

DYLAN THOMAS'S "LAMENT": A POET OF HUMAN REALITY

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ABSTRACT: *In the poem "Lament," Dylan Thomas moans that Auden's art songs are all sarcastic about the political and the war poets' ignorance of metaphysical process of intensity, their conflicting love of mortal desires while keeping himself to ascetic aloofness, indifferent to the sufferings of the lovers of his art song. Auden's songs of self-renunciation, self-denunciation, and Annunciation are his long stream of exploits and harvests of the fellow-poets' ignorance. Quite contrastingly, Thomas's art songs, while directing the suffering ignorant poets to the Yeatsian introspective process of life and death, individuation and integration, mortal vision of Grecian altruistic art song, offer a hope for poetry and promising future and happy life. In the poem "Lament," there is further perception that Auden's pursuit of immortal vision of immortal art itself may be as unsubstantial and illusory as all the dreaming lovers of Auden's art. What Thomas shows in the poem is the Yeatsian paradoxical truth, the Yeatsian introspective process of transfiguration and transformation that assures him of Grecian philanthropic impersonal art. He finds that Yeats's mortal vision of pagan philanthropic impersonal art and human reality is analogous to the sceptic poetic tradition of Thomas Hardy, A.E. Houseman and William Blake.*

KEYWORDS: annihilate, individuation, transcend, posterity, hysterical, shrink, pagan, exalt, purgatorial, godhead, and predilection.

INTRODUCTION

Much of Dylan Thomas's poetry is concerned with the nature and function of poetry itself, and the post-lapsarian problems of human reality are presented sharply in his poems and art songs vis-à-vis the contemporary poets' concern for immortal art, immortality and pre-lapsarian virtues. He speaks of this in his last poetic testament *In Country Sleep*:

This night and each night since the falling star you were born,
Ever and ever he finds a way, as the snow falls,
As the rain falls, hail on the fleece, as the vale mist rides
Through the haygold stalls, as the dew falls on the wind-
Milled dust of the apple tree and the pounded islands
Of the morning leaves (*Poems* 80)

The metaphysical poetry of W.H. Auden, his follower Philip Larkin and the other Movement poets represents one kind of intellectual conception. But their pre-lapsarian vision, though delightful, is much too fragile and dependent on metaphysical response and being completely divorced from human reality, it does not meet the mortal man's need, the challenge of the human predicament. In contrast, in Thomas's poetry the question becomes related to the ultimate problem of man's freedom in the post-lapsarian world, "my spectre around me night and day ... like a wild beast guards my way ... my Emanation far within ... weeps incessantly for my sin" (Blake, *Collected Poems* 124), and the poet's own creative journey becomes at the same time explorative of man's destiny, "and, to end thy cruel mocks ... annihilate thee on the rocks ... and another form create ... to be subservient to my fate" (127). Thomas distinguishes the main thrust of his poetry as well as his art songs, his introspective process of reconciliation and regeneration, mortal vision of Grecian altruistic art from the contemporary poets' vision of immortal art and immortality:

As the star falls, as the winged
Apple seed glides,
And falls, and flowers in the yawning wound at our sides,
As the world falls, silent as the cyclone of silence. (*Poems*)

In the last poem *In Country Sleep*, Thomas projects his journey in the form of a mortal vision analogous to his early poem *18 Poems* and William Blake's introspective process of transfiguration and transformation, pagan altruistic functioning in contrast to Auden's Eliotian process of transgression and transmigration, eternal suffering and eternal art and the metempirical poets' dream of comfortable life and eternity, "to see a World in a Grain of sand ... and a Heaven in a wild flower ... hold Infinity in the palm of your hand ... and Eternity in an hour" (Blake).

Auden envisions that the poet is the most privileged among men; he has the power of articulation and can give visions and insights enduring forms. But this privilege also increases his responsibility and his anxiety. He learns from the influence of the metaphysical poet Walter de la Mare that the young poet has "to destroy the efflorescence of the flesh ... the intricate play of the mind, to enforce ... conformity with the orthodox bone ... with organised fear, the articulated skeleton" (Auden, *Poems* 66) and he acquires more historical knowledge that the growing poet needs historical consciousness of pure being and pure poetry, poetry of impersonal art and metaphysical reality rather than romanticism:

Give up his breath, his woman, his team;
No life to touch, though later there be
Big fruit, eagles above the stream. (37)

But Auden's contemporary friends at Oxford, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice, while defying his metaphysical vision of poetry, are time-conscious and metempirical in their vision of poetry. In the early poems *Beechen Vigil and other Poems*, Day Lewis explores in what ways he can play an effective functional role in society. The danger is that Auden's metaphysical process may delude him into fantasies and deprive him of his moorings in life "it is becoming now to declare my allegiance ... to dig some reservoir for my springtime's pain ... bewilderment, and pride, before their insurgence ... is all sopped up in this dry regimen" (Day Lewis, *Collected Poems* 20) In *Nine Experiments*, Spender struggles between time-consciousness and historical pure art, between Shelley and Auden, how he can remain a pure poet and reconcile his commitment as an artist with his obligation as a human being, "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" (19). With Spender the contemporary reality weighs very heavily on his consciousness. In the earlier poem "Genesis," MacNeice starts questioning if poetry is to be justified as something meaningful and not dismissed as a fanciful construction, how the poet should use his special faculty, "a million whirling spinning-wheels of flowing gossamer ... a million hammers jangling on the anvils of the sky ... the crisp chip of chisels and the murmuring of saws ... and the flowing ripple of waters from a million taps" (*Collected Poems* 59) and in "Evening Indoors," he analyses how pagan impersonal art of Yeats is to be differentiated from Auden's metaphysical art, "like the calm blue 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 the early poem *Poems*, Auden is seen as a lonely pilgrim in search of the meaning of life, but the poem also carries a severe indictment of the contemporary poets of retreat, dream, and illusion, "travelling by daylight on from house to house ... the longest way to the intrinsic peace ... with love's fidelity and with love's weakness" (46), and, by implication, of the idea of personal salvation. He perceives:

While the divided face
Has no grace,
No discretion,
No occupation
But registering
Acreage, mileage
Of the virtuous thing. (48-49)

The young Thomas laments that it is not clear how the rest of suffering humanity can share Auden's understanding. It may be assumed that after his emergence as a recognized poet he would write the kind of poetry that would transmit his agony and his comprehension of the

misery of suffering, and would thus share with the fellow-poets the insight that he gains from the metaphysical influence and the scenes of the past that he unfolds, “the force that drives the water through the rocks ... drives my red blood; that drives the mouthing streams ... turns mine to wax” (*Poems* 127).

The emerging pattern in Auden’s *Poems* is ironic and complex and the final impression is akin to the message of “unlamenting” dying Christ, “and I was struck down by death’s feather ... I was a mortal to last ... long breath that carried to my father ... the message his dying Christ” (*Poems* 41). Although the poem is a testament of faith, perplexities persist. The direction is clearly towards a firmer commitment to Eliotian metaphysical reality, but the visionary aspiration for immortality is not totally repudiated according to Thomas, “you who bow down at cross and after ... remember me and pity Him ... who took my flesh and bone for armour ... and double-crossed my mother’s womb” (*Poems* 41-42). In *Look Stranger!*, the narrative of eternal suffering and eternal art proceeds, Auden gains increasingly a clarity of understanding; but this clarity is attended by a deepening sense of immortality, “forgive the murderer in his glass ... tough in its patience to surpass ... the tigress her swift motions” (16).

Another Time is Auden’s transitional attempt at exploring the existential art; even while he seems to attain to enlightenment, he continues to feel the almost unbearable weight of the load of mortality. The vision embodied in the landscape symbolism of the French poet, Rainer Maria Rilke liberates the mind, at least momentarily, from the bondage of experience, but its impact is also terrifying, “no wonder then so many die of grief ... so many are so lonely as the die ... no one yet believed or liked a lie ... another time has other lives to live” (*Another Time* 62). In the elegy “In Memory of Ernest Toller,” he defends the metaphysical art of de la Mare, “it is their to-morrow hangs over the earth of the living ... and all that we wish for our friends: but existence is believing ... we know for whom we mourn and who is grieving” (111) while mourning for the contemporary poets of war time, their “unconcerned condition” (18) as they “find mortal world is enough” (44), “the warmth is enough” (45), “that existence is enough” (64). Among the war poets of the forties the passive war poet F.T. Prince passionately vows to immortalize the art of Auden, but to him truth of Auden’s immortal art is half-revealed as he stands as dilemmatic as the political poets divided between personal love and Auden’s metaphysical art, “Or Eros and of dust ... beleaguered by the same ... negation and despair ... show an affirming flame” (115). Auden experiences awe at Prince’s partial revelation of the impersonal art and the pain of incomprehension, “though kingdoms are at war ... all the peoples see the sun ... all the dwellings stand in light ... all the unconquered worlds revolve ... life must live” (124). Apparently, the tone is calm, this calm is not expressive of serenity achieved through a resolution of doubts and complexities, “the grave and my calm body are shut to your coming as stone ... and the endless beginning of prodigies suffers open” (*Poems* 78).

In the middle phase. the quester Auden’s accent bears the stresses of the purgatorial climb; and even when he reaches what seems to be the end of the pilgrimage or, at least the end of a phase, the prospect that de la Mare holds out before him is of endless travail. Despite his

hopelessness, “there are no birds, the predatory ... glaciers in a chilly evening ... and death is probable,” he believes in the metaphysical process “whatever the situation and the blame ... let the lips do formal contrition ... for whatever is going to happen” and acknowledges “the attributes of ... one immortal, one infinite Substance” (*New Year Letter* 187). This quiet power of Auden, born of a sense of resignation to his ultimate destiny from which no escape is possible, is reflected in *For the Time Being* that carries his faith in Eliot’s art songs *Four Quartets*, in God’s Grace, “they will come, all right, don’t worry; probably in a form ... that we do not expect, and certainly with a force ... more dreadful than we can imagine” (*Collected Poems* 308).

The last phase represents, in a sense, Auden’s highest poetic achievement under Eliot’s influence the original source of new direction for his early poem *Poems* that makes him grand and popular in the early phase among the contemporary poets. The heavily laden diction of *New Year Letter* and of *For the Time Being* is discarded in favour of a mellifluous austerity in the last phase, “whales in the wake like capes and Alps ... quaked the sick sea and snouted deep ... deep the great bushed bait with raining lips ... slipped the fins of those humpbacked tons.” But if Auden reaches in the transitional phase to a bare, direct statement, he also achieves, for the first time, a rich symbolic manner: “And fled their love in a weaving dip / Oh, Jericho was falling in their lungs!” In the early phase, his use of certain key-images followed a pattern: he adopts an image and explores its potential to the furthest limit, thus exploring in the process both its relevance and limitation, “till every beast blared down in a swerve ... till every turtle crushed from his shell ... till every bone in the rushing grave ...- rose and crowed and fell...” The same exploratory manner is also evident in the last phase, “she nipped and dived in the nick of love ... spun on a spout like a long-legged ball” (*Poems* 35). Eliot’s architectural art song, the key image in the poem *The Age of Anxiety* reveals both its potential and its inadequacy, “it is where we are wounded that is when He speaks ... our creaturely cry, concluding His children ...in their mad unbelief to have mercy on them all ... as they wait unawares for His World to come” (*ACP* 408-09), but in *Nones* stark statements, combined and interspersed with symbols, attain a new poetic power. Auden explains his transparent functioning:

The blessed will not care what angle they are regarded from,
 Having nothing to hide, Dear, I know nothing of
 Either, but when I try to imagine faultless love
 Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur
 Of underground streams, what I see is limestone landscape. (*Nones*13)

Thomas perceives that in conveying an experience that Auden does not fully understand and that he can only half-explain, his words have the transparency of metaphysical truth, “the whirled boat in the burn of his blood ... is crying from nets to knives” and the inscrutability of

hieroglyphics to the young Movement poets who “are making under the green, laid veil ... the long-legged beautiful bait their wives” (*Poems*). The manner that is anticipated in several passages in the early poetry, in the songs and sonnets of the transitional and middle phases, and especially in the rendering of Auden’s metaphysical process of transgression and transmigration, immortal vision of immortal art is further developed in *Nones*, and the language reflects the impact of Eliot’s miraculous vision that is both luminous and baffling, “good luck to the hand on the rod ... there is thunder under its thumbs ... gold gut is a lightning thread ... his fiery reel sings off its flames” (*Poems*) according to Thomas.

