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DYLAN THOMAS AS A LOVE POET

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Eliška Mečířová

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval/a samostatně a pouze na základě uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Praze dne .....

(I declare that the following B.A. thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

Prague, date .....)

Contents

1. Introduction.....6-10
2. “Beginnings”.....11-22
2.1 “Especially When the October Wind”.....11-15
2.2 “Where Once the Waters of Your Face”.....15-18
2.3 “If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love”.....18-22
3. “Experience”.....23-35
3.1 “Love in the Asylum”.....24-25
3.2 “Paper and Sticks”.....26-27
3.3 “On the Marriage of a Virgin”.....28-31
3.4 “In My Craft or Sullen Art”.....31-35
4. “Return to Nature and Faith”.....36-50
4.1 “A Winter’s Tale”.....37-42
4.2 “In Country Sleep”.....42-47
4.3 “In the White Giant’s Thigh”.....47-50
5. Conclusion.....51-53
Bibliography.....54-56

Chapter 1: Introduction.

The aim of the following BA thesis is to discuss and analyse the poetry of Dylan Thomas as love poetry. Thomas's relatively short literary career ended prematurely and the reception of his work was inconsistent from the very beginning. Some praised him as one of the best English poets and others condemned his poetry as empty rambling. Thomas led the life of a prototypical Bohemian poet and in his speech in Rome in 1947 he proclaimed about himself: "One: I am a Welshman; two: I am a drunkard; three: I am a lover of the human race, especially of women." Thomas's poems very much reflect his attitude, his love of life; the main themes they deal with are procreation, birth and death, sensuality, love and religion. Only a few of Thomas's poems do not contain the word "love", yet the range and the meanings of love are multiple in his work. Thomas includes the notion of love in all of his collections. His love for Wales and human race in general merges with his love for women and also for men, his love of God as well as the senses is reflected in his poetry.

The following essay will provide a detailed analysis of 11 of his poems, respectively: "Where Once the Waters of Your Face" and "Especially When the October Wind", "If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love" from *18 Poems* in the second chapter, "In My Craft or Sullen Art", "Love in the Asylum", "On the Marriage of a Virgin" and "Paper and Sticks" from *Deaths and Entrances* in the third chapter and "A Winter's Tale" from *Deaths and Entrances*; "In Country Sleep" and "In the White Giant's Thigh" from the last collection called *In Country Sleep* in the fourth chapter.

All of these poems deal with love in Thomas's characteristic conception. In "Where Once the Waters of Your Face" and "Especially when the October Wind" it is love of Wales and the interconnected processes of man's life and nature; in "If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love" it is a sensual and wild adolescent experience, the luring of lust, love connected to physicality and sin, in "In My Craft or Sullen Art" it is love as the aim of poet's struggle for

creation, in “Love in the Asylum” we find the interconnectedness of love and madness, the richness of imagination, “Paper and Sticks” deals with the selfish love of man for man.

Finally, in the fairy-tale-like “A Winter’s Tale” it is the love of the Welsh countryside and religiosity; “In Country Sleep” we find romantic love; and in “In the White Giant’s Thigh” love connected to death and nostalgia for the past. The following thesis aims to analyse each of these poems in detail, exploring the “type” of love each contains, as well as discussing Thomas’s unusual treatment of language and the original devices and aspects of modern poetry. Thomas’s poetry is characteristic for its play with language. He puts together different words and also creates his own. He does not respect word classes and works with obscure metaphors and ambiguous syntax. Even though Thomas’s poetry may sometimes seem too technical or too obscure to be clearly grasped, it is full of impressive and unique images and some of his poems about love belong to the greatest love poetry ever written.

Moreover, this essay will also explore various reasons why, despite their obscurity and difficulty, the poems were so enthusiastically embraced by the general reading public. In addition, each of Thomas’s collections demonstrated diverse qualities and stages of development as his later collections gradually became more mature than the earliest ones, and were preoccupied with different themes, which is also reflected in the type of love it deals with. Therefore the structure of the thesis should work as a cycle developing from Thomas’s beginnings, dealing with the poems in his very first collection *18 Poems*, with puns and adolescent experience with physical love and sexuality in the second chapter. Afterwards it moves to the more mature themes of love as a transforming experience in the third chapter. The cycle closes itself in the fourth chapter when it returns to nature, tradition and faith in Thomas’s last collection *In Country Sleep*, with what G. S. Fraser calls “a retreat to the themes of childhood innocence and country peace [...]; a vision of a lost paradise regained.”[1]

[1] G. S. Fraser, *Dylan Thomas* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957) 22.

