

DYLAN THOMAS, D.H. LAWRENCE AND "THE FORCE"
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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that Dylan Thomas read, and was influenced by, the prose of D.H. Lawrence, in the years before the publication of Thomas' first volume of poetry. Similarities in their terminology and their separate characterizations of birth, sex, and death point to Thomas' use of Lawrence's world-view in formulating his own: similarities most evident between their descriptions of the "life force" in Lawrence's Fantasia and the Unconscious (1923) and Apocalypse (1931), and Thomas' poem "The Force That Through The Green Fuse" (1934).

In these works, both authors propose that life and death are circular and interdependent, and that sexuality is the means by which the two are connected in a process of continual rebirth. These propositions are here seen as adhering to two philosophical schools: a 'vitalistic' view of nature, and an "apocalyptic" view of physical and psychic rebirth. These views are applied by Lawrence and Thomas to physical and metaphysical generalizations about the nature of life. Personal experience is for both a reflection and a substantiation of those generalizations.

As evident in Thomas' references to Lawrence in his early letters and his remarks in later interviews, the younger writer expressed an interest in Lawrence which lead to his adoption of Lawrence's world-view and use of Lawrence's terminology. The former was revised in the development of Thomas' own world-view, while the latter remained, despite exceptions, a central part of Thomas' poetic vocabulary. "The Force..." illustrates Thomas' reliance on Lawrence's imagery and the previous author's concepts of sexuality and death; it also illustrates the emergence of Thomas' own ideas concerning love and language: ideas which answered flaws and omissions Thomas perceived in Lawrence's concept of "the force."

DYLAN THOMAS, D.H. LAWRENCE AND "THE FORCE"

In a letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, in 1933, the nineteen-year-old Dylan Thomas wrote,

Only today, after reading for the hundreth time out of the 'Plumed Serpent', have I come to make a valuation of Lawrence. And as nearly everyone today has come sort of set ideas upon that almost legendary figure, it may interest you to know what conclusions I--on the outskirts of the literary world, if any such world exists--have reached.

Thomas' "valuation" came at a critical period in his career: the point at which he moved from a conscious imitation of authors he admired to the development of his own style. His criticism of Lawrence, one of those authors, illustrates both a familiarity with Lawrence's point of view, and a growing distance from it--a distance which was personally, if not professionally, necessary.

How well read Thomas was in D.H. Lawrence's work is a matter of conjecture. There is no comprehensive list of Thomas' reading available (Thomas' claim to have read from The Plumed Serpent a hundred times is innocent exaggeration, and, like many of his remarks,

must be scrutinized), and yet friends and critics alike refer to Lawrence's influence on Thomas--without elaboration. Nevertheless, Lawrence was, in Thomas' words, an "almost legendary figure," whose effect on the "literary world"--including Thomas--was fundamental and pervasive. If Lawrence's theories were not ultimately convincing, they demanded, at least, reply.

Thomas' criticism of Lawrence's work is made the more pertinent because of the similarities between the two authors, both personal and professional. Thomas shared Lawrence's ambivalence toward sexuality: for both, sex was a necessary, yet often bewildering and sometimes intimidating fact of human existence. This ambivalence is expressed in their literary association of sex and death. In The Plumed Serpent, for example, Lawrence's characters express an attraction for death and a fear of sex, as emotions traditionally associated with one are transferred to the other; in Thomas' early poetry, sexuality and mortality are coincidental, as together they describe the inescapable condition of life.

As a result of this association, both Thomas and Lawrence portray life as a paradox: growth ends, not in permanence or stability, but in decline and death, while sexuality is at once a means of creating new life

and the perpetuation of a mortal existence. Birth, sexuality, and death became central themes in the work of each, and prominent reference points in their respective cosmologies, as they separately sought to describe and resolve the contradictory aspects of life.

While Lawrence was not the sole source of such theories of sexuality, it is through Lawrence that Thomas was exposed to ideas generally prevalent during the first decades of the century--ideas Thomas used in formulating his own cosmology. Lawrence's writing would, at the very least, have reinforced Thomas' ambivalence toward sexuality and his fixation on death. The similarities between their works, however, point to Thomas' further use of Lawrence's conception of sexuality: a conception dependent on the communication of birth and death in sex. While this does not mean that Thomas' world-view can be wholly attributed to Lawrence, yet the work of the earlier author can be used to explain and highlight the poetry of the later. The comparison between the two can perhaps be most easily made in their separate conceptions of a "life force," as presented in Lawrence's Apocalypse and Fantasia of the Unconscious, and in Thomas' poem "The Force That Through The Green Fuse."

In these works, Thomas and Lawrence ascribe the

contradictory aspects of life to a fundamental tension within the individual at once organic and metaphysical. Two traditions can be seen to emerge in these works: a "vitalistic" concept of nature and an "apocalyptic" vision of life. The first expresses the relationship between man and nature within a spiritual as well as organic whole, while the second proposes the interdependence of life and death in a process of continual change. For both authors, these works constitute an overview of life and sexuality, overviews connected by the elements common to both. Further coincidences between the two author's works suggest that the formulation of Thomas' cosmology was aided by a disposition to Lawrence's point-of-view, and a reliance on Lawrence's terminology.

I

Dylan Thomas' choice of trade was inseparable from his choice of identity. Paul Ferris describes how Thomas' interests had a determining role in the formation of his self-image, in a now-standard biography:

It is likely that by this time [1930] he was already conditioned to regard himself as a poet. He had written and thought about it for long enough. The previous year he contributed a survey of modern poetry to the school magazine that showed off a close acquaintance with names and trends. The business of poetry was serious. If he took up a poetic posture it was not because he was following other poets--or if he was, the pose was becoming the reality.

Thomas' interest in literature led him to emulate the writers in his father's library and those he began to collect for himself. In response to a later query, Thomas replied,

I wrote endless imitations, though I never thought them to be imitations but, rather, wonderfully original things, like eggs laid by tigers. They were imitations of anything I happened to be reading at the time: Sir Thomas Browne, de Quincey, Henry Humbolt, the Ballads, Blake, Baroness Orczy, Marlowe, Chums, the Imagists, the Bible, Poe, Keats, Lawrence,

Anon., and Shakespeare.

By the mid 1920s, Thomas' father was reading Lawrence, and, as Thomas wrote to Pamela Hansford Johnson in December of 1933:

I have. . .volumes of poetry by Aldous Huxley, Sacheverell & Edith Sitwell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, D.H. Lawrence, Humbert Wolfe, Sassoon, and Harold Monro. . .most of Lawrence, most of Joyce, with the exception of Ulysses, all Gilbert Murray's Greek translations, some Shaw, a little Virginia Woolf, & some E.M. Forster. This is inadequate, really, but added to Dad's, it makes a really comprehensive selection of literature. (Letters, p. 78)

If Thomas' approach to this "comprehensive selection" was not methodical, it was at least spirited.

Lawrence was a fortuitous inclusion, in Thomas' omnivorous reading. To a young romantic in search of an identity, Lawrence would have been an attractive model: he was a loner, a self-made outcast, a prophetic voice in a desert of social mores, dealing

openly with those topics which are the particular preoccupations of every adolescent--sexuality, the unconscious, and death. Thomas might also have seen coincidences between the domestic tensions within both households, and the fundamentalism both boys were exposed to from an early age.

By 1930, however, Thomas had become critical of Lawrence, referring to him as "the body-worshipper who fears the soul." In the previously quoted letter to Miss Johnson, Thomas maintained,

Lawrence was a moralist, a preacher, but his morals & his sermons were not progressive. He preached a doctrine of paganism and, to the best of his tubercular ability, attempted to live a pagan life. But the more paganistic, sun-and-sex loving one becomes, the less one feels the desire to write. . . .Lawrence. . . .would condense the world into a generative principle, and make his apostles decline not cogitare but copulare.

Such letters proved a useful forum for Thomas to vent his feelings, and to test his new-found position as critic. In addressing Lawrence, Thomas was willing to

exploit points on which the earlier author was ambiguous, if not contradictory.

Thomas' criticism of the contradictory aspects of Lawrence's work was, to some extent, a conscious attack upon a figure of literary authority. This attack on personal faults, real or exaggerated, yielded a like denunciation of Wordsworth, though Thomas was quick to view himself with the same weakness, and in the same company:

Fatal selfconsciousness prevents me from carrying on in the same noble vein. (How about the idiom to help my argument?) It is typical of the physically weak to emphasize the strength of life (Nietzsche); of the apprehensive and complex-ridden to emphasize its naivete and dark unwholesomeness (D.H. Lawrence); of the naked-nerved and blood-timid to emphasize its brutality and horror (Me!) (Letters, p. 48)

How Lawrence is "unwholesome" is unstated, as Thomas' criticism is directed in turns by spontaneous enthusiasm for an idea and a sense of literary perspective. Thus, Thomas' criticism is a mixture of

insight and rhetoric which makes his exact opinion of Lawrence's work problematic.

Yet, Thomas' remarks regarding Lawrence the writer--as opposed to the man--also demonstrate a respect for the sentiments Lawrence expressed. To Trevor Hughes, Thomas wrote in 1932:

What you want to keep out is morbidity, even though everything is despondent. Not a forced cheerfulness, nor a preoccupation with the pleasant instead of the dirty side. But there's a fountain of cleanness in everyone, Bach found it, Mozart, D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats and probably Jesus Christ. (Letters, p. 8)

Thomas no doubt felt a gap between the thought of Lawrence and his own, which he expressed in alternating outbursts of admiration and depreciation. A note of yearning enters into the same letter to Hughes:

Why I am writing this is uselessness. Stop it. I can't shout like Lawrence, of the red sea of the living blood. Why can't I put a message in a parcel?