Auden’s metaphysical concept of the historical march of consciousness resulting in the emergence of qualitatively grand impersonal art seems no longer tenable, and in the early poem *18 Poems* Thomas’s knowledge of man’s inescapable tragic mystery of life and death necessitates the new Yeatsian introspective process of reconciliation and reformation and also an appraisal of Auden’s metaphysical process of self-annihilation and immortal art, “in the beginning was the three-pointed star ... one smile of light across the empty face ... one bough of bone across the rooting air.” However, he recognizes the possibility of an extension in his consciousness:

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

This increase in awareness does not alter the material facts of life – Thomas still remains a mortal creature and bears the load of pain – but it affords a clearer view of the reality of suffering. Thomas no longer aspires to immortality as he considers mortal existence as the ultimate reality:

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

Thomas laments that the greater part of mankind is denied access to Auden’s Eliotian metaphysical art, and against this Thomas in *18 Poems* proposes to offer the Yeatsian mortal

vision of Grecian altruistic art, a more comprehensive vision and proclaims his solidarity with the whole of suffering mankind

There grows the hours' ladder to the sun,
Each rung a love or losing to the last,
The inches monkeyed by the blood of man,
An old, mad man still climbing in his ghost,
My fathers' ghost is climbing in the rain. (*Poems 67*)

The poet is given a higher status in that he can secure his insights from oblivion, but it also granted that every perceptive individual can be a poet if he fulfils two conditions he must be well nurtured in his mother tongue, and possess the capacity for love

Then all the matter of the living air
Raised up a voice, and, climbing on the words,
I spelt my vision with a hand and hair, (*Poems*)

In the early poem *18 Poems*, Thomas as a man of creative consciousness seeks to explore reality and aspires to a world beyond this temporal order in quest of freedom. He emulates Thomas Hardy's *Poems of the Past and Present* and incorporates himself into the introspective process of individuation and integration, pagan altruistic vision warm impersonal art as worked out in Yeats's later poem *The Tower* in defiance of Auden's metaphysical process of transgression and transmigration and aesthetic amoral impersonal art:

A process in the weather of the heart
Turns damp to dry; the golden shot
Storms in the freezing tomb.
A weather in the quarter of the veins
Turns night to day; blood in their suns
Lights up the living worm. (*Poems 17*)

Hardy sings of human suffering, innate reality and moral disinterestedness, "the spell ... of inner themes and inner poetries" (Hardy 140), his process of endurance and tolerance, "his homely Northern breast and brain ... grow up a Southern tree" (80) and Yeats sings of his Grecian vision of reconciliation and regeneration, his paradoxical vision of kind impersonal art, "hurried through the smooth and rough ... and through the fertile and waste ... protecting, till the danger past ... with human love" (Yeats, *Collected Poems* 180).

Thomas's early poem *18 Poems* is indeed an altogether different poem, and the change is manifest both in the mode of presentation and conceptual orientation. The objective, impersonal and magnificent grandeur of Auden's early poem *Poems* is in *18 Poems* replaced by an inward vision, and there is an attempt at coalescence of the personal and the impersonal. With this shift in focus, Thomas's poem acquires Yeatsian dimensions and partakes the political poets' mystery of suffering that it attempts to probe and reveal his Yeatsian pagan altruistic impersonal art:

Light breaks where no sun shines;
Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart
Push in their tides;
And broken ghosts with glow-worms in their heads,
The things of light
File through the flash where no flesh decks the bones. (*Poems* 94)

The process of salvation or freedom from ignorance, in the altered perspective, seems to point to a condition of experience in which the paradoxical mind confronts misery, transfigures the tragic suffering and transforms into tragic mirth; his active participation and involvement, his "double vision" of his paradoxical mind that he has learnt from Yeats, "from the divorcing sky I learnt the double ... the two-framed globe that spun into a score" affords him vision of his own self and the vision of his antithetical self and assures him of tragi-comic vision of impersonal art in contrast to Auden's metaphysical ideas of transgression and transmigration, "one wound, one mind spewed out the matter ... one breast gave suck the fever's issue," his ironic speculative abstract mind represents his ancestor Eliot's idea of aesthetic amoral art. The Yeatsian "double vision" of paradoxical sensibility is implicit in Thomas's early poem, and is treated more fully in the art songs. Yeats, while explaining his introspective process of transfiguration and transformation, his kind impersonal art and the contemporary poets' fanciful vision of immortality, sings of his "double vision" of paradoxical sensibility:

I call to the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things
The most unlike, being my anti-self,
And, standing by these characters, disclose

All that I seek.... (148)

The poetry of Hardy and Yeats suggest that only a deep commitment to life, an unselfishcern for fellow-beings can give one the title of a genuine poet. Hardy sings of his mortal vision of endurance and tolerance vis-à-vis the immortal vision of immortal art, “yet, voices haunting us, daunting us, taunting us ... hint in the night-time when life-beats are low ... other and graver things ... hold we to braver things ... wait we, in trust, what Time’s fullness shall show” (Hardy 78). Yeats sings of his introspective process of individuation and integration, mortal vision of pagan philanthropic art against the metaphysical vision of aesthetic amoral art:

The death of friends, or death
 Of every brilliant eye
 That made a catch in the breath –
 Seem but the clouds of the sky
 When the horizon fades;
 Or a bird’s sleepy cry
 Among the deepening shades. (168)

In the first three poems, *18 Poems*, *25 Poems* and *The Map of Love*, Thomas reflects on his own situation and leaves it to posterity to judge the nature of his Yeatsian mortal vision of Grecian altruistic art, “over the wakeward-flashing spray ... over the gardens of the floor ... clash out the mounting dolphin’s day ... my mast is a bell-spire” (*Poems*). These poems, contain, as MacNeice observes, an indirect challenge to Auden, “the courage of eyes, the craft of hands ... the gay feet, the pulse of hope ... the will that flings a rope—though hard -- ... to catch the future off its guard” (*MCP* 191). In the later poem *Deaths and Entrances* written during war time, Thomas is especially as poignant and pragmatic as A.E. Houseman, the war poet, “the nettle nods, the wind blows over ... the man, de does not move ... the lover of the grave, the lover ... that hanged himself for love” (Houseman 33), but the political poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice perceive in his later art songs a touch of irony that operates at a deeper level: “From salt-lipped beak to the kick of the stern / Sing how the seal has kissed her dead! / The long, laid minute’s bride drifts on / Old in her cruel bed” (*Poems*). In the last poem *In Country Sleep*, Thomas evaluates that a poet can give his vision an enduring physical form, but he himself is destined to perish, “over the graveyard in the water ... mountains and galleries beneath ... nightingale and hyena ... rejoicing for that drifting death.” No insight into metaphysical reality, however significant, can alter man’s mortal destiny, “sing and howl through sand and anemone ... valley and sahara in a shell ... Oh all the wanting flesh his enemy ... thrown to the sea in the shell of a girl” (*Poems* 36).

In the last poem *In Country Sleep*, Thomas suggests to the afflicted Eliotian artist Auden entranced in metaphysical process and eternal suffering that he is to liberate himself from the logo-centric tradition, the metaphysical vision of self-annihilation and immortal art and to explore the mystery of human predicament with a sharpened insight into the heart and nature of man to regain his lost grandeur and influence among the contemporary poets, “and you shall wake, from country sleep, this dawn and each first dawn ... your faith as deathless as the outcry of the ruled sun” (*Poems* 81). The human predicament is in the nature of a mystery, and the heart’s response to this mystery should be Auden’s major concern to become as popular and influential as Thomas. However, Auden’s *Nones* presents his soul’s agonized search for light in the existential art of Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, his ultimate transcendence of anxiety and uncertainty, “no civil style survived ... that pandaemonium ... but the wry, the sotto-voice ... ironic and monochrome” (*Nones* iii), and also his war cry against the popular Thomas.

In the poems “In Country Sleep,” “Lament” and “In the White Giant’s Thigh,” Thomas shows how he confronts and transcends the dilemma in the midst of popular metaphysical stream. The urge to return to the capacious atmosphere of Yeats’s poetry of last phase, his Grecian altruistic vision is insistent, but Auden’s anxiety, loneliness and uncertainty of his immortal art and immortality, his cry of violence and vengeance against him, the Movement poets’ sympathy for Auden’s fallen condition, their divination of Auden and their chorusing of his war cry and vengeance, “my assassin to be and my name ... stands for my historical share and care ... for a lying self-made city ... afraid of our living task, the dying ... which the coming day will ask” (*Nones* 10), coupled with the urgency of his broken relationship with the political and the romantic war poets and their destructive rage and hatred for his pitiless later art songs, for his aspiring for metaphysical immortal art make him aware of the demands on poetry in a vastly altered setting, “trot and gallop with gulls upon them ... and thunderbolts in their manes ... O Rome and Sodom To-morrow and London ... the country tide is cobbled with towns” (*Poems* 38). His choice of the large canvas of Blake’s poetry, his functioning as a poet of ignorance and innocence, balance and benevolence is suggestive of the identical situation. Blake sings of his position in the midst of hostile environs:

The sun arises in the east,
Cloth’d in robes of blood and gold;
Swords and spears and wrath increast
All around his bosom roll’d
Crown’d with warlike fires and raging desires. (Blake 80)

But the chief focus that is identical with that of Hardy, Yeats and Houseman is on the inner reality of man, the introspective process of reconciliation and regeneration, individuation and integration. Thomas explains:

No longer will the vibrations of the sun desire on
Her deepsea pillow where once she married alone,
Her heart all ears eyes, lips catching the avalanche
Of the golden ghost who ringed with his streams her mercury bone,
Who under the lids of her windows hoisted his golden luggage,
For a man sleeps where fire leapt down and she learns through his arm
That other sun, the jealous coursing the unrivalled blood. (*Poems* 106)

Thomas reaches the end of his journey as a poet of success and appeal, self-fulfilment and self-contentment; this beatitude is denied to Auden in the last phase, and it is part of his tragic destiny to grope in a blind Purgatory.

But Thomas gains, through Blake's example, a clearer understanding of his own allotted role in the drama of life. Blake sings of his introspective function as a poet of individuation and co-existence, ignorance and innocence, paradoxical sensibility, human reality in human words and rhythm emulous of the poets of pagan philanthropic poetic tradition:

And now beside thee, bleating lamb,
I can, lie down and sleep;
Or think on Him who bore thy name,
Graze after thee and weep.
For, washed in life's river,
My bright mane for ever
Shall shine like the gold
As I guard o'er the fold. (56-57)

In the poem "Lie down, Sleep Becalmed" Thomas explains how, while examining Auden's miserable fall and loneliness, his critical dilemma as a victim of being a medium of historical sorrow and historical art identical to his own lonely suffering, when his functioning as a medium of pagan altruistic art in the later art songs being misread as the medium of Auden's metaphysical process of aesthetic amoral immortal art and when he confronts the ironic cry of war, violence and vengeance from the contemporary poets, he continues to function relentlessly emulating the exemplary functioning of Blake as a poet of transfiguration and transformation, prudence and innocence, modesty and magnanimity in the last phase:

Lie still, sleep becalmed, sufferer with the wound

In the throat, burning and turning. All night afloat

On the silent sea we have heard the sound

That came from the wound wrapped in the salt sheet. (*Poems* 93)

In the last poem *In Country Sleep* as well as in the last art song “Over Sir John’s Hill,” Thomas, leaving aside his own memory of bitterness and “sickness,” focuses on the “health” of the fellow-poet as well as his antagonist Auden, the process of transforming his tragic suffering into tragic joy which he has already performed in the tragic cases of the political and the romantic war poets.

Thomas laments that Auden’s art songs are all sarcastic about the political and the war poets’ ignorance of his metaphysical process of intensity, their conflicting love of mortal desires while keeping himself to ascetic aloofness, indifferent to the sufferings of the lovers of his art song. Auden’s songs of self-renunciation, self-denunciation, and Annunciation are his long stream of exploits and harvests of the fellow-poets’ ignorance according to Thomas:

He saw the storm smoke out to kill

With fuming bows and ram of ice,

Fire on starlight, rake Jesu’s stream;

And nothing shone on the water’s face.... (*Poems* 34-35)

Quite contrastingly, Thomas’s art songs, while directing the suffering ignorant poets to the Yeatsian introspective process of life and death, individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, self-exploration, self-development, self-advancement, mortal vision of Grecian altruistic art song, offer a hope for poetry and promising future and happy life:

But the oil and bubble of the moon,

Plunging and piercing in his course

The lured fish under the foam

Witnessed with a kiss. (*Poems*)

In the poem “Lament,” there is further perception that Auden’s pursuit of immortal vision of immortal art itself may be as unsubstantial and illusory as all the dreaming lovers of Auden’s art:

Is as old as water and plain as an eel;

Always good-bye to the long-legged bread

Scattered in the paths of his heels

For the salty birds fluttered and fed.... (*Poems*)

What Thomas shows in the poem is the Yeatsian paradoxical truth, the Yeatsian introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation that assures him of Grecian philanthropic impersonal art “for there’s more enterprise ... in walking naked.” Yeats sings of mythopoeic functioning, his paradoxical sensibility in contrast to the metaphysical poet of collective myths of common sorrow and the metempirical poets’ romantic myths of personal sorrow, “I made my song a coat ... covered with embroideries ... out old mythologies ... from heel to throat” (*YCP* 104). Thomas finds that Yeats’s mortal vision of pagan philanthropic impersonal art and human reality is analogous to the sceptic poetic tradition of Hardy, Houseman and Blake:

The blind, clawed stare is cold as sleet.

