, "frivolous and stringent spring ... we never come full circle," "never remember ... self behind self years without number," and "a series of dwindling mirrors." In Thomas's vision of the dissolving fabric of the pageant, MacNeice finds a dramatic rendering of his own mood:

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world

Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes—

On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palm of one's hands—

There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses. (86)

Auden's aesthetic structure of *Poems* appears to Day Lewis, Spender, and MacNeice as a hill that towers above them and his musical pattern tolls the knell of death to their freedom and fellow-feelings. Commenting on their abject failure to climb Auden's transcendental hill, Day Lewis explains their maiden attempts to emulate Auden:

Broods the stone-lipped conqueror still

Abject upon his iron hill,

And lovers in the naked beds

Cry for more than maidenheads. (*DCP* 177)

Thomas's lines dramatise the ultimate end of their wild love of Auden's song structure and the beginning of their romance for the surrealistic poem *18 Poems* offering "poles of promise" to their poetry of pity and their survival: "The haring snail go giddily round the flower, / A quarrel of weathers and trees in the windy spiral" (*Poems* 73). Day Lewis explains the falling of Auden's influence over his friends and the rising of Thomas's influence over Auden's enemies:

And, if the truth were told,

You' count it luck, perceiving in what shallow

Crevice and few crumbling grains of comfort

Man's joy will seed, his cold

And hardy fingers find an eagle's hold. (*DCP*)

The disenchanted contemporaries of Auden are enchanted by Thomas's moral disinterestedness in *18 Poems*: "The sound about to be said in the two prayers / For the sleep in a safe land and the love who dies" (*Poems*). With the outbreak of the Second World War, however, they are disappointed with Thomas's refusal to be a poet of pity in the war poem, "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London." Thomas rephrases their strictures pointing out the tone of mutability in his war poem and predicting the death of his poetry:

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

The time-conscious poets of pity estimate that Thomas is as pitiless as Auden in his war poem which foreshadows the dissolution of his vicarious mind and his complete identification with the existential suffering of Auden in the next poem *In the Country Sleep*. They foresee the possibility of Thomas dissolving his moral disinterestedness and attaining to the amoral aesthetic disinterestedness of Auden, his forthcoming poem becoming Audenesque, "will be the same grief flying."

However, while mutability has been a persistent factor in the poetry of the poets of the thirties and the forties, immutability has been the salient character of Thomas's poetry especially his later poem *Deaths and Entrances* and his perceptions on the poetry of pity become more transparent during the moments of the Second World War. In the early poem "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines" of *18 Poems*, he compares and contrasts the instability of the poets of pity and his own stability: "And, broken ghosts with glow-worms in their heads, / The things of light / File through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones" (*Poems* 94). In "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" of *25 Poems*, he underscores the rising and falling, "mad and dead as nails" of the sound-conscious poets of the thirties and his own sustenance: "Heads of the characters hammer through daisies; / Break in the sun till the sun breaks down, / And death shall have no dominion" (47). In the poem "The Tombstone Told When She Died" as included in *The Map of Love*, he underlines the romantic war poets's dilemmatic poems and his own resolute and independent work of art that rehabilitates and revamps the fallen poets of the thirties, "my womb was bellowing": "And I felt with my bare fall / A blazing red harsh head tear up / And the dear floods of his hair" (132). And in *Deaths and Entrances* especially in the war poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London," he sings of the immutable nature of his own moral disinterestedness and the mutability of the pity-conscious poets of the thirties and the pitiless war poets of the forties, "deep with the first dead lies London's daughter ... robed in the long friends" (*Poems* 18), in "Poem in October" he marvels at the perseverance and permanence of his ideal poetical character in the context of the contemporary poets's discourse on mortality and their refusal to be active poets of pity: "And the true / Joy of the long dead child sang burning / In the sun" (116), and in "Fern Hill" he modestly hectors of the persistence of his immutable moral disinterestedness, "Nothing I cared." In the altered context even the platitude of the war poet Prince's vainglorious justification of permanence and peace for Auden's poetry and the continuation of immutable vicarious mind of Thomas in the last poem *In Country Sleep* empathising with the suffering Auden carry a new depth of focus: "It was my thirtieth ... year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon ... though the town below lay leaved with October blood" (*Poems*).

Moreover, Thomas's poetry has obviously manifested the immutability of his inclusiveness of heterogeneity in a relentless manner: "and earth and sky were as one airy hill" in *18 Poems*, "the mounted meadows in the hill corral" (*Poems*), "a cock-on-a-dunghill" (74), "and my images roared and rose on heaven's hill" (75) in *25 Poems*, "a hailing hill in her cold flintsteps" (69) in *The Map of Love*, and "locked in the lark-high hill" (88) and "fern hill" in *Deaths Entrances*. His moral disinterestedness has been continuously unchanged in his poetry: his "vision ... of new man strength" in *18 Poems*, "my man of leaves and the bronze root, mortal, unmortal" (*Poems*) in *25 Poems*, "an upright man in the antipodes" (40) in *The Map of Love*, and "the man on the stairs ... to-night shall find no dying but alive and warm" (*Poems*) in the later poem *Deaths and Entrances*, especially in "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, By Fire, of a Child in London" and "Fern Hill." MacNeice brings out:

His last train home is Purgatory in reverse,  
 A spiral back into time and down towards Hell  
 Clutching a quizzical strap where wraiths of faces  
 Contract, expand, revolve, impinge; disperse  
 On a sickly wind which drives all wraiths pell-mell  
 Through tunnels to their appointed, separate places. (*MCP*)

The real forte of his actual poetic character has been a refusal to be an intellectual poet like Auden or a poet of active pity like the time-conscious poets of the thirties or a poet of passive pity like the war poets of the forties; however he empathizes with the painful experiences of the fellow-beings and fellow-poets and stands as a distinctive poet of the Yeatsian empathy, "whatever flames upon the night ... man's own resinous heart has fed" (*YCP* 181), "the struggle of the fly in marmalade" because "the rhetorician would deceive his neighbours ... the sentimentalist himself" (*YCP*147).