There is a note of ambivalence in Thomas' remark: he is not Lawrence, nor was he meant to be; yet he cannot help but envy Lawrence's conviction. (Ironically, "the living blood" was to become a central motif in Thomas' poetry.) In another letter, Thomas admonished Hughes to write more directly, using Lawrence as an example:

What you want to do is to sit down and write, regardless of plot or characters, just as you write a letter to me. You know Middleton Murry's prose, and Lawrence's non-fiction prose. (Letters, p. 15)

How much of Lawrence's "non-fiction prose" Thomas had read by that time is unstated, yet beneath such casual references lies a familiarity with Lawrence's work which, though unmapped, made both Thomas' appreciation and his criticism possible.

The exact relationship of Thomas' thought to that of Lawrence has received surprisingly little critical attention, despite Thomas' sometimes strong feelings concerning Lawrence, and the frequency with which Thomas mentions Lawrence in his letters. There are stylistic elements common to both writers--their works

depend upon the pivotal use of certain images and themes (the sun, blood, death, and sex) which are built up through repetition, while Thomas' short-stories share with Lawrence's the same note of heavy yet ambiguous, sometimes surreal symbolism--and a correspondence between their visions of the world and conclusions about life in general. At some point, Thomas tacked a photograph of Lawrence on the wall in his study at the Boat House in Laugharne, and in his lecture tours of the United States, included two of his favorite poems by Lawrence in his readings: "On Another Home Holiday," and "The Ship of Death"--which, in turn, have their counterparts in Thomas' own "Fern Hill" and "Poem on His Birthday." The exploration of that relationship can only help to clarify Thomas' own ideas as they are presented in his poetry.

II

"The Force That Through The Green Fuse" is the poem--if any one poem can be--central to understanding the development of Thomas' thought: it contains an early formulation of the poet's attitude toward nature and sexuality, and introduces his fixations on birth,

sex, death, and the self. It is "The poem that gained the Book-prize," springing almost without revision from Thomas' notebook to print, and generally acknowledged to be one of his best poems.

"The Force" is an adolescent poem--not in the sense that it is immature, unfinished, or belonging to that second rank of poetry called "juvenilia," but in the sense that it reflects the preoccupations of a mind just growing aware of itself and the world it inhabits. As Linden Huddleston observed in 1948: "an important issue to the adolescent mind is its struggle to comprehend birth, love, sex, and death as integral parts of a scheme of life. Thomas has been preoccupied with this almost to the point of obsession." The poem traces the speaker's efforts, if not to resolve the extremes he sees at work in the processes of the world, at least to understand them clearly. His reaction to those processes is, finally, ambiguous; the overall impression of the poem recalls that "fatal selfconsciousness" of which Thomas wrote to Pamela Johnson, and which provides both the poem's impetus and power.

The speaker is, appropriately enough, himself an adolescent in the "green age" of "my youth," likened in the first line to a blooming flower. The structure of

each stanza illustrates the growing self-consciousness of this youth through his reaction to the world he perceives. As he becomes more aware of his relationship to nature and the limitations they share, the narrator grows abashed at his egocentric impulses, "dumb to tell" the rose, the hanging man, and the dead lover of this conflict of precedence. He sees himself included in the mortal world around him, aware of forces at once natural and metaphysical which dictate the conditions of all of life, and struggles to understand those forces, even as he is drawn in by them.

The poem traces the complexities of the narrator's self-consciousness through the form of observation and reply. Confronted by an impersonal, inexplicable "force" at work in the world, he responds by attempting to reduce nature to personal terms--"my youth," "my veins," "my clay." The result is a gradual internalization of that "force" through anthropomorphization, in "the hand," and then in its correspondence to human sexuality, that the powers at work in the external universe are understood in human and, finally, personal terms. The refrain at the end of each stanza shifts, in effect, from a disclaimer of his egocentricity to a reinforcement of it. In the

final refrain, the narrator maintains a tentative balance between the acceptance of his relationship to the world and a sense of isolation within the world.

"The Force" is built on repetition, symmetry, and correspondence: repetition in the grammatical and syntactical structure of each stanza, symmetry in the balance of its images of life and death, positive and negative, and a correspondence between the external world the narrator sees and the internal one he feels. The repetitive structure emphasizes the common element of "force" and its effects in images of growth and decay.

In the poem, life is portrayed as contradictory: nature is simultaneously waxing and waning, blossoming and dying. Insofar as "the force" that fuels these is an inherent mechanism, life is both self-creative and self-destructive; "the force" is not simply a mechanism of growth, but a dynamic process which includes decay and death. The poem serves to illustrate how this situation is possible.

Certainly in the first stanza, "force" best describes the processes at work within nature, as "the flower" emerges through its stem with the same power as "blasts" the tree: emergence and destruction, birth and death, are at equal--and equally violent--extremes

of life. These extremes are combined in the emotional experience of the narrator, as the intensity of both his development and his anxieties combine in the oxymoron of "wintry fever": his, a rapid, hothouse growth verging on the pathological.

The second and third stanzas bind these extremes of growth and death on a linguistic level, first in the multiple uses of the word "mouth," and then in the use of key, polysemic terms: "quicksand" and "shroud sail." The "mouthing streams" in the second stanza are those "babbling brooks" which are no longer driven but dried; "to mouth" is synonymous with "to tell" in the previous stanza; and "the same mouth sucks" at both the spring and the veins of the narrator in the destructive aspect of "the force." "Mouth" as noun, verb, and adjective binds the distinct, sometimes disparate, aspects of life into a single, variable image.

This consolidation continues, as the next stanza revolves on multiple uses of the terms "quicksand" and "shroud sail." Like "the water in the pool," a symbol of both life and change, "quicksand" is deadly, and yet, in the alternative definition of "quick" as "living", it is simultaneously vital. "Shroud sail" connects an image of life with one of death, in that

"shroud" is at once a mast-stay and a winding-sheet: the "shroud sail" catches "the blowing wind" of life, and yet enfolds the dead in a sort of burial at sea--death in the midst of life. This multiplicity of meaning is repeated in the relationship of "my clay" to "the hangman's lime" (read also: "quicklime" to correspond to "quicksand"): the narrator's body, having been created of earth, is lime for a corpse returning to it, as life and death join in the consummation of the grave.

Just as "the force" in the third stanza exhibits a shift toward the anthropomorphic, so in the the fourth it exhibits a shift toward both the particular and the abstract. The metaphors of the first line are not so much ambiguous as they are multiplex: "the lips of time" which swallow the stream (of the previous stanza) as it issues forth from "the fountain head" of life are also the lips of a baby fastened to its mother's breast. Reproduction generates, in this metaphor, two things: offspring and death, as the "milk" of life drains from one generation to the next in the perpetuation of a mortal existence.

The "fallen blood" which follows reinforces this paradox of reproduction: it is the combined blood of menstruation, defloration, and childbirth, yet as

"love," that blood calms the "sores" of mortality. In this ability to generate new life out of old, sexuality is a personal manifestation of "the force," and like that "force," fuels both death and life.

The "weather's wind" in the refrain refers to the vagaries of a transitory existence. "Heaven" is "ticked"--the inorganic counterpart to the dripping blood--"round the stars" in lightless, interstellar space: the darkness out of which the stars emerge, and into which they will one day return. The image of "stars" serves to complete the movement toward a metaphysical statement begun in "the flower" of the first stanza, the stars' terrestrial counterpart.

The final refrain restates the major points of the poem: the coincidence of life and death, and the role of sexuality in bridging them. The "lover's tomb" is both his sepulchre and his mortal body, his weakness and his power. The narrator's identification with that "lover" rests on an equally complex interpretation. "My sheet" is at once a winding sheet, as was the "shroud sail" of the third stanza, and a bed-sheet, linking, between these two possibilities, death and sex. The first interpretation resolves the "crooked worm" as one of physical corruption, the second, as the narrator's penis. The "crooked worm" of the last line

is tied to the "crooked rose" of the first stanza--in apparent allusion to William Blake's "The Sick Rose"--providing the reader with a circular poem to reflect the circular processes of nature it describes, and completing a metaphor for life, sexuality and death on an all-inclusive, organic level.

The correspondence between the self and nature at large is for Thomas a metaphorical correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm. In a letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, Thomas credited John Donne with the model for the relationship of man and nature:

The body, its appearance, death, and disease, is a fact, sure as the fact of a tree. It has its roots in the same earth as the tree. The greatest description I know of our own 'earthiness' is to be found in John Donnes's Devotions, where he describes man as earth of the earth, his body earth, his hair a wild shrub growing out of the land. . . .

Through my small, bonebound island I have learnt all I know, experienced all, and sensed all. All I write is inseperable [sic] from the island. As much as possible, therefore, I employ the scenery of the island to describe

the scenery of my thoughts, the earthquake of
the body to describe the earthquake of the
heart. (Letters, p. 48)

Thomas extends this correspondence to a metaphysical plane as well, in the refrain to the last stanza: "And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind/How time has ticked a heaven round the stars."