The tempter under the eyelid

Who shows to the selves asleep

Mast-high moon-white women naked.... (*Poems*)

MacNeice regards the first four stanzas of the poem “Lament” as projection of “always a defeat,” “a fast ...lock of ill luck, an ending where he began,” but the last stanza is meaningful in more senses than one:

And so between firth and fro Sir Patrick must make his call

To find say a northern queen, say Understanding,

And make her take ship home with him – as must we –

And should our fate preclude both home and landing

Yet to have even embarked her, though not all,

Is all most men can hope for in such a sea. (*MCP* 296)

First, the defence of poetic activity is significant in view of the subsequent denunciation of fantasy in the pagan altruistic poetry of Hardy, Yeats, Houseman and Blake. Secondly, the phrase, “home and landing” underlines an important motif in the poem. Thirdly, the poem shows the paradoxical poet Thomas’s attempt at guarding against possible self-deception, *ignites fatuus*, “and the tall grains foamed in their bills ... always good-bye to the fires of the face... for the crab-backed dead on the sea-bed rose ... and scuttled over her eyes” (*Poems*).

Reviews, Methods and Objectives

In the last poem *In Country Sleep*, Moynihan observes, “Blake’s influence looms large in Thomas’s attempt to find symbols for the old forms of Chapel and country” (33). Tindall explains that “in the house at Laugharne, Thomas has read his daughter to sleep with folk and

fairy tales. However terrible these tales, he says fear no more. Have no bad dreams of wolves, pigs, ganders, or witches; for these are natural or fictive” (275). Munro states that in the last poem Thomas “has given meaning to the human predicament, by imposing on it an all-containing form” and “the form of the poem may be taken as a miniature of the whole pattern of existence” (27). Yeomans perceives “a unified overall poetic vision emerging, one which exists in its own right – without translation” (105). However, a metaphorical study of the poem abounding in functional imagery of Thomas’s own poems as well as the poems of the contemporary poets suggests that his poised and benign functioning as a poet of introspective process of individuation and integration, organic form and regeneration, paradoxical sensibility and cosmopolitan culture ensures his success and happiness, appeal and popularity in contrast to Auden’s loneliness and anxiety, his ignorance of the cause of loss of his grandeur and the political, the war and the Movement poets’ self-deception resulting in broken dreams. This paper, focusing on Auden’s *leit-motif* of lament, immortal art and metaphysical reality from the early phase to the last phase and the political, the war and the Movement poets’ conflicting motif of immortal art and romantic reality, their lament of failures, purposes to establish Thomas’s grand success and distinctive position as a poet and an artist of mortal vision of Grecian altruistic art and human reality. The humanistic paradoxical sensibility, the ignorance and innocence, the modesty and magnanimity of the dying Thomas stands stark contrast to the whimpering end of Auden, his metaphysical ironic sensibility, the futility of the political, the war and the Movement poets, their dissociated romantic sensibility and their grumbles and murmurs.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The poem “Lament” is, at one level, a repudiation of dream and fantasy, a reaffirmation of faith in human reality, the process of life and death, but it begins with the assumption that visionary aspiration of immortal art is a thing of value and that all poets, irrespective of their culture and historical knowledge, are dreamers, “but the hungry kings of the tides ... sin who had a woman’s shape ... sleeps till Silence blows on a cloud ... and all the lifted waters walk and leap” (*Poems*). The dream of perfection of work of art perpetually haunts Auden’s mind vis-à-vis a few contemporary poets who do not feel this hunger. In the last phase, the romantic Day Lewis, “a state of undress and improvised abandon ... upon shadowless sand,” the dilemmatic Spender divided between time-consciousness and artistic dream “a sharp spasmodic peck” and even the ignorant self-indulgent MacNeice sending “a cry of protest or a call for ... protection up into all ... those dazzling miles,” construct their romantic forms, and they differ from Auden’s metaphysical beauty, “Miss Lovely, life and soul of the party ... wakes with a dreadful heart” in that they lack the expressive power to articulate their dreams. In *Nones*, Auden’s glimpses into an ideal order, “knows in fact about all dyings, is in ... fact our place, namely this ... place of a skull, a place where the rose of ... self-punishment will grow” are valuable as they show man’s capacity to rise above animal instinctiveness:

Or hearing, beyond the hushabye noises

Of sea and Me, just a voice

Ask as one might the time or a trifle

Extra her money and her life. (26)

In the juvenile verse “The Carter’s Funeral,” Auden claims that his image of the priest-poet alone is valid, “little enough stays musing upon ... the passing of one the masters of things ... only a bird looks peak-faced on ... looks and sings” (*New Verse* 5), and in “Allendale” he also debars poets of other faiths and communities from his metaphysical dream of immortal art under the influence of the metaphysical poet de la Mare:

So under it stand we, all swept by the rain and the wind there,

Muttering: ‘What look you for, creatures that die in a season?’

We care not, but turns to our dreams and the comfort we find there,

Asking no reason. (*NV*)

In early *Poems* (1928), Auden implicitly condemns the pagan and the political minded contemporary poets, Rex Warner, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice at Oxford for their paganism and communal sense, narrowness and personal comforts:

The future shall fulfil a surer vow

Not smiling at queen over the glass rim

Nor making gunpowder in the top room,

Not swooping at the surface still like gulls

But with prolonged drowning shall develop gills. (*Poems* 29)

In *Poems* (1930), Auden stresses the Eliotian impersonality, “the shutting of a door ... the tightening jaw ... a conscious sorrow ... and saying yes ... turns love into success” (54) and persistence of the longing for perfection of work of art in rejection of “the hard bitch and the riding-master” and “the lolling bridegroom, beautiful there,” the romanticism:

Needs more than the admiring excitement of union.

More than the abrupt self-confident farewell,

The heel on the finishing blade of grass, our death,

The self-confidence of the falling root,

Needs death, death of the grain, our death,

Death of the old gang.... (*Poems* 66)

The opening lines of the first stanza of the poem “Lament” projects Auden’s immortal vision of metaphysical process and immortal art in the early phase in contrast to his contemporary poets’ preference for romantic and socio-political themes:

When I was a windy boy and a bit
And the black spit of the chapel fold,
(Sighed the old ram rod, dying of women),
I tiptoed shy in the gooseberry wood,
The rude owl cried a tell-tale tit.... (*Poems* 91)

In the early poems *Country Comet* Day Lewis, while rejecting his earlier romanticism and Auden’s intellectualism, his metaphysical process of immortal art, assigns the poet a higher status under the influence of Edward Thomas’s Wordsworthian romanticism, “seeing the fall of a burnt-out faggot ... make all the night sag down ... I became lord of ... light’s interplay – a stoker of an old parable” (*DCP* 15). In *Twenty Poems*, Spender being influenced by Shelley believes that in social scene he could secure his insights from oblivion and accepts the challenge for a new order, “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” (19). But in *Blind Fireworks*, the contemporary reality rather than Auden’s metaphysical reality weighs very heavily on MacNeice’s consciousness, and he defines the poet as an observer of the socio-politico- historical events, a shaper of John Clare’s romanticism:

The rooks bicker heckle bargain always
And market carts lumber –
Let me in the calm of the all humouring sun
Also indulge my humour
And bury myself beyond creaks and cawings
In a below world, a bottom world of amber. (*Collected Poems* 68)

Thomas sums up the early vision of the pity conscious poets Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice, “I skipped in a blush as the big girls rolled ... ninepin down on donkey’s common ... and on seesaw Sunday nights I wooed ... whoever I would with my wicked eyes”(*Poems*).

Thomas in the early poem *18 Poems* suggests that only a deep commitment to life, an unselfish concern for fellow-beings can give one the title of a genuine poet. He explains:

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 last three lines of the first stanza of “Lament,” Thomas reflects on his own situation and leaves it to posterity to judge the nature of his paradoxical vision of poetry under the influences of Hardy and Yeats:

The whole of the moon I could love and leave

All the green leaved little weddings’ wives

In the coal black hush and let them grieve. (*Poems*)

18 Poems may contain, as Thomas observes in the poem “From Love’s First Fever to Her Plague” an indirect challenge to Auden’s intellectualism and the political poets’ romantic realism. The greater part of mankind is denied access to Auden’s immortal art, and against this Thomas’s proposes to offer a more comprehensive vision and proclaims his solidarity with the whole suffering mankind:

One wound, one mind, spewed out the matter,

One breast gave suck the fever’s issue;

From the divorcing sky I learnt the double,

The two-framed globe that spun into a sphere;

A million minds gave suck to such a bud

As forks my eyes.... (*Poems*)

The last line is especially poignant, but there is also a touch of irony that operates at a deeper level, “what had been one was many sounding minded.”

In the transitional and mature poems of the early phase, the political poets dream of immortal art as a synthesis of socio-political theme and Auden’s song structure, “sapience and folly,” “passion dies from the heart ... but to infect the marrow ... holds dream and act apart ... till the man discard his narrow” (*DCP* 42). In *Transitional Poem*, Day Lewis explores the possibility of possessing immortal art of Auden through the theme of his own choice, “now our research is done, measured the shadow ... the plains mapped out, the hills a natural boundary ... such and such is our country. There remains to ... plough the meadowland, reclaim the marshes” (*DCP* 54). In *From Feathers to Iron*, Day Lewis desires the integration of public and private elements, the contemporaneous theme and Auden’s aesthetic amoral art, “passion has grown full man by his first birthday ... running across the bean-fields in a south wind ... fording the river mouth to feel the tide-race ... child’s play that was, though proof of our possessions” (*DCP*), “now to be with you, elate, unshared ... my kestrel joy, O hoverer in wind” (81). In *Twenty Poems*, Spender is concerned with the eternal conflict between dream and reality. He resolves to overcome his fascination for the past and the future and to concern himself solely

with the present, “not giddied by stars, but touching the ground ... not struggling through flame to the imagined heaven” (9). MacNeice also passes through dream and fear, “crawling down like lava or termite ... nothing seduces, nothing dissolves, nothing affrights ... you who scale off masks and smash the purple lights ... but I will escape, with my dog, on the far side of the Fair” (*MCP* 78).

Day Lewis finds himself in a wild art song “A Time to Dance” which, unlike Auden’s, is luxurious and extravagant, “his fall is short of pride, he bleeds within ... and paler creeps to the dead end of his days” (*DCP* 169). Spender’s *Poems* reverberates with the idea of conflict and portrays the social reality which intrudes the private love of the poet making him difficult to remain confined to his personal love of art song, what I expected was ... thunder, fighting ... long struggles with men ... and climbing” (26). MacNeice perceives that Auden’s “never-to-be-touched vision” of art song is abundantly Circean “something of glass about her, of dead water ... chills and holds us ... far more fatal than painted flesh or the lodestone of live hair ... this despair of crystal brilliance” (*MCP* 76) and gratifies the senses of sight, sound, and smell, “so listening for the night express coming down the way ... I receive the expected whistle of the engine ... sharp and straight on the ear like stigmata” (*MCP* 77). Thomas presents the hysterical cries and “lament” of the political poets:

When I was a gusty man and a half
 And the black beast of the beetles pews
 (Sighed the old ram rod, dying of bitches),
 Not a boy and a bit in the wick-
 Dipping moon and drunk as a new dropped calf,
 I whistled all night in the twisted flues.... (*Poems*)

The time-conscious political poets’ wild love of Auden’s art song, their agony of predicament, the stormy blast of their ordeal of suffering imaged as “the glacier”, the fear of becoming stone” (*MCP* 80), “... my heart, like corn, was broken for ... a harvest I could not have” (*DCP* 204), “shapes of death haunt life, ... Neurosis eclipsing each in special shadow” (*Poems* 32), “our mind, being dead, wishes to have time die ... for we being ghosts cannot catch hold of things” (*MCP*) is equal to Dante’s “sad hell” that drives on their “spirits with restless fury”, their “rueful wailings” and their “shrieks ... lamentations, moans, ... blasphemies against the good Power in Heaven” heard in the deep darkness (Dante 19).

Auden’s *Look Stranger!* is Eliotian and the parallelism is close to Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and his aesthetic amoral impersonal art, “she climbs the European sky ... churches and power stations lie ... alike among earth’s fixtures” (*Look Stranger!* 14), but the implication is equivocal. He explains his problematic position of being “unwanted and went out” (61), a

lonely “stranger,” “the river is alone and the trampled flower ... and through years of absolute cold” (68), confronting challenges from the Yeatsian pagan lover Thomas whom his erstwhile friends Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice celebrate as their redeemer:

Look, stranger,
On this island now
This leaping light for your delight discovers,
Stand stable here
And silent be,
That through the channels of the ear
May wander like a river
The swaying sound of the sea. (*LS* 19)

To Auden, Thomas in *18 Poems* appears as “incarnate devil” telescoping two scenes, his position as paradoxical poet and his position of being antithetical to the intellectual poet Auden, in a single frame of reference, thus unfolding the evolution of human history from innocence to knowledge, from simplicity to complexity, from the felicity of immortal vision to the pain of mortal condition. Thomas recasts:

Incarinate devil in a talking snake,
The central plains of Asia in his garden,
In shapes of sin forked out the bearded apple,
And God walked there who was a fiddling warden
And played down pardon from the heaven’s hill. (*Poems* 86)

Thomas’s fall from grace, from Auden’s Christian point of view, the beginning of his misery, but the myth seems to be re-orientated in his early poem. He explains:

We in our Eden knew the secret guardian
In sacred waters that no frost could hard,
And in the mighty mornings of the earth;
Hell in a horn of sulphur and the cloven myth,
All heaven in the midnight of the sun,
A serpent fiddled in the shaping-time. (*Poems*)

Auden's metaphysical process of Eliotian impersonal art is referred to as the pre-lapsarian state, the repast prepared by Eve for the guardian angel Raphael, "whenever I dove in a breast high shoal ... wherever I ramped in the clover quilts ... whatsoever I did in the coal," and Thomas's Yeatsian introspective process of individuation and integration as the post-lapsarian state, as Eve, tempted by the Serpent Snake, eating the forbidden apple. In the early poem, Thomas follows the Yeatsian introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, the mortal vision Yeatsian pagan altruistic impersonality in defiance of Auden's Eliotian vision of aesthetic amoral impersonality, "midwives grew in the midnight ditches ... and the sizzling sheets of the town cried" (*Poems*).