Prince's first volume *Poems* narrates the story of Auden's falling as well as his own rising poetic self, "there boyhood's sun foretold, retold" (*DCP*). His dreaming of the architectural design of Auden's *Poems* is the soul's adventure amidst great poetry, yearning for a communion with another kindred spirit. His search for "godfather" is no

longer realized as he is close to his own selfhood and settlement in the world. Auden holds that a poet with no historic Passion or Agony but that of a debating mind, “another to another” or personal experiences, “love’s pleasure and love’s pain” suffers and “designs his own unhappiness ... foretells his own death and is faithless” (*Poems* 54-55). The war poet’s dying cry persists in Auden’s memory in *The Age of Anxiety*:

When the historical process breaks down and armies organize with their embossed debates the ensuing void which they can never consecrate, when necessity is associated with horror and freedom with boredom, then it looks good to the bar business. (*ACP* 345)

The judgement of Auden, the professional critic of poetry of his contemporaries, is relevant to Prince’s *Poems* that betrays a lack of inwardness and immutable love.

In contradistinction to the dreams and deaths of wild love of the time-conscious poets of the thirties and Prince of the forties, their waxing and waning passion for Auden’s aesthetic transcendence and his impersonal stature, Thomas in *18 Poems*, while rejecting Donne’s metaphysical pattern “the singing house,” “the light of sound” and “the sound of light” and defying Auden’s transcendental, musical structure and historic sense, “the stony idiom of the brain,” “the root of tongues ... in a spent-out cancer” (*Poems* 58), “a reverie,” “moments the mightiest pass uncalendered,” “the Absolute ... in backward Time,” “the norm of every royal-reckoned attribute” (Hardy, 75), “architectural masks” (144), “perfection of work,” “a heavenly mansion, raging in the dark,” “that old perplexity an empty purse” (*YCP* 209), chooses “the deedful word” of Hardy “whereby all life is stirred” and the Yeatsian paradoxical magnanimous structure, “translunar paradise” (167) and the “deep considering mind.” Influenced by the skeptical poetic tradition of Hardy and Yeats, Thomas demonstrates in *18 Poems* to the poets of metaphysical tradition, “I am dumb to tell the crooked rose ... my youth is bent by the same wintry fever” (*Poems* 127) and persuasively tells “a weather’s wind,” the time-conscious fallen poets of the thirties, “how time has ticked a heaven round the stars,” “the purposed Life,” and “the spell ... of inner themes and inner poetries” (*HCP* 140) for “perfection of life” (*YCP*). His *25 Poems* underscores the value of the magnanimous Yeatsian empathy, “when the worm builds with the gold straws of venom ... my nest of mercies in the rude, red tree” (*Poems*) and justifies how his anti-metaphysical, vicarious, paradoxical mind, “hurried through the smooth and rough ... the fertile and waste ... protecting, till the danger past ... with human love” (*YCP* 180) and how his “memorial,” his sequence of sonnets “Altarwise by Owl-light” won “the world’s heart.”

Then, in *The Map of Love* “that breaks one bone to light with a judgement clout” he vindicates to the romantic war poets of the forties how his early objective poems are redemptive and rejuvenating to the fallen poets, “morning smack of the spade that wakes up sleep ... shakes a desolate boy who slits his throat ... in the dark of the coffin and sheds dry leaves” (*Poems*) and directs them to “sobriety” that “is a jewel ... that I do much adore” and “that I may stay a sober man ... although I drink my fill” and “a drunkard is a dead man ... and all dead men are drunk” (*YCP* 268). And in the later poem *Deaths and Entrances*, Thomas upholds the continuity of his empathic mind, despite his being estranged from the poets of the thirties and the forties whom he has been caring:

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

This is what Thomas has reiterated in an emphatic manner in the concluding stanza of the poem “Fern Hill”:

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,  
In the moon that is always rising,  
Nor that riding to sleep  
I should hear him fly with the high fields  
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land. (*Poems*)

It is evident that the poem is an illustration of the case study of Thomas’s poetry, a symbol of his paradoxical poetry, his moral disinterestedness and his immutable poetic character.

In the concluding three lines of “Fern Hill,” Thomas reconstructs the phrases of his early paradoxical poems -- “I See the Boys of Summer in Their Ruin,” “When Once the Twilight Locks No Longer,” “A Process in the Weather of the Heart,” “The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower,” “My Hero Bares His Nerves,” “From Love’s First Fever to Her Plague,” and “Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines” -- of dramatic contexts and symbolic significances to recall his rejoinder to Auden’s critique of *18 Poems*.