The revisions of these lines provide a glimpse into Thomas' developing thought on the subject of the cosmos. Between October of 1933, when the first draft was entered into the notebooks with the lines "And I am dumb to tell the timeless/How Time is all" and November of 1934, when the poem was submitted for publication in 18 Poems, Thomas tested "the timeless sun" and "the timeless clouds" in the penultimate line and "That time is all" in the last line, before the final version. Thomas' intention seems clear: to climax the poem with a statement of metaphysical truth. His revisions illustrate his attempts to do so. In revising the first line of the refrain to "the timeless sun," Thomas seemed to be drawing directly upon Lawrentian symbol for the ceaseless, timeless power within the universe: the source of life. For whatever reason--the too-close resemblance of his "sun" to Lawrence's "sun," or a

growing reliance on his own cosmology--Thomas deleted the image, substituting one of variability for that of immutability by replacing "the timeless sun" with "the timeless clouds" and then with "a weather's wind," ultimately deleting "time" altogether.

Having completed this revision, Thomas was no doubt encouraged to follow the structure dictated by the previous stanzas. He maintained the metaphysical bent of the refrain by retaining "time" in the last line of the stanza, and introducing the celestial images of "heaven" and "stars" into the previous line. Lacking Lawrence's comprehensiveness and conviction, however, Thomas' conclusion remains ambiguous. It is unclear how "time" completes the definition of "the force" at work within the poem: technically, "time" is not itself a force, but a medium by which force or change is measured. Furthermore, the tone of "heaven" seems ironic, in that it is associated with mechanical time rather than abstract time, and with the darkness between the stars, rather than the light of the stars themselves. There is, in this refrain, no reconciliation of life and death on a metaphysical plane.

Thomas' symbolism in "The Force. . ." is not, finally, fixed: it exists in a volatile association of

images which implicate all aspects of life at once, on a physical as well as metaphysical plane. If Thomas rejected the Lawrentian image of the sun in the last stanza of his poem, he did not escape the Lawrentian tone, in dealing at once with man, nature, and the cosmos--with physics and metaphysics--in a system dependent upon certain pivotal ideas: time, sex, change, and "the force."

III

Because of the many functions and manifestations that "the force" has in Thomas' poem, the term is not easily defined. Subsequent poems do little to elucidate the term: "the force that. . .drives the flower" becomes "The secret oils that drive the grass," "the hand" develops into "the green unraveller," whose destructive powers are symbolized by his "scissors," and man, in his mortal aspect, is both "Cadaver" and "Jack Christ." In "The Force. . ." more than any other poem, Thomas tends toward a metaphysics which reconciles the contradictory aspects of life and sexuality, and the role of "the force" is pivotal to that metaphysics.

Thomas' "force" seems to be a version of "life force," a much-used term during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries within a broad tradition of "vitalism." Thomas might well have been introduced to the term--particularly in its applicability to sexuality--through D.H. Lawrence's work, given Thomas' interest in Lawrence during the formative period of Thomas' thought. In Lawrence's work Thomas would have also been exposed to the "apocalyptic" nature of sexuality, that the two drives--"life force" and "death force"--would be seen as coincidental. The poem thus appeals to two philosophical traditions: a "vitalistic" view of nature in the circularity of change, and an "apocalyptic" view of life in the circularity of time. The first expresses the relationship of all living things, and the second defines the relationship of birth and death, within them.

"Vitalism" is at once a general attitude and a specific concept in an organic theory of nature. First proposed in Aristotle's natural philosophy, "vitalism" later became an attribute of Galen's physiology and Hans Driesch's biological theory. The term (or at least the idea behind it) achieved philosophical

prominence during and after the Romantic period in the philosophy of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Bergson, the natural philosophy of Herbert Spencer and Hans Driesch, and the literature of George Bernard Shaw and D.H. Lawrence.

Briefly, "vitalism" is a doctrine which proposes the existence of a distinct entity or quality, called "life," as that which distinguishes living from non-living matter. This entity or quality is shared by all living things, binding them into a whole. In Thomas' poem, the flower, the tree, "the hanging man," and the narrator are all related by their common condition in living, and the experiences which are inevitable to that condition: birth, growth, decline, and death.

The corresponding "life force"--or elan vital--is the power within all living things for self-preservation and self-propagation, an instinct for the maintenance and continuity of life. "Life force" or "will" is interpreted within that broad tradition of 'vitalism,' as an evolutionary drive in Spencer, a sexual drive in Shaw and Freud, a psychological drive in Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and an emotional drive in Lawrence (though Lawrence is less than clear on this point). In Thomas' poem, "the force" is both a

physical and an ontological drive, both common and individual. Insofar as nature is a mutually supportive relationship of living things, "the force" also serves as a bond among them that the general experiences of one entity--rose, tree, or man--corresponds to, and supports the experiences of the others.

Given the philosophical history which precedes him, Thomas' "force" seems to correspond to the "life force" in the works of earlier writers. However, Thomas' diverges from the general tradition of 'vitalism.' First of all, "the force" affects inorganic as well as organic objects--rocks and water--in the overall mutability of the world. In the seasons which alternately feed and dry the streams, "the force" represents "change," without distinction between living and non-living things. Furthermore, Thomas' "vitalism" deals equally with creative and destructive aspects of "the force," so that any "life force" is inseparable from a corresponding "death force." This latter aspect of "the force" points to an "apocalyptic" view of life: birth and death are here not only part of a circular process of life, but inseparable within it.

Life in "The Force. . ." tends towards death: the tree, "the hanging man," water, and wind all reinforce the mortality of the narrator. As part of an

ontological drive, death is at once the end of life and its fulfillment. First of all, death prefigures transformation: the "clay" of which the narrator's body is made and to which it returns is the soil out of which the flower springs and into which the tree falls, just as the "heaven" of the night-time sky is the darkness out of which the stars emerge, and into which they will someday fade. Both are versions of a "primal substance" which is the intermediary stage of successive lives. Within those lives, "the force" flows and ebbs in stream, bloodstream, and breast, in the waters of time, as life moves in continual change through death. Life flows from one season to the next in the changes of the stream, from one generation to the next through the "lips of time," and from one individual to the next in the primal substance of "clay."

The "immortality" which is denied any single being is granted to life as a whole, as the death of one creature allows for the birth of another. Birth and death gradually become interchangeable, in Thomas' poetry, as in an "apocalyptic" cycle of existence death and birth occur in the same violent instant. In "The Force. . .," "shroud sail" and "quicksand" present life and death simultaneously in one image, and in the

flower and the tree, the same "force" which "blasts" one gives birth to the other. Here, death and birth are inseparable, as elsewhere they are synonymous.

In this "apocalypse," sexuality is the human manifestation of "the force." Like "the force," sexuality is described as both positive and negative, reinforcing both the regeneration and the mortality of the individual. The child in "The Force. . ." is at once the continuation of its parents and the expression of the force ("time") which dooms them. In similar fashion, the "lover's tomb" is both his bed and his grave: the scene of consummation, and end of his "love." The duality of the narrator's "worm" reinforces the ambiguity of the image: as penis and maggot, is both the source of his sexual "power" and testimony to its physical limitations.

This is the complication within the concept of life Thomas presents in "The Force. . .": the interplay of life and death in sexuality. This complexity is not without precedent: D.H. Lawrence had expressed such a concept in his novels, defined his theory of physical regeneration in Apocalypse, and outlined his theory of psychic death and regeneration in Fantasia and the Unconscious. Possessing "most of Lawrence," Thomas might have derived Lawrence's

theories of life and sexuality from his poetry or fiction. These theories are more explicitly and exhaustively presented in Lawrence's of non-fiction. In addition, Thomas' poem seems to draw strongly upon images presented in Apoclaypse, while Thomas' remarks concerning Lawrence's excesses is applicable to Fantasia. . . . in particular. It would be useful to examine these two works of non-fiction, in order to establish the concepts the two writers held in common and the ways in which Thomas, if indeed he had drawn from Lawrence's work, chose to diverge from it.

IV

Many of the images in Thomas' "The Force. . . ." can be found in a single passage from Lawrence's novel, Sons and Lovers, and the images which reoccur in Lawrence's prose as a whole are central motifs in Thomas' poetry as well: the sun, blood, and birth (or, in Lawrence's case, "rebirth"). As Thomas did later, Lawrence used these images in formulating his own cosmology and his own metaphysics.

While the themes of sex and death are central to Lawrence's work, Lawrence's concepts of sexuality and

"life force" are most clearly explained in his non-fiction. As he himself explains:

This pseudo-philosophy of mine--'pollyanalytics', as one of my respected critics might say--is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse. The novels and poems come unwatched out of ones's pen. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man.

(Fantasia. . . ., p. 9)

The major works in this regard are Fantasia and the Unconscious, written in 1923, and Apocalypse, published posthumously in 1931. The first explores the psychic tension within the unconscious faculties of the individual and the process of personal renewal through coition, while the second explores the cultural sources of the Christian myth of cosmic destruction and regeneration. Together, these works present Lawrence's "apocalyptic" vision of human life, serving as mirror and foil to "The Force. . ." and other early poems

by Dylan Thomas.