The implication more fully developed in the subsequent poem *25 Poems* is that the fall is accompanied by a widening of consciousness; and if pain be inherent in experience, it is also the unique privilege of the human mind to explore the situation in which man is placed by divinity. Thomas explains:

Intricate manhood of ending, the invalid rivals,
Voyaging clockwise off the symbolled harbour,
Finding the water final,
On the consumptives' terrace taking their two farewells,
Sail on the level, the departing adventure,
To the sea-blown arrival. (*Poems* 73).

Thomas's early poem *18 Poems* and the art song "Altarwise by Owl-light" reinforce this reading. The Eliotian process of self-annihilation and historical knowledge of art song are of emblems of an ancient past; it is the task of the human mind, "man's enterprise" especially of the poet, to assimilate the mortal vision of Yeatsian altruistic art song and understand its bearing on man's present predicament, "quick! ... black night, I left my quivering prints" (*Poems*). Yeats sings of his introspective process of individuation and integration, Grecian altruistic vision of art song in contrast to the metaphysical immortal vision of immortal art song:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blar-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil. (*YCP* 184).

The drama of the innocent Eve's life is, in a different form, re-enacted in the art song of the poet-pilgrim Auden, and he avidly savours the historical process of the historical ancestors to quench his thirst. He has been so passive that his artistic process of his artistic growth is

involuntary in contrast to the contemporary poets' individualism and paganism "rise with the wind, my great big serpent ... silence the birds and darken the air ... change me with terror, alive in a moment ... strike for the heart and have me there" (*Poems* 58). In the early poem *Poems*, Auden's Eliotian historic consciousness of the momentousness of the contemporary poet Rex Warner's pagan impersonal art stirs him out of narrow confines of his self, and he imbibes the Eliotian process, pledging all living men and the renowned dead, "as for ourselves thee is left remaining our honour at least ... and a reasonable chance of retaining ... our faculties to the last" (57) according to him

Even in the stable position, the poet-pilgrim Auden in *Look Stranger!* feels the pressure of mortality with the emergence of Thomas and his Yeatsian altruistic impersonal art in the early poem, "love raging for the personal glory that reason's gift would add ... the liberal appetite and power ... the rightness of a god," "the tigress her swift motions," "as through the a child's rash happy cries ... the drowned voice of his parents rise ... in unlamenting song" (16). The Eliotian historical awareness is persistent and he associates with his journey all humanity. The idea of personal salvation is discarded; and there is the added suggestion that the pilgrim-poet is not an isolated individual, but a representative of mortal man. He sings:

Our hunting fathers told the story
Of the sadness of the creatures,
Pitied the limits and the lack
Set in their finished features.... (*LS* 17)

The lines imply a continuity: the pilgrim-poet is preceded by other spiritual ancestors; and although his journey may mark a further step in the growth of historical knowledge, the accumulated experience of earlier generations is generally accepted as a sustaining force.

In the art song "Altarwise by Owl-light," Thomas does not, as Auden suggests, wholly repudiate the earlier religious pursuits. He recognizes their significance in the history of man's search for truth and also their inadequacy:

My images stalk the trees and the slant sap's tunnel,
No tread more perilous, the green steps and spire
Mount on man's footfall,
I with the wooden insect in the tree of nettles,
In the glass bed of grapes with snail and flower,
Hearing the weather fall. (*Poems*)

Taken out of the context, the lines quoted above may signify rejection of religious systems; but seen in the light of the previous tribute to the memory of the illustrious pagan ancestor, Hardy and his introspective process of endurance and tolerance, man's innate reality, his tragi-comic vision of art song, "thus the shadowless man or ox, and the pictured devil ... in seizure of silence commit the dead nuisance" and "the natural parallel" ancestor Yeats and his introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, Grecian altruistic song, "this is the fortune of manhood: the natural peril ... a steeplejack tower, bonerailed and masterless ... no death more natural" (*Poems*), the dismissal seems qualified.

The transitional poem *The Map of Love* proves strangely powerful, the art song "After the Funeral" more potent than the early art song. The paradoxical song is as Audenesque in structure and Yeatsian in *leit-motif* as his early art song. But the important point to note is that this song produces not self-forgetfulness, but a heightening of consciousness. Thomas explains:

Oh, time enough when the blood runs cold,
And I lie down but to sleep in bed,
For my sulking, skulking, coal black soul! (*Poems*)

He persuades the pre-war poets to bid good-bye to the process of extremes of romanticism and classicism, the Wordsworthian process of "expression of personality" ("Preface" ??) and Auden's Eliotian process of "extinction personality" ("Tradition" ??) and explore the Yeatsian introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, pagan philanthropic impersonal art to become as great and popular as he in the early poem and the art song as well. Yeats insists "we must labour to be beautiful ... it's certain there is no fine thing ... since Adam's fall but needs much labouring" (64). Thomas's art song affords not a blissful escape from the atmosphere of war and misery, but a sharpened paradoxical insight into the mortal condition of his contemporary poets of pre-war time. Thomas perceives:

I mean by time the cast and curfew rascal of our marriage,
A nightbreak born in the far side, from an animal bed
In a holy room in a wave;
And all love's sinners in sweet cloth kneel to a hyleg image,
Nutmeg, civet, and sea-parsley serve the plagued groom and bride
Who have brought forth the urchin grief. (*Poems* 89)

Auden's struggle against the dominion of Thomas, "time marks a black aisle kindle from the brand of ashes ... grief with dishevelled hands tear out the altar ghost ... and a firewind kill the candle" shows his resistance to possible self-dissolution, "it is the sinners' dust-tongued bell ... when, with his torch and hourglass, like a sulphur priest." He does not fully anticipate

the effect, and he attempts to retain his identity in order to be able to comprehend the whole experience with the symbolic art of the French poet J.M. Rilke. Thomas recasts that “when I was a man you could call a man ... and the black cross of the holy house ... (sighed the old ram rod, dying of welcome)” (*Poems*). Auden determines “to set against the large and dumb ... the timeless and the rooted ... his money and his time” (*AT 15*). He explains his declining appeal against Thomas’s rising influence and popularity:

Fresh loves betray him every day
Over his green horizon
A fresh deserter rides away,
And miles away birds mutter
Of ambush and of treason;
To fresh defeats he still must move,
And the defeat of grief. (*AT 16*)

With the return of consciousness, the rehabilitated political poets, Day Lewis, Spender and MacNeice find themselves in an entirely different setting worshipping Thomas as their godhead, “and from the pacing weather-cock ... the voice of bird on coral prays.” The earlier poems of the Wordsworthian war poets Roy Fuller, Alan Rook, Keidrych Rhys disappear, “hear by death’s accident the clocked and dashed-down spire ... strike the sea hour through bellmetal,” and the active war poets Alun Lewis and Sidney Keyes discover the pity of war in Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, the First World War poets respectively, “there is loud and dark directly under the dumb flame ... storm, snow, and fountain in the weather of fireworks.” Two things that particularly strike the passive war poet F.T. Prince as a pilgrim about Auden’s sacred sanctuary are his personal love, and his strange, unearthly character. He is shrouded in eternal mystery and his elevation of Auden is awesome, “from blank and leaking winter sails the child in colour” (*Poems*). Thomas laments the pre-war poets’ mortal concerns and self-indulgence:

Brandy and ripe in my bright, bass prime,
No springtailed tom in the red hot town
With every simmering woman his mouse
But a hillocky bull in the swelter
Of summer come in his great good time
To the sultry, biding herds, I said.... (*Poems*)

The fourth stanza of the poem “Lament” focuses on the position of Auden in the middle phase and Thomas’s contra-position in the later phase, “when I was half the man I was ... and serve me right as the preachers warn ... (sighed the old ram rod, dying of downfall)” (*Poems*). Day Lewis commends Thomas’ early poem, his early and transitional art songs for his functioning as redeemer of the miserable political poets from their enchantment and dream, defeat and disgrace, ignorance and insecurity:

Strange how those yearning airs could sweeten
And still enlighten
The hours when solitude gave me her breast.
Strange they could tell a mere child how hearts may beat in
The self-same tune for the once-possessed
And the unpossessed. (*DCP* 216)

Day Lewis, then, pities Auden’s dream and destination, his rise and fall of Eliotian metaphysical process and immortal art, “alas, the bird flies blind ... hooded by a dark sense of destination” and praises Thomas’s for his Yeatsian metaphorical and metamorphical process, reconciliation and regeneration, mortal vision of pagan generous impersonal art, “each is our wish.” He elaborates:

Her weight on the glass calm leaves no impression,
Her home is soon a basketful of wind.
Travellers, we are fabric of the road we go;
We settle, but like feathers on time’s flow. (220)

During the middle phase, Auden’s literary reputation has been waning among the contemporary poets due to his “way of life,” his metaphysical process and aesthetic amoral disinterestedness, “and the colourless blind worm, triumphantly self-degraded ... who serves as an image to men of the worst adjustment ... oxymoron of parasitical glory” and “not knowing ... that he has chosen the worst. MacNeice observes in his “explorations”:

So even that legions of birds who appear so gladly
Purposeful, with air in their bones, enfranchised
Citizens of the sky and never at odds with
The season or out of line,
Can be no model to us; their imputed purpose

Is a foregone design.... (*MCP* 217)

In contrast, Thomas's popularity has been waxing in the later phase and it is all attributed to his Yeatsian process of life and death and Grecian altruistic art. MacNeice recasts Thomas's Yeatsian introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation:

And ours is not. For we are unique, a conscious
Hoping and therefore despairing creature, the final
Anomaly of the world, we can learn no method
From whales or birds or worms,
Our ends our own to be won our own endeavour
And held on our own terms. (*MCP*)

However, Auden under the influence of the metaphysical poet de la Mare, "there are no birds, the predatory ...glaciers glitter in a chilly morning," the original source of influence for his Oxford poems, is deterministic. In *New Year Letter*, while rejecting the observations of his contemporary political poets of the thirties, he sings of his continuous pilgrimage:

And death is probable. Nevertheless,
Whatever the situation and the blame,
Let the lips do formal contrition
For whatever is going to happen.... (187)

Comparison with the sceptical and sensual images is futile, "Judas the Abyss? The rocks are big and bad ... and death no substantial in the thinning air ... learning screams in the narrow gate where ... events are traded with time but cannot..." and the metaphysical process of eternal suffering and eternal art symbolizes eternity itself, "Time remembered bear witness to time required ... the positive and negative ways through time ... embrace and encourage each other ... in a brief moment of intersection" (*NYL*). Auden's Christian Oratorio, *For the Time Being* is set beside the lofty architecture, grey cathedrals, emblems of the historical religions of mankind, and even natural architectonic patterns appear as decayed relics. Subsequently, the structure is said to be New Jerusalem temple where Auden prays "to redeem ... from insignificance":

When the Spirit must practise his scales of rejoicing
Without even a hostile audience, and the Soul endure
A silence that is neither for nor against her faith

That God's Will will be done, that, in spite of her prayers,

God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph. (*ACP* 308)

But Thomas's later poem *Deaths and Entrances* seems to be the repository of his entire poetry and all his art songs, his disinterested goodwill and action corresponding to his functioning in the early poem, the early and the transitional art songs and the influence of the war poet Houseman rather than a surviving relic of a particular phase. Houseman sings of his pagan altruistic functioning during war time:

Luck, my lads, be with you still
By falling stream and standing hill,
By chiming tower and whispering tree,
Men that made a man of me.
About your work in town and farm
Still you'll keep my head from harm,
Still you'll help me, hands that gave
A grasp to friend me to the grave. (*Houseman* 9)

Houseman's pragmatic, philanthropic functioning recalls the Grecian altruistic functioning of Hardy and Yeats whom Thomas has emulated as his models of functioning in the early and the transitional phase.

Thomas explains the *leit-motif* of his later poem analogous to his early poem *18 Poems*:

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

This is especially suggested in the last stanza of the art song "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London":

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,

Secret by the unmourning water

Of the riding Thames.

After the first death, there is no other death. (*Poems* 18)

The passage is obscure, but the general implication is clear. This is a paradoxical sensibility of fusion of five traditions – the Word-centric metaphysical, the social, the patriotic, the pacifistic, the romantic into the sixth Yeatsian Grecian altruistic vision identical to his disinterested goodness and action, his impersonal vicariousness in the early poem *18 Poems* and Yeats “rooted in one dear perpetual place” in the poem “A Prayer for My Daughter.” Yeats explains his functioning during socio-politico-historical crises:

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,

The sort of beauty that I have approved,

Prosper but little, has dried up of late,

Yet knows that to be choked with hate

May well be of all evil chances chief.

