

THE ENGLISH R. S. THOMAS

ALISTAIR HEYS

Through a glass darkly: then face to face.

SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1: This chapter conducts a survey of Bloom's theory of intra-poetic relations. His Gnostic reading of Genesis 1 is taken as a model Romantic reading of Romanticism. Bloom's Satan and Beelzebub are identified as Wordsworth and Coleridge and their precursor proper as Milton. This leads to a meditation upon why Wordsworth is sometimes said to be Coleridge's greatest creation. Then Bloom's figures of the Sphinx and the Covering Cherub are identified as the Blakean limits of contraction and opacity. The chapter ends with a discussion of Bloom's six revisionary ratios of Clinamen, Tessera, Kenosis, Daemonization, Askesis, and Apophrades in relation to R. S. Thomas's debt of influence to Patrick Kavanagh.

Chapter 2: Discussion of the Bloomian figure of the Covering Cherub. This is pursued with reference to two parallel triads of influential relations. The first being Blake and Yeats's influence upon Bloom's figure of the Cherub and the second Blake and Yeats's influence upon the Prytherch figure. This leads to an examination of the figure of Prytherch as an example of the same. The chapter closes with a Bloomian reading of Thomas's 'The White Tiger'(F) in which poem Thomas is so temerous as to cage an analogue for Leviathan.

Chapter 3: An extended study of Thomas's debt to Wordsworth. The chapter opens with an investigation of their respective sensory deprived peasants. Wordsworth is shown to be more than wisely passive with respect to the natural world. The poet-priest is unable, as Wordsworth puts it, to pass Jehovah unalarmed. The Prytherch figure is linked to the Leech Gatherer and Thomas's conversations with him to what Weiskel describes as monolithic monologue. A dearth of such moments of near solipsism leads to the association of Thomas with Beelzebub rather than Satan. The chapter finishes with 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) considered as an equivalent Dejection ode.

Chapter 4: An examination of the influential triad of Coleridge, Yeats, and Thomas. The chapter examines Yeats's contention that poetry represents a quarrel within the self. This maxim is then used to counter readings which assert that the Prytherch figure is representative of Thomas's quarrel with society. The Yeatsian divided self is examined in the light of Coleridge's argument that the Imagination is a state of irreconcilable contraries. The Coleridgean categories of primary and secondary and their Yeatsian analogues of primary and antithetical are examined with reference to the Prytherch figure. The chapter ends with Prytherch thought of as Porlockian.

Chapter 5: A meditation upon the influential triad of Shelley, Yeats, and Thomas. The Manichean Machine is diagnosed as a recapitulation of Shelley's figure of Merkabah. This trope for God is then contrasted with that of fire and voice. The watershed in Thomas's Promethean poetry is identified as 'The Grave'. The chapter concludes with an extended discussion of 'The Tree'(AAL) which combines an influential debt to Yeats's *Vacillation* and Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*.

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ABBREVIATIONS:

- SF: *The Stones of the Field*
AAL: *An Acre of Land*
SYT: *Song at the Year's Turning*
PS: *Poetry for Supper*
T: *Tares*
BT: *The Bread of Truth*
P: *Pietà*
NHBF: *Not that he brought Flowers*
H: *H'm*
LS: *Laboratories of the Spirit*
F: *Frequencies*
C: *Counterpoint*

PROLOGUE

There are three disparate species of R. S. Thomas critic: the theologian, the politician, and the aesthete. I am one of the latter, though I intend this word in its Paterian sense: "aesthete" is from the Greek *aisthetes*, "one who perceives." So the "aesthetic critic" is simply the perceptive critic, or literary critic proper, and "aesthetic poetry" is precisely the contemporary poetry that is most perceptive, that is, in one's judgement most truly poetry.¹ R. S. Thomas has always struck me as one of the less deceived whose passion is reality and thus he is –within the ambits of this thesis– considered as the poet proper. Regarding the former categories the best that can be said for those of a theological bent is that I have little or no interest in probing Thomas's poetry of the Hidden God. Though it must be acknowledged there is a large amount of negative theology incorporated within this thesis. Of the politically minded opponents of Prytherch thought of as 'of the earth, earthy,'² there have been too many. Political critics of R.S. are the most burdened since, as the *bête noire* of depoliticised Prytherch criticism, M. Wynn Thomas, has argued:

The Iago Prytherch poems have not helped –although the fault lies much less in them than in the blind and disproportionate attention that has been paid to them. As Kingsley Amis in a way foresaw in 1956, the garlands of adjectives draped for years around Thomas's neck by Prytherch's admirers have turned into millstones.³

If millstones were erased and albatross inserted then the above sentence would adumbrate the relationship of Thomas with Prytherch much as it is viewed by this critic. For me the Prytherch figure rather than mere Iago Prytherch is R.S.'s paradigmatic creation and one that, as I shall argue in later chapters, is the direct ancestor of Thomas's figure of the *Deus Absconditus*. This thesis pays undue attention to the Prytherch figure because he is sublime and is so at the expense of the vast majority of Thomas's religious poetry and all of Thomas's so-called propaganda poetry.

This said, it is impossible to proceed without examining the one-way-street of rivalry that exists between R.S. and Dylan. Anne Stevenson once confessed that 'on a gusty, wet afternoon' she as 'a young American mother' sought out 'the poems of a famous Welshman, not long dead, called Dylan Thomas...But the book she pulled out...was not by the anticipated Dylan; it was the work of a poet she had never heard of...by R. S. Thomas'.⁴ Stevenson is keen to emphasize her new world naïveté and yet her anecdote contrasts well the bohemian Welshman of the 'heron/Priested shore', and the reclusive priest who delivers extreme unction to the bleak shore of Evan's death-bed. R.S. has maintained that 'There's nothing Welsh about

Dylan Thomas except that he knew his Bible'.⁵ In a less prickly mood the poet once admitted to an interviewer that Dylan Thomas was 'every inch a poet'.⁶ This is a fortuitous phrase since Bloom has argued that the etymological definition of Canon: 'goes back to a Greek word for a measuring rule, which in Latin acquired the additional meaning of "model"...The Greek word *kanon* was of Semitic origin, and it is difficult to distinguish between its original meanings of "reed" or "pipe," and "measuring rod."' ⁷ It is therefore important to reiterate that it is the intention of this thesis to compare the poetic physique of R. S. Thomas with that of the Mighty Dead.

A pithy comparison of Dylan and R.S. has been made by Walford Davies, who writes: 'If the unit is that of single words, relished in ways determining all larger structures, for Dylan their succulence is that of fruits, for R.S. that of pebbles.'⁸ R.S. like Job is after all 'in league with the stones of the field' [Job:5.23], however, unlike Job, but, very much like Jonah when God has caused his gourd to wither, R.S. does 'well to be angry, *even* to death.' [Jonah:4.9] Seamus Heaney ~~also~~ compares Dylan to Yeats, arguing: 'Yeats in the 1890s punted into the scene on the Celtic current, but, once in the swim, he used his mystique to initiate a counter-cultural move within English poetry itself. Thomas, however, never did have that kind of ambition.'⁹ R.S. himself has propounded a similar point:

One of the first questions that arises for a Welshman face to face with the English tongue is: What is my true feeling for these words? Am I fascinated, repelled, resentful? A case used to be made out for the debt contemporary English owed to the Celtic fringe. English writing, it was said, had reached such a state of debility, that it could only be revived by frequent transfusions of Celtic blood...As proof there were Yeats, Synge and Joyce from Ireland, and Dylan Thomas from Wales...Where he is a willing exile, associating his native speech and locality with a backward stage in man's progress towards the English millennium, he will delight in the newly-discovered riches of English words. Where he has a real love and respect for his native traditions, he will regret his enforced separation from them and resent the necessity of having to use words, which to all intents and purposes are those of a foreign people.¹⁰

Here we sense R.S. draws a line between himself and Dylan. Ruled in terms of 'riches' and 'resentment' these are their respective gourds and stones.

Walford Davies relates that 'Nigel Jenkins can only call R.S.'s Welshness

"spectral" by adding, "subject matter apart".¹¹ This seems to me a brilliant insight and one on a par with that made by the young child in the story of the Emperor's new clothes. His intuitive criticism allows 'Welsh Landscape'(AAL) to be interpreted as a complaint against late-coming:

There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics,
Wind-bitten towers and castles
With sham ghosts;
Mouldering quarries and mines;
And an impotent people,
Sick with inbreeding,
Worrying the carcass of an old song.

This poem was written in reaction to *Fern Hill*. In contrast to *Fern Hill* it has a primitive power that enriches the work due to the weight of precious metal removed. Dylan's poem, as Heaney has argued, 'is buoyant upon memories of a sensuously apprehended world and is suffused by them. Its poetry is admirably and bewitchingly candid'.¹² However, this is to fall for what M. Wynn Thomas suggests is 'an idyll of a pious, musical, cultured "volk"'.¹³ or what Moelwyn Merchant in his phrase 'rejection of "false mythology"'.¹⁴ argues 'Welsh Landscape'(AAL) reacts against. Yet the sanctity of these culturally specific readings is challenged by this thesis which interprets 'cries in the dark' as a misprision of 'the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold' and R.S.'s courts for owls as a misreading of 'the owls...bearing the farm away'. The oft praised lines: 'to be conscious/ At dusk of the spilled blood/ That went to the making of the wild sky,/ Dyeing the immaculate rivers' hence become a creative misinterpretation of 'the holy streams' when 'The sky gathered again/ And the sun grew round'. Conception has priority over parturition and thus the later poet insists upon his earliness in relation to the manifest anteriority of his rival.

Poems are far from immaculate conceptions and the bloody wars of influence and their fiery amnions are the subject of this dissertation. A consciousness of inter-poetic rivalry is here alluded to by Anthony Conran, who argues:

This early poetry, for all the over-writing and badgering tone that sometimes mars it, made R. S. Thomas the hero of the Anglo-Welsh

at a crucial moment in our history, just when Dylan Thomas was dead and the way to further development of Milk Wood looked blocked for good. I think it made possible the school of poets that is associated with *Poetry Wales* in the 'sixties, not so much through actual influence -though of course there was that, in plenty- as through the mere fact that English poetry of such seriousness existed about Wales at all. One of the typical gestures of the school is to parody R. S. Thomas's perpetual conversations with the seemingly moronic Iago Prytherch, the 'archetypal' Anglo-Welsh peasant. You can hardly be an English poet of Wales and not be constantly aware of the radiation-risk that emanates from R. S. Thomas. It scalds, irritates, warms, chills, picks at our bones, at the marrow of our bones. I have sometimes thought that one of the pleasures of being an Englishman must be to read R. S. Thomas as though he was just a poet, for aesthetic enjoyment or moral vision or any of the usual things one reads poets for.¹⁵

For Conran: 'The typical Anglo-Welsh poem of the 'sixties...became an elegy for the Welsh Way of Life, in one or other of its many aspects: an elegy that signs the death-warrant of its subject, asserts that it is thoroughly dead, in order that the poet may define his stance, defiant or pathetic, in the act of acknowledging the demise.'¹⁶

If such grief-stricken polemic is ignored in favour of a consideration of poetry in terms of poetry or R.S.'s refusal to mourn, then one is open to this countermand:

A pure poet is one who, presumably, lives for his art, interested in the interior world of words and thought, rather than in the everyday world of noise and pain and evil. I think, when I examine my own position, that I have never been a pure poet in that way. To make a poetic artefact out of words has never, or rarely ever been my first aim or satisfaction. There is always lurking in the back of my poetry a kind of moralistic or propagandist intention.¹⁷

Fortunately, R.S. is also on record as stating: 'Propaganda poetry is always in danger of rant or jingoism.'¹⁸ With this disclosure set squarely in mind much extraneous or aesthetically weak poetry can be discarded from the mind's eye of this dissertation. In lieu of R.S.'s first propagandist statement this thesis therefore cleaves to that rare breed of R.S. poem that in his own words becomes raised to the level of "more than mortal tongue."¹⁹ Or to echo the poet's love of Stevens:

To say more than human things with human voice,
 that cannot be; to say human things with more
 than human voice, that, also, cannot be;
 to speak humanly from the height or from the depth
 of human things, that is acutest speech.²⁰

Thomas has spoken of his desire to write in such a mode: 'At times there comes the desire to write with great precision and clarity, words so simple and moving that they bring tears to the eyes, or, if you like, as Wordsworth said, are "too deep for tears".'²¹

This complements the blurb for *The Collected Poems* in which Ted Hughes muses: 'Lorca said: "The poem that pierces the heart like a knife has yet to be written." But has anybody come closer to it than R. S. Thomas?' The mechanism for this heart-rending sublimity, and not preciousness, is illuminated by Thomas's observation that: 'I remember also Wordsworth's "human heart by which we live." The poet's function and privilege surely is to speak to our condition in the name of our common humanity in words which do not grow old because the heart does not grow old.'²² R.S. here implies that the accurate portrayal of a universalized human nature is the key to writing strong poetry. However, jingoism and rant are as endemically human as 'the great, simple images and symbols of life such as birth, death, sex and sin...the greatest of human virtues like love and faith.'²³ What draws our attention is the use of 'old' in the sense of 'enduring' and the patronymic Wordsworth. Thomas, while discussing a nothing different topic, has made this belated apologia:

So far as we can tell, there are no works of poetry being produced in English today that are of comparable stature with those of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare or Milton. Whether these writers themselves were avowedly Christian or not, they wrote within a Christian framework... Many like to associate poetic decline or inferiority with a consciously adopted Christianity, Wordsworth being the *locus classicus*.²⁴

Forgetting the decline in Thomas's later poetry which the above self-analysis figures, this statement is an open avowal of belatedness. To return to the division between the political and the aesthetic, in a prose gloss culled from *The Echoes Return Slow*, there is an allusion to Yeats's *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*:

Rumours of bestiality. The old, scarifying stories about each other

kept by nations in the cupboard for the next time. An unwillingness by some to recognise war as the lesser of two evils exposed at the tribunals to the satisfaction of whom? Casualty of the quarrel with strong men, bandaging himself with Yeats's sentence about the quarrel within, he limped on through an absence of sympathy. His poetry was bitter.²⁵

Of rhetors and rhapsodes Yeats wrote: 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.'²⁶ Or rather we make poetry out of the quarrel with that part of ourselves that we cannot properly call ourselves or those thoughts that lie too deep for tears.

The key word here is 'deep' which has the sense of a Bloomian 'deep' reading. Thus the first chapter begins with a discussion of Harold Bloom's theory of intra-poetic relations. Those that follow attempt to draw the splinters of influence from where they lie embedded in the poetry of Thomas.

PROLOGUENOTES:

- 1). Harold Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: Seabury, 1976), p.20.
- 2). William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt* vol IV, ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols, (London: Dent, 1930), p.239. Hazlitt employs this phrase to describe Caliban.
- 3). M. Wynn Thomas, 'Introduction to *The Page's Drift*', in *The Page's Drift*, ed. by M. Wynn Thomas, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1993), p.9.
- 4). Anne Stevenson, 'The Uses of Prytherch' in *The Page's Drift*, p.36.
- 5). Walford Davies, 'Bright Fields, Loud Hills and the Glimpsed Good Place: R. S. Thomas and Dylan Thomas', in the *Pages' Drift*, p.183.
- 6). Benedict Nightingale, 'Hewer of Verses', *The Guardian*, 4th March 1964, in *Critical Writings on R. S. Thomas*, ed. by Sandra Anstey, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1982) p.35.
- 7). Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1976), p.29.
- 8). Op. Cit., 'Bright Fields, Loud Hills and the Glimpsed Good Place: R. S. Thomas and Dylan Thomas', p.177.
- 9). Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p.126.
- 10). R. S. Thomas, 'Words and the Poet' in *R. S. Thomas Selected Prose*, ed. by Sandra Anstey, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1983), p.80.
- 11). Op. Cit., 'Bright Fields, Loud Hills and the Glimpsed Good Place: R. S. Thomas and Dylan Thomas', p.187.
- 12). Op. Cit., *The Redress of Poetry*, p.142.
- 13). Op. Cit., 'Introduction to *The Page's Drift*', p.10.
- 14). Tony Bianchi, 'R. S. Thomas and his Readers' in *Critical Writings on R. S. Thomas* 2nd edn, ed. by Sandra Anstey, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1992), p.175.
- 15). Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), pp.232-233.
- 16). Ibid., p.233.
- 17). Op. Cit., 'Words and the Poet', pp.82-83.
- 18). R. S. Thomas, 'Probings: An Interview with R. S. Thomas', in *Miraculous Simplicity*, ed. by William V. Davis, (Fayetteville: Arkansas, 1993), p.31.
- 19). Ibid., p.42.
- 20). Ibid., p.34.
- 21). Op. Cit., 'Words and the Poet', p.83.
- 22). Op. Cit., 'Words and the Poet', p.85.
- 23). R. S. Thomas, 'Review of *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas* by William T.

Moynihan', *Critical Quarterly*, IX:4 (1967), p.383.

24). R. S. Thomas, 'A Frame for Poetry', in *Selected Prose*, p.92.

25). R. S. Thomas, *The Echoes Return Slow* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.22.

26). William Butler Yeats, 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', in *Mythologies* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.331.

CHAPTER 1:
ADAM'S CURSE: R. S. THOMAS
&
THE APOCALYPSE OF CLAY

It might seem back to front to begin by mentioning what is absent from this chapter but it nevertheless makes sense to start after the beginning. What is missing from this outline is the Spectre or Selfhood, the 'shadow of desire' that pursues Satan when in Bloom's Blakean reading of *Paradise Lost* the archetype of the modern poet 'ceases...to be a poet'.¹ In Bloom's misprision of post-Miltonic tradition these 'shadows of desire' are intimately related to the Covering Cherub of poetic influence. A discussion of this shadowy figure must be postponed until chapter two which is devoted entirely to investigating the dark and shady corners of Thomas's poetry.

What this chapter concentrates upon is the twin influence Gnosticism and Kabbalah have had upon Bloom's theory of misreading. What follows is an explication of how a Gnostic theory of poetry throws light upon R. S. Thomas's place in literary tradition with reference to post-Miltonic Romanticism as defined by *The Anxiety of Influence*. The second half of this chapter considers the influence of Kabbalah upon Bloom's theory of poetry and investigates the Lurianic triad of withdrawal, crisis-creation, and representation. From these Bloom assembles a series of six defensive ratios for charting the movement of tropes in post-Enlightenment poetry. The efficacy of these revisionary ratios is then explored with reference to Thomas's relationship to the Irish poet Kavanagh. The chapter finishes with a comparison of Kavanagh's Maguire and Thomas's peasant Iago Prytherch. It is the main argument of this thesis that the Prytherch figure is Thomas's Covering Cherub and hence the second chapter begins where the first ends.

Having adumbrated after the beginning it is mete to now journey to before the beginning or at least before 'In the beginning':

When God set about to create heaven and earth -the world then being a formless waste, with darkness over the seas and only an awesome wind sweeping over the water- God said, "Let there be light". And there was light.²

The question that the Gnostic interpreter asks 'Looking, as it were, over the Priestly Author's shoulder...What was that "then" prior to Creation? What were those entities, "a formless waste" and "darkness" and the "water" over which the awesome wind swept? The Priestly Author has swept away by his own breath the enormous wars against the abyss and its creatures that God fights and wins'.³ Not only does the Priestly Author tendentiously revise the victory of Yahweh over His foes to the extent that the embarrassingly potent creatures of the abyss are cut and the merely dominant Yahweh becomes omnipotent, but as Bloom notes: 'Homer's precursors are unknown, his triumph over them being so absolute...Yet nothing that even Milton accomplishes in this mode of negative allusion...quite compares with the unique agon

and victory of the Priestly Author of Genesis 1:1-2:4.'⁴ The ellipsis that the Priestly Author perpetrates cannot, however, silence the Psalms and the Book of Job since they:

reverberate with passages in which Yahweh triumphs in a grand fight with a dragon or sea serpent, sometimes named Rahab, sometimes Leviathan. Some of these passages make God's adversary the sea itself, which struggles vainly to oppose the act of Creation. Behind the combat between Yahweh and the sea, or its representatives, is a Canaanite myth that tells how the storm god Baal and his sister (and wife) Anat fought Yamm, or the sea, emblem of chaos.⁵

Gnostic revisions of the Priestly Author's text attempt to restore the creatures of the abyss to the story of creation. Bloom has argued: 'Gnosticism first rose among the Hellenistic Jews, both of Alexandrian Egypt and Syria-Palestine, a full century or so before Christ. I do not think that it began as a rebellion against the priestly Creator-God of Genesis 1, though eventually it turned into that, and it continues to regard the false Creation of Genesis 1 as the true Fall'.⁶ The use Bloomian textual analysis makes of Gnostic theology therefore lies in its search for those elements in a text that do not seem to have been inherited directly from the precursive father and which signify before in the beginning: 'the Abyss in its Gnostic sense: the forefather or foremother, before Creation, who was usurped by the Demiurge, that Demiurge being what Platonists, Jews and Christians call God the father. Loving poetry is a Gnostic passion not because the Abyss itself is loved, but because the lover longs to be yet another Demiurge.'⁷ As Bloom puts it in *Omens of the Millennium*:

The final organized Western Gnosticism was destroyed in the so-called Albigensian Crusades, which devastated southern France in the thirteenth century, exterminating not only the Cathar Gnostic heretics but also the Provençal language and its troubador culture, which has survived only in the prevalent Western myth and ideal of romantic love. It is yet another irony that our erotic lives, with their self-destructive reliance upon the psychic disease called 'falling -or being- in love,' should be a final, unknowing heritage of the last organized Gnosticism to date.⁸

Poets begin by imitating those poems and poets that they love or rather have fallen

in love with, yet this love affair does not involve a benign transmission of afflatus from poetic father to son. Instead the ephebe poet enters into a combat with his composite precursor in order to win priority just as before in the beginning Yahweh battled with those creatures of the abyss that refused to grant Him primogeniture.

What makes the strong poet so cocksure of himself and his abilities is his Gnosis or sense of election:

Gnosis, as the word itself indicates, means a kind of 'knowledge,' rather than a mode of thought. This 'knowledge' is itself the form that salvation takes, because the 'knower' is made Divine in such a 'knowing,' the 'known' being 'the alien God.' This kind of 'knowledge' is anything but what the West has meant by rational 'knowledge,' from the Greeks until our time...It is *not* what normative Judaism and orthodox Christianity have meant by any human 'knowledge' of God, for Gnostic 'knowledge' transforms man *into* God.⁹

What the ephebe poet knows is that he is one of the elect, or, as Keats had it, one of the English poets. During the act of creation the ephebe's composite precursor becomes internalized as what Bloom refers to as the 'Primal Scene of Instruction'. The mark of election that the poet has knowledge of is hence his creativity which in each fresh act of creation tells a fresh lie against time. Bloomian poets are witnesses against the tyranny of time where time is a false creation of the alien god:

Strong poetry is strong only by virtue of a kind of textual usurpation...A strong poem does not *formulate* poetic facts any more than strong reading or criticism formulates them, for a strong reading *is* the only poetic fact, the only revenge against time that endures, that is successful in canonizing one text as opposed to a rival text...poetry...does not go back to a truly divine origin, poetry is always at work *imagining its own origin*, or telling a persuasive lie about itself, to itself. Poetic strength ensues when such lying persuades the reader that his own origin has been re-imagined by the poem.¹⁰

Strong poets are seen by Bloom as Emersonian 'liberating gods' who 'free themselves from the ultimate poverty of death'¹¹ and their works revelatory: 'To fall in love with great poetry...is to be awakened to the self's potential...The self's

potential as power involves the self's immortality, not as duration but as the awakening to a knowledge of something in the self that cannot die, because it was never born.'¹² For Bloom this idea originates in Blake's prose satire *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 'William Blake...taught us that a crucial aspect of religious history is the process of "choosing forms of worship from poetic tales."¹³ Bloom's knowledge of his own 'aftering' is perhaps most poetically explicated in his critical manifesto *The Anxiety of Influence* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is of peculiar interest in this respect because it reveals what waste and what waters were present before the first chapter of *The Anxiety of Influence*.

The Anxiety of Influence is a severe prose-poem¹⁴ and its precursors are English Romantic poets in the form of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Shelley, Yeats, and somewhat anachronistically, Milton. The most important ancestor of *The Anxiety of Influence* is Blake, however. Blake's misprision of Milton contains the germ of Bloom's theory of poetry as these two quotations from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* articulate:

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out; but
the Devil's account is, that the Messiah fell, and formed a heaven
of what he stole from the Abyss.

But in the Book of Job, Milton's Messiah is call'd Satan.

Bloom's commentary upon Blake in *The Visionary Company* provides the interpretative stepping stones that convey the reader from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* to *The Anxiety of Influence*:

In the *Book of Job*, Satan is God's accusing agent, and with heavenly permission subjects Job to an external Hell of maximum tribulation, complete with soreboils and imputations of sin. In *Paradise Lost* the Messiah, with chariot of fire, drives the rebel angels out of heaven and thrusts them forth into Chaos... Messiah is thus the agent who creates an external Hell, a torture chamber for punishments, and so in Blake's view is one with Job's Satan, the restrainer of desire. Milton's Satan begins as desire, but, being restrained, he by degrees becomes passive, until he is only a Spectre, a shadow of desire. Yet Satan's lost substance is the stuff of life, which Milton's God and Messiah can only bind and order, in the present time of *Paradise Lost*, when all divine creation is in the past. The abyss of the five

senses, chaotic substance, undifferentiated energy, is stolen by the Messiah, who undergoes a Satanic fall that he may perform his Promethean act of stealth. From this stolen substance, the orthodox bound of Heaven...is formed. Milton, according to Blake wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell.¹⁵

The Messiah is hence a demiurgical creator opposed to the belief of Satan in *Paradise Lost* that he was a self-created inhabitant of the abyss. Satan therefore knows more than remembers that he should oppose the establishment of God's estate upon the Messiah.¹⁶ Bloom, like Shelley, heaps praises upon the moral character of Satan even to the extent of reading Satan's struggle against Heaven as an instance of an ape eating jewels in hell. Or rather Satan's determination to turn his hell into a heaven because the mind is its own place is read as a pre-echo of the quixotic and decadent ideal of leading one's life as art. As Bloom argues:

The poet is our chosen man, and his consciousness of election comes as a curse; again, not "I am a fallen man," but "I am Man, and I am falling" -or rather, "I was God, I was Man (for to a poet they were the same), and I *am* falling, from myself." When this consciousness of self is raised to an absolute pitch, *then* the poet hits the floor of Hell, or rather, comes to the bottom of the abyss, and by his impact there creates Hell. He says, "I seem to have stopped falling; now I *am fallen*, consequently, I lie here in Hell."¹⁷

To refuse to accept the God of cultural history and the embarrassments of a tradition grown too wealthy to need new poetic acts requires an exuberance of creativity. This is the heroism that the indefatigable modern poet needs and which Milton's Satan exhibits. It is troped by Bloom as 'a refusal to mourn'¹⁸ or as a Johnsonian fear of either indolence or destruction; the 'two antipodes of invention'.¹⁹ The satanic modern poet must above all else be bold, daring, and resolute, and not timid, acedic, nor dissolute, and hence Bloom, like Blake, admires the vitalism of the Voice of the Devil:

Energy is the only life, and is from the body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

Energy is Eternal Delight.

As Bloom argues: 'Energy is Eternal Delight, or Joy, as Coleridge and Wordsworth

more simply call it. This delighted exuberance is the outward mark of a healthy imagination, and is definitive of beauty and identifiable with it.'²⁰ To identify Lakeland 'Joy' with Cockney 'Energy' is to rehearse the following passage in *The Anxiety of Influence*: 'Why call Satan a modern poet? Because he shadows forth gigantically a trouble at the core of Milton and of Pope, a sorrow that purifies by isolation in Collins and Gray, in Smart and in Cowper, emerging fully to stand clear in Wordsworth, who is the exemplary Modern Poet, the Poet proper.'²¹ A discussion of what it is that makes Wordsworth the most influential of modern poets must wait until chapter three. It is enough for now to assert that Wordsworth pioneered a way of writing poetry that became indispensable to his descendants. However, this statement is tempered by the knowledge that Wordsworth did not invent modern poetry as much as play the Roman to his Greek friend Coleridge. An understanding of the opening chapter of *The Anxiety of Influence* is thus not possible without Coleridge's name being mentioned despite the fact that Bloom makes no such reference. If Satan is the modern poet and the modern poet is Wordsworth then Bloom throws Coleridge into his discussion under the name of Beelzebub:

When Satan or the poet looks around him on the floor of fire his falling self had kindled, he sees first a face he only just recognizes, his best friend, Beelzebub, or the talented poet who never quite made it, and now never shall. And, like the truly strong poet he is, Satan is interested in the face of his best friend only to the extent that it reveals to him the condition of his own countenance.²²

Such a pairing is not unique in Bloom's oeuvre and to the double act of Wordsworth and Coleridge, might be added, the J-writer and the Court historian, author of 2 Samuel, and Marlowe and Shakespeare. To this catalogue I would add the much lesser names of Dylan Thomas and R. S. Thomas who while the Jahwist and the Court Historian invented Jewish scripture, Shakespeare and Marlowe invented English Renaissance drama, Wordsworth and Coleridge invented English Romantic Poetry, deserve the greatly reduced commendation (but only in this illustrious company) of inventing Anglo-Welsh poetry.

Bloom's chapter in *The Visionary Company* on Coleridge begs to be read as a sustained comparison of both Wordsworth and Coleridge. The first sentence of Bloom's exegesis begins: 'Coleridge's "conversation poems" are the origin of the Wordsworthian mode, of *Tintern Abbey*'.²³ Wordsworth's debt to his friend is in Bloom's opinion palpable and with reference to Coleridge's invocation to 'the one Life within us and abroad' in *The Eolian Harp* he has written: 'If this was written in 1795, we clearly have here the source of the extraordinary myth of an organic sense

of seeing-hearing as the special mark of capable Imagination, a myth whose complexities we have explored in Wordsworth, a poet sometimes referred to as Coleridge's "greatest work."²⁴ This is not the place to rehearse Bloom's reading of *The Eolian Harp* but the last lines of his exegesis are nevertheless relevant: 'The poem collapses in a self-surrender that augurs badly for the Imagination. Coleridge will go on to write several "poems of pure Imagination," but he will liberate himself into his potential all too rarely. *The Eolian Harp* shows why. The Imagination wishes to be indulged, and Coleridge feared the moral consequences of such indulgence.'²⁵ According to Bloom Coleridge succumbs to his orthodox censor and *The Eolian Harp* lapses into 'babbling about "the Incomprehensible," a mystery transcending Nature and language.'²⁶

Bloom writes of *Frost at Midnight* that it is 'the masterpiece of the "conversation poems"...it shares with *Tintern Abbey* the distinction of inaugurating the major Wordsworthian myth of memory as salvation'.²⁷ In *Figures of Capable Imagination* Bloom writes: 'Coleridge presumably knew what "Tintern Abbey" owed to "Frost at Midnight," but this knowledge nowhere found expression.'²⁸ Bloom means that this lack of expressiveness is a lack of determination to do better than Wordsworth. This demarcates Coleridge from the egotistical sublime and explains why Bloom quotes Humphrey House's observation that "Coleridge was quite unbelievably modest about his own poems; and the modesty was of a curious kind, sometimes rather humble and over-elaborate."²⁹ Perhaps Bloom's most helpful insight into the creative paralysis that enervated Coleridge is this: 'The fear of solipsism is greater in him than the fear of not individuating his own imagination.'³⁰ This should be coupled with a quotation from Bloom's chapter upon Walter Pater in the same tome: 'The Romantics, as Pater understood...were not nature-poets, but rather exemplars of the power of the mind, a power exerted against the object-world, or mere universe of death.'³¹ This has ramifications for any reading of *Frost at Midnight* because in this poem Coleridge achieved his most convincing self-interrogation spoilt only by his need to marry the mind to the secret ministry of frost. Or as Bloom argues: 'The secret ministry of frost is analogous to the secret ministry of memory'³² and in this proposal 'we recognize the doctrine...of *Tintern Abbey*, anticipated but with a tremulous intensity, very unlike the primitive confidence Wordsworth at his best was to bring to the Coleridgean formulation of the religion of Nature.'³³

What was begun in *The Eolian Harp* and reached its apogee in *Frost at Midnight* found its nadir in *Dejection: An Ode*. Or as Bloom argues: 'The logic of *Dejection* is that human process is irreversible: imaginative loss is permanent, and nature intimates to us our own mortality always.'³⁴ He continues:

The epigraph to Wordsworth's *Intimations* ode is a motto of natural piety. Against its rainbow Coleridge sets the natural emblem most in opposition: the new Moon, with the old Moon in its arms. In *Dejection* the storm is predicted, comes on, and finally is 'but a mountain-birth,' sudden and soon over. The poem's new moon is the Wordsworth surrogate, 'Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice'; its old moon, Coleridge himself.³⁵

Bloom writes of the structure of *Dejection* that it is in two units: 'stanzas I, VII, VIII, and stanzas II-VI. The first group are respectively devoted to the pre-storm calm, the storm itself, and the subsequent calm, which is analogous to the peace at the end of a formalized tragedy. The middle stanzas are argument, between Coleridge-as-Wordsworthian and Coleridge-in-dejection, with the latter dialectically triumphant.'³⁶ Bloom's discussion turns upon the often maligned seventh stanza:

Part of the functional obscurity of Coleridge's stanza VII is its reference to the child as Otway might present her, where we would expect one of the solitary creature's of Wordsworth's poetry. The problem here is merely a genetic one, related to the successive 'Edmund' and 'lady' substitutions for Wordsworth in the *Dejection* ode. Originally Coleridge had written:

As William's self had made the tender Lay-

This vanished together with:

A boat becalm'd! dear William's Sky Canoe

after the present line 36 of the ode, identifying the crescent moon with the visionary sky-boat of *Peter Bell*. So vanished also Coleridge's 'I too will crown me with a Coronal' in direct answer to Wordsworth's 'My heart hath its coronal,' also vanished from the final version. Otway, like Chatterton, was a figure of Romantic myth: the poet as hungry outcast in the storm of organized society.³⁷

The mention of Chatterton together with Bloom's assertion that 'The fierce epiphanies of Wordsworth are declared with the trumpeting of the prophet Amos, for whom judgement could run down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty

stream'³⁸ brings this discussion circling back towards the modern poet proper.

Wordsworth's egoism and primitive simplicity enabled him to grow-up as a poet and hence he avoided the Coleridgean failing which Bloom deduces as 'something of an eternal child is in Coleridge'³⁹ despite the fact that the sensitivity of a Hamlet characterises much of his poesy's pathos. Unlike the Coleridge of *Dejection* Wordsworth did cross with strangers and is lifted from his Slough of Despond by the Leech Gatherer:

Resolution and Independence is a poem dealing with the passage from crisis to what will suffice, that place of spirit from which one can again start to live and to write. The poet stands almost at the midpoint of his existence -he is thirty-two, soon to be married, and fearful that his vision has fled. He contemplates the acedia and ruin of his brother poet, Coleridge, and sees in him the entire line of the doomed poets of Sensibility, from Chatterton to Burns, the bards who in their youth began in gladness, but who fell one by one into the despondency that preceded total alienation. From this terrible anxiety, this grief without a name, Wordsworth is rescued by a privileged moment that scarcely yields itself even to the later reason of the imagination. Nothing the Leech-gatherer says makes a difference -it is the uncanny shape, the *kind* of speech, above all, the preternatural *stationing* of such a figure in the lonely place, that finds Wordsworth, that brings him home to consolation and to the secure stay of a possible fresh start for a life of poetry.⁴⁰

Bloom's allegory links Wordsworth and Satan as exemplars of the modern poet proper because 'Wordsworth...said of his "spots of time" that they gave knowledge of to what extent and how the mind held mastery over outward sense'.⁴¹ Outward sense is here the universe of death that by the strength of his imaginings Satan argues can be changed from a hell into a heaven. Although a hero Satan runs the risk of becoming a heroic failure and to avoid this fate the hubris-driven poet has to keep proving his poetic worth. This is true to the extent that Blake's Satan should not be confused with Bloom's Satan, who has more in common with the dynamic fallen virtue of Blake's Milton:

The characteristic modern lyric of real ambition is generally a variant of the Wordsworthian crisis poem, the ultimate models being *Tintern Abbey*, *Resolution and Independence*, and the

Intimations Ode. This does not mean, of course, that the reliance of later poets upon Wordsworth is always overt or conscious; it means only, and yet all-importantly, that Wordsworth perfected the genre that Coleridge in fact had invented. In the crisis lyric, the poet seeks to save himself for poetry. The price of failure is madness, or death-in-life; the reward of success is only to have written the poem, and to be free for the struggle with the next poem. *Resolution and Independence* is a poem about not being able to do what Blake's Milton does, to cast off the coverings of anxiety and of self-torturing analysis.⁴²

The Prytherch poems of Thomas are the equivalent of *Resolution and Independence* and his equivalent Dejection Ode is 'Reservoirs'(NHBF).

The impression that is given by Bloom's comparison of Wordsworth and Coleridge is of two amazingly talented and fecund minds competing and cooperating on the ribbed sea sands of poetic incarnation. Yet in *To William Wordsworth* one has flowers strewed upon his cortège and the other triumphal wreaths laid before his chariot. In Bloom's view what separates them is the relative poetic exuberance of Wordsworth in comparison to the godly Coleridge. From a certain angle Wordsworth turned out to be more god-like than Coleridge since as Northrop Frye has argued in relation to Collins' *Ode on the Poetical Character*: 'not only does the poet in his creation imitate the creative power of God, but is himself a son of God and Fancy, a "rich-hair'd youth of morn" associated with the sun-god, like the Greek Apollo, a prophet and visionary of whom the last exemplar was Milton.'⁴³ For Bloom poets are liberating gods and in his commentary on *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he writes: 'The boundary of desire you learn only by moving beyond, and the furious energy of this liberation is definitive of beauty'⁴⁴ and that: 'Eternal Delight, the primal Exuberance that is Beauty, exists beyond the bounds.'⁴⁵ In Bloom's theory of poetry the modern poet proper is Satan and in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* the breaker of bounds is 'the vitalist -or Devil'.⁴⁶ Dr. Johnson maintained that: "'The highest praise of genius is original invention'" and Bloom writes that Johnson 'revered invention because he associated originality with vitalism, and found in any fresh fiction what naturalism discovers anew with every Spring.'⁴⁷ To be the victim of a precursor's proleptical rhetoric is to suffer the frosts of winter rather than to invoke the tempestuous winds of poetic spring.

Thus this discussion approaches the related figures of the Sphinx and Covering Cherub. Bloom introduces this Greek and Judaic duo in the opening chapter of *The Anxiety of Influence*. He writes of the Sphinx that it embodies the sexual anxiety which colours the poet's relationship with nature:

the Sphinx is natural, but the Cherub is closer to the human. The Sphinx is sexual anxiety, but the Cherub is creative anxiety. The Sphinx is met upon the road back to origins, but the Cherub upon the road forward to possibility, if not to fulfillment... Emerson thought that the poet unriddled the Sphinx by perceiving an identity in nature, or else yielded to the Sphinx, if he was merely bombarded by diverse particulars he could never hope to integrate. The Sphinx...is nature and the riddle of our emergence from nature⁴⁸

Bloom awards the laurels to those poets who break free from an unfallen or Adamic Oneness with Nature and hence individuate themselves. Before proceeding it is important to note that Bloom argues: 'Even the strongest poets were at first weak, for they started as prospective Adams, not as retrospective Satans.'⁴⁹

Once the poet has discovered in Paul De Man's words: 'a possibility for consciousness to exist entirely by and for itself, independently of all relationship with the outside world, without being moved by an intent aimed at a part of this world'⁵⁰ then the ephebe is forced to confront the Covering Cherub. Bloom adopts Satan as the figure of the modern poet because, like Wordsworth, Satan in *Paradise Lost* utilizes his imagination to retrope the universe of death and hence individuates his poetic consciousness from the riddle of man's origins in nature. In *Tintern Abbey* or Bloom's modern poem proper Wordsworth turns away from his reciprocal relationship with nature in order to escape the tyranny of ocular sense. Instead the modern poet proper turns from tropes of seeing to Miltonic tropes of hearing and hence from the Sphinx to the Covering Cherub who for Wordsworth was Milton.

This seeing/hearing dialectic is crucial to an understanding of Bloom's Gnostic theory of poetry because the three poetic crossings that Bloom outlines in the last chapter of *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* are more often than not identifiable as such due to their synaesthesia. As Bloom argues:

each of these crossings seems to me to have three characteristic marks in nearly every poem in which they occur. These are:

1). A dialectic movement of the senses, usually between sight and hearing, though sometimes between different degrees of clarity in sight.

2). A movement of oscillation between mimetic and expressive theories of poetic representation, between mirror and lamp, to employ the terms that M. H. Abrams derived from Yeats.

3). A movement toward an even greater degree of internalization of self, no matter how inward the starting point was.⁵¹

A more extended explication of Bloom's three poetic crossings is undertaken towards the end of this chapter, whereas a fuller explanation of Bloom's reading of *Tintern Abbey* is provided in chapter three. What concerns me here is once again Bloom's Gnostic theory of poetry and as such it is pertinent to concentrate upon the terms that Bloom adopts rather than mirror and lamp. Bloom's terms are *ethos* and *pathos*. He argues:

The authentic temporal moment is thwarted *by nature*, which reveals to the poet that immediacy or presence is indeed an *illusio* or ironical dialectic, a here and now always self-negating. But this natural thwarting educates the poet's mind, by reading the *ethos* of nature, its "action," without an immediately full significance. *Ethos* has become limitation, a contraction or withdrawal of meaning, that opens the way for a rethinking that is necessarily a remeaning....*Ethos* or poetic character or natural action is converted into a poet's fate, and the re-cognition becomes the path of imaginative freedom, until the power of self-recognition intervenes, completing the dialectic with a passage into the ultimate *pathos* of wonder.⁵²

Bloom's tropes of action fall under the category of *ethos* and they include irony, metonymy, and metaphor. Their tropological partners are synecdoche, hyperbole, and metalepsis and Bloom names these tropes of *pathos*. Another name for *pathos* in Bloom's triad of dialectics is imaginative desire since in their exuberance the latter attempt to break the bounds of the former. Bloom defines a trope as 'either the will translating itself into a verbal act or figure of *ethos*, or else the will failing to translate itself and so abiding as a verbal desire or figure of *pathos*. But, either way, the trope *is* a figure of will rather than a figure of knowledge.'⁵³ Knowledge here denotes Platonic knowing rather than the will-to-identity that characterises poetry and poetic character or what Bloom defines as '*the will to utter within a tradition of uttering*'.⁵⁴ This is an intrinsically Kabbalistic idea and depends upon the assumption 'that all distinction between proper and figurative meaning in language has been totally lost since the catastrophe of creation.'⁵⁵

Bloom further defines his Gnosis with reference to Hans Jonas:

In its theological aspect this doctrine states that the Divine is alien

to the world and has neither part nor concern in the physical universe; that the true god, strictly transmundane, is not revealed or even indicated by the world, and is therefore the Unknown, the totally Other, unknowable in terms of any worldly analogies. Correspondingly, in its cosmological aspect it states that the world is the creation not of God but of some inferior principle whose law it executes; and, in its anthropological aspect, that man's inner self, the *pneuma* ('spirit' in contrast to 'soul' = psyche) is not part of the world, of nature's creation and domain, but is, within that world, as totally transcendent and as unknown by all worldly categories as is its transmundane counterpart, the unknown God without.⁵⁶

The distinction between soul or psyche and pneuma is worth labouring and in *Omens of the Millennium* Bloom argues: 'Gnosis depends upon distinguishing the *psyche*, or soul, from the deep self'⁵⁷ because 'God is at once deep within the self and estranged, infinitely far off, beyond our cosmos.'⁵⁸ This uncovering of the God within the self is what Bloom means by a 'deep reading' since his Gnostic theory of poetry seeks out the ephebe poet's affinity for the precursor's muse. In the triad ephebe, precursor, precursor's muse; Sophia equates to the precursor's muse, the Demiurge to the precursor, and Adam to the ephebe and hence the anxiety of influence is said to skip a generation since the successfully transumptive ephebe writes as if he were an influence and not influenced. What the ephebe therefore essays is a lie against time where the epigoni's lie of voice tries to persuade the reader that it has temporal priority over its precursor's lie of voice or as Bloom argues: 'all rhetoric as a system of tropes is a synchronic rhetoric, but all rhetoric as persuasion is diachronic, so that the *aporia* between the two indeed is beyond resolution'.⁵⁹ This militates against Platonic knowledge but the spark that jumps the gap between this anode of *ethos* and cathode of *pathos* is 'the "Thought" of God scattered into the broken vessels'.⁶⁰ *Logos* in Bloom's system is reserved for those who believe that 'truth can be expressed *through* the interplay of proper and figurative meaning.'⁶¹ The interplay of rhetoric as the art of persuasion and rhetoric as persuasion generates meaning or dialectical truth when *pathos* or rhetoric as persuasion outweighs *ethos* or rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Or as Bloom argues: 'This theory depends upon the verifiable pronouncement that the language of British and American poetry, from at least Wordsworth to the present, is overdetermined in its patternings and so is underdetermined in its meanings.'⁶² Bloom's theory therefore hinges upon an understanding of works of literature as inter-texts rather than as isolated holistic entities and thus the intra-textual

comparison of text and prior text reveals the influence of precursive patternings to the alarming extent that the 'literal' meaning of a text seems underdetermined.

Bloom hails the alluring Satan of the first four books of *Paradise Lost* as his figure for the strong poet and the justification of life through art is what Bloom refers to as the 'Dark Intention' into which 'the ephebe must fall' and from which the nascent poet 'emerges crippled and blinded', but numbered 'among the strong poets'⁶³:

The power I seek to gain over the text is what Milton's Satan called 'quickenning power,' the conviction of pragmatic self-engendering. Such a power is parallel to any strong poem's power over its precursor poems...What concerns me in a strong poem is neither self nor language but the utterance, within a tradition of uttering, of the image or lie of voice, where 'voice' is neither self nor language, but rather spark or *pneuma* as opposed to self, and act made one with word (*davhar*) rather than word referring only to another word (*logos*).⁶⁴

The root meaning of *davhar* 'involves the notion of driving forward something that initially is held-back. This is the word as moral act, a true word that is at once an object or thing and a deed or act. A word not an act or thing is thus a lie, something that was behind and was not driven forward.'⁶⁵ Bloom describes *davhar* as being 'dynamic' and therefore this dynamic *davhar* 'in thrusting forward what is concealed in the self, is concerned with oral expression, with getting a word, a thing, a deed out into the light.'⁶⁶ Thus the dynamic *davhar* is 'word', 'thing', 'act', all simultaneously. The etymological root of dynamic means power or force and in this context describes the powerful or forcefully original poetic personality. *Pneuma* on the other hand derives from the opposition between *psyche* and *daemon* which Bloom terms 'cosmic soul against acosmic self.'⁶⁷ Bloom argues that 'the Gnostic dualism of soul or *psyche* against self or *pneuma* or "spark" is crucial for seeing just what Gnostic knowing, or Gnosis, takes as its quest.'⁶⁸ The crux of Bloom's argument is that Platonic being is static whereas a pneumatic happening is a movement; 'is itself a critical event.'⁶⁹ All a poet can know is what he has himself created and thus poetry is a representation of the *pneuma* or a crisis-creation that makes a happening in the form of a poem. This poem is thus part of Bloom's process of self-engendering where the poet asserts his free will during a Lucretian swerve away from the strength of the precursor.⁷⁰

For both Wordsworth and Coleridge the precursorial Cherub equates to Milton and in turn Milton wrestles with a combination of Scripture and Spenser.⁷¹

Setting aside the influence of Spenser a useful dialectic can be adumbrated if Bloom's longest meditation upon the earliest surviving fragments of the Bible is considered. The basis of this dichotomy is that of poetic exuberance and poetic acedia or more simply between being and non-being. As has already been touched upon, the God of *Paradise Lost* is creatively exhausted or, as Bloom writes in *The Anxiety of Influence*, 'Satan is that modern poet, while God is his dead but still embarrassingly potent and present ancestor...God has no Muse, and needs none, since he is dead, his creativity being manifested only in the past time of the poem.'^{7 2} If as Bloom claims all great poets are 'directly related by a tradition' and 'share qualities we recognize yet find difficulty in describing'^{7 3} then the non-tropological answer to what lies against time is the spark or *pneuma* and dynamic physical act as word or *davhar*. The strong poet is dynamic whilst his irresolute brethren cannot accomplish even the weakest of their mightier sibling's acts of covenant love.