Both of Lawrence's works acknowledge the fundamental relationship between humans and the universe on material and psychic levels, in varying degrees of scientific "realism":

When the living individual dies, then is the realm of death established. Then you get Matter and Elements and atoms and forces and sun and moon and earth and stars and so forth. In short, the outer universe, the Cosmos. The Cosmos is nothing but the aggregate of the dead bodies and dead energies of bygone individuals. The dead bodies decompose as we know into earth, air, and water, heat and radiant energy and free electricity and innumerable other scientific facts. (Fantasia, pp. 148-49)

We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos. I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. (Apocalypse, p. 200)

This is the common ground between the two works: the dynamic relationship between the individual and nature. From this common ground, however, one proposes an overall view of life, while the other examines consciousness in physiological terms, describing the formation of the self in the unconscious and the renewal of that self in sexual intercourse.

Central to both works is the concept of "apocalypse." Commonly associated with a vision of the end of the world, "apocalypse" describes the destruction of a material, cultural, or moral order, yet that destruction invariably precedes the emergence of a new order. The biblical account is only one of several cultural myths of the destruction of the world; in each case, a new set of gods and a new race of men replace the old. Drawing upon general religious principles, Lawrence saw destruction in terms of the birth-pangs of a new order, and proposed that death and birth--or death and re-birth--constituted the central experience of all human life.

On its surface a critique of "The Revelations of Saint John the Divine"--Lawrence attributes the work to "John of Patmos" (p. 19)--Apocalypse is an attempt to

remove the layers of Christian and Jewish interpretation from an essentially "pagan" myth of death and renewal. Lawrence traces the imagery of the "Revelations" back to "Chaldean star-lore," fragments of which are scattered throughout the Bible, and which Lawrence re-creates according to his needs in explaining this "apocalyptic" vision.

The basis for this vision lies in a correspondence between the cosmos and the human body:

There is an eternal vital correspondence between our blood and the sun: there is an eternal vital correspondence between our nerves and the moon. . . .The sun is a great source of blood-vitality, it streams strength to us. . . .The same with the moon, the planets, the great stars. (p. 44-45)

Lawrence does not state whether this correspondence is symbolic or physical; the ambiguity between the two possibilities aids the suggestive power of the images he presents.

The result of this correspondence, Lawrence claims, was originally a religion "of vitality, potency, and power" (p. 59) associated with "the pagan

Mysteries, Artemis, Cybele, even Orphic" (p. 62). The model of this "religion" lies in vegetation-god worship, itself based on the seasonal, cyclical death and rebirth of plants; ceremonies attached to this religion developed, in time, to "the worship of the underworld powers, the chthonioi" (p. 114), and resulted in the application of vegetative symbolism to human experience. Man's life, too, Lawrence claims, runs in cycles of periodic regeneration, as "The old nature of man must give way to a new nature" (p.113) through death, entry into the "underworld," re-emergence, and new life. In this transformation, governed by a conjunction of planets which are at once creative and destructive, death and birth are simultaneous:

The seventh stage is a death and birth at once. Then the final flame-point of the eternal self of a man emerges from hell, and at the very instant of extinction becomes a whole cloven flame of a new-bodied man with golden thighs and a face of glory. (p. 106)

This "death and rebirth," Lawrence insists, was the pagan model whereby life and the universe were

understood, synthesizing "life and death and the cosmos, the whole great adventure of the human soul" (p. 40).

The conjunction of plant and man in the interdependence of birth and death yields an "apocalyptic" physics; the conjunction of humanity and the cosmos in the necessary polarity of life and death yields an "apocalyptic" metaphysics. Both are expressions of a "potency" or "vital power" or "vital consciousness" which "Modern philosophers may call. . . Libido or Elan Vital" (p. 144). This "power" is not a mechanistic force, but a capacity and a predeliction for internal change. This concept of dynamic, apocalyptic change is central to Lawrence's thought, and finds its way into Thomas' work.

As Apocalypse presents Lawrence's vision of physical death and renewal, Fantasia and the Unconscious constitutes his vision of the psychic death and rebirth of the individual during the span of physical existence. In Fantasia. . . ., the polarization of the self in sexuality corresponds to the polarization of the world between the sun and moon in Apocalypse, and the renewal of the psychic self is the counterpart of the physical renewal in regeneration

myth.

The extinction and regeneration of the self in sex are central concerns to Lawrence's world-view. In Apocalypse, this world-view is supported by contemporary theories of cultural myth--particularly those of Sir George James Frazer, whom Lawrence mentions in passing--and in Fantasia. . . . by theories of psychoanalysis--Freud being the major influence in this regard. These theories would have been background to Thomas' thought as well, so that he might have been "prepared" for Lawrence by the general intellectual activity of the time, viewing Lawrence's work within the context of that activity.

Lawrence's non-fiction comprised an attempt to formulate a consistent theory of life and personal experience, building selectively upon scientific and philosophical developments as they served his purposes. His goal was to connect philosophy and science in a "subjective science" (Fantasia. . . ., p. 6) which would approximate a form of knowledge he claimed once existed in the major "pagan" cultures of the western world. Along with defining the major concepts of this "science," however, Lawrence had to formulate a vocabulary to deal with them effectively. As in any

science, the two are inseparable.

In Fantasia and the Unconscious, Lawrence proposes an anatomy of the human psyche in terms of opposing constituent corporal "centers." These "centers" are divided, first, into upper and lower "planes of consciousness," divided by the diaphragm. The "planes of consciousness" comprise distinct receptive centers ("plexuses") and active centers ("gangliae"), each of which is responsible for a particular aspect of the unconscious. "Thought" is thus governed by various physical characteristics in a corporeal "mind" (pp. 30-33).

Among these characteristics, sex plays the dominant role in determining the character of the individual, his or her motivations, and the relationship between the sexes. The sex of the individual determines the dominance within him or her of either upper or lower "plane of consciousness," and the relationship of the four centers determines the character of the individual (pp. 71-72). Thus all women are, "at heart," idealistic and possessive, while men, "in their guts," are inquisitive and independent (p. 31).

Each set of centers also constitutes an electro-magnetic pole, the upper being negative, the

lower being positive (p. 94). Again, the sex of the individual determines the dominance of one "pole" or the other, while the relationship or "current" between them constitutes the strength of his or her sexual identity (p. 100). Thus Lawrence explains the essential opposition of the sexes as a difference of polarity, and the "dynamic consciousness" of each individual in a "current" between their internal "poles" (p. 55).

Based on the "polarity" of the sexes, sexual desire is explained as an attraction of opposing "fields." In coition, Lawrence insists, each participant seeks both the "completion" of his or her "field," and in the neutralization of their internal, psychic "current," the temporary suspension of their identities. In coition, this "cancellation of fields" is only temporary, as sexual polarity afterwards reasserts itself, consequently reasserting the consciousness of the individual (p. 104).

This is the personal "apocalypse" of the self, as the temporary loss of identity constitutes a psychic "death" and the recovery of that identity is tied to the periodic "rebirth" of the self: "the blood of the individual finds its great renewal in a perfected sex circuit" (p. 184). Lawrence's use of the term

"circuit" indicates both the cyclical nature of this "regeneration" and the completion of the electro-magnetic current within and between the sexes. Both creative and destructive aspects are joined in this "circuit," as coition is both "magic" and "fatal":

And there can be no successful sex union unless the greater hope of purposive, constructive activity fires the soul of the man all the time: or the hope of a passionate, purposive destructive activity: the two amount religiously to the same thing, within the individual. (pp. 184-85)

Sexuality is thus positive and negative: life-affirming even while it is consciousness-destroying.

As is the case in Apocalypse, the individual in Fantasia also has counterparts in the cosmic universe in a relation to both physical and metaphysical spheres. The "poles" of the "sexual unconscious" correspond to the sun and the moon, and the cosmic forces are themselves involved in a dialectic formation of the individual:

So that we begin to realize our visible universe as a vast dual polarity between sun and moon. Two vast poles in space, invisible in themselves, but visible owing to the circuit which swoops between them, round them, the circuit of the universe, established at the cosmic poles of the sun and moon. This then is the infinite, the positive infinite of the positive pole, the sun-pole, negative infinite of the negative pole, the moon-pole. And between the two infinities all existence takes place.

But wait. Existence is truly a matter of propagation between the two infinities. But it needs a third presence. Sun-Principle and moon-principle, embracing through the aeons, could never by themselves propagate one molecule of matter. The hailstone needs a grain of dust for its core. So does the universe. Midway between the two cosmic infinities lies the third, which is more than infinite. This is the Holy Ghost Life, individual life. (p. 155)

What sexuality is for man, man is to the universe: the

manifestation of the creative forces of life, while the psychic renewal of the self in coition is thus commensurate with the symbolic renewal of the individual in death and rebirth.

Nevertheless, the emphasis at the end of Fantasia, as it is throughout Thomas' poem, is on the extinctive aspect of sex. For the properly "balanced" man, sexual union is "the splendour of the darkness between [his wife's] arms" (p. 190); "Death," Lawrence writes, "is the only pure, beautiful conclusion of a great passion" (p. 191). For Lawrence, the consummation of life lies in psychic "death," as for Thomas, it lies in physical death.

Thomas might have read either or both Apocalypse and Fantasia by 1933, when he wrote to Trevor Hughes of "Lawrence's non-fiction prose." In August of that year, Thomas travelled to London (though Hughes and George Reavy claim to have met Thomas there in 1932: see Ferris, p. 86), and would have been able to buy or read there what he did not have access to in Swansea. Later in August, Thomas began the notebook which contains the first version of "The Force. . .," and beginning in September, began to write to Pamela Hansford Johnson of his "conclusions" concerning

Lawrence.