If there’s no hatred in a mind

Assault and battery of the wind

Can never tear the linnet from the leaf. (*YCP* 160)

However, the political poets who have worshipped Thomas as their godhead and celebrated his early poem, his early and transitional art songs suspect that the art song “A Refusal...” is as ironic, metaphysical, pitiless as Auden, a deviation from his early poem of pity and his early and transitional songs of regeneration besides aspiring for Auden’s immortality. Thomas remembers their reading, “no flailing calf or cat in a flame ... or hickory bull in milky grass ... but a black sheep with a crumpled horn” (*Poems*). Day Lewis doubts the authorship of *18 Poems*, “if again misgivings grieve me ... that love is only a respite, an opal bloom ... upon our snow-set fields” and comments on Thomas’s later art song “A Refusal...” as deadly cruel and pitiless as Auden’s metaphysical art song:

In a shelter one night, when death was taking the air

Outside, I saw her, seated apart – a child

Nursing her doll, to one man’s vision enisled

With radiance which might have shamed even death to its lair. (*DCP* 298)

Spender likens Thomas’s later art song to the false appearance of earth covering a horrible reality:

As the earth wears a variegated cover
Of coloured flowers.
Covering chaos and destruction over
Where deaths are told. (*Poems of Dedication* 17)

MacNeice perceives that Thomas in the later art song, having lost his Yeatsian introspective process of reconciliation and regeneration, Grecian altruistic vision of art song, becomes “the casualty” of Auden’s metaphysical process and immortal art:

Here you are gabbling Baudelaire or Donne,
Here you are mimicking that cuckoo clock,
Here you are serving a double fault for set,
Here you are diving naked from a Dalmatian rock,
Here you are barracking the sinking sun,
Here you are taking Proust aboard your doomed corvette. (*MCP* 269)

Day Lewis, while commending the active war poets Lewis and Keyes for laying down their lives for the cause of pity and peace, laments his inactive role as well as the role of poets of war time, “the sea drained off, my poverty’s uncovered ... sand, sand, a rusted anchor, broken glass ... the listless sediment of sparkling days ... when through a paradise of weed joy wavered” (*DCP* 290) and pities Thomas “a liberating arm” becoming pitiless in the later art song, “Poem in October” receding “from rippled flesh bared without appetite” and aspiring for Auden’s aesthetic amoral immortal art in contrast to his early poem of moral disinterestedness:

A stranded time, neap and annihilation
Of spirit. Gaspings on the inglorious rock,
I pray the sea return, even though its calm
Be treachery, its virtue delusion. (291)

When the heroic war poets preserve the vitality of their inner spirit, the individual falls apart and shuts out pity and partake of the flaming wrath of God resulting in violence and destruction according to Spender, “shut in himself, each blind, beaked subject kills ... his neighbour and himself and shuts out pity ... for that one winging spirit which fulfils” (*Poems of Dedication* 39). MacNeice perceives that in the art song “Poem in October” Thomas moves against the *leit-motif* of pity in his early poem and merges with the metaphysical sorrow of Auden, “for all green Nature has gone out of gear ... since they were apart and hoping, since last year” while desiring immortality in contrast to the active war poets who sacrifice their lives for pity:

Sun is too bright and brittle, wheat is too quick,
She turns from them to the wood where the slow thick
Shade is becalmed and chill and as a glacial stream
Meeting the sea inlays and weaves a milky gleam
Through the dark waste, so here the bluebells flow
Athwart the undergrowth, a merger of blue snow. (*MCP* 242)

What Thomas does in the art song “Poem in October” is lamenting the heroic war poets’ ignorance of the process of individuation and integration, their being misled as victims of patriotism, nationalism and Owen’s pacifistic pity or Sassoon’s satirical pity of war, “keep dancing like a wave ... and under every dancer ... a dead man in his grave” (*YCP* 268) and projects his Yeatsian *leit-motif* analogous to that of his early poem *18 Poems* and Yeats’s singing in contrast to the heroic war poets’ death-motif as victims of dogmatists :

At last the soul from its foul mousehole
Stunk pouting out when the limp time came;
And I gave my soul a blind, slashed eye,
Gristle and rind, and a roarers’ life.... (*Poems*)

Yeats sings “sobriety is a jewel... that I do much adore ... and therefore keep me dancing ... though drunkards lie and snore” in contrast to the contemporary poets of war time, “a drunkard is a dead man ... and all dead men are drunk” (*YCP*). Towards the end of the art song Thomas possibly means that the primal, paradisiacal innocence and bliss can no longer be regained, and that the focus of his attention in the poetry and art songs as well is firmly directed towards sobriety and sagacity, to the reality of life, pain and death. What he sings in the later song “A Refusal...” is, while identical to the *leit-motif* of the early poem, the early and the transitional art songs, anticipates the identical intention in the following art song “Fern Hill” and the forthcoming last art song “Over Sir John’s Hill”:

It was my thirtieth
Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.
O may my heart’s truth
Still be sung
On the high hill in a year’s turning. (*Poems* 116)

In “Fern Hill,” Thomas projects that the experiences of the war poet Prince as passive lover of Auden’s immortal art are alternatively assuring and bewildering, and the excruciating pain that the climb involves at the beginning suggests purgatorial trial. The moment of bliss is, however, brief, and the dreamer Prince is startled to hear a stern, solemn voice that both welcomes and warns him, “and I shoved t into the coal black sky ... to find a woman’s soul for a wife” (*Poems*). Thomas recalls the voice of his own as well as Auden’s:

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* 55)

What both Auden and Thomas insists on is that the young poet is to concentrate on his *modus operandi* to ensure his success as an artist. Yeats, while laying stress on the poet’s mode of approach, contradistinguishes the metaphysical modes of approach and operation from the metaphorical and metamorphical modes, the process of perfect work of art, the aesthetic amoral disinterestedness from the process of perfect life, the moral disinterestedness, “ceremony’s a name for the rich horn ... and custom for the spreading laurel tree” (*YCP*). However, Day Lewis reads that “Fern Hill” is as metaphysical as Auden’s early poem *Poems*, “a church on a small green knoll” and confessional in tone, “a limestone church ... and above the church ... cedar boughs stretched like hands that yearn ... to protect or bless” (*DCP* 294). He understands that Thomas in his later phase seeks religious relief for all his past misdeeds, his sceptical and sensual life, “what blindly my heart is racked,” religious faith for his sustenance:

When I think hoe, 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 ---
And turned my eyes away. (295)

Day Lewis, having seen Thomas’s topsy-turvy in his way of functioning, turns away from his influence and friendship.

Spender comments that time and space consume the vitality of human life, “the miles and hours you feed ... they eat your eyes out with their distance ... they eat your heart out with devouring need ... they eat your death out with lost lost significance” (*PD* 41). MacNeice condemns

Thomas for having deviated from the motif of his early phase, from the Homeric Yeats's magnanimous art song to the Eliotian Auden's magnificent metaphysical art song, "turning back shrugging to the misty West ... remembered out of Homer but now yours" (*MCP* 267). He commends Thomas's "Fern Hill" for his accomplished craftsmanship equal to that of Auden, his immortal vision of phono-centric art song at the expense of his Yeatsian introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, Grecian altruistic mortal vision of soundless art song and human reality, his accredited name and fame. MacNeice correlates the diminishing Auden in the middle phase to Thomas's later phase:

That thread of so articulate silence. How
You died remains conjecture; instantaneous
Is the most likely – that the shutter fell
Congealing the kaleidoscopic at Now
And making all your past contemporaneous
Under that final chord of the mid-Atlantic swell. (*MCP*)

Moreover, the disgruntled and disenchanting political poets' condemnation of Thomas goes further. They deprecate Thomas's last poem *In Country Sleep* and his last art song as Audenesque in theme and structure. Day Lewis, addressing Thomas as a dreaming thing, discovers a structural coherence in the apparently unconnected thoughts and shows how hopes of pure poetry alternate with doubt and reassurance in the first part of the poem:

Rhadamanthine moment! Shall we be judged
Self-traitors? Now is a chance to make our flux
Stand and deliver its holy mark... (*DCP* 347)

He perceives that the second part projects Auden's metaphysical and visionary, immortal and mortal thoughts keeping themselves aloof, but the objective inclusive mind of Thomas is no longer agitated:

Now, when the tears rise and the leaves crumble,
To tap the potency of farewell.
What ark is there but love? Let us embark. (*DCP*)

In the poem "In Country Sleep," Thomas erects a barrier between himself and the world and thus proves worthless to society according to Spender, "in darkness where we are ... with no saving star ... we the world we made ... pay back what we paid" (*Edge* 34). MacNeice sees

Thomas in the introductory poem “In Country Sleep” as a sick man absorbed in his own speculative fantasies:

Yes, all you gave were inklings; even so
Invaluable – such as I remember
Out of your mouth or only in your eyes
On walks in blowsy August, Brughel-like December,
Or when the gas was hissing and a glow
Of copper jugs gave back your lyrical surprise. (*MCP* 269)

Day Lewis perceives that in the art song “Over Sir John’s Hill” Thomas functions as an avenger in an ironic way, “the swart ... avenger rises ... we know there’ll always be those two ... strolling away without a clue” and “magic’s credentials” that “look rather at the oafish Dread ... the Cloud-man come to strike it dead ... armed with a sword and gorgon’s head” (*DCP*), and suggests the reality of his original intention and his instigation, the *leit-motif* of his later and last art songs against Auden’s career:

To either hand the crisis throws
Its human quirks and gestures. Those
Are not essential. (*DCP*)

Spender projects the difficult choice between two ways of life, one represented by the Magi, and the other by Herod who was out to murder the Divine Child:

Her clear gaze divides
The world into two worlds:
Of kings who bring myrrh
To worship this birth:
Of heroes whose rays
Murder in the womb
Prenatal generations
Of reincarnate earth. (*Edge* 46)

MacNeice also endorses his contemporary poets’ perception of the *leit-motif* of Thomas’s later ironic art songs and his last song directed against Auden, and his killing attitude stands in sharp

contrast to the magnanimous lyric impulse of his *18 Poems*, his early and transitional art songs and his paradoxical sensibility:

Of which high humble were you,
Outside the cliques, unbothered with the fashion,
And self-apprenticed to the grinding trade
Of thinking things anew, stropping the blade
You never used, your multicoloured passion
Having been merged by death in universal Blue. (*MCP* 268)

During the later and the last phases, Thomas's paradoxical art songs fused with Auden's metaphysical process of artistic intensity and his immortal art of historical sorrow are proven as a virtuoso performance of quite dazzling accomplishment, as the Audenesque musical avant-gardism and modernism according to MacNeice.

MacNeice forewarns that Thomas's continuous moving away from "andante" to Auden's accomplished artistry and workmanship would endanger his future and see him as depressed and mad as the political poets, the lost lovers of Auden's art song:

And what happens next on the programme we do not know,
If, the red line topped on the gauge, the fish will go mad in the tank
Accelerando con forza, the sleeper open her eyes
And, so doing, open ours. (261)

Day Lewis, being doubtful about the immortality of Auden's poetry of paradox of death-in-life, aesthetic amoral disinterestedness and pitiless art songs, "dimly senses" the loss of Thomas's popularity and his immortality as he diverts in the later and the last art songs from his Yeatsian vision of altruistic art song to Auden's pure aesthetic amoral vision of art song:

What each of them shares
With his fellow-traveller, and which 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* 294)

Spender perceives that misery, that is the keynote of the song “Over Sir John’s Hill, is the haunting image of his mind in his loneliness, “while the gloom descends ... on our means become our ends” (*Edge*).

Auden’s response to the art song “Over Sir John’s Hill” that the poets of the fifties acclaim as Yeatsian transfiguration and transformation, tragi-comic vision of art song and Thomas as redeemer offering salvation to the sufferers, “but – Music Ho! – at last it comes ... the Transformation scene” (*Nones* 29) reinforces his previous sarcastic comments and perception that it is a continuation of his ironic game to liberate his friends and enemies to rise and act for the death of his adversary, a repeat of his performance in the early poem *18 Poems*, “a somewhat shapeless figure ... of indeterminate age ... in an undistinguished hat” (*LS* 27). Thomas’s last art song stands as chaotic and indiscriminate, immature and incoherent, formless and florid as his early poem according to Auden. Auden attributes this incoherent structure to the skeptical, wild influence of Yeats:

A rather scruffy-looking god
Descends in a machine
And, gabbling off his rustic rhymes,
Misplacing one or two,
Commands the prisoners to walk,
The enemies to screw. (29)

Auden’s overall conclusion is that Thomas’s last art song is as wild and flamboyant as his early poem and as unskilled and untidy as the poems of the political poets of the thirties, the war poets of the forties and the wild poet of the fifties as they are steeped in “pleasure land” (24) or “in Schrafft’s” land.