What stifles a poet's creativity is, as Bloom argues, the Covering Cherub 'the great blocking-agent who inhibits fresh human creativity by embodying in himself all the sinister beauty of tradition.'^{7 4} In *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom notes that 'the cherubim in the tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple spread their wings over the ark, and so protected it'.^{7 5} Yet the God of *Paradise Lost* is a Deity that desperately needed cherubic minders, as Sarah Kofman notes:

In *The Antichrist* (24-26) Nietzsche shows how the Jewish priests transformed their conception of divinity under pressure of historical circumstances. Originally their god is symptomatic of a highly tenacious vital force: he is a warrior god who fights with the Jewish people against its enemies...he is the god of a chosen people...But after the period of the Kings, internal anarchy and, externally, the triumph of the Assyrians made the Jews lose the confidence they had put in their god: was he really *their* god if he could change camps like that? It became essential to abandon such a changeable god: but the Jews preferred to change the conception they had of him. They turned him into a god who was good and peaceful and forbade war^{7 6}

This argument is augmented as later scribes whittled away the Jahwist's stories:

As the revision of J proceeded...the human attributes of Yahweh consistently diminish. And yet he remains in R what he always is for J, a person and a personality, the most

extraordinary of all personalities. It is in Jewish theology, from the Alexandrian Philo through Maimonides, that the anthropomorphic, so called, vanishes all but utterly, a process carried still further in Christian and Muslim theology.⁷⁷

Kofman's Nietzschean account of Jewish theological history mirrors Bloom's own reading of this history in *The Book of J*. Except whereas Kofman is concerned with explicating Nietzsche, Bloom is primarily fixated by the Jahwist. Bloom argues that his *Gevurah*, or great lady, is severely edited by the Redactor presumably at the time of Ezra. As Bloom argues: 'Her Yahweh is a lively fellow, dynamic in the extreme, who has very little in common with the God of the Priestly Author or of Jeremiah, though something in common with the Davidic God of the Court Historian.'⁷⁸ Such a deity is consonant with Bloom's proposal that the scandal of J's work was:

a Yahweh at once human-all-too-human and totally incommensurate with the human. I suggest that this was a *deliberate* scandal, though of a high-spirited, comic kind...Divine bureaucrats do not squat on the ground under terebinth trees and devour roast veal so as to strengthen themselves to walk down the road and destroy a sinful city or two. Believers...prefer an invisible Yahweh above the clouds, a kind of troublesome but remote gaseous vapour, or failing that, a tyrant suitably enthroned.⁷⁹

The Deity of Exodus 24 who attempts to murder Moses for no apparent reason is not the kind of supreme being that could be crammed like a jack into a cedar-wood box! Bloom heaps praises upon *Gevurah's* post-Solomonic Enlightenment or Romantic 'nostalgia... for...a state founded upon heroic vitalism'⁸⁰ and the 'extraordinary vividness of J's art depends upon its ability to convey restless interactions'.⁸¹ Bloom's spark or *pneuma* reduces to the vitalism of J and this is the exuberance that tradition ultimately measures itself against. This is born out by the Hebrew etymology of the word for 'naught' because in order to denote "absence of existence, non-being, the Hebrew says: as 'naught' [*lo dabhar*, 'no word'] = non-existent. For the existent finds expression only in action and movement, and if there is no action or movement, there is nothing [literally 'no word']...Actuality is the fact of power and action, which are life. Life is conceived as power."⁸²

The ephebe is always vying for priority with past generations and the ultimate agon for Bloom is not with the lyric power of Homer but with the

charismatic Gevurah/Bathsheba. The imaginative space that today and yesterday's Achilles and Hector battle for is not Priam's city but the mantle of the J writer and her Davidic Jahweh whose incommensurable personality excites the imagination. It is this god and his decadent ways that the philosopher-ephebes of Bloom's misreading of Borges's parable assassinate at point blank range:

A parable of Borges tells of a dream in which the Gods returned, to occupy a platform in a lecture hall before an audience of the School of Philosophy and Letters. The professors first applauded, tearfully, but then began to suspect that the Gods were dumb and degenerate, 'cunning, ignorant and cruel like old beasts of prey.' Lest the Gods destroy them, the scholars 'took out our heavy revolvers...and joyfully killed the Gods.'⁸³

Bloom continues: 'The tears were authentic, yet so was the joy; we applaud enchantment, but celebrate the success of our resistance to it. "We are improved only as we find something to be imitated or declined,"...there is no Romanticism without a return, in some form, of the Gods.'⁸⁴

Borges begins his parable with reference to the opium haunted dreams of Coleridge: 'In our dreams (writes Coleridge) images represent the sensations we think they cause; we do not feel horror because we are threatened by a sphinx; we dream of a sphinx in order to explain the horror we feel.'⁸⁵ Yet Bloom has argued that: 'Opium was the avenging daemon...of Coleridge's life...his experiential acquaintance with Milton's Satan'.⁸⁶ On one celebrated occasion the horror that he dreamed of was the death of the Logos experienced as the exorcism of the dynamicism of David displaced as the Jahwist's impish Jahweh. This is necessarily reductive and yet Davidic exuberance is pragmatically what the logic-loving philosophers shoot at in Bloom's reading of Borges's parable 'Ragnarök'. As Bloom's reading of *The Eolian Harp* demonstrates, Coleridge was unable to tolerate a return of the gods and his delicate Romantic project ran itself aground upon the rock of religious belief. Bloom argues: 'the Gods are poets whose auguries all have been fulfilled, men who somehow learned never to die, men who mastered divination...Hermes Thoth...invented all names, establishing the certainties of ownership, and so goes on writing all books whatsoever.'⁸⁷ John Drew has drawn attention to the fact that in November, 1802, 'Coleridge wrote in his notebook: "Kublai Khan ordered letters to be invented for his people"' and consequently argues:

the concept of Kublai Khan ordering letters to be invented for his

people and thus being a fountainhead of civilisation accords closely with the initial image in Coleridge's poem of Kubla having his cultivated garden laid out at a place where the river is called Alph ...the holy lama who invented the alphabet was, as a reward, invested with the highest sacred office in the land. Not only is Coleridge's Alph a sacred river but control of it apparently bears some relationship to the existence of the mystical figure at the end of the poem.⁸⁸

At the end of *Kubla Khan* Coleridge's poetic nerve failed him and this is because to build the poem's physical dome in the Imagination would be as Bloom argues: 'to create more lastingly than even Nature and Art can do together. And could he do this, he would be a reincarnation of the young Apollo.'⁸⁹ The argument of *The Book of J* implies that Scripture was manufactured from a secular narrative and Coleridge refused to allow the Imagination to challenge the Logos. Bloom writes of Coleridge's poetically 'disabling hunger for the Absolute' and of what the poet termed "'the wretchedness of division"⁹⁰, or the death-in-life of nature perceived as the antithesis of mind. Hoisting Pater as his standard Bloom attacks the sage of Highgate's hunger for the organic analogue because Coleridge:

in describing Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, keeps repeating his absolute formula that poems grow from within themselves, that their 'wholeness is not in vision or conception, but in an inner feeling of totality and absolute being.' As Pater says, 'that exaggerated inwardness is barren' because it 'withdraws us too far from what we can see, hear, and feel,' because it cheats the senses and the emotions of their triumph. I urge Pater's wisdom here not only against Coleridge, though I share Pater's love for Coleridge, but against formalist criticism that continued in Coleridge's absolute spirit.⁹¹

A poem is not a monad and every poet, although he wishes to delude himself and his readers to the contrary must have a precursor and in Coleridge's case this was pre-eminently Milton who as Bloom points out in *A Map of Misreading* had his precursors in scripture and his Great Original in Spenser. Milton in tandem with the spirit of his pre-Tübingen era believed Moses to be the author of the Pentateuch and as a direct result of taking on all of the horse tail rather than the individual hairs: 'Coleridge acquired a doubly Sublime anxiety of influence...Beyond the beauty that has terror in it of Milton was beauty more terrible.'⁹² Gnostic exuberance is poetic

beauty in Bloom's poetics but the terrible beauty Bloom here tropes is that of the dynamic poet's Nemesis. This fear of the divine in Milton also had an effect upon Coleridge's famous comparison of the bard and the blind bard of *Paradise Lost*. Of Shakespeare Coleridge wrote: "Shakespeare was all men, potentially, except Milton" and that "Shakespeare became all things...while all forms, all things became Milton - the poet ever present to our minds and more than gratifying us for the loss of distinct individuality of what he represents."⁹³ Bloom senses a principle of loss behind Coleridge's gratifications since the myriad mind of Shakespeare has by the time of Milton become a most single minded protestantism. Bloom's point is that Coleridge is not single minded enough and that his smack of Hamlet is really a longing for the opiate 'of generosity between poets, as between people, a generosity that is not allowed in a world where each poet must struggle to individuate his own breath, and this at the expense of his forebears as much as his contemporaries...Coleridge wanted better poems than can be made without misprision.'⁹⁴ In *The Anxiety of Influence* Coleridge becomes the aborted incarnation of the strong or satanic poet and Bloom describes his sick rose as 'so poor an example'⁹⁵ of the poetic species even to the extent of diagnosing his canker as 'Miltonic Blight'.⁹⁶

The crux of this thesis is that R.S. like Coleridge fails as a strong poet because he also has too much faith to let his Imagination challenge the priority of the Logos. However, the topography of Bloom's Miltonic allegory is also worthy of comment since Satan's burning lake also corresponds to the shores of Delos and hence to the poetic incarnation of Apollo. It is here that Satan or the modern poet stops falling and claims that hell is improved by his Clinamatic swerve. Wordsworth in his moments of vision, for instance, at the beginning of *Tintern Abbey*, hears the far away sound of inland waters moving and this sound is the susurrus of Delian surf. To apply Bloom's Miltonic allegory these waters recall the amphibiousness of poetic incarnation and the sands where the Wordsworthian child enjoys a taste of immortality. Bloom darkly defines the epebe poet's antithetical love for the sea thus: 'Ocean, the matter of Night, the original Lilith or "feast that famished," mothers what is antithetical to her'.⁹⁷ The distant echo of Genesis 1 can be heard in the sighing of Wordsworthian waters, though, the putative Creation narrative that Bloom presents as anterior to the Priestly Author's owes something to the opposition in *Blake's Apocalypse* of 'Urizen, cloudy sky-god, and Tharmas, chaotic instinct become the god of tormented waters.'⁹⁸ This is Bloom's resurrected Jawistic account of the story of Creation:

In creating, Yahweh rode above the Deep, which rose against him. Tehom, queen of the Deep, sought to drown out

Yahweh's Creation...Yahweh destroyed her vassal Leviathan with one great blow to the monster's skull...The waters fled backward, awed by the voice of Yahweh, and Tehom fearfully surrendered. Yahweh shouted his triumph, and dried up the floods...the Morning Stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Thus the work of Creation was completed.⁹⁹

Jahweh is here the strong poet and his enemy is Tharmas and in *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom describes their duel in this way: 'Before the Fall (which for Blake meant before the Creation, the two events for him being one and the same) the Covering Cherub was the pastoral genius Tharmas, a unifying process making for undivided consciousness; the innocence, pre-reflective, of a state without subjects and objects, yet in no danger of solipsism, for it lacked consciousness of self.'¹⁰⁰ This is the state of Adam or as Bloom writes: 'Adam is given or natural man, beyond which our imaginations will not contract.'¹⁰¹

Kabbalah means 'reception' or alternatively 'the given' and texts like the *Zohar* are so belated that they appear to be parodies of Jewish Scripture upon which they are commentaries: 'the Kabbalists developed implicitly a *psychology of belatedness*, and with it an explicit, rhetorical series of techniques for opening Scripture'.¹⁰² The extreme misprisions of this tradition are analogous to the belatedness of post-Enlightenment poetry and the desperation of 'aftering', the feeling that one is a late-comer, is manifested as the strong poet's unequivocal sense of election or what Bloom terms the Primal Scene of Instruction: 'Election-love...is the Primal start of a Primal Scene of Instruction...Behind any Scene of Writing, at the start of every inter-textual encounter, there is this unequal initial love, where necessarily the giving famishes the receiver.'¹⁰³ According to Bloom the Primal Scene of Instruction is 'where the Idea of Poetry first came to them'.¹⁰⁴ Or more simply: 'Poetry begins, always, when someone who is going to become a poet *reads a poem*. But I immediately add -when he *begins* to read a poem, for to see how fully he reads that poem we will have to see the poem that he himself will write *as his reading*'.¹⁰⁵ To return to the penultimate quotation, he continues 'The interplay between accommodation and assimilation...depends upon the inter-textual covenants that are made, implicitly and explicitly, by later with earlier poets.'¹⁰⁶ Thus the Provencal figure of falling in love becomes an Election-love that is ambivalently directed at both the reception and assimilation of an earlier poet's work and the accommodation that the later poet comes to with this work. To number oneself amongst the poetic elect is therefore to be influenced by tradition but to love tradition in the ambivalent sense of loving one's own work as distinct from tradition.

Thus to be part of tradition is to compete with tradition. This is the state of Satan or 'the situation of the strong poet, the capable imagination, when he confronts the universe of poetry, the words that were and will be, the terrible splendor of cultural heritage.'¹⁰⁷

This competition or self-reliance is merely a recapitulation of Vico's dictum that 'We only know what we ourselves have made'.¹⁰⁸ As Bloom argues: 'the initial poetic kindling of Election-love is a self-knowing founded on a self-making, since a young Blake or a young Wordsworth had to know the possibility of sublimity in the self before he could know it in Milton and go onto be elected by Milton.'¹⁰⁹ This leads Bloom to note that the psychic place 'where the Scene of Instruction is staged, is necessarily a place cleared by the newcomer in himself, cleared by an initial contraction or withdrawal that makes possible all further self-limitations, and all restituting modes of self-representation'.¹¹⁰ This is again tropable as a form of falling in love: 'This revelation depends upon a breaking. Its best analogue is when any of us becomes aware of love just as the object of love is irreparably lost.'¹¹¹ The word breaking takes us to the Lurianic triad of limitation, catastrophe-creation, and substitution, which terms are introduced by Bloom as *zimzum*, *ha-shevirath*, and *tikkun*. During the Primal Scene of Instruction Bloom predicts that this breaking of the vessels or clearing of the poet's psyche of poetic influence will in the case of strong poetry occur three times.

Bloom divides his revisionary ratios of *zimzum* or limitation into Clinamen, Kenosis, and Askesis. He argues: 'If the anxiety of influence be imaged as a lack of breathing space, then the voluntary limitation that allows a new poem to begin, amounts to a holding-in of breath, until some space is cleared for it. *Zimzum*...derives from the verb *mezamzem*, to draw in breath.'¹¹² In contrast Bloom demarcates his expansive ratios of *tikkun* or restitution into Tessera, Daemonization, and Apophrades: 'If representation is the aesthetic translation for the Kabbalistic *tikkun*...then representation is being viewed as a kind of mending process...Poems cannot retribute, and yet they can make the gesture of restitution. They cannot reverse time, and yet they can lie against time.'¹¹³ *Ha-shevirath* therefore becomes the three Bloomian crossings of Election, Solipsism, and Identification or 'a separating out and re-forming by and through differences, as a breaking-apart.'¹¹⁴ The Scene of Instruction proceeds as a triad of antithetical contractions and expansions each pairing separated by a poetic crossing that as we have already seen often displays synaesthesia, an oscillation between mimetic and expressive forms of poetic representation, and a movement towards a greater degree of internalization of the self. The basis of this model for poetic creation is as Bloom argues: 'a startlingly regressive process, one in which an abyss can separate any one stage from another, and in which catastrophe is always the central event. Reality for

Luria is always a triple rhythm of contraction, breaking apart, and mending, a rhythm continuously present in time even as it first punctuated eternity.'¹¹⁵ Thus Clinamen and Tessera are connected by the crossing of Election, Kenosis and Daemonizaion by the crossing of Solipsism, and Askesis and Apophrades by the crossing of Identification. In terms of the Bloom's reading of *Tintern Abbey*, at crucial moments during the poem Wordsworth moves from tropes of ethos and also of seeing to tropes of pathos and of hearing. As he does so he switches his muse as the sight of Nature inscribed with Miltonic traces to his muse as Nature heard as the blinded Milton heard. These movements correspond to the trio of crossings described above and underlines Bloom's dictum that: 'The last truth of the Primal Scene of Instruction is that purpose or aim -that is to say, meaning- cleaves more closely to origins the more intensely it strives to distance itself from origins.'¹¹⁶

Poetry is the precipitation of the anxiety that one poem displays with reference to another poem and the best individual example of a poem dependant upon a single debt of influence to another poem in Thomas's oeuvre is 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) which, as Anthony Conran has pointed out, is beholden to Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger*. In Conran's judgement with regard to Thomas's first volume of poems 'the biggest and most Wordsworthian demonstration is 'The Airy Tomb', the story of a country lout',¹¹⁷ but as Conran's footnote informs us: 'This is not to deny the very different inspiration of Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* which seems to lie behind 'the Airy Tomb' both in subject-matter and treatment. The Welsh poem is many degrees more Romantic and Wordsworthian than the Irish, however; and it seems to me a much slighter achievement.'¹¹⁸ In order to surpass Kavanagh Thomas turns to Kavanagh's precursor who, as Antoinette Quinn has argued, was Wordsworth: 'Wordsworth's was an influence which Kavanagh had ingested during his reading of nineteenth-century schoolbook poetry and of which he appears to have been unconscious.'¹¹⁹

The Great Hunger is an Irish expression for the potato famine and the main thrust of Kavanagh's poem is a sexual famine that afflicts the poem's protagonist Maguire. This has the effect of swinging the pendulum of influence towards Wordsworth because as Quinn points out: 'It would seem that it was from Wordsworth himself, a poet whose exemplary influence he never acknowledged, that Kavanagh learned how to combine "carnal method" with transcendentalist vision.'¹²⁰ However, Quinn fails to dwell upon the purport of this statement and reads the poem in a politico-historical light. As such Quinn argues that by 1940 "'the intellectual darkness of the country was almost palpable". Yeats was dead and so, too, was Romantic Ireland. The "emptiness and horror of Irish Life" had begun to dawn on any Irish writer who was not a "rogue or an imbecile".¹²¹ What Quinn fails to notice is that Wordsworth, as Bloom argues, treated Nature as though it

were a mistress and tropes the modern poet proper's relationship to Nature as displaying sexual anxiety:

Coleridge first observed of Wordsworth that he had no feminine element in his mind, and it is true that Wordsworth is almost too masculine a poet...in a clear sense all the poetry of the Great Decade is erotic, in a tradition going back to the Song of Solomon, with Wordsworth as the Bridegroom, Nature as the Bride, and the Great Marriage between the two as something evermore about to be, a possible sublimity never altogether consummated.^{1 2 2}

Maguire's onanism is hence part and parcel of Kavanagh's revisionary stance with regard to Wordsworth since the poet in no way allows his peasant to marry, whether with woman or Nature. In 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) Thomas revises Kavanagh by portraying his equivalent Maguire or the peasant Twm as a natural man wholly absorbed into the eye of nature.

In the three or so poems that I shall attempt to map using the six-fold movement of image, trope, defence, proposed by Bloom, Thomas misprisions the asexuality of Maguire in such a way to suggest that Thomas was Kavanagh's precursor rather than the Irish poet's ephebe. The three poems I shall consider are 'The Airy Tomb'(SF), 'The Minister'(SYT), and 'Evans'(PS) and the three Thomasian Maguires are hence Twm, Elias Morgan, and the dying Evans, respectively. Ultimately, these Maguire substitutes resolve themselves into the figure of Prytherch and the last gasp of this chapter looks forward to the next chapter where he is identified as Thomas's Covering Cherub.

The first of Bloom's crossings confronts the death of the creative gift and is 'the crossing between irony and synecdoche, or psychologically between reaction formation, where one defends against one's own instincts by manifesting the opposite of what one both wants and fears, and turning against the self, which is usually an exercise in sado-masochism.'^{1 2 3} Bloom terms this the Crossing of Election and it begins with the revisionary ratio of Clinamen:

Clinamen, which is poetic misprision proper; I take the word from Lucretius, where it means a 'swerve' of the atoms so as to make change possible in the universe. The later poet swerves away from the precursor, by so reading the parent -poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as the corrective movement of his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point,

but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves.¹²⁴

In later retractions Kavanagh complained that *The Great Hunger* exhibited a kind of 'vulgar kinesis' and it is precisely this real language of men that Thomas swerves away from in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF). Conran remarks that 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) is 'overwritten'¹²⁵ and in his 'Introduction to *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse*' Thomas openly prefers 'the composer of 'The Prelude', the Immortality Ode, 'Resolution and Independence', the lines written above Tintern Abbey' to what he describes as 'the bathos of:

Spade with which Wilkinson hath tilled his lands.'¹²⁶

Thomas excuses this quite Kavanaghese line as being a sad consequence of 'Wordsworth's theory of language' concluding that 'Mercifully, there is enough of the other kind to maintain Wordsworth's position as a very great poet'.¹²⁷ Thomas's Clinamen casts a Maguire substitute in an extremely Wordsworthian landscape and hence in the sexless figure of Twm it is possible to discern the presence of Maguire but because of the marriage of Twm to the Wordsworthian landscape it is not possible to note the attendant sexual frustration that Maguire experiences.

This sense of presence and absence or *illusio* can also be obtained from a comparison of Kavanagh and Thomas's respective stances with regard to the locales in which their poetry is set. Introducing *The Great Hunger* in a BBC broadcast Kavanagh asked his listeners to remember: 'that I was born and bred and reared in such a society and in such a landscape as "The Great Hunger" described.'¹²⁸ In comparison Thomas is a stranger from the fat plain:

The parishioners had more to teach me than I them. They were hard, hard-working and narrow, with the crude wisdom of workers on the land. Theirs was mixed farming, so they had little time for cultural pursuits. The Vicar of Chirk had warned me against preaching at them about cruelty to animals and such like. Any of my enthusiastic expressions about the beauty of the surrounding country were met with faint smiles, half-amused, half-cynical. Yet they loved the land in their way, and were prepared to talk about it for hours, when I visited them of an evening. One of the subjects to avoid was religion!¹²⁹

The godlessness of Thomas's flock is diametrically opposed to one of Kavanagh's most bitter confessions regarding his Catholic upbringing: 'I was reared in a very barbaric form of religion, a kind that was very injurious to a sensitive person, a kind that wouldn't do any harm to the ordinary idiot.'¹³⁰ *The Great Hunger* is the story of just such an 'ordinary idiot' and 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) is the tale of his loutish twin. In Kavanagh's poem a sense of theological repression haunts Maguire and therefore Kavanagh. The contrastive stance of Thomas instead emphasizes the naturalness of Twm and how the one religion he knew was natural religion.

Indeed in reaction formation to Kavanagh's meditation upon the blindness of his peasant to the poetry of nature (which also reveals Maguire's passively feminine stance towards nature):

Nobody will ever know how much tortured poetry the pulled weeds
on the ridge wrote
Before they withered in the July sun,
Nobody will ever read the wild, sprawling, scrawling mad
woman's signature,
The hysteria and the boredom of the enclosed nun of his thought.

Thomas describes how his peasant:

found a new peace
Tracing the poems, which the rooks wrote in the sky.

Thomas swaps the Catholic Maguire for the natural religionist Twm or rather an inscription of Kavanagh is discovered in the landscape and is so in an antithetical fashion. Maguire's loneliness and religious servility is replaced by a character at one with the universe of death and the absence of these narratives is succeeded by the presence of the never lonely Twm. Twm is free of the tyranny of the church and is so at the cost of having no religion other than a faith the Imagination cannot abide just as the Logos is the dedicated enemy of the Imagination. The unbearable absence of religion in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) produces a crossing in Thomas's poem as his reaction formation shifts into a turning against the self and the identification of Kavanagh with Maguire is superceded in Thomas's poem with the identification of Thomas with Tomos or Twm. From an author writing from 'under the skin of the tillage farmer because, to some extent it was his own skin too'¹³¹ we go to a poet composing as an outsider and therefore Kavanagh's desire to escape from his rural roots is swapped for Thomas's wish to belong. This produces the mounting horror in Thomas's poem at the fate of Twm which is as a mirror turned upon the poet who

in 'Border Blues'(PS) writes: 'And I must go the way of my fathers/ Despite the loneli -you might say rudeness.' The unpronounceability of this heartfelt isolation is a far cry from Thomas's insistence that the 'hypocrite reader' 'must face the fact/ Of his long life alone'. The way of Thomas's fathers could be interpreted as the Christian 'Way' but here means the alienated way of the poet torturing himself with the need to be like his poetic father but at the same time unlike. This is the sado-masochism that Bloom associates with the revisionary ratio of Tessera and occurs in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) when Twm's 'father sickened and at the week's end died,/ Leaving him heir to the lean patch of land'.

Tomos takes possession of his lean acre as the poem moves from tropes of ethos to those of pathos. As he does so Thomas compares his poetic topography to that of his poetic father. This is the revisionary ratio known as *Tessera*:

Tessera, which is completion and antithesis; I take the word not from mosaic-making, where it is still used, but from the ancient Mystery-cults, where it meant a token of recognition, the fragment, say, of a small pot which the other fragments would reconstitute the vessel. The later poet antithetically 'completes' the precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in an opposite sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough.^{1 3 2}

From Thomas's viewpoint Twm's loneliness is suffocating and the peasant's unthinking oneness with what to Maguire is the generative world is revealed in a number of parodistic synecdoche's for the state that Blake named the lower paradise or Beulah. This completes the transformation of a psycho-sexual famine into the paradox of one man's unindividuated isolation from society. Maguire is never completely cut off from his fellow man although his alienation is palpable, however, the phlegmatic Twm does not even keep a wake around the embers of his hearth upon the eve of his own father's funeral. Twm enters his seniority with 'too few tears' shed for his father. Moreover, Twm's untaught affinity for the natural world is mirrored by his wether status as a man surrounded by ewes or potential Eves.

The visual poetry of the rooks brings the theme of fatherlessness into the context of the 'tattoo of sound' and emphasizes the untutored pain that the poet's sense of his own election necessitates. The mimesis of tracing the patterns of rooks in the sky opposes the expressive noise of a synaesthetic 'loud tattoo' of earth as it falls onto the 'cheap coffin'. The punning of Twm and tomb which ultimately entombs Thomas's namesake in the 'lucid weather' is then highlighted by a number of synecdoches that signify death and the universe of death. Thomas thus completes

The Great Hunger by taking Kavanagh's 'Among the blackthorn shadows in the ditch,/ A dead sparrow and an old waistcoat' in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) and turns it from a meditation upon a lost gregariousness symbolised by a sparrow and an old weskit into the unheeded isolation of a peasant wholly at one with the universe of death:

He had seen sheep rotting in the wind and sun,
 And a hawk floating in a bubbling pool,
 Its weedy entrails mocking the breast
 Laced with bright water; but the dead and living
 Moved hand in hand on the mountain crest
 In the calm circle of taking and giving.
 A wide sepulchre of brisk, blue air
 Was the beast's portion, but a mortal's lot
 The board's strictness, and an ugly scar
 On the earth's surface, till the deliberate sod
 Sealed off for ever the green land he trod.

Thomas's tropological expansion produces a surfeit of morbid synecdoches that end in a disturbing passage of poetry that moves 'from dialectic irony to synecdochal representation' as it 'confronts' the prior ironic contraction. As Bloom argues: 'The movement is from a troubled awareness of dearth, of signification having wandered away and gotten lost, to an even more troubled awareness that the self represents only part of a mutilated or broken whole, whether in relation to what it believes itself once to have been, or still some-how hopes to become.'¹³³

Bloom terms his second crossing that of Solipsism and outlines his theory thus:

The second crossing...struggles with the death of love, and tries to answer the fearful query Am I capable of loving another besides myself? This is the crossing between metonymy and hyperbole, or defensively between regressive and isolating movements of one's own psyche, and the massive repression of instinct that sublimely augments one's unconscious or inwardness at the expense of all the gregarious affects.'¹³⁴

This crossing occurs in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) at that point in the poem when Thomas stops troping the unfelt loneliness of Twm's mind. From the moment Twm's mother dies to the point where Thomas begins his address to the hypocrite reader

represents the poem's Kenosis and from there until the end of the poem its contrary or Daemonization. Bloom defines the revisionary ratio of Kenosis in the following way:

Kenosis, which is a breaking-device similar to the defense mechanisms our psyches employ against repetition-compulsions; *Kenosis*, then, is a movement toward discontinuity with the precursor. I take the word from St. Paul, where it means the humbling or emptying-out of Jesus by himself, when he accepts reduction from Divine to human status. The later poet, apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhood, seems to humble himself, as though he ceased to be a poet, but this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor's poem-of-ebbing that the precursor is emptied out also, and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems.¹³⁵

If Maguire was Twm then *The Great Hunger* would be a comedy rather than a tragedy which is a formula equally true when reversed. Thomas's poem empties out the precursive poem by showing a man married to the fields in contrast to a man who is told that this is a virtue. In *The Great Hunger* Maguire's mother tyrannises over her son: 'And he is not so sure now if his mother was right/ When she praised the man who made a field his bride', but in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) Twm's mother is left the cameo of dying of grief: 'it was ever her boast/ Not to stay one winter with the goodman cold/ In his callous bed'. Her antique Roman sensibility contrasts sharply with that of her cold-hearted son:

Can you picture Tomos now in the house alone,
The room silent, and the last mourner gone
Down the hill pathway? Did he sit by the flame
Of his turf fire and watch till dawn
The slow crumbling of the world he had known?
Did he rebuild out of the ragged embers
A new life, tempered to the sting of sorrow?
Twm went to bed and woke on the grey morrow
To the usual jobbery in sty and stable;
Cleaned out the cow-house, harnessed the mare,
And went prospecting with the keen ploughshare.

Twm's sexless embers are also emptied of meaning when compared to the hearth-side connotations the glowing cinders have in *The Great Hunger*. When he was young: 'Pat opened his trousers wide over the ashes/ And dreamt himself to lewd sleepiness' and when old: 'Maguire spreads his legs over the impotent cinders that wake no manhood now'. Twm does not distribute tobacco-stained caramels to school girls neither does he dream of Eileen, Kitty, Molly, nor any other love interest and instead:

his mind was free
 Of the dream pictures which lead to romance.
 Hearts and arrows, scribbled at the lane's entrance,
 were a meaningless symbol, as esoteric
 As his school fractions; the one language he knew
 Was the shrill scream in the dark, the shadow within the shadow,
 The glimmer of flesh, deadly as mistletoe.

Maguire masturbates, smokes, sucks toffees, and tipples pints of porter, and Kavanagh is capable of writing lines like: 'They put down/ The seeds blindly with sensuous groping fingers,/ And sensual sleep dreams subtly under ground.' This is unheard of sensuality in the natural world of the unsexed Tomos where even death has no sting. As with the image of the dead hawk the most arresting poetry in the poem is associated with images of death that attest the grave's victory.

Thomas can only describe Twm's unromantic nature in terms that recall Maguire's nostalgia for the departed gallantry of youth. Of note is Thomas's description of Twm's life posthumous to his mother's death since the narrative returns to apparent memories of the hill farmer's school days. This breaks up the bildung of the poem which began by telling the tale of Twm's duncehood. The hearts and arrows over which the years have like rain drops run are the symbolic opposite of Twm's lack of longing for adolescent passion. Indeed Twm might be said to be in love with death since unlike esoteric fractions, or carven sweet nothings, the only language Twm knows is that of the universe of death. Thus the glimmer of flesh, the shadow within the shadow, the school fractions, and the cupid's arrows and hearts, are all metonymys for the language of death. This part of the poem is fairly discontinuous and this is consonant with the first two of the defences that Bloom associates with the revisionary ratio of *Kenosis*:

Undoing...is an obsessional process in which past actions and thoughts are rendered null and void by being repeated in a magically opposite way, a way deeply contaminated by what it

attempts to negate. Isolation segregates thoughts or acts so as to break their connecting links with all other thoughts or acts, usually by breaking the temporal sequence. Regression, the most poetically and magically active of these three obsessional defenses, is a reversion to earlier phases of development, frequently manifested through expressive modes less complex than present ones.¹³⁶

Thomas manages this last defence by taking Twm to an earlier phase of development even than that of either adolescence or primary school. Twm is almost pre-linguistic and as such his infancy of nocturnal sounds and 'deadly' sights recalls Wordsworth's association of moving waters with childhood immortality. This regression harkens back to the Romantic era's lesser burden of belatedness and then moves forward to the greater, but to Thomas still lesser weight of tradition, experienced as the anxiety of influence by Kavanagh. The influence of Wordsworth is hence the shadow within the shadow or Thomas's imaginative debt to Kavanagh disguised as a desire to write with Wordsworthian priority.

The shadow within the shadow is a shrill scream in the dark and this synaesthesia or dialectical movement of the senses marks the poem's second point of crossing. The said crossing is also sign-posted by the movement of mimetic to expressive tropes here signified as the school-room rhetoric of love that deteriorates into expressive images of death. The opposition between Twm's psychological independence and that of both the dwellers in the petticoat town and the church-attending and card-playing Maguire is emblematic of the greater degree of internalization that this lonely crossing engenders. Bloom writes of the revisionary ratio of daemonization that:

Daemonization, or a movement toward a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime; I take the term from general Neo-Platonic usage, where an intermediary being, neither Divine nor human, enters into the adept to aid him. The later poet opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent-poem that does not belong to the parent proper, but to a range of being just beyond that precursor. He does this, in his poem, by so stationing its relation to the parent-poem as to generalize away a uniqueness of the earlier work.¹³⁷

The Kenosis that 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) effects is a reduction of Kavanagh's psycho-sexual drama into a metonymy of death and thus Thomas's poem simplifies

Kavanagh's revelation that man's clay is filled with sensual but frustrated life to the point of denying anything other than the sensuousness of death. The daemonization that Thomas effects changes Kavanagh's understated final flourish:

He stands in the doorway of his house
 A ragged sculpture of the wind,
 October creaks the rotted mattress,
 The bedposts fall. No hope. No lust.
 The hungry fiend
 Screams the apocalypse of clay
 In every corner of this land.

into an outspoken *ex cathedra* utterance of the type first attempted in 'A Priest to his People'(SF):

And you, hypocrite reader, at ease in your chair,
 Do not mock their conduct, for are you not also weary
 Of this odd tale, preferring the usual climax?
 He was not well-favoured, you think, nor gay, nor rich,
 But surely it happened that one of those supple bitches
 With the sly haunches angled him into her net
 At the male season, or, what is perhaps more romantic,
 Some lily-white maid, a clerk or a minister's daughter,
 With delicate hands, and eye's bright as flowers
 Or curved sea-shells, taught him the tender airs
 Of a true gallant.

No, no, you must face the fact
 Of his long life alone in that crumbling house
 With winds rending the joints, and the grey rain's claws
 Sharp in the thatch.

This is aimed at the metropolitan Romanticisers of peasants that Thomas rightly picks out as the target of *The Great Hunger's* ire. It is to my ear poor poetry. However, this out-burst is sandwiched between another daemonic utterance that derives from this passage in Kavanagh's poem:

Talk in evening corners and under trees
 Was like an old book found in a king's tomb.
 The children gathered round like students and listened

And some of the saga defied the draught in the open tomb
And was not blown.

The gossiping of neighbours and the recitation of folk-lore is here combined with what provides the ending and the title for 'The Airy Tomb'(SF):

So the tongues still wagged, and Tomos became a story
To please the neighbour with, or raise the laughter
In the lewd tavern,

.....

For Twm was true to his fate,
That wound solitary as a brook through the crimson heather,
Trodden only by sheep, where youth and age
Met in the circle of a buzzard's flight
Round the blue axle of heaven; and a fortnight gone
Was the shy soul from the festering flesh and bone
When they found him there entombed in the lucid weather.

Hence the poem finishes with a sensual image of death in contrast to the mock romance and tired imagery of sea-shells and flowers. Thomas's harangue is hyperbolic but the camera-like panning of his description takes the reader from the blue heavens to the crimson earth and this drop from great heights to the grave's depth is not so much sublime as grotesque. Bloom defines poetic sublimity as repressive:

When the poem has endured such emptying-out that its continuity threatens to be broken off, then it represses its representing force until it achieves the Sublime or falls into grotesque byways, but in either case it has produced meaning. The glory of repression, poetically speaking, is that memory and desire, driven down, have no place to go *in language* except up onto the heights of sublimity, the ego's exultation in its own operations. ¹³⁸

What was emptied-out in the limiting half of this pairing of revisionary ratios is suddenly released as Thomas tropes Twm's undiscovered and decomposing corpse. As the pun of Twm on tomb suggests, Twm's death has become synonymous with the 'one language he knew'. Twm hence becomes an analogue for the mistletoe of the imagination which is after all what the too obtrusive presence of the precursor

equates to. Thus of the two poetic crossings present in this poem one figures the death of the father and the other the death of love in the form of Twm's oneness with, and love for, the universe of death.

'The Airy Tomb'(SF) does not progress to the revisionary ratio of Askesis and the crossing of Identification since Twm is at all times inseparable from nature. However, Thomas's radio-play 'The Minister'(SYT) is almost entirely an askesis of *The Great Hunger* and it is to its central protagonist, the equally isolated Elias Morgan BA, that I now turn. In 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) Thomas's misprision removes the religious element from Twm's existence and this means that like Maguire in these lines:

Religion, the fields and the fear of the Lord
And Ignorance giving him the coward's blow,
He dare not rise to pluck the fantasies
From the fruited Tree of Life. He bowed his head
And saw a wet weed twined about his toe.

Twm is sexually innocent. He is a child-like peasant ignorant of the mortal and carnal taste of the Tree of Good and Evil which Kavanagh here confuses with the Tree of Life. However, Thomas's rhetoric in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) is not directed at a repressive clergy. Twm's ignorance, for instance, is troped as an 'inscrutable riddle'. It is this loss of meaning in 'The Airy Tomb'(SF) that represents Thomas's main misprision of Kavanagh. Indeed in 'The Minister' it is the priest who is persecuted by the peasants and not *vice versa* and this reversal of perspective is summed up by the percipient comments made by the minister in his first speech:

I wore a black coat, being fresh from college,
With striped trousers, and indeed, my knowledge
Would have been complete, had it included
The bare moor, where nature brooded
Over her old, inscrutable secret.
But I didn't know the names
Of the birds and the flowers by which one gets
A little closer to nature's heart.

The minister is as disconnected from nature as he is from an adequate understanding of human nature. Moreover, Morgan is as ignorant of the natural world as Twm would be of the theology taught in a Bible college and in this respect they are the exact opposite of one another. Morgan considers it his calling to be both a moral

and spiritual guardian: 'I went to my house with the light heart/ Of one who had made a neat job/ Of pruning the branches on the tree/ Of good and evil.' The crucial difference between *The Great Hunger* and 'The Minister'(SYT) is that in 'The Minister'(SYT) it is the preacher who is sexually frustrated and not his parishioners. His flock, here symbolised by Buddug and the chapel Deacon, Job Davies, half-listen to his preachings and then blithely ignore his message:

They lost the parable and found the story,
And their glands told them they were still alive.
Job looked at Buddug, and she at him
Over the pews, and they knew they'd risk it
Some evening when the moon was low.

This is contrapuntal to Mary Ann Maguire of whom Kavanagh writes: 'And the wet grass could never cool the fire/ That radiated from her unwanted womb'. Thus Morgan's sublimated out-pourings and zealous sermonising cause him to suffer the same fate as Maguire's sister:

His sister tightens her legs and her lips and frizzles up
Like the wick of an oil-less lamp.¹³⁹

The image of a smothered flame is repeated almost word for word in 'The Minister'(SYT) and symbolises an evaporation of the perspectivising that such fire imagery represents. Thomas, like Kavanagh, means that his character is trapped and cannot, even if her life depended upon it, change her perspective. This parallelism is perhaps best summed up in Thomas's poem by a series of images that owe absolutely nothing to Kavanagh but everything to Coleridge:

The moor pressed its face to the window.
The clock ticked on, the sermon continued.
Out in the fir-tree an owl cried
Derision on a God of love.
But no one noticed, and the voice burned on,
Consuming the preacher to a charred wick.

someone had broken a window
During my absence and let a bird in.
I found it dead, starved, on the warm sill.
There is always the thin pane of glass set between us

And our desires.

We stare and stare and stare, until the night comes
And the glass is superfluous.

Adultery's a big word, Morgans: where's your proof?
You who never venture from under your roof
Once the night's come; the blinds all down
For fear of the moon's bum rubbing the window.

This cento of quotations develops into a crescendo of bitterness until something happens that would be unheard of in *The Great Hunger*; a peasant, and no less a peasant than the militant Deacon Job Davies, out-faces his minister. No doubt this is connected to the relative financial security of the Catholic clergy and perhaps too to the presence of Jesuit schools in Ireland and the comparative degree of free thought that protestantism fosters. However, Davies's victory is nevertheless one of sensuality and the body's instincts over their puritanical repression and this is the moral of Thomas's ending:

Is there no passion in Wales? There is none
Except in the racked hearts of men like Morgan,
Condemned to wither and starve in the cramped cell
Of thought their father's made them.
Protestantism -the adroit castrator
Of art; the bitter negation
Of song and dance and the heart's innocent joy-

What is interesting about this passage is that what purports to be a diatribe aimed against non-conformism begins as a complaint against the overbearing influence of the father.

Before pursuing this argument further it is appropriate to return to the windows that divide Morgan from the sensuous earth and pleasures of sin. On the subject of windows Bloom has argued:

there is a fine transformation of one of Coleridge's best moments when Stevens sets himself as inside observer against a cosmic outside, in a juxtaposition that prophesies the great confrontation of *The Auroras of Autumn*:

Out of the window,

I saw how the planets gathered
 Like the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind.

In *Dejection: an Ode*, Coleridge looks out of the window at the western sky, just before a storm, 'and with how blank an eye!' anticipating both Emerson's *Nature*: 'The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our eye,' and Stevens' *Auroras*: 'The man who is walking turns blankly on the sand.' What Coleridge sees, stars and moon, he sees precisely, but without the capacity to rejoice in his own seeing:

I see them all so excellently fair,
 I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

Stevens, out of his window, sees his own (and Shelley's) trope; the gathering planets are *like* the leaves turning in the wind. This giant perspectivizing shrinks the cosmos to one autumnal metaphor, but Stevens ends his poem with a very different figuration:

I saw how the night came,
 Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks.
 I felt afraid.
 And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.¹⁴⁰

In *The Great Hunger* Kavanagh writes: 'We may come out of the October reality, Imagination' and Thomas echoes this sentiment in 'The Minister':

A year passed, once more Orion
 Unsheathed his sword from its dark scabbard;
 And Sirius followed, loud as a bird
 Whistling to eastward his bright notes.
 The stars are fixed, but the earth journeys
 By strange migrations towards the cold
 Frosts of autumn from the spring meadows.

This is the second time in the poem that the song of birds is troped as exhibiting synaesthesia and in the original Thomas goes beyond his precursor whereas in its repetition a window again curtails Morgan's growing sense of integration:

But the morrow woke me
 To the ancestral fury of the rain
 Spitting and clawing at the pane.
 I looked out on a grey world, grey with despair.

This smacks more of Coleridge than Kavanagh and figures the Revisionary ratio of Askesis:

Pater said of *askesis* (which he spelled *ascesis*) that in a stylistic context it equalled 'self-restraint, a skillful economy of means,' and in his usually subtle play on etymological meaning, he hinted at the athlete's self-discipline. Even more subtly, Pater was attempting to refine the Romantic legacy of Coleridge, with its preference for mind/nature metaphors over all other figurations. To Pater belongs the distinction of noting that the secularized epiphany, the 'privileged' or good moment of Romantic tradition, was the ultimate and precarious form of this inside/outside metaphor.¹⁴¹

The defence mechanism related to this revisionary ratio is that of sublimation and this returns us to the divinely inspired fury that occurs as a consequence of the minister's evident sexual frustration. As the narrator drily notes: 'the hot sparks/ Fell from his lips...It was sex, sex, sex'. The definition of Askesis that Bloom gives is this:

Askesis, or a movement of self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude; I take the term, general as it is, particularly from the practice of pre-Socratic shamans like Empedocles. The later poet does not, as in *Kenosis*, undergo a revisionary movement of emptying, but of curtailing; he yields up part of his own imaginative endowment, so as to separate himself from others, including the precursor, and he does this in his poem by stationing it in regard to the parent-poem as to make that poem undergo an *askesis* also; the precursor's endowment is also truncated.¹⁴²

In 'The Minister'(SYT) Twm has become Morgan, moreover, unlike the sexless Twm Morgan is tormented by his repressed sexuality the sublimations of which result in his frequent fire and brimstone sermons. The priestly status of the lowland Thomas

is thus diametrically opposed to the peasant origins of Kavanagh or as John Betjeman has suggested: 'in his long poem 'The Minister'...Here, one feels...goes R. S. Thomas.'¹⁴³ Thomas's attempt to separate himself from his precursor is therefore revealed in the anti-social existence of Morgan. What has been curtailed in Thomas, as Betjeman notes, is 'the fact that he loved the beauty of Welsh scenery and pitied rather than despised those who cannot look up from the barren soil and their hard tasks'.¹⁴⁴ 'The Minister'(SYT)'s fecund peasants are a far cry from the cold fish Maguire and the expressive humanity that Thomas allows them evaporates any sympathy the reader might feel for their plight and this is in stark contrast to Twm whom we are drawn to because his sexless elementalism is an inscrutable riddle.

Thomas has truncated his love for nature and instead we have the Calvinist doctrine that the fallen world is vile. He also truncates any mutuality we might feel for his equally vile congregation. However, the repressive power of the clergy is also truncated and the shuffling of sexually frustrated peasant for pastor turns the tables on Kavanagh's poem. We might not like Elias Morgan but we hardly prefer his penny-pinching and adulterous flock. His sexual inhibitions excuse his impassioned and stilted behaviour whilst they have no excuse for their salacious and at times malicious shenanigans. However, as Bloom argues: 'The third and final dialectical movement of modern strong poems tends to begin with such a sublimating metaphor, but again this is another limitation of meaning, another achieved dearth or realization of wandering signification'¹⁴⁵ The enclosing of the self from the beauties of nature represents a sublimation of the heart's innocent joy in sex as well as in the sensual clay of the generative world. Its sublimated expression in the anger of Morgan is hence an introjection of Maguire's sense of isolation on the part of Thomas who as Betjeman argued is equally alienated from his parishioners. This is complemented by a projection of Thomas's calling onto his substituted peasant, or Twm's virginal analogue, Elias Morgan.

Introjection and projection are the defence mechanisms that Bloom associates with the revisionary ratio of Apophrades:

Apophrades, or the return of the dead; I take the word from the Athenian dismal or unlucky days upon which the dead returned to reinhabit the houses in which they had lived. The later poet, in his own final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship, before his

strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios of *clinamen* and the others. But the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work.¹⁴⁶

This transumptive figure turns the clocks back and is often associated in the poetry of Thomas with Rhiannon's birds that legend states had the ability to wake the dead and send the living to sleep. Transumption or metalepsis is therefore a taking-after or substitutive resemblance that beguiles the ephebe with the grail of temporal priority. In 'The Minister'(SYT) Thomas bobs in these lines:

Did you dream, wanderer in the night,
 Of the ruined house with the one light
 Shining; and that you were the moth
 Drawn relentlessly out of the dark?
 The room was empty, but not for long.
 You thought you knew them, but they always changed
 To something stranger, if you looked closely
 Into their faces. And you wished you hadn't come.
 You wished you were back in the wide night
 Under the stars. But when you got up to go
 There was a hand preventing you.
 And when you tried to cry out, the cry got stuck
 In your dry throat, and you lay there in travail,
 Big with your cry, until dawn delivered you
 And your cry was still-born and you arose and buried it,
 Laying on it wreaths of the birds' songs.

The key words here are 'arose' and 'still-born' which indicate the nadir of organic development and the fact that Thomas secretly wishes his imagination to rise like an unfathered vapour. This dichotomy is so compelling that it reduces Kavanagh's: 'O Christ! I am locked in a stable with pigs and cows for ever' to the status of vulgar kinesis. The hand that stifles Thomas's poetic voice is his own love of God and unlike *The Great Hunger* in which Kavanagh rebels against rural Catholicism 'The Minister' is something of an apology for those of Thomas's vocation. Thus the above verse block ends:

But for some there is no dawn, only the light
 Of the Cross burning up the long aisle
 Of night; and for some there is not even that.

In the synaesthesia of the birds that are later decribed as loud as Sirius and troped as a wreath rather than a garland (as in 'Song at the Year's Turning'(SYT)) we have an opposition of ocular and auditory imagery. In the need to speak or poetically sing lies the poet's potential for exuberance and in the tactile and suffocating hand we find the inquisitive blocking agent. Taken as one the two quoted passages are more darkly internalised than anything in *The Great Hunger* where quiet desperation is the mode of Maguire's being. In Thomas's misprision this mute surrender is nothing short of a muzzling. It is the poet who speaks here rather than the narrator and what is described is the poet's attempt to escape from an opaque interior that imprisons desire. Although the victim does not in this instance escape his exit is assured in the above passage's final recapitulation:

Evans? Yes, many a time
 I came down his bare flight
 Of stairs into the gaunt kitchen
 With its wood fire, where crickets sang
 Accompaniment to the black kettle's
 Whine, and so into the cold
 Dark to smother in the thick tide
 Of night that drifted about the walls
 Of his stark farm on the hill ridge.

It was not the dark filling my eyes
 And mouth appalled me; not even the drip
 Of rain like blood from the one tree
 Weather-tortured. It was the dark
 Silting the veins of that sick man
 I left stranded upon the vast
 And lonely shore of his bleak bed.

This poem has a terse inevitability about it that is wholly lacking in Kavanagh's poetry. It reminds of the cry of Juno's birds and is an Apophrades of the 'wreaths of birds' songs' episode in 'The Minister'(SYT). Thomas leaves the habitation of the dead and his metonymy of a metonymy is 'the dark filling' Thomas's 'mouth' which in 'Evans'(PS) tropes upon the trope of the 'hand preventing you' in 'The

Minister'(SYT). But in 'Evans'(PS) the dark 'hand preventing you' is decisively the subject of the poem and not an inexplicable interruption that jars the narrative. 'Evans'(PS) is the quintessential R. S. Thomas poem and in it he sounds like nobody else. This is true to the extent that the phrase reduction through intensity might have been invented to describe him. One could be forgiven for thinking that Kavanagh had cribbed Thomas's foul papers and misprisioned them in an oppositionally expansive fashion as the slow drowning of Maguire.

That 'Evans'(PS) is doubly indebted to previous misprisions of *The Great Hunger* is betrayed by these lines from 'The Airy Tomb'(SF):

And Tomos about the house or set at table
 Was aware of something for which he had no name,
 Though the one tree, which dripped through the winter night
 With a clock's constancy, tried hard to tell
 The insensitive mind what the heart knew well.

Thomas describes Twm as an 'inscrutable riddle' and this underlines the fact that as an outsider he cannot fully enter into communion with the peasant. This inability is also apparent in 'Memories'(AAL) where Thomas insistently asks 'Do you remember', 'Do you recall' and as the poem's title implies the poet's muse is here forced back into the realm of memory. The germ for this poem is not in Kavanagh's:

Come with me, Imagination, into this iron house
 And we will watch from the doorway the year's run back.

but rather in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The Prytherch figure is therefore Thomas's symbol for the Romantic Imagination and Thomas's meetings with him become the poet's method of expressing the poetry of a mind faced with a world of its own making. Or rather as Thomas escapes from the perpetual re-perspectivising of askesis he to his horror becomes aware of a frightening division in the self. This subjectivity is best symbolised by this passage from *The Prelude* (1805):

A tranquilizing spirit presses now
 On my corporeal frame, so wide appears
 The vacancy between me and those days,
 Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
 That sometimes when I think of them, I seem

Two consciousnesses –conscious of myself,
And of some other being. [II.27-33]

This vacancy is the darkness of utterance in 'Evans'(PS) and it represents the crossing of Identification and contrasts with the brutal repression of the movement from Askesis to Apophrades in the 'wreaths of the bird's songs' episode in 'The Minister'(SYT). Bloom writes of this poetic crossing:

The third and final crossing, which I have called the Crossing of Identification, takes place between metaphor and metalepsis, or psychoanalytically between sublimation and introjection, that is between substituting some labor for one's own prohibited instincts and the psychic act of so identifying oneself with something or someone outside the self that time seems to stand still or to roll back or forward. The dilemma here is the confrontation with mortality, with total death, and the prohibited instinct is the drive toward death¹⁴⁷

The Prytherch figure causes Thomas's mind to run back the years and what smothers Thomas's muse and swaps a wreath for a garland of synaesthetic bird song is precisely the Prytherch figure. In his desire to escape origins Thomas inexorably returns to origins whether this is in the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Kavanagh, or, as I shall argue in the next chapter, Yeats.