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
Time held me green and dying  
Though I sang in my chains like the sea. (*Poems*)

In *Look Stranger!* Auden, while complimenting Thomas's second volume *25 Poems* as highly impersonal and artistic achievement, a well-accomplished paradox, "cold, impossible," faults his first volume *18 Poems* "the mountain's lovely head ... whose white waterfall could bless ... travellers in their last distress" (24), for its adolescent, sentimental and rhetorical structure:

Sighs for folly said and done  
Twist our narrow days;  
But I must bless, I must praise  
That you, my swan, who have  
All gifts that to the swan  
Impulsive Nature gave,  
The majesty and pride,  
Last night should add  
Your voluntary love. (60)

Thomas's counter reply, besides pointing out that his *18 Poems* is endowed with the intense maturity and artistic stature of a paradox, the poetic process of life-in-death, "the womb ... drives in a death as life leaks out," describes it as "twin miracle" of his art song *25 Poems*. He speaks proud of his anti-metaphysical paradoxical *18 Poems* and *25 Poems*, "the weather fall" and "man's footfall" (*Poems* 73) as works of art influenced by the poetic tradition of Hardy and Yeats:

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

He justifies his early poem *18 Poems* as an "image of images," "this is the fortune of manhood" "the natural peril ... a steeplejack tower, bonerailed and masterless ... no death more natural" as mature and impersonal as his *25 Poems*, "the natural parallel." These early poems are also "natural parallel" to Auden's early poems, *Poems* (1928), "the consumptives' terrace," and *Poems* (1930), "the water final": "Under the skysigns they who have no arms / Have cleanest hands, and as, the heartless ghost / Alone's unhurt, so the blind man sees best" (*Poems* 144).

The last stanza of "Fern Hill" has its significance only in the context of all the shaping forces, positive and negative, that go to make the poetry of Thomas totally impersonal and magnanimous but taken in isolation, it may sound as sentimental communication or trite reflections on life. Thomas's remark is the final commentary on his poetry and the poetry of his fellow-poets and friends; his skeptical poetic process which, in turn, reveals the process of his transfiguring mind, "a process in the weather of the heart ... turns damp to dry; the golden shot ... storms in the freezing tomb" (*Poems* 17), his moral disinterestedness that alchemizes the tragic sorrow into tragic joy, "a weather in the quarter of the veins ... turns night to day; blood in their suns ... lights up the living worm..." is in sheer contrast to the intellectual poets's poetic process of turning "ghost to ghost," tragic bitterness into tragic sweetness, "a process in the weather of the world," "a process blows the moon into the sun" pulling "down the shabby curtains of the skin ... and the heart gives up its dead," the historical process of transubstantiation and transmigration. The transfiguring process of casting out the tragic failure of the fellow-poets as tragic joy which Thomas dramatically demonstrates in "Fern Hill" has already been accomplished in the early poem "From Love's First Fever to Her Plague": "youth did condense; the tears of spring ... dissolved in summer and the hundred seasons ... one sun, one manna, warmed and fed. (*Poems* 59). In the early poem, Thomas underlines the metaphysical, aesthetic-oriented tragic sorrow of the intellectual poets, Donne and Auden imaged as "airy hill.":

From love's first fever to her plague, from the soft second  
And to the hollow minute of the tomb,  
From the unfolding to the scissored caul,  
The time for breast and the green apron age  
When no mouth stirred about the hanging famine,  
All the world was one, one windy nothing,  
My world was christened in a stream of milk.  
And earth and sky were as one airy hill.  
The sun and moon shed one white light. (*Poems*)

Thomas believing that human minds should leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points, emphasizes the meaningfulness of the creative inquiry and the barrenness of pugnacious dogmatism in his poetry. Day Lewis points out the poetic process of transformation in Thomas's poetry: "Into the blue we project / Our dreaming shadows. And is the hope forlorn / That in them we may be reborn, that our images / More masterful are, more true" (*DCP* 274). Dogma is assertive, while creative speculation leaves the mind open to receive experience and

admits of alternative approaches: “A process in the eye forwarns / The bones of blindness; and the womb / Drives in a death as life leaks out” (*Poems*). So, Thomas’s vision of paradoxical poetry and human reality finds faith “in time alone” in which “may man, full grown, reach out over the void ... a rapt, creator’s wing” stands distinguished from Auden’s vision of ironic poetry and metaphysical reality “Time’s your condition” (*DCP*).

Vernon Watkins estimates that the poem “Fern Hill” is not nostalgic about Thomas’s childhood or death-centric musical structure or religion but speaks of the Magnus Annus, the paradox of life-in-death in sharp contrast to his contemporaries’s pursuit of the paradox of death-in-life, the perfect aesthetic Beauty, the Magnum Opus:

In the churchyard the yew is neither green nor black  
 I know nothing of Earth or colour until I know I lack  
 Original white, by which the ravishing bird looks wan.  
 The mound of dust is nearer, white of mute dust that dies  
 In the soundfall’s greatest light, the music in the eyes,  
 Transfiguring whiteness into shadows gone,  
 Utterly secret. I know you, black swan. (*Modern Verse* 367)

The poem “Fern Hill” testifies to Thomas’s faith in the vicarious mind and the poetic tradition, the transfiguring mind of Yeats. “Gaiety transfiguring all that dread. / All men have aimed at, found and lost; / Black out; Heaven blazing into the head” (*YCP* 250).