Thomas’s reply given in the art song “Poem in October” does not, however, fully resolve the political poets’ doubts about the motif of his later art songs according to Auden, “no; no one is really sorry for their ... heavy gait and careworn ... look, nor would they thank you if you said you were” (*Nones* 33). Auden adjudges that Thomas may not be wholly dreamer, but he is still a visionary. And he wonders how Thomas compares himself with those philanthropists who actively labour for the mortal well-being. Thomas, too, may feel the suffering of the world; but his humanistic sympathies operate purely on the imaginative level, while the men of action who selflessly dedicate themselves to the task of alleviating human suffering play a more positive role in society. A sense of his own unworthiness troubles the artist Auden, and this is revealed in his puzzled utterance:

Our grief is not Greek: As we bury our dead
We know without knowing there is reason for what we hear,

That our hurt is a desertion, that we are to pity
Neither ourselves nor our city;
Whoever the searchlights catch, whatever the loudspeakers blare,
We are not to despair. (*Nones* 35)

The doubt has been present in Auden's mind throughout his poetic career and he finds the same dilemma in Eliot; his last moving document *Nones* brings into sharp focus all questionings and uncertainties in regard to his vocation. The last stanza of the poem "Lament" recasts the lamenting tone of Auden and the political poets:

Now I am a man no more no more
And a black reward for a roaring life
(Sighed the old ram rod, dying of strangers),
Tidy and cursed in my dove cooed room
I lie down thin and hear the good bells jaw. (*Poems* 92).

In *Nones*, the dying Auden, "unendowed with wealth or pity ... eye each flu-infected city" (28), emulates Eliot's musical structure that makes him popular and grand in the early phase, continues the pursuit of pure poetry and pure being and intensifies his fire with the passive support of the Movement poets in general, "altogether elsewhere, vast ... herds of reindeer move across ... miles and miles of golden moss ... silently and very fast" and with the active, staunch support of Larkin in particular, "the piers are pummeled by the waves ... in a lonely field the rain ... lashes an abandoned train ... outlaws fill the mountain caves" (*Nones* 28) against the dying Thomas for his alleged conspiracy in the last art song under the influence of Yeats and joining hands with Hughes, "dear, I know nothing of ... either, but when I try to imagine a faultless love ... or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur ... of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape" (13). The poem "The Fall of Rome" hints at the idea that after emerging from death into life, and, in another sense, from dream into reality of faith in God, Auden sets out on a perilous journey of protecting the legacy of Eliot.

In *The North Ship*, the Movement poet Larkin affirms the privileged position of Auden and exalts his ceaseless spiritual quest, "submission is the only good ... let me become an instrument sharply stringed ... for all things to strike music as they please" (*Collected Poems* 301); there is also an implicit contempt for the dreamers and visionaries, "the northern sky rose and black ... over the proud untruthful sea ... East and West the ships came back ... happily or unhappily" (*LCP* 302). Thomas recasts him: "For, oh, my soul found a Sunday wife / In the coal black sky and she bore angels! / Harpies around me out of her womb! /" (*Poems*). Thomas's statement evoking the *leit-motif* of Ted Hughes's poem *The Hawk in the Rain* -- "Chastity prays for me, piety sings, / Innocence sweetens my last black breath" -- which follows

the pilgrim poet Larkin's troubled query exalts, on the other hand, the poets of disinterested goodwill and action, and even defends Yeatsian Thomas and his simple sceptic altruistic human perceptions and human reality; and it implies a total repudiation of the metaphysical poetic activity and the Eliotian Auden's mode of apprehension, "cage after cage seems empty, or stinks of sleepers from the breathing straw ... it might be painted on a nursery wall." Hughes no longer recognizes Auden's distinction between genuine poets and dreamers; he places both visionaries and fragile dreamers in the same category and contrasted with poets of action, "but he who runs like the rest these arrives ... at a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized ... as a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged ... through darkness after the drills of his eyes." The latter are not disturbed by the mystery of things; and as they do not acknowledge any reality beyond the human situation, they do not search in perplexities for truth. Hughes upholds Thomas's Yeatsian introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, Grecian altruistic functioning, paradoxical sensibility:

He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him
More than to the visionary his cell:
His stride is wildernesses of freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel,
Over the cage floor the horizons come. (Hughes 4)

In short, Thomas realizes truth in concrete, ameliorative action. It is frankly asserted that he is superior to the metaphysical visionary artists, and the point of censure is that the visionary artists, in their restless quest for metaphysical reality, miss reality itself. Yeats sings of his Grecian altruistic vision of human reality and art song in contrast to the dreamer's ecstatic existential vision of immortal art and romantic reality and the metaphysical poet's immortal vision of immortal art and metaphysical reality:

For those that love the world serve it in action,
Grow rich, popular and full of influence,
And should they paint or write, still it is action:
The struggle of the fly in marmalade.
The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours,
The sentimentalist himself; while art
Is but a vision of reality. (YCP 134)

Thus, the poem "Lament" contradistinguishes vividly the physical anguish, the metaphysical lament of Auden, the disheartened lament of the political and the Movement poets from

Thomas's functioning as a redeemer and rehabilitator of the lamenting fellow-poets. The effort of the dreaming political and the Movement poets proves nerve-racking and exhausting, and the pilgrim poet Auden feels a deathlike numbness to the suffering of his lovers, the political and the war poets. The metaphysical process of intensity stifles the lover's feet, his throat, and his heart, "rest beyond choice in the dust-appointed grain ... at the breast stored with seas. No return ... through the waves of the fat streets nor the skeleton's thin ways" (*Poems*). Thomas's Yeatsian introspective process of self-discovery, self-growth, self-advancement is "serene, sagacious, free ... her waxing seasons bloomed with deeds well done ... and the world's heart was won" (Hardy 75). He explains his process of his progress, "self-delighting, self-appeasing, self-affrighting" (*YCP*), his pagan humanistic functioning, "and I stepped out in flesh and bone ... manful like the man of stone" (AEH 34) under the influences of the pagan philanthropic vision of Hardy, Yeats, and Houseman:

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

When at last after hard toil he comes to the last phase "the sun arises in the East ... cloth'd in robes of blood and gold," he hears the cries of violence and murder from Auden and his friends old and new against him, "swords and spears and wrath increast ... all around his bosom roll'd ... crown'd with warlike fires and raging desires" (Blake 80). However, his magnanimous modesty learnt from Hardy, Yeats, Housman, and Blake ignores them and maintains his poise and benign functioning till his death, "modesty hides my thighs in her wings ... and all the deadly virtues plague my death!" (*Poems*). In the last art song "Over Sir John's Hill," Thomas heeding to "the voice" of Blake and his human reality, "beneath them sit the aged man, wise guardians of the poor ... then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door" (Blake 55), shares the suffering of the tumultuous Auden and cares for his goodness while ignoring his cry of hatred and ill-will, war-mongering and avenging in tune with his Grecian humanistic poetic tradition that makes him popular and influential in contrast to Auden's metaphysical inhuman ascetic tradition that deprives him of his popularity and grand image, "Or driven from home and left to die in fear ... they sang, but had nor human tunes nor words ... though all was done before in common as before ... they had changed their throats and had the throats of birds" (*YCP* 299).

Findings and Interpretations

The poem "Lament" implies that the censure of Auden and the political poets, their cries of vengeance and violence against Thomas's art songs is due their failure in their aspiration and ambition for immortal art song which, in turn, points to their ignorance of the process of life and death, human misery and human reality; Auden stands as metaphysical lover of the

sorrowful world, the metaphysical process of transgression and transmigration and the political poets as lovers of the world of pleasures and romantic reality. Thomas imputes their fall to extremism:

Always good-bye, cried the voices through the shell,
Good-bye always, for the flesh is cast
And the fisherman winds his reel
With no more desire than a ghost. (*Poems*)

Thomas relates the poem “Lament” to his assertions in the early poem, the early and the transitional art songs and to the contemporary poets’ earlier romantic and metaphysical pronouncements:

Always good luck, praised the finned in the feather
Bird after and the laughing fish
As the sails drank up the hail of thunder
And the long-tailed lightning lit his catch. (*Poems*)

That Thomas’s salvation, his popularity and influence is merited, that he is saved because he has probed the depths of human misery and experienced the convulsive agony of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, pagan humanistic impersonal art, disinterested goodness and action, paradoxical sensibility is suggested in the early poem *18 Poems* in contrast to the ignorance of the dreaming political poets, “how light the sleeping on this soily star” and the metaphysical knowledge of the intellectual poet Auden, “how deep the walking in the worlded clouds” (*Poems*). He perceives:

The boat swims into the six-year weather
A wind throws a shadow and it freezes fast.
See what the gold gut drags from under
Mountains and galleries to the crest! (*Poems*)

Auden’s metaphysical idea of grace or the political and the war poets’ idea of pleasure centric consciousness does not square with Thomas’s Yeatsian Grecian altruistic premise of transforming human sorrow into human joy. Yeats contradistinguishes his introspective process of reconciliation and regeneration in contrast to the contemporary poets’ exclusive sorrow or pleasure:

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day.

Love's pleasure drives his love away
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
Exhaust his glory and his might:
Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed. (*YCP* 181)

The choice involves two alternatives: one can choose either ignorance or knowledge. To shrink in fear is to die on the pavement, to return to the common earth without any comprehension of the meaning of life. Thomas explains his progressive advancement as a seasoned poet and artist over Auden's regressive struggling as a metaphysical artist, the digressive straddling of the political and the war poets as seasonal dreamers, their ignorance of human predicament and human reality:

Venus lies star-struck in her wound
And the sensual ruins make
Seasons over the liquid world,
White springs in the dark. (*Poems*)

William Empson attributes Auden's ignorance of the mystery of life and death and the political and the war poets' ignorance of historical suffering, the metaphysical process of crucifixion, their dream of immortal art to their failure and Thomas's empirical knowledge of man's suffering, his spirit of endurance and tolerance assures him of blissful career:

This last pain for the damned the Fathers found:
They knew the bliss with which they were not crowned
Such, but on earth, let me foretell,
Is all, of heaven or of hell. (*Modern Verse* 265)

But there is also a bolder, more fearful, course related to Eliotian Auden. He can with spiritual intrepidity, face the ordeal and approach the impersonal art to confront metaphysical reality itself. The hour is appointed by destiny. The priestess warns the pilgrim that he must ascend the steps of hell before he reaches the purgatorial process:

The fellow halves that, cloven as they swivel
On casting tides, are tangled in the shells,
Bearding the unborn devil,

Bleed from my burning fork and smell my heels.

The tongue's of heaven gossip as I glide

Binding my angel's hood. (*Poems*)

Empson explains that Auden's Eliotian process of historical knowledge and self-extinction leads him to attainment of the state of aesthetic amoral impersonality, the immortal vision of immortal art song and metaphysical reality:

Those thorns are crowns which, woven into knots,

Crackle under and soon boil fools' pots;

And no man's watching, wise and long,

Would ever stare them into song. (*MV*)

Again, Auden's ironic indictment of complacent, insensitive political poets and self-absorbed dreamers of art song who repose in the world in thoughtless dream cannot be reconciled with Thomas's later commendation of the capacity for responding to pain and pleasure as distinct experiences, "man in the day or wine at night ... laid the crops low, broke the grape's joy" lingers in Thomas's memory:

Once in this time wine the summer blood

Knocked in the flesh that decked the vine,

Once in this bread

The oat was merry in the wind;

Man broke the sun, pulled the wind down (*Poems* 136)

In the early poem *18 Poems*, Thomas suggests that the perception of human suffering causes intense creative disturbance. Norman MacCaig brings out Thomas's endurance and tolerance, his Yeatsian mortal vision of Grecian humanistic vicariousness in contrast to the political and the war poets' extreme reaction and Auden's metaphysical response to pain:

Clip-clop go water-drops and bridles ring,

Or, visually, a gauze of water, blown

About and falling and blown about, discloses

Pudicity herself in shameless stone,

In an unlucky world of shells and roses. (*Contemporary Verses* 236)

It is this politically-influenced hyper-sensitivity of the political poets and this aesthetically, amorally influenced metaphysical sensibility of Auden to pain that Thomas repudiates in the early poem *18 Poems* according to Henry Reece:

There was a man
With a coloured coat of rags
Who left his body and blood on a tree;
But the thieves at his side gave the bones to the dogs,
And the black-thorn cock sang merrily. (*CV* 242)

One principal feature of Thomas's mature poetic thought in the early art song "Altarwise by Owl-light" of *25 Poems* is recognition of Yeatsian paradoxical sensibility as a value. As he attains to a more inclusive view of life he discovers the inseparability of joy and pain

This flesh you break, this blood you let
Make desolation in the vein,
Were oat and grape
Born of the sensual root and sap;
My wine you drink, my bread you snap. (*Poems*)

MacCaig attributes the political poets' ignorance of Auden's metaphysical process, their time-consciousness to their miserable failure to compose art song which Thomas could succeed with his Yeatsian metaphorical and metamorphical process, moral disinterestedness:

The shaven grass a summer's litter lies
Of paper bags and people. One o'clock
Booms on the leaves with which the trees are quilted
And wades away through air, making it rock
On flower-beds that have blazed and dazed and wilted. (*CV*)

Treece imputes the political poets' failure as lovers of Auden's art song to their motif of eternal pleasures and eternity that works against Auden's motif of historical knowledge and eternal suffering:

The lads of the town
Drank down to the dregs
Then took a sharp axe to lop the tree.