CHAPTER 1NOTES:

- 1). Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1997), p.22.
- 2). Harold Bloom, *The Breaking of the Vessels* (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1982), p.16. Bloom uses E. A. Speiser's translation.
- 3). Ibid., p.16.
- 4). Ibid., pp.15-16.
- 5). Harold Bloom, *The Book of J* (New York: Random House, 1990), p.29.
- 6). Harold Bloom, *Omens of the Millennium* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), p.236.
- 7). Harold Bloom, *Agon* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1982), p.17.
- 8). Op. Cit., *Omens of the Millennium*, pp.30-31.
- 9). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, pp.213-214.
- 10). Ibid., pp.6-7.
- 11). Harold Bloom, *The Ringers in the Tower* (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1973), p.6.
- 12). Op. Cit., *Omens of the Millennium*, p.16.
- 13). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.10.
- 14). Bloom refers to criticism as prose-poetry at the beginning of both *The Anxiety of Influence* and *A Map of Misreading*. The references are: Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.13. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1975), p.3.
- 15). Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (Ithica (N.Y.): Cornell U. P., 1961), pp.63-64.
- 16). Bloom writes: 'The state of Satan is therefore a constant consciousness of dualism, of being trapped in the finite, not just in space (in the body) but in clock-time as well. To be pure spirit, yet to know in oneself the limit of opacity; to assert that one goes back before the Creation-Fall, yet be forced to yield to number, weight, and measure'. Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.32.
- 17). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, pp.20-21.
- 18). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.22.
- 19). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.5.
- 20). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, pp.62-63.
- 21). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.20.
- 22). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.21.
- 23). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.194.
- 24). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.195.

- 25). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.196.
- 26). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.196.
- 27). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.196.
- 28). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.6.
- 29). Ibid., p.6.
- 30). Ibid., p.5.
- 31). Ibid., p.40.
- 32). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.199.
- 33). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.198.
- 34). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.216.
- 35). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.217.
- 36). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.218.
- 37). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.219.
- 38). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, pp.198-199.
- 39). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.199.
- 40). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.327.
- 41). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.298.
- 42). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.326.
- 43). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, pp.7-8.
- 44). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.62.
- 45). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.60.
- 46). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.59.
- 47). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.5.
- 48). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.36.
- 49). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, pp.23-24.
- 50). Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithica (N.Y.): Cornell U. P., 1980), p.381.
- 51). Ibid., pp.403-404.
- 52). Ibid., pp.384-385.
- 53). Ibid., p.393.
- 54). Ibid., p.393.
- 55). Ibid., p.394.
- 56). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.214.
- 57). Op. Cit., *Omens of the Millennium*, p.22.
- 58). Op. Cit., *Omens of the Millennium*, p.30.
- 59). Op. Cit., *Wallace Stevens: Poems of Our Climate*, p.394.
- 60). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.215.
- 61). Op. Cit., *Wallace Stevens: Poems of Our Climate*, p.394.
- 62). Op. Cit., *Wallace Stevens: Poems of Our Climate*, p.377.

- 63). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.14.
- 64). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, pp.3-4.
- 65). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.42.
- 66). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.43.
- 67). Op. Cit., *Agon*, p.7.
- 68). Op. Cit., *Agon*, p.7.
- 69). Op. Cit., *Agon*, p.8.
- 70). This will be more properly discussed at the end of this chapter since a Lucretian swerve is analogic of Bloom's revisionary ratio of *Clinamen*.
- 71). Bloom writes: 'Insofar as Spenser...was Milton's Great Original, then even Milton was inhibited, for Spenserian vision became an attribute of Milton's id-component. But Milton's prophetic, oral original was Moses, who became an attribute of the Miltonic superego, and thus stimulated the largest power of *Paradise Lost*, which is its marvelous freedom in expanding Scripture to its own purposes.' Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.50.
- 72). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.20.
- 73). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, p.12.
- 74). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.16.
- 75). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.37.
- 76). Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (London: Athlone, 1993), p.54.
- 77). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.282.
- 78). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.31.
- 79). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.281.
- 80). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.280.
- 81). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.287.
- 82). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.277.
- 83). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.5.
- 84). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, pp.5-6.
- 85). Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, ed./trans. by James E. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.276.
- 86). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.14.
- 87). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.6.
- 88). John Drew, "'Kubla Khan" and Orientalism' in *Coleridge's Visionary Languages: Essays in Honour of J. B. Beer*, ed. by Tim Fulford, (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), p.43.
- 89). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.214.
- 90). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.4.
- 91). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.4.
- 92). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.5.

- 93). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.5.
- 94). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.15.
- 95). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.12.
- 96). Op. Cit., *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p.7.
- 97). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.15.
- 98). Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* (London: Gollancz, 1963), p.326.
- 99). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, pp.30-31.
- 100). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.24.
- 101). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.24.
- 102). Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p.34.
- 103). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.51.
- 104). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.53.
- 105). Op. Cit., *Kabbalah and Criticism*, p.107.
- 106). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.53.
- 107). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.32.
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- 126). R. S. Thomas, 'Introduction to *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse*', in *Selected Prose*, p.123.
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- 139). Kavanagh inherited this line from Yeats's *The Living Beauty*.
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- 143). John Betjeman, 'Introduction to *Song at the Year's Turning*', in *Song at the Year's Turning* (London: Hart-Davis, 1955), p.13.
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CHAPTER 2:
IN WHAT FURNACE WAS THY BRAIN?
R. S. THOMAS
&
THE CAGE OF LEVIATHAN

In an interview with Robert Moynihan Harold Bloom reminisced: 'In the summer of 1967 I wrote a long sort of prose rhapsody called "The Covering Cherub of Poetic Influence." Eventually six years later in greatly cut down, revised, and to some extent historicized guise, it became the first chapter of *The Anxiety of Influence*'.¹ Bloom's prose-poem is a Romantic reading of Romanticism. Its usefulness for a discussion of the poetry of R. S. Thomas is that with the exception of Kavanagh, Thomas's major precursors are integral to Bloom's manifesto. His theory of poetry grants priority to the figure of the Cherub as does *Yeats* in which he writes: 'I follow in the tradition of Blake and Yeats by employing the Covering Cherub as the emblem of the negative or stifling aspect of poetic influence...the Cherub manifests itself in many forms, tending to appear whenever Yeats invokes his precursors in his poetry.'² Yeats exerts a pervasive influence over the poetry of Thomas as does Blake over Bloom in the opening chapter of *The Anxiety of Influence*. The principal figure in Bloom's cosmology is paralleled in the early poetry of Thomas by the Prytherch figure who is Thomas's Covering Cherub.

The Prytherch figure can be directly related to Yeats: 'It is for someone I don't know/ Really; someone I saw once/ Draped over his bones like a thing/ To scare birds; his smile saddened/ The stillness of the afternoon/ In the high ploughland, where he worked.' Thomas here misprisons Yeats's self-deprecation of himself as 'A sixty-year-old smiling public man' who thinks it better 'to smile on all that smile, and show/ There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.' Thomas writes that this scarecrow 'has become part of me' and addresses his sonnet 'Dear!' though for the dark lady of this poem there is 'no love' and 'no sex'. Thomas's de-romanticised love-poem broaches an important aspect of Yeats's revisionary relationship to Blake's figure of the Covering Cherub insofar as Bloom argues that 'Yeats found in Blake a theory of sexual love that Yeats wanted to find...Poetic influence and Romantic love...are similitudes verging toward an identity. Milton's shadow, for Blake, is to some degree Milton's influence; Blake's shadow, for Yeats, is largely a dark vision or obsession that sees sexual love as demonic.'³ As Bloom comments: 'The blindness of our love must be woven, for Yeats, by the terrible network of the stars.'⁴

Yeats's ill-starred attraction for Maud Gonne is matched in Thomas's oeuvre by the Welshman's *amour-propre* for his *alter ego*. In the second edition of *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom speaks of 'the moon's (that moist star) influx upon the waves. The flowing from the stars upon our fates and our personalities is the prime meaning of "influence,"...Shakespeare also uses the word "influence" to mean "inspiration"'.⁵ Whilst in the first edition Bloom quotes Wordsworth's desire 'that my Song/ With star-like virtue in its place may shine,/ Shedding benignant influence'.⁶ The same trope appears in 'The Labourer'(AAL) where Thomas's peasant

is blind not with love but 'with tears/ Of sweat to the bright star that draws you on.' This echoes 'Affinity'(SF) in which the Prytherch figure's 'aimless grin' belies the fact that 'the same small star,/ That lights you homeward, has inflamed his mind/ With the old hunger, born of his kind.' The identity of this nocturnal muse is then revealed in 'Valediction'(AAL): 'I saw you loitering with the cows,/ Yourself one of them but for the smile,/ Vague as moonlight, cast upon your face/ From some dim source, whose nature I mistook.' Mistook equates to misprision and the sad smile of the Prytherch figure's lips and their moony lustre is that of Yeats as he grins at the corraled school children mesmerised by their rote learned lessons.

We are close now to the heart of Thomas's poetic since in 'Valediction'(AAL) he states: 'The hills had grace, the light clothed them/ With wild beauty' and that the Prytherch figure's 'uncouthness has/ No kinship with the earth, where all is forgiven,/ All is requited in the seasonal round'. This should be coupled with 'The View from the Window'(PS) where Thomas suggests that the subtle play of light upon the landscape is analogous to the brushstrokes of God since: 'All through history/ The great brush has not rested,/ Nor the paint dried; yet what eye...ever saw/ This work and it was not finished?' In the 'Minister'(SYT) Thomas declares that 'nature's truth/ Is primary and her changing seasons/ Correct out of a vaster reason/ The vague errors of the flesh.' 'Vague' is here the same as the Yeatsian Prytherch figure's 'vague' moonlit smile or for that matter the nebulous mists of the imagination through which as 'A vague somnambulist'(Affinity'(SF)) we might imagine the Prytherch figure wades. Whereas in his 'Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Religious Verse*' Thomas is adamant that 'by echoing the primary imagination' the poet 'recreates' the primary truth of nature 'thus bringing' the reader and poet 'nearer to the actual being of God as displayed in action'.⁷ This catechism is curiously akin to what Bloom identifies as the germ of *A Vision*:

The mind or imagination or consciousness of man may be said to have two poles, the personal and impersonal, or, as Blake preferred to call them, the limit of contraction and the unlimited expansion. When we act from the personal we tend to bind our consciousness down as to a fiery centre. When, on the other hand, we allow our imagination to expand away from the egoistic mood, we become vehicles for the universal thought and merge into the universal mood. Thus a reaction of God against man and man against God...goes on continually. The "genius" within us is impatient and law-breaking, and only becomes peaceful and free when it grows one with "the poetic genius" -the universal mood.⁸

For Thomas as for Yeats the quest moves between 'a solipsistic self-absorption and the merging of that self in the universal mood. Prophesying *A Vision* and later works, Yeats allows even the poet very little free will: "No man can see or think of anything that has not affinity with his mood or 'state', as Blake preferred to call it."⁹

This brings us to Yeats's most severe misprision of Blake since in *The Phases of the Moon* Robartes recites 'the changes of the moon': 'Twenty-and-eight the phases of the moon,/ The full and the moon's dark and all the crescents,/ Twenty-and-eight, and yet but six-and-twenty/ The cradles that a man must needs be rocked in;/ For there's no human life at the full or the dark.' Or as Yeats wrote in the Ellis-Yeats edition of Blake: 'The Cherub is divided into twenty-seven heavens or churches, that is to say, into twenty-seven passive states through which man travels, and these heavens or churches are typified by twenty-seven great personages from Adam to Luther...one era closes, another commences....In these twenty-seven...Blake found...the whole story of man's life'.¹⁰ The idiosyncrasy of Yeats's misreading of Blake's theory of the States is adumbrated by Bloom as the paradox that 'so great and unique a poet abdicated the idea of man to a conception of destiny'.¹¹ For Blake: 'The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself' [32:32] and Yeats's misinterpretation elides the free will implicit in his precursor's exhortation to 'Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore,/ What is Eternal & what Changeable, & what Annihilable!' [32:30-31] As Bloom argues: 'The twenty-seven Churches are that many demonic cycles of fallen history, named Churches after the institutionalized spiritual errors of each age. The State of Milton, which is about to be created by the poet's self-purgation, is a state of self-annihilation, in which the Spectre is cast off by the awakened humanity in man.'¹²

It is for this reason that Blake has Milton descend from 'the intricate mazes of Providence' like a meteoric swift: 'Viewing his Sixfold Emanation scatter'd thro' the deep/ In torment! To go into the deep her to redeem & himself to perish?' [2:19-20] This is Bloom's model for the six-fold Scene of Instruction and as the ephebe fights to pass from tropes of Adam to those of Satan he wrestles with 'the manifold *daimon* which determines our choices in art'.¹³ This Yeatsian daimon is 'the shadow haunting every body, the Covering Cherub acting as barrier between creative desire and artistic completion'.¹⁴ *The Anxiety of Influence* develops this idea directly from Blake: 'Blake names one state of being Adam, and calls it the Limit of Contraction, and another state Satan, and calls it the Limit of Opacity.' As we have seen 'Adam is given or natural man, beyond which our imaginations will not contract' whilst 'Satan is the thwarted or restrained desire of natural man'.¹⁵ The

Janian prize for which the satanic poet quests is to write as if he wrote the precursor's works and so be found by a fresh generation of Adams. Or as Shelley had it: 'Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present...the influence which is moved not, but moves.'¹⁶

In 'Iago Prytherch'(PS) Thomas attests that 'I took/ Your rags for theme' and this chains him to Yeats and to Blake. With reference to Blake's reductionist misdoubting of *Paradise Lost* as the pocket epic *Milton* Bloom argues:

Blake's Milton, at the close of *Milton*, utters a great declaration in which the imagery of removing false garments, which goes through the whole poem, achieves an apotheosis:

To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-Examination,
 To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human,
 I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
 To cast-off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
 To cast off the rotten rags of memory by Inspiration
 To Cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albion's covering
 To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
 To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration'¹⁷

The rags of memory clothe and, as Bloom argues in *Yeats*, 'conceal Blake's "Human Form Divine," the real man, the imagination.'¹⁸ Bloom continues: 'At the stroke of midnight, the time of *All Soul's Night*, of the epilogue to *A Vision*, and of the dance of the spirits on the Emperor's pavement in *Byzantium*...we pass from the death-in-life of the generative world to the imagination's freedom'.¹⁹ Or as Yeats wrote in *Byzantium*: 'At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit/ Flames that no faggot feeds...An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.' When the misprisoned furnaces of Los have cleansed man of his cloven fictions man's life as man begins and this equates to the state of Milton: 'Satan & Adam are States Created into Twenty-seven Churches,/ And thou, O Milton art a State about to be Created,/ Called Eternal Annihilation, that none but the Living shall/ Dare to enter'. [32:25-28] Yeats's mistake is to read the State of Milton as more than human and to imagine that twenty-six of the prior twenty-seven churches are analogous to what for Blake 'is only a relaxation from the energies of creativity'.²⁰ Or as Bloom again argues: 'to Blake these Churches are not necessarily passive, and in them he certainly did not find the whole story of our life. The emphasis on human passivity, and on astrological completeness, reinforces Yeats's preference for Beulah as a

finality'.²¹

Beulah is Blake's lower paradise and Bloom writes of it: 'this is the state of being created and inhabited by the Romantic Eros, this is the world conceived as an erotic illusion; not the world as gratified desire, but the world as blocked desire, the world presided over by Sphinx and Covering Cherub.'²² It is also the world of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, 'the emanative world of Eden, the innocent vision of nature as perfectly loving mother. Yet it is not what Eden's creation would have been if unrestrained, but rather a refuge from "the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration."²³ In terms of Thomas's poetic achievement it is a vision of pastoral that continually yields to experience as 'No Through Road'(SYT) makes plain:

All in vain. I will cease now
 My long absorption with the plough,
 With the tame and the wild creatures
 And man united with the earth.

However, this is not a new resolution for Thomas and is a recapitulation of a poem published some ten years before: 'The age demands the facts, therefore be brief- / Others will sense the simile -and say:/ "We are turning towards the sun's indifferent ray."²⁴ ('Spring Equinox'(SF)) Thomas is still making the same determined pronouncement in 'Earth'(T) nearly fifteen years later: 'I have looked it in the face./ I have seen the land emptied of Godhead'. This last statement sits uneasily with Thomas's stressed preference for the primary world and echoes his disillusioned observation in 'Autumn on the Land'(SYT) that 'earth/ Has of itself no power to make men wise.' This is an anti-natural exclamation and hints at a secret turmoil within the poet's psyche since wisdom is associated by Yeats with the objective or primary world: 'The Wanderer is the *primary*, "objective" man of *A Vision*, while the Solitary is the quester who is doomed to carry subjectivity to its limit, in the search for a possible ecstasy, away from a possible wisdom.'²⁴ Primary here means godly and in the context of this chapter subjectivity is analogous to the fiery centre of Yeatsian egoism. More needs to be said on this topic because this dialectic is figured in 'The Minister'(SYT) and 'Evans'(PS). Before returning to the Thomasian wanderer and his antithetical contrary it is first necessary to discuss the term 'quester' which in Bloom's theory of poetry is itself dialectical.

In his essay 'The Internalization of Quest Romance' Bloom identifies two different stages of quest romance which he argues can be applied to all six major Romantic poets. He names these phases 'Prometheus' and 'the Real Man, the Imagination'.²⁵ The former he equates with the state of Beulah and the 'poet-as-

hero' and the latter he antithetically defines as what 'emerges after terrible crises in the major stage of the Romantic quest, which is typified by a relative disengagement from revolutionary activism...so as to re-center the arena of search within the self'.²⁶ He continues: 'In the Real Man, the Imagination, stage, nature is the immediate though not the ultimate antagonist. The final enemy to be overcome is a recalcitrance in the self'.²⁷ The first phase of Thomas's poetic quest extends until *H'm* and his second phase is dedicated not to the worldly politics of the Prytherch figure but to a deeply personal search for the Hidden God. In both phases Thomas seeks for the Condition of Fire, the only difference being that in the second phase it has become an internalized quest devoid of its earlier Prometheanism. A full treatment of Thomas the *prmantha* is reserved for the last chapter which deals exclusively with the poet's relationship to the Condition of Fire.

However, a working definition of the Condition of Fire is nevertheless desirable at this juncture since a discussion of the Covering Cherub and its framing context is rendered meaningless without a basic understanding of this term. The Yeatsian quester is the antithetical man who seeks for a vision of Byzantium where the refining fires of the Emperor's pavement at midnight cleanse the soul of its mortal encrustations. To attain a vision of this refining fire is to leave nature or to burn through the natural contexts of the fallen world. Thus it is that dolphins, creatures that traditionally carry dead souls to the island of the blessed, ferry human beings to what *A Vision* posits as a more than mortal state. Moreover, in Yeats's mythology the city of Byzantium around the reign of Justinian stood for that elusive moment in history when artist and artisan could find unity of being. Yeats expressed this thus: 'I think that in early Byzantium, and maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers...spoke to the multitude and few alike.'²⁸ This Vitruvian concept is best understood in terms of J. B. Yeats's proposal that: 'All art is *reaction from life*...but never, when it is vital and great, *an escape*...In Michaelangelo's time it was not possible to escape for life was there every *minute* as real as the toothache and as terrible and impressive as the judgement day.'²⁹ The attainment of the visionary fires of Byzantium represent an apocalypse of the imagination. Unity of being is therefore analogous to the overcoming of one's lateness:

To Yeats, the fallen world or shadow of history contains the *daimon* of the *antithetical* or subjective man, of the poet who seeks to redeem time. So the other self, that can lead one toward Unity of Being, is both natural and temporal, and must be met by an embrace of the shadow. Yeats does not seek to exorcise the shadow by clarifying it, or by compelling it to a full

manifestation of itself.³⁰

Thomas swerves away from Yeats by devoting much of the first phase of his quest to the compulsion of his Covering Cherub. The reading offered in this thesis insists that the Prytherch figure is daimon more than man and cherub more than daimon. Unfortunately, the casting off of the Cherub in Thomas leads to a severe decline in Thomas's poetic vivacity. There is hence a strong argument for adjudging Thomas's Promethean quest to be of more interest than that phase of quest romance Bloom terms the Real man, the Imagination.

The last Prytherch poem, 'The Grave', closes a chapter in Thomas's poetic project and the runaway enjambement of these lines, 'It is the old/ Failing, a skirmish seen/ As a battle, victory turned/ To a legend before it is won' have a covert Yeatsian undercurrent that is far from political. 'The Grave' is partly a palinode for this vignette in 'Temptation of a Poet'(PS): 'the mind draws/ Me onward blind with the world's dust,/ Seeking a spring that my heart fumbles.' As Bloom argues: 'Yeats's most typical poem is a dramatic lyric that behaves as though it were a fragment in a mythological romance, as though the poet himself as quest-hero undertook continually an odyssey of the spirit. There is a tendency throughout later Romantic poetry for this pattern to establish itself.'³¹ The above excerpt from 'The Grave' is the death-song of Thomas the Solitary. Bloom defines the Wordsworthian Solitary as: 'a failed magus, tormented by an excessive self-consciousness that will never be purged into possible ecstasy.'³² Wordsworth's Solitary conforms to the Yeatsian antithetical man whereas the Wordsworthian Wanderer equates to the primary or objective man inasmuch as antithetical means anti-natural. Or as Bloom argues: 'Nature is a power separated from our creative power, until the poet makes nature intelligible to us, "and by so doing a part of our creative power."..."The world knows nothing because it has made nothing, we know everything because we have made everything." So much for nature and God, and their merely Primary worlds.'³³

In 'The Minister'(SYT) Thomas writes that 'nature's truth/ Is primary' and it is appropriate that it is the 'wanderer in the night' who hears the wreaths of birdsong that signify the death of the organic analogue. Whereas in 'Valediction'(AAL) the Prytherch figure is ignorant of 'the beauty/ And grace that trees and flowers labour to teach...You stopped your ears to the soft influence/ Of birds'. It begins to come clear that Thomas has blurred the distinction between antithetical and anti-self as his preference for the primary world and dislike for the anti-natural Prytherch figure here adumbrates. But in 'Evans'(PS) the antithetical Thomas departs from the death-bed of an analogous 'wanderer in the night' who is here identified as the Prytherch figure. The dark that appals Thomas in 'Evans'(PS)

and a free hand'.

The Prytherch figure has no choice except to be passively receptive to the moony weather of Beulah. This plasticity is also apparent in 'On the Farm'(BT) which owes a debt of influence to both *The Phases of the Moon* and *Ego Dominus Tuus*. The Prytherch figure and the analogic Pughs are trapped like Yeats in a deterministic Beulah-world. Thus, in 'On the Farm'(BT) the studiously lit face of Yeats is associated with a girl's 'gentle, sensitive mind':

And lastly there was the girl:
Beauty under some spell of the beast.
Her pale face was the lantern
By which they read in life's dark book
The shrill sentence: God is love.

The male Pughs are deformed as trees and exist in the dark of the moon or the godless primary world. The organic analogue is deformed also and Thomas connects this to *The Phases of the Moon*: 'they speak what's blown into the mind;/ Deformed beyond deformity, unformed,/ Insipid as the dough before it is baked'. This bread is the bread of truth which Thomas tropes as what it is 'to know/ Waking from a dark dream to find/ The white loaf on the white snow'('Bread'(PS)).

It is the moon-white bread of Phase 15 that in 'The Dark Well'(T) Thomas admits is dialectical to the shadowy soul of his double: 'There are two hungers, hunger for bread/ And hunger of the uncouth soul/ For the light's grace.' Here Thomas dissects both a spiritual hunger for the Eucharist and an antithetical lust for poetic priority. As such 'The Dark Well'(T) is best read in the context of these remarks made by Jeffares and Yeats upon the composition of *Ego Dominus Tuus*:

the artist is open to the power that fills creative men, that the artist has a well of strength from which to draw, the source of which he does not know, there being an ununderstood unreality in life:

How could I have mistaken for myself an heroic condition that from early boyhood has made me superstitious? That which comes as complete, as minutely organised, as are those elaborate, brightly coloured lighted buildings and sceneries appearing in a moment, as I lie between sleeping and waking must come from above me and beyond me. At times I remember that place in Dante where he sees in his

chamber the 'Lord of Terrible Aspect', and how, seeming
'to rejoice inwardly that it was a marvel to see, speaking,
he said many things among the which I could understand
but few, and of these this: ego dominus tuus'³⁵

Referring to the overdetermined Prytherch figure Thomas relates that he hunger's for 'light's grace' and that from his antithetically dark well he consequently draws 'The terrible poetry of his kind.'

When in 'Poetry for Supper'(PS) Thomas exclaims "'Natural, Hell...Man, you must sweat/ And rhyme your guts taut, if you'd build/ Your verse a ladder' he plays upon Yeats's *The Circus Animal's Desertion*: 'Now that my ladder's gone,/ I must lie down where all the ladder's start,/ In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.' This heart is the Prytherch figure's 'whose heart' is the rag-and-bone of Thomas's muse. Thus, when Thomas contrasts the 'sunlight' that surprises the mind with sunlight troped as 'a thing that needs a window/ Before it enters a dark room' he is making a distinction between vision and the poet's relationship to vision. In *The Circus Animals' Desertion* Yeats's vision has deserted him and he is left with his relationship to what has departed. In 'Poetry for Supper'(PS) Thomas tropes the window of inspiration that allows the sunlight of vision to enter his mind. This window is equivalent to the dark well and hence to the Prytherch figure's dark mind and in 'Poetry for Supper'(PS) the words 'Natural, Hell' proclaim the Prytherch figure as anti-natural in character.

Bloom argues that the anti-natural poet is haunted by his daimon: 'The anti-self, which leads the poet to at least the possibility of his fuller self, leads also to an uncovering that promises release from time's burden, including the embarrassments of poetic tradition.'³⁶ Yeats therefore enters the shadow of the Cherub in order to experience a possible revelation or a pulsation of the artery, 'the sudden epiphany, the vision that comes "like terrible lightning"'.³⁷ This is all very dramatic for the slow world of Thomas's poetry and the suddenness of this uncovering recapitulates *Ego Dominus Tuus* where *Ille* describes the double or anti-self who will: 'whisper it as though/ He were afraid of birds, who cry aloud/ Their momentary cries before it is dawn'. This transliterates into Thomas's Prytherch poetry as the ending to 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL): 'For he's still there/ At early morning, when the light is right/ And I look up suddenly at a bird's flight.'

What is absorbing about 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL) is the sunrise 'Filling the valley' as the Prytherch figure stands in the pre-dawn greyness out of which his thorn-bright eyes blaze. This has to remind us of the high rhetorical cadence that in *The Anxiety of Influence* announces the figure of the Covering Cherub:

Poetry may or may not work out its salvation in a man, but it comes only to those in dire imaginative need of it, though it may come then as terror. And this need is learned first through the young poet's or ephebe's experience of another poet, of the Other whose baleful greatness is enhanced by the ephebe's seeing him as a burning brightness against a framing darkness, rather as Blake's Bard of Experience sees the Tyger, or Job the Leviathan and Behemoth, or Ahab the White Whale or Ezekiel the Covering Cherub, for all these are visions of the Creation gone malevolent and entrapping, of a splendor menacing the Promethean Quester every ephebe is about to become.³⁸

Bloom describes *Yeats* 'as a kind of case history testing a theory of poetic influence. The emblem of that theory is the Covering Cherub, a figure in Ezekiel crucial to Blake's symbolism, and central also to Yeats's, under the more generalized metaphor of the shadow.'³⁹ Bloom further advances his argument thus:

Yeats...interpreted Blake's Covering Cherub as the "mask of created form in which the uncreated spirit makes itself visible," and thought that Blake "praises or denounces this Covering Cherub according to whether he considers it as a means whereby things, too far above us to be seen as they are, can be made visible in symbol and representative form, or as a satanic hindrance keeping our eager wills away from the freedom and truth of the Divine world. It has both aspects for every man." That is good theosophical doctrine, but not Blake, for Blake never praises the Cherub any more than an orthodox Christian praises Satan. To employ a Blakean distinction made by Northrop Frye, between cyclic and dialectical symbolism, Yeats is interpreting a dialectical figure as though it were cyclic, and naturalizes an apocalyptic image, or more simply, finds the *daimonic* where Blake saw the demonic, the genuine death of the imagination.⁴⁰

Of note in the above quotation is Bloom's Fryean distinction between Yeats's cyclic and Blake's dialectic conception of the Covering Cherub. For Bloom the heart of Yeats's misinterpretation of Blake is this:

In Yeats's interpretation of Blake's brief epic, *Milton*, Milton is seen as that Gnostic poet, at work redeeming his own shadow, saving a nature he had prematurely condemned...to Blake...what matters is the confrontation between Milton and the shadow, his own Satan, in which the temptation of Satan is rejected, and history is dismissed. Blake's vision of history...ends in the realization that all historical conceptions of truth are like all doctrinal conceptions: false. Milton -Blake's Milton- learns the pragmatic spiritual wisdom that Blake knew so well; the language of faith is not that of the imagination, and the poem must not become a sacred book, the vision only of another 'Church,' to be drawn into the cycles of history.⁴¹

Like Blake Thomas does not want another 'Church' and would not wish his poetry to become a theodicy. Unlike that of Yeats his poetry is an unending 'dialogue between his *antithetical* Self and his *primary* Soul...the questing Oisín...disputed by the aggressively Christian Patrick.'⁴² Thomas disputes with the daimonic Prytherch figure except in Thomas's misprision it is the saintly Patrick that quests and the fallen Oisín or Prytherch that is the spectre of Selfhood. At the end Thomas rejects the irredeemable Prytherch and escapes from the cyclic world of Beulah into that of an Ulro ruled by the demiurgical machine.

In answer to the self-set question 'what does the Cherub cover?' Bloom replies: 'in Blake, everything that nature itself covers; in Ezekiel, the richness of the earth, but by the Blakean paradox of *appearing to be those riches*; in Genesis, the Eastern Gate, the Way to the Tree of Life.'⁴³ In Thomas the Cherub stands-in for the natural world and in 'Enigma'(AAL) the poet looks with the Prytherch figure's eyes and sees a vision of Beulah or the lower paradise all deformed. The Prytherch figure is 'like a tree'('A Peasant'(SF)) and is 'framed in the gap/ Between two hazels'('The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL)). In this poem he also has 'eyes/ Bright as thorns' and 'In Church'(P) this tree or metaphoric cross becomes 'an untenanted cross'. In 'Once'(H) Thomas writes that 'There were no footprints on the beaches' and this refers once again to *Ego Dominus Tuus*, however, it is more pertinent at this juncture to consider the lines 'no birds sang' and 'I hid myself in the side/ Of the mountain.' This is a misprision of 'no birds sing' and 'The latest dream I ever dream'd/ On the cold hill side' in Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. There are no footprints on the beaches because Thomas's mysterious double like the Hidden God has vanished. Moreover, his departure signifies the end of the pastoral vision which Thomas's debt to Keats signifies as a lower paradise or Beulah: 'The song of Beulah land requires its contrary in a song of Ulro. Heaven's lower counterpart is Earth,

the hell we are never out of, but the lower paradise finds its diabolic double in the false garden of desire...Keats's vision of Ulro is...the terse and haunting ballad of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.⁴⁴ In 'Once'(H), which is the first poem in *H'm*, Thomas awakes to find himself in a rational Ulro that, as I shall argue in chapter five, is the territory of the Machine. A dialectic world has taken the place of a cyclic one and consonant with this dialectic is Thomas poem 'The White Tiger'(F). In 'The White Tiger'(F) the Cherub covers the way back to God, but God signified as the tiger's whiteness which symbolises Yeats's full moon or Phase 15 of *A Vision*. However, this whiteness is covered by the tiger's own sprawling shadow which in Thomas's poem symbolises Yeats's dark of the moon or Phase 1.

Perhaps the most readily observable characteristic of Blake's Tyger is its potential exuberance that in its ready-to-pounce tension is beautiful. Bloom on the other hand suggests that 'The Tyger' displays a potential for laughter:

Blake must have recited *The Tyger*, as we know Kafka read aloud to his friends from *The Metamorphosis* or *The Trial*, with a laughter that seems inexplicable only to the Urizenic reader. The tone of the initial 'Tyger! Tyger!' is one of affrighted and startled awe only if you dramatically attempt to project the poem's speaker as the self-duped creature he assuredly is; read aloud with understanding, the tone has a fierce and ironic joy.⁴⁵

This 'fierce and ironic joy' is developed by Bloom until some years later in *Poetry and Repression* he argues:

No speaker could be more determined to insist that origin and aim were the same impulse and the same event. We can surmise that the unconsciously purposeful forgetting of this poem's speaker is precisely that he himself, as an aim or purpose, has been separated irreparably from his point of origin. Confronting the Tyger, who represents his own *daemonic* intensity, the form that is his own force, what Blake would have called Vision or his own Imagination, the dramatic speaker is desperately determined to identify completely the Tyger's aim and purpose with the Tyger's supposedly divine origins.

Yet it is not the speaker's text, but Blake's, and the meaning of the text rises parodistically and even with a wild comedy out of the intertextual juxtapositions between

the text itself and texts by Cowper, by Milton, and the text cited from Job.⁴⁶

In his revisionist reading Bloom identifies *The Tyger's* speaker as 'Cowper or Job, or rather Cowper assimilated to Job, and both assimilated not to the strong poet or revisionist in Blake, but to Blake's own Spectre of Urthona, that is, the time-bound work-a-day ego, and not what Blake liked to call "the Real Man the Imagination."⁴⁷ As an analogue for Blake's Tyger Bloom, in his earlier text, argues: 'the Tyger is a precise equivalent of the Leviathan and Behemoth of Job. In Blake's view, between Job and visionary emancipation lay the tyranny of the order of nature, the "War by Sea Everlasting" of the great Dragon-Serpent-Crocodile figure, and the "War by Land Everlasting" of the almost-as-dreadful primeval shore beast.'⁴⁸ Or as he also argues: 'The speaker of *The Tyger*...sees his Tyger not through his eye but with it...The eye in its shrunken perception was born in the night of our fall from Imaginative vision'.⁴⁹ Another important point to note is that '*The Tyger* is a Sublime or hyperbolic monologue...It is dominated by the single trope of repression, by an unconsciously purposeful forgetting'.⁵⁰ Yet this repression has yielded an uncanny vision and what, apart from the Tyger, the speaker of *The Tyger* sees is a horizon of dark forests and this sight is energy. However, creative energy for Blake is opposed to rationality which is 'the horizon or bounding circle of energy, and is not the same that it will be when our energy has expanded our consciousness. Urizen, the fallen Prince of Light in Blake's pantheon, takes his name from the same root as "horizon".⁵¹ This, though, is to encroach upon ground already reaped since Energy as Eternal Delight or Coleridgean Joy strives, in Bloom's reading of Romanticism, to transcend the Apollonian vision of the demiurgical precursor. Moreover, Blake is not the speaker of this hysterical monologue and one must assume that the Cherub prevents an increase in the ephebe's circle of vision.

However, Blake's Tyger is 'a Sublime representation, is a self-imposed blocking agent, what Blake called a Spectre, and what Ezekiel and Blake called a Covering Cherub.'⁵² Blake's precursors were Milton and the Bible and *The Tyger* owes a debt of gratitude to Cowper's *The Task* and Book VII of *Paradise Lost* and 'is in no danger of falling into the repetition of the Bard confronting the Jobian Tyger.'⁵³ In order to separate origins and ends Blake, Bloom argues, parodies 'the Cowper-like bard' as he 'confronts an unacceptable surrogate for the divine Precursor, a surrogate who grants him no priority, and who has authority over him insofar as he is natural.'⁵⁴ According to Bloom a normative or canonical reading fails to distinguish origins from ends and identifies the speaker as Blake. Blake seeks priority over his precursors and yet the one to one ratio of the Tyger and *The*

Tyger's speaker grants no priority to the speaker and recapitulates 'the Book of Job, where God confronts Job with crushingly rhetorical questions, all of them reducing to the cruelty of: Where were you, anyway, when I made everything?'⁵⁵

Bloom argues that Jobian irony is out of place in Blake's poem: 'After all, Job's plea had been "Call Thou, and I will answer"(13:22), and God therefore relies upon a continuous irony as figure-of-thought. But the speaker of *The Tyger* is incapable of deliberate irony; every one of his tropes is...an hyperbole.'⁵⁶ Thus Blake's position with regards the poem's speaker is parodistic to the extent that Bloom compares him with a Nietzschean tiger:

What indeed *does* man know about himself? Oh! that he could but once see himself complete, placed as it were in an illuminated glass case! Does not nature keep secret from him most things, even about his body...? Nature threw away the key; and woe to the fateful curiosity which might be able for a moment to look out and down through a crevice in the chamber of consciousness and discover that man, indifferent to his own ignorance is resting on the pitiless, the greedy, and insatiable, the murderous, and as it were, hanging in dreams on the back of a tiger. Whence, in the wide world, with this state of affairs, arises the impulse to truth?⁵⁷

Blake's parody places the Cowper-like bard of experience and his one to one ratio with the fearful Tyger in a glass cage and the result is Nietzschean laughter and 'Carnival in the grand style.'⁵⁸ Curiosity killed the Catholic and what are the canonical readings Bloom speaks of if not universalized misreadings of Blake's cat. The seed of Bloom's gnostic reading is that Blake's stance is one of self-conscious belatedness and this is also the stance of Thomas in his poem 'The White Tiger'(F). However, in Thomas's poem the dominant trope is not that of hyperbole as in *The Tyger* where the speaker vainly attempts to repress the fact that for him origin and ends are run together and that the Urizenic precursor as represented by the tigrish Covering Cherub refuses to yield priority. The dominant trope of Thomas's poem is irony as Thomas in the second phase of his quest attempts to use negative theology in order to detect God's presence by His palpable absence. Thus Blake's surrogate for the Urizenic creator becomes in Thomas's poem an aged tiger with 'a body too huge/ and majestic for the cage in which/ it had been put'. Thomas's *via negativa* functions by enticing the reader to recall Blake's Tyger and invites unfavourable comparison between Blake's free ranging beast with his own superannuated not to say domesticated animal. For Thomas's creature memory is all that it has left of the

sublime snowscapes from which it has become divorced. This anthropomorphism is far from sentimental and when it is turned around and applied to the aged Thomas it has far more force. But taken as a complaint against the venerability of tradition, Thomas's internalized tiger has indeed become divorced from all but the memory of the forests of violent energy through which it crept. Thus, as in all *via negativas*, the absence of Blake's Tyger's 'fearful symmetry' recalls these stripes which, in Thomas's poem, are ironized as the Urizenic bars of the white tiger's cage. This links the white tiger to the Prytherch figure who is often depicted as incarcerated by nature and also to the primal chaos that in Bloom's myth of creation the Jahwistic poet smashes like the skull of the Leviathan. Or as Thomas tropes it: 'I have a desire to walk on the shore,/ To visit the caged beast whose murmurings/ Kept me awake.'(Within Sound of the Sea'(P)). This animal is also associated with reading: 'Between their pages/ The beast sleeps and never looks out/ Through the print's bars' and this is because Thomas reads of 'that Being whose will is our peace?' Thomas's love of the Logos aside this shore is that of poetic incarnation and Thomas, despite his attraction for Kierkegaard and the Bible, still keeps returning to Delos.

Piety and poetic incarnation also clash in 'Priest and Peasant'(SYT) where Thomas refuses to ask his Covering Cherub the requisite questions of other more daring encounters. In this poem the reader is confronted by a failure of confrontation as Thomas somewhat sadomasochistically allows himself to be humiliated:

And so you work
 In the wet fields and suffer pain
 And loneliness as a tree takes
 The night's darkness, the day's rain;
 While I watch you, and pray for you,
 And so increase my small store
 Of credit in the bank of God,
 Who sees you suffer and me pray
 And touches you with the sun's ray,
 That heals not, yet blinds my eyes
 And seals my lips as Job's were sealed
 Imperiously in the old days.

In this poem Thomas does not enter the realm of memory nor attend to the inscriptions of precursorial voices that are sometimes embedded in his landscapes. As such his stance in this poem is not unlike that of Kierkegaard:

And yet there is no hiding place in the wide world where troubles may not find you, and there has never lived a man who was able to say more than you can say, that you do not know when sorrow will visit your house. So be sincere with yourself, fix your eyes upon Job; even though he terrifies you, it is not this he wishes, if you yourself do not wish it.⁵⁹

whereas Thomas's preaching attitude towards his peasant is more like Calvin's reaction to Job:

For Job could not better prove his patience than by resolving to be entirely naked, inasmuch as the good pleasure of God was such. Surely, men resist in vain; they may grit their teeth, but they must return entirely naked to the grave. Even the pagans have said that death alone shows the littleness of men. Why? For we have a gulf of covetousness, that we would wish to gobble up all the earth; if a man has many riches, vines, meadows, and possessions, it is not enough; God would have to create new worlds, if He wished to satisfy us.⁶⁰

Posturing of this ilk is wretchedly pious and Thomas's sermon to his peasant masks the fact that in 'Priest and Peasant'(SYT) he is on the run from facing his literary leviathan.

To the Christian Thomas, Blake's Urizenic creator is the true God but Thomas's deity has withdrawn His presence from the world and is now hidden. Hence the Jobian poet locked in a perpetual Phase 1, the Yeatsian dark of the moon, describes a tiger 'the colour of the moonlight on snow' as padding 'up/ and down in the shadow/ of its own bulk'. Thomas with his dialectic of ironic presence and absence wishes to move from Phase 1, the dark of the moon, the phase of complete objectivity, to Phase 15, the full moon, the phase of complete subjectivity. What raises this poem above the morass of most of Thomas's other ghastly religious poems is conveniently symbolised by just one word in the last verse block:

as quiet
as moonlight, but breathing

as you can imagine that
God breathes within the confines

of our definition of him, agonising
over immensities that will not return.

A normative reading of this poem would attempt to show how Thomas like Job seeks to cause God to manifest himself in the form of the voice from the whirlwind or some such theatrical gesture. Due to Thomas's *via negativa*, the argument might run, Blake's *The Tyger* is recalled and hence those normative readings of *The Tyger* that record Blake's canonical debt to the Book of Job. A normative reading of 'The White Tiger'(F) would propose that it is the poet's definition of God that is at fault since mortal language cannot adequately represent the ineffable except in negative terms.

The revisionary ratio of Thomas's poem is that of Clinamen and Thomas's swerve from Blake is an ironic retroping or returning that replaces 'deeps' with 'immensities that will not return'. This absence in contrast to Blake's yawning abysses is 'agonising' a word that is often interpreted as meaning to wrestle pointlessly on with the semantics of God's absence. However, it can also mean the God of cultural history that in its composite form is an analogue for the Bloomian Covering Cherub. Thus what makes the 'agonising' of this later poem so readable is its antithetical agon with the refining fires that ring Blake's midnight tiger.

A striking difference between Blake's poem and Thomas's is the fact that Blake's speaker is fascinated with the Tyger's eyes, as the line 'In what distant deeps or skies/ Burnt the fire of thine eyes' indicates, whereas Thomas's tiger is blind: 'it turned,/ the crumpled flower of its face/ to look into my own/ face without seeing me.' But this is not a congenital defect since as Thomas notes:

It was beautiful as God
must be beautiful; glacial
eyes that had looked on
violence and come to terms

with it;

Thomas's tiger is more like Blake's lamb but Blake's lamb laid down with Blake's Tyger and this point leads to another crucial difference between Thomas and Blake's poems. Thomas's poem mimicks in a loose way Blake's clipped quatrains which in themselves give the impression of two pints poured into the same pot. However, Thomas's quatrains are far more languid and his poem does not possess a repeated last stanza and, in step with his later religious poetry, is dialectical rather than cyclic. Bloom's antithetical reading of *The Tyger* is based upon the premise that

Blake is not the speaker of the poem because he is a prophet in Jonah-like retreat from public declamation. Blake does not wish to confront the Covering Cherub because to win such a confrontation would be to enter another cycle of history or to begin as an Orc and end as another Urizen. The way to defeat the Covering Cherub or the Spectre of Selfhood that constricts the Real Man, the Imagination, is via the sacrifice of self-atonement as practised by Albion in Blake's *Jerusalem*. Thomas's tiger has come to terms with violence and, moreover, is blind to the presence of Thomas and indeed the cage which contains it. Thomas's tiger is thus oblivious to its gaol and its lyric creator as much as Thomas's God is uncaring of the definition of God in which Thomas hears the breathing of moonlight upon snow. This is an imaginative conception of God and one dependent upon synaesthesia rather than ocularcentrism. The lamb of God has hence become the superannuated tiger that Bloom observing the design of Blake's *The Tyger* describes as a 'shabby pawn-shop sort of stuffed tiger'.⁶¹ Thomas's synaesthesia is 'the organic sense of seeing-hearing as an apocalyptic foreboding'⁶² which contrasts the One of Thomas's tiger with the glass case one-of-many-a-one of Bloom's Nietzschean Tyger.

Snow as a synecdoche for winter underlines the belatedness of Thomas's poem as does the aged creature that Thomas observes within its zoo enclosure. Just as an antithetical reading of Blake's *The Tyger* reveals it as a parodistic inter-text Thomas's antithetical swerve away from Blake also creates an ironic reading of Blake's poem. To escape the chains of influence Blake ironically distances himself from being identified as the speaker of the poem just as Thomas ironises the speech delivered by the spectre of Urthona in *The Tyger* in order to distance himself from 'The White Tiger'(F)'s precursive text. Yet *The Tyger* is not the only precursive influence upon Thomas's 'The White Tiger'(F) and the salient feature of Thomas's poem that indicates another influential debt is the cage that imprisons his white beast. If Thomas does not confront his big cat in a one to one ratio this is because his tiger is an ironised misreading of Blake's Covering Cherub that theologically corrects Blake's blasphemous beast. However, Thomas repeatedly confronts the Prytherch figure in a one to one ratio that grants him no priority, asks of him numerous rhetorical questions, and depicts him as imprisoned in the cage of nature. Thus, by confronting the Prytherch figure Thomas is confronting the force that is his own force.

In Thomas's first volume opposite the very first Prytherch poem, 'A Peasant'(SF), is placed the most important of Thomas's references to the Book of Job. 'The Question'(SF):

Who is skilled to read
The strange epitaph of the salt weed

Scrawled on our shores? Who can make plain
 The thin, dark characters of rain,
 Or the hushed speech of wind and star
 In the deep-throated fir?

Was not this the voice that lulled
 Job's seething mind to a still calm,
 Yet tossed his heart to the racked world?

This poem is the ultimate precursor (in terms of Thomas's oeuvre) of 'The White Tiger'(F) and as the Jobian reference clarifies it is indebted to the Book of Job and in particular the episode of the voice from the whirlwind. Though it should also be noted that Thomas's 'The Question'(SF) is phrased as if to suggest that the writing of God is inscribed into the landscape. As such it begs comparison with the language of the natural world that, for instance, Twm is able to interpret, but which Thomas finds indecipherable. This brings us to Thomas's prolegomenon to *The Stones of the Field* or 'For you shall be in league with the stones of the field.' Thomas's quote is used ironically since, as H. H. Rowley argues, there: 'runs through much of the OT a deep sense of the sympathy between man and nature, which often finds expression in the prophetic descriptions of the happy future'.⁶³ Thomas has lost this sympathy between man and nature and in his most Wordsworthian moments turns to those whom he thinks can regain it for him. In the best Prytherch poems Thomas is thrown back into the dark backward and abysm as he uses the myth of memory to try and gain his lost sympathy with the Coleridgean One life.

The rhetorical questions that are explicitly Jobian in 'The Question'(SF) become implicitly Jobian in a series of Prytherch figure poems that to a greater or lesser extent depend upon a concatenation of rhetorical questions directed at the enigmatic Prytherch figure. 'A Labourer'(SF) is an extreme example and is so because it entirely consists of rhetorical questions in the Jobian mode and because it begins with racking imagery that apes the earlier more overtly Jobian poem:

Who can tell his years, for the winds have stretched
 So tight the skin on the bare racks of bone
 That this face is smooth, inscrutable as stone?
 And when he wades in the brown bilge of earth
 Hour by hour, or stoops to pull
 The reluctant swedes, who can read the look
 In the colourless eye, as his back comes straight
 Like an old tree lightened of the snow's weight?

Is there love there, or hope, or any thought
 For the frail form broken beneath his tread,
 And the sweet pregnancy that yields his bread?

Thomas is concerned with finding some common ground with his peasant subjects as is demonstrated by another Prytherch figure poem from the Jobian *The Stones of the Field*, 'Affinity'(SF):

Ransack your brainbox, pull out the drawers
 That rot in your heart's dust, and what have you to give
 to enrich his spirit or the way he lives?
 From the standpoint of education or caste or creed
 Is there anything to show that your essential need
 Is less than his, who has the world for church,
 And stands bare-headed in the woods' wide porch
 Morning and evening to hear God's choir
 Scatter their praises?

The last example of this Jobian questioning occurs in the projected cage of 'Memories'(AAL):

Do you remember the shoals of wheat, the look
 Of the prawned barley, and the hissing swarm
 Of winged oats busy about the warm
 Stalks? Or the music of the taut scythe
 Breaking in regular waves upon the lithe
 Limbs of grass? Do you recall the days
 Of the young spring with the lambs mocking the snow
 That was patched with green and gold in the bare fields?
 Or the autumn nights with Sirius loud as a bird
 In the wood's darkness?

As the object of Thomas's unanswered questions the Prytherch figure becomes a literal question mark in 'Enigma'(AAL) and his 'gaunt question' falls across the page in 'Iago Prytherch'(PS). It is almost as if the Prytherch figure is in the dock and this trope is used in 'The Figure'(BT) as the Prytherch figure once more faces up to Thomas's 'questionings' ('Servant'(BT)):

Were there questions

My lips hardly would have dared
 To frame, put there by his own
 Brutally at the cold bar
 Of reason, where he was arraigned?

There is no imaginative redemption for the Prytherch figure because he is a prisoner of the Urizenic horizon of reason that bars or frames the questionings that Thomas in the cyclic phase of the quest puts to him. This is underlined by the word 'arraigned' which forms part of this catalogue in *The Double Vision of Michael Robartes*: 'Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent'. Here dead beyond our death the Prytherch figure is pounded by Thomas's rhetoric into a particular inhabitant of Phase 1. Whilst in 'Prisoner'(BT) Thomas depicts the Prytherch figure as imprisoned by the natural world:

In new woods
 There are the old ghosts to appease.
 The prisoner in the rain's cage
 Dies, but his place has to be filled.