#### 4. Findings and Implications

Thomas has begun the poem “Fern Hill” with the intention of illustrating symbolically the ascent of his creative mind to fellowship with the mortal poets. Many pre-“Fern Hill” poems, too, recognize the value of friendship as a creative power that inspires the fellow-poets. Fellowship implies and involves sympathy, understanding, a projection of one’s self into another. But Thomas is to witness in his later career his dearly cherished values being rudely shaken by petty bickering among his friends and to discover with pain that moral disinterestedness is a rare virtue. His later poem “Fern Hill” shows how intensely and sharply he reacts to this atmosphere of quarrelsomeness and antagonism. MacNeice, distinguishing Thomas’s Yeatsian vicarious impersonality, “this time-bound ladder out of time” and “in haunts of friendship and untruth” (*MCP* 234) from Auden’s “fierce impersonality,” “pattern of inhuman good ... hard critic of our thought and blood,” describes Thomas as a paradoxist and Auden a satirist:

He is the pinprick master, he can dissect  
 All your moods and manners, he can discover  
 A selfish motive for anything—and collect  
 His royalty as recording angel. No  
 Reverence here for hero, saint or lover. (*MCP* 232)

The poem “Fern Hill” stands as a paragon of magnanimous disinterestedness, a paradoxical structure of harmonization and reconciliation, “friend by enemy,” “desireless familiar” (*Poems* 138), by forgetting and forgiving “an army of mercenaries,” “what God abandoned, these defended ... and saved the sum of things for pay” (*AEH* 16). Thomas himself comments that the poem is “an essential part of the feeling and meaning of” *Deaths and Entrances* “as a whole” (*Collected Letters* 569).

To reconcile the poetic vision with the frightening spectre of the shrunken mood of the fellow-poets would involve the telescoping of two different perspectives. This Auden seldom achieves; what is noted chiefly is a juxtaposition of contraries. His mockery deepens the poignancy of the situation “for few are able to keep moving ... they drag and flag in the traffic” and not just serving as a relief that Thomas accords in the harmonious structure of paradox “for the example ... of living like fugue and moving” (*MCP* 108). MacNeice, underlining the attitudes of remoteness and closeness, farness and nearness between Auden and Thomas, compares and contrasts:

High above London, naked in the night  
 Perched on a board. I peered up through the bars  
 Made by his fear and mine but it was more than fright  
 That kept him crucified among the budding stars. (*MCP*)

Thomas’s paradoxical poem “Fern Hill” comes close to an inclusive vision in which the contrariness is not dissolved, and the thought-process resembles a flow rather than a cluster.

Auden’s continual ascending of the transcendental hill from the structural principle of de la Mare’s impassivity to Eliot’s impersonal character, from Nature’s metaphors, “those morning rivers are love-in-a-mist ... and the chimneystacks prayers” to modernistic, dialectic metaphors, “a man of affairs ... a seasoned commuter ... intent on perusing ... facts and figures” (*DCP* 293), from “the initiating ceremony” (*Poems* 70) to “new styles of architecture” (89), from “fearer to farer” (*Orators* 116) is not “change of heart” but reinforcement of his conception of impersonal elegance, “we rebuild our cities” (*LS* 23) identical with his transitional poetic setting “against the large and dumb ... the timeless and the rooted ... his money and his time” (*AT* 15), “waves of anger and fear ... to an apathetic grave” (*AT* 112). The unstable irony of his earlier phase, the stable irony of his early phase, the “ironic points of light” (115) are similar to the structural irony, the “ironic breath ... turning poverty to song” (124) of his mid-career. His elegant art of

“timid similarity” of the middle phase recalls his early art of “stating timidly” (18); “the double Man” is none other than “our double-shadow” (*LS* 30). If Auden’s early poetry has the pronounced impact of the “metaphysical distress” (*LS* 15) of de la Mare and Eliot, his poems of middle phase – *Another Time*, *New Year Letter*, “The Sea and the Mirror” and *For the Time Being* – “form its ethical resolve ... now to suffer and to be” (*AT*) under the impact of Rilke and Ernest Toller, and Auden expecting truly great art to have the same “conscious sorrow” (*Poems* 54) of metaphysics, mutters: “Beleaguered by the same / Negation and despair, / Show an affirming flame” (*AT*), “Back to the labyrinth where either / We are found or lose ourselves for ever” (*NYL* 186). The existential suffering of his early poetry, “the sorrow” of his “founders of these starving cities ... whose honour is the image of our sorrow” (*LS* 22) is synonymous with his transitional poetry believing in the existentialistic suffering of Soren Kierkegaard. Auden admits:

We are lived by powers we pretend to understand:  
They arrange our lives; it is they who direct at the end  
The enemy bullet, the sickness, or even our hand. (*AT* 111)

The metaphysical, unified sensibility of the English Auden of the early phase is in common with the cultured but debilitated sensibility of the European Auden of the middle phase, “that dying where they stand / Image our last and leave an / Adored light behind” (*DCP* 172). So, it is the identical, symbolic landscape technique of de la Mare, Eliot, Rilke and Ernest Toller that have shaped Auden’s art of self-annihilation according to Day Lewis: “Through mansion, lake and lackluster groves / We see the landscape of their dissolution” (173). Auden’s insistence on the “fine tradition” (*LS* 17) of sorrow in the early career and on refined sensibility in the world of war and sorrow during his mid-career, “imperialism’s face ... and international wrong” (*AT* 113). “the unmentionable odour of death ... offends the September night” (*AT*), “existence is believing ... grieving” (*AT*) in *Another Time*, “let the lips do formal contrition ... for whatever is going to happen” (*NYL* 87) in *New Year Letter*, “for my company be lonely ... for my health be ill” (*ACP*) in “The Sea and the Mirror,” “the Pilgrim Way has led to the Abyss” (*ACP* 274) in *For the Time Being* are all emblematic of his pilgrimage as pain, his climbing up the hill to reach his faith in the religion of sorrow, the symbolic image of Christian sorrow and salvation. “And I must enter again the round / Zion of the water bead / And the synagogue of the ear of corn” (Thomas, *Poems* 18). Day Lewis also points out the continuous presence of the main current of historic sense in Auden’s pilgrimage: “Shields and medallions; overshadowing eaves ... like studious brows” and “all’s definitive” (*DCP* 337).