Points in Thomas' reaction to Lawrence's work in general might well have been addressed to Fantasia.

Thomas denounced Lawrence as "a preacher, a moralist," having previously explained:

There are only three vocabularies at your disposal when you talk of sex;: the vocabulary of the clinic, of the gutter, & of the moralist. Of the three the last is by far the worst; it is compromise and the jargon of the prude. . . .The moralist, with his half learnt knowledge and his frustrated or perverted acquaintance, cloaks everything in words and symbols.

The criticism seems apt, here. Despite early moments of humor, Fantasia tends to be dogmatic, the combinations of "gangliae" and "plexuses" bewildering, and Lawrence use of autobiographical detail (his "perverted acquaintance"?) in presenting examples lends the work a personal slant which undermines its claims to objectivity. Thomas' ambivalence toward Lawrence in general would have been a natural reaction to Fantasia.

Yet Fantasia also constitutes a thorough analysis of the relationship between psyche and sexuality, and an account of the powers of the unconscious mind. As such, it explains the "magnificent power" of Sons and Lovers and presents the background for the development of Thomas' own theory of "life force."

v

In their conceptions of the nature of life and the "force" within the cosmos, the thought of Thomas and Lawrence runs parallel. Both systems rest upon shared points: the relationship of man to nature, the correspondence between man and the cosmos, and the apocalyptic nature of sexuality in particular and life in general. Just as Lawrence proposes the physical origins of consciousness in terms of a "corporal mind," Thomas refers, in a letter to Pamela Johnson, to the physical origin of all knowledge:

All thoughts and actions emanate from the body. Therefore the description of a thought or action--however abstruse it may be--can be

beaten home by bringing it onto a physical level. Every idea, intuitive or intellectual, can be imagined and translated in terms of the body, its flesh, skin, blood, sinews, glands, organs, cells, or senses. (Letters, p. 48)

This relationship of the physical to the intellectual is more clearly metaphorical for Thomas, while Lawrence maintains an ambiguous stance between the metaphorical and physical nature of this relationship:

Everything is a question of relativity. Not only is every force relative to other forces, but every existence is relative to other existences. Not only does the life of man depend upon man, beast, and herb, but on the sun and moon, and the stars. And in another manner, the existence of the moon depends absolutely on the life of herb, beast, and man. (Fantasia, p. 175)

Yet in either case, the relationship between man and nature depends upon the denominator of "the force."

For both authors, the "force" which binds the extremes of experience into a coherent life, and which

binds man, nature, and cosmos into a coherent whole is an ambiguous quality that resists definition. Thomas' "force" is at once organic and abstract, as for Lawrence the "force" is both real and symbolic, physical and psychic. As Lawrence explains, this "force" is not an external one:

I will not call this vital flow a force, because it depends on the incomprehensible initiative and control of the individual or self. Force is that which is directed only from some universal will or law. (Fantasia, p. 128)

Lawrence denies such "universal laws" because they are mechanistic: "We refuse any Cause, whether it be Sex or Libido or Elan Vital or ether or unit of force or perpetuum mobile or anything else" (p. 13). In suspicion of the terminology itself, Lawrence avoids defining "this vital flow," contentent to describe its actions in various ways. For Thomas, too, the poetic power of "the force" stems from its ambiguity and allusive power: in revising the poem, he resisted defining it as "time" as Lawrence avoided defining it as "Sex or Libido or Elan Vital."

The contradictory aspects of this "force" are reconciled, for Thomas, first in the interdependence of all life within the circular processes of nature, and then in the coincidence of birth and death in an "apocalyptic" view of life. In "The Force. . .," the narrator's "clay" is the substance common to all life, while the water which alternately flows and ebbs in seasonal progression mirrors the cycles of death and regeneration which transforms one man's "clay" into another's. It is characteristic of Thomas' poetry in general that life and death are mutually inherent--"the pulse of summer in the ice" and the child who is both "green and dying"--as birth and death are not only interdependent, but simultaneous. Life is in a constant state of "apocalypse," just as for Lawrence, life depends upon a continuous process of "rebirth."

Similarities between the two authors' works go beyond these concepts of "vitalism" and "apocalypse." Many of Lawrence's images anticipate those of Thomas, whether by coincidence or in a loose assimilation of terminology by the young writer. In Apocalypse, for instance, Lawrence explains:

. . .the Apocalypse is still, in its

movement, one of the works of the old pagan civilisation, and in it we have, not the modern process of progressive thought, but the old pagan process of rotary image-thought. Every image fulfils its own little circle of action and meaning, then is superceded by another image. . . .Every image is a picturegraph, and the connection between the images will be made more or less differently by every reader. Nay, every image will be understood differently by every reader, according to his emotion-reaction. And yet there is a certain precise plan or scheme. (p. 83)

The same idea of "circular thought"--the progression of successive images--is expressed by Thomas as well. In a letter to Henry Treece in 1938, Thomas observes

. . . .when you say that I have not Cameron's or Madge's 'concentric movement round a central image' you are not accounting for the fact that it consciously is not my method to move concentricly round a central image. A poem by Cameron needs no more than one image; it moves around one idea, from one logical

point to another, making a full circle. A poem by myself needs a host of images because its centre is a host of images. I make one image. . .let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make of the third image bred out of the dangling over the formal limits, and dragged the poem into another. . .An image must be born and die in another; and any sequence of my images must be a sequence of creations, recreations, destructions, contradictions. . .I believe in the single thread of action through a poem, but that is an intellectual thing aimed at lucidly through narrative. (Letters, p. 190-91)

Thomas' method, like Lawrence's world-view, is a mixture of synthetic and sequential states and images, and Lawrence's "rotary image-thought" is consistent with Thomas' stated poetic method.

Coincidences between the two writers' works continue, as images in "The Force. . ." have direct counterparts in Lawrence's prose. Lawrence's discussion of the dynamic flow between the child and its mother's breast in Fantasia. . . (pp. 69-70) is

consistent with "the lips of time" in "The Force. . .," "the well-heads of our existence" (p. 72) reflects "the fountain head" of life, and the "wheels of the heavens" (Apocalypse, p. 56) seem wound "round the stars" in Thomas' poem, as well.

Yet such a comparison is finally too easy. Neither of their cosmologies are comprehensive nor fixed, and Thomas' attitude toward Lawrence is expressed in a selective use of Lawrence's images and ideas. It is important to note as well how Thomas diverges from Lawrence's concepts.

VI

In response to the apparent finality of death, Thomas and Lawrence both incorporate a circular model of life into their respective works. Lawrence promotes the symbolic death and rebirth of his characters in his poems, short-stories, novels, and non-fiction, while Thomas proposes the interdependence of all life in the "clay" which binds flower and tree, narrator and hanged man, and the "milk" which connects mother and child. "Life" is for both a closed system which is self-sustaining and self-perpetuating.

Both writers also describe the complex qualities of sexuality. In The Plumed Serpent, Kate reacts to sexual situations with a mixture of attraction and fear, while in Fantasia. . . ., the relationship of the sexes necessary, yet overshadowed by antagonism--a positive-negative polarity which defies permanent reconciliation. In Thomas' poetry and prose, procreation yields death, while images of masturbation and sexual frustration overshadow effective heterosexual intercourse--witness the "lover's" rather than "lovers'" tomb in "The Force. . . .," and the narrator's solitary "sheet." Lawrence's response is a complex process of psychic extinction, in which sexual identity is neutralized even as it is fulfilled, while Thomas formulates a theory of "love" which describes it as asexual and immortal. In his use of "love," Thomas diverges from Lawrence's view of the polarity of the sexes, and qualifies the strictly circular view of life.

In Lawrence's Fantasia. . . ., "love" between the sexes is variously described as a psychic emanation, a sense of duty, and a possessive impulse: given the fundamental opposition of the sexes, all of these are expressions of the psychic distance between two

individuals, rather than their psychic or emotional union. "Love" is an ambiguous quality. In its most elementary definition, love is a physical emanation, as "Without sight or scent or hearing the powerful magnetic current vibrates from the hypo-gastric plexus in the female. . . .And there is immediate response from the sacral ganglion in some male" (p. 183). As a physical impulse, "love" quickly becomes "love-will," the possessive impulse of all females. The mother's "love" of her children becomes an idealistic yet smothering activity: Lawrence refers to it as "this stone, this scorpion of maternal nourishment" (p. 140). Between two adults, "love" can take two forms: either a derivative of the previous "love-will," in a "softness and sweetness and smarminess and intimacy and promiscuous kindness" (p. 187)--in short, "poison" (p. 76)--or as an undemanding, ideal supportiveness: a

quiescent, flowering love. . . sexually asking nothing, asking nothing of the beloved, save that he shall be himself, and that for his living he shall accept the gift of love. (p. 124)

In this latter form, "love" is synonymous with "honour"

(p. 75), while familial "love" is synonymous with "duty."

Yet neither of these definitions is constant, and the role of "love" vacillates throughout Fantasia, as it does throughout Lawrence's work as a whole. Denouncing the "love" of attachment, Lawrence insists: "Wives, don't love your husbands nor your children nor anybody," and "Husbands, don't love your wives any more" (p. 143). Lawrence is, in Fantasia, unable to reconcile the various aspects of emotional attachment, and "love" represents, in its extremes, complete passivity and malevolent possessiveness.