In these late Prytherch figure poems the pattern of self-revision begun in 'Temptation of a Poet'(PS) approaches its ultimate conclusion as the poet returns to the Beulah of the pastoral world for his last visits. In the end the failure of Thomas to pass into the experiential realm of Generation hinders him in his quest for Eden or what becomes Phase 15 or the full moon of the later poetry. Thus in 'Encounter'(BT) the spare description of the later Prytherch poetry emphasizes the implied artistic sterility that Thomas's continued search for unity of being causes:

I've been back. Just the same;
 Does the period matter? There he was
 In fields' cemetery, a man
 Without honour, without rank,
 Working calmly at the grave's edge,
 Hedless of time's sullen abyss;

The Prytherch figure is heedless because of the frightening 'vacancy of his mind'('A Peasant'(SF)) and it is this internal abyss that in the later poetry is analogous with the darkness of God. The Prytherch figure is often troped as an analogue for Jesus and as already noted the most important example of the Prytherch figure's Christ-like associations occurs in 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL) where the Prytherch figure's

description has much in common with Bloom's diagnosis of the Covering Cherub. The burning bright eyes of the Prytherch figure are in this poem adumbrated by a framing darkness that is gradually enlightened by the enfiling sunrise. Yet in an uncanny fashion this depiction of the Prytherch figure as God-like, is in the strictest of Jewish senses, blasphemous. On the subject of the second, monotheistic, commandment Bloom has written:

This zealous or impassioned God molded Adam in His own *zelem* (image) and so presumably He is urging us not to presume to emulate Him, that being the Greek sin of Prometheus or the Romantic sin of Frankenstein. But the prohibition then continues until it becomes remarkably comprehensive, and the divine passion mounts to sublime hyperbole. That the intent of the Second Commandment is to compel us to an extreme interiority is palpable enough...The preferred biblical way of representing an object is to explain *how it was made*. We are not told how the Ark of the Covenant...looked, because the stories of how they [it] were built is what constitutes depiction.⁶⁴

The language of hyperbole and the method of describing something by depicting its manufacture has to remind of Blake's *The Tyger* which is analogous to Blake's Covering Cherub and is also closely connected to the cherubim that spread their wings over the Ark of the Covenant. Another analogue for the Covering Cherub is Thomas's caged white tiger and also Thomas's Adam, the Prytherch figure, who is also encaged by Thomas's doubtful questionings. These interrogations do not describe the origins of Prytherch but they do derive from God's beration of Job which for Bloom reduces to the emphatic rebuff: 'Where were you anyway when I made the world?' In the cyclic phase of Thomas's quest, origins and ends are equated and the Prytherch figure is nothing if not an analogic Leviathan or Behemoth. But in the form of the white tiger, which broods in its own shadow and is oblivious to the cage of the material world which would contain it, Thomas's Covering Cherub has a dialectical being that grants access to the Phase of the full moon if and when Thomas is able to annihilate his constricting selfhood.

The central irony of *The White Tiger* is that it works as poetry because Thomas's muse is still agonistic and is therefore prone to creating just one more analogue for the Covering Cherub, however forlorn. In Blake's *Jerusalem* the constricting Selfhood or Covering Cherub separates the giant Albion from Jesus and, due to Thomas's misprision of Yeats's cycles of the moon, the dark of the moon and the dark of the Prytherch figure's mind are the Covering Cherubs of Thomas's

earlier and later poetry respectively. It is this darkness, or Thomas's misreading of the darkness of the moon as the darkness of God, that the Covering Cherub covers and thus the white tiger is shrouded in its own shadow just as the Prytherch figure's vacant mind is contained within a Christ-like body. The Prytherch figure's vacant mind separates Thomas from Jesus just as in Blake's *Jerusalem* the Covering Cherub separated Albion from Jesus. Thus the cage of Prytherch is the natural world as encapsulated in that most Thomasian formula: 'the hedge defines/ The mind's limits' ('Soil'(AAL)). Here the Urizenic horizon is an enclosure of pleached trees and the one gap in this hedge is filled by the Prytherch figure. Though, he is only there 'when the light is right/ And I look up suddenly at a bird's flight.' The Prytherch figure has put up this bird. 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL) has an unsettling ending as the symmetry of the natural world's horizon is disrupted by the burning bright eyes of the Prytherch figure framed between the gap in two hazels. We share Thomas's double-take in that behind or within the Prytherch figure lies Blake's crouched Tyger as indeed the Prytherch figure's later metamorphosis into 'The White Tiger'(F) reveals.

CHAPTER 2NOTES:

- 1). Robert Moynihan, 'An interview with Harold Bloom' in *A Recent Imagining* (New York: Archon Books, 1986), p.10.
- 2). Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1970), pp.6-7.
- 3). Ibid., *Yeats*, p.77.
- 4). Ibid., *Yeats*, p.78.
- 5). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.xii.
- 6). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.126.
- 7). Op. Cit., *Selected Prose*, p.64.
- 8). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.73.
- 9). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.73.
- 10). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.78.
- 11). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.471.
- 12). Op. Cit., *Blake's Apocalypse*, p.349.
- 13). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.361.
- 14). Op. Cit., *Blakes's Apocalypse*, p.359.
- 15). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.24.
- 16). *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, (New York: Norton, 1977), p.508.
- 17). Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard U. P., 1989), p.128.
- 18). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.413.
- 19). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.413.
- 20). Op. Cit., *Blake's Apocalypse*, p.343.
- 21). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, pp.78-79.
- 22). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.109.
- 23). Op. Cit., *Blake's Apocalypse*, p.342.
- 24). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.12.
- 25). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.22.
- 26). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.22.
- 27). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.22.
- 28). A. Norman, Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W B Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p.353.
- 29). Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (New York: Routledge, 1957), p.25.
- 30). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.218.
- 31). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.7.
- 32). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.10.

- 33). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.180.
- 34). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.180.
- 35). Op. Cit., *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of WB Yeats*, p.195.
- 36). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.183.
- 37). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.183.
- 38). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.35.
- 39). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.218.
- 40). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.218.
- 41). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, pp.219-220.
- 42). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.226.
- 43). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.38.
- 44). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.375.
- 45). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.33.
- 46). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, pp.47-48.
- 47). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.49.
- 48). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.33.
- 49). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.32.
- 50). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.46.
- 51). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.62.
- 52). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.50.
- 53). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.49.
- 54). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.50.
- 55). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.47.
- 56). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.47.
- 57). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.45.
- 58). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.45.
- 59). Harold Bloom, 'Introduction' to *The Book of Job, Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), p.1.
- 60). Ibid., p.1
- 61). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.31.
- 62). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.26.
- 63). *Job*, ed. by H. H. Rowley, (Aylesbury: Nelson, 1970), p.65.
- 64). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, pp.149-150.

CHAPTER 3:
THE VOICE OF HIS FATHER:
R. S. THOMAS
&
THE SOUND OF INLAND WATERS

Bloom has written that: 'I myself love *Tintern Abbey* more than any other poem by Wordsworth, but the love is increasingly an uneasy one. I do not see how any poem could do more or do better...I suspect that *Tintern Abbey* is *the* modern poem proper, and that most good poems written in English since *Tintern Abbey* inescapably repeat, rewrite, or revise it.'¹ In the Prytherch figure there is a kind of coiled spring vitalism that is evident in Thomas's descriptions of blade-stropping. It is in the octosyllabics of *The Tyger* but is nowhere to be found in the poetry of Wordsworth. Wordsworth ended as Thomas began as an Anglican apologist for the Romantic Imagination. This is also how Thomas ends but before then Thomas produces in his poetry what he repressed in his daily life as a priest. The split between Thomas the divine and Thomas the liberating god is everywhere apparent in his poetry. It is also manifest in his relationship with Wordsworth who with Yeats has to be regarded as the greatest influence upon the earlier poetry of Thomas. Thomas's Prytherch poetry is demonstrably beholden to *Tintern Abbey* and also *Resolution and Independence* and the *Intimations* ode.

In his essay 'Wordsworth and the Scene of Instruction' Bloom argues: 'Internalization is at once the great Wordsworthian resource and the great Wordsworthian disaster, and it is never enough to praise Wordsworth for a process in which he was indeed, as Keats saw, the great poetic inventor and, as Keats also saw, the great poetic villain; indeed as much a hero-villain...as his true precursor, Milton's Satan.'² It is precisely this internalization that Thomas rebels against. Thomas misprisons the influence of his precursor to the extent that Wordsworthian internalization begins to look like wilful solipsism. Thomas's revisionary swerve from Wordsworth is to place the Wordsworthian Prytherch figure in circumstances where as Locke argued: 'the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone knows or can contemplate'.³ In comparison the Prytherch figure is usually contrasted with the truly Wordsworthian figure of Thomas who still maintains an intrinsic belief in the fitting of his mind to the fitted of Nature. The Prytherch poetry of Thomas exists in Beulah, the married land, or the mind of man joined to that of Nature. However, after the death of the Prytherch figure Thomas passes into the world of Generation consonant with Yeats's Phase 1 or dark of the moon. On a number of occasions both Thomas and the Prytherch figure are also depicted as existing in what can only be described as Blake's Ulro or the abyss of introspection.

However, if this were the sole difficulty presented by the Prytherch poetry of Thomas there would be no interest in studying it, for what makes it quite remarkable is that the Prytherch figure is also troped as Christ-like. Blake's criticism of Wordsworth is pertinent here since, unlike Wordsworth, under no circumstances will Thomas pass Jehovah unalarmed. That the Prytherch figure is

troped as Jesus heaps irony upon the solipsism that Thomas misreads into the Wordsworthian position. Moreover, the presence of a Christ-like Prytherch figure not only guarantees the commingling of Thomas's mind with that of Nature but it also draws a line up to which the self-reliant internalization of Thomas must not pass lest it too mistake the struggle with the Covering Cherub for the sin of solipsism. The Prytherch figure is frequently depicted as tree-like and this organic analogue forks lightning when superimposed onto the Prytherch figure as Covering Cherub. This again figures the central dialectic in Thomas's work between a life of imagination and a life of piety. The landscapes Thomas describes are draped in words cut from the cloth of English Romantic precursors. This pre-figures Bloom's argument that: 'the love of that answering subject, nature, is a love that distances and estranges nature. Internalization and estrangement are humanly one and the same process.'⁴ Or as Bloom has also argued: 'It is perhaps sour wit, but it seems true to remark that Wordsworth could see only landscapes that he had seen before, and that no landscape became visible to him that he had not first estranged from himself'.⁵ One must reply that Thomas's landscapes are doubly estranged because not only does the Prytherch figure stand-in for these landscapes but their language of expression is not necessarily that of the perceiving subject.

Both Wordsworth and Thomas are attracted to subjects living upon the very edges of society. In the latter's case this includes school children, an evacuee, a poacher, a tramp, senile old ladies, those on their death-beds, hill farmers, other poets such as Yeats and Stevens and of course Søren Kierkegaard. In the former's case the Leech Gatherer of *Resolution and Independence*, the beggar of *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, a sailor returning home in *The Brothers*, and the shepherd of *Michael*, etc. With certain passages from *The Excursion*, *The Prelude*, the *Intimations* ode, and *Tintern Abbey*, the decisive Wordsworthian influences upon Thomas are in our sights. Of the destitutes that so fascinated Wordsworth Bloom has written:

We know today, better than his contemporaries could, what led Wordsworth to the subject of human decay, to depictions of idiocy, desertion, beggars, homeless wanderers. He sought images of alienated life, as we might judge them, which he could see and present as images of natural communion. The natural man, free of consciousness in any of our senses, yet demonstrates a mode of consciousness which both intends nature for its object and at length blends into that object. The hiding places of man's power are in his past, in childhood.

Only memory can take him there, but even memory fades, and at length fades away. The poet of naturalism, separated by organic growth from his own past, looks around him and sees the moving emblems of a childlike consciousness in the mad, the outcast, and the dreadfully old. From them he takes his most desperate consolation, intimations of a mortality that almost ceases to afflict.⁶

This is also what attracts Thomas to the Prytherch figure or as a dark compounding of this theme the Prytherch figure in the state of Evans.

One such episode is Thomas's visit to the senescent of 'Ninetieth Birthday'(T) where the 'thick tide/ Of night' and 'dark filling my eyes/ And mouth'('Evans'(PS)) of his archetypal death-bed poem becomes an 'abyss' separating parishioner from priest:

And there at the top that old woman,
Born almost a century back
In that stone farm, awaits your coming;
Waits for the news of the lost village
She thinks she knows, a place that exists
In her memory only.

You bring her greeting
And praise for having lasted so long
With time's knife shaving the bone.
Yet no bridge joins her own
World with yours, all you can do
Is lean kindly across the abyss
To hear words that were once wise.

As he travels to the nonogenarian's remote dwelling Thomas is surrounded by the sounds of nature; he remembers the nocturnal chur of the nightjar, the whine of insects, and the 'stream's whisper'. This contrasts with the 'history' that the 'lichen' inscribes into the rock at the very beginning of the poem and the sea's 'Signal' that flashes to him at the end of the poem's opening movement. Having heard the Wordsworthian sound of inland waters moving and glimpsed the Wordsworthian ocean by the side of which the poet incarnates he then describes his encounter with an old woman who suffers such extreme sensory depravity that she lives in a world made almost entirely out of her own memory. In her senility the woman imagines a bygone age that she still deems herself to be in touch with and in this respect her

confidence in her faculties is like that of the Leech Gatherer who assumes his senses are pristine and that in actuality it is the leeches that are in decline. She, like the dying Evans, is beyond Thomas's help and is imprisoned in a world more of her own making than not.

'Ninetieth Birthday'(T) finds sorority with 'An Old Lady'(AAL) a poem in which we again find an elderly lady attentive for gossip:

if neighbours call she leans and snatches
The crumbs of gossip from their busy lips,
Sharp as a bird,

This is embarrassingly close to Wordsworth's description of the Old Man in *The Old Cumberland Beggar*:

scattered from his palsied hand,
That, still attempting to prevent the waste,
Was baffled still, the crumbs in little showers
Fell on the ground; and the small mountain birds,
Not venturing yet to peck their destined meal,
Approached

Both Thomas and Wordsworth are Romantic poets and are by definition belated, but time's knife has shaved more from Thomas's bone than from his precursor's as this reversal of meaning from the same two poems reveals:

let his blood
Struggle with the frosty air and winter snows

Yet neither tea nor heat of the small fire,
Its few red petals drooping in the grate,
Can stop the ice that forms within her veins,

Male has become female and fight has become flight and here Thomas has become perfectly antithetical to his precursor. 'An Old Lady'(AAL) is a mere splinter when compared to *The Old Cumberland Beggar* and the difference in stature between the two poets justifies Walford Davies's comment that Thomas is a mere 'sub-Wordsworthian'.⁷ Whilst Wordsworth is conscious of his belatedness and celebrates the virtues of a human being existing on the very verge of consciousness as it is understandable as consciousness Thomas, on the other hand, is more aware of the

inevitability of passing away; of the inexorable ebb of the imagination. Bloom writes of *The Old Cumberland Beggar* that it 'is Wordsworth's finest vision of the irreducible natural man, the human stripped to the nakedness of primordial condition...approaching that identity with nature that the infant at first knows, when an organic continuity seems to exist between nature and consciousness. Being so naturalized, he must die in the eye of nature, that he may be absorbed again'.⁸ Like the subject of 'An Old Lady'(AAL) and 'Ninetieth Birthday'(T) the Prytherch figure suffers from near total sensory depravity and has an 'organic continuity' with nature and indeed is depicted in 'Enigma'(AAL) as living in the eye of nature:

A man is in the fields, let us look with his eyes,
 As the first clouds ripen with the sunrise,
 At the earth around us, marking the nameless flowers
 That minister to him through tedious hours
 Of sweat and toil, their grave, half-human faces
 Lifted in vain to greet him where he passes.
 The wind ruffles the meadow, the tall clouds sail
 Westward full-rigged, and darken with their shadow
 The bright surface as a thought the mind.

Thomas is quickly disillusioned with his attempt to mind-meld with the peasant and bitterly relates that although the peasant effectively lives inside the eye of nature he is:

Blind? Yes, and deaf, and dumb, and the last irks most,
 For could he speak, would not the glib tongue boast
 A lore denied our neoteric sense,
 Being handed down from the age of innocence?

The second of these quotations makes it clear that Thomas's search for lost innocence has been stymied and that this failure is represented as the basin of a mind stricken deaf and dumb and blind. The Prytherch figure's abysmal lack of perceptual data is hence much worse than even the most wretched of Wordsworth's mendicants. Even so Thomas is utterly convinced that this human-subhuman has some esoteric lore to impart be it only one word that might illuminate the mind like a flash of lightning. In this context Thomas's usage of the word 'neoteric' is of interest since as Bloom has argued: 'The scholar Aristarchus, working at the Museion in Alexandria, first contrasted the *neoterioi* or "moderns" with Homer, in defense of a latecomer poet like Callimachus.'⁹ It is thus Bloom's contention that:

'Romantic tradition is *consciously late*, and Romantic literary psychology is therefore necessarily a *psychology of belatedness*. The romance-of-trespass, of violating a sacred or daemonic ground, is a central form in modern literature, from Coleridge to Wordsworth to the present.'¹⁰ Such rapine and wanton desecration is implicit in this passage from 'The Minister'(SYT):

Harvest, harvest! The oats that were too weak
 To hold their heads up had been cut down
 And placed in stooks. There was no nonsense
 Plaiting the last sheaf and wasting time
 Throwing sickles. That was a fad of Prytherch
 Of Nant Carfan; but the bugger was dead.
 The men took the corn, the beautiful goddess,
 By the long hair and threw her on the ground.

The Prytherch figure with his corn dolls and archaic practices is here distinguished from those other labourers and their stolen tresses. There is hence a duality within the Prytherch figure that encompasses these contraries. He is at once natural man and Covering Cherub or constricting Selfhood. The Prytherch figure is a natural man and he lives and breathes in the eye of nature and in 'Enigma'(AAL) Thomas paradoxically imagines the Prytherch figure and what it is that his discontinuous senses apprehend. But as a coarse inhabitant of the hare-eyed primary world he is the equivalent of the constricting Selfhood that separates the Giant Albion from Jesus in Blake's *Jerusalem*.

Thomas is perhaps not as much in sympathy with his subject matter as Wordsworth and yet at times he hits a vein of elementalism in his own writing that renders him a man like the Prytherch figure. This is best summed up by Thomas's statement that he plays 'on a small pipe, a little aside from the main road'.¹¹ That Wordsworth is more in harmony with his solitary peasants is hence symbolised by the line: 'Humanity in fields and groves/ Pipe solitary anguish'. Wordsworth's greater intimacy with his itinerants succeeds where Thomas seems insistent and overtly moralising as in 'The Hill Farmer Speaks'(AAL): 'Listen, listen, I am a man like you' or 'The Labourer'(AAL): 'No, no, a man like you, but blind with tears/ Of sweat to the bright star that draws you on.' Or even: 'Affinity'(SF): 'He also is human, and the same small star,/ That lights you homeward, has inflamed his mind/ With the old hunger, born of his kind.' This division between the one Prytherch figure that senses the star that here symbolises the Imagination and the other that is blind to the redemptive power of the Imagination again depicts Thomas's peasant as both object and Alazon of the quest. Yet Thomas is a man like the Prytherch figure

though not a poet like Wordsworth whom the Prytherch figure at times seems to parody. We know this because like any man of men Thomas is often stricken with fear, though there is cause to celebrate the fact that he is not struck dumb, and, indeed, that the awe and panic he feels goads him into his astonishing relationship with the Prytherch figure.

It is often supposed that the Prytherch poetry of Thomas was stimulated by the sight of a labourer docking swedes on 'a dark, cold day in November' because after this visit to 'a farm over a thousand feet above sea-level' the poet by his own admission wrote 'A Peasant'(SF).¹² However, it cannot be denied that what transfixes Thomas in this poem is the 'frightening...vacancy of his mind'('A Peasant'(SF)). Or that his theological fascination with this gap or abyss derives from the 'Prospectus' to *The Excursion*:

Not Chaos, not
 The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
 Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
 By help of dreams -can breed such fear and awe
 As fall upon us often when we look
 Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man-
 My haunt, and the main region of my song. [E.P:35-41]

In Wordsworth's poem this is preceded by the spectacle of Wordsworth passing Jehovah unalarmed. The sheer egotism of this level of self-reliance is an anathema to the believer in Thomas, but maddeningly fascinating to the doubter that is Thomas the poetic explorer of gaps. Bloom writes of the above passage: 'That is Wordsworth, taking on Jehovah and Milton together, only a few months before writing *Tintern Abbey*. That is not a poet whose eye and ear "half-create." Power is being repressed in *Tintern Abbey*, a power so antithetical that it could tear the poet loose from nature, and take him into a world of his own, restituting him for the defense of self-isolation by isolating him yet more sublimely.'¹³ To surpass Wordsworth Thomas would have to repress with more tigrish ferocity than Wordsworth but Thomas is not stirred to rival his precursor's sublime heights. Instead he repeatedly presents the reader with a vision of the Prytherch figure that abruptly ends whenever the possibility of a truly sustained Wordsworthian flight of afflatus threatens. What snuffs out the flame of potential sublimity is the darkness of the Prytherch figure's mind or rather the unrepressed memory of Wordsworthian priority. In his discussion of *Tintern Abbey* in *Poetry and Repression* Bloom argues that the faculty of memory 'attempts to become a trope and/or defense that overcomes time'.¹⁴ The prime poetic attribute of Wordsworthian memory is that it

is selective and Wordsworth is able to compose poetry about past experience because as a poet he is strong enough to repress the nigh over-whelming influence of Milton. In his poem 'Memories'(AAL) Thomas's repeated questionings of the Prytherch figure yield this imagined answer:

Yes, though your lips are sealed
 By a natural reticence, your eyes betray
 The heart's rich harvest, gathered seasons ago
 When I was a child too small even to have heard
 Under the sombre foliage of the sky
 The owl and badger answering my cry.

This child, though, is the Wordsworth of the initial drafts of *There was a boy...* before the boy's identity was revised to that of one of Wordsworth's classmates. The boy of Winander it is who blows 'mimic hootings to the silent owls/ That they might answer him.' However, in Wordsworth's poem this leads to a privileged moment as the natural world enters the boy's mind unawares. The 'sombre foliage' has a hint of this 'solemn imagery' that has here been received into Thomas's bosom. But, in Thomas's poem this askesis is killed off the instant its possibility arises and in Wordsworth's poem too the boy of Winander's sudden death renders the poet mute.

The juxtaposition of sound and sight imagery signals the possibility for a poetic crossing. In 'Memories'(AAL) as with the majority of the Prytherch figure poems the dominant trope is hyperbole. Whereas in *There was a boy* it is metaphor and Thomas's poem ends when his repressed debt to Wordsworth becomes too noticeable. Wordsworth's poem passes into the revisionary ratio of Apophrades when the poet introjects the boy's death as the death of his imaginative askesis and projects his mimick hootings onto the vehicle of a school-friend. Thomas polices his poem to the censorious point of preventing a similar process of projection and introjection from occurring. Thomas projects his thoughts onto the peasant but does not receive reciprocal ideas. Except, that is, when the person whom the peasant really represents begins to assert his influence.

Again Thomas tries to enter into the eye of the Prytherch figure and this is significant because an ear/eye dichotomy is apparent in a good many of the Prytherch figure poems. The most important of these dialectics manifests itself in the word 'watercolour' in 'Reservoirs' (NHBF) and this dialectic is pre-echoed in 'Portrait'(T) where Thomas writes of the Prytherch figure:

eyes that you might

Have fancied brown from their long gazing
 Downward were of a hard blue,
 So shrill they would not permit the ear
 To hear what the lips' slobber intended.

As in 'Memories'(AAL) Thomas peers into the eyes of the Prytherch figure and is met with an obmutescent reply. In 'Enigma'(AAL) Thomas speeds this process up by beginning with an attempt to see the natural world through the mind of the Prytherch figure. Thomas's conclusion in this poem is that the peasant is blind and this lack of vision reminds of the influence of Milton upon Wordsworth in *Tintern Abbey*. According to Bloom Milton obliquely enters the poem as the Hermit who 'stands, through the fixation of a primal repression, for the blind contemplative Milton of the great invocations...the Miltonic Solitary or *Penseroso*, the true start for Wordsworth as Pilgrim and Wanderer, appears at the close of *Il Penseroso* as a Hermit.'¹⁵ This leads Bloom to argue: 'For Wordsworth as well as Milton knows that poetry cannot take on the authority of the natural world, but must assault the supposed priority of the natural object over the trope.'¹⁶ Thomas's revision of this prioritisation of the trope is to try and reassert the priority of the natural world over the trope. Thomas achieves this by portraying the Wordsworthian Prytherch figure as tragically cut adrift from the splendours of the natural world. The audacity of Thomas's misprision is to depict himself as a frustrated Wordsworth who cannot persuade the Prytherch figure to accept his proposal of marriage on behalf of nature. Thomas wishes for the Prytherch figure to act as the Christ-like guarantor of his imaginative dealings with the object world. However, the Prytherch figure represents near imaginative autonomy not to mention the anteriority of the precursor. It is thus the presumed solipsism of Wordsworth that Thomas reacts against when he tropes the Prytherch figure as deaf, dumb, and blind. Moreover, the only slightly less than total sensory deprivation of the Prytherch figure also alludes to Thomas's precursor's agon with Milton since as Bloom argues:

Book III of *Paradise Lost* begins by hailing the Holy Light. Milton speaks of himself as revisiting the Light, and of hearing the 'warbling flow' of Divine waters. But Milton is like the nightingale, and sings darkling. Seasons return, but not to Milton, for the Day does not return. Milton therefore prays to the 'Celestial Light' to purge and disperse all mist from his mind, that he may see and tell of invisible things. Lines 9-18 of *Tintern Abbey* are a misprision or reversed epiphany of this Miltonic passage,

and are resumed in the opening lines of the *Intimations Ode*, where the 'Celestial light' is absent though all the glories of nature are present. For Wordsworth, unlike Milton, 'the day is come,' and the season is seasonally bestowing its fruits to the seeing eyes. The mist that Milton prays be purged from his mind is sent up, to Wordsworth's sight, from the fire of the Hermit's cave. And if this transposition seems far-fetched, then examine the very strangely phrased opening of the poem's very next verse-paragraph:

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:

Need we question who this blind man is?¹⁷

Yet the beauteous forms of nature are exactly what Thomas tropes the Prytherch figure in 'Enigma'(AAL) as being too blind to see: 'The earth is beautiful, and he is blind/ To it all'.

Wordsworth flattered his own ambition when he wrote of *The Excursion* that it is but a part of a more comprehensive work to be called *The Recluse* and employed this calculus to describe their relation: 'the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other...as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church...his minor Pieces...when they shall be properly arranged, will be found...to have such connexion with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices.'¹⁸ Thomas's equivalent metropolitan temple is, however, in ruins:

They made the grey stone
Blossom, setting it on a branch
Of the mind; airy cathedrals
Grew, trembling at the tip
Of their breathing; delicate palaces
Hung motionless in the gold,
Unbelievable sunrise. They praised
With rapt forms such as the blind hand
Dreamed, journeying to its sad
Nuptials. We come too late
On the scene, pelted with the stone

Flowers' bitter confetti.

Confetti is strewn at a wedding and this is an ironic commentary upon Thomas's inability post-'Reservoirs'(NHBF) to marry his mind to that of nature. The married land of Beulah is hence now divorced from Thomas. What guaranteed this marriage was the presence of the Prytherch figure whose dendritic form represents an analogue for Christ. However, the slow realisation that dawns upon Thomas as poet is that the Prytherch figure guards against the leaving of this state where the mind of man can be joined to that of nature. Thomas's sensuous engagement with the Prytherch figure is less than that of Wordsworth with his peasant subject matter. This is because the Prytherch figure is more insistently troped as a symbol for Christ than a phenomenological interlocking with the natural world. Thomas seeks to defend against what he misreads as Wordsworth's blasphemous solipsism and the very sensuousness of Wordsworthian description that ultimately dissociates itself from its purported interlocution with the object world. His method of opposition is to reassert the alarming presence of Jehovah and this has the effect of swerving his poetic away from that of Wordsworth. In so doing he presents a series of portraits whose attraction for Thomas is their very Wordsworthian quality of being separated from the divine. However, the absorbing contradictions of Thomas's Prytherch poetry are such that these contradictory elements are the basic make-up of Thomas's discourse and are even, as I shall argue, discernible within the critical reception of individual words.

In this respect the poem 'The Moor'(P) merits further discussion since it has been used by the film maker John Ormond to explicate Thomas's sacramental poetic. During a televised interview Thomas admitted that:

Christianity...seems to me to be the presentation of imaginative truth...As a priest I am committed to the ministry of the word(sic) and the ministry of the sacraments...word is metaphor, language is sacrament, sacrament is language...In presenting the Bible to my congregation I am presenting [an] imaginative interpretation of reality. In presenting the sacrament, administering the sacrament of bread and wine to the congregation I am again conveying, I'm using a means, a medium of contact with reality (in a slightly different medium from language).¹⁹

The logic of Thomas's argument means that his position in relation to the natural

world is essentially the same as that of Wordsworth; though of which Wordsworth, the earlier or the later, is the non-question that has to be addressed. Writing of *The Prelude* Bloom notes:

The 1850 text both suffers and gains by nearly half a century of Wordsworth's revisions, for the poet of the decade 1798-1807 was not the Urizenic bard of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*...The 1850 text shows better craftsmanship, but it also sometimes manifests an orthodox censor at work, straining to correct a private myth into an approach at Anglican dogma...nothing could be more significant than the change of

I worshipped then among the depths of things
As my soul bade me...
I felt and nothing else...

(XI, 234-8, 1805)

to

Worshipping then among the depths of things
As piety ordained...
I felt, observed, and pondered...

(XI, 184-8, 1805)

In the transition between these two passages, Wordsworth loses his Miltonic heritage, an insistence upon the creative autonomy of the individual soul. With it he loses also an emphasis peculiar to himself, a reliance upon *felt* experience, as distinguished from received piety or the abstraction that follows experience.²⁰

In his 'Introduction to a Choice of Wordsworth's Verse' Thomas self-consciously prefers the *Prelude* of 1850 to that of 1805. Thomas argues that what he reads as 'the pantheism of the 1805 version was later toned down' and that 'I was brought up on the 1850 version'.²¹ It is hard to credit that an Anglican priest would do anything other than privilege the 1850 over the 1805 *Prelude* and Thomas's Anglican poetics are clearly visible in these lines from 'The Moor'(P). Here Thomas depicts the Eucharistic bread as metaphoric manna-dew:

I walked on,

Simple and poor, while the air crumbled
And broke on me generously as bread.

Bloom has noted that: 'No words are more honorific for Wordsworth than "simple" and "common"'^{2 2} and if 'poor' is taken as a synonym for 'common' then Thomas in peripatetic mode sounds most Wordsworthian. Though due to Thomas's usage of the word 'crumbled', Yeats's 'coarseness' and 'drudge' should also be added to this list. In *The Phases of the Moon* it is the moon that crumbles and in 'The Moor'(P) Thomas's reverie lifts him from the dark to the full. In *The Book of J* Bloom draws attention to the fact that Psalm 74:14: 'Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness' 'identifies the flesh of the slain Leviathan with manna fed to the wandering Israelites in the Wilderness, an identification that flowered in Kabbalistic stories that the companions of mystical contemplation would feast again upon Leviathan in the days of the Messiah.'^{2 3} The Prytherch figure is at once Leviathan and Christ and in 'Servant'(BT) Thomas writes of him:

Not choice for you,
But seed sown upon the thin
Soil of a heart, not rich, nor fertile,
Yet capable of the one crop,
Which is the bread of truth that I break.

Thomas's misprision of Blake's leviathanic Tyger is the colour of moonlight upon snow and in 'Bread'(PS) the power of prayer is troped as the 'white loaf on the white snow'. This poem seeks to 'share' with the eternal 'His rags' secret' and these rags are the torn cap and tatters of Prytherch. Thomas inherits his motley from Yeats who himself derived it from Blake where the Covering Cherub on one key occasion separates the Giant Albion from Jesus. Thomas's Covering Cherub is the Prytherch figure and in 'Absolution'(PS) the Prytherch figure is troped as a priest offering clemency and loaves:

Prytherch, man, can you forgive
From your stone altar on which the light's
Bread is broken at dusk and dawn

Christ and the leviathanic fallen world are thus combined in the leavened Prytherch figure to create a transubstantiation moment.

By troping the Cherub as priest-like Thomas projects his spiritual

identity onto the Prytherch figure and introjects the peasant's earthly identity onto himself. Thomas, hence, attempts to achieve unity of being or the artisan resolved with the artist as in Yeats's conception of Byzantium during the reign of Justinian; when, like the blind cathedral building hands of 'Art History'(NHBF), the stone flowers were still beaded with sweated dew. The Prytherch figure is not, however, wholly an artisan since his most prototypical feature is a naked elementalism that belies Thomas's attempts to trope him as anything so metaphysical as a priest. The Prytherch figure is more usually troped as a natural man and his unspoilt innocence is best captured by Thomas in 'Iago Prytherch'(SF):

Ah, Iago, my friend, whom the ignorant people thought
 The last of your kind, since all the wealth you brought
 From the age of gold was the yellow dust on your shoes,
 Spilled by the meadow flowers, if you should choose
 To wrest your barns from the wind and the weather's claws,
 And break the hold of the moss on roof and gable;
 If you can till your fields and stand to see
 The world go by, a foolish tapestry
 Scrawled by the times, and lead your mares to stable,
 And dream your dream, and after the earth's laws
 Order your life and faith, then you shall be
 The first man of the new community.

This is Thomas's Beulah at its most bucolic and the very innocence of the Adamic Prytherch figure that it portrays connects to the marriage of Wordsworth's mind to that of the natural landscape. I have already discussed Thomas's main pronouncements upon 'man united with the earth'('No Through World'(SYT)) and the subsequent confusions of subject and object that the lower paradise entails. However, the tone of these utterances is nevertheless important and, as already argued, Bloom has described Wordsworth as 'almost too masculine a poet' who treats nature as an 'enigmatic mistress'.²⁴ If Wordsworth addresses nature as a lover that will not 'betray' the heart that loves her then Thomas's bedside manner is that of a man threatened by the overbearing femininity of Mother nature:

But see at the bare field's edge, where he'll surely pass,
 An ash tree wantons with sensuous body and smooth,
 Provocative limbs to play the whore to his youth,
 Till hurled with hot haste into manhood he woos and weds
 A wife half wild, half shy of the ancestral bed,

The word Beulah is taken from Isaiah:

Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. [62:4]

Thomas's sensual dalliance in the realm of lower innocence is coterminous with the lifespan of the Prytherch figure. Nothing becomes Thomas's tone when addressing nature as in 'The Slave'(SYT): 'Adam had Eve to blame; I blame the earth,/ This brown bitch fawning about my feet' than his leaving of Beulah. This occurs in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) and within its parameters Thomas sticks to his poetic heritage:

If Beulah is Spring and Eden Autumn, then we may expect Generation to be Summer and Ulro Winter...With the event of the Creation-Fall-Deluge, the cycle of history begins, and Generation and the Ulro lying within and below it are created. No longer can one move directly from Spring to harvest. The only road from innocence to creativity and apocalypse lies through the realm of Summer, through Generation, the hard world of experience.^{2 5}

This last quotation is of paramount importance to the argument that I have been trying to develop in the first three chapters of this thesis. In his long goodbye to his Beulah or *Fern Hill* Dylan Thomas tropes the advent of a Creation-Fall-Deluge in the form of *The Prologue to The Collected Poems*. However, an antithetical flood narrative is penned by R.S. when in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) he too pays his last respects to the cyclic phase of his quest or the lower paradise of the Prytherch poetry.

During Wordsworth's celebrated 'spots of time' incidents in *The Prelude* the nakedness of a figure that acts as a stand-in for Nature transports Wordsworth to memories of his childhood. This transport to an Edenic past also figures the belatedness of the post-Romantic poet or as Bloom notes in *Yeats*: 'There have been too many Adams, and they have named everything.'^{2 6} Thomas is no exception to this rule and, due to Thomas's misprision of Wordsworth, the internalization that the poet undergoes as a method of blotting out the influence of the precursor holds the ever present peril of slipping into the horrors of Ulro. Bloom has written of the Wordsworthian Ulro:

Wordsworth's Solitary is...tormented by an excessive self-consciousness...The Solitary's despair cannot be overcome because it is both a despair at being oneself and at having failed to be oneself, a double sense of reduced imagination and diseased imagination. Wordsworth gives us a man who has lost family, revolutionary hope, and the capacity for affective joy, but who suffers the endless torment of not being able to lose his imaginative power, which now lacks all objects save himself. This is the state of being Blake named Ulro, the hell of the selfhood-communer.²⁷

The Prytherch figure's Ulro is to be found in 'A Welsh Testament'(T):

Is a museum
Peace? I asked. Am I the keeper
Of the heart's relics, blowing the dust
In my own eyes? I am a man;
I never wanted the drab role
Life assigned me, an actor playing
To the past's audience upon a stage
Of earth and stone; the absurd label
Of birth, of race hanging askew
About my shoulders.

The speaker of the poem is the Prytherch figure and the redeemer/internee is Thomas who in the preceding part of the poem takes on the poet's usual role of the viewer to that the Prytherch figure who is viewed. The poem is a complaint against neo-De Valeran Celtic nationalism and in this respect is the nadir of 'Iago Prytherch'(SF). Not unexpectedly the poem is quite Kavanagheseque but this masks a deeper debt to Wordsworth since the state of near-solipsism that the Prytherch figure enters is also a veiled criticism of the Wordsworthian trope of memory. Thomas, like Wordsworth, is irresistibly attracted to figures like that of the Prytherch figure in 'Affinity'(SF) 'Stumbling insensitively from furrow to furrow,/ A vague somnambulist' and the Old Man in *The Old Cumberland Beggar* because their perceptual powers are so degraded that they invent more than perceive the natural world. In *The Western Canon* Bloom to a certain extent recants of the reading that he offered in *The Visionary Company* and instead argues:

I recall writing about this passage in a book published a third

of a century ago...that the Old Cumberland Beggar differed from the other destitute solitaries in Wordsworth because he is not the agent of a revelation; he does not startle the poet into a privileged moment of vision. It now seems to me that I was too young to understand, though I was slightly older than Wordsworth was when he wrote the passage. The entire poem, nearly two hundred lines of it, is secular revelation, an uncovering of last things. If there can be the oxymoron of a revealed yet natural piety, it must be this: the aged beggar and the small mountain birds, the sun on the pile of masonry, the shower of crumbs falling from the shaking hand. This is an epiphany because it intimates to Wordsworth, and to us, a supreme value, the dignity of the human being at its most outrageously reductive, the immensely old beggar scarcely conscious of his condition.²⁸

The agent of this revealed naturalness in Thomas's poetry is the Prytherch figure who is repeatedly troped by the poet as being Christ-like.

In *The Old Cumberland Beggar* Wordsworth protests that we are all of us possessed by one human heart. 'A Welsh Testament'(T) depicts the Prytherch figure as the 'keeper' of 'the heart's relics' whereas in 'Affinity'(SF) the disquietude that the sleepwalking Prytherch figure causes Thomas forces him to exhort the reader to 'pull out the drawers/ That rot in your heart's dust'. The whole cast of 'A Welsh Testament'(T) is retrospective and the Prytherch figure describes himself as 'an actor playing/ To the past's audience' and that 'My high cheek-bones, my length of skull/ Drew them as to a rare portrait/ By a dead master.' The Prytherch figure also grumbles about those who 'stand/ By the thorn hedges, watching me string/ The far flocks on a shrill whistle.' This is at once a reference to the peeping Thomas and also to *Tintern Abbey* :

Once again I see
These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms
Green to the very door;

For R.S. the hedge defines the mind's limits and in his efforts to escape the enclosure of Wordsworthian consciousness this door becomes in 'A Welsh Testament'(T) the entrance to a cell:

I was in prison
 Until you came; your voice was a key
 Turning in the enormous lock
 Of hopelessness. Did the door open
 To let me out or yourselves in?

To join the Wordsworthian Covering Cherub in his prison is to experience a state of sensory deprivation akin to acute solipsism. A testament is solemn declaration of one's will especially in regard to the disposition of one's property after death but is also an expression of God's will towards man. Wordsworth is the poetic god that Thomas is desperate to repress and from whom he does not desire to inherit a legacy.

Gertrude's public advice to Hamlet is pertinent: 'Do not for ever with thy veiled lids/ Seek for thy father in the dust' since in 'A Welsh Testament'(T) Thomas writes: 'Am I the keeper/ Of the heart's relics, blowing the dust/ In my own eyes?' This momentary blindness is the 'nighted colour' of the etiolated; Thomas's Wordsworthian museum curator benighted by soul searching. A direct consequence of being a 'sub-Wordsworthian' is the paternal inheritance of a misprisoned poetic. According to Bloom's antithetical reading of *Tintern Abbey* as Wordsworth surveys the sylvan Wye he discovers 'inscriptions' that remind of his poetic father. Primary among these traces of Miltonic anteriority are the Hermit of *Il Penseroso* and the Wordsworth's reference to the blind man's eye. The progress of Wordsworth's meditation thus swerves away from describing the natural world when it happens upon instances of Miltonic 'memory traces'. Such is the buoyant influence of the precursor that Wordsworth sees Milton's presence and wishes for a transumptive blindness so that he can relearn to hear the natural world just as the blinded Milton relearnt.

In 'A Welsh Testament'(T) the Prytherch figure shows to the world his scars in the revelatory form of 'the absurd label/ Of birth, of race hanging askew/ About my shoulders.' The most tangible influence upon the Prytherch figure has to be regarded as the Leech Gatherer who seemed to Wordsworth 'like a man from some far region sent/ To give me human strength by apt admonishment'. However, a similar moment of other-worldly ministering occurs in this passage from Book VII of the 1805 *Prelude* but, unlike *Resolution and Independence*, it has a direct resonance with 'A Welsh Testament'(T):

'twas my chance
 Abruptly to be smitten with the view
 Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,

Stood propp'd against a Wall, upon his Chest
 Wearing a written paper, to explain
 The story of the man, and who he was.
 My mind did at this spectacle turn round
 As with the might of waters, and it seemed
 To me that in this label was a type,
 Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,
 Both of ourselves and of the universe,
 And on the shape of the unmoving man,
 His fixèd face and sightless eyes, I look'd
 As if admonish'd from another world. [VII:610-623]

To echo Bloom: need we ask who this supernatural soliciting derives from?
 Moreover, in Thomas's parody of Wordsworth's agon with Milton the Prytherch
 figure laments:

My word for heaven was not yours.
 The word for hell had a sharp edge
 Put on it by the hand of the wind
 Honing, honing with a shrill sound
 Day and night. Nothing that Glyn Dwr
 Knew was armour against the rain's
 Missiles. What was descent from him?

To descend is also to fall as well as to inherit genetic characteristics which Thomas
 does in a poetic fashion by here referring to the 'unconquerable will' of Milton's
 Satan. All Glyn Dwr's good proved ill in the Prytherch figure and as the rain's
 spears fall upon him like perpetual storms and dire hail the stropping Prytherch
 hones the Welsh word for an anglicised poetic. 'Without joy, without sorrow,/ Without
 children, without wife'('Affinity'(SF)) and without revolutionary hope, the
 Prytherch figure curses his confinement within the hell of ultimate error.

Another senescent and potentially an elderly version of the Prytherch
 figure in 'A Welsh Testament'(T) is found in 'Survivor'(T). This Prytherch figure
 brags of his 'feats/ Of strength and skill with the long scythe' but Thomas ends the
 poem on this Miltonic note:

pride and hate
 Are the strong's fodder and the young.
 Old and weak, he must chew now

The cud of prayer and be taught how
From hard hearts huge tears are wrung.

The passage has echoes of 'I will clear their senses dark,/ What may suffice, and soften stony hearts/ To pray, repent'. [III.188-190] as well as Wordsworth's *Intimations* ode. Thus from the intrepid Satan's quest through the universe of death the 'pride and hate' of the superb Prytherch figure is reduced to a tale told by an idiot. Here Thomas is on the side of the angels and sings in praise of Blake's Urizen or what Blake would have condemned: 'The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round, even of a universe, would soon become a mill with complicated wheels.'²⁹ Thus 'A Welsh Testament'(T)'s partner in crime is 'The Mill'(BT) where the poet writes:

Nine years in that bed
From season to season
The great frame rotted,
While the past's slow stream,
Flowing through his head,
Kept the rusty mill
Of the mind turning-
It was I it ground.

This is a direct misdoubting of *An Acre of Grass*:

Here at life's end
Neither loose imagination,
Nor the mill of the mind
Consuming its rag and bone,
Can make the truth known.

Grant me an old man's frenzy.

This chapter is devoted to Wordsworth and I am not about to entertain a diverting flirtation with regard to Thomas's Yeatsian debt. However, the above is interesting in the present circumstances because the Prytherch figure is here associated with the rags of received perception that Blake indefatigably purged with the power of his imaginings. Yet the Prytherch figure is as much of the Romantic Imagination as Thomas possesses and in this poem he rots. This is at once a complaint against belatedness and Thomas's revulsion for the anti-theological cast of the

Wordsworthian Imagination. Thomas does not want to be the curator of Blake, Wordsworth, and Yeats; a mere actor repeating another's lines and yet his most powerful poetry draws upon what he perceives to be their potentially god-slaying faculty of imaginative self-creation.

Darkening the doors of a museum is not unlike going into a church and as Thomas explained to John Ormond in the context of having just having read 'The Moor'(P) during the afore-said television broadcast: 'I'm a solitary, I'm a nature mystic; and silence and slowness and bareness have always appealed. And when I was in Montgomeryshire, rather than the valley in which I lived, I sought out the moorland and, as I left the road and walked into the moorland, it was very similar to entering a church, a quiet church.'³⁰ Thomas's likening of the moorland's holiness to the spare beauty of a Welsh church is comparable to Bloom's impressionistic account of what it feels like to read Wordsworth: 'Going back to the everyday after reading it sometimes gives me that peculiar sensation we all receive when we emerge from a movie matinee into the sunlight of midafternoon on a summer day.'³¹ The likeness and unlikeness of Bloom and Thomas's related reveries lies in the touching loneliness of both thinkers; whereas Thomas compares the emptiness of a church to the desertion of the moor; Bloom departs the cinema auditorium and re-experiences the solitude of an equally crowded but impersonal street. The pupil-narrowing that Bloom recalls refers specifically to the two-part *Prelude* of 1799 and is borrowed from Emerson:

If the imagination intoxicates the poet, it is not inactive in other men. The metamorphosis excites in the beholder an emotion of joy. The use of symbols has a certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men...We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air. This is the effect on us of tropes, fables, oracles and all poetic forms. Poets are thus liberating gods.³²

These liberating gods 'free themselves from the ultimate poverty of death' when they gain ephebes of their own for 'the young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is'.³³ Bloom continues:

When the greatest precursor of High Romanticism found himself, he accepted the darkness of his fate, in the hope that renown accompanied the darkness:

...but chief

Thee *Sion* and the flowrie Brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow,
 Nightly I visit: nor somtimes forget
 Those other two equal'd with me in Fate,
 So were I equal'd with them in renown,
 Blind *Thamyris* and blind *Maeonides*,
 And *Tiresias* and *Phineus* Prophets old.^{3 4}

Romantic consciousness raised to apocalyptic pitch takes the blind bard out of his Platonic cave and gives him a glimpse of the shadows that the bonfires of eternity cast. Yet as the above passage adumbrates poetic revelation is not new and just as Thomas could not lose his poetic father that poetic father not lost could not lose his. This is also true of Bloom and a Wordsworthian reading bubble is englobed by Bloom to rescue his introspective thoughts from the morbidity of Ulro:

I read Wordsworth pretty much in the personal way I read the Hebrew Bible, looking for consolation, by which I don't mean cheering myself up. As the years pass, I develop an even greater horror of solitude, of finding myself having to confront sleepless nights and baffled days in which the self ceases to know how to talk to itself. Wordsworth, more than any other single poet, instructs me in how to sustain the heaviness of going on talking to myself.^{3 5}

The Prytherch figure is more Wordsworthian than Thomasian despite the fact that the Prytherch figure is quintessentially Thomasian. The solution to this paradox is that the darkness of the Prytherch figure's mind is akin to the darkness of Plato's cave or indeed the blindness of Wordsworth's muse.

The Prytherch figure is too Wordsworthian and too Wordsworthian in the sense of the later, more orthodox Wordsworth. But before drawing a distinction between the two in terms of the poetics of Thomas it is first necessary to ascertain what it means to be Wordsworthian. Wordsworth is not Blake since as Bloom argues:

The shadow of Milton, for Blake, had entered the nightmare of history, which includes the representative of that larger nightmare, poetic history. Blake told us that 'in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses, & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!' I begin to fear that in Blake, the Father

is Milton, the son is Blake, who is a profound reduction of Milton and the Bible, and the Holy Ghost of inspiration is a not wholly persuasive special pleading. Blake, like the poets of sensibility, lingered in that theater of the mind, that *kenoma* or sensible emptiness, which lay between Enlightenment truth and High Romantic meaning. He could not ruin the sacred truths, either to fable and old song, or to a story that might emerge clearly from the abyss of his strong ego, as it emerged from Wordsworth, even as Blake wrote his own brief epics. Blake is one of the last of the old race of poets; Wordsworth was the very first of the race of poets that we have with us still.³⁶

Thomas is one of the latest Apollos to claim descent from Wordsworth and Wordsworth is very much his Father and the Holy Ghost the darkness of his Miltonic muse that Thomas has adulterated as the blindness of Prytherch. Or rather Thomas's transumption is such that he is the priestly father, the Prytherch figure the apophradectic, Jesus-like son, and the vacancy of the Prytherch figure's mind the Holy Ghost.

Thomas Weiskel asked the question that Bloom set himself and answered it in the following way:

What then was Wordsworth's discovery?...What must orient us here is his discovery of a mode of conversation, now most easily recognized outside of poetry in the domains of the authentic psychoanalyst...This conversation is not a 'communication'...its aim is not the transmission of knowledge or a message but the springing loose of an efficacious spirit which haunts the passages of self-knowledge, however, shallow or deep. Yet to describe *The Prelude* as any kind of conversation seems perverse. Its apparent form is closer to monolithic monologue; it drifts, gets lost, peters out now and then, and generally proceeds without dramatic constraints a stricter form or a genuine auditor would compel. The ostensible auditor has no chance to reply, and indeed it might be said that Coleridge's assumption of this role presupposed his own subsidence as a poet...Wordsworth's real interlocutor is not Coleridge, but himself, archaic or prospective but in any case alienated from his present, who beckons to him across a 'vacancy.' 'Often do I seem,' he says, 'Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself/ And

of some other Being'³⁷

This other Being Weiskel isolates as Nature: 'for "the earth/ And common face of Nature" is the predominant locus of the signifier.'³⁸ Or as Weiskel argues with regards to the relationship of Nature and the analysand of *The Prelude*:

Nature hovers in the background as the sum or ground of the intermediary personifications ('Powers,' 'genii,' 'Presences,' 'Visions,' 'Souls') who are supposed as actual agents of articulation. Nature is thus the guarantor of the dialogue, at once the principle assumed to cover and redeem its discontinuities and a kind of screen on which the multiplicity of representations is projected. When 'forms' begin to assume the shape and function of 'characters,' Nature's significant absence (or 'negative presence') is already presupposed, for characters are symbols standing in for something no longer immediately there. Behind every symbol is an absence, the death of the thing (form or image) whose place the symbol takes. Hence speech itself is founded on the withdrawal of the primordial object, in which we find as well the essential formula of anxiety.³⁹

Origins and ends are divorced from the trope of the father and in Bloom's theory of intra-poetic relations this also includes the self-induced anxiety of the poet's estrangement from paternal influence. In Weiskel's formula origins and ends equate to dust to dust insofar as origins and ends signify Mother Nature.