Moreover, Auden’s inviting to the contemporary poets, “all that we wish for our friends,” to his poetic technique of irony, “to recall or compose ... from “snatches of vision, hints of vanishing airs” (*DCP*) is an indirect endeavour to immortalize his poetry and the historic tradition. What Auden suffers for is mainly for his own survival and immortality, “and yet we know what he knows what he must do” (*MCP* 235) though apparently conceptual and dogmatic which is in sharp contrast to Thomas’s suffering for the good of his fellow-mortals, “... though I loved them for their faults ... as much as for their good... (*Poems*). Thomas narrates their “winter’s tale”:

Once when the world turned old  
On a star of faith pure as the drifting bread,  
As the food and flames of the snow, a man unrolled  
The scrolls of fire that burned in his heart and head,  
Torn and alone in a farm house in a fold  
Of fields. (*Poems*)

The problem that Auden’s amoral cultivated, historic sensibility “meditating on ... Time’s ruins, and the seven laws” (Jain 27) confronts with the free joyous Thomas and with the opportunistic Prince is similar to that of Burbank in Eliot’s poem “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar”: “Defunctive music under sea ... passed seaward with the passing bell ... slowly” (26). In this context, de la Mare’s poetic lines can be adapted as an objective correlative to suggest the artistic stature of Auden: “Her dark eyes seem / Dark with a beautiful / Distant dream...” (107).

Day Lewis, throwing light on the inner stresses and uncertainties of the fellow-poets that enrich the texture of Thomas’s “Fern Hill” and his poetry, *18 Poems*, *25 Poems*, *The Map of Love* and *Deaths and Entrances*, compares and contrasts Auden’s ironic principle of aesthetic disinterestedness, the Eliotian historic concept of “*Datta. Dayadhavam. Damyatta*” (*WL* 43) and the Yeatsian ideals of “self-delighting, self-appeasing, self-affrighting” (*YCP*) which Thomas has espoused as his poetic ideals of moral disinterestedness:

Wild natures, kin to all cageless things—  
Thistledown, grass and cloud—yet mewing  
So ghostly, no prey nor animal need pursuing  
In those pure rings and hoverings,  
I watch the angelic pastime until  
I seem to know what is beyond the hill. (*DCP* 284)

In Day Lewis’s poem “Buzzards Over Castle Hill,” the original context of “Fern Hill” is not superseded. What is more significant is transposition to a different context in Houseman’s lyric “It Nods and Curtseys and Recovers” which gives a metaphoric and symbolic character to a word, phrase or the poetic character of Thomas’s poem compared with other poems:



The nettle nods, the wind blows over,  
 The man, he does not move,  
 The lover of the grave, the lover  
 That hanged himself for love. (33)

In contrast with Auden's language of irony and gestures that structures the symbols of the Passion and Purgation resurrecting his *Weltansicht*, his tragic vision of historic sense, Thomas's "language of paradox" re-creates images of self-sacrifice and redemption according to his own apprehension and promotes his *Weltschmerz*, his comic vision of co-existence, happiness and peace. What Thomas articulates in "Fern Hill" is the language of empathy and life-centric creative force which has been the language of his poetry rather than the language of death-centred amoral aesthetic. Cleanth Brooks remarks that "our prejudices force us to regard paradox as intellectual rather than emotional, clever rather than profound, rational rather than divinely irrational" (292).

The entrances and deaths of romances of the poets of pity of the thirties, their "aspiring ... and the renouncing of" their dreams of pure and timeless poetry can simply be attributed to their greater concern for existence in time, mortal living. Auden explains: "So many, fearful, took with them their sorrow / Which stayed them when they reached unhappy cities" (*LS*). Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice's continual change of heart from Warner's personal language of pagan beauty, "the light ... a conjured inlay on the grass" (*MCP* 236) to Auden's impersonal language of metaphysical beauty, "language ... a prism ... whose rays today are concentrated" results in wild passion, "language grown a burning-glass." MacNeice sums up the sum and substance of their pursuit of greatness in vain:

Instantly and it would be permanently  
 God was uttered in words and gulped in gin,  
 The bar maid was a Madonna, the adoration  
 Of the coalman's breath was myrrh, the world was We  
 And pissing under the stars an act of creation  
 While low hills lay purring round the inn. (*MCP*)

On the whole, the passion of the poets of the thirties for Auden's greatness as a classic poet is "only a grain of faith" for the reassurance of their poetry: "And, like ten million others, dying for people" (*MCP*). Thomas's pertinent comments on their identical visionary language and aspiration: "The sound about to be said in the two prayers / For the sleep in a safe land and the love who dies" (*Poems*). Their tragic failure, "unluckily for a death" recalls the lines from Eliot's poem, "Whispers of Immortality," "Polyphiloprogenitive ... the sapient subtler of the Lord" (Jain, 36), "the masters of the subtle schools ... are controversial, polymath" (37). They understand the meaning of their awful defeat, "thus are we weaned to knowledge of the Will ... that wills the natural but wills us dead" and realized that their "gluttony" for Auden's transcendental art "for us was Lenten fare," their passionate love of Auden's elegant art, "the tops of topless towers" crunched "away ... the beams of human life" and they "were chill ... though cotted in a grill of sizzling air ... striped like a convict—black, yellow and red..." (*MCP* 218). Thomas perceives that these poets's irresolute mind between the temporal and the timeless concerns is the root cause of their tragic failure: "I see the tigrone in tears / In the androgynous dark..." (*Poems*).