In its ultimate form, Thomas' "love" constitutes an indissoluble bond, transcending time and death. "Love" in "After the Funeral" binds the living and the dead, the past and the present: "The stuffed lung of the fox twitch and cry Love/And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill." In his earlier poetry, the concept of "love" is not fixed, however, referring to various kinds of "desire." In "My Hero Bares His Nerves," for instance, "love" represents the self-conscious desires of the narrator for companionship:

And these poor nerves so wired to the skull
 Ache on the lovelorn paper
 I hug to love with my unruly scrawl
 That utters all love hunger
 And tells the page the empty ill.

Elsewhere, "love" ameliorates the vicissitudes of mortal existence: "If I were tickled by the rub of love. . . I would not fear the apple nor the flood." Later, in Thomas' poetry, "love" represents a transcendence of death itself, as an independent, immortal quality--"Though lovers be lost love shall not"--taking on aspects of "the force," as a "silk and rough love that breaks all rocks."

In "The Force. . .," the significance of "love" is not so clearly defined. In its association with sex, it reflects Thomas' fixation with time and mortality, yet seems to stand as an alternative to these. In Thomas' early poetry, the desire for permanence in a transitory world must constantly battle the consciousness of impending death, yielding between them a "fatal selfconsciousness" which checks all action. This is the plight of the narrator in "The Force. . .": apprehending his mortality, yet determined to find some consolation for approaching

death. "Love" provides him with that consolation. While yet a problematic term in "The Force. . .," "love" increasingly replaces "blood" in importance to Thomas' poetry, and is finally as central to Thomas' world-view as sex is to Lawrence's. The immortality implicit in "love" is Thomas' version of the "rebirth" associated with sex in Fantasia and elsewhere.

Thomas' images in "The Force. . ." parallel Lawrence's so long as the two address the same concerns and share the same general conclusions. Thomas diverges from the Lawrentian model in his use of "love," but does not seriously revise Lawrence's world-view--the correspondence between man and universe, the cycles of existence, and the simultaneity of "death" and "rebirth"--in doing so.

Yet Thomas' evaluation of Lawrence returns ever to the repeated denunciation of Lawrence's "paganism" (an accusation made the more involved with the later debate over Thomas' own "paganism"). As Thomas uses it, the term has several possible meanings, each of which Thomas was willing to "try on": "paganism" refers at once to a physically unrestrained lifestyle, a worship of mythological symbols of sexuality and power, and a fundamentally instinctual, essentially illiterate frame

of mind. The first was checked, Thomas argues, by Lawrence's physical limitations ("He Preached a doctrine of paganism and, to the best of his tubercular ability, attempted to live a pagan life": Letters, p. 71), the second by the flawed perspective of his condition ("As it was, weak and diseased, he wrote of the struggle of the ideas of the pagan strong. And his literature, therefore, however valuable, is a lie from start to finish": Letters, p. 72), and the third by the contradiction in denouncing rational consciousness through the conscious use of language. It is this third point which leads Thomas to a break with Lawrence's cosmology, as the debate over the status of conscious knowledge leads to a difference of opinion on the value of language: Lawrence emphasizing the limitations of language in addressing the world, and Thomas defending the powers of language in creating--or re-creating--the world.

Thomas classes writers into two "philosophical" groups: those who exalt the body and depreciate the mind, and those who exalt the mind and depreciate the body. Thomas classes Lawrence with the former, claiming:

Lawrence preached paganism, and paganism, as

the life by the body in the body for the body,
 is a doctrine that contents man with his lot.
 It defies the brain, and it is only through the
 brain that man can realise the chaos of
 civilisation and attempt to better it.

(Letters, p. 71)

Thomas might have seen in Lawrence's emphasis on the powers of the instincts a denial of the powers of intellect--powers which include language. As a young man, Thomas was transfixed by the ideas of sex, death, and time; as a writer, he was drawn to the terms which evoked them, in "the warm simulacra of experience in words." Thus, Thomas' deliberately overstated defense of "the brain" is the basis for his defence of literature, the product of that "brain."

To an extent, it was Thomas' resistance of too close an association with Lawrence which spurred his denunciation of Lawrence's "paganism." Like Lawrence, he relied heavily on poetic instincts and subconscious associations in formulating his literary images: "When he was not catching queer fish in the stream of the unconscious, Thomas was singing the praises of the instinctive life." Furthermore, both writers associated consciousness with death: Lawrence, because

of the reductive nature of rational thought, and in Thomas, in the interplay of consciousness, birth, and mortality.

In "Twenty-Four Years," Thomas' narrator, as a foetus, prepares simultaneously for birth and death--"In the groin of the natural doorway I crouched like a tailor/Sewing a shroud for a journey"--while in other poems, infants and children are characterized as "dying." For Thomas, death begins at birth because consciousness begins at birth: consciousness of the external world leads to self-consciousness (to a painful degree in adolescence, for example), and self-consciousness yields an awareness of inevitable death. From the ideal, "undying," unconscious life of the womb, the infant is thrust into the conscious, mortal life of the world.

This view of separation and death is commensurate with Lawrence's view of the Expulsion, for

It was not till the individual began to feel
separated off, not till he fell into awareness
of himself, and hence into apartness; not,
mythologically, till he ate of the Tree of
Knowledge instead of the Tree of Life
(Apocalypse, p. 160)

that he was separated from the eternal life of the "cosmic unconscious." Personal self-consciousness is translated into death at a cultural level as well, as "Every race which has become self-conscious and idea-bound in the past has perished" (Fantasia. . . ., p. 82). For Lawrence, the "idea," the conscious abstraction of reality, signals the death of the instinctive self, and just as conscious, rational thought is evidence of man's "fallen" condition, rational language is evidence of the "fallen," reductive, moribund state of his consciousness:

We have lost almost entirely the great and intricately developed sensual awareness, or sense-awareness, and sense-knowledge of the ancients. It was a great depth of knowledge arrived at direct, by instinct and intuition, as we say, not by reason. It was a knowledge based not on words but on images. The abstraction was not into generalisations or into qualities, but into symbols. . . .The price we pay is boredom and deadness. Our bald processes of thought no longer are life to us. For the sphinx-riddle of man is as terrifying

today as it was before Oedipus, and more so.
 For now it is the riddle of the dead-alive man,
 which it never was before. (Apocalypse, pp.
 76, 79)

For Thomas, self-consciousness is "deadly" because of its effects; for Lawrence, abstraction in the intellect is "deadly" of itself.

Yet Lawrence's response is, as Thomas has pointed out, self-contradictory: Lawrence advocates an unconscious, illiterate form of knowledge through the self-conscious, abstracted, written language he denounces. For Thomas, one counteracts the other: "the more paganistic, sun-and-sex loving, one becomes, the less one feels the desire to write," Thomas wrote in 1933, concluding by 1935 that "There is no pagan literature."

For Lawrence, language is evidence of a consciousness sundered from the world of instincts. For Thomas, language corresponds to the power to create life. Yet, Lawrence shares Thomas' regard for the power of the Logos in the Christian myth of Creation: in Apocalypse, Lawrence writes "the grand Logos of the beginning was a thunderclap laughing throughout chaos, and causing the cosmos (p. 91), while Thomas' poem,

"In The Beginning," maintains:

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

(Collected Poems, p. 27.)

For Lawrence, however, it is only this mythical aspect of "language" which remains "alive." The rituals which honor the Logos are based on imitation of its power, not communication with its effects, and the symbolism within that ritual is based on visual representation, not language. With introduction of language, abstraction, and allegory, the relationship of man and Logos is sundered:

We are back again at the level of allegory, and for me, the real interest is gone. Allegory can always be explained: and explained away. The true symbol defies all explanation, so does the true myth. (Apocalypse, pp. 183-84)

Thus, any linguistic construct falsifies the reality it claims to represent, moving away from the essentially inexplicable "reality" of the universe.

For Thomas, however, the cosmos is not only formed by the Logos, but consists of the Logos: nature consists of, and is understood through, language. In "syllabic blood" and "the water's speeches" exists the intermediary of language which connects man and cosmos. "Man be my metaphor," Thomas writes--his "metaphor" for the cosmos--while the cosmos reciprocates in the "signal moon" and the "signal grass" which are part of a language inherent in nature and directed toward man. Through language man comes to know both the cosmos and himself, as "Through my small, bone-bound island I have learnt all I know, experienced all, and sensed all. . . ."

The power of language in man corresponds to the power of the Logos in the cosmos: the power to create. In this, the power of language parallels the power of sexuality: man creates language with the same intensity as he creates new life. In a letter to Charles Fisher, in 1935, Thomas describes the coincidence of language and sexuality:

Poetry, heavy in tare though nimble, should be

as orgiastic and organic as copulation,
 dividing and unifying, personal but not
 private, propagating the individual in the mass
 and the mass in the individual. . . . Men
 should be two tooled, and a poet's middle leg
 is his pencil. (Letters, p. 151)

These manifestations of "the force," sexuality and language, are linked in the coda of "The Force. . . .": "And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb/How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm." "My sheet" has already been interpreted as a bed-sheet and a shroud, their corresponding "worms" being the narrator's penis and decay. Yet the "sheet" is also a sheet of paper, and its "worm" is a pencil with which the narrator writes of the "lover's" doubled condition, and his own. The narrator's power of language is akin to the "lover's" power of sexuality.