Bloom concurs with Weiskel that Wordsworth provides a paradigmatic pattern for monolithic monologue. He then adds that Wordsworth replaced 'a dying god' with that 'of the perpetually growing inner self.'⁴⁰ Bloom writes of Wordsworth's 'sublimely untroubled self-love' and of 'Nature...as a hard, phenomenal otherness...the context that rims the inner self, a context that begins as the universe of sense and ends as a universe of death.'⁴¹ Nature's otherness is thus tropologically 'a kind of death, a figuration for one's own death.'⁴² Thus the two-part *Prelude* which is the text that supports Bloom's brooding 'turns continually' 'upon the topos of how and to what extent the poet's mind is lord and master, outward sense the servant of the mind's will. Any sublime that founds itself upon the power of the mind over a universe of death must smash itself to fragments on that rock of otherness constituted at last by death our death.'⁴³

Bloom argues that: 'In Wordsworth the past is not a burden but a force,

without which we fall into death-in-life.'⁴⁴ Wordsworth's famed spots of time are hence not 'a topos but an event stretching across two times and bearing the past alive into the present'.⁴⁵ To back this argument up Bloom has recourse to Hazlitt:

He may be said to create his own materials; his thoughts are his real subject. His understanding broods over that which is 'without form and void' and makes it pregnant. He sees all things within himself. He hardly ever avails himself of remarkable objects or situations, but, in general, rejects them as interfering with the workings of his own mind, as disturbing the smooth, deep, majestic current of his own feelings.⁴⁶

Bloom's answer to Weiskel is therefore to refer him to Hazlitt who has priority as a critic over both. Bloom has now a trio of nonconformists in his sights and his argument concludes with the covenant that Wordsworth's mind makes with 'a subsuming presence not wholly distinct from his own best aspect'.⁴⁷ Bloom's reading is more protestant than Weiskel and answers the question with a question:

But what else is the authentic burden of Wordsworth's poetry, unless it be his sense of election to be the prophet of nature ...in succession to Milton as prophet of Protestantism? If there is belief in *The Prelude*, or in any other vital poetry of the great decade, it can only be belief in the imaginative strength of one's own divine childhood. Commenting upon his 'Intimations of Immortality' ode, Wordsworth was clearer than any exegete can hope to be:

Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being...it was not so much from the source of animal vivacity that *my* difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me. I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated in something of the same way to heaven. With a feeling congenial to this, I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature.

'The indomitableness of the spirit within me' is a Protestant and Miltonic sentiment to Wordsworth, but I think that we must now identify such a stance as Wordsworthian, since he remains our archetype of the strong modern poet. Who since him, in any Western language, has been able to compete with him?⁴⁸

In terms of this thesis the answer to Bloom's question is certainly not R. S. Thomas who barely represses the influence of Wordsworth enough to write transumptively of anything but the Prytherch figure. Thomas's poetic project would be scandalised by the praise that Wordsworth heaps upon his 'own transport, his own exalted sublimity, the pathos of the Miltonic bard emancipated from any representations that could inhibit the fully imagined self'.⁴⁹ It is a telling truism that the poem 'The Cry of Elisha after Elijah'(SF) is not written about Thomas's own poetic self and is no more than a translation from the Welsh of Thomas Williams. Thomas's muse is constantly menaced by his Christian belief which eventually conquers his desire to become a Wordsworthian hero of subjectivity. Thus it is that Thomas attempts no sustained sublime musings which Weiskel describes as 'a "ghostly language," a pattern of signifiers without signifieds, a language without semantic dimension'.⁵⁰ Thomas finds the self-reliance of the Wordsworthian visionary imagination with its tidal progress down the page blasphemous because it precludes the need for faith or the reassuring presence of the Prytherch figure whose Christ-like narratives guarantee that Thomas's poetry has semantic dimension.

Yet the fact that Thomas is drawn to the ascension of Elijah also tells of a contrary aspiration in his psyche -one that has an analogue in Wordsworth's invocationary 'Prospectus' to *The Excursion*:

All strength -all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form-
Jehovah -with his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones-
I pass them unalarmed. [E.P:31-35]

The orthodox censor in Thomas is horrified by the egoism of Wordsworth's pretensions to humanist godhead and concur with the objections of Blake:

Solomon, when he married Pharoah's daughter & became a
Convert to the Heathen Mythology, Talked exactly in this way
of Jehovah as a Very inferior object of Man's Contemplation;
he also passed him by unalarm'd & was permitted. Jehovah

dropped a tear & follow'd him by his Spirit into the Abstract
Void; it is called the Divine Mercy.⁵¹

As Bloom explicates: 'To marry Pharoah's daughter is to marry Nature, the Goddess of the Heathen Mythology, and indeed Wordsworth will go on to speak of a marriage between the Mind of Man and the goodly universe of Nature.'⁵² Wordsworth therefore surrounds himself with various versions or projections of self and his Beulah or married land gradually disintegrates into the Ulro of the self-preying mind. Thomas is perfectly well aware of this and in his 'Introduction to *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse*' writes of Wordsworth's exquisite fittings:

The countryman gains in stature from the grandeur of the
surrounding landscape; the landscape in turn is a fitting setting
for the simple human dignity of its inhabitants. This is a poetic
variation on the philosophical doctrine regarding mind and reality,
or, as Wordsworth puts it in the preface to 'The Excursion':

my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted: -and how exquisitely, too-
Theme this but little heard of among men-
The external World is fitted to the Mind.

And if Wordsworth inclined to one side rather than to another in
this relationship, then it was to an attitude of 'wise passiveness'
before nature⁵³

This is Thomas's fundamental misprision of Wordsworth and perhaps underlines just why the Prytherch figure is uncanny. Thomas's unconsciously purposeful forgetting is summed up by Blake's 'You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted'.⁵⁴ Bloom continues: 'Wordsworth puts himself forward as...a new Adam upon whom fear and awe fall as he looks into his own Mind, the Mind of Man'.⁵⁵ Exactly this 'fear and awe' falls like a shadow across the soul of Thomas as he looks into the mind of his Adam, the Prytherch figure. The Prytherch figure is an inhabitant of Beulah and he is married to the mind of Thomas as surely as his words are nothing his own and almost entirely framed in the manner of Wordsworth. Or rather they are a vast foreshortening of Wordsworth's titanic project of

internalization limited by Thomas's anti-poetic religious instinct that swaps the desire to pass the Father unalarmed with the urge to genuflect before His altar. Thomas then is not like Blake but more like St. Paul or St. Augustine. His true poetry is written when his orthodox censor has fallen asleep, lulled by the pipings of solitary anguish that beguile his conversations with the Caducean Covering Cherub. If 'Blake constructs his poetry as a commentary upon Scripture' and 'Wordsworth writes his poetry as a commentary upon Nature'⁵⁶ then Thomas writes his as a commentary upon Wordsworth and when he writes of his peasant's blindness he is of the devil's party without knowing it.

With reference to the ephebe/precursor relationship of two other Celts, Beckett and Joyce, Bloom is the inventor of an interesting critical experiment that with certain modifications throws light upon Thomas's relationship with Wordsworth and hence with the death or otherwise of his poetic father: 'Place my namesake, the sublime Poldy, in *Murphy* and he might fit, though he would explode the book. Place him in *Watt*? It cannot be done, and Poldy (or even Earwicker) in the trilogy would be like Milton (or Satan) perambulating about in *The Prelude*.'⁵⁷ If Satan would ill become *The Prelude* it is worth asking whether another character might grace its pages without seeming a glaring misfit. To act as a synecdoche for the poem's numerous renovated versions I have selected an apocalyptic passage from the two-part *Prelude* of 1799 that describes Wordsworth's screen memory for the death of his father:

And afterwards the wind and sleety rain,
 And all the business of the elements,
 The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
 And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
 The noise of wood and water, and the mist
 Which on the line of each of those two roads
 Advanced in such indisputable shapes—
 All these were spectacles and sounds to which
 I often would repair, and thence would drink
 As at a fountain. And I do not doubt
 That in this later time, when storm and rain
 Beat on my roof at midnight or by day
 When I am in the woods, unknown to me
 The workings of my spirit thence are brought.

In such denuded poetry the presence of Milton's Satan would be hugely incongruous, which is to say that Wordsworth has here largely escaped the interfering presence of

his poetic father. However, if Milton is passed over for a lesser scion of the vatic line then the poetry of Thomas provides an apt Wordsworthian analogue. The figure of Iago Prytherch would not explode the above passage and the analogy that suggests itself is that the Prytherch figure 'fits' this passage like a gate into the gap between two hedges.

John Ackerman has argued that Thomas has 'accepted that nature has no moral or didactic influence', a statement that, as Ackerman informs us, explicitly rejects the 'Wordsworthian ethos.'⁵⁸ However, Ackerman does not confront the failure of Thomas to go beyond or extend the usual pattern of tropes that post-Wordsworthian poets have traditionally found intolerably invaluable. In particular Ackerman is guilty of ignoring the one overt reference to Romanticism in Thomas's entire poetic corpus:

The sheep are grazing at Bwylch-y-Fedwen,
Arranged romantically in the usual manner
On a bleak background of bald stone.

These lines from 'The Welsh Hill Country'(AAL) are at once a complaint and an apology for the poet's inability, despite his best attempts, to escape Wordsworth's: 'The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,/ And the bleak music of that old stone wall'. Thus a remark like: 'Thomas's view of nature always arises from daily observation, is not romanticised, but keeps close to the reality of life in the Welsh hill country'⁵⁹ is too dogmatic to be persuasive. The most obtrusive influence that has been laid in Thomas's nest like a cuckoo's egg is *Resolution and Independence* and it is to this poem that I now turn.

Weiskel writes of *Resolution and Independence*: 'Many readers have remarked the signs of an ebbled flood throughout the imagery of the poem. No doubt the flood represents the "oceanic" feeling of joy, of total union with the Mother and her original derivative, Nature, so that its receding leaves the "I" stranded.'⁶⁰ Coleridge with his constant need to be mollycoddled can hardly be regarded as a hero of subjectivity and hence it is apt that *Resolution and Independence* is in many ways the antithesis of *Dejection: an Ode*. The ebbled flood that Weiskel speaks of is therefore a metaphoric beaching upon Mt. Ararat and a sign that the death of the imagination has been averted. Thus rather than conversing with nature in *Resolution and Independence* nature is represented by an intermediary figure whose uncanny appearance is taken by Wordsworth as proof of a covenant restored. As the poet himself allowed:

A young Poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is

described as over-whelmed by the thought of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, viz Poets -I think of this till I am so deeply impressed by it, that I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence....'A lonely place, a Pond' 'by which an old man was, far from all house or home' -not stood, not set, but 'was' -the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible^{6 1}

At the moment of meeting the Leech Gatherer, as Bloom remarks, 'a "spot of time" is so badly needed. The old man *was*, as a rock or a shrub simply *is*, another part of an ordinary landscape on an ordinary morning.'^{6 2} The old man's faculties verge on entry into a second childhood, but not quite, and his senses are contracted to the extent that he believes the leeches almost extinct. He is more than a bedraggled sea-monster or a rock or part of the natural given of the landscape since his near decrepitude contains an element of indomitable humanity that admonishes Wordsworth's wavering faith in his poetic vocation.

The draining flood that symbolised the dejection of Coleridge and of Wordsworth also possesses intimations of Apollo's incarnation at Delos or the ocean's nursling's fall from the amniotic womb onto the beach of ephebehood:

The young poet *is* a god, a rebirth of Apollo, stimulating new life and representing the perpetual freshness of the earth, but only so long as his spirits remain glorious and joyful. When they fail, the sad irony of the line, its sense of illusion, becomes dominant; it is *only* by our own spirits that we are deified. We merely follow cycle. As youths we begin in gladness, but thereof, from the gladness itself, come in the end derangement and melancholia. We pass from Orc to Urizen, Beulah to Ulro, in Blakean terms.^{6 3}

The Leech Gatherer gives to Wordsworth a sense of grace peculiar to the holiness of his heart's affections. But in terms of Thomas's debt to *Resolution and Independence* the Prytherch figure poems with their perpetually inundated fields and craggy characters equate to a willingness to enter into an agon with an English precursor.

In 'A Peasant'(SF) the Prytherch figure is 'churning the crude earth/ To a stiff sea of clods' and 'A Labourer'(SF) again contains the same inundated fields: 'he

wades in the brown bilge of earth'. This pattern is then repeated in 'The Labourer'(AAL): 'There he goes, tacking against the fields'/ Uneasy tides' and 'Valediction'(AAL): 'the pattern of your slow wake/ Through seas of dew'. Terraqueous imagery like 'the moor's deep tides'('Green Categories'(PS)) or 'the old currents are in the grass,/ Though rust has becalmed the plough'('A Line From St. David's'(BT)) abounds in Thomas's verse. As such Bloom's mellifluous guide to the Wordsworthian Imagination is pertinent:

Wordsworth's Imagination is like Wallace Stevens's *Angel Surrounded by Paysans*; not an angel of heaven, but the necessary angel of earth, as, in its sight, we see the earth again, but cleared; and in its hearing we hear the still sad music of humanity, its tragic drone, rise liquidly, not harsh or grating, but like watery words awash to chasten and subdue us. But the Imagination of Wordsworth...is 'a figure half seen, or seen for a moment.' It rises with the sudden mountain mists, and as suddenly departs.⁶⁴

For any reader of Thomas these last sentences must remind of 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL) where Thomas surprises the Prytherch figure and his flocks 'haloed/ With grey mist lifting from the dew.' This apparition is 'still there' which, as in 'The Face'(P), I take to mean perpetually in the mind's eye of the poet; but only at unexpected moments like 'early morning, when the light is right/ And I look up suddenly at a bird's flight.' 'Light' is a loaded word in this context because in the Shelleyan 'Song at the Year's Turning'(SYT) Thomas is bathed in 'Light's peculiar grace' that 'In cold splendour robes this tortured place/ For strange marriage.' This marriage is that of the mind of man to that of Nature and again this recalls Wordsworth's unforeseen meeting with the Leech Gatherer:

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace,
A leading from above, a something given,
Yet it befell that, in this lonely place,
When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,
Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
I saw a Man before me unawares:

The very presence of the Leech Gatherer is part and parcel of Wordsworth's attempt to marry his mind with the given of the natural world. Or as Bloom argues:

For Wordsworth the individual Mind and the external World are exquisitely fitted, each to each other, even as man and wife, and with blended might they accomplish a creation the meaning of which is fully dependent upon the sexual analogy; they give to us a new heaven and a new earth blended into an apocalyptic unity that is simply the matter of common perception and common sexuality raised to the freedom of its natural power.⁶⁵

The flood symbolises the curtailment of this ability as does the Covering Cherub and in 'The Figure'(BT) Thomas presents a Prytherch figure who has himself internalized the terraqueous fields that represent Thomas's misprision of the deluge:

It could have been a part
Of the strange calling I followed,
Wading closer to have found
The dark wrack of his thoughts lifting
And falling round the thick skull;

This flood implies that Thomas like Hamlet cannot shake off the memory of his father whom the Dane claims to see 'In my mind's eye' and Jonathan Bate has pointed out the similarity of this to Wordsworth's: 'In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace/ About the weary moors continually'.⁶⁶ 'The Face'(P) also depicts Thomas's equivalent Leech Gatherer internalized to the extent that he is lodged like a mote in the poet's mind's eye:

When I close my eyes, I can see it,
That bare hill with the man ploughing,
Corrugating that brown roof
Under a hard sky. Under him is the farm,
Anchored in its grass harbour;
.....
He is never absent, but like a slave
Answers to the mind's bidding
Endlessly ploughing, as though autumn
Were the one season he knew.

Even in the above quotation from 'The Face'(P) the time is out of joint and Thomas's necessary angel of earth wrestles with the universe of death. Yet Thomas is battling for poetic supremacy and akin to the rivalry of Jacob and Esau he seeks to compare

his physiognomy with the famous portraits of his ancestors. He battles with the angel of death only to the extent that the Covering Cherub will be defeated just one more time and another confrontation with his equivalent Leech Gatherer will yield a further poetic blessing. In 'The Face'(P) the farm is anchored in a 'grass harbour' and this terraqueous trope is ambivalent inasmuch as its indeterminacy is an analogue for the mists of the imagination. As Bloom argues: 'In a letter to the poet Landor (Jan. 21, 1824) he [Wordsworth] defines an imaginative passage as one in which "things are lost in each other, and limits vanish, and aspirations are raised."' ⁶⁷ Or as Kavanagh writes in *The Great Hunger*, 'Is there some light of the imagination in these wet clods?' The Imagination, after all, rises like an unfathered vapour and yet in the beholden poetry of Thomas the imaginative mists or muds associated with the Prytherch figure tend to indicate a memory of childhood and in particular a remembrance of Thomas's sea-faring father.

At time's of imaginative renovation when Wordsworth senses the transport of the Imagination he usually hears the sound of inland waters moving and this trope is also at times apparent in Thomas's poetry. As Jason Walford Davies argues in the introduction to Thomas's brief prose autobiography *No-one*:

No-one is structured by the way in which that outward...career curves to follow an inward Welsh return-journey, to a place his parents had not prepared for him. But the return is universalised in that it is also seaward. The editor of a selection of Wordsworth's poetry, R. S. is himself profoundly Wordsworthian ...So when R. S., inland, yearns to return to places within sight of the sea it is because of happy childhood memories of the seaside port of Holyhead, certainly, but also with that seaward vision that, in the 'Immortality' Ode, the land-bound Wordsworth was compelled to imagine ⁶⁸

Thomas's yearning for the sea is too similar to Wordsworthian models not to have excited comment and Tony Brown has argued of Thomas's poem 'Hiraeth'(SF):

My dark thought upon that day
That brought me from Arfon's bay,
From the low shores of Malltraeth and its sand,
Far inland, far inland.

that:

The poem expresses the poet's longing from 'far inland' for the seascapes of Angelsey, where he had grown up: 'The running sea under the wind,/ Rough with silver, comes before my mind'. It was clearly a longing which was deeply felt; in an essay in Welsh entitled 'Dylanwadau' (Influences), in which he writes of the influence of Angelsey upon him, he writes of his 'two dreadful years' far away at Hanmer, while in a recent interview he spoke of the 'terrible' longing for the sea' he had previously felt while a curate at Chirk, on the Welsh border.⁶⁹

Brown then quotes one of the glimpsed good moments of Thomas's prose: 'the poet describes his childhood in the countryside and along the shores of Angelsey in almost Wordsworthian terms, as a place of freedom and natural beauty -'I was a boy with the energy of a young colt, and would race the wind and sing out in front of the waves, trying to catch the salt snowflakes as they rose off the sea'.⁷⁰ The 'far inland' of 'Hiraeth'(SF) is an explicit allusion to Wordsworth's 'Intimations' Ode:

Hence in a season of calm weather
 Though inland far we be,
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither,
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Bloom writes of this stanza: 'Though twenty-eight years inland from his birth, Wordsworth hears again the particular intimation of his own immortality that he first heard five years before on the banks of the Wye.'⁷¹

If Shakespeare can be said to smell mortality, and Milton to taste it, then Wordsworth elides his fear of death by substituting the remembered immortality of childhood. When Thomas describes landscapes as terraqueous we do not hear the distant sound of inland waters signifying the immortality of childhood and as a consequence of this the Wordsworthian elision of death is elided. Thomas's most personal poetic thumbprint, that of terraqueous imagery, is ruminative of his sea-faring father and tends to conceal Thomas's debt to the unheard sound of Wordsworth's mountain torrents. Thus the most readily identifiable images of Thomas's poetic uniqueness are an elision of an elision. This is because Thomas turns to paternal imagery in order to retrope his unconsciously purposefully

forgotten debt to Wordsworth. Thomas's father became deaf in later life and in 'Salt'(LP) Thomas figures the loss of the sea as akin to deafness or 'a silence unhaunted/ by the wailing signals' that afflicted Thomas's father 'on that four-walled/ island to which all sailors must come'. Thomas's father cannot hear his own voice nor that of the sea and when Thomas writes painfully moving lines like: 'The voice of my father/ in the night with the hunger of the sea in it and the emptiness/ of the sea'('Salt'(LP)) the hollowness Thomas describes is the deafness of interiorization. Thomas's father is hence troped as akin to the Prytherch figure who in a poem like 'Memories'(AAL) does not, or, perhaps, chooses not, to hear the questions that Thomas asks him. Needless to say in 'Salt'(LP) the internalization of Wordsworth as parodied by the Prytherch figure's sensory dearth is echoed in Thomas's deeply personal poem about the deafness of his father.

Wordsworth too is too preoccupied with his perpetually growing inner self to properly listen to the Leech Gatherer and Thomas therefore swaps places with Wordsworth's peasant since his own peasant, the Prytherch figure, is a representation of the father. Or rather he is an uncanny example of the return of the repressed. Bloom insists that the sublime is a product of repression and his revisionary ratio of Daemonization conforms in his poetics to what he terms the Counter-sublime. Of this ratio Weiskel argued: 'The dissolving of word into Word, or for that matter of face into Human Form, is a moment of "daemonic" influx'^{7 2} and that:

we are suddenly fixated by a spot in the landscape which becomes an omphalos –a recurrent event in Wordsworth, which Geoffrey Hartman has brilliantly isolated as the 'spot syndrome.' Verticality is the appropriate dimension, and the image is inevitably some variant of the abyss, the 'fixed, abysmal, gloomy breathing-place' which is the central image in *The Prelude*, and indeed in most romantic poetry.^{7 3}

Or as Hartman himself argues:

The spot syndrome –the obsession with specific place– is paradoxically stronger because imagination in its withdrawal from nature first withdraws to a single point. Its show-place is still nature but reduced to one centre as dangerous as any holy site. This site is an *omphalos*: the navel-point at which powers meet, the 'one' place leading to a vision of the One. To describe it, the poet later resorts to the figure

of an abyss (*Prelude* VI.594) which is a kind of verticalized point and a variant of the 'narrow chasm' and 'gloomy strait' (VI.621) he has actually crossed; while in another encounter he suddenly glimpses imagination in a 'breach' or 'dark deep thoroughfare' (1805 *Prelude* XIII.62ff.)

In its quality of omphalos, this place of places is at once breach and nexus, a breach in nature and a nexus for it and a different world. Like Porphyry's Cave of the Nymphs it leads perilously from one state of being to another. The image of a flood or sea...is often conjoined.⁷⁴

This verticality that Weiskel and Hartman speak of is also evident in Bloom's explanation of the revisionary ratio of Daemonization: 'As trope, poetic repression tends to appear as an exaggerated representation, the overthrow called hyperbole, with characteristic imagery of great heights and abysmal depths.'⁷⁵ Thomas questions the Prytherch figure as if he were the voice from the whirlwind speaking to Job and Bloom identifies Leviathan and Behemoth with the natural world from which Thomas's peasant like Wordsworth's presences spring from. This utterance is dependent upon the trope of hyperbole or exaggeration and Bloom argues: 'To "exaggerate" etymologically means "to pile up, to heap," and the function of the Sublime is to heap us, as Moby Dick makes Ahab cry out "He heaps me!"'⁷⁶ Moby Dick like Blake's Tyger or the Prytherch figure is a representation of the Covering Cherub and according to Bloom: 'The formula of *daemonization* is: "Where my poetic father's *I* was, there *it* shall be," or even better, "there my *I* is, more closely mixed with *it*."⁷⁷ and thus: 'Art's True Subject is art's great antagonist, the terrible Cherub concealed in the id'.⁷⁸ The Prytherch figure is Thomas's depiction of life at its most wretched and yet most tenacious as Thomas explores the implications of humanity existing at the limits of consciousness. This poetry of extremity is sublime. As Bloom argues: '*Daemonization*, like all mythification of the fathers, is an individuating movement purchased by withdrawal from the self, at the high price of dehumanization.'⁷⁹ *Daemonization* is the antithesis of kenosis and instead of an emptying out of divinity the poet enjoys a transport that leads to a vision of the One. Or in terms of Bloom's theory of influence the individuated precursor becomes as one with the God of cultural history. This composite entity remains repressed until in his sublime flight the poet 'becomes, and is, a daemon, unless and until he weakens again...Turning against the precursor's Sublime, the newly strong poet undergoes *daemonization*, a Counter-Sublime whose function suggests *the precursor's relative weakness*.'⁸⁰

But it is debateable whether the influence of Wordsworth on Thomas is

eclipsed and the poet's mind is truly thrown back upon itself. As a Christian, Thomas is unhappy at the prospect of the self taking on the mantle of a liberating God and hence we come to the matter of the vacancy of the Prytherch figure's mind. This is the abyss that is associated with the sublime, the great depths and heights that Bloom identifies with the revisionary ratio of Daemonization. To those who do not find the Prytherch figure uncanny Thomas seems to be grossly exaggerating when he depicts the Prytherch figure in say 'A Peasant'(AAL) with a mind that is frighteningly vacant, in 'The Dark Well'(T) which speaks of the Prytherch figure's 'terrible poetry', or the liminal verticality of 'Alone'(BT):

To the watcher at the window
Life could have had all
Its meaning crammed into one
Vertical figure, one shape that stood up
From the bare landscape and walked on
With a mind monstrous as you will.

However, the poet's famed honesty is best read in an antithetical fashion to suggest the water's roar of Wordsworth. Repression in Bloom's poetic equates to sublimity and Bloom uses the phrase 'the Imagination rises triumphantly from the mind's abyss'⁸¹ to describe the unfathered vapour that ascends as Wordsworth accepts the Leech Gatherer into his mind's eye. In Thomas the Prytherch's figure's mind represents a displacement of the imagination as it is projected onto the personification of the imagination that is the Prytherch figure. The Prytherch figure and his empty mind is a mirror image of the abyss from which Wordsworth's imagination rises. Indeed it is a containment for, rather than an emancipation of, the self-sufficiency of the Wordsworthian imagination.

Bloom argues that daemonization *is* the anxiety of influence or the precipitation of poetry that is 'a war between Pride and Pride'⁸² 'purchased by a fresh and greater repression than the precursor's Sublime.'⁸³ As a poem 'A Peasant'(AAL) with its physically robust but almost retarded originary Prytherch figure is antithetically dependent upon the earlier poet's meeting with the physically decrepit but mentally strong Leech Gatherer. Of this particular spot of time Bloom writes: 'Faced again with the dialectic of love between Man and Nature, here at a quiet limit of the human condition, Wordsworth is renovated, and given yet another intimation of the natural strength of the human heart. The therapy for the poet's tortured sensibility, the way out of dejection, is to think of the earth, and to seek no wonder but the human face.'⁸⁴ To a certain extent this is consonant with the penultimate lines of 'A Peasant'(SF):

Yet this is your prototype, who, season by season
 Against siege of rain and the wind's attrition,
 Preserves his stock, an impregnable fortress
 Not to be stormed even in death's confusion.

Prytherch, it is often argued, was part of the land army and these lines it follows are thus imbued with martial overtones. Alternatively, Prytherch is here the Welsh Lob, the antithesis of the hero of Waterloo, Hastings, and Agincourt. Edward Thomas's 'disappeared/ In hazel and thorn' also explains the phrase 'the gap/ Between two hazels with his sharp eyes,/ Bright as thorns'. The Kenosis of Christ's incarnation as Prytherch is hence balanced by the sublime depths that the poet as a liberating god must plumb. Thus an intra-textual reading of 'A Peasant'(AAL) has to interpret this martial imagery as referring to the psychic wars that characterise the struggle between precursor and ephebe. The Leech Gatherer is hooped as Sycorax and the Prytherch figure is base and prototypical as Victorian readings of Caliban as a dehumanized or Darwinian missing link. It must be remembered that in 'A Labourer'(SF) the Prytherch figure is bent double as he 'stoops to pull/ The reluctant swedes'. But the real force of these lines derives from the inhospitableness of the peasant's environment which matches the saturated dreariness of the landscape in *Resolution and Independence*. However, Thomas is not revitalized by the Prytherch figure's presence in the same way that Wordsworth is healed of his self doubts. The last lines of the poem:

Remember him, then, for he, too, is a winner of wars,
 Enduring like a tree under the curious stars.

have a Christian cast and one that stems from the Prytherch figure's existence as a combination of the contrary elements that the symbols of the 'tree' and the 'curious stars' outline.

Yeats refers to 'primary curiosity'⁸⁵ in *A Vision* and Walford Davies has also alluded to 'cold logic or mere curiosity'.⁸⁶ But there is a double vision in Thomas's mind's eye and one that connects Thomas's 'curious stars' to Marvell's 'curious peach'. In his poem 'Country Child'(SF) Thomas writes of 'an orchard of stars in night's unscaleable boughs.' Moreover, T. R. Henn connects Marvell's *The Garden* with its 'Soul into the Boughs does glide:/ There like a Bird it sits and sings,' with the artifice of Byzantine eternity: 'Once out of nature I shall never take/ My bodily form from any natural thing./ But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make'.⁸⁷ If the stars are wrought with exquisite workmanship like Marvell's peach

or Yeats's golden birds that sing like the psalm-like stars of 'Memories'(AAL) where the poet hears: 'Sirius loud as a bird/ In the woods darkness' then we have left the primary or curious world and entered its antithesis. The Prytherch figure is a winner of wars and despite his unlikeness to the poet Thomas's half-unconvinced plaint that the peasant is 'a man like you' is really a recapitulation of Prospero's confession 'this thing of darkness I/ Acknowledge mine'. [5.1.275-6] However, this thing of darkness is the vacancy of the Prytherch figure's mind or the poetic instinct of Wordsworth whose growing sense of internalization Thomas mocks. Paul Muldoon quips in *Immram*: 'over every Caliban/ There's Ariel, and behind him, Prospero'. Thus: over every Thomas hovers Wordsworth and behind him, Milton. Or rather the darkness of the Prytherch figure's mind is a misprision of the abyss from which the Wordsworthian Imagination rises which in turn is a misdoubting of the blindness in which Milton composed *Paradise Lost*. What sparks off this train of associations is the microcosm of the godless Prytherch figure's vacant mind considered as an analogue for the macrocosmic stars. In 'The Hill Farmer Speaks'(AAL) Thomas wishes to be sheltered from the Prytherch figure's 'curious gaze'. Thus Thomas is afraid that the Wordsworthian Prytherch figure actively creates a world with no need for a Creator. As an antithetical quester Thomas is paradoxically repulsed by the blasphemous vitalism of the Imagination and tropes the Prytherch figure as 'enduring' like the organicist 'tree' under the artificer of eternity's peach-like stars.⁸⁸

If the centrality of 'A Peasant'(SF) is defined as the covenant of election that is granted to the poet then the equal and opposite importance of 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) is that in this poem the covenant made in 'A Peasant'(SF) is broken. Thomas's covenant is that of the antithetical man's power to imaginatively redeem the merely curious or given of the primary world. In 'A Peasant'(SF) Iago Prytherch is presented as an analogue for the Leech Gatherer and the last lines of the poem exhort the reader to 'Remember him' as a 'tree' 'under the curious stars'. The peasant is a 'winner of wars' because he represents Thomas's victory over the curious stars that if interpreted correctly are consonant with Christ's passion as symbolised by the tree that is troped as enduring like the Prytherch figure. Curious puns on cure (of souls) or Thomas's vocation as a priest and the renovation of vision that the continually reinvented figure of Prytherch signifies. Thomas's repeated returns to the Prytherch figure retrope the memory of Thomas's initial meeting with the farmer's brother which in effect becomes a spot of time. For instance, in 'Green Categories'(PS) Kant with his 'mind's uncertainty faced with a world/ Of its own making' is resolved with the Prytherch figure's prelapsarian passivity of perception: 'Here all is sure;/ Things exist rooted in the flesh,/ Stone, tree and flower.' What is noticeable about this improbable encounter is that the

Prytherch figure has 'never heard of Kant' but 'Space and time/ Are not the mathematics that your will/ Imposes, but a green calendar/ Your heart observes'. The past tense of 'to hear' is again opposed to the present tense of 'to observe' and the eye is portrayed in a far more tyrannous fashion than the ear. Indeed, the will or head is opposed to the heart and their unification is reported in the last lines of the poem as Kant joins the Prytherch figure beneath both the curious and curative stars. Thus the Imagination is opposed to the given in such a fashion to imply the marriage of man's mind to the rhythm of the seasons.

'A Peasant'(SF), along with many of Thomas's poems, exhibits terraqueous imagery and this symbolises the reduction of the flood and calming of the storm in *Resolution and Independence*. It is hence opposed to the rising storm and impending deluge that forms the depressed backdrop to Coleridge's *Dejection: an Ode*. This imagery of storm and calm derives from the biblical story of Noah and the transient yet enduring image of God's bow which was famously utilized by Wordsworth to signify that 'Nature never did betray/ The heart that loved her'. As Bloom argues:

Like Abraham, Wordsworth is the patriarch of a Covenant, made in the latter case between phenomenal appearance and the human heart. If the human heart, in its common, everyday condition, will love and trust the phenomenal world, then that world will never betray it. Betrayal here takes some of the force of its meaning from the context of sexuality and marriage. For man to betray Nature is to embrace one of the several modes in which the primacy of Imagination is denied. For Nature to betray man is to cease as a renovating virtue for man when he returns to it. Man turns from that loving embrace of nature which *is* in fact the supreme act of Imagination, and takes the cruel mistress of discursiveness in her place. Nature turns from man by ceasing to be a Beulah state, and becoming instead a hostile and external object. What Wordsworth never considers is the more sinister manifestation of Nature-as-temptress, Blake's Vala or Keats's Belle Dame. Shelley climaxes his heritage from the Wordsworthian tradition in *The Triumph of Life* by introducing Wordsworthian Nature as the deceptive 'Shape all light,' who tramples the divine sparks of Rousseau's imagination into the dust of death. Wordsworth's symbol of the covenant between man and nature, the rainbow, is employed by Shelley as the emblem that precedes the appearance of the beautiful but destructive Nature figure of

*The Triumph of Life.*⁸⁹

This is an overlong quotation but I justify it as a prolepsis for much of the argument that is to come. In the last chapter of this thesis I shall argue that Thomas's figure of the machine is a misprision of Shelley's humanized vision of Merkabah. 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) thus marks a watershed in Thomas's poetry and soon after its palinode, 'The Grave', Thomas's poetic undergoes the radical transformation of the *H'm* volume. After 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) nature ceases in its renovating function and the symbol of the poet's triumph over acedia, the Prytherch figure, dies. The Prytherch figure is a stand-in for nature; a Christ-like figure that symbolises the fitted and fitting of Thomas's mind to the landscape. After his death nature loses its innocence and becomes a Kenoma ruled over by the Machine. Thus Beulah is lost and only the mechanised Ulro of the Machine and the cynical world of Experience remains.

'Reservoirs'(NHBF), despite its unadorned, matter-of-fact tone, abounds with allusions and intra-textual references. The poem itself is divided into two verse blocks that describe where Thomas does not go and where this leaves for him to go. The former introduces a catalogue of metonymys of which the latter is a hyperbolic commentary. The one poetic crossing of this poem is the Crossing of Solipsism which 'tries to answer the fearful query Am I capable of loving another besides myself?'⁹⁰ Thomas is profoundly out of love with his subject matter; his marriage with nature is on the rocks and this is so because the Prytherch figure has gone to his watery grave. Synecdochal of this divorce is the absence of Thomas's Wordsworthian Covering Cherub whose grave Thomas tropes in 'A Grave' and whose death underpins the unspoken grief of Thomas in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF). Thomas describes the subconscious of every Welshman as putrefying like a corpse; a similie that Daffydd Ellis M.P. publicly misread as reducing Wales to 'an image of death'.⁹¹ What it actually implies is that the Imagination has become mere decaying sense and that the triumph of the primary over the antithetical is at hand. To an antithetical quester those who dwell in the purely political realm lead a life that is an unredeemed death-in-life hence Thomas in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) can only be talking about the potential death of his own imaginative engagement with the primary world. Yet Thomas's gangrenous analogues do not seem to overtly derive from a poetic agon with Wordsworth and the influence of Wordsworth upon 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) would perhaps remain invisible if it were not for the palpable influence of Yeats. When Thomas writes:

I have walked the shore
For an hour and seen the English

Scavenging among the remains
 Of our culture, covering the sand
 Like the tide and, with the roughness
 Of the tide, elbowing our language
 Into the grave that we have dug for it.

he is in danger of weakening his grasp upon the sublime mode and this whitening of the knuckles is figured by a change of poetic father that nevertheless reveals where the lyric force of the preceding part of the poem was generated. The power of Thomas's poem falls off towards its somewhat predictable end as Thomas's antithetical afflatus wanes and his political engagement heightens. This falling off is partly due to Thomas's switch of allegiance from Wordsworth to these lines from *A Prayer for My Daughter*:

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
 Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
 My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
 But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
 Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
 Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
 And for an hour I have walked and prayed
 Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

Thomas often turns to Yeats in moments of political turmoil as in his reply to Keidrych Rhys's questionnaire. Upon being asked for whom do you write Thomas emphatically replied by quoting from Yeats's *The Fisherman*:

All day I'd looked in the face
 What I had hoped 'twould be
 To write for my own race
 And the reality.⁹²

Thomas self-consciously depicts himself as a national bard and this is underlined by his reference in the same questionnaire to the relationship of literature and society being akin to that of Jacob and the angel.⁹³ After his victory over the angel Jacob gains the name of Israel just as Thomas desires to look upon the face of God since Jacob's encounter with the angel takes place at Peniel meaning: 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.'⁹⁴ Yet Thomas's priority as the name of Israel or Wales's national bard is threatened by the breakdown of his covenant with

nature which in 'The Face'(P) is 'the angel/ Of no name'. In his moment of doubt Thomas turns to the dejected imagery of Yeats because like those bards that begin in gladness Thomas is now assailed with a 'great gloom'.

Bloom argues that *A Prayer for My Daughter* displays a 'daimonic hatred of the contemporary world.'⁹⁵ There can be no doubt that Thomas is out of love with the world in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) though due to the diagnosis that his anglicised muse is symptomatic of the wider condition much of his venom is self-directed. Rather than a phantasmagoric marriage to Maud Gonne⁹⁶ Thomas tropes a grave which is all that is left of the marriage of his mind to that of nature. Just as *A Prayer for My Daughter* is concerned not so much with Anne Butler Yeats as Maude Gonne, 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) is concerned not with the reduction of Wales to an image of death but with the Prytherch figure's nemesis. Two other images of interest in Yeats's poem are the howling storm and the more portentous reference to the Atlantic ocean. I shall deal with the storm first. The storm that is howling in *A Prayer for My Daughter* is consonant in Thomas's misprision with the 'coming on of rain and squally blast' of Coleridge's *Dejection: an Ode*. Coleridge's 'wan and heartless mood' is the antithesis of Wordsworth's:

There was a roaring in the wind all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
But now the sun is rising calm and bright;

and yet Thomas's tone in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) is the opposite of Wordsworth's tone in these lines:

The pleasant season did my heart employ:
My old remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

rather it is more like:

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low;

The phrase 'Of joy in minds that can no further go' is crucial since it links 'A Peasant'(SF), the second of Thomas's Leech Gatherer indebted poems, to this, the second last of Thomas's *Resolution and Independence* beholden lyrics.

'Reservoirs'(NHBF) 'can go no further' with Thomas's poetic project because it has become a place to which the poet relates 'I don't go'. The question Thomas sets himself is 'Where can I go?' since a new poetic covenant is for the poet as poet his most urgent need.

Resolve has become dejection and along with his equivalent Leech Gatherer, the Prytherch figure, Thomas rids himself of all ties with the primary world. As a symbol of this sea-change he rejects the most hopeful of all natural phenomena, the rainbow:

There are places in Wales I don't go:
 Reservoirs that are the subconscious
 Of a people, troubled far down
 With gravestones, chapels, villages even;
 The serenity of their expression
 Revolts me, it is a pose
 For strangers, a watercolour's appeal
 To the mass, instead of the poem's
 Harsher conditions.

Thomas is about to enter the second phase of the quest, that of the Real Man, the Imagination. He must perforce leave the world of primary perception and become a wholly antithetical quester. For all that the Prytherch figure is a symbol for the Imagination he is too unworldly a character for Thomas's latent poetic. The antithetical quest that Thomas embarks upon after 'A Grave' is what Thomas refers to as the 'poem's/ Harsher conditions'. Gone is the watercolour of God's bow and the land of Beulah and in its place lies the world of Generation; a condition dominated by the Machine and redeemed by moments of epiphany that in Blakean terms yield to Thomas visions of Eden.

A hint of this nascent poetic is found in 'A Grave Unvisited'(NHBF) where Thomas writes: 'It is Luke's gospel/ Warns us of the danger/ Of scavenging among the dead/ For the living -so I go/ Up and down with him in his books,/ Hand in hand like a child/ With its father'. Thomas's later poems are Kierkegaardian as Thomas's identification of him as a paternal influence makes plain and as many studies have shown. Unfortunately, the majority of these later poems are too often aridly metaphysical. 'A Grave' marks the limit of this discussion and the reader is referred to Dr. Johnson's opinion regarding devotional verse:

Of sentiments purely religious, it will be found that the most simple expression is the most sublime. Poetry loses its lustre

and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. All that pious verse can do is to help the memory, and delight the ear, and for these purposes it may be very useful; but it supplies nothing to the mind.⁹⁷

The Welsh nation rots, Thomas argues, because it allowed the Tryweryn dam to be built and the Welsh-speaking community of Capel Celyn to be drowned so that the Liverpool Corporation could be supplied with drinking water. Thomas's disgust with the primary world of politics is extended to the self-disgust he feels at his method of complaint which adds to the superabundance of English language poets. However, this is the bedrock of the Welsh Sublime and Thomas cannot protest too much since like all poets he too quests for poetic fame.

Having observed the symbolic destruction of his political hopes Thomas's muse after 'A Grave' turned to metaphysical matters. God, for the poet, had now deserted the world and evidence for the triumph of Yeats's Phase 1 over the Prytherch of Beulah is provided by Thomas's sham rainbow. The innocence of the natural world is henceforth a 'watercolour' for the masses or those who do not recognise that the machine-god of the fallen world is a demiurge. As an antithetical quester Thomas defines himself against the masses and in the most moving section of the poem draws upon Wordsworth's *Michael* to illustrate his anti-metropolitan bias:

There are the hills,
Too; gardens gone under the scum
Of the forests; and the smashed faces
Of the farms with the stone trickle
Of their tears down the hills' side.

God's bow is a covenant that guaranteed that the Flood would never return and yet this is not the only covenant that in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) is broken. 'The Face'(P) refers to Penuel and Jacob's temporal blessing which allowed the Patriarch to take the name of Israel. The poem also refers to the spots of time that Thomas's repeated returns to the Prytherch figure trope. These returns are again a form of covenant in that they underwrite Thomas's continued vitality as a poet. In his equivalent Dejection ode the time is indeed out of joint and in his melancholia Thomas depicts the 'bare hill', 'the farm', 'the valley', 'With the school and the inn and the church' of 'The Face'(P) as 'smashed faces'. Or rather it becomes the smashed face of his omphalos.

The poem that 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) most resembles is *Michael* since the

physical description of the farms crumbling as they are dynamited and then inundated leaves them in the same state as 'the remains/ Of the unfinished Sheepfold'. *Michael* also turns upon the issue of ownership:

the land
 Shall not go from us, and it shall be free;
 He shall not possess it, free as is the wind
 That passes over it.

and at heart 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) asks not only the political question of who owns Wales? (the answer to which is not the Welsh) but also the antithetical question who owns language; or more particularly who owns poetic discourse? Thomas quests for priority and his dubiety with reference to the covenant that sustains Wordsworth also underwrites his desire to poetically transume the anteriority of Wordsworth. Thomas's doubting reaches its nadir during the death throes of the Prytherch figure of whom Belinda Humphrey has written: 'We can find occasional parallels...in Wordsworth's writings, especially when Wordsworth is at his loftiest as poet-preacher, such as in his presentation of a cruciform apparition of an idealized shepherd ("him have I descried in distant sky, A solitary object and sublime...like an aerial cross").'⁹⁸ Bloom describes *Michael* as the epitome of 'Wordsworthian Man, the solitary against the sky celebrated in Book Eight of *The Prelude*:

as he stepped
 Beyond the boundary line of some hill-shadow,
 His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
 By the deep radiance of the setting sun:
 Or him have I descried in distant sky,
 A solitary object and sublime,
 Above all height!'⁹⁹

Bloom continues: 'The man at the heart of many thousand mists is free; there is a binding covenant between him and nature, symbolised by the rainbow of *My Heart Leaps Up* and the epigraph to the *Intimations* ode. But a covenant between him and another man, even the child of his old age, has little force against the world of experience.'¹⁰⁰ Bloom also argues with reference to the covenant of *Michael*:

Michael is the most directly Biblical of Wordsworth's poems.
 It turns upon the symbol of a covenant between father and son,
 and its hero, though a poor shepherd, has a moral greatness

that suggests the stories of the Patriarchs. Had Michael ever heard of his vanished son again, he might have said, with Jacob: 'It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.' But in Wordsworth's poem, the covenant is forever broken, and the old shepherd dies without solace of a prodigal's return.¹⁰¹

In a sense the subconscious of those Welshmen untroubled by the events surrounding the death of Capel Celyn represent Luke, and Thomas frequently rails against those like Gelli Meurig or Rhodri Theophilus Owen who leave the high pastures of the heart for the English plain. But this explanation is not as satisfying as the one I will presently adumbrate. Thomas has a penchant for presenting himself as the national bard of Wales as such poems as 'Welsh Landscape'(AAL), 'A Welsh Testament'(T), and 'A Priest to his People'(SF) testify. When the devolution referendum was taking place I remember hearing a recitation of 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) on the BBC Breakfast News and during the inauguration of the new Welsh parliament a leading Welsh thespian read 'Welsh History'(AAL) to tumultuous applause. 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) is a poem about possession and to an antithetical reader it is concerned with a temporal agon and not political protest. The poem can be read in a tropological fashion and the movement from 'I don't go' to 'Where can I go' figures what Bloom describes as the Crossing of Solipsism as the ocularcentric description of a painter's landscape is replaced by nostril-flaring putrefaction. At this point outward impression is translated into an internalized acknowledgement of despair as a Ragnarök scenario is represented replete with ravening wolves in the form of English engineers. Kenosis becomes Daemonization and although Thomas's counter-sublime represses the influence of Wordsworth and then latterly that of Yeats and Coleridge, the real source of Thomas's anxiety is Dylan Thomas.

R.S.'s only serious rival to being the national bard of the majority language of Wales is Dylan Thomas. In 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) Thomas tropes himself as Michael and Dylan as Luke. The clue for this reading is provided by the line 'covering the sand/ Like the tide'. Rather than taking this as a complaint about tourists this should be read as referring to the anglicised public who are the intended audience for the 'scummed, starfish sands' of Dylan's seaside poem *Prologue to The Collected Poems*. This is the high tide mark of decaying sense over which the English in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) scavenge as in his equivalent Dejection ode Thomas laments the fate of the English-speaking Welsh writer. Such a writer is forced to make a covenant with an English tradition and 'Reservoirs(NHBF) turns upon a series of broken covenants including the breaking of the covenant that God made with Noah. In Dylan's last poetic success *Prologue to The Collected Poems* the alcoholic poet describes himself as a 'moonshine drinking Noah of the bay', a pun that plays upon

Dylan's love of both poetry and the bottle not to mention Noah's thirst since as Bloom notes in *The Book of J*:

The Deluge over, the propitiated Yahweh smells 'soothing scent' and is moved to declare that there will be no more mass destructions of people or of animals. This seems a fit Yahweh for Noah, the first alcoholic, so splendidly celebrated in a poem by G. K. Chesterton in which the most righteous of his generation chants as refrain, 'I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the wine.'¹⁰²

In *Prologue to The Collected Poems* Dylan tropes his departure and impending emigration to America as a figurative sailing to the Byzantium of New York. Dylan in his search for remuneration was preparing to take the step of launching his armada of arks from Beulah to the second phase of the quest. In the act of burying the Prytherch figure and leaving his own poetic Beulah R.S. responds to Dylan's farewell to *Fern Hill* in the antithetical fashion of troping the *enfant terrible* of Anglo-Welsh letters as the 'dissolute' Luke 'driven at last/ To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas' and himself as a broken hearted Michael.

This is not the first time R.S. has been moved to rebuke his namesake and the escapist *Prologue to the Collected Poems*. Dylan has spoken of 'Wales in my arms' as his 'water lidded lands' and R.S. is reminded of Milton's flood and the tears of Adam: 'How didst thou grieve then, Adam, to behold/ The end of all thy offspring, end so sad,/ Depopulation; thee another flood,/ Of tears and sorrow'.(XI.754-757) This becomes 'The Depopulation of the Hills'(AAL) where in opposition to Dylan's 'At God speeded summer's end...the flood flowers now' R.S. writes: 'Leave it, leave it -the cold rain began/ At summer end'. In place of Dylan's 'patch/ Work ark' R.S. has this ruined cottage: 'Leave it, leave it -the rain dripped/ Day and night from the patched roof/ Sagging beneath its load'. In *Prologue to the Collected Poems* Dylan describes the pumice skyscrapers of America as 'cities of nine/ Day's night whose towers will catch/ In the religious wind/ Like stalks of tall, dry straw'. This is a combination of the 'Nine times the space that measures day and night'[I.50] and the 'straw-built citadel'[I.773] of Mulciber and Dylan's first impressions of New York: 'Manhattan is built on rock, a lot of demolition work is going on to take up another super Skyscraper, & so there is almost continuous dynamite blasting.'¹⁰³ But R.S. refers Dylan to Robert Gregory: 'consume/ The entire combustible world in one small room/ As though dried straw, and if we turn about/ The bare chimney is gone black out/ Because the work had finished in that flare.' He writes: 'The grass/ Wrecked them in its draughty tides,/ Grew from the

chimney-stack like smoke,/ Burned its way through the weak timbers.' If Dylan is trying to burn through the context of the mortal world R.S. reverses the perspective such that nature has the last laugh: 'That was nature's jest, the sides/ Of the old hulk cracked, but not with mirth.' Milton describes the ark as a 'vessel of huge bulk'(XI.729) and hence R.S. ends his swingeing criticism by emphasizing that Dylan's covenant-love did not escape from the lower paradise. 'Vessel' thus becomes the sleeping partner to this diatribe since R.S. also mentions 'the dank hand/ Of age was busy on the walls/ Scrawling in blurred characters/ Messages of hate and fear.' This alludes to the holy vessels that were used at Belshazzar's banquet and to Dylan's profligacy. The writing on the wall is decipherably blunt: R.S. objects to the prostitution of Wales as a theme for poetry and in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) R.S. again weighs Dylan in the balance and finds him wanting.