But the thieves had been there first gathering logs,

And the black-thorn cock sang steadily. (CV)

Thomas's success as an artist of "Altarwise by Owl-light" confirms his popularity and influence of his early poem *18 Poems*, his Yeatsian introspective process of reconciliation and regeneration, transfiguration and transformation, Grecian altruistic impersonal art, paradoxical form of human sorrow.

Empson perceives that Auden's intellectual capacity to separate joy from sorrow points to his fundamental unreality, and his vision of art song, which is essentially tragic, is the reward of his Eliotian insight into metaphysical experience of historical knowledge and self-annihilation:

Imagine, then, by miracle, with me,

(Ambiguous gifts, as what gods give must be)

What could not possibly there,

And learn a style from a despair. (MV 267)

Human history, as Thomas envisages it in the early art song "Altarwise by Owl-light" shows the extension of his awareness of human misery, his introspective process of individuation and integration, his role in the early poem as rehabilitator to the role as redeemer in the early art song, his Grecian altruistic impersonal art from simplicity to paradoxical sensibility, his anti-intellectualism which makes the political poets worship Thomas as their godhead as a hope for poetry, prosperity and happiness. Empson underscores:

Thorns burn to a consistent ash, like man;

A splendid cleanser for the frying-pan;

And those who leap from pan to fire

Should this brave opposite admire. (MV)

And it is something of a puzzle that Auden, who incarnates the tragic mystery of creation in the transitional poem *Another Time*, almost ridicules Thomas's transitional art song "After the Funeral," his comprehension of things in which each experience is many-dimensional, "a phrase goes packed with meaning like a van ... a look contains the history of man ... and fifty francs will earn the stranger right ... to warm the heartless city in his arms" (AT 30). However, Thomas's transitional art song acquires coherence when seen not as indictment but as an exhortation as the early poem to the pre-war romantic poets to Yeatsian introspective process of self-discovery and self-development, self-identity and empathic identification according to MacCaig:

Light perches, preening, on the handle of a pram
And gaps on paths and runs along a rail
And whitely, brightly in a soft diffusion
Veils and unveils the naked figure, pale
As marble in her stone and stilled confusion. (CV 236)

Treece perceives that the transitional art song makes Thomas as “legend” whom the political poets worship as godhead in the place of Auden:

One day at dawn
Upon their nags
Twelve tinkers came and their hearts were free,
For they cut twelve whistles from the knuckles of the dogs,
To hear the black cock company. (CV)

In effect, Thomas reminds the pre-war poets of their responsibility and of the price that they will have to pay for gaining keener understanding of human reality vis-à-vis their dreaming of the Wordsworthian immortality according to Empson:

All those large dreams by which men long live well
Are magic-lanterned on the smoke of hell;
This then is real, I have implied,
A painted, small, transparent slide. (MV)

The chief point of interest, according to Vernon Watkins, in Thomas’s transitional dramatic song is its atmospheric quality and its speculation on the future of the fragmented war poets that is analogous to his major concern for the unpopular political poets and his own active magnanimous disinterested functioning in the early poem and the art song born of his own “enterprise” in contrast to Auden’s historical memory, “a christening remembered,” “the self-born mockers of man’s enterprise” (YCP). Watkins underlines:

The font in your awakening is waylaid,
Where fell that christening moment from the vine.
If I look deeply there, I see time fade
And light grow perfect, dark; and darkness shine.

Again I see the curve her body made,

Bearing you like a pitcher doomed to wine. (*MV* 369)

Edwin Muir holds that Thomas's transitional art song is an offshoot of his early poem and art song, and it has the characteristic features of Yeatsian pagan altruistic vision of art song, careful impersonal art written for the Wordsworthian pre-war poets, the hollow men's dream of great art song:

There on a summer evening

Reclines at ease upon his tomb

And is his mortal effigy.

And there within the womb,

The cell of doom.... (*MV* 357)

In "After the Funeral," Thomas directs the romantic war poets to Yeatsian process of Grecian generous impersonality that has made his early poem *18 Poems* a success in lieu of Wordsworthian process of expression of personality or Auden's Eliotian process of extinction of personality. Yeats sings that "stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more ... then stumbling to the kill beside the shore ... then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds ... and chants of victory amid the encircling hounds" (*YCP* 290).

In the later art song "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London," Thomas has been Yeatsian in his functioning identical to that of his in the early poem as a poet committed to the Grecian altruism, pragmatism and empathy, endurance and tolerance in contrast to the evasive, indifferent, self-centred functioning of the contemporary poets of war time, but very much committed to their desire for immortal art and immortality. Treece explains:

As nothing moves except one dog that runs,

A red rag in a black rag, round and round

And that long helmet plume of water waving,

In which the four elements, hoisted from the ground,

Become this grace, the form of their enslaving. (*CV*)

That Thomas, the pagan humanistic artist of sobriety and sagacity, introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation, disinterested goodwill and action, paradoxical sensibility, is superior to self-seekers and dreamers is self-evident, Empson perceives, in the later art songs:

These the inventive can hand-paint at leisure,

Or most emporia would stock our measure;

And feasting in their dappled shade

We should forget how they were made. (*MV*)

Muir underlines that Thomas's song "A Refusal..." upholds his Yeatsian process of life and death, Grecian altruistic functioning analogous to his functioning, his impersonal vicariousness in the early poem; his life-centric paradoxical sensibility stands antithetical to Auden's sound-centric ironic sensibility and the war poet's pleasure-centric dissociated sensibility:

There the ship sailing safe in harbor

Long since in many a sea was drowned.

The treasure burning in her hold

So near will never be found,

Sunk past all sound. (*MV* 356)

The modern poet Bernard Spencer underscores how Thomas in the later song has been functioning identical to that of his in the early poem and the early and the transitional art songs as an artist of disinterested goodness and action, as a dynamic energy and hope for poetry, success and prosperity "perhaps the gold of their oil is mild with dreams healing" and "the warm thing is that they are ... first promise of the South to waking travellers" in contrast to the political and the war poets imprisoned within an otherwise static images of personal safety and Auden's pursuit of immortal art and peace, aesthetic amoral impersonal art and metaphysical structural beauty, "the cold thing is that they were ... there at the start of us; and one grey look surveyed ... the builder imagining the city, the historian with his spade" (*MV* 378).

Rejecting the political poets' allegation that Thomas's later dramatic art song "A Refusal..." deviates slowly from the element of pity of his early poem *18 Poems* and seeks shelter in the metaphysical, ironic, timeless Auden, "bore back only stretched whitefingered ... hand of the swelling sea and found him sheltered," W.S Graham underscores Thomas's distinctive functioning as an artist of paradoxical sensibility, empathic love and practicality similar to his functioning in *18 Poems* and Yeatsian functioning, but dissimilar to his contemporaries' insensibility and their commitment to the structural centre of hatred and love, war and peace, and power and pride:

Sheltered in soon all of us to be

That memory against the scuppering rocks,

The spilling aprons of the sea.

Grief fills the voice with water, building ruin on the ruining land. Sheltering

In sea he breathes dry land, dry grave and dwelling. (*MV* 410)

Yeats, while underlining his commitment to functioning as an artist of moral disinterestedness “like some laurel tree ... rooted in one dear perpetual place,” explains his mortal vision of pagan philanthropic art song and human reality as a hope for future and prosperity, “the sort of beauty that I have approved ... prosper but little, has dried up of late ... yet knows that to be choked with hate ... may well be of all evil chances chief” (*YCP*).

In the art song “Poem in October,” according to Kathleen Raine, the interplay of Auden’s aesthetic amoral impersonal art, the active war poets’ Owen’s pity, the inactive romantic war poets’ and the fallen political poets’ private concerns are compared and contrasted with Thomas’s altruistic functioning, his prudent and benign position identical to that of Yeats and his own functioning in the early and the transitional phase:

My silver stag is fallen – on the grass

Under the birch-trees he lies, my king of the woods,

That I followed on the mountain, over the swift streams,

He is gone under the leaves, under the past. (*MV* 373)

Raine finds that the reconciliation of two apparently diverse passions, love and fear, war and peace, mortality and immortality, idealism and pragmatism, and birth and death is one of the distinguishing features of Thomas’s later song “Poem in October” similar to that of his own early poem *18 Poems* and Yeats’s pagan impersonal art and altruism:

What, so desiring, was my will with him,

What wished-for union of blood or thought

In single passion held us, hunter and victim?

Already gone, when into the branched woods I pursued him. (*MV*)

While Owen’s pity of war provides a model for the background of the song “Poem in October,” the asocial, apolitical and ahistorical nature of Yeats and the early Thomas is conducive to the special kind of treatment of the poets of war time and their romantic, political and historical tradition. Raine brings out the contraposition of Thomas and the contra-functioning of poets of war time desirous of immortality of the poetry of pity, love and peace:

Mine he is now, my desired, my awaited, my beloved,

Quiet he lies, as I touch the contours of his proud head,

Mine, this horror, this carrion of the wood,

Already melting underground, into the air, out of the world. (*MV*)

In “Poem in October,” Thomas reaffirms his functioning as an asocial, apolitical and ahistorical poet of empathy like his mentor Yeats in contrast to his social, political and historical contemporaries, “pillowing their heavy sculptured heads, their broad ... foreheads like rides of sand, the roch of the chin ... the mouth, the simple map of the face, the carved ... hair in full sail.” In the song of war time, Thomas reasserts his faith in the Yeatsian process of life and death and the pagan altruistic vision of art song rather than the contemporary war poets’ concern for romanticism, political patriotism and historical peace and aesthetic amoral concerns, “surrender of sunlight and market and the white ... loops of the coast ... was simply a journey, a bargain rigid as stone” (*MV* 379). Yeats, having learnt that “an intellectual hatred is the worst,” drives “all hatred,” “opinionated mind” and “recovers radical innocence ... and learns at last that it is self-delighting ... self-appeasing, self-affrighting ... and that its own sweet will is Heaven’s will” (*YCP*).

In “Fern Hill,” Thomas projects the declining Auden being sheltered and saved by the inspired war poet Prince who worships Auden’s early *Poems* as an emblem of unblemished purity and immortal art, “one by one in dust and shawl ... dry as echoes and insect-faced ... his fathers cling to the hand of the girl ... and the dead hand leads the past” (*Poems*). Raine contradistinguishes Prince’s ambition for immortal art, his timeless dissociated sensibility from Thomas’s unified sensibility and his commitment to the Yeatsian cyclical process and Grecian altruistic art since the early poem:

Oh, the stillness, the peace about me

As the garden lives on, the flowers bloom,

The fine grass shimmers, the flies burn,

And the stream, the silver stream, runs by. (*MV*)

Treece sees that it is Thomas’s integrated approach to Yeats’s paradoxical art song, his moral disinterestedness, his process of transfiguration and transformation, his tragi-comic vision of art song that ensures him of his increasing success and popularity, that it is Prince’s dilemmatic approach between Auden’s metaphysical process of historical memory and self-annihilation and his romantic love that deprives him of Auden’s impersonal art, that makes

him anxious about the fate of his immortal art reminding him of the fatality of the wild lovers of immortal art, the political poets and the war poets as death-pale victims:

The drops sigh, singing, and, still sighing, sing
Gently a leaning song. She makes no sound.
They veil her, not with shadows, but with brightness;
Till, gleam within a glitter, they expound
What a tall shadow is when it is whiteness. (CV)

Prince's artistic dream ends as a vain attempt for want of unified approach to Auden's musical sensibility. Yeats, while disapproving of the ignorant poets aspiring for immortal beauty, sings that "hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned ... yet many, that have played the fool ... for beauty's very self, has charm made wise" (YCP 159). Thomas's functioning during war time evokes the disinterested goodwill and action, the wise and noble character Hector in Homer's *Iliad*, and his adherence to sceptic, pragmatic position as an asocial, apolitical and ahistorical artist is in harmony with the Homeric tradition of Yeats who sings that "Homer is my example and his unchristened art" (YCP 215), "that high horse riderless ... though mounted in that saddle Homer rde ... where the Swan drifts upon a darkening flood" (206).

In the last art song "Over Sir John's Hill," it is the Yeatsian *leit-motif* of the pagan altruistic impersonal art, the tragi-comic vision of art song, the mythopoeic functioning, the disinterested goodness and action that makes Thomas more famous, secure and self-contented artist in contrast to Auden's Eliotian metaphysical process and functioning that results in his decline from the grand image of musical avant-garde, great influence and his discontentment, his cries of poetic justice and war mongering. The poet Raine compares and contrasts the grumbles of Auden and his well-wishers and the contentment and happiness of Thomas in the early fifties:

Trees crash at midnight unpredicted,
Voices cry out,
Naked he walks, and with no fear,
In the strange isle, the wise and gentle. (MV)

Thomas maintains his sober, serene and magnanimous functioning from the beginning till the end of his career especially in the last phase when all his friends whom he has redeemed from their suffering betray him and become his gravediggers joining hands with Auden. His balanced and innocent position ignoring the war cry of Auden and his friends, "for arrogance and hatred are the wares ... peddled in the thoroughfares" recall Yeats's attitude "she can, though every face should scowl ... and every windy quarter howl ... or every bellows burst, be

happy Still” (*YCP*). Thomas imputes the failure of the lovers of Auden’s art song to their blemished and bleached approaches that “have no business but dispensing round ... their magnanimities of sound ... nor but in merriment begin a chase ... nor but in merriment begin a quarrel” (*YCP*).