Prince's shift from the Wordsworthian language of tranquility, "handsel joy" to Auden's erudite language of intensity, "accredited to time and meaning" remains "a timeless" passionate dream. His approach is not that of "some atavistic" scholar, nor does he have recourse to a regular critic's tools and methods. He makes a distressing attempt at imposing mechanical standards from without on his fellow poets. He is "a fossil ... mind in its day both its own king and castle..." (*MCP*). MacNeice is not sure whether Auden knows that Prince who castles him and soldiers on his cause is a connoisseur, a soldier of fortune full of inward feelings and thoughts building castles in the air:

And thence conceive a vague inaccurate notion  
 Of what it meant to live embroiled with ocean  
 And between moving dunes and beyond reproving  
 Sentry-boxes to have been self-moving. (*MCP* 251)

MacNeice notes in Prince a want of taste for self-annihilation, "time to descend ... where Time will brief us briefed himself to oppress" (*MCP*), leading to a confusion of issues, a refusal to yield up to the spell and mystery of Auden's art. Prince's approach is an almost unpardonable temerity and opinionatedness where only passive receptivity can open up the secret, "living thoughts coagulate in matter," "an age of mainlanders, that dare not fancy ... Life out of uniform..." (*MCP*). Moreover, his incarnation of Auden as god is a process for his own incarnation. To quote Harold Bloom is more apt to explain the context:

All poetic odes of incarnation are ... Immortality odes, and all of them rely upon a curious divinity that the ephebe has imparted successfully, not to himself, but to the precursor. In making the precursor a god, the ephebe already has begun a movement away from him, a primary revision that imparts error to the father, a sudden inclination or swerve away from obligation; for even in the context of incarnation, of becoming a poet, obligation shines clear as a little death, premonitory of the greater fall down to the inanimate. (220-21)

Thomas, commenting on Prince's warring passions between aesthetic love and personal love, "Time" and "the spring weather," "that belled and bounded with the fossil and the dew reborn," correlates to the unholy alliance between a young man and an old woman in Eliot's poem "The Portrait of A Lady":

For the bird lay bedded  
 In a choir of wings, as though she slept or died,  
 And the wings glided wide and he was hymned and wedded,  
 And through the thighs of the engulfing bride,  
 The woman breasted and the heaven headed. (*Poems*)

Thomas's language of moral disinterestedness emulated from Hardy, Yeats, and Houseman, his "sharper apprehension" differs from Prince's sentimental, "affective," "mass language," "the fallacy of communication" (Tate). According to Tate, "mass language is the medium of "communication," and its users are less interested in bringing to formal order what is sometimes called the "affective state" (374). Day Lewis describes Prince "the neurotic," "this man who turns a phrase and twiddles a glass ... seems far from that pale muttering magician ... pent in a vicious circle of dilemmas" and "wistful, amazed, but more affrighted ... gay fluent forms of life wavering around ... and dare not break the bubble and be drowned" (*DCP*). Prince's poems "walk a stage where endlessly ... phantoms rehearse unactable tragedy" and his "words cannot ennoble ... this Atlas who fell down under a bubble" according to Day Lewis.

Then the romantic war poets, Fuller, Rook and Rhys inspired and "formed" by Wordsworth, "a precocious ... image of spring, too brilliant to be true" (*DCP*), fail to emulate the moral sweetness of Thomas: "The man who looks and finds Man human and not his friend / And whose tongue feels around and around but cannot taste / That hour-gone sacrament of drunkenness" (*MCP*). Their sensuous love of the various poetic models undergoes frequent changes, from their impassive love of the Wordsworthian spontaneity and recollection to their split love of objectivity of Auden and to their passive love of Thomas's magnanimous art. Their flirting, flowery love discredits them as incommunicado according to MacNeice:

When we were children Spring was easy,  
 Dousing our heads in suds of hawthorn  
 And scrambling the laburnum tree—  
     A breakfast for the gluttonous eye;  
 Whose winds and sweets have now forsaken  
     Lungs that are black, tongues that are dry. (*MCP*)

The war poets's rhetorical poems, while displaying their "good wishes" for Thomas's paradoxical structure of *18 Poems*, smack of wild love and exhibitionism. Their perception of the Second World War climate and the world's sorrow is rather personal and sentimental according to Thomas:

All love but for the full assemblage in flower  
 Of the living flesh is monstrous or immortal,  
 And grave its daughters. (141)

It is understood that the soldier-poets's dream of emulating Thomas's moral disinterestedness, their strange, dilemmatic relationship with Thomas, "moving dunes and beyond reproving," "the child ... unharmed" and "the man ... crying" is simply their passions for eternity and self-advancement in life. Thomas comments: "The conversation of the prayers about to be said / Turns on the quick and the dead" (*Poems*).