In 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) Thomas retropes the village of 'The Face'(P) as 'gone under the scum/ Of the forests' and which terraqueous imagery is repeated in 'the stone trickle/ Of their tears'. Dewy-eyed Dylan recalls the 'water lidded lands' he is leaving behind and this iris is the watercolour that R.S. tropes Dylan as selling to his public and which arc he now reveals as harbouring tears that are wet. The 'hollow dell' to which Michael often repaired to build the Sheepfold thus becomes in this reading the 'Hollow farms in a throng/ Of waters'. As these fields sink beneath the flowering flood Dylan half-hears the tolling bells of a sunken land and echoes their peel: 'drowned deep bells/ Of sheep and churches noise/ Poor peace as the sun sets/ And dark shoals every holy field.' In so doing Dylan is referring to the legend of *Cantre'r Gwaelo*:

the land of Gwyddno Garanhir...was drowned beneath what is today Cardigan bay...Gwyddno's kingdom had sixteen noble cities and was defended from the sea by an embankment with sluices. The drunken Seithenyn, keeper of the dyke, was responsible for letting in the water which drowned all the inhabitants save the king himself. On calm evenings, it is claimed, the church bells of *Cantre'r Gwaelod* can be heard ringing beneath the waves of Cardigan bay.'¹⁰⁴

R.S.'s poem is the hangover to this drinking binge but unlike Dylan, R.S. assumes the moral greatness of a Patriarch or a Prophet and does not run away to the New World and is as Michael and Jacob lamenting their lost sons or Gwyddno cursing Seithenyn. Thus in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) Dylan's drowning-by-drinking utterance is identified with the guilt that R.S. tropes as 'Reservoirs that are the subconscious/ Of a people, troubled far down'.

CHAPTER 3NOTES:

- 1). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.59.
- 2). Ibid., p.58.
- 3). Ibid., p.65.
- 4). Ibid., p.65.
- 5). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.182.
- 6). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, pp.177-178.
- 7). Davies, W., 'Introduction to *William Wordsworth Selected Poems*', in *William Wordsworth Selected Poems*, ed. by Walford Davies, (London: Dent, 1984), p.xviii.
- 8). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, pp.173-177.
- 9). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, pp.34-35.
- 10). Ibid., p.35.
- 11). R. G. Thomas, 'Humanus Sum: A Second Look at R. S. Thomas' in *Critical Writings on R. S. Thomas*, p.20.
- 12). R. S. Thomas, 'Neb' in *Autobiographies*, trans./ed. by Jason Walford Davies, (London: Dent, 1997), p.42
- 13). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.76.
- 14). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.80.
- 15). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, pp.70-71.
- 16). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.72.
- 17). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, pp.72-73.
- 18). *William Wordsworth The Poems*, ed. by John O. Hayden, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), II, p.36.
- 19). From the written transcript of R. S. Thomas's televised interview with John Ormond published as 'R. S. Thomas: Priest and Poet' in *Poetry Wales*, Spring (1972), ed. by Meic Stephens, (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1972), p.53.
- 20). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, pp.136-137.
- 21). Op. Cit., 'Introduction to *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse*', p.126.
- 22). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.122.
- 23). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, p.30.
- 24). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.127.
- 25). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.20.
- 26). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.4.
- 27). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.10.
- 28). Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p.241.
- 29). *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, ed. by Mary Lynn Johnson, (New York: Norton,

- 1979), p.15.
- 30). Op. Cit., 'R. S. Thomas: Priest and Poet', p.51.
- 31). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.130.
- 32). Op. Cit., *Agon*, p.32.
- 33). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.6.
- 34). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.6.
- 35). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.131.
- 36). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.129.
- 37). Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: John Hopkins U. P., 1986), pp.169-170.
- 38). Ibid., p.171.
- 39). Ibid., p.172.
- 40). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, pp.131-132.
- 41). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.133.
- 42). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.132.
- 43). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.133.
- 44). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.133.
- 45). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.137.
- 46). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.135.
- 47). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.137.
- 48). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, pp.137-138.
- 49). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.139.
- 50). Op. Cit., *The Romantic Sublime*, pp.173-174.
- 51). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.121.
- 52). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.121.
- 53). Op. Cit., 'Introduction to *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse*', p.124.
- 54). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.123.
- 55). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.121.
- 56). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.124.
- 57). Op. Cit., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, p.199.
- 58). John Ackerman, 'Man and Nature in the Poetry of R., S., Thomas', in *Poetry Wales*, Spring (1972), ed. by Meic Stephens, (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1972), p.19.
- 59). Ibid., p.21.
- 60). Op. Cit., *The Romantic Sublime*, p.138.
- 61). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.160.
- 62). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.160.
- 63). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.162.
- 64). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.123.

- 65). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.123.
- 66). Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p.103. As Bate argues: 'As the ghost will come to whet Hamlet's almost blunted purpose, so the figure of the Leech Gatherer admonishes Wordsworth for his Hamlet-like self-absorption.'
- 67). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.149. Bloom also writes that 'the Imagination's strength to reach transcendence is the abode and harbour of human greatness. "More! More! is the cry of a Mistaken Soul. Less than All cannot satisfy Man," is Blake's parallel statement. Wordsworth stresses infinitude because he defines the imaginative as that which is conversant with or turns upon infinity.' Blake's statement is the exact opposite of Calvin's position with regards Job and therefore of Thomas's position in 'Priest and Peasant'(SYT) which was outlined in the last chapter. But if Thomas's earlier statement, recorded in note 53, is taken into account then the poet's relationship to the eternal or Wordsworth's infinitude has to be taken as the opposite of Job's genuflection before Leviathan and Behemoth. This again figures the unease with which Thomas views the Wordsworthian Imagination and as a corollary of this the Prytherch figure.
- 68). Jason Walford Davies, 'Introduction to *R. S. Thomas Autobiographies*,' in *R. S. Thomas Autobiographies*, ed. by Jason Walford Davies, (London: Dent, 1997), p.xix.
- 69). Tony Brown, "'Over Seventy Thousand Fathoms": The Sea and Self-definition in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas,' in *The Page's Drift*, pp.148-149.
- 70). Ibid., p.149.
- 71). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.69.
- 72). Op. Cit., *The Romantic Sublime*, p.27. Weiskel writes that 'Longinus inaugurated a great cliché when he found the silence of Ajax in the underworld "more sublime than words"'. Where is it possible to find a better description of the equally wordless and yet sturdy figure of Prytherch?
- 73). Op. Cit., *The Romantic Sublime*, p.27.
- 74). Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1977), p.122.
- 75). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.18.
- 76). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.24.
- 77). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.110.
- 78). Ibid., p.107.
- 79). Ibid., p.109.
- 80). Ibid., p.100.
- 81). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.165.
- 82). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.101.

- 83). Op. Cit., *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.106.
- 84). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.166.
- 85). William Butler Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.293.
- 86). Op. Cit., 'Introduction to *William Wordsworth Selected Poems*', pp.xviii-xix.
- 87). T. R. Henn, *The Lonely Tower* (London: Methuen, 1965), p.227.
- 88). The Curious Controversy has been well documented elsewhere and is something of an embarrassment to the field of R. S. Thomas studies. An introduction to the issues is provided by Wintle in his book, *Furious Interiors* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1996), pp.186-189.
- 89). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.139.
- 90). Op. Cit., *Wallace Stevens The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithica (N.Y.): Cornell U. P., 1980), p.403.
- 91). M. Wynn Thomas, 'Keeping His Pen Clean: R. S. Thomas and Wales', in *Miraculous Simplicity*, p.70.
- 92). Replies to Rhys's questionnaire were first printed in the 1946 issue of the Anglo-Welsh magazine *Wales*. A more readily available summary of Thomas's reaction is included in *Furious Interiors*, pp.220-221.
- 93). Op. Cit., *Furious Interiors*, p.220.
- 94). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, p.48.
- 95). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.325.
- 96). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.326.
- 97). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.191.
- 98). Belinda Humphrey, 'The Gap in the Hedge: R. S. Thomas's Emblem Poetry', in *Miraculous Simplicity*, ed. by William V. Davis, (Fayetteville: Arkansas, 1993), p.166. On the subject of Wordsworth's relationship to Milton it is fascinating to note that Walford Davies has pointed out 'that it was the blind man healed by Christ who said "I see men as trees, walking"'. In 'Bright Fields, Loud Hills and the Glimpsed Good Place: R. S. Thomas and Dylan Thomas', p.178.
- 99). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.178.
- 100). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.179.
- 101). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.178.
- 102). Op. Cit., *The Book of J*, pp.189-190.
- 103). Dylan Thomas, *The Collected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, ed. by Paul Ferris, (London: Dent, 1985), p.747.
- 104). Meic Stephens, *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford: Oxford, 1990), pp.71-72.

CHAPTER 4:
THE BUBBLE OF STONE
R. S. THOMAS &
THE FILM ON THE GRATE

Thomas's usage of negative theology is often interpreted in the light of the pseudo-Dionysius's apophatic theology. But this discussion adheres to Johnson's dictum that: 'The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere.'¹ As such the sidereal stigmata of 'Via Negativa'(H):

Why no! I never thought other than
 That God is that great absence
 In our lives, the empty silence
 Within, the place where we go
 Seeking, not in hope to
 Arrive or find. He finds the interstices
 In our knowledge, the darkness
 Between stars. His are the echoes
 We follow, the footprints he has just
 Left. We put our hands in
 His side hoping to find it warm.

are related not to Meister Eckhart or the Areopagite but to Yeats. Elaine Shepherd refers to Thomas's practice of placing his hand into the mountain grass that still keeps the form of a hare hoping to find it warm.² Shepherd relates this practice to 'Via Negativa'(H) but the footprints R.S. follows are perhaps more evocative of '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'. In 'The Minister'(SYT) Thomas notes that 'God is in the flowers/ Sprung at the feet of Olwen, and Mellengell/ Felt His heart beating in the wild hare.' Unlike Mellangell Thomas feels the presence of the hare through its absence and yet the Prytherch figure is 'never absent, but like a slave/ Answers to the mind's bidding'('The Face'(P)). In 'Once'(H) the vacancy of the Prytherch figure's mind has expanded to become the God gap and within this Ulro Thomas notes: 'There were no footprints on the beaches'. This is also figured in the relationship between 'The Grave' and 'Ynys Enlli' where Thomas's assertion that 'under/ The bright grass there is nothing/ But your dry bones. Prytherch,/ They won't believe that this/ Is the truth' becomes 'Under the grass/ Are the choirs of dead men.' These choirs are those of dead eremites and the movement of theme from worldly peasant to unworldly hermit outlines the secession of Thomas's Prytherch poetry with religious preoccupations.³

In the wake of these two poems comes *H'm*, a title which signifies

suspicious cogitation followed by pleased discovery. To return to the poet's tactile *via negativa* Thomas has written of Coleridge that: 'the chief tragedy of the poet's life' was 'his loss of imagination...the loss of his capacity to feel the beauty of things'.⁴ Thomas is want to contrast the rheumy-eyed pessimism of the later Coleridge with his youthful opposite who could:

never find myself alone within the embracement of rocks and hills, a traveller up an alpine road, but my spirit courses, drives, and eddies...a wild activity, of thoughts, imaginations, feelings, and impulses of motion, rises up from within me -a sort of *bottom-wind*, that blows to no point of the compass, and comes from I know not whence, but agitates the whole of me...Life seems to me then a universal spirit, that neither has, nor can have, an opposite...where is there *room* for death?⁵

M. H. Abrams has argued that it is 'evident from Coleridge's many letters testifying to his delight in wind and storms, which he watched 'with a total feeling worshipping the power and "eternal Link" of Energy,' and through which he had walked, "stricken...with barrenness" in a "deeper dejection than I am willing to remember," seeking the inspiration for completing *Christabel*.'⁶ This dialectic is again traced by the impending whirlblasts and mill-wheel groans of *Dejection: an Ode* and the eerie calm of *Resolution and Independence*. Though this is not a watertight analogy since Wordsworth's poem contains what Dylan Thomas recapitulated as the 'jack/Whisking hare' of *Prologue to the Collected Poems*. Or rather the imagination of a great wit, as Coleridge argued, is stimulated not 'by telling the half of a fact and omitting the half...it is from their mutual counter-action and neutralization that the whole truth arises, as a *tertium aliquid* different from either.'⁷

Wordsworth puts this as the 'central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation' or even 'the stationary blasts of waterfalls'. Thomas, however, teases his readership with this oxymoron: 'Here the cathedral's bubble of stone/ Is still unpricked by the mind's needle'. ('A Line from St. David's'(BT)) What could be more ephemeral than a bubble or more enduring than stone? Who could hope to put their name to such a negation of the individual's worth? Man's life is here contrasted to the eternity of God in the image of a Norman structure that defied the technology of the age and stands to this day. Thomas is fond of quoting Coleridge's belief that the opposite of poetry is science and his 'pointed foolishness' can only be unravelled by means of negative theology.

Whilst the stone bubble represents an ovum that the needle of the 'test-tube age' is impotent to inseminate, it is also terraqueous. The ultimate source of

amphibious imagery in Thomas's poetry derives from Wordsworth's *The Brothers* and to Leonard who in his delirium saw mountains 'in the bosom of the deep'. This fevered description is akin to the sleepwalking of his brother James where the actions of the somnambulist betray a disquietude deep in the soul. The Prytherch figure betrays a similar disquiet in Thomas's psyche and obliquely enters 'A Line from St. David's'(BT) as the mysterious man that 'sharpens a scythe'; a phrase that recalls its poetic twin: 'Iago Prytherch, forgive my naming you./ You are so far in your small fields/ From the world's eye, sharpening your blade/ On a cloud's edge'('Iago Prytherch'(PS)). The Prytherch figure endlessly ploughs, is forever to be found stropping his scythe, or merely smiling sadly his lips vague as moonlight on snow, or indeed, the befuddled mind of a somnambulist.

'A Line from St. David's'(BT) runs in two bursts, one ending with the Edwardian conquest of Wales, and the other with the thought of tourists visiting the cathedral's crypt. Both these caesuras are abrupt and the hare after which I course is an explanation of this phenomenon. If you will 'this burst bubble'.

The priest in *The Brothers* remarks: 'These Tourists, Heaven preserve us!' and this comment together with the unease in James's soul is echoed by M. Wynn Thomas's reading of the figure of Prytherch:

Iago Prytherch is also his great, deliberate exercise in mystification. He is the counterpart, in the earlier poetry, of the *Deus Absconditus* who is the dominant dramatis persona of the later poetry. As critics have frequently noted, and as even the poet himself has more or less agreed, the descriptions of Iago's personality border on, if they do not actually cross over into, the self-contradictory. Is he an avid, devoted reader of 'the slow book/ Of the farm'? Or is he as mindless as the soil he tills? And if he is mindless, is he blissfully, enviably so; or brutishly so?⁸

This quotation introduces a reading of 'Servant'(BT):

I also find these lines revealing –revealing of the need Prytherch is brought into existence to serve. To identify that need is also to begin to understand why Iago's serviceableness consists of his being an enigma; of his being inscrutable; of his being eminently visible and yet permanently beyond the reach of sight. Iago Prytherch is, for me, a most interesting temporary expedient for

dealing with the centuries-old Welsh problem of how to resist the invading, appropriating, eyes of the English.⁹

This study is opposed to Wynn Thomas's conclusion and to the premise which he reacts against: 'interpreters are content to talk about the Iago Prytherch poems as consisting of R. S. Thomas's arguments with himself, without enquiring too deeply into the social content, or context, of this arguing.'¹⁰ In reply I would argue that this dissertation is deep and is so because it concerns itself so single-mindedly with Thomas the antithetical man. The Prytherch poetry represents Thomas's attempt to rid himself of the daimon of influence; his attempt to exorcise the monkey from his back.

Despite these reservations with regards to Wynn Thomas's masterful analysis of the Prytherch figure it has to be owned that his position is strong enough to contaminate an influential study. Wynn Thomas's argument that:

It has been fairly widely remarked that Iago Prytherch was brought into being partly by a counter-cultural, anti-picturesque impulse, but it remains to suggest that it was the same impulse, properly understood as being of national and not merely local or aesthetic origin, that kept Iago in a state of perpetually perplexing existence. It was of the essence, if he was to avoid being appropriated by the very attention the poetry invited. Therefore the more he seemed to abide R. S. Thomas's questioning, the more he remained free. One arrives at Iago very quickly in the early collections, and yet each arrival is only the point of a new departure. One could paraphrase a splendid remark made once by Hugh MacDiarmid and assert that 'the prodigiousness of Iago's character itself becomes a safeguarding excellence.' What it safeguards is the mystery of a way of life which is a synecdoche for Wales.¹¹

This reading is suggestive of the arguments ventured by Frank Kermode in his book, *The Genesis of Secrecy*. A politico-historical reading of the character of Prytherch does not overtly tread the same esoteric paths as Kermode's hermeneutically-winged feet. Nevertheless, the conclusions reached by Wynn Thomas are strikingly mercurial in the sense that Prytherch is held to be interpretatively protean. Kermode argues that 'in the Greek Bible' the word parable 'is equivalent to Hebrew *mashal*, which means "riddle" or "dark saying"'.¹² Kermode continues that parables 'are stories, insofar as they *are* stories, which are not to be taken at face

value,' and that although these narrativised riddles are often comic they are more usually tragic. One such tragic narrative or riddle/parable is 'that proposed by the Sphinx to Oedipus -if you can't answer it, you die, for that is the fate of the outsider who sees without perceiving and hears without understanding.'¹³ This is also the fate that Wynn Thomas suggests will befall the Welshness of a Welshman who is naïve enough not to erect a Prytherch-like palisade.

To demonstrate the voraciously appropriating strength of Wynn Thomas's reading it is rewarding to see what light Kermode's discussion of *mashals* and midrashic explication throws upon the parable that is Prytherch:

'Before the law' is a good deal longer than any biblical parable... And like Mark's Parable of the Sower, it incorporates very dubious interpretations, which help to make the point that the would-be interpreter cannot get inside, cannot even properly dispose of authoritative interpretations that are more or less obviously wrong. The outsider has what appears to be a reasonable, normal, and just expectation of ready admittance, for the Law, like the Gospel, is meant for everybody, or everybody who wants it. But what he gets is a series of frivolous and mendacious interpretations. The outsider remains outside, dismayed and frustrated. To perceive the radiance of the shrine is not to gain access to it; the Law, or the Kingdom, may, to those within, be powerful and beautiful, but to those outside they are merely terrible; absolutely inexplicable, they torment the inquirer with legalisms. This is a mystery; Mark, and Kafka's doorkeeper, protect it without understanding it, and those out-side, like K and like us, see an uninterpretable radiance and die.¹⁴

Without realising it, Kermode has recapitulated Bloom's trope of the Covering Cherub whose 'baleful charm imprisons the present in the past' and like the light beyond the door that frames the doorkeeper is a 'burning brightness against a framing darkness'.¹⁵ If an inter-text fails to be creatively misread then the reinterpreter sees, as Kermode suggests, 'an uninterpretable radiance' and the ephebe interpreter's misreading remains normative or weakly homiletic. The Cherub provides a dreariness of continuity while the ephebe seeks a daring hermeneutic discontinuity. In this respect Prytherch (to such luminaries as Hugh Macdiarmid and M. Wynn Thomas) has become normalised as a safe-guarding prodigiousness; a reading that at once allows for new interpretations while simultaneously

appropriating the variousness of interpretation to a narrow historico-political purview. In the secular gospel of Wynn Thomas all discontinuous readings of the Prytherch parable have become as leopards incorporated into the mass or as Kermode argues:

we cannot easily use the word 'parable' in such a way as to exclude the notion of 'enigma.' Who would deny Kafka the right to call his anecdote of the leopards a parable (*Gleichnis*)? 'Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony.'¹⁶

The interpretation of the opaque parable of the leopards that Kermode provides is exactly analogous to the problem of going beyond the normative reading of the Prytherch figure proffered by Wynn Thomas: 'All we can suppose is that some familiar rite is being intruded upon, and that the intrusion is assimilated, the cultus altered to accommodate it, in a manner often discussed by sociologists of religion. The alternate procedure, to their way of thinking, would be to shoot ("nihilate") the leopards.'¹⁷

To prevent the yoking of this pard to the chariot of Wynn Thomas I wish to cite the biblical parable most closely associated with Prytherch. Kermode argues that the Synoptic transmitters of the Parable of the Sower fundamentally misunderstood Jesus's meaning and instead offered this weak homiletic:

What the sower sows is the Word. People by the wayside hear it, but Satan (the birds) comes and takes it from their hearts. The stony ground signifies those who receive the Word with gladness, but are unable to retain it under stress and persecution; the thorns stand for those who hear it but allow it to be choked by worldly lust and ambition. The last group are those who hear and receive the Word and bear much fruit (4:14-20)¹⁸

Kermode argues that: 'The purpose of the Sower parable, as many think, was, like that of most of the parables, eschatological: it had to do with the end-time that had now come upon the world, with the breaking-in of the kingdom of God, here represented by the harvest, a traditional figure for it. Between sowing and harvest many frustrations occur; but when the harvest comes, and the angel puts in his

sickle, all will be fruition and triumph.'¹⁹

Before returning to the whetstone Prytherch and his eschatological depopulation of the Welsh hills it is fruitful to consider the lines from 'The Dark Well'(T) that reveal Prytherch as a perverse revision of the Sower parable:

They see you as they see you,
A poor farmer with no name,
Ploughing cloudward, sowing the wind
With squalls of gulls at the day's end.

Thomas provides this prolegomenon to his volume *Tares*: 'Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence, then, hath it tares?' (St. Matthew xiii.27) 'They see you as they see you' is hence equivalent to saying 'Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.'(Matthew xiii.13) But this innocuous peasant represents what Kavanagh in *The Great Hunger* describes as 'the source from which all cultures rise,/ And all religions,/ There is the pool in which the poet dips'. In 'The Letter'(PS) this becomes the 'black ink of the heart's well...what the hand has written/ To the many voices' quiet dictation.' This is the dark well of Thomas's poetry and the terrible words that Thomas speaks are turned against him or in the putative words of Jesus 'sown with tares'. Aside from this direct reference to a dark saying of Jesus the manifold Prytherch becomes overtly contradictory in tone and imagery when the figure of the sowing Prytherch is contrasted with his reaping counterpart:

Do you remember the shoals of wheat, the look
Of the prawned barley, and the hissing swarm
Of winged oats busy about the warm
stalks? Or the music of the taut scythe
Breaking in regular waves upon the lithe
Limbs of grass?

This beautiful passage of poetry has a Shakespearian or Keatsian lushness to it and hence the tone of 'Memories'(AAL) clashes with the lachrymose gulping of 'The Dark Well'(AAL) and this underlines the myriad contradictions that form the metaphorical make-up of Prytherch. He is at once Sower and Reaper, Ear and Tare, Yahweh and Sammael, Word and word, Adam and Satan, inside and outside, pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian, *via negativa* and *via positiva*. Prytherch's contiguity to the figure of the reaper in the Parable of the Sower is thus an embarrassment to a normative or homiletic reading of Prytherch because he is meant to guard against the death of the

Welsh language. Prytherch is strongly associated with death but this death is not necessarily the death of the Welsh language. An eschatological reading of the parable of Prytherch reveals that Prytherch tropes against the death of the imagination and that the terrible end-time of the imagination marks the sublime beginning of Thomas's attempt to clear an unsullied swathe of creative space.

Wynn Thomas begins his discussion of Prytherch by arguing: 'For more than a century Welsh culture had celebrated the stock figure of cultured shepherd and farmer, who epitomized all that was best in the unique Welsh *gwerin*. And that image was not simply replaced by Iago Prytherch. It survived, in drastically modified form, as one of the several contradictory elements of which the poetic character of Iago is compounded.'²⁰ The contrast between Coleridge and Muldoon's parody of the poet in *Madoc* is apparent, as Wynn Thomas notes, in Thomas's portrayal of pantisocratic peasants both as 'men who "spent long days...swapping *englynion* over the peat cutting"²¹ and 'the shock of coming up against "the harsh realities of rural life"²² The balanced view that Wynn Thomas arrives at is that Thomas's poetry 'evades much more than it admits of the realities of the region. Considered as an approximation to, let alone as an accurate report of, life in an upland rural community, the Prytherch poems are, as we all know, non-starters.'²³ Wynn Thomas's scepticism with regards the faithful depiction or otherwise of Thomas's peasants is echoed by Belinda Humphrey:

The Welsh hills are unrealistically always bare because they are emblematic of a spiritual condition. The poet sees without what he has within. The landscapes are of the mind's eye, the mind's gallery (and the real Wales is forgotten). A distant figure in a landscape becomes a portrait in a frame. Wordsworth on the Leech-gatherer, while preaching endurance and independence against the ills of transient life, is also exploring the disparity between reality and vision. Although he writes of an actual man plowing as an emblem of endurance, R. S. Thomas is concerned only with vision.²⁴

A clue to the accurate classification of this visionary state is mooted by Wynn Thomas when he writes of Prytherch as a mystificatory enigma and this pointer is amplified by Humphrey when she writes: 'The peasant is a figure in the diagrammatic sense, a question mark. Prytherch, the hill farmer, is Thomas's meditative emblem of all his confrontations of life and its meaning...the diagrammatic emblem is

especially striking with its mirror image of the question-mark man in a square field reflected as a square page containing a question-mark poem.²⁵

The Prytherch figure equates to the reaping question mark that benights Thomas's pages and in his thorn-bright eyes Thomas is able to discover the sparkling blaze of Milton's Satan. As such the contrary connotations that the Prytherch figure brings to a reading of Thomas's antithetical imagination find a strong parallel in Steven Knapp's book *Personification and the Sublime*. At the beginning of his book Knapp attends to a Coleridgean lecture upon *Romeo and Juliet* in which the discursive poet considers the conceits of this speech by Romeo:

Here's much to do with hate, but more with love:-
 Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
 O anything, of nothing first created!
 O heavy lightness! serious vanity!
 Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
 Fether of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
 Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!

As Knapp puts it, this speech leads Coleridge into a 'startling digression' from his stated subject of Shakespeare's metaphysical wit. Shakespeare's dainty contraries trigger an unexpected effusion upon the topic of 'the alien territory of Milton, allegory, and the aesthetics of the sublime'²⁶:

I dare not pronounce such passages as these to be absolutely unnatural, not merely because I consider the author a much better judge than I can be, but because I can understand and allow for an effort of the mind, when it would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of, to reconcile opposites and qualify contradictions, leaving a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other, when it is, as it were, hovering between images. As soon as it is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination. Such is the fine description of Death in Milton:-

'The other shape,
 If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none
 Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,

Or substance might be call'd, that shadow seem'd,
 For each seem'd either: black it stood as night;
 Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
 And shook a dreadful dart: what seem'd his head
 The likeness of a kingly crown had on.'

Paradise Lost, Book II [666-673].

The grandest effort of poetry are when the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected; the result being what the poet wishes to impress, namely, the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image.²⁷

Knapp puts this outburst into perspective by arguing:

Throughout the eighteenth century, Milton's allegory was controversial, because it was thought to be an irrational intrusion into the realistic clarity and continuity of the epic...The example Coleridge uses to dissociate the imagination from fixed visual perception is thus multiply "negative": by virtue of its oxymoronic style, its association with disruptions of poetic unity, and of course its referent, death.²⁸

Knapp proceeds: 'The source of Coleridge's example must be Edmund Burke, who uses precisely the same example from Milton to ground his own claims for "obscurity" as a source of the sublime...For Burke, the relation of obscurity to the sublime is far more direct: "It is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions".²⁹

Kermode argues that few biblical scholars would contradict that 16:18 is the authentic end of the Gospel of Mark³⁰ and this passage is significant because it describes the astonishment of the two Marys upon entering the now empty tomb of Jesus: 'And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed...for they were afraid.' This quotation should be coupled with these lines from *The Great Hunger*: 'Yet sometimes when the sun comes through a gap/ These men know God the Father in a tree:/ The Holy Spirit is the rising sap,/ And Christ will be the green leaves that will come/ At Easter from the sealed and guarded tomb'. This coupled with Edward Thomas's *Lob* is the seed-corn for 'That man,

Prytherch...I saw him often, framed in the gap/ Between two hazels'('The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL)). I shall return to this poem presently but first it is more pressing to consider instances of godless gaps. Prytherch's mind is at various times described as vacant, empty, bare, a dark well, and these vacua are frightening, monstrous, or terrible. These lacunae are complimented by this prose reminiscence: 'When I began writing I devised a character called Iago Prytherch -an amalgam of some farmers I used to see at work on the Montgomeryshire hillsides...And there was something...that would worry me as I saw him...What is he thinking about? What's going on inside his skull? And of course there was always the possibility that the answer was "Nothing"'.³¹ This should be compared with this subtly different memoir: 'On a dark, cold day...on his way to visit a family in a farm over a thousand feet above sea-level, he saw the farmer's brother out in the field docking mangels. This made a profound impression on him, and when he returned to the house after the visit he set about writing "A Peasant", the first poem to attempt to face the reality of the scenes around him.'³² Ostensibly, the figure of Prytherch represents Thomas's attempts to confront his own ignorance regarding these simple folk but poetry cannot help Thomas to know the ur-Prytherch because all that poetry knows is the quarrel with the self. The ur-Prytherch and the Prytherch figure are in this respect incommensurable. Insofar as the Prytherch poetry admits an ignorance of the ur-Prytherch it also omits a knowledge of the Romantic models upon which Prytherch is based. Their submerged influence causes Thomas to dip his pen 'Not in tears' volatile liquid'('The Letter'(PS)) these thoughts being too deep but in the black ink of the heart's well. This dark well is filled with gulped tears and is the source of the Prytherch figure's unknowable sublimity. Or as Knapp argues: 'ignorance gets it power, like all sources of the sublime, from *fear*. The combination of darkness, ignorance, and fear accounts for the power of Milton's description, in which "all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree".'³³

Milton depicted his allegorical figure of death as king-like and in 'A Peasant'(SF) Thomas speaks of 'death's confusion'. This is beholden to Yeats's 'Confusion of the death-bed' in *The Cold Heaven* a poem which contains a 'rook-delighting heaven'. This reminds of 'rooky-wood' and gains a regally Shakespearian resonance when it is compared to this speech by Macduff:

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!
 Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
 The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence
 The Life o'the building! [II.3.71-74]

Prytherch stands-in for nature or the universe of death and his presence rises like an 'impregnable fortress' between Thomas and the absence of God that the universe of death represents. Prytherch's anatomy is thus like Duncan's in that he has a mortal signifier, the ur-Prytherch, and a divine signified in the form of a narrative structure of contradictory metaphors. These metaphors such as the thorn-bright eyes of Prytherch or his well-spring heart are constructs of the Imagination for which Prytherch taken as a holism is a figure. The paradox of this signification is that Prytherch's mind is vacant and this is relateable to his disappearance and yet reappearance as the *Deus Absconditus*. Such an interpretation gains added impetus when the above quotation from *Macbeth* is compared to the fascinating and yet textually unmoored rhetoric that Elaine Shepherd employs to begin her book on Thomas: 'In the year 63 BC the Romans stormed the temple in Jerusalem. They were astonished to find, on entering the Holy of Holies, that it was empty: there was no great idol or object of worship; at the heart of the faith there was a great absence.'³⁴ Bloom reminds us that the cherubim spread their wings over the ark in order to protect it and as a consequence of this Thomas as an agonistic poet is profane as the ravishing Tarquin. The Prytherch figure has flashing eyes or as Thomas puts it in 'Homo Sapiens 1941'(SF): 'a frenzy of solitude mantles him like a god.' Here Thomas fears the return of the Joycean ghost of his own father i.e. himself in the Orphic moment of composition. As was argued in the first chapter, Coleridge possessed a godly fear of his own imaginative potential and this equates to a preference for Akiba's box over Bloom's self-liberating gods or the return of J's incommensurable Jahweh.

If Prytherch's presence symbolises Thomas's agonistic imagination then his absence enacts a *via negativa* that if not handled with care resurrects the spectre of an imaginative agon. The genesis of Prytherch led Thomas to ask: 'What is nothing?'³⁵ and one possible answer to this question is suggested by Belinda Humphrey who writes that the apostrophe in the book *H'm* 'is certainly an emblem of a gap, a gap in which the "I" or "i" of "I AM" can certainly be known by its absence, its very invitation to speculative seeking.'³⁶ This refers to Coleridge's pronouncement that:

The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the finite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the

mode of its operation.³⁷

Both the first and second names of the Prytherch figure are perfect embodiments of the negative potential of the appellation Iago Prytherch. Pushing aside the paranomasia of 'Prytherch' it is rewarding to dwell upon the 'long aed'³⁸ associations of his Christian name:

Satan...is...a repetition of Shakespeare's discovery of nothingness at our centre. Hamlet tells us that he is at once nothing and everything in himself, while Iago goes deeper into the abyss: 'I am not what I am,' which deliberately reverses Saint Paul's 'by the grace of God, I am what I am.' 'We know of no time when we were not as now,' and yet we are nothing now. Ontologically, Iago knows he is a hollow man because the only bestower of being, the war-god Othello, has passed him over. Satan, passed over, insists he is self-created and sets out to undo the creation intended to replace him. Iago, far more potent, undoes his god, reducing to chaos the only reality and value he recognizes.³⁹

As Iago the Less⁴⁰ the Prytherch figure represents the nihilistic possibility that everything might reduce to chaos. Or to swap *Othello* for *Romeo and Juliet*, his *raison d'être* is to cough when the poet and his muse would kiss.

Yet Prytherch is garland and wreath, I am and I am not what I am, land-locked calm and 'sea wind/ Blown through the wood's darkness'('Winter'(PS)). Thomas is 'lost in the world's wood'('Song at the Year's Turning'(SYT)) and in 'Winter'(PS) night's unscaleable boughs are 'rigid with frost':

I said fiercely -it was the star's breath
Whitening your hair- Let the wind speak
For us also, opening an old wound
That time dealt us;

This is the killing frost of influence that nips poetic greatness in the bud. Thomas reads his poetry as if praying and in 'The Belfry'(P) he writes: 'There are times/ When a black frost is upon/ Ones's whole being...in the cold/ Of a stone church, on his knees/ Someone is praying'. In 'The Belfry'(P) a bitter chill lies between Thomas and God but in 'The Moon in Lley'n'(LS) prayer like poetry is controlled by the migrations of the moon:

The last quarter of the moon
of Jesus gives way
to the dark; the serpent
digests the egg. Here
on my knees in this stone
church, that is full only
of the silent congregation
of shadows and the sea's
sound, it is easy to believe
Yeats was right. Just as though
choirs had not sung, shells
have swallowed them; the tide laps
at the Bible; the bell fetches
no people to the brittle miracle
of the bread. The sand is waiting
for the running back of the grains
in the wall into its blond
glass. Religion is over, and
what will emerge from the body
of the new moon, no one
can say.

But a voice sounds
in my ear: Why so fast
mortal? These very seas
are baptised. The parish
has a saint's name time cannot
unfrock. In cities that
have outgrown their promise people
are becoming pilgrims
again, if not to this place,
then to the recreation of it
in their own spirits. You must remain
kneeling. Even as this moon
making its way through the earth's
cumbersome shadow, prayer, too
has its phases.

Doubt has its travail only for personal belief to be reborn like the new moon. That Thomas uses the moon to symbolise this lunar death and rebirth has to remind of

Yeats's theory of the gyres. The lines: 'The sand is waiting/ for the running back of the grains/ in the wall into its blond/ glass' refer to the 'special shell' of St. Hywyn's church which as Wintle reports is 'actually...sinking into the sand'.^{4 1} In this respect the feet of tourists combine with the sands of the hourglass to symbolise the denudation that Father time causes. The suggestion is that the 'special shell' of St. Hywyn's is being digested in much the same way that the final arch of the moon is swallowed by the darkness of space. The cone of night that benights the moon again symbolises the Yeatsian gyres as does the conical sea-shells and their analogic choirs of voices that once sang in the now empty-as-a-shell church. The vicissitudes of temporality therefore act as metaphors for the loneliness of Thomas's struggle against the prevalent tastes of the age and, as Bloom argues, this is quite consonant with Yeat's theory of the gyres:

Yeats visualizes the process of life as a double cone, moving in just one direction at a time, yet always containing the opposite direction within itself. As the directional thrust gains momentum, the counter-movement begins within it, starting from the base of the first cone and going back through it. The rotation of this double-cone produces a total circular movement, or cycle, divided by Yeats into twenty-eight phases, governed by the moon, partly because of the moon's association with sexuality and with the Romantic imagination.^{4 2}

The tide that erodes the coastal church is thus controlled by the moon and the prayers that Thomas describes as having 'phases' are successful according to which phase of history the penitent prays from. Trapped in the double-bind of an irreligious age and a prayer-phase that is riddled with doubts; the miracle that Thomas seeks is the Canute-like reversal of the seas of time or as Bloom argues in relation to Yeats's conception of the Covering Cherub: 'To Yeats, the fallen world or shadow of history contains the *daimon* of the *antithetical* or subjective man, of the poet who seeks to redeem time.'^{4 3} Bloom writes of this *daimon*:

Ego Dominus Tuus implied that a poet's mastery came in seeking and finding the inevitable or *daimonic* image, a double of the self in appearance, but opposite to the self in nature ...But Yeats never developed, in the poem or the treatise or later, his indistinct image of his own anti-self. Why? Surely we ought to expect, whether in verse or prose, an account of 'the mysterious one'? Yeats shied from it, almost

superstitiously, perhaps believing that to encounter his double-but-opposite, as Shelley's Zoroaster did when walking in a garden (in *Prometheus Unbound*) or Shelley himself by tradition did, just before drowning, would be to meet his own death.⁴⁴

Thomas goes beyond Yeats in this respect and his daimonic double is Iago Prytherch or in the case of the later poetry, his analogue, the God gap. A direct imagistic echo of the Covering Cherub and the God gap, other than the vacancy of Prytherch's mind, is the egg digesting serpent of 'The Moon of Lley'n'(LS): 'To Blake the shadow or serpent was a selfhood, but not the 'other' or creative self; it was the stifler or Covering Cherub, the separating or inhibiting force of nature and history, sanctified by an inadequate version of reason'.⁴⁵ Here Bloom identifies the fallen world as synonymous with the Cherub. It must be remembered that the fallen world is also associated with the *aporia* that prevents the embrace of tropes of ethos and pathos. The Covering Cherub is thus the symbol of the Bloomian *aporia*.

The diagram of 'The Great Wheel' in *A Vision* depicts the dark of the moon as *Gapienda*. This I read as the dominant influence upon Thomas's God gap. Of *Pulchritudo* Bloom argues: 'Yeats wants a Byzantine Christ, free of humanity, capable of perfect absorption into Phase 15, a God of art.'⁴⁶ Phase 15 is a supernatural state in which the phenomenal world is replaced by an illusory one of love, beauty, and art. This is in stark contrast to the equally supernatural Phase 1 where the particular is pounded much like Thomas's church as it is eroded by the tide. This process of pulverization finds its nadir in Phase 1 and because of this the completely plastic individual has no sense of subjectivity. Phase 1 is hence a mental state of objectivity and this is reflected in Thomas's poem which depicts Thomas receiving divine instruction from the voice of God. As Bloom has argued, the pure plasticity of Phase 1 'is the raw material for any supernatural agency to work upon'.⁴⁷ Despite Thomas's lame pronouncement that even prayer has its phases his later poetry converts Yeats's system into a binary opposition between Phase 1 and Phase 15. Bullied by a primary world of disbelief and secularism in 'The Moon in Lley'n'(LS) Thomas imagines the moon's progress to the full. Yet this *via negativa* is not cyclic since Thomas is trapped in the world of the Covering Cherub and dialectically strives to escape this eclipse.

In a scathing review of Auden's *Secondary Worlds*, Bloom argues that Coleridge was ill-advised to nominate the secondary imagination as secondary and the primary imagination as primary.⁴⁸ Bloom's point is that the potential confusion this causes is that secondary might be taken as synonymous with inferior which could not have been Coleridge's intent. Although Bloom does not in this instance

admit it, his aesthetic practice prefers the Yeatsian coinage 'antithetical': '*Antithetical* would seem to mean "secondary" only in the sense of Coleridge's Secondary Imagination; the *primary* has a metaphysical priority, but the *antithetical* is the creative principle, marked by its name as being in direct opposition to any "objective" view of the world.'⁴⁹ Thus Yeats's Mask and Will are antithetical terms and his Creative Mind and Body of Fate primary terms. Thomas's antithetical terms are his poetic persona and that of his anti-self whereas his primary terms are his priestly persona and the ur-Prytherch.

Bloom writes that 'the most Yeatsian vision in a poem not by Yeats himself is this, in a late fragment of Coleridge' where 'a human figure leaves the realm of the human, is absorbed into Phase 15, and acquires citizenship in the world of Yeats's *Byzantium*'⁵⁰:

But that is lovely -looks like Human Time,-
 An Old Man with a steady look sublime,
 That stops his earthly task to watch the skies;
 But he is blind -a Statue hath such eyes;-
 Yet having moonward turn'd his face by chance,
 Gazes the orb with moon-like countenance,
 With scant white hairs, with foretop balk and high,
 He gazes still, -his eyeless face all eye;-
 As 'twere an organ full of silent sight,
 His whole face seemeth to rejoice in light!
 Lip touching lip, all moveless, bust and limb-
 He seems to gaze at that which seems to gaze on him!

That Coleridge's blind old man recognizes the light of the moon by way of mimicking the reflected sun-light of the moon through a gnostic certainty that the moon is shining recalls the paradox that the root of black and blank are one and the same. Or as Bloom puts it: 'black and blank have the same root, *bhel*, to shine or flash'.⁵¹ This antithetical primal word exists simultaneously in Thomas's poem 'The Moon in Lleyn'(LS) as both the moon's dark of Phase 1 and the negatively implied blank or full moon of Phase 15. Bloom writes that in the case of Milton this creative blank is analogous to the Priestly author's 'light' and the 'sensuous light' that Milton has lost'.⁵² This fecund contradiction is recapitulated in the commentary that Bloom provides to the above passage of Coleridgean poetry:

In Coleridge's fragment, this vision is juxtaposed to one of Limbo, which is remarkably like Yeats's Phase 1, a plastic state of what

Blake called non-entity. Most simply, the opposition in Yeats between Phase 15 and 1 is the Coleridgean or Wordsworthian contrast between the Secondary, creative Imagination, and the death-in-life of the world without imagination.⁵³

The Coleridgean contrast is between the death-in-life of those glum individuals unable to unprick the mystery of the 'bubble of stone' and those like Dewi Sant who with the heel of his episcopal staff created St. Mary's spring. This equates to the bright menstrual blood in 'Song at the Year's Turning'(SYT) that must run unstanched in order that like Dylan in *Poem in October*, Thomas's song might still be heard in a year's turning. The spry imaginative faculties of a saint and poet are drawn further into focus when the meaning of Byzantium for Yeats is reflected upon:

Yeats thought that Shelley "believed inspiration a kind of death," and Byzantium is for Yeats a state of inspiration, a kind of death, and an actual historical city, all at once. For this to be possible, phantasmagoria is necessary, and Yeats begins and ends his poem as a phantasmagoria. Indeed, the *given* of the poem is this phantasmagoria; either we grant it to Yeats, or the poem cannot be coherent. *Kubla Khan* is a precisely similar phantasmagoria, and the Byzantium of Yeats is thus analogous to Coleridge's Xanadu, another domed sacred city (an analogy first remarked by G. Wilson Knight). That is, to read *Kubla Khan* we must allow Coleridge his waking dream, and to read *Byzantium* we must accept the dialectic of waking dream also.⁵⁴

The 'bubble of stone' is correlate with Yeats's 'moonlit dome' that disdains 'All that man is' as in its enduring resistance to the anxiety of time it acts as a profound metaphor for the sensitivity of belief and the power of art to confer a limited and antithetical immortality upon certain gifted men. This corresponds to the death-like figure of Prytherch who with primary vacancy and antithetically bright eyes recapitulates the root of black and blank, *bhel*. Jeffares argues that the moonlit dome's sematron or gong can be read as a warning sign, an intimation of the nearness of death⁵⁵ and this is exactly what the patient figure of Prytherch is supposed to signify as he sharpens his scythe in 'A Line from St. David's'(BT).

Yet in 'A Line from St. David's'(BT) the image of the strolling Prytherch is just one among many that pass before the reader's eye like a scatterbrain series of images as seen in a fevered dream. This phantasmagoria at

once holds in dialectical interplay the pre-linguistic child's plasticity and the pure art of the 'bubble of stone' and its Shelleyan shadow, the horned blade honing Prytherch. The 'bubble of stone' as an image of eternity is slavishly analogous to the Byzantium dome inasmuch as Bloom argues:

Present only is the dome, image of Eternity, scorning and outshining the human, for it presides here over a phase of being that has no human incarnations, though we cannot know as yet whether it is the phase of complete beauty or of complete plasticity...in the Phantasmagoria of this Eternity, Phases 1 and 15 of Yeats's system somehow exist simultaneously. Yeats, himself not a ghost but recently having come very near the gates of death, confronts a purged image, a Virgilian shade, at once an emblem of 'death-in-life' or complete plasticity.⁵⁶

Or as Kermode argues: 'What, after all, is the *Vision*, but a blueprint of a palace of art, a place in the mind where men may suffer...where the artist explains his joy in making at the cost of isolation and suffering?'⁵⁷

Dark age St. David's is Thomas's sacred city and if as Bloom argues Yeat's Emperor is 'himself as much a surrogate for God as the Kubla Khan of Coleridge'⁵⁸ then St. David as the creator of the sacred city of St. David's is Thomas's surrogate or translucent and moonlit synecdoche for God. Bloom has also argued that 'Kubla Khan...builds a dome of pleasure for himself, as the rulers of Byzantium built a greater dome to honor God. But the Byzantium dome, while apt for Yeats's purposes, is too theological for Coleridge's poem. Kubla builds the dome for himself, and the poet with his music will build a dome in air, matching and at length overgoing the mightiest of human material power.'⁵⁹ The afflatus of Thomas has formed a perfect sphere of stone that endlessly levitates above the Welsh fountain which is timeless as God because it also transcends the materialism of neo-Edwardian England. Over and above Coleridge's oriental dome or Yeats's near-eastern demi-sphere the 'bubble of stone' also recapitulates these lines from *Paradise Lost*:

from the first

Wast present, and with mighty wing outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
And mad'st it pregnant... [I:19-22]

Bloom writes of these lines:

Milton, hardly dove-like in temperament, spreads out the mighty wings of his own spirit, and broods on the universal blank or vast abyss he now perpetually inhabits, until he makes that blank pregnant with the colours that are the tropes of *Paradise Lost*...In Milton's grand metaleptic reversal, the account of Creation in Genesis has become a Midrash upon Milton. True time is the present in which Milton writes his poem, a time in which spirit again creates, as it did in the beginning, and all time in between is de-sacralized when compared to the truth of creation.⁶⁰

The 'bubble of stone' exists in the 'here' of the poet's creative faculty and in tandem with Bloom's reading of Milton Thomas de-sacralizes all time between himself and his precursors and thus Thomas returns to those times before the bishopric of St. David's was forced to genuflect to the archbishopric of Canterbury. In these transumptively introjected times his mind is able to imaginatively prick the 'bubble of stone' and fertilize the antithetical embryo of creativity.

The death-like readiness of Prytherch's question mark falls across the page as if it were a field of transumptive ears of corn. A corollary of this is that his shade also falls across the 'universal blank' since as Bloom argues: 'Milton's "universal blank" itself is a grim substitution for the major Western trope of nature as a book...If nature is to be a blank page, or an abyss, then a transumption of the trope of natural writing becomes a necessity. The celestial light is therefore introjected even as the mist of Chaos is projected, cast out onto the fallen angels.'⁶¹ Prytherch is the scholar of the field's pages and the mists of the imagination fulminate around him in 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL) just as in his thorn-bright eyes the introjected celestial light remains unpricked by the materialistic denizens of the Universe of Death. Prytherch, though, is Thomas's Covering Cherub and the fact that his character is antithetically anterior to Thomas accounts for the poet's confident depiction of him brightening the pre-dawn mists with the inner light of the imagination. If Thomas had depicted his own dome as the repository of such illumination he would have announced himself as heir to a far more expansive estate than the mortgaged soil through which Prytherch paddles. Indeed he would have proclaimed his dome as ennobled by an aureola of genius inasmuch as the lines in 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL) that are of most interest to this reading derive from the last couplets of Coleridge's uncoupled 'Constancy to an Ideal Object':

And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when

The woodman winding westward up the glen
 At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze
 The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,
 Sees before him, gliding without tread,
 An image with glory round its head;
 The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues,
 Nor knows he makes the shadow he pursues!

Minus the snow and reduced to this coupleted verse block the above is virtually the same poem as 'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL):

That man, Prytherch, with the torn cap,
 I saw him often, framed in the gap
 Between two hazels with his sharp eyes,
 Bright as thorns, watching the sunrise
 Filling the valley with its pale yellow
 Light, where the sheep and the lambs went haloed
 With grey mist lifting from the dew.
 Or was it a likeness that the twigs drew
 With bold pencilling upon that bare
 piece of sky?