If anything, the narrator's power of language lies beyond that of the "lover," in that he is able to re-create the universe he lives in through poetry. Language--in this case, poetry--affords the narrator within the poem (as it does to Thomas, without) some of the same "temporary immortality" which "love" affords the "lover." Having gone to great lengths to describe

the actions of the "force" which checked his power, the narrator is, in a reversal, finally able "to tell" the world of his plight, no longer "dumb" nor, in the relative permanence of literature, "dying."

VII

In the early 1930s, Dylan Thomas was a young would-be-poet in search of a personal style and a comprehensive world-view. D.H. Lawrence's works helped him toward both: while Lawrence to some extent simply reinforced viewpoints already formed in Thomas' conception of life, his work provided Thomas with a vocabulary through which to express those ideas. Motifs prevalent in Lawrence's work became equally central to Thomas', while the "vitalistic," "apocalyptic" world-view Lawrence expressed was repeated in Thomas' early poetry in general, and in "The Force That Through The Green Fuse," in particular. The "life force" Lawrence describes in Apocalypse, and Fantasia and the Unconscious would have attracted Thomas. The "force" reconciles life and death, and explains sexuality as a power which is at once personal and cosmic, sexual and abstract. While there is only

circumstantial evidence to show that Thomas was familiar with Lawrence's major works of non-fiction, his early poetry illustrates both a resemblance and a response to Lawrence's theories of sexuality, regeneration, and the "language" of myth and symbol.

Lawrence was the more doctrinaire writer of the two: the intricate structure of Thomas' poems and the evocative, sometimes contradictory nature of his images are more given to complication than explication. It is therefore useful to use Lawrence's thought as a yardstick by which to measure Thomas' vision. "The Force. . ." presents such an opportunity: in their common concerns--the relationship of man and nature, the individual and the cosmos, life and death--Lawrence provided Thomas with the necessary vocabulary, and a convincing scenario. As a result, "The Force. . ." shares many of the same images, themes, and conceptual devices of Apocalypse and Fantasia. . ., based on the generally "vitalistic," "apocalyptic" vision the two writers shared.

The greater part of Lawrence's effect on Thomas took place before 1934, when Thomas' first book of poetry was published. References to Lawrence before 1931 are inconclusive; Thomas' correspondence during 1930 and 1932 illustrates a growing ambivalence toward

Lawrence's thought, and while Thomas respected Lawrence's intentions and admired Lawrence's conviction, he broke with Lawrence to elaborate his own cosmology. After 1932, Thomas became openly critical of Lawrence, perhaps in an attempt to distance himself from "that almost legendary figure," and by 1935, had developed his own concepts of language, love, and sexuality in response to Lawrence's "paganism."

"The Force. . .," first composed in 1933, bears the effects of Lawrence's influence to that time. In the first and fullest formulation of Thomas' world-view, the poem used Lawrentian images--blood, sun, and "force"--when they served Thomas' purposes, and diverged from them--in the increasing role of "love" and the lessened role of "the timeless sun"--as Thomas' own world-view asserted itself. Yet their common vocabulary remains, providing the means to gauge the effect Lawrence had on Thomas' work, and to trace Thomas' early development, as poet and thinker.

NOTES

1 Dylan Thomas to Pamela Hansford Johnson, "Late 1933," in Constantine Fitzgibbon, Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas (N.Y.: New Directions, 1965), p. 71. References to this work will be hereafter cited as Letters.

2 With the exception of four pages in one study. See William T. Moynihan, The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1966), pp. 37-40ff.

3 D.H. Lawrence, Apocalypse (1931; rpt. N.Y.: Viking, 1966) and Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (1923; rpt. London: Heinemann, 1961), and Dylan Thomas, Collected Poems (N.Y.: New Directions, 1952), p. 10.

4 Paul Ferris, Dylan Thomas (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 67. Thomas' official biographer, Constantine Fitzgibbon, mentions Thomas' preoccupation with identity only in passing:

His ambition was enormous, but at this early age quite undirected even as to the sort of poetry he wished to write. If he could not be

at the top of his class then very well, he would be bottom. Any place in between would have seemed to him unworthy of his stature.

Fitzgibbon, The Life of Dylan Thomas (Boston: Little and Brown, 1965), p. 42.

5 Dylan Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," Texas Quarterly 4 (Winter 1961); rpt. in Early Prose Writings of Dylan Thomas, ed. Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent, 1971), p. 156.

6 Fitzgibbon, The Life of Dylan Thomas, p. 14.

7 See Moynihan, Craft and Art, pp. 19-20.

8 Dylan Thomas, "Modern Poetry," Swansea Grammar School Magazine 26 (December 1929); rpt. Early Prose Writings, p. 148.

9 Harold Bloom discusses a writer's impulse to deliberately misread a predecessor "so as to clear imaginative space" for himself in The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford University, 1973), p. 5.

To Pamela Hansford Johnson, Thomas wrote:

Old Father William was a human nannygoat with a pantheistic obsession. He hadn't a spark of mysticism in him. How could he be a metaphysicist? Metaphysics is merely the structure of logic, intellect, and supposition on a mystical basis. And mysticism is illogical, unintellectual, and dogmatic....He writes about mysticism but he is not a mystic; he describes what mystics have been known to feel, but he himself doesn't feel anything, not even a pain in the neck." (Letters, pp. 24-25)

10 For a short discussion on the relationship of "Ship of Death" to "Poem on His Birthday," see Aneiran Talfan Davies, Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body (London: J.M. Dent, 1964), p. 69.

11 Note to the Table of Contents in the first edition of 18 Poems (London: Fortune Press, 1934), p. 4.

12 Linden Huddlestone, "An Approach to Dylan Thomas," New Penguin Writing, No. 35 (1948), p. 131. Huddlestone proposes that Thomas "grew out" of his adolescent frame of mind with his experiences in the Second World War. Other critics are not so inclined.

13 Ralph Maud describes the narrator's response in the refrain to each stanza in terms of a Chaucerian occupatio: "the rhetorical technique of confessing it

to be beyond his skill to describe what he then goes on to describe." Entrances to Dylan Thomas' Poetry (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1963), p. 84. In Chaucer, however, occupatio indicates knowledge posing as ignorance; here it is the shedding of ignorance in the light of new knowledge (or, at least, the proposition of new knowledge). The narrator's reponse is tied syntactically to his observation with "and," indicating that his intended observation is subverted by his perception of the greater reality around him. His condolence of "the crooked rose," for example, is undercut by his realization that both are equally subject to an over-arching, undefinable "force."

Thomas' use of a "dialogue" form, and the complex relationship to the world he describes suggests a Romantic concept of the world. For elaboration, see Horace Gregory, "The 'Romantic' Heritage in the Writings of Dylan Thomas," Poetry and Poverty 1 [1952]; rpt. A Casebook on Dylan Thomas, ed. John Malcolm Brinnin (N.Y.: Crowell, 1960), pp. 131-38. The contradictions within that tradition are discussed in Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1936), p. 9ff, and Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., Romantic

Contraries: Freedom versus Destiny (New Haven: Yale University, 1984).

14 "Mouth" as "spring" and "mouth" as "estuary" also binds beginning and end in one image. See Ralph Maud, Entrances, pp. 68-69.

15 Thomas' poem, "When Once the Twilight Locks No Longer," supports this interpretation:

The mouth of time sucked, like a sponge,
The milky acid on each hinge,
And swallowed dry the waters of the breast.
(Collected Poems, p. 4)

16 The use of the word "weather" dates that revision of the poem to a period during the mid-1930s. Ralph Maud comments on the "process poems" of the period, and on Thomas' later abandonment of the term just before the war: see Entrances, pp. 61-62. Thomas later wrote to Vernon Watkins that he had "cut out the ubiquitous 'weather'" from a poem he was revising in 1938: Letters to Vernon Watkins, ed. Vernon Watkins (London: Dent, 1957), p. 40.

Thomas' attitude toward time is a major component of the criticism of his poetry. Paul Ferlazzo echoes the sentiments of most critics, when he claims:

Dylan Thomas saw time as a negative, destructive force....Time was not organic for Thomas, was not part of an overall growth. Time was mechanical, ticking relentlessly forward to the inevitable midnight hour; or it was out of joint, banging, churning, and halting in its progress toward the final escape.

"Dylan Thomas and Walt Whitman: Birth, Death, and Time," Walt Whitman Review 23 (1977), pp. 139-40.

"Time" is also discussed below, in a note on "flux."

17 A third possibility, again, presents itself: that the "sheet" is paper, and the "worm" is either the narrator's finger or pen: see William York Tindall, A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas (N.Y.: Noonday, 1962), p. 41. For a full discussion of the relevance of language to sexuality, in "The Force..." and Thomas' poetry in general, see section VII, below.

18 Based as they were on personal experience, the world-views of Thomas and Lawrence were essentially ego-centric. As Lawrence explains:

The great prime knowledge is sympathetic in nature. I am I, in vital centrality. I am I, the vital centre of all things. I am I, the clue to the whole. All is one with me. It is the one identity. (Fantasia..., p. 128)

The sometimes-problematic distinction between ego-centricity and egotism, between personal

perspective and personal fixation, forms the background for David Holbrook's study of Dylan Thomas: Llareggub Revisited: Dylan Thomas and the State of Modern Poetry (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1962).

19 For the notebook version of "The Force...", and a list of subsequent revisions, see Ralph Maud, ed., The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas (N.Y.: New Directions, 1965), pp. 250, 328. Maud does not, however, mention the addition of the "sun" to the original version; for this, and a fuller discussion of the revisions of "The Force...", see David Clay Jenkins, "The Shrine of the Boily Boy," Anglo-Welsh Review 19 (1970), pp. 126-28.