Day Lewis estimates that the war poets's passionate love of Thomas's moral disinterestedness is as affective as Wordsworth's love of the Tintern Abbey:

Here's Abbey Way: here are the rooms  
 Where they held the chrysanthemum show—  
 Leaves like talons of greenfire, blooms  
 Of a barbarous frenzy, red, flame, bronze.... (*DCP*)

Wordsworth explains his wild love of nature above Tintern Abbey: "Their colours and their forms, were then to me / An appetite; a feeling and a love / That had no need of a remoter charm..." (569). And the war poets's predicament, their "overwhelming question," their muttering retreats ... of restless nights" (*WL* 3), their "time yet for a hundred indecisions ... and for a hundred visions and revisions" (4) is identical to that of Prufrock, "politic, cautious, and meticulous" (7) in Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

As a whole, the time-conscious poets's vain attempt for Auden's sound pattern as a classic mode of conquering reality and aesthetic perception, the slow ordeal and bitter memories of Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice, the tragic despair of Prince for Auden's musical pattern, and the dreams and deaths, the initiations and struggles of Fuller, Rook and Rhys for Thomas's greatness as a paradoxical poet of human love result as "*hysterica passio* of its emptiness..." (*YCP* 289) which is the central focus and concerns of Thomas's "Fern Hill" according to Day Lewis:

Such is the tenant you'll have beside you,  
 Often beside you

Through the spoilt Junes when a gusty rain  
 Strums fitful arpeggios on the pane  
 The dawns when light is denied you. (269)

The totally deplorable failure of the poets of the thirties and the forties in climbing up Auden's aesthetic hill of greatness evokes the identical theme of the poem *The Waste Land*: "I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew Nothing, / Looking into heart of light, the silence." (WL 28). However, Thomas has transfigured the tragic fall of these poets as his poetry: "All all and all the dry worlds couple / Ghost with her ghost, contagious man / With the womb of his shapeless people" (*Poems*). So the poem "Fern Hill," contrary to the interpretations of literary critics focusing on the romantic subjectivism or the childhood memories of the poet, becomes a participation in the movements of the poems of his contemporaries and forwards the sceptic poetic tradition of his poetry to the future. What Thomas has done in the poem is that he deconstructs the existing construct of the fellow-poets and then reconstructs it so as to liberate them from the influence of Auden, his concept of metaphysics.

In *18 Poems*, "the resuffered pain ... my genesis in sweat of death" (*Poems* 66), Thomas suffers for the rejuvenation of the depressed poets of the thirties, Day Lewis, Spender, and MacNeice, "morning smack of the spade that wakes up sleep," in *25 Poems* he suffers for the redemption of the fallen poets of the thirties, "shakes a desolate boy who slits his throat ... in the dark of the coffin and sheds dry leaves," in *The Map of Love* his suffering is for the salvation of the war poets, Prince, Fuller, Rook, and Rhys, "that breaks one bone to light with a judgement clout .. after the feast of tear-stuffed time and thistles ... in a room with a stuffed fox and a stale fern" (*Poems*) and in the later poem *Deaths Entrances*, especially in "Fern Hill" continuing the cynical concern of his preceding poems that represent his poetic tradition "still in the water and singing birds" (116), "for this memorial's sake, alone ... in the shrivelling hours with the dead," he sings as a fellow-sufferer though the fellow-poets have turned hostile, "the weather turned around" and identifies himself with the agony of the poets of the thirties and the forties. Thomas, as he has "aims in common" throughout his poetry, has been speaking "in the same language" (*MCP* 228) of moral disinterestedness of his poetic tradition, his poetic ancestors, Hardy, Yeats and Houseman, "hearts of gold," and "hands that gave ... a grasp to friend me to the grave" (*AEH*). MacNeice reveals the truth behind Thomas's poetic functioning:

But now the sphinx must change her shape--  
 O track that reappears through slush,  
 O broken riddle, burst grenade—  
 And live must be pulled out like tape  
 To measure something not themselves,  
 Things not given but made, but made. (241-42)

So, Thomas whom MacNeice has imaged as Viola, a morally disinterested character in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* has been the poetic "image" of "other images," the poetic tradition of Hardy, Yeats and Houseman. He has emulated these poetic images of moral disinterestedness in *18 Poems*, *25 Poems*, *The Map of Love* and *Deaths and Entrances*, "by falling stream and standing hill ... by chiming tower and whispering tree ... men that made a man of me" (*AEH* 9).

And it is this image of the poet as fellow-sufferer that Thomas cherishes and clings to in his poetry and this is in common with Yeats's "last confession":

And give his own and take his own  
 And rule in his own right;  
 And though it loved in misery  
 Close and cling so tight,  
 There's not a bird of day that dare  
 Extinguish that delight. (*YCP* 234).

The poet is seen no longer as a protean personality taking every possible shape and attitude, as a superior being looking upon the manifold aspects of life as beautiful forms. He perceives that a poet is known "by heart," "he that sings a lasting song ... thinks in a marrow-bone" and that "men think ... in the mind alone" (*YCP* 243) make songs of "the lacking sense scene," "a sad-coloured landscape" as their "self-smitings kill self-joys" (*HCP*), as they "fasten ... their hands upon their hearts" (*AEH* 13). This poetic image of protector and redeemer of fellow-poets and fellow-mortals as revealed in "Fern Hill" has been persistently present in all the preceding poems as well as the last poem, *In Country Sleep* in which Thomas annexes with the "anxiety" and languish of Auden, "a cloud vibrating ... in the wash of the hull-down sun" (*DCP* 336), and makes a work of art, "the languid strings" of "Over Sir John's Hill," a dramatic rendering of Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*, an inferno of spiritual anguish, perplexity and despair, "the tart aroma of some classic text" (*DCP*).