Deserving especial attention is the note that Coleridge appends to his poem: 'Pindar's fine remark respecting the different effects of Music, on different characters, holds equally true of Genius -as many as are not delighted by it are disturbed, perplexed, irritated. The beholder either recognizes it as a projected form of his own Being, that moves before him with a Glory round its head, or recoils from it as a Spectre.'^{6 2} This is Thomas's Covering Cherub poem *par excellence* and Coleridge's description of the figure of Genius as a 'Spectre' has itself an uncanny perfection about it. Prytherch is an over-determined figure and yet Coleridge predicts this discussion since he also postulates that this spectral presence is 'a projected form' of the author's 'own being'. The major difference between the two poems is that whereas Thomas's is an Easter poem Coleridge's idealistic love for Asra is caught in something of a mid-winter time-warp. Thomas's human form is framed by overt references to art such as pencilling and drawing and the Ideal Object of Thomas's poem is therefore the artistic or antithetical imagination. Thomas's Ideal Object contrasts sharply with Coleridge's anagrammatical Asra which remained metaphysically and metaphorically disconnected from the real repository of his affections, Sara Hutchinson. Hence 'Hope' and 'Despair' meet to form another

experience of death-in-life for the poet and as such there is an echo of the brewing storm of the *Dejection* ode in this poem since this is what causes the poet to shelter a platonic projection under a mortal porch. The difference is that while Coleridge torments himself with a love-madness and in his *Dejection* ode states that the woodman cannot now climb so high Thomas's love is platonized as that of the believer for the Nazarenic Prytherch figure. This is the chief reason that Thomas sees a sanctified and visionary figure in a dew-mist where the lambs of God are haloed and Coleridge's wood-cutter sees an apparition of the unhallowed Brocken-spectre in a snow-mist.

'The Gap in the Hedge'(AAL) swaps the winter of Coleridge's *Constancy to an Ideal Object* for an Easter vision. Bloom has argued: 'To originate anything in language we must resort to a trope, and that trope must defend us against a prior trope...' "repetition is inherent in the very meaning of the word 'meaning.'" ⁶³ Thomas's defensive tropes become a compulsive repetition as the poet echoes the eternal I AM and the poet asserts himself as an epebe of the supreme manipulator of metaphor. However, such is the curse of belatedness that only the brave dare face or rather unconsciously purposefully forget their precursor. Thus like Perseus advancing recursant towards the reflected image of Medusa the spring thaw of Thomas compares well with the petrified Coleridge whom as Bloom argues with reference to the *Dejection* ode lacked the talismanic quality of obstinate self-belief:

Coleridge is one of the authentic poets, not of the truth of creation, but of the universal blank, the void of decreation. Wordsworth may have been prompted by an earlier version of the *Dejection* Ode when he wrote the astonishing section IX of his *Intimations* Ode, where a very Coleridgean child gazes upon shifting realities with how blank an eye:

But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized...

The misgivings are blank because young Hartley Coleridge, like his father before him, could not accept the world of the reality principle, a world not governed by the sympathetic and compensatory imagination. But Wordsworth's blank transumes Coleridge almost in passing, en route to the more

dangerous and adventurous transumption of the sacred Milton. The blank misgivings are after all a later version of the 'blind man's eye' of *Tintern Abbey*; they are another instance of that retroactive meaningfulness that Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*, the human sense of being always after the event, the human nightmare of the sense that the dreadful has already happened. The dreadful *is* what *is* happening at that moment in *Dejection: An Ode* when Samuel Taylor Coleridge... cries out: 'And still I gaze -and with how blank an eye!' What this says, amidst much else, is, 'I am not John Milton,' who did not see, but who felt, greatly, while:

I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

The blank reappears, with dreadful eloquence, in Coleridge's *Limbo*, where 'Limbo den' enshrines 'the mere horror of blank Naught-at-all.' Coleridge thus refuses transumption, and accepts poetic and human defeat.⁶⁴

Coleridge's *Limbo* remembers the 'old Man with a steady Look sublime' to this discussion. The old man is 'As Moonlight on the Dial of Day' and as he stops at his 'earthly Task' is 'blind'. The Prytherch figure possesses a 'smile/ Vague as moonlight' ('Valediction'(AAL)) and is also 'blind' ('Enigma'(AAL)) to the imaginative impregnations that Thomas intends for the earth. Only the moon's spotlight separates the Prytherch figure of 'Valediction'(AAL) from being mistaken for kine and in 'Enigma'(AAL) Thomas projects onto his precursive alter ego the possibility that the orally received lore that he has inherited from the age of innocence is an 'embryonic thought that never grows' (it should also be noted that Limbo is the place where the still-born infants languish in Catholic theology). This is the symbolic opposite of the 'embryonic poem still coiled in the ivory skull' ('Memories of Yeats whilst Travelling to Holyhead'(SF)) and it becomes Thomas's task to give breach-birth to this figure or else face the fate of Coleridge in 'A Person from Porlock'(SYT) where 'the embryo' remains 'maimed in the womb'. However, without Prytherch's anteriority as a precursive double Thomas could not strike his antithetical flint. Prytherch like the 'bubble of stone' and the praying figure of Thomas in 'The Moon in Lley'n'(LS) straddles Phases 1 and 15 since residing within each is the unresolved possibility for both states.

The figure that Thomas borrows from Coleridge is that of youth and age

and the poem that most obviously manifests this Coleridgean figure is Thomas's poem 'Lament for Prytherch.'(SYT) The poem begins:

When I was young, when I was young!
 Were you ever young, Prytherch, a rich farmer:
 Cows in the byre, sheep in the pen,
 A brown egg under each hen,
 The barns oozing corn like honey?

and is to all intents and purposes an upside-down sonnet with the sestet lengthening from five lines to six when it is remembered that the line 'When I was young, when I was young!' forms one short and one part-line in the poem that Thomas has pilfered it from:

Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,
 Where Hope clung feeding, like a bee-
 Both were mine! Life went a maying
 With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,
 When I was young!
 When I was young? -Ah, woful When!
 Ah! for the change 'twixt Now and Then!

There is no honour in Thomas's theft; that Thomas felt the need to plagiarise a notorious plagiariser indicates a self-conscious desire to resolve his on other occasions subconscious debt to Coleridge. The poem's octet contrasts an elderly Prytherch with the creatively rich Kulak of the quintet/sextet:

You are old now; time's geometry
 Upon your face by which we tell
 Your sum of years has with sharp care
 Conspired and crossed your brow with grief.
 Your heart that is dry as a dead leaf
 Undone by frost's cruel chemistry
 Clings in vain to the bare bough
 Where once in April a bird sang.

Ignoring the unsubtle references to *To Autumn* Thomas's inverted sonnet associates youth and age with spring and autumn and hence the relative creative riches of poetic earliness and its nadir; the poverty of belated gleaning (whether this is of ears

or leeches).

The phrase 'frost's cruel chemistry' has to remind of Coleridge's more famous 'secret ministry of frost' and Thomas's recapitulation of the theme of youth and age is further compounded when it is noticed that these lines from *Youth and Age*:

This body that does me grievous wrong,
O'er aery cliffs and glittering sands,
How lightly then it flashed along:-

form a natural double with these lines from *Frost at Midnight*:

But *thou* my Babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain,

With the exception of the plagiarised first line of 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) Thomas's poem is an expansion of these four lines from the rondo of *Frost at Midnight*:

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch

It is almost as if Thomas is quoting a fragment of Coleridge's wistful later revision of *Frost at Midnight* (i.e. *Youth and Age*) at the younger and still poetically potent Coleridge. This ironic upbraiding of Coleridge's wide-eyed optimism in terms of the poet's later pessimism reduces to the realization that the Prytherch figure in 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) is identifiable with Coleridge.

'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) reads as a conversational retort to the Prytherch figure's Coleridgean reminiscence of youth. We might assume that the peasant has said something on the lines of 'Ah, yes, when I was young!' and that this sparks off Thomas's learned rejoinder. As such the fictional peasant would be quite justified in saying:

I am Prytherch. Forgive me. I don't know
What you are talking about; your thoughts flow
Too swiftly for me; I cannot dawdle

Along their banks and fish in their quick stream
With crude fingers.

It is ironic that Prytherch should assert his fictional identity because in 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT), the immediate Prytherch poem before 'Invasion on the Farm'(SYT), Thomas clearly takes the Prytherch figure for Coleridge. Thomas here usurps Coleridge's garrulous role as the sage of Highgate and patronises his precursor by talking over his head.

However, if we listen to the sole speech Thomas allows the Prytherch figure then his weary plaint augments the theme of youth and age. Prytherch speaks of the 'quick stream' of Thomas's thought which he contrasts with his own crudeness. This builds into a serene meditation upon the topic of loneliness:

I am alone, exposed
In my own fields with no place to run
From your sharp eyes. I, who a moment back
Paddled in the bright grass, the old farm
Warm as a sack about me, feel the cold
Winds of the world blowing. The patched gate
You left open will never be shut again.

In *The Wild Swans at Coole* Yeats writes: 'They paddle in the cold/ Companionable streams or climb the air; Their hearts have not grown old; Passion or conquest, wander where they will, Attend upon them still.' Yeats's poem responds to Maude Gonne's rejection of his second proposal of marriage. Yet Yeats is not depressed about the refusal and instead laments his relief and the consequent loss of feeling that he has experienced. An intensity has dimmed and Yeats connects this to the possibility that the imagination might fail to fire. For an immutable dedication to Maude Gonne Thomas swaps his obsession with the less than swan-like Prytherch figure. Prytherch paddles in the bright grass much as Yeats's brilliant creatures glide more than swim in the lake at Coole. The loss in *amour* that equates to a fear that the imagination might ebb with the years is connected by Thomas to Coleridge via a wooden-horse word. Yeats's swans are 'companionable' as is the fluttering film on the grate and the film presages the entrance of a stranger just as Yeats's swan's symbolise the estrangement of the poet from an earlier more passionate self.

The language of 'Invasion on the Farm'(SYT) is martial as words like 'Invasion' and 'sack' indicate and this is similar to 'A Peasant'(SF) where Thomas speaks of the Prytherch figure as an 'impregnable fortress' that resists the 'winds' attrition'. It is perhaps fanciful to link Prytherch's crude fingers to Leda's 'terrified,

vague fingers.' The Prytherch figure lacks knowledge and power and clothes and it is tempting to connect his patched gate with the gates of Troy and the 'cold/ Winds of the world' with 'cold brain of the machine/ That will destroy you and your race?' ('Too Late'(T)) It is more probable that the Prytherch figure represents Thomas's temple whilst the winds represent the labyrinth through which the Prytherch figure wanders.

In essence Thomas contrasts the black-lipped⁶⁵ procrastinator with the Coleridge who according to Dorothy had on his first visit to Racedown 'more of the "poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling" than I ever witnessed' and who Richard Holmes argues 'seemed [to the Wordsworth's] a sort of incarnation of the Romantic poetic personality'.⁶⁶ This dynamic precociousness finds its contrariety in the introversion and enervated self-dramatization that Coleridge's later poetry increasingly displays or as Hazlitt mused in his character sketch of Coleridge in *The Spirit of the Age*: 'The present is an age of talkers, and not of doers; and the reason is, that the world is growing old.'⁶⁷ The implication of Hazlitt's diagnosis is that Coleridge has talked away his talent: 'If Mr. Coleridge had not been the most impressive talker of his age, he would probably have been the finest writer'.⁶⁸ Hazlitt's is precisely the criticism that Thomas levels at Coleridge by proxy of the harangue that Prytherch receives in 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT).

Frost at Midnight is triangular in the sense that time in the poem moves from disquieted present to tranquil past to visionary future and then back to a triumphant present. However, this triumphalism is advised inasmuch as Bloom argues: 'Memory, moving by its overtly arbitrary but deeply designed associations, creates an identity between the mature poet and the child who is his ancestor, as well as with his own child.'⁶⁹ This sense of the past's deterministic effect upon what should be the freedom of the present is intensified by Lucy Newlyn's argument that *Frost at Midnight* has a Chinese box effect:

an imprisoned man, recalling his imprisoned childhood, recalling another childhood in which he was free. The structure is itself a kind of trap: initially, for the reader, who believes that beyond the final imprisonment there is a primal freedom; permanently, for the poem, because the intensity of present exclusion is shown inevitably to qualify what is past. It is as though the prophetic music is invented, to prevent the infinite regression of imprisonments that might otherwise happen.⁷⁰

These lower deeps are the preserve of Milton's Satan whose despair, as Kierkegaard argued, was 'absolute because Satan, as pure spirit, is pure consciousness, and for

Satan (and for all men in his predicament) every increase in consciousness is an increase in despair'. Opposed to this 'self-consciousness' is the strength of the 'imagination, a more than rational energy by which thought could seek to heal itself.'⁷¹

In 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) Thomas's silent interlocutor is an aged Prytherch who signifies the decline in poetic fecundity of Coleridge's muse and also those Coleridgean narratives that return to over-determine Thomas's poem. Thomas has thus interrogated a likeness outside of the self and upon discovering its identity as an ancestor to the self then recapitulates its reminiscences of past adventures and plenty as an ingenious commentary upon his own belated and deeply indebted activity. Thomas's poem is thus self-reflexively swaddled in a mesh of protective irony that defends against the return of the over-determining influence of Coleridge.

The One Life is unmawkishly figured in *Frost at Midnight* as the frost's secret ministry and what enables the poet to begin his three-pointed journey into the past and then equally imaginary future is the fluttering film on the grate. What is significant about 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) is that it represents an expansion of Coleridge's blessing to his son retroped as a Jeremiad. In opposition to this curse stands 'The Village'(SYT) which in turn represents a blessed extension of the solitude and silence beloved of antithetical men. This is mirrored by *Frost at Midnight* where the secret ministry of cold and quiet is the antithesis of carillons of bells on Fair-days. Thus Coleridge's depiction of disquietude within quietude is re-fashioned by Thomas into the vision of the unspoilt back-water that is 'The Village'(SYT). 'The Village'(SYT) and 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) represent a double poetic birth in which 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) emerges from the womb of *Frost at Midnight* clutching its twin brother's heel.

M. H. Abrams has recorded Coleridge's liking for high winds: 'The rising wind...is correlated with...the renewal of life and emotional vigour after apathy and death-like torpor'.⁷² Abrams compares this broom-like wind to outbreaks of creativity after prolonged 'imaginative sterility' and this Romantic metaphor is alluded to in Hazlitt's essay upon his first acquaintance with poets: 'A thunder-storm came while we were at the inn, and Coleridge was running out bare-headed to enjoy the commotion of the elements in the *Valley of Rocks*, but as if in spite, the clouds only muttered a few angry sounds, and let fall a few refreshing drops.'⁷³ Though an influential study of Thomas should be as unlike to a source hunt as Bloom is to Lowes, it is irresistible to point out the similarities between Hazlitt's description of the sudden evaporation of a potentially inspirational moment and 'Coleridge'(SYT):

And at the tide's retreat,
 When the vexed ocean camping far
 On the horizon filled the air
 With dull thunder, ominous and low,
 He felt his theories break and go
 In small clouds about the sky,

The most tendentious word in this passage has to be 'vexed' which echoes the terse apology Prospero proffers to Ferdinand as the thought of Caliban irrupts into the Masque of Ceres: 'Sir, I am vexed'. This is analogous to the Coleridgean calm that 'vexes meditation' and which signals that the poet feels obliged to marry his mind to the secret ministry of frost. That Thomas uses it to describe the wracks of cloud that dissolve into the Lynton sky again recapitulates the sudden turn from harvest and cornucopia to the frosts of winter that 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) figures. Like Thomas's 'The Village'(SYT) Prospero has held temporal sequence according to his at times tempestuous temper and this potent metaphoric transumption is stifled in Thomas's poem by a knocking that cries against the poet's very heart.

The identity of the mysterious girl who in 'The Village'(SYT) 'crosses/ From door to door' is resolved if it is considered that the word 'scale' not only suggests platonic measurement but also that this representative of the brave new world is involved in some sort of survey. The unexplained girl is therefore someone who knocks from door to door in order to discover 'bland' facts about this 'last outpost of time past.' She is a stranger: a Saul not a Paul with the scales still weighing heavily upon his eye [Acts.IX.18]; one who might bring the twentieth century flooding back into Thomas's dream of his equivalent equilibric Ottery. Or rather these 'scales *are his pride*, shut up together *as with a close seal*' [Job.41.15] and which will reverse the process that St. Augustine here describes: 'a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in my heart, there arose a mighty wind, bringing a mighty shower of tears'; with the result that 'by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.'⁷⁴

In 'Out of the Hills'(SF) the Prytherch figure is described as possessing a 'scaly eye' that 'glitters' and we are invited to 'witness his swift undoing' as he becomes a stranger to himself during his visit to a town on market day. One is always arriving at the Prytherch figure and the aberrant appearance of a census-taker in 'The Village'(SYT) is transformed in 'Lament for Prytherch'(SYT) into the naturalistic figure of Prytherch. This transformation finds its symbolic opposite in the conversion of the film on the grate in *Frost at Midnight* into the companionable form of Coleridge's son Hartley's imagined natural education. Both 'Lament for

Coleridge'(SYT) and *Frost at Midnight* figure the desire to live in the morning of the world and in 'The Village'(SYT) these wishful thoughts are dismissed by the figure of the stranger. But a mere page later in 'Coleridge'(SYT) the figure of the mysterious interloper gains entrance into Thomas's poem as an uncanny knocking:

Coleridge never could understand,
Dazed by the knocking of the wind
In the ear's passage,

By the last poem in Thomas's Coleridgean tetralogy, 'A Person from Porlock'(SYT), this 'knocking' resolves itself as the poet's inability to overcome his authorial aphasia:

There came a knocking at the front door,
The eternal, nameless caller at the door;
The sound pierced the still hall,
But not the stillness about his brain.
It came again. He arose, pacing the floor
Strewn with books, his mind big with the poem
Soon to be born, his nerves tense to endure
The long torture of delayed birth.

Delayed birth: the embryo maimed in the womb
By the casual caller, the chance cipher that jogs
The poet's elbow, spilling the cupped dream.

The encounter over, he came, seeking his room;
Seeking contact with his lost self;
Groping his way endlessly back
On the poem's path, calling by name
The foetus stifling in the mind's gloom.

The 'lost self' of 'A Person from Porlock'(SYT) is identifiable as the self-same 'pale ghost/ Of an earlier self' that Thomas trusts with in 'Temptation of a Poet'(PS). But the most arresting part of this poem is the word 'cipher' which according to the O.E.D. can mean: 'An arithmetical symbol of no value or a naught. He who or that which fills a place but is of no importance, a nonentity. A secret manner of writing...intelligible only to those possessing the key.' The businessman from Porlock who interrupts Coleridge is concerned with monetary matters of no value

and the metonymical figure that signifies this naught is the 'jog' or 'knock' that spills the cupped dream. The Prytherch figure is as much a dark saying as any parable in that he is at once a scale or drinking cup with which the poet sips the milk of paradise and the cipher that knocks this cup from the poet's hands.

The character of Prytherch represents a paradox and is at once a knocker, a critic, or even an Idiot Questioner; one who ruins creative potential or prevents the knocking of an arrow to the bow of Apollo. He is also the subject of Thomas's poetry and is therefore a Iago who has himself had his brains knocked out. In relation to Xeno's paradox Thomas has written that he 'persists in knocking on the door of understanding'⁷⁵ and this echoes the Sermon on the Mount:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock,
and it shall be opened unto you:

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth;
and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.(Matthew:VII.7-8)

Thomas's usage of the verb 'to knock' is the antithesis of this and is more consonant with the esoteric message of Jesus's putative preachings. The suspected eschatological meaning of the Parable of the Sower is that the end-time of the earth is near and that when the angel puts in his scythe all will be fruition and triumph. The incommensurable Prytherch figure contains both these oppositions in that Prytherch is exactly this 'knocking' or wreath-strewn person from Porlock who stuns Thomas into poetic inaction while at the same time he equates to the agonistically cast out Coleridgean narratives that provide the poet with a triumphal theme in the first place.

Thomas tropes the knocking of the business man from Porlock as the echoing wind inside the ear of Coleridge and in 'A Person from Porlock'(SYT) the 'knocking at the front door' becomes a hideous portrait of artistic sterility. 'Delayed birth' is twice repeated and the last line of the poem contains the grotesque image of Thomas calling out as if for a lost child to the 'foetus stifling in the mind's gloom.'⁷⁶ The cupped dream's miscarriage is therefore a desperate knocking at the womb gates which should be associated with the incommensurability of the Prytherch figure and the organic analogue.

Thomas explores the antithesis of this anamnesis or the drawing of 'gulped tears' from the 'dark well' of Prytherch in his essay 'Where do we go from here?':

'A little water clears us of this deed,' scoff the Lady Macbeths
of this world, appealing to reason. But the heart has its reasons

that reason knows not of. 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?' asks Macbeth. And the answer still wakes an echo in a million hearts:

No, this hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

So, in a way, it is the moral argument that persuades. The tough, the thug, the hard-headed businessman say: 'I go my way. I do as I please. I make the world serve my turn. And when my time comes, I'm not afraid to die! Stone dead has no bedfellow!' True. If you are stone dead, you can feel nothing. So what is there to fear? But just supposing it is not true? Which is not impossible.

Methought I heard a voice cry: 'Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep.'⁷⁷

Forgetting 'the tough' and 'the thug' it is of note that Thomas associates 'the hard-headed businessman' with Macbeth and the theme of Macbeth's guilt and alienation from God Who enters the above passage as the possibility that we might die and not become as a clod of clay. In Act II scene 3 the Porter exclaims: 'Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were a porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key...Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub?' One can easily imagine Bloom's Beelzebub half-turning from his manuscript and shouting-out the same distracted sentence. In a disturbing example of dramatic irony Macduff assumes that: 'Our knocking has awak'd him' which serves as a symbolic doubling of Macbeth's remorseful cry: 'Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!' In terms of Coleridge's fumbling efforts to revive his symphony and song Macbeth is now: 'Seeking the contact with his lost self'('Coleridge'(SYT)) or as Macbeth laments: 'To know the deed, 'twere best not know myself.'

Yet murder is a fine art and, as De Quincey also realised, is the antithesis of those who long for the knock of the everyday: '-if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved...when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard'.⁷⁸ Thomas's Porlockian trope of knocking originates in 'The Village'(SYT) as the census taker who 'crosses/ From door to door'. In Thomas's Ptolomaic universe the mysterious girl is a stranger

from tomorrow or the Copernican world of the present. The appearance of this representative of a culture that would reduce this Platonic village to a specifically defined and annotated place and time signifies the entrance of death into the poem. The Prytherch narratives only just break the poem's surface and yet the girl dominates the poem to the extent that she counter-balances Thomas's conceit that the outside world is a mere wheel turning around the village's hub.

'The Village'(SYT) has Yeatsian elements and the dog cracking his fleas is the same dog of whom Yeats asked the question: 'But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?' The figure of Plato is also very Yeatsian and in the context of these flea-imitators his presence asks the question: 'What then?' Or rather how long will these dreams of subjectivity resist the impingement of the objective world. Thomas derives his anti-self from Yeats but in this series of poems portrays the destruction of possible ecstasy as a Coleridgean figure for 'those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute...the lasting misery and loneliness of the world.'⁷ It is highly appropriate that the Prytherch figure should develop into the businessman from Porlock since his identity in this seriation ultimately derives from the film on the grate that presages the entrance of the stranger in *Frost at Midnight*. As such the initial impetus for the 'The Village'(SYT) is revealed as the uncanny silence that descends like a hymen-thin snowfall across Coleridge's psyche.

We have returned to the silence and desertion of the streets that one imagines accompanied the passing of Duncan's cortege. It remains only to observe that the peculiar depth of solemnity that accompanies the murder of Duncan is followed by an outbreak of black humour. The best production of Macbeth that I have seen, Cusack and Pryce's study in the psychology of a childless couple, had the demerit of introducing an unscripted 'Knock, knock!' joke into the Porter's role. My version of which is 'Knock, knock!' 'Who's there?' 'Porlock.' 'Porlock who?' 'Iago Porlock'.

CHAPTER 4NOTES:

- 1). *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Arthur Murphy, 12 vols (London: Nichols, 1816), IX, p.276.
- 2). Elaine Shepherd, *R. S. Thomas Conceding an Absence* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.155.
- 3). These two poems were published in *The Anglo-Welsh Review* in 1969 whereas *H'm* was published in 1972. *Not That He Brought Flowers* was published in 1968 and thus 'The Grave' marks a watershed in Thomas's poetry.
- 4). R. S. Thomas, 'Abercuawg', in *Selected Prose*, p.160.
- 5). M. H. Abrams, 'The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', in *English Romantic Poets*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1975), p.39.
- 6). *Ibid.*, p.39.
- 7). *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by James Engell, 16 vols (London: Princeton, 1985), VII, p.44.
- 8). M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference* (Cardiff: Wales U. P., 1992), p.111.
- 9). *Ibid.*, p.112.
- 10). *Ibid.*, p.112.
- 11). *Ibid.*, p.113.
- 12). Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard U. P., 1996), p.23.
- 13). *Ibid.*, p.24.
- 14). *Ibid.*, p.28.
- 15). *Op. Cit.*, *The Anxiety of Influence*, pp.35-39.
- 16). *Op. Cit.*, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, pp.25-26.
- 17). *Op. Cit.*, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.26.
- 18). *Op. Cit.*, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.29.
- 19). *Op. Cit.*, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.32.
- 20). *Op. Cit.*, *Internal Difference*, p.109.
- 21). *Op. Cit.*, *Internal Difference*, p.110.
- 22). *Op. Cit.*, *Internal Difference*, p.109.
- 23). *Op. Cit.*, *Internal Difference*, p.110.
- 24). *Op. Cit.*, "'The Gap in the Hedge': R. S. Thomas's Emblem Poetry", p.167.
- 25). *Ibid.*, p.166.
- 26). Stephen Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard U. P., 1985), p.8.
- 27). *Ibid.*, p.8.

- 28). Ibid., p.9.
- 29). Ibid., pp.9-10.
- 30). Op. Cit., *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.66.
- 31). Op. Cit., *Selected Prose*, p.159.
- 32). Op. Cit., 'Neb', p.52.
- 33). Op. Cit., *Personification and the Sublime*, p.10.
- 34). Op. Cit., *R. S. Thomas Conceding and Absence*, p.1.
- 35). Op. Cit., *Selected Prose*, p.159.
- 36). Op. Cit., "'The Gap in the Hedge": R. S. Thomas's Emblem Poetry', p.168.
- 37). Op. Cit., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, VII, p.304.
- 38). Op. Cit., 'The Uses of Prytherch', p.39. Stevenson writes: 'The name Iago Prytherch, strange to English ears, is common enough in Welsh. Iago simply means James, pronounced with a short a, as in 'baggage' or 'map'; it bears no relation, probably, to the long-aed villain of *Othello*.'
- 39). Op. Cit., *The Western Canon*, pp.177-178.
- 40). James, or Iago in Welsh, was the younger brother of Jesus. Iago's Christ-like connotations mean he is something of a negative double for Christ.
- 41). Op. Cit., *Furious Interiors*, p.323.
- 42). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.217.
- 43). Ibid., p.218.
- 44). Ibid., pp.204-205.
- 45). Ibid., p.218.
- 46). Ibid., p.239.
- 47). Ibid., p.235.
- 48). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.207.
- 49). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.225.
- 50). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, pp.214-215.
- 51). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, p.78.
- 52). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, p.81.
- 53). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.215.
- 54). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.390.
- 55). Op. Cit., *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W B Yeats*, p.345.
- 56). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, pp.390-391.
- 57). Op. Cit., *Romantic Image*, p.26.
- 58). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.392.
- 59). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.212.
- 60). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, p.84.
- 61). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, pp.80-81.
- 62). Op. Cit., *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by E.

- H. Coleridge, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), p.456.
- 63). Op. Cit., *A Map of Misreading*, p.69.
- 64). Op. Cit., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, pp.84-85.
- 65). Richard Holmes, *Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), p.116.
- 66). Richard Holmes, *Early Visions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), pp.149-150.
- 67). Op. Cit., *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, XI, p.28.
- 68). Op. Cit., *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, XI, p.30.
- 69). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.199.
- 70). Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), p.37.
- 71). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.127.
- 72). Op. Cit., 'The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', pp.37-38.
- 73). Op. Cit., *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, XVII, p.120.
- 74). Op. Cit., 'The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', p.47.
- 75). Op. Cit., 'Abercuawg', in *Selected Prose*, p.162.
- 76). The immediate source of Thomas's hideous childbirth imagery is perhaps Berowne's speech in Act I, scene i, of *Love's Labour's Lost*: 'Why should I joy in any abortive birth?/ At Christmas I no more desire a rose/ Than wish a snow in May's new-fangl'd shows; But like of each thing that in season grows.
- 77). R. S. Thomas, 'Where do we go from here?' in *Selected Prose*, p.150. Thomas also mentions that the prostitute science 'is the drop of bitterness in the modern cup' and concludes his essay upon the subject of the great hereafter thus: 'It is T.S.Eliot's "still point, there the dance is", Wordsworth's "central peace, subsisting at the heart of endless agitation". It is even closer. It is within us, as Jesus said. That is why there is no need to go anywhere from here.'
- 78). *De Quincey's Works*, 15 vols (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1863), XIII, pp.196-197.
- 79). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.224. I take this from Bloom because he also adds: 'The "luminaries," Shelley's version of the subjective, move toward the ecstasy of a self-destructive "intensity and passion," a more glorious end than "those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute...the lasting misery and loneliness of the world," which the objective might claim as wisdom.'

CHAPTER 5:

ISAIAH'S COAL:

R. S. THOMAS &

THE MIRROR OF FIRE

Bloom has argued that 'there are three major biblical tropes for God, and these are voice, fire, and chariot'.¹ In this chapter voice is identified as the song of Rhiannon's birds, fire with the embers of the Prytherch figure's mind, and chariot with the Manichean machine. The fire of perspectivism represents Thomas's attempt to flame through the firmament of his precursor's influence. The chorus of Rhiannon's birds causes Thomas, like Eve, to exclaim 'with thee conversing I forget all time'. [IV:639] The machine, meanwhile, is a metonymy of a metonymy for God. These rank as Thomas's most successful tropes and figure the gradual shift in Thomas's poetic from Askesis to Apophrades. This chapter is devoted to the tripartite relationship that exists between Thomas, Yeats and Shelley. Once more I shall argue that to escape the pervasive influence of the precursor Thomas writes as if he were his precursor's muse. Yeats is the decisive influence upon Thomas's nationalistic utterances, as I shall, in a backhanded way, touch upon. However, the political poems of Thomas have been read to death and this thesis concerns itself with aesthetics. Whereas Thomas's love of bird song and his pining for the Condition of Fire owe much to Yeats, Thomas derives his misprision of Merkabah solely from the atheistic Shelley and *The Triumph of Life*. In relation to this poem's title Bloom argues:

The imaginative lesson of *The Triumph of Life* is wholly present in the poem's title: life always triumphs, for life, our life, is after all what the Preface to *Alastor* called it, a 'lasting misery and loneliness.' One Power only, the Imagination, is capable of redeeming life, 'but that Power which strikes the luminaries of the world with sudden darkness and extinction, by awakening them to too exquisite a perception of its influences, dooms to a slow and poisonous decay those meaner spirits that dare to abjure its dominion.' In *The Triumph of Life*, the world's luminaries are still the poets, stars of evening and morning, 'heaven's living eyes,' but they fade into a double light, the light of nature or the sun, and the harsher and more blinding light of Life, the destructive chariot of the poem's vision.²

Shelley's chariot of Life derives from Ezekiel and Revelation and also Dante and Milton. In Ezekiel the 'chapter terminates in the vision of "the likeness of a throne" appearing over the cherubim and their chariot, with a flaming "likeness as the appearance of a man" upon the throne...the Enthroned Man on the firmament above the chariot has always been read as direct prophecy of the Son of God.'³ The crux of Shelley's misreading of this tradition is summarized by Bloom thus: 'Where

chariot and cherubim are "instinct with Spirit" in the Christian tradition, here in Shelley chariot and cherubim (team and charioteer) are instinct with the reverse of Spirit, are possessed by Death-in-Life. The warm light of the Christian chariot is matched by the cold glow, the "icy glare" of the chariot of Life.⁴

Thomas's depiction of the machine represents a dehumanised misprision of Shelley's humanised vision of Merkabah or the chariot of God. *H'm* is the pivotal volume in Thomas's poetic career and after 'The Grave' Thomas's poetic topography becomes the domain of the demiurgical machine. The transformation that takes place in *H'm* is the supercession of Promethean perspectivism for the trope of Merkabah. Or rather the Promethean phase of the quest is replaced by that of the Real Man, the Imagination.

This discussion concerns itself with the said trio of tropes for God and begins with Thomas's statement that, 'The aircraft, the motors were rending the silence; the lights and glow from cities and village street lamps were hiding the stars...the Machine is dehumanizing. It...insulates man from natural processes.'⁵ Just as the machine has made Nature retreat from man it also disconnects man from God 'breaking the fields'/ Mirror of silence'.('Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL)) Thomas's mirror of silence reflected 'The sun' as it 'comes over the tall trees/ Kindling all the hedges' and is an analogue for the 'mirrors of/ The fire for which all thirst' in *Adonais* and also echoes the opening lines of the *The Triumph of Life*: 'In the April prime/ When all the forest tops began to burn/ "With kindling green'. Bloom writes that: 'Shelley called our minds "mirrors of the fire for which all thirst," and Yeats is most moving when he asks "What or who has cracked the mirror?"'⁶ Bloom also argues with reference to Milton's *Il Penseroso* that: 'Milton's magus has uncovered the Cherub, and welcomes the Cherub's unfallen form, Ezekiel's and Revelation's guider of "the fiery-wheeled throne," or "the Cherub Contemplation" as Milton calls him'.⁷ However, like Wordsworth, Thomas is a failed magus and he answers Yeats's question with a derisive satire of the tradition to which both are beholden.

The machine's first manifestation is in the ironic form of a wheeled throne that transforms the Prytherch figure into 'a new man' who is 'part of the machine'(Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL)). Traction-engines are next associated with the machine in 'Welsh Landscape'(AAL) where Thomas writes: 'Above the noisy tractor/ And hum of the machine'. Here the machine's cacophony covers the 'sped arrows' of the past. In 'The Face'(P) when: 'tenancies of the fields/ Will change; machinery turn/ All to noise' then 'on the walls/ Of the mind's gallery that face' will endure. Except that a mere three years later Thomas writes in 'The Grave' that the Prytherch figure is dead and in his next volume, *H'm*, the poet is fixated by a new adversary. The machine it is that breaks the mirror of silence where the mind of the

poet mirrors the 'Light whose smile kindles the Universe...which the eclipsing Curse/ of birth can quench not'. And the machine it is that contradicts this Platonism: 'but not for him/ Who runs his engine on a different fuel.' The machine occults the sun and the words of warning that Thomas delivers in 'Too Late'(T) are therefore stark:

Can't you see
 Behind the smile on the times' face
 The cold brain of the machine
 That will destroy you and all your race?

This Jeremiad is repeated in 'Lore'(T) where Thomas reveals the machine's appetites: 'Never mind the machine,/ Whose fuel is human souls.' This revelation sets up a dialectic between the Prytherch figure's body which in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) becomes a tool of the machine and the machine's cold brain that symbolically fills the Prytherch figure's vacant mind.

Bloom notes that there is a 'long Jewish and Judeo-Christian tradition of not attempting to describe the *Ma'aseh Merkabah*, Work of the Chariot, any more graphically than the deliberately obscure Ezekiel described it, for fear of prying into the divine mystery.'⁸ The machine is metonymically non-descript and all the reader ever learns is that it is often a tractor or an aeroplane (as in 'Tramp'(BT) and 'Encounter'(BT)) and therefore that it is winged and/or wheeled and that these wheels are often cogs that turn larger cogs. 'Earth'(T) has the harsh but elliptical image of 'slow tractors' mangling 'the unloved body of God' with 'Their wheels' and in 'Eviction'(BT) Thomas uses the phrase: 'His jazz band of gadgets and wheels' to describe the machine and its cursing gearbox. This is also true of 'Movement'(BT):

The chimney corner
 Is a poor place to sing
 Reedy accompaniment
 To the wheels' rattle,
 As life puts on speed.

The key word here is 'life' which when combined with gear ratios or 'wheels within wheels' recalls the chariot of Life in Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*. Shelley's depiction of Merkabah differs from either Ezekiel or Milton who place an emanation of God above the chariot or Christ within the chariot in that the being that is carried by the Romantic poet's car is a metonymical representation of Life. Shelley's shape of Life exudes a supernatural light that extinguishes the natural light of nature and

which in turn douses the starry light of poetic nature.

Thomas's misprision is antithetical inasmuch as his machine has the effect of separating man from God just as if God had become Sophia and the machine demiurge of the fallen world. This means that instead of palling the poet in blinding incandescence, Thomas's misprision of Merkabah surrounds its victims with an impenetrable cloud of unknowing. Darkness is therefore substituted for light and the hell of Dante and the death-in-life of Shelley becomes the material world or Kenoma. The Prytherch figure is by turns deaf('Enigma'(AAL)), dumb('Memories'(AAL)), or somnambulistic('Affinity'(SF)), but most of all he is blind to the cold brain of the machine('Too Late'(T)) which in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) isolates him from the eclat of the natural world. This sensory depravity equates to the cloud of unknowing that estranged Moses from God as he ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the tablets of stone. It also explains the symbolic lack of a 'shape all darkness' in Thomas's post-*H'm* refiguration of Shelley's eye-banded shape since the internalized darkness of the peasant's mind becomes externalized as the outward machinations of materially-minded man. In opposition to this, Thomas's externalized societal concerns, his Promethean mission to the Prytherch figure, become internalized as the poet searches for the light of the soul cleansed of fallen narratives.

Peter Abbs has argued that Thomas's early poetry was dependent upon the conflict between 'a certain admiration for the physical solidity of the man [the Prytherch figure] and a certain disquiet over the spiritual emptiness of his mind' and continues: 'In *H'm* the opposites are seen as transcending the particular contexts of place and community and envisaged as universal energies, God and the Machine, Theocracy and Technocracy'.⁹ But Abbs adds: 'The words are without lyrical energy and poetic density. The meanings are explicit, prosaic. The sentences are like those in a treatise or a drab political manifesto'.¹⁰ While it is possible to broadly agree with Abbs it is, however, impossible to accept the naive reading of *H'm* and the machine's genealogy that is proffered by I. R. F. Gordon:

The machine, which, in earlier poems such as 'Cynddylan on a Tractor', (1952), had been seen as an ironically bright release from the drudgery of labour, is seen now as the explicit enemy of mankind ruthlessly destroying the true human spirit. In the opening poem of *H'm*, (1972), Thomas presents a twentieth-century version of the Fall, in which a modern Adam and Eve face a transformed serpent¹¹

The problem with Gordon's synopsis is that Thomas's ironies are both harsher than he gives credit and also deeper. Wintle is closer to an accurate representation of

Thomas's poem when he writes: 'The possibility that man and Satan are one and the same creature haunts the entire poem. And the implications of this are momentous. It implies that God didn't quite follow the script. That creation is somehow bungled.'^{1 2} *H'm* begins with 'Once'(H) a poem that relates a darkly ironic creation-fall:

God looked at space and I appeared,
 Rubbing my eyes at what I saw.
 The earth smoked, no birds sang;
 There were footprints on the beaches
 Of the hot sea, no creatures in it.
 God spoke. I hid myself in the side
 Of the mountain.

As though born again

I stepped out into the cool dew,
 Trying to remember the fire sermon,
 Astonished at the mingled chorus
 Of weeds and flowers. In the brown bark
 Of the trees I saw the many faces
 Of life, forms hungry for birth,
 Mouthing at me. I held my way
 To the light, inspecting my shadow
 Boldly; and in the late morning
 You, rising towards me out of the depths
 Of myself. I took your hand,
 Remembering you, and together,
 Confederates of the natural day,
 We went forth to meet the Machine.

Before the Fall God was infinite, but afterwards he is a machine intelligence who presides over a world of production rather than poetry. There is absolutely nothing in 'Once'(H) to indicate that the machine is the serpent or that the serpent's knowledge would be catastrophic rather than liberating. The nomenclature of the Manichean machine in this poem is unusual in that 'the Machine' is capitalized; an honour normally reserved for the Deity. The machine, that in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) and 'Too Late'(PS) was portrayed as a Delilah, has here become a Demiurge.

In many respects Thomas's post-*H'm* treatment of the machine does not differ from its pre-*H'm* representations. In 'Digest'(H) the jazzed dissonance of the

machine meant that 'Silence/ Was out of date' and in 'God's Story'(LS) the machine again possesses wheels within wheels: 'the dumb cogs and tireless camshafts.' These poems bear witness to the machine's Shelleyan and therefore Romantic origins which is in contradistinction to D. Z. Phillips's Eliotic statement: "'But it is the three volumes of the 1970's...which take him into a still rarer class of excellence." Gone is all trace of a romanticism about the countryside'.¹³ Phillips's cant does, however, contain a half-truth in that the countryside or nature is scoured of God's presence by the machine just as in Shelley's poem the light of the chariot blots out the light of nature. The car of life's conquest has parallels in Thomas's poetry and in 'Digest'(H) Thomas alludes to the machine's wars and the ironic triumph of diplomacy: 'to synchronise/ The applause, as the public images/ Stepped on and off the stationary/ Aircraft' whereas in 'God's Story'(H) the patronage of the screaming popes becomes the object of Thomas's satire:

The Pope's ring was deadly
as a snake's kiss. Art and poetry
drank of that slow poison. God,

looking into a dry chalice,
felt the cold touch of the machine
on his hand,

The language of power always courts the hand that signs the paper or as the Hazlitt scholar Uttara Natarajan has argued: 'Political enslavement goes against the grain of intellectual empowerment; it allows only a condition of servility in which men are turned into machines.'¹⁴ In 'God's Story'(H) 'Art and poetry' are obvious substitutions for the Nepenthe-sipping Rousseau just as Rousseau in Shelley's poem is an analogue for Wordsworth and Coleridge: 'Rousseau might just as well be named Wordsworth or Coleridge in the poem, except that Shelley was too tactful and urbane to thus utilize those who were still, technically speaking, alive.'¹⁵ The major difference between Rousseau and Thomas is that post-*H'm* the generative world has become mechanised:

God looked at the eagle that looked at
the wolf that watched the jack-rabbit
cropping the grass, green and curling
at God's beard. He stepped back;
it was perfect, a self-regulating machine ('Rough'(LS))

We might afford this unpoetical poetry a double-take and exclaim with Claudius: 'What dost thou mean by this?' and surmise that Darwinists understand nature as a metaphorical Denmark where the strong prey upon the weak and the good are unwilling to revenge themselves upon the strong lest they become no better than animals. The good in this ecosystem are idealists and the strong a juggernaut that grinds 'the Cross' 'under men's wheels' ('Poste Restante'(H)).

The machine is usually a tractor and the O.E.D. gives this definition for tractor: 'One who or that which draws or pulls something...An aeroplane with one or more propellers or screws in front'. Hence the wheels which in 'No Answer'(H): 'Over the creeds/ And masterpieces...go' are also associated with aeroplanes: 'But the wheels roll/ Between and the shadow/ Of the plane falls'. ('Pavane'(H)) This refluxes Thomas's debt to previous depictions of Merkabah since in Ezekiel the chariot of God descends from heaven and as Shelly notes its team possesses 'ever-moving wings'. 'Postscript'(H) describes the triumph of affluence:

As life improved, their poems
Grew sadder and sadder. Was there oil
For the machine? It was
The vinegar in the poet's cup.

This once more recapitulates the episode of Rousseau drinking from the goblet of Nepenthe but transforms it into an analogue for Socrates's Hemlock. It is hence an optimistic image of imaginative gain snatched from the jaws of experiential loss inasmuch as Socrates and Jesus are the 'sacred few' or eagles of a 'native noon' whose fate it was to escape the coldness of the Shape of Light. This returns us to Thomas's tendentious description of the machine's coldness: 'the cold acts of the machine' ('The Gap'(LS)), 'cold brain' ('Too Late'(PS)) and these automatonised figures should be associated with 'cold language' ('Eviction'(BT)) and 'cold fact' ('Country Cures'(BT)) because as Thomas argues in one of his more anglophobic moods: 'For it is England, the home of the industrial revolution, and consequent twentieth-century rationalism, that have been the winter on our native pastures'.¹⁸ Cold is a synecdoche for poetic winter and Bloom has argued:

Shelley's hatred of cold became part of his poetic equipment, as I have already evidenced in discussing 'Mount Blanc,' 'Prometheus,' 'The Sensitive Plant,' and 'Epipsychidion,'...Here...it achieves its most successful *use* in Shelley's poetry. The repetition, 'but icy cold,' drives in the effect of this incredibly intense, blinding cold glare given off by the chariot of Life. Light absolutely without

heat, which obscures the warm but less bright light of the sun,
just as the sun's light obscures the light of the stars.¹⁷

This cold glare overcomes poets and politicians alike and its chill is similar to the paralysis that plagues Keats as he climbs Moneta's stairs. Rapid movement rather than stillness is a more definitively Shelleyan trope and the frenzied dance of Life is mimicked by the poisonous venality of 'Other'(H): 'The machine appeared/ In the distance, singing to itself/ Of money. Its song was the web/ They were caught in, men and women/ Together.' The dance of death-in-life also finds an echo in 'Pavane'(H):

Convergences
Of the spirit! What
Century, love? I,
Too; you remember—
Brescia? This sunlight reminds
Of the brocade . I dined
Long. And now the music
Of darkness in your eyes
Sounds. But Brescia,
And the spreading foliage
Of smoke! With Yeats' birds
Grown hoarse.

Artificer

Of the years, is this
Your answer? The long dream
Unwound; we followed
Through time to the tryst
With ourselves.

A pavane is a grave and stately dance in which the dancers are elaborately dressed in the golden brocade that in this poem is modelled on the 'golden handiwork' of Yeats's *Byzantium*. As is the reference to Yeats's birds which derives from this spontaneous overflow: 'Subject for a poem...Death of a friend...Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millennium. A walking mummy. Flames at the street corners where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbour [dolphins], offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them to Paradise.'¹⁸ Thomas's lengthy dinner perhaps alludes to the twenty minute transforming fire of spiritual happiness that

became the inspiration for *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.¹⁹ Phase 15 represents the convergence of Yeats's Body of Fate with Mask and Will with Creative Mind 'and nothing is apparent but dreaming Will and the Image that it dreams'²⁰ and what is dreamt in 'Pavane'(H) is the convergence of dance and dancing spirits upon the emperor's pavements. Yeats also writes: 'Even for the most perfect, there is a time of pain, a passage through a vision, where evil reveals itself in its final meaning.'²¹ The poem thus begins as a supernatural moment of inspiration similar to Yeats and his wife George's automatic writing sessions where Thomas's anti-self lures 'him like a beloved woman by raising that insatiable desire which eventually becomes vision.'²²

The vision that comes to Thomas is initially that of the refined and Byzantine Phase 15 or the city outside of nature. However, a nightmare arises from the midst of this reverie as in unity with the Prytherch figure, which in *H'm* is indistinguishable from that of Thomas's wife or the male/female Covering Cherub, Thomas confronts the implications of the word 'Brescia'. In *The Triumph of Life* the 'Brescian shepherd breathes' the 'soft notes' of a 'dear lament' which was identified by Mary Shelley as 'I am weary of pasturing my sheep'.²³ *H'm* marks the death of the Prytherch figure or at least in 'Pavane'(H) and 'Hearth'(H) his transformation into an unnamed female associate who in 'Pavane'(H) is the ocular echo-chamber in which Thomas discerns 'the music/ Of darkness'. In previous poems like 'Memories'(AAL) or 'Enigma'(AAL) the eye of Prytherch is synonymous with the eye of nature and represents the precursorial narratives that Thomas tries to divine. In 'Temptation of a Poet'(PS) Thomas summons the pale ghost of an earlier self to a 'tryst' and now in 'Pavane'(H) his medium is referred to as 'love' but the poetry like the pale ghost still comes: 'The long dream/ Unwound; we followed/ Through time to the tryst/ With ourselves.'

The nightmare vision that haunts Thomas is that of kindling leaves or its literal antithesis 'the spreading foliage/ Of smoke!' and this refers to the burning tree of Attis in 'The Tree'(AAL) and also to the terrorist activities of 'The Grave' (readings of which poems are preambled by this discussion of 'Pavane'(H)). Artifice is a key word in *Byzantium* since it alludes to that mythical period of early Byzantine history when 'religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers...spoke to the multitude and the few alike.'²⁴ Thomas is weary of Shepherds much as Yeats also showed scant regard for the ill-educated²⁵ but in the Condition of Fire the God of Byzantium is a Demiourgos or 'Artificer/ Of the years'; a unitary combination of priest and shepherd. Just as Rousseau's Brescian air fades into 'The presence of that shape' Thomas's privileged moment is disturbed by his own 'cold bright car': 'But the wheels roll/ Between and the shadow/ Of the plane falls.' Bloom writes that in one draft of *Sailing to Byzantium* Yeats 'attempts to

mount the purgatorial stairs as Dante does, or Keats in *The Fall of Hyperion*, but fails:

When prostrate on the marble step I fall
 And amid my tears-
 And cry aloud- "I sicken with desire
 Though/ and fastened to a dying animal
 Cannot endure my life -O gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.'²⁶

The last lines of Thomas's poem exactly mimick this rejected draft: 'The/ Victim remains/ Nameless on the tall/ Steps. Master, I/ Do not wish, I do not wish/ To continue.'

The dichotomy between the Condition of Fire and the machine's darkness is also apparent in 'Earth'(H):

God of light
 And fire. The machine replaces
 The hand that fastened you
 To the cross, but cannot absolve us.

The God of 'Earth'(H) is one of light and fire, a God that sublimely cried 'Let there be light' and this Longinian moment is what Thomas's fiery imagery reduces to when in 'The Bright Field'(LS) Thomas experiences, as in 'Pavane'(H), a privileged moment in the form of luminous sunshine. In 'Hearth'(H) Thomas depicts the poet and his wife enjoying a Prytherchesque *tête à tête*:

In front of the fire
 With you, the folk song
 Of the wind in the chimney and the sparks'
 Embroidery of the soot -eternity
 Is here in this small room,
 In intervals that our love
 Widens; and outside
 Us is time and the victims
 Of time, travellers
 To a new Bethlehem, statesmen
 And scientists with their hands full
 Of the gifts that destroy.

It is precisely the 'folk song/ Of the wind in the chimney and the sparks' that materialist culture is losing. The vision of fire is shared but not by the Prytherch figure who in previous volumes was the mute embroiderer of Thomas's fireside brocades.