20 "In The Beginning," "Where Once the Waters of Your Face," "When, Like a Running Grave," "If I Were Tickled By the Rub of Love," "Altarwise By Owl-Light": VIII; Collected Poems, pp. 27, 12, 21, 13, 84.

21 For Lawrence and Thomas, personal experience and metaphysical conclusion were mutually supportive. Like Lawrence, Thomas' metaphysics grew out of his experience, and, once formulated, directed his poetry: "His poems spoke to me with the voice of metaphysical truth; if we disagreed it was on a metaphysical issue,

for natural observation in poetry meant nothing to us without the support of metaphysical truth": Vernon Watkins in his introduction to Dylan Thomas: Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 18.

22 The following definition of "vitalism" is based on one in Morton O. Bechner, "Vitalism," in Vol. VIII of The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, pp. 253-54.

23 Various critics have described Thomas' preoccupation with mutability in terms of "flux": Moynihan calls it "the flux of time" (Craft and Art, p. 54). Vernon Watkins insists Thomas had no such fixation on "time" (Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 17). Maud refers to a "universal flux" (Entrances, p. 60), which is at once a more inclusive and yet less useful term, in defining Thomas' thought. Lawrence himself provides the most applicable term to describe the sense of mutability central to "The Force..." in "the flux of the flesh" (Apocalypse, p. 175), dealing at once with the idea of change and organic circularity. The idea of "flux," in turn, leads to the concept of "dynamism," as the material counterpart to an organic "vitalism." See Milic Capek, "Dynamism" in Vol. II of The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards

(N.Y.: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 444-47, and Michael C. Stokes, "Heraclitus of Ephesus," in *ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 477-81.

Derek Stanford is the only critic to explore the "apocalyptic" nature of Thomas' images (Dylan Thomas: A Literary Study (N.Y.: Citadel, 1954)), describing the "apocalyptic phallus" of sexuality within an "apocalyptic batter" of the universe: quoted in David Holbrook, Llareggub Revisited, pp. 95-96.

24 Here, the child is a physical continuation of its parents, serving as their limited "immortality"--"limited," because the child is itself doomed, (see "Twenty-Four Years," Collected Poems, p. 110). The conjunction of reproduction and death fascinated Thomas, as did the paradox of a growth so extreme as to be pathological: Thomas wrote to Pamela Hansford Johnson of his Aunt Ann's "cancer of the womb" (Letters, p. 11) in January of 1933; the image became a ready reference point in his later letters, an image self-consciousness only exaggerated (see Letters, pp. 32 and 130). In generalization, "cancer of the womb" also became "the tumour of civilization" and "the womb of war" (Letters, pp. 48 and 191).

25 Sons and Lovers (N.Y.: Modern Library, 1913),

pp. 414-15:

When he came to, he wondered what was near his eyes, curving and strong with life in the dark, and what voice it was speaking. Then he realized it was the grass, and the peewit was calling. The warmth was Clara's breathing heaving. He lifted his head, and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him; and he put his face down on her throat, afraid. What was she? A strong, strange wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars. . . . They felt small, half-afraid, childish and wondering, like Adam and Eve when they lost their innocence and realised the magnificence of the power which drove them out of Paradise and across the great night and the great day of humanity. It was for each of them an initiation and a satisfaction. To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them always, gave them rest within themselves. If so great a magnificent power could overwhelm them, identify them altogether with itself, so that they knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass blade its little height, and every tree, and living thing, then why fret about themselves? They could let themselves be carried by life, and they felt a sort of peace each in the other. There was a verification which they had had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away; it was almost their belief in life.

My thanks to Prof. Michele Totah for drawing my attention to this passage.

26 Thomas was himself the unintentional figurehead of the "New Apocalypse" movement of the 1930s, which was associated with the Surrealist movement, to which it seemed to have affinities. Nicholas Moore, J.F. Hendry, G.S. Fraser, and Henry Treece headed the movement, which published two anthologies, The White Horseman and The New Apocalypse [ed. J.F. Hendry] (London: Fortune Press, [1940]); the latter included two of Thomas' works, "The Burning Baby," a short story, and the poem "How Shall My Animal." Thomas nevertheless resisted association with the movement: see Arthur Edward Salmon, Poets of the Apocalypse, Twayne's English Authors Series 360 (Boston: Twayne, 1983), pp. 4, 111. For a discussion of the New Apocalypse, see The New Apocalypse, pp. 49-58, and Geoffrey Bullough, The Trend of Modern Poetry (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934), pp. 213-33.

27 The clearest example of this--other than the Christian myth--can be found in the Germanic tradition of "gotterdammerung": see Brian Branston, Gods of the North (N.Y.: Thames Hudson, 1980) and Lost Gods of England (N.Y.: Oxford University, 1974).

Mary Freeman discusses the religious significance of the "Apocalypse" to Lawrence in D.H. Lawrence: A

Basic Study of His Ideas (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1955), pp. 224-36, while Horace Gregory proposes that Lawrence's theory of 'apocalypse' was reinforced by his illness: see D.H. Lawrence: Pilgrim of the Apocalypse (N.Y.: Grove, 1933), pp. 89-108. See also Eugene Goodheart, "The Man Who Died," and George Panichas, "Voyage to Oblivion," both in Critics on D.H. Lawrence, ed. W.T. Andrews, Readings in Literary Criticism 9 (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami, 1971), pp. 109-16 and 117-123, for discussions of Lawrence's theories of cosmic rebirth.

28 Lawrence pays passing credit to Sir James George Frazer's Golden Bough on p. 6 of Fantasia....

The reference also suggests that Thomas' "hanging man" might be a sacrificial figure, though Tindall is the only critic to nibble the bait, calling him "Christ on the cross, maybe" (Reader's Guide, p. 41).

29 Peter Thorslev describes the tension between the freedom implied by Lawrence's "organicism" and the sense of destiny dictated by the unconscious as factors in an "inhuman humanism": see Romantic Contraries, pp. 93-112.

30 This suspension of the conscious mind in sex is, in effect, the temporary "death" of the Ego. Both Lawrence and Thomas briefly acknowledge the influence Freud had on thought in the first half of the century. As Thomas pointed out: "no honest writer today can possibly avoid being influenced by Freud through his pioneering work into the Unconscious and by the influence of those discoveries on the scientific, philosophic, and artistic work of his contemporaries": "Poetic Manifesto," Early Prose Writings, p. 158. Lawrence expresses an ambivalence toward Freud (Fantasia...., pp. 11-13) which reinforces rather than belies Freud's influence on Lawrence's work.

The conjunction of sex and death reflects Freud's theory of "Eros" and "death instinct," elaborated in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. James Strachey (N.Y.: Norton, 1961), and The Ego and the Id, trans. Joan Reviere, rev. ed. James Strachey (N.Y.: Norton, 1960). Lawrence and Thomas translate these ideas of "Eros" and "death instinct" into philosophical and literary terms.

31 "I See The Boys of Summer," "Fern Hill"; (Collected Poems, pp. 1, 178.

32 "After The Funeral," "If I Were Tickled By the Rub of Love," "And Death Shall Have No Dominion," and "There Was a Savior"; Collected Poems, pp. 97, 13, 77, 140.

33 Derek Stanford, "Critics, Style and Value," in A Casebook on Dylan Thomas, ed. John Malcolm Brinnin (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1936), p. 95.

34 Stuart Holroyd, "Dylan Thomas and the Religion of the Instinctive Life," in Emergence From Chaos (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pp. 77-94; rpt. John Malcolm Brinnin, ed., Casebook, p. 139.

35 "Twenty-Four Years," and "I See the Boys of Summer"; Collected Poems, pp. 110, 1.

36 W.E. Yeoman, in "Dylan Thomas: The Literal Vision," Bucknell Review 14 (March 1966), points out the correspondence between Christian mythology and personal experience: "In Thomas' overall vision the history of man is analogous to the history of the cosmos; the foetal stage is analogous to Eden and Heaven; the individual birth is analogous to the fall

of Eden, heaven, and God" (p. 112). Ariele Sachs describes why, psychologically, the foetal state is idyllic:

We are nothingness, well-packed in nothingness, our own existence is entirely indistinguishable from any existence external to it. But if internality cannot be distinguished from externality, togetherness cannot be distinguished from separateness, and so everything, in being identified with itself, is identified with everything else. In the profound depths of the preconsciousness, 'there in the deep with quartering shades/Of sun and moon,' everything is everything else.

"Sexual Dialectic in the Early Poetry of Dylan Thomas," Southern Review: An Australian journal of literary studies 1 (1964), p. 43.

The "fall" for Thomas is irreversible--"After that first death, there is no other" ("A Refusal to Mourn...", Collected Poems, p. 112)--and thus the sense of fatalism which pervades his work.

37 Review of Alfred Haffenden's Dictator on Freedom, Tract Four, Adelphi 9 (February 1935); rpt. Early Prose Writings, p. 176.

38 Thomas refers to the "magic" quality of language in a letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, in December of 1933: Letters, p. 80.

39 Especially When the October Wind," If I Were
Tickled By the Rub of Love," "The Force...,"
"Especially When the October Wind"; Collected Poems,
pp. 19, 15, 1, 19.

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