Day Lewis interprets the poetry of Auden and Thomas rightly in terms of their faith in Christian sorrow and human sorrow, existentialistic metaphysical reality and human reality respectively:

When I think how, not twice or thrice,  
 But year after year in another's eyes  
 I have caught the look that I missed today

Of the church, the knoll, the cedars—a ray  
 Of the faith, too, they stood for,  
 The hope they were food for,  
 The love they prayed for, facts beyond price.... (DCP 295)

What the comic vision of Thomas's poetry suggests is that the way to salvation is self-effacing moral disinterestedness serving the cause of fellow-poets and mortal beings than the aesthetic transcendence representing the "superstructure," the "structurality" of the central presence symbolizing the logocentric "self-born mockers of man's enterprise" (YCP 184). "Fern Hill" that vindicates the poetic truth of Thomas's poetry, the thought of doing good to the fellow-beings through self-sacrifice and self-immolation reassures the continuation of the same rule and energy in his last poem *In Country Sleep*: "O may my heart's truth / Still be sung / On this high hill in a year's turning" (*Poems*). Thomas's "Fern Hill," bearing abundant evidence of his magnanimous disinterestedness identical with the moral functioning of the sceptical poets Hardy, Yeats and Houseman, anticipates the consummate influence of the world-centric poetic tradition of William Blake, "until that one loved least ... looms the last Samson of your zodiac" (*Poems*) in the last poem *In Country Sleep*.

Day Lewis, comparing the poetic character and functioning of the "two travellers" moving in opposite directions, Auden and Thomas cherishing amoral aesthetic disinterestedness and moral disinterestedness respectively, speculates on their future and immortality. If Thomas continually looks forward, he also occasionally looks back and rereads the ground covered earlier. The process is both accumulative and progressive. In the labyrinth of the intellectual poetry of Auden, in his movement of advance and recoil, the readers may discover certain important milestones. Day Lewis comprehends that Thomas's moral disinterestedness is for the living present, his concern for the fellow-poets, fellow-beings and paradoxical art justifies and reassures the future life of his poetry in sheer contrast to Auden's poetry of the historic aloofness and sarcasm:

What each of them shares  
 With his fellow-traveller, and which is making the best of it,  
 And whether this or the other one  
 Will be justified when the journey's done,  
 And if either may carry on some reward or regret for it  
 Whither he fares. (DCP)

MacNeice also hints at the prospect of "futuraity" of Thomas's paradoxical poetry of vicariousness, "the kind, the single-hearted ... the lads I used to love" that transcends the concerns of "humanity," "the clock strikes the hour ... tells the time none" (*AEH* 25) in contrast to the poetry of the Time-conscious Auden and the time-conscious poets of the thirties and the war poets of the forties:

And though is arid,  
 We know—and knowing bless—  
 That rooted in futurity  
 There is a plant of tenderness. (MCP)

While Thomas's early poems "Light Breaks Where No Sun Breaks," "Altarwise by Owl-Light," and "After the Funeral" carve out for him the career of a popular poet, the later poem "Fern Hill" acclaimed as *chef par excellence* assures the right niche for himself and the last poem "Over Sir John's Hill," a *chef-d'oeuvre*, reassures him of a niche in the temple of fame.

## 5. Conclusion

What Thomas has enriched and renewed his perception in "Fern Hill" is that the poet is a crucified man realizing himself through the world of sorrow, conveying in his poetry the artistic sensibility that transfigures the private agony of his fellow-mortals into a universal experience of sorrow and the wisdom that sorrow brings. His poems are the comments on the life of sorrow, "man's ... pain" (*HCP*), "man's ... cry" (*YCP*), and "man's ... sorrow" (*AEH*) and they render "the budding" artists a new vision of poetry-making and "a ray of faith" which is in sharp contrast to Auden's existentialistic faith in suffering. His poetry is, in a sense, emblematic of Hardy's transfiguring mind, "serene, sagacious, free" (*HCP*) that transmutes "cramps, black humours, wan decay, and baleful blights ... distress into delights" (102), symbolic of Yeats's magnanimous disinterestedness, "sleepy cry ... among the deepening shades" (*YCP*), "propinquity had brought ... imagination to that pitch where it casts out ... all that is not itself" (*YCP*) and synonymous with Houseman's moral disinterestedness, his poetry of "embittered hour" that "should do good to heart and head ... when your soul is in my soul's stead ... and I will friend you ... in the dark and cloudy day" (*AEH* 56). Thomas's "Fern Hill," thus, stands as a symbol of his symbols of poetic tradition, Hardy, Yeats, and Houseman and an epitome of his paradoxical poetry and magnanimity, a symbolic representation of the immutability of his poetic character and culture of his poetic *oeuvre*. It is due to this explicit enunciation of Thomas's "recalcitrant" (*MCP*) mind, his *Weltanschauung* of "the Beautiful and Damned," or, what Donald Davie calls "cultivated cries" (*Contemporary Verse* 324) that the poem "Fern Hill" can be commended as the *locus classicus*, the poetic testament of his lyric impulse identical to Yeats's symbolic poem "Byzantium" which is a paradoxical artefact of moral disinterestedness, an inclusive vision of Eliot's phonocentric poetry and Yeats's graphocentric poetry.

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