Bloom has argued that: 'The Condition of Fire, with its purifying simplification through intensity, is precisely the Romantic Imagination, the burning fountain of *Adonais*'.²⁷ This is "'the power of the mind over the universe of death," in which the mind's power means the Imagination, and the universe of death means all of the object-world.'²⁸ It is this fire-cracker that the Promethean Thomas tries to explode in the hearts and hearths of his materialist flock. The origin of the Condition of Fire as it is exhibited in the poetry of Thomas ultimately derives from Wordsworth. The exact lineage of tropes that sire Thomas's version of the Condition of Fire is Wordsworth, Shelley, and then Yeats. In terms of Thomas's belated reception of sparking imagery, Shelley is the most pervasive influence and supersedes both Yeats and Wordsworth in this respect. In *Poetry and Repression* Bloom gives this interpretation of Shelley's affinity for the fiery element:

Like other poets, Shelley first tried to achieve a perspectivizing stance in relation to precursors through the limiting trope of metaphor. Fire is the prime perspectivizing metaphor of Romanticism, and to burn through context, the context of precursors and of nature, is the revisionary aim of that metaphor. Fire becomes the 'inside' or 'subjectivity' while nature becomes the context or the 'outside' in this unconvincing but prevalent Promethean trope. That is why Shelley begins *Alastor* by addressing, earth, air, and water as though he were one with their brother-element of fire.²⁹

The trail of blazing sparks spilled from the baton of Prometheus as it is passed from Wordsworth to Shelley to Yeats to Thomas begins in the *Intimations* ode:

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,

Bloom has argued that: 'It is surprising how much of Shelley's poetry, on close analysis, is obsessed with the careers of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who had ceased to be strong poets at just about the time when Shelley became one.'³⁰ Bloom also pin-points those moments in Shelley that are aglow with the seeded embers that

Wordsworth scattered in the *Intimations* ode. In *Adonais* we find:

From the contagion of the world's slow stain
 He is secure, and now can never mourn
 A heart grown cold, a head grown gray in vain;
 Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
 With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

Bloom comments: "Two stanzas before, in *Adonais*, Shelley had chided, as I would interpret it, Wordsworth and Coleridge, by crying out "Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now—" and then contrasting Keats's perpetual glowing in the burning fountain of the Eternal, to the sitters who are told: "thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame."³¹ For Bloom Shelley is upbraiding Coleridge and Wordsworth for being visited by the fate that Yeats dreaded: 'living on with an extinguished poetic hearth and writing sparkless verses.'³² To these excerpts from *Adonais* must be added Shelley's tempestuous cry at the end of *Ode to the West Wind*:

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

This line along with a related line in *The Triumph of Life* is perhaps the most influential of Shelley's writings upon Thomas. The imposing quality of its effect upon his early poetry makes the following quotation apply as much to Thomas as it does to Shelley:

post-Enlightenment poetry, as Shelley understood, was in one phase at least a questing for fire, and the defensive meaning of that fire was discontinuity. "The fire for which all thirst" or burning fountain of *Adonais* may have an ultimate source in Plotinus, but its immediate continuity was with the "some-thing that doth live" in our embers that still gave Wordsworth joy, in the final stanzas of the *Intimations* ode. Those "embers" of Wordsworth, still smouldering in the *Ode to the West Wind*, flare up for a last time in *Adonais*, and then find their continuity, after Shelley, in what Yeats called the Condition of Fire, which has its flamings in Browning and Pater while en route to Yeats.³³

From Yeats the stalk of fennel reaches Thomas as the poet tries to ignite his

antithetical self with the requisite vitalism to avoid 'what Shelley dreaded to become, the extinguished hearth, an ash without embers'.³⁴ It must not be forgotten that Thomas's daimon is the Prytherch figure and that the vacancy of the Prytherch figure's brain is just such an extinguished hearth.

Yeats is privy to this fireside genealogy too. In *To Some I Have Talked With By The Fire* he writes: 'My heart would brim with dreams about the times/ When we bent down above the fading coals/ And talked of the dark folk who live in souls/ Of passionate men'. Whilst in *The Song of the Old Mother* his aged matron rises in the dawn to 'kneel and blow/ Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow'. This is where Thomas derives his poetry of hearthside folk, though, passages like the Priest's from Wordsworth's *The Brothers* should not be ignored: 'on a winter's evening,/ If you were seated at my chimney nook,/ By turning o'er these hillocks one by one/ We could travel, Sir, through a strange round'. [190-194] However, to re-apply the now familiar Bloomian triad, this chapter charts the influence of the precursor's muse as well as that of the precursor.

As I have tried to demonstrate *The Triumph of Life* has had a huge impact upon Thomas's poetry and a moment of real significance occurs once Rousseau has taken his fateful swig:

in Shelley's cruellest parody of the Wordsworthian "O joy! that in our embers/ Is something that doth live." Seven years of brooding on the imaginative failure of Coleridge and of Wordsworth, that is, of their failure to carry their youthful imagination intact into middle age, culminates in this frightening vision:

'And still her feet, no less than the sweet tune
To which they moved, seemed as they moved, to blot
The thoughts of him who gazed on them, & soon

'All that was seemed as if it had been not,
As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath
Her feet like embers, & she, thought by thought,

'Trampled its fires into the dust of death...'³⁵

Bloom concludes that this 'is the end, in Shelley of the fire of sublimation, the hope that poetic discontinuity or autonomy could be achieved by a radical or Nietzschean perspectivism.'³⁶ This is also true of Thomas and what follows is an attempt to outline the development of this perspectivising trope as it gradually changes from

the object of Thomas's Promethean quest to a method of reuniting the poet with the absconded ruler of Olympus.

The most prevalent tropes of fire in Thomas's poetry derive from his hearth-side conversations with the Prytherch figure and 'Temptation of a Poet'(PS) suggests that a poetic quarrel within the self is more prevalent than a rhetorical dispute with society:

The temptation is to go back,
 To make tryst with the pale ghost
 Of an earlier self, to summon
 To the mind's hearth, as I would now,
 You, Prytherch, there to renew
 The lost poetry of our talk
 Over the embers of that world
 We built together

The Prytherch figure is the shadowy daimon that causes Thomas to assert his poetic individuality in the most fiery terms possible. The Prytherch figure's 'soul gutters in the grave's draught'(Pharisee. Twentieth Century(T)) and his indifference to the 'tangled fire-garden'(On the Farm(BT)) is matched only by the brain damaged Pughs or the Prytherch figure of 'A Peasant'(SF) who shows his contempt for the Condition of Fire by gobbing in the grate.

In the poetry of Thomas the mind is frequently represented as a hearth and the homely Prometheanism of such imagery finds itself plumbing Shelleyan depths in 'The Last of the Peasantry'(SYT):

Moving through the fields, or still at home,
 Dwarfed by his shadow on the bright wall,
 His face is lit always from without,
 The sun by day, the red fire at night;
 Within is dark and bare, the grey ash
 Is cold now, blow on it as you will.

That the machinations of Thomas's poetic nemesis should be resisted at all costs is the message of 'Too Late'(T) and the poet's caveat regarding the machine's cold brain is in these lines contrapositioned with the warmth of a glowing ingle:

But there was comfort for you at the day's end
 Dreaming over the warm ash

Of a turf fire on a hill farm,
 Contented with your accustomed ration
 Of bread and bacon, and drawing your strength
 From the membership of an old nation

The best way to read these poems is by adopting the internalized Prometheanism of 'Autumn on the Land'(SYT) as an interpretative paradigm. This poem portrays the externalised shadow or anti-self of Thomas troped as if the hearth over which Thomas and the Prytherch figure are accustomed to talk is in fact the soul of the peasant:

You may look in vain
 Through the eye's window; on his meagre hearth
 The thin, shy soul has not begun its reign
 Over the darkness. Beauty, love and mirth
 And joy are strangers there.

If this poem is taken as the mark then the hearth imagery that follows can be viewed as a dearth of active self-creation in a mind wholly determined by materialist concerns. These same received notions symbolise the precursorial narratives with which Thomas attempts to wrestle. The Prytherch figure is Thomas's anti-self and by describing his fireside chatter with his alter-ego Thomas is effectively straining to over-hear himself. The internalization of the hearth image makes the Prytherch figure part of the mind's furniture and this is the fiery centre that Thomas's drive towards poetic purity fans. It is also the home for which the poet searches since it represents a method of escaping from the maze of the fallen world signified in Thomas's poetry as the world's dark wood.

Thomas's repeated conversations with the Prytherch figure represent the narrative method that Thomas employs to seek out his true poetic self. So pervasive is his debt to the trope of perspectivism that the context of his fireside colloquies are always defensive recapitulations of influential anxiety. The pattern established in 'Autumn on the Land'(SYT) re-occurs in 'Lowri Daffydd'(PS) such that the 'Winds of the world' that blow in 'Invasion on the Farm'(SYT) become synonymous with the soul that gutters in the grave's draught in 'Pharisee. Twentieth Century'(T):

When I returned, stars were out
 Over my roof, the door fallen
 About my hinges, and on the hearth

A cold wind blowing forever.

These delapidated poems are emblematic of the poet's spiritual condition and this torpor is deepened if it is remembered that the most common season in Thomas's verse is autumn as, for instance, it is in 'Walter Llywarch'(T):

Born in autumn at the right time
 For hearing stories from the cracked lips
 Of old folk dreaming of summer,
 I piled them on to the bare hearth
 Of my own fancy to make a blaze
 To warm myself, but achieved only
 The smoke's acid that brings the smart
 Of false tears into the eyes.

This poem recapitulates another of Thomas's favourite words 'acid' which puns upon acedic and is the self-pitying state upon which much of Thomas's poetry borders. It also adumbrates the violentia that personifies the quester as he moves from the dark of the moon to its full and the Condition of Fire.³⁷ The internalization of the Prytherch figure's hearth as the Condition of Fire means that Thomas is self-consciously at war with the realm of memory and this retreat into the past at the expense of the imaginative present is implicit in 'Eviction'(BT):

To me you are an old man
 Out on the roads, robbed by strangers
 Of what was your own, sitting in memory's
 Kitchen by a fire gone out.

In these poems Thomas's poetry is acedic to the point of desolation and as the sequence of hearth poems increase in longevity the frailty of the trope becomes more and more apparent. These poems represent Thomas's defensive gestures against the sighing sea of precursive grass and in 'The Mill'(BT) the poet confronts a shrivelled specimen whose decline is equalled only by the paucity of his imaginative fire:

In the shallow grate
 The small fire's petals
 Withered and fell.

In essence this and other late returns to the mind's hearth are revisions of the

earlier Thomas in terms of the later Thomas and thus another precursor is added to the list that makes up his composite Covering Cherub. The process of self-wrestling might be said to begin with 'Temptation of the Poet'(PS) where in the poem that follows the extended Eliotic failure of 'Border Blues'(PS) Thomas self-consciously summons the Romanticised spectre of Prytherch back to the mind's hearth. Thomas's trope of the mind's hearth is quintessentially Romantic and signals a rejection of literary Modernism in favour of fireside dialogues that metaphorically mock the belated midnight bell.

The last poems that exhibit this form of Romanticism at once admit of a debt both to the trope of discontinuity and also to previous incarnations of this trope in Thomas's poetry. 'Servant'(BT) is almost an epitaph for the entire mini-genre of hearthside poems:

Is truth so bare,
So dark, so dumb as on your hearth
And in your company I found it?

According to Shelley's Demogorgon the deep truth is imageless³⁸ as is the peasant's mind and the plangency of this poem derives from its use of the past tense of the verb 'to find' which implies that the truth that Thomas sought was found long ago. Even as early as 'Temptation of a Poet'(PS) Thomas perhaps realized that he could neither supplant his Romantic forebears nor advance further in the quest than they had proceeded. In all these poems Thomas is shackled to the precursive shadow that is the Prytherch figure and hence their tragedy is that his tigrish poetic is insufficient to burn through its framing context. An admission of failure is tacitly present in the reverence with which Thomas describes Saunders Lewis in 'The Patriot'(BT):

He had that rare gift that what he said,
Even the simplest statement, could inflame
The mind and heart of the hearer.

This is a rare gift indeed and it must be remembered that in 'A Priest to his People'(SF) Thomas's inflammatory rhetoric was quenched by the cold reception it received. Here the mind and heart should perhaps be swapped for the mind's eye's hearth. It must not be forgotten that what 'inflames' the poet and peasant's mind in 'Affinity'(SF) (a poem which as the title suggests explores the similarity of priest and peasant) was the 'same star that lights you homeward.' Hearth and metaphysical heart are one and the same thing in the poetry of Thomas and the hearth is hence a

metonymy for the home which is where the proverbial heart is centred. However, in this antithetical fiery centre the star of Adonais that represented the starting point of Thomas's quest for priority is internalized as the mind's hearth or beacon.

It comes then as something of a surprise to learn that the last Prytherch poem, which is also the last of Thomas's poems to exhibit the trope of Promethean perspectivism, unexpectedly turns this ever increasing burden of internalization upon its head. 'The Grave' remains uncollected and this has to be considered something of a scandal since it is a palinode:

I pass your grave
 Daily; walk up and down
 On it. I know that under
 The bright grass there is nothing
 But your dry bones. Prytherch,
 They won't believe that this
 Is the truth. Rumours start
 Like hill fires; empty minds
 Blow on them. Someone has seen
 You at a meeting; somewhere
 A bomb grumbles. Echoes
 Reverberate in the heart's
 Hollows. Durable
 As a tree in history's
 Landscape, you are renewed
 By wishes, by foliage
 Of young hopes....

It is the old
 Failing, a skirmish seen
 As a battle, victory turned
 To a legend before it is won.

Thomas has tried to bellows the Prytherch figure's mind but in this poem 'empty minds' fan the flames of violent protest. The internalized fiery centre is thoroughly externalized in this poem and this is to the revolutionary extent that he is reported not dead. Thomas in contrast knows different and instead of hearing a star's fire in the heart's hearth the poet senses the beating of hearts in the mouths of terrorists stirred to action by the Tryweryn crisis. The grave Thomas speaks of is synonymous with that of the Welsh language in 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) and 'The Grave' therefore represents a retraction of the incendiary criticism therein. Thomas is

forced to write this apology because his words have opened ears that could not stop the vent of hearing just as during this period the bombing campaign of The Free Wales Army created its own ripples of rumour. However, these acts of violence against property are mere side-shows that grow with the telling until like all propaganda or its modern equivalent spin it becomes 'the old/ Failing, a skirmish seen/ As a battle, victory turned/ To a legend before it is won.' This, though, is equally true of Thomas's return to the trope of perspectivism insofar as this poem does not advance much further than either 'Reservoirs'(NHBF) or 'The Tree'(AAL). Aesthetically the poem is a failure which possibly accounts for its uncollected status and what originality it possesses derives from the skilful use Thomas makes of Shakespeare's many-headed beast. The most moving part is its closing vignette, which to H. J. Savill seemed 'a perfect articulation of the Celtic hero, who although defeated in fact, by some miraculous turn of fate and his own native cunning turns things to his own advantage, creating in so doing the kind of legend of which the Arthurian is the apogee.'³⁹

'The Grave' notes that 'empty minds' are windbags and if this is coupled with the images of hollows, graves, and nothing, more usually associated with the ashes of Prytherch's mind then one is left with the impression of the blind leading the blind. The sporadic outbursts of violence that accompanied the Tryweryn disaster proved like Shelley's wind to be uncontrollable. This is perhaps the fault of the English parliament which ignored the united front presented by the Welsh M.P.s and also explains the historical immediacy of Thomas's abandonment of his Promethean rhetoric. Poetically Thomas continued his quest and the Condition of Fire in post-*H'm* volumes becomes a purely internalized figure more strongly associated with the burning bush of Moses than the Attis-like tree and Promethean hill fires of 'The Grave'.

'The Grave' is Thomas's equivalent Terror and represents the image of all he dreads and yet secretly desires. In 'Welsh History'(AAL) Thomas prophecies a peaceful protest: 'we will arise,/ Armed, but not in the old way' whereas the patriots Thomas castigates are terrorists 'taut for war' and this figures a fissure in the bellicose pacifism of the poet-priest. 'The Grave' is full of references to nothing and marks the poet's Promethean menopause but Thomas still seeks as Bloom puts it 'the image of desire to redress his essential poverty' or that moment when: "'I shall find the dark grow luminous, the void fruitful when I understand I have nothing, that the ringers in the tower have appointed for the hymen of the soul a passing bell."⁴⁰ Having attained his last knowledge Thomas 'is free to explore the hollow image or *antithetical* self, and find there...the figure of the *daemon* who whispers in the dark with the poet's beloved'⁴¹. 'The Grave' records the turning aside of Thomas from the vacuity of violence as symbolised by the Narcissistic Prytherch figure of

'Aside'(P) to the 'miracle/ of the lit bush'.('The Bright Field'(LS))

The passing bell of Prytherch equates to the rise of the demiurgical machine. That the machine gains such priority in the *H'm* volume adumbrates Thomas's indebtedness to Shelley and to pursue the Shelleyan spoor it is necessary to return to its point of inception. The origins of the machine lie in Thomas's antithetical reading of *The Triumph of Life* and this first manifests itself as the Prytherch figure in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL). The Prytherch figure is most commonly associated with the age of gold but in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) he is a being of 'iron mixed with [Adam's] clay'.⁴² The predominant trope in this poem is irony and this *illusio* is intensified by the ancient appellation of Cynddylan. Any reader who has read the *Canu Helledd* will connect the name of the Prytherch figure with that of the departed chieftan Cynddylan. That the *Canu Helledd* englynion are a source for the poem makes it as Justin Wintle has argued 'not just a satire about the spiritual destitution of contemporary agriculture; it is also a Welsh lament. Where once proud princes bestrode the land, now there is only the deceived labourer.'⁴³ Wintle includes a translation of part of the *Canu Helledd* cycle which continues the untended hearth theme into a poem that does not overtly strike the reader as being concerned with the metaphoric trope of fire: 'Cynddylan's hall is dark tonight,/ There burns no fire...Cynddylan's hall is dark tonight,/ No fire is lit, no candle burns'. The dialectic of presence and absence which the fallen and unfallen identities of Cynddylan engender oscillates between the presence of the nomative Cynddylan and the disparity between his noble memory and the degeneracy of his literary descendent.

The poem's clinamatic swerve ironises the austere tragedy of Shelley's poem and depicts an equally ironised Welsh figure as the simultaneous victim and master of the machine. What upsets the irony of this serio-comic poem is the implied spiritual darkness of the Prytherch figure. Light that comes to all comes not to Cynddylan and the sun's rays are of the greatest indifference to this lost soul. Like *The Triumph of Life*, 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) begins at dawn and contains an image of birds chorusing the morning's matin. To the blindfolded Cynddylan the dawn's choirs are present but absent-mindedly forgotten as is the 'old look that yoked him to the soil' and the sun 'Kindling all the hedges'. In Thomas's triumph of the dunce the yoke of the soil is replaced by the yoke of anglicisation and the effective mechanisation of agriculture. This retroposes Shelley's image of the Roman populace subjecting a colonised people to the imperial yoke and the irony that the celebrants of such a triumph were equally under the yoke of their imperial ruler:

As when to greet some conqueror's advance

Imperial Rome poured forth her living sea
 From senatehouse and prison and theatre
 When Freedom left those who upon the free

Had bound a yoke which soon they stooped to bear.

As part of the Machine's virtual triumph the Prytherch figure is blind to the beauties of nature. The peasant is satirised by Thomas to the extent that the ironised triumph of this 'knight at arms' becomes something of a hallucination as his tractor-chariot scatters farmyard animals and disturbs the woodland creatures as if they were bacchanants. Thomas depicts the Prytherch figure as triumphing over these indigenous inhabitants of the forests and fields when in fact it is the plebeian/peasant with the title of a patrician/knight who has surrendered his savage nobility.

Poetic character is essentially fascist and the imagery of a poetic triumph whether tragic or ironic underlines Bloom's Hazlitt-like fascination with the *fascēs* bearers of poetic history. Bloom has written of the chariot trope that it 'succeeds in breaking continuity, in the sense that continuity equals nature or the *re extensa* of Descartes. The fire is limitation; the chariot substitutes for it as a representation. The fire is a sublimation; the chariot is an introjection of futurity, and a projection of lost or past time.'⁴⁴ It is Bloom's contention that the chariot trope escapes the influence of Wordsworth because it is mythological and Wordsworth was an anti-mythological poet.⁴⁵ However, Bloom questions whether this 'accomplishes a successful transumption of the fundamental Wordsworthian metonymy of gleam for imagination...The cold light of the chariot overcomes the light of the Wordsworthian Shape, even as the light of nature overcomes the earlier light of Rousseau, or of the young Wordsworth.'⁴⁶ Or as Bloom also argues:

In the synaesthetic splendor of a "confusing sense" he sees and hears "A shape all light," whom we may describe as a sublimating metaphor for everything that Wordsworth called "nature." In response to her seductive summons, he yields up to her the metaphoric fire of his poethood, in Shelley's cruellest parody of the Wordsworthian "O joy! that in our embers/ Is something that doth live."⁴⁷

The 'shape all light' it is that tramples the embers of Wordsworth into the dust of death and as Bloom argues 'there is no mystery about Life in *The Triumph of Life*. Life is precisely what has triumphed over Wordsworth and Coleridge, that is, over their imaginative integrity and autonomy as strong poets.'⁴⁸ As Bloom explains:

'Life is the conqueror of strong poets, the death-in-life that they sought to fend off by divination.'⁴⁹ The transumptive chariot of God is a metonymy of a metonymy. Just as the machine is a dehumanised parody of Shelley's humanised misreading of the chariot of Ezekiel and Milton.

In *The Visionary Company* Bloom argues:

The chariot's glare is the light of life; the sun's, of nature; the stars', the visionary light of imagination and poetry. Nature's light obliterates that of the poet, only to be destroyed in turn by the light of life, the moonlike cold car of Life.⁵⁰

Thus in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) the Prytherch figure is impervious to the light of the sun because this is the light of nature to which he is no longer yoked. The sunlight at dawn has covered the cone of night in which shine the singing stars of Thomas's poetry and it is significant that the Prytherch figure in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) is as oblivious to the bird song as he is to the kindling light of the sunrise:

And all the birds are singing, bills wide in vain,
As Cynddylan passes proudly up the lane.

A. E. Dyson and C. B. Cox have argued that birdsong in the poetry of Thomas symbolises the endurance of tradition.⁵¹ Whilst in *Neb* Thomas writes of 'the Birds of Rhiannon and the old tale of how the listener would, on hearing them, forget time.'⁵² But Jason Walford Davies has argued that these transumptive birds have been appropriated for Thomas's purposes in an inaccurate fashion: 'We should therefore note that the mistake linking the birds of Rhiannon to a forgetfulness of time probably came from Edward Thomas...In Edward Thomas's version of "Branwen" in his *Celtic Stories* (1911) we read that "They were seven years sitting at this repast and listening to the birds of Rhiannon, and the seven years were no longer than a summer's day."⁵³ In essence it does not matter that Thomas's borrowings from Welsh are inexact, since it is Thomas's understanding of the allusion that is important and not its mythological veracity. These lines from 'Maes-Yr-Onnen'(AAL):

You cannot hear as I, incredulous, heard
Up in the rafters, where the bell should ring,
The wild, sweet singing of Rhiannon's birds.

or these from 'The Tree'(AAL)

For one brief hour the summer came
 To the tree's branches and we heard
 In the green shade Rhiannon's birds
 Singing tirelessly

prefer voice to either chariot or fire. At the beginning of 'The Minister' the narrator asserts: 'O, but God is in the throat of a bird'. In 'The Minister' voice is also 'the fiery tongue/ Of God...the voice no others listen to' and this is the pheonical voice that is in the song of Rhiannon's birds which as Meic Stephens notes wakes the dead and sends the living to sleep.⁵⁴

When Thomas can resurrect the embers that the machine scatters then the peasant's kinship with a proud past will be renewed and Rhiannon's birds will sing again. In influential terms this is the very stuff of the Promethean stage of the quest since Thomas in these overtly Romantic and Nationalistic poems is questing for signs of his election as a national firebrand. Alas for Thomas his fiery words fall on deaf ears which, to recall one of Thomas's favourite puns, are really tares. These, the bad seed of Adam, are as much closed to Thomas's gospel as the ministrations of the ubiquitous bird calls which also go unnoticed. 'Valediction'(AAL) upbraids the peasant because: 'You stopped your ears to the soft influence/ Of birds'. Thus the recalcitrance of the peasants with regard to the singing of the birds of God is a fecund trope and re-appears in 'Enigma'(AAL): 'nor distinguish the small songs/ The birds bring him, calling with wide bills' and 'The Lonely Farmer'(AAL):

And once when he was walking
 Along a lane in spring he was deceived
 By a shrill whistle coming through the leaves:
 Wait a minute, wait a minute -four swift notes;
 He turned, and it was nothing, only a thrush
 In the thorn bushes easing its throat.

The birdsong in 'Cynddylan on a Tractor'(AAL) trumpets the 'kindling' of the hedgerows by the light of the sunrise and Bloom has noted that 'Dante and Milton both relate their chariot-visions to the Sun; Shelley parodies both when the cold light of his chariot emits beams that quench the sun, but that still do not avail as a light to guide the chariot properly.'⁵⁵ The Prytherch figure is deaf to the transumptive birdsong of God and blind to the kindling sunrise. He is also deaf to the Gospel of love that Thomas preaches as well as the poetic gospel that Thomas

recites and this recalls the acedic lament of 'A Priest to his People'(SF): 'I whose invective would spurt like a flame of fire/ To be quenched always in the coldness of your stare'. 'Quenched' echoes the usage of the verb in *The Triumph of Life*:

little profit brings

Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
Nor then avail the beams that quench the Sun
Or that these banded eyes could pierce the sphere

Of all that is, has been, or will be done.-
So ill was the car guided, but it past
With solemn speed majestically on

In Thomas's poem it is the Prytherch figure that falls for the curse of Pandora's gearbox.

This discussion now proceeds to another of Thomas's attempts to see from inside the eye of nature. Thomas is again the mouthpiece for his natural man in 'The Tree (Owain Glyn Dwr speaks)'(AAL). This poem is a misprision of these lines from *The Triumph of Life*:

That what I thought was an old root which grew
To strange distortion out of the hill side
Was indeed one of that deluded crew,

And that the grass which methought hung so wide
And white, was but his thin discoloured hair,
And that the holes it vainly sought to hide

Were or had been eyes.

Rousseau and Prytherch are natural men and Rousseau is yoked to the soil much like the Prytherch figure before he became one with the machine. Rousseau warns Shelley that he may only advise the poet if he can 'forebear /To join the dance' and Thomas's ironic distance from the Prytherch figure indicates that the ephebe poet has sufficient will power to avoid the fate of Shelley's Virgilian guide.

What connects Rousseau and Glyn Dwr is that both are revolutionary icons. Thus the narrative force of 'The Tree'(AAL) derives from an unleashing of creative and destructive polarities. As such a deep reading of the poem reveals a

revisionary swerve away from *The Triumph of Life*. In this respect Thomas holds up *Ode to the West Wind* as a model of resistance to what he reads as the defeatism of Shelley in his later poem. The debate in 'The Tree'(AAL) therefore makes use of Yeats's *Vacillation* as a means of exploring the antipodes that Thomas sees these poems as representing. Or as Bloom argues with reference to Shelley's Ode:

What is most crucial to an understanding of the 'Ode' is the realization that its fourth and fifth stanzas bear a wholly antithetical relation to one another. The triple invocation to the elements of earth, air, and water occupies the first three stanzas of the poem, and the poet himself does not enter those stanzas; in them he is only a voice imploring the elements to hear. In the fourth stanza, the poet's ego enters the poem, but in the guise only of a battered Job, seeking to lose his own humanity. From this nadir, the extraordinary and poignantly 'broken music' of the last stanza rises up, into the poet's own element of fire, to affirm again the human dignity of the prophet's vocation, and to suggest a mode of imaginative renovation that goes beyond the cyclic limitations of nature^{5 6}

'The Tree'(AAL) revises *The Triumph of Life* and to be precise those lines after line 182 when the figure of Rousseau is introduced into the poem. The poem differs from Shelley's dialogue with Rousseau in that 'The Tree'(AAL) is made up of Glyn Dwr's speech alone. What Thomas objects to in the parent poem is Shelley's humanisation of the vision of Merkabah and the Romantic poet's declaration that 'God made irreconcilable/ Good and the means of good'. Thomas is in revolt against the poetically unredeemed hell of kindling leaf and branch in which Shelley depicts Rousseau as languishing. Thomas's poem is thus:

a symbolic representation of that process of rebirth described by Wordsworth in the 'Intimations' ode, in which a poet passes from his initial vision into a time when vision ceases in its original sense, and another kind of vision may or may not succeed it; or again, described by Blake as a passage out of the land of Beulah into the world of Generation, out of Innocence into Experience, or into something worse than Generation, into the hell of Ulro, equivalent to Life in Shelley's "Triumph."^{5 7}

This is a strange hell since it is not in the least bit sulphurous and its chief defining

feature is the quenching rather than external presence of purgatorial flames. It is the very absence of fire that tortures Shelley's courteous master:

Rousseau began at least with a spark lit in his spirit; a flame which had light *and* heat. It was his own business to supply the proper nutriment for the spark; he failed, and he subsists now in the hell of his awareness of this failure^{5 8}

The magic word here is failure and for Thomas this is 'the long failure/ In the poet's war' though we must disagree with the rest of this sentence which is too apologetic and not Apollo-like and energetic enough: 'that he preferred/ The easier rhythms of the heart/ To the mind's scansion' ('Death of a Poet'(PS)). Thomas is at his best when he writes from the Wordsworthian or Yeatsian heart as in 'The Tree'(AAL) and at his worst when he writes for the head as in the interminably bad philoso-religious poems that speculate upon God's absence. The God of poetry is a vitalistic entity symbolised by the pneumatic spark of poetic election and it is precisely this seed of fire that the Shape of Life stamps into the dust of death. Thomas's revision is hence his defiant tone that stares defeat in the face and then defies even death with the hope of prophetic rebirth via the eternal poetic striving for divination.

'The Tree'(AAL) is a poem devoted to life and not the death-in-life of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*. Thomas's poem bustles with boisterousness in the form of sack, ale, song and dance. There is even the strain of the lascivious lute to which the 'proud women' of Powys dine on game and fish. Thomas's depiction of the festive jollity of Glyn Dwr's court is entirely in keeping with its Medieval reputation. Glyn Dwr was linked to Cadwaladwr (after the death of whom it was written that the Britons lost the crown of the kingdom and the Saxons won it) and Gruffudd Llwyd produced a poem in around 1385 which identified him with the prophetic tradition that *Cymru* would one day vanquish the *Sais*. John Davies writes that Glyn Dwr's hospitality was much praised^{5 9} and this is certainly an element of Thomas's poem that should not be underestimated since the festivities of the Medieval section of the poem contrast sharply with the austerity of its Modern counterpart. Another facet of his character, that in *Henry IV* annoyed the obstreperous Hotspur, is the prestidigitation associated with Glyn Dwr and of which John Davies writes:

The millenarian tradition played a central role: it was widely believed that the world would come to an end in the year 1400; Glyn Dwr referred to the ancient prophecies in 1401 when writing to the king of the Scots, and he was encouraged by the comet which appeared in 1402; Gwallter Brut joined the insurgents; like

Bruce at Bannockburn, the abbot of Llantarnam sought to inspire Glyn Dwr's warriors with passages from the book of the Maccabees, and the English parliament stressed the important part played in the rising by *divinations, messonges et excitations*.⁶⁰

Even the eventual defeat of Glyn Dwr is shrouded with obscurity and legend: 'Glyn Dwr's death, like many aspects of his life, was mysterious; a manuscript copied about 1560 noted: "many say that he died; the *brudwyr* [the prophetic poets] say that he did not."⁶¹

Thomas is one such prophetic poet and his omphalos is the 'scarred bole' although in terms of 'The Tree'(AAL) his oracular statements are necessarily dyadic in that he is heir to two traditions one English and Judaic and the other Welsh and Hellenic, as an investigation of this poem's relationship to the myth of Attis reveals. However, before considering Thomas's treatment of Yeats it is first pertinent to attend to the poem's relationship with Shakespeare and in particular the verbal sparring of Hotspur and Glendower. The mystical implications of Thomas's substitution of Glyn Dwr for Rousseau are profound since it is precisely Shelley's scepticism and as a corollary of this, his atheism, to which the devout Thomas objects. It cannot be emphasized enough that 'The Tree'(AAL) is antithetical to Shelley's humanistic portrayal of the chariot of God and that a direct consequence of this is Thomas's praise poem to a less than puritanical icon. The reason that Glyn Dwr is chosen by Thomas rather than Rhodri Mawr or Hywel the Good or even Llywelyn the Last is because Hotspur's irritation with the credulous Glyn Dwr is reversed in 'The Tree'(AAL) as Thomas's dissatisfaction with the skeptical Shelley. In 'The Tree'(AAL) it is almost as if the earth is speaking and not a fifteenth-century warlord and such an event gives the lie to Hotspur's accusation at the end of this fizzing exchange:

Glend: ...at my nativity
 The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
 Of burning cressets; and at my birth
 The frame and huge foundation of the earth
 Shak'd like a coward.

Hot: Why, so it would have done at the same season,
 if your mother's cat had but kitten'd, though
 yourself had never been born.

.....
Glend: The heavens were all on fire, the earth did tremble.

Hot: O, then the earth shook to see the heavens on fire,
 And not in fear of your nativity.
 Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth
 In strange eruptions; oft the teeming earth
 Is with a kind of colic pinch'd and vex'd
 By the imprisoning of unruly wind
 Within her womb; which, for enlargement striving,
 Shakes the old beldame earth and topples down
 Steeples and moss-grown towers. At your birth
 Our grandam earth, having this distemperature,
 In passion shook. [III.13-35]

Had Hotspur but known it the details of his vituperative outburst resemble the vaticinations that are associated with Vortigern or Gwertheyrn who is more popularly known as king of the rumbling spires:

A central episode in Nennius's account is Gwertheyrn's attempt to flee from his troubles. His druids advise him to build a fortress in the mountains of Eryri, but when the day's work disappears each night, they recommend that the foundations be sprinkled with the blood of a fatherless boy. Such a boy is found, but he confounds the druids by revealing that the true reason for the disappearing foundations is that they are laid upon a pool where two dragons are asleep. The dragons, one red, the other white, awake and begin to fight. The boy explains that their conflict symbolizes prophetically the struggle of the Britons and Saxons for supremacy and the ultimate success of the British.⁶²

'The Tree'(AAL) thus charts the wavering of Glyn Dwr's mind between lean rebellion and fatted servitude; a dialectic that contrasts what Thomas reads as the early idealism of Shelley with his later nihilism. Or rather the debate in the poem swivels between its debt to *Ode to the West Wind* and *The Triumph of Life*.

Thomas desires the second coming of Glyn Dwr and his misprision of Yeats asks the question: 'Is there no passion in Wales?'(The Minister'(SYT)) This takes us to the heart of the Romantic dilemma since Thomas inverts Yeats's formula that: 'The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ are full of passionate intensity.' Those who lack conviction are dismissed in 'A Welshman to any Tourist'(SYT) as suffering from 'mind erosion' and as consequence of this apathy Thomas is forced to

relate: 'The hills are fine, of course,/ Bearded with water to suggest age/ And pocked with caverns,/ One being Arthur's dormitory;/ He and his knights are the bright ore/ That seams our history,/ But shame has kept them late in bed.' Savill's synopsis upon the last lines of 'The Grave' is astute and his reading refers to 'A Welshman to any Tourist'(SYT) as much as 'The Grave'. What connects both poems to 'The Tree'(AAL) is the figure of the once and future king troped not as Arthur but as Glyn Dwr. Yet in 'The Tree'(AAL) it is Thomas who has a Shelleyan passion and who wishes to turn the ears of his readers with rumour of his coming.

Hazlitt wrote that: 'The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power...Its front is gilt and blood-stained. Before it "it carries noise, and behind it leaves tears." It has its altars and its victims, sacrifices, human sacrifices.'⁶³ These are the 'Tedious concomitants of power', the 'flattery' of 'the glib bards' that Glyn Dwr tries to resist. But Thomas writes: 'he who stands in the light above/ And sets his ear to the scarred bole,/ Shall hear me tell from the deep tomb/ How sorrow may bud the tree with tears,/ But only his blood can make it bloom.' The tree of Glyn Dwr is as much a blood spattered altar to a would-be conquerer as Shelley's humanised vision of Merkabah. This is "'the mystery within" which Shelley, like Blake, recognized as the imagination's great enemy' and which Bloom also describes as 'a Quisling within, in aid of Life's triumph over the individual's spirit, no matter who the individual.'⁶⁴ Or as Bloom again argues: 'Rousseau was a great poet, and his dominant theme was human love. His imagination had the intensity of divine beauty, but this intensity carried in itself the danger of self-enslavement and enslavement of its converts.'⁶⁵ This reduces to Hazlitt's pronouncement that: 'The love of liberty is the love of others; the love of power is the love of ourselves.'⁶⁶ In 'The Grave' Thomas wakes up to the fact that his best was his worst.

To emulate the subtle Shelley without sharing his self-destructiveness is an intimidating prospect. Hence the suspicious tone of Thomas's Glyn Dwr as he tries to abstract the language of power as embodied in Iolo's praise poetry. From Thomas's view point it is a masochistic ambivalence that converts instinctual desires for revenge into the procrastinations of a Hamlet. This Ulroic introspection as to whether the clay of Thomas dare aspire to the fire of heaven connects the poem to Yeats's *Vacillation*. What links *The Triumph of Life* and *Vacillation* is their respective fire imagery. After sipping from a cup of Nepenthe the 'shape all light' treads upon the dreams of this Yeatsian member of the dreamer-tribe's sparks. As such the poet is awakened from his vision to the domination of Life and those who 'find their pleasure in a cup that is filled from Lethe's wharf.'⁶⁷ Yeats contrasts this with 'the vision...the revelation of reality' for which 'tradition offers us a different word -ecstasy.' This is the joy Yeats defines at the beginning of *Vacillation* and of

which Ellmann writes:

To hang the image of Attis between the two sides of the tree was to give up one's hopes for normal experience and to become one with the god, thereby achieving a reconciliation of antinomies. He who sacrifices himself in this way "may know what he knows" because such knowledge is not susceptible of intellectual formulation, but he knows the ecstatic state of not-grief, which may be called joy.⁶⁸

To so castrate oneself is to leave a mark of the divine upon the human and as Ellmann argues to experience if only transiently a sublime moment of epiphany, however, regretful these spur of the moment bridegrooms later became.⁶⁹

This is implicit in the first section of *Vacillation*:

Between extremities
 Man runs his course;
 A brand, or flaming breath,
 Comes to destroy
 All those antinomies
 Of day and night;
 The body calls it death,
 The heart remorse.
 But if these be right,
 What is joy?

This 'flaming breath' is the spark of intuition and the poet's 'longing to touch it' was rightly resisted by Yeats. In *Vacillation* this fiery symbol becomes Isaiah's coal or the moment of scalding dumbness when the angel touched the prophet's lips with a tong held coal. This incident is exactly analogous to the simplicity of fire or the Phase of the Moon so holy no human can experience it. The flaming coal of *Vacillation* finds its mirror image in the prose of Shelley: 'the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.'⁷⁰ Representation cannot equal inspiration which is ineffable⁷¹ and hence the Condition of Fire fades as the Promethean poet translates Isaiah's coal into a mortal image. What separates the later from the earlier poetry of Thomas is that his desire to bring the divine spark to the Prytherch figure is replaced by a self-obsessed search for signs of his own poetic election. Or as Thomas writes in *Counterpoint*: 'When our eyes close/ on the world, then

somewhere/ within us the bush/ burns'. Ellmann argues that: 'To follow the soul into another world is to give up one's heart and self, and worst of all for a poet, to give up one's tongue, for in the presence of that unblemished world our tongue's a stone, in the simplicity of fire we are struck dumb.'⁷² The sentimental quester loses his antithetical status in the condition or stoniness of the fire and this destruction of poetic inspiration pragmatically equates to the loss of life's ambivalences.

In 'The Tree'(AAL) life itself is celebrated rather than denigrated thus as Bloom argues with relation to *Vacillation*: 'The heart knows that a born poet must write of "things that seem," of earthly complexity and not the simplicity of fire, which needs and nurtures no poet'.⁷³ Yet Yeats's poem articulates the premise that 'The swordsman throughout repudiates the saint, but not without vacillation'⁷⁴ but this, because of Thomas's vocation, seems an almost absurd proposition to apply to the priest's poem. 'The Tree'(AAL) is not castrated by the poet's often too intrusive theological concerns. Though, in a wonderful piece of irony, the Dionysian reveller is emasculated not by Attic frenzy but because of his preference for feasting rather than fighting. As Glyn Dwr speaks, Thomas symbolically takes the cross in the crusading sense and the Condition of Fire is stolen from heaven where in tongues of flame it visits the prophetic poet. His fire equates to the strings that burn on Gruffudd Llwyd's harp and rather than extinguishing this song as with the tread of feet or the touch of a burning coal Thomas risks self-destruction as like Shelley in *Ode to the West Wind* he forgets mortal constraint.

Thomas's exuberance is antithetical to that of Yeats in *Vacillation* and Shelley in *The Triumph of Life*. As Bloom argues: 'a vision of a burning tree from the *Mabinogion*, presents a blind joy of self-immolating poetic absorption that, by implication, is no longer available to the mature Yeats. The Poet-hero of *Alastor*, and all his Yeatsian descendants, could choose this fury of creative conflagration, but not the experienced poet in his mid-sixties'.⁷⁵ The essence of any reading of 'The Tree'(AAL) has to be the way in which Glyn Dwr recalls his indecision at unfurling the standard of the House of Gwynedd which in terms of the poem's debt of influence issues a challenge to the confessional figure of Rousseau/Wordsworth and his poetic contrition. Ultimately, this defiance is also extended to the moral or 'wisdom' of Yeats's poem which Bloom sums up as:

The answer to 'What is joy' the return of the revitalised antinomies, is implicit in the glancing reference to the parable of the lion and the honey-comb: 'Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.' One strength both slays the lion, and then feasts upon its sweetness. Joy does not depart permanently from the Samsons of poetry, such as Homer,

Shakespeare, Blake, in whose company Yeats desires to find himself. Vacillation is wisdom, or as much of wisdom as can be won through being a poet, because poetic realities, things that seem, are ceaselessly in flux.⁷⁶

Thomas misprisons the half aflame tree of Attis as the warring of the red and white dragons. Some of the leaves are 'hurled...Over the face of the grim world', some fall 'in a gold shower/ About its roots.' Glyn Dwr becomes Hotspur and Yeats Shelley. This is the great to be or not to be of Thomas's poetry and at this stage in the quest he chooses to make his quietus with a bare bodkin. Indecision is a method of soul searching that in 'The Tree'(AAL) borders on self-flagellation. This poem is hardly caustic in tone and yet Thomas would dearly love to castigate Shelley for his humanisation of Merkabah. The figure of Glyn Dwr is a palimpsest; a projection of Thomasian idealism onto Shelleyan despair. A reversal that parodies the respective poetic tone normally associated with each poet. Thomas projects all his aristocratic and non-pacific narratives onto Shelley's natural man. In a beautiful paradox these projected narratives coincide with the urbane poetic energy that is intrinsically Shellyan and which Thomas loves in spite of his almost unreasoning hatred of all things urban.⁷⁷

The repressed thoughts of the dead generations express themselves in Thomas's poem as the exulting song of nightingales that sing 'In the green shade' and which sound like 'the streams/ That pluck glad tunes from the grey stones'. These birds hit the same notes as the plucked harps of the bards and their hypnotic sparks burn through the context of the fallen world's dark woods. 'The Tree'(AAL) represents Thomas at his most Dionysian and to juxtapose it with the despair of 'A Welsh Testament'(T) is to show just how precarious was his visionary Prometheanism. The one saving grace of 'A Welsh Testament'(T) is that it is still possible for 'the door' to 'open/ To let me out or yourselves in'. This is still Prometheanism since like Eliphaz we may still join Job in his suffering. However, so reclusive does Thomas become that by the time of these lines from *Counterpoint* he is fully resigned to the inevitable failure of the Promethean part of the quest:

On an evening like this
 the furies have receded.
 There are only the shining sentinels
 at hand: Yeats in his Tower,
 who was his own candle,
 poring over the manuscript
 of his people, discovering pride

in defeat; discovering the lidless
 eye that beholds the beast
 and the virgin. Edward Llwyd,
 finding the the flower that grew
 nowhere but in Wales,
 teaching us to look for rare things
 in high places. Owain Glyn Dwr
 who tried blowing that flower
 into flame in the memory
 of an oppressed nation. The poets,
 all of them, in all languages,
 pausing on their migration
 between thought and word
 to watch here with me now
 the moon come into its fifteenth phase
 from whose beauty and madness
 men have withdrawn these last days,
 hand on heart, to its far
 side of sanity and darkness.

This is as close as Thomas comes to writing an *Il Penseroso* and the above has many Yeatsian analogues but the most relevant imagery for this discussion is that pertaining to Glyn Dwr and Phase 15 or the desecularized inspiration for the Condition of Fire. This is a purely spiritual state in which no human can dwell and yet Thomas in his pious last poems returns to it as an exercise in self-revision that repudiates the swithering wisdom of 'The Tree'(AAL). Fire is once more used to deperspectivise the machine (which is here symbolised by the dark of the moon as well as its unquoted counterpoint across the page from the above) and in this instance Thomas's perspectivism is a criticism of worldly objectives that includes Thomas's retracted revolutionary ardour. The evidence of a continued vacillation is slight and is limited to the wistful memory of Glyn Dwr or, to assert an Augustinian cliché, Thomas is ready for a life of writing mere devotional poetry but not quite. As Bloom argues: 'Like the other lost and defeated questers, the poet awaits now what he prayed for in the poem's opening, his hour of hours which will be also the universal apocalypse'.^{7 8} The apocalypse of Thomas is that of a dehumanised vision of Merkabah and this thesis must end with Thomas's vision of the Machine that in its long and illustrious history moves through Ezekiel, Revelations, Dante, Spenser, Milton, Pope, Cowper, Blake, Shelley and finally finishes in Thomas. In the three times three score years and ten since the seventeen-nineties the visionary gleam of

the Romantic generation has faded into the Celtic gloam of the Decadent generation and now finds its zed in the Millennial generation's moonless gloom.

CHAPTER 5NOTES:

- 1). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.87.
- 2). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.113.
- 3). Harold Bloom, *Shelley's MythMaking* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1959), p.233.
- 4). Ibid., p.241.
- 5). Op. Cit., 'Probings: An Interview with R. S. Thomas', pp.35-37.
- 6). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.471.
- 7). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.10.
- 8). Op. Cit., Bloom, *Shelley's MythMaking*, p.240.
- 9). Peter Abbs, 'The Revival of the Mythopoeic Imagination -A Study of R. S. Thomas and Ted Hughes', in *Critical Writings on R. S. Thomas*, pp.86-89.
- 10). Ibid., p.90.
- 11). I. R. F. Gordon, 'The Adult Geometry of the Mind', in *Three Contemporary Poets: Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes & R. S. Thomas*, ed. by A. E. Dyson, (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.244.
- 12). Op. Cit., *Furious Interiors*, p.421.
- 13). D. Z. Phillips, *R. S. Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.69.
- 14). Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p.168.
- 15). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.104.
- 16). R. S. Thomas, 'Some Contemporary Scottish Writing', in *Selected Prose*, ed. by Sandra Anstey, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1983), p.34. On another occasion Thomas continued his vituperative outburst thus: 'Our respective countries are being subjected to the winter of industrialism, mechanism and rationalism, and the spirit of man is longing for an escape to the summer pastures once again.' Thomas, R., S., 'A Welsh View of the Scottish Renaissance', in *Wales*, VIII:30, (1948), p.600.
- 17). Op. Cit., *Shelley's MythMaking*, p.230.
- 18). Op. Cit., *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W B Yeats*, p.352.
- 19). S. Coote, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), p.525.
- 20). Op. Cit., *A Vision*, p.135.
- 21). Ibid., p.136.
- 22). Op. Cit., *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, p.386.
- 23). Op. Cit., *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.467.
- 24). Op. Cit., *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W B Yeats*, p.353.
- 25). Bloom says of Yeats: 'his more lasting hope for the folk, with its attendant hatred of the half-educated.' Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.221.

- 26). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.349.
- 27). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.189.
- 28). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.209.
- 29). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.105.
- 30). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, pp.102-103.
- 31). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.103.
- 32). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.103.
- 33). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.106.
- 34). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, pp.193-194.
- 35). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.108.
- 36). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.108.
- 37). Op. Cit., *Yeats, A Vision*, p.66.
- 38). *Prometheus Unbound* II, iv: -If the Abyss/ Could vomit forth its secrets:-but a voice/ Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless'.
- 39). H. J. Savill, 'The Iago Prytherch Poems of R. S. Thomas', in *Critical Writings on R. S. Thomas*, p.43.
- 40). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.181.
- 41). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.182.
- 42). Op. Cit., *Omens of the Millennium*, p.30.
- 43). Op. Cit., *Furious Interiors*, p.158.
- 44). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.106.
- 45). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.107.
- 46). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.107.
- 47). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, pp.107-108.
- 48). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.104.
- 49). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.104.
- 50). Op. Cit., *The Visionary Company*, p.345.
- 51). Of the poem 'A Blackbird Singing'(PS) they write that it alludes to Keats, Shelley, Blake, and Herbert '-to the great touchstones in English Poetry'. 'C. B. Cox, & A. E. Dyson, *Modern Poetry: Studies in Practical Criticism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), pp.133-136.
- 52). Op. Cit., 'Neb,' p.64.
- 53). Jason Walford Davies, 'Allusions to Welsh Literature in the Writing of R. S. Thomas' in *Welsh Writing in English* Vol. I, (1995), ed. by Tony Brown, (Llandysul: Gomer, 1995), p.117.
- 54). Op. Cit., *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p.513.
- 55). Op. Cit., *Poetry and Repression*, p.102.
- 56). Op. Cit., *The Ringers in the Tower*, p.101.
- 57). Op. Cit., *Shelley's MythMaking*, p.263.

- 58). Op. Cit., *Shelley's MythMaking*, p.257.
- 59). John Davies, *A History of Wales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p.195.
- 60). Ibid., p.196.
- 61). Ibid., p.203.
- 62). F. B. Roberts, 'Tales and Romances' in *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, ed. by A. O. H. Jarman, (Cardiff: Wales, 1992), p.209.
- 63). William Hazlitt, 'Coriolanus' in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, IV, p.214.
- 64). Op. Cit., *Shelley's MythMaking*, p.247.
- 65). Op. Cit., *Shelley's MythMaking*, p.253.
- 66). Op. Cit., *The Reach of Sense*, p.175.
- 67). Op. Cit., *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, p.331.
- 68). Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* 2nd edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), p.273.
- 69). J. G. Fraser, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp.347-352.
- 70). Op. Cit., *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp.503-504.
- 71). Ibid., p.504.
- 72). Op. Cit., *The Identity of Yeats*, p.xiii.
- 73). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.396.
- 74). P. J. Keane, *Yeats's Interactions with Tradition* (Columbia: Missouri U. P., 1987), p.114.
- 75). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.395.
- 76). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.397.
- 77). 'You must forgive me if I rant, but I hate towns and so-called modern civilisation.' Op. Cit., Thomas, 'A Welsh View of the Scottish Renaissance', p.600.
- 78). Op. Cit., *Yeats*, p.131.

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