Thomas’s last song persuades the Eliotian Auden to bid adieu to the historical *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* to choose the Yeatsian cyclical process and caring impersonal art as an antidote to the grief of his declining trend. But Auden’s description of the appropriate scope and framework of the ironic song of his last phase, *Nones* “no civil style survived ... that pandaemonium ... but the wry, the sotto-voice ... ironic and monochrome,” reaffirms his functioning as the metaphysical Eliotian artist of aesthetic amoral impersonal art. He indicates his inner predilection regarding the choice of subject matter and manner:

And where should we find shelter

For joy or mere content

When little was left standing

But the suburb of dissent. (*Nones* ii)

Thus a new motif is built into Thomas’s theme of deliverance in the last art song, and this explains the dual response of the rising of simplicity and magnanimity and the falling of sovereignty and magnificence, waxing popularity and the waning literary reputation, the intimations of immortality and mortality that the last dramatic art song produces. Treece explains:

A perpetual modification of itself

Going on around her is her; her hand is curled

Round more than a stone breast; and she discloses

The more than likely in an unlikely world

Of dogs and people and stone shells and roses. (*CV*)

Watkins commends Thomas for his introspective process of individuation and transfiguration “the flood of Noah dies, the rainbow is lived ... yet from the deluge of illusions an unknown colour saved,” and integration and transformation of tragic tears into tragic joy, “white must die black, to be born white again ... from the womb of sounds, the inscrutable grain ... from the crushed, dark fibre, breaking in pain.” He implies that one of the main concerns of Thomas’s last song is the liberation of the metaphysical, phono-centric Auden from illusion and declining reputation, the alteration in the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* to ensure his recovery and regeneration as an artist of greatness and appeal among the contemporary

poets in the forthcoming years. Thomas's tragi-comic vision of art song emulous of Yeats, the paradoxical sensibility, "music of colours" stands in contrast to Auden's tragic vision of pure aesthetic and pure being, "white blossom" influenced by de la Mare and Eliot, symbols of metaphysical transcendence and transubstantiation, phono-centric tradition and double immortality, the musical avant-gardism and modernism, power and pride. Watkins compliments Thomas on his success as an artist of polygonal sensibility and soundless warm art song obscuring the grand beauty and the grandeur of Auden, the musical avant-garde:

White blossom, white, white, white shell; the Nazarene
Walking in the ear; white touched by souls
Who know the music by which white is seen,
Blinding white, from strings and aureoles,
Until that is not white, seen at the two poles,
Nor white the Scythian hills, nor Marlowe's queen. (*MV* 366)

Auden's *leit-motif* of pride and power, immortal beauty and immortality is identical with Helen of Troy, "with beauty like a tightened bow, a kind ... that is not natural in an age like this ... being high and solitary and most stern..." and the political and the romantic war poets' divided love of Auden's beauty is analogous to the pleasure-loving Trojan Prince Paris, the lover of Helen who has "taught to ignorant men most violent ways ... or hurled the little streets upon the great" and the conflicting love of the war poet Prince for Auden's historical beauty corresponds to the dilemmatic Menelaus after rescuing his wife Helen but unable to punish her irresistible beauty, as he has no "courage equal to" his "desire" (*YCP* 73).

In the last art song "Over Sir John's Hill," modesty, a profound understanding of the mortal predicament, and a capacity to bear pain are the virtues that Thomas enjoins on Auden and the young Movement poets, and the pitiless flagellation is intended to arouse their conscience. Empson observes:

Feign then what's by a decent tact believed
And act that state is only so conceived,
And build an edifice of farm
For house where phantoms may keep warm. (*MV*)

Auden's statement that the poet is less than the active doer is a reminder of both his inherent limitation and his distinctiveness according to Thomas:

And prophets loud on the burned dunes;

Insects and valleys hold her thighs hard,
Times and places grip her breast bone,
She is breaking with seasons and clouds.... (*Poems*)

He has intenser powers of apprehension and yet cannot render any direct, tangible service to society, and a proper self-evaluation and understanding of his role is a necessary prerequisite to the realization of his poetic identity. But if the poet has the privilege of a seer he has also the necessary obligations:

Round her trailed wrist fresh water weaves,
With moving fish and rounded stones
Up and down the greater waves
A separate river breathes and runs.... (*Poems*)

The sense of superiority may tend to generate complacency as inflated sense of egotism may increasingly isolate him from the rest of humanity, “strike and sing his catch of fields ... for the surge is sown with barley... the cattle graze on the covered foam ... the hills have footed the waves away...(*Poems*).

What happens in the last phase is that Thomas as Yeatsian Grecian altruistic artist ignores the deeper implications of Auden’s indictment that his art songs are all chimerical and worthless, “absence of heart – as in public buildings ... absence of mind – as in public speeches ... absence of worth – as in goods intended for the public,” ironic play within a play “indescribable – being neither this nor that ... uncountable – being any number ... unreal – being anything but what they are” (*Nones* 45) to tilt, topple and kill his grand image. He takes it not as a challenge to but as a sweeping dismissal of his poetic activity. Thomas explains, “we heard the sea sound sing, we saw the salt sheet tell ... lie still, sleep becalmed, hide the mouth in the throat ... or we shall obey, and ride with you through the drowned” (*Poems* 93). Two things may have prompted Thomas to write the last song “Over Sir John’s Hill.” First he may have feared that the readers would take Auden’s censure too literally and feels the need for clarification. Secondly, he would like to establish the fact that he is a poet as well as an artist of moral disinterestedness, an impersonal artist of vicariousness, “O keep his bones away from the common cart ... the morning is flying on the wings of his age ... and a hundred storks perch on the sun’s right hand” (*Poems* 30). Dramatically, however, Auden’s indictment lacks relevance according to Empson. The poet-pilgrim Auden seems to forget that he has been admitted into the temple of immortality precisely because he is not a dreamer like the political, the war and the Movement poets despite Thomas’s repeating the charge that Auden is of the metaphysical dreamer and suggests that the poet and the dreamer are polar opposites, “ever and ever by all your vows believe and fear ... my dear this night he comes and night without end my dear ... since you were born” (81). Empson recalls the censure of Auden, the grand Eliotian

artist, the anthropological ironic monolithic artist describing Thomas's art songs as hollow, "shape without form, shade without colour ... a paralysed force, gesture without motion" (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 79) and Machiavellian:

There is a supreme God in the ethnological section;
A hollow toad shape, faced with a blank shield,
He needs his belly to include the Pantheon,
Which is inserted through a hole behind.
At the navel, at the points formally stressed, at the organs of sense,
Lice glue themselves, dolls, local deities,
His smooth wood creeps with all the creeds of the world. (MV 266)

In contrast, Thomas's poetry as well as his art songs have been vindicating his Yeatsian process of life and death, his Grecian altruistic functioning, his paradoxical sensibility, "and you shall wake, from country sleep, this dawn and each first dawn ... your death as deathless as the outcry of the ruled sun" (*Poems*). Empson commends Thomas for his Yeatsian mortal vision of art song, his polygonal sensibility, his Yeatsian love of everyone and everything in the human world, his cosmopolitan culture, his humility that nothing is immortal on earth:

Attending there let us absorb the cultures of nations
And dissolve into our judgement all their creeds.
Then, being clogged with a natural hesitation
(People are continually asking one the way out),
Let us stand here and admit that we have no road.
Being everything, let us admit that is to be something,
Or give ourselves the benefit of doubt;
Let us offer pinch of dust all to this God,
And grant his reign over entire building. (MV)

Thomas's polylythic position is analogous to Yeats's polychromic culture, his endurance and tolerance, his tragi-comic attitude to life and death. Yeats imputes his success and self-contentment to his mortal vision of art song, his paradoxical sensibility and cosmopolitan culture:

I am content to follow to its source

Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot;
Forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest. (*YCP* 199)

Roberts maintains that Thomas's paradoxical poetry, especially his songs of vicarious impersonal art has been symbolic of his "tenacity," his immortality and this has become very obvious as Auden who has been harshly critical of his contemporaries's poetry could not damage with his critique of Thomas's sceptic poetic tradition and his early poem *18 Poems* enjoying continuous popularity among the emerging new poets, "that the world lives by labour and barter ... and all things, in the long run, end up shabby," "and we remember tracer-bullets and the white flares ... and a general atmosphere of form and colour ... with possible extinction giving flavour to the stewed pears." He commends:

'Her years of pain and glory' are not ended.
Silent, invisible, the bombs exploded,
The dead and wounded walk the cancelled streets,
Colour and form run through the brittle pages,
And Time can crumble all, but cannot touch
The book that burns, faster than we can read. (364)

Muir pays tribute to Thomas for his empathic impersonal art and art songs similar to that of Yeats, his Grecian altruistic vision of transforming the tragic suffering of his contemporaries into tragic joy and his mortal vision of art song and human reality dissimilar to Auden's Eliotian tragic vision of art song, his historical vision of immortal art and metaphysical reality:

... Christ the crucified
Christ the discrucified, his death undone.

His agony unmade, his cross dismantled—

Glad to be so—and the tormented wood

Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree

In a green springing corner of young Eden.... (360)

Thomas banishes hatred and ill-will from his mind and functions as an artist of ignorance and “radical innocence,” redemption and resurrection as he has learnt from Yeats the introspective process of individuation and integration, reconciliation and regeneration, Grecian altruistic vision of art song, “that it is self-delighting ... self-appeasing, self-affrighting ... and that its own sweet will is Heaven’s will” (*YCP*).

The poem “Lament,” thus, demonstrates that Thomas has been functioning as a poet and an artist, as the Noah of Ark, the redeemer and saviour of everything and everyone from the Deluge, innocence and ignorance, modesty and magnanimity, balance and benignity, *Weltansicht* in contrast to Auden’s metaphysical immortal vision of immortality, his *Weltanschauung* and the political, the war and the Movement poets’ broken dreams of immortal art, their *Welimirch*. His Grecian humanistic position gifted with all the pre-lapsarian characteristics stands as sharp contrast to the contemporary poets’ contra-functioning as poets of the post-lapsarian virtues, avarice and jealousy, ill-will and hatred, malcontent and discontent, malevolence and vengeance, “as the star falls, as the winged ... apple seed glides ... and falls, and flowers in the yawning wound at our sides ... as the world falls, silent as the cyclone of silence” (*Poems* 80).

CONCLUSION

In the poem “Lament,” Thomas recognizes human situation as the ultimate reality, “love seeketh not itself to please nor for itself hath any care ... but for another gives its ease ... and builds a heaven in hell’s despair,” and the related assumption is that to envision an extra-temporal order is to indulge in fantasy, “love seeketh only to please ... to bind another to its delight ... joys in another’s loss of ease ... and builds a hell in heaven’s despite” (Blake 66). He also recognizes that the human reality is fundamentally tragic; to confront reality is to experience pain, “the sun moves always west ... the road one treads to labour ... will lead one home to rest ... and will be the best” (Houseman 89). His Grecian altruistic mortal vision of salvation in defiance of Auden’s metaphysical concept of salvation also undergoes change, “with no more sound than the mice make ... his hand moves to and fro ... like a long-legged fly upon the stream ... his mind moves upon silence” (*YCP* 287). Salvation now becomes synonymous with the process of endurance and tolerance, reconciliation and regeneration, “souls have grown seers, and thought out-brings ... the mournful many-sidedness of things ... with foes as friends, enfeebling ired ... and fury-fires by gainsgivings!” (Hardy 86), the introspective process of individuation and integration, transfiguration and transformation,

“whatever flames upon the night ... man’s own resinous heart has fed” (*YCP*). This is analogous to the journey of the creative mind envisaged in the pagan altruistic poetry of Hardy, Yeats, Houseman, and Blake in contrast to Auden’s pilgrimage for immortal art and immortality. In the early art song, the salvation is shifted from individual salvation to the salvation of all mankind, “what if those things the greatest of mankind ... consider most to magnify, or to bless ... but take our greatness with our bitterness?” (169), “their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind” (179). In the transitional art song, the sense of solidarity with suffering humanity is regarded as an essential precondition for gaining access to the divination, “propinquity had brought ... imagination to that pitch where it casts out ... all that is not itself” (*YCP*), and in the later and the last art songs although Thomas speaks in his own voice his ascent is symbolic of humanity’s progress towards creative growth, “hearts with one purpose alone ... through summer and winter seem ... enchantment to a stone ... to trouble the living stream” (152). Auden’s repudiation of the Yeatsian Grecian altruistic art songs as ironic play of conspiracy and war-mongering explains his harsh dismissal of Thomas’s entire poetic work, “slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills ... the waste remains, the waste remains and kills” (*MV* 267). Auden’s estimate is not wholly justified, for while the early and the transitional art songs reach forward to a new understanding of life and poetry, the later and the last art songs mark a consummation of the early efforts, “it is the poems you have lost, the ills ... from missing dates, at which the heart expires” (*MV*). Auden’s indictment of Thomas’s entire artistic output as wasteful shows, however, the intensity of Thomas’s grasp at what he regards as true art song and reality.

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