To establish the framework of the following thesis and try to find Thomas's place in it, it is also essential to introduce the most important stages of development of love poetry in English literature. The predecessor of the genre as it is known today came with the emergence of courtly love from France. During the earlier Middle Ages, "there was no concern about passionate love between male and female as a normal feeling."[2] The status and social prestige of women was low, they were not perceived as sexual objects but merely as potential child-bearers and certainly not man's equal companions or ladies inspiring strong devotions. This perspective changed markedly in France in the poetry of troubadours. "The novelty of courtly love lies in three basic elements: first, in the ennobling force of human love; second, in the elevation of the beloved to a place of superiority above the lover; third, in the conception of love as ever unsatiated, ever increasing desire."[3] In England it found its fullest early representative in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde.*[4]

The next stage of primary importance is the Renaissance love sonnet in England influenced by Petrarch's sonnets "with their Renaissance version of courtly love."[5] According to the Italian model, the English sonnets were also often pastoral where "the lover and his beloved are stock figures and Nature is Arcadia in eternal spring."[6] The sonnet was introduced to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt, however, it was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, "who established the accepted ABAB CDCD EFEF GG, a pattern more congenial to the comparatively rhyme-poor English language"[7] as opposed to the traditional Petrarchan sonnet. The most famous earlier sonnets are the sonnets of Dante to Beatrice and of Petrarch to Laura that praise a single woman only as their object of love. In England the peak of the development of the finest sonnet is reached by Shakespeare who does not mention the precise

[2] T.V.F. Brogan and Alex Preminger, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 156.
[3] The Princeton Encyclopedia 157.
[4] Ibid.
[5] The Princeton Encyclopedia 227.
[6] Ibid.
[7] The Princeton Encyclopedia 782-783.

name of his beloved and often exploits pastoral themes. The love theme of the sonnet is usually resolved in the last concluding couplet.

A single poet with a profound impact on Dylan Thomas was the most iconic representative of the so-called Metaphysical poets, John Donne. Donne "wrote of sacred and profane love, the hope of heaven and the fear o hell [...]" Most importantly, in connection to Thomas, his lyrics "fuses sex with saintliness. [...] By his mingled levity and seriousness, his ironic egocentricity, his rhetoric of shock and outrage, his subtle ambiguities [...] Donne has profoundly affected 20th- as well as 17th-century poetry."[8], Thomas not excluded. Furthermore, the metaphysical poets are "distinguished by revolutionary and highly original attitudes toward sexual love. Donne rejected not only Petrarchan rhetoric but also the pose of abject worship of the mistress [...]." He came up with "a new kind of sexual realism together with an interest in introspective psychological analysis."[9] An example of his praise of sensuality is the poem "The Sunne Rising" reminiscent of "On the Marriage of a Virgin": "She 'is all States, and all Princes, I,/ Nothing else is./ Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;/ This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy spheare."[10] After his lead, Thomas also employs both sexual and religious imagery at once with a certain amount of ambiguity.

In the context of modern poetry, Thomas's work has a lot in common with W.B. Yeats'. According to D.S. Savage, Thomas's work has a "Yeats-like celebration of blind sexual vitality."[11] Yeats' poems also celebrate the fulfilling sensuality of a relationship between a man and a woman such as in "The Mask": "'Put off that mask of burning gold/ With emerald eyes.' [...]/ 'But lest you are my enemy,/ I must enquire.'/ 'O no, my dear, let

[8] The Princeton Encyclopedia 230.
[9] The Princeton Encyclopedia 495.
[10] Ian Mackean, "The Love Poetry of John Donne," Feb. 2001, 5 Jul. 2009 <www.literature-study-online.com/essays/donne.html>.
[11] D.S. Savage, "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 144.

all that be,/ What matter, so there is but fire/ In you, in me?'"[12] There are also some similar motifs in Yeats' and Thomas's poetry, such as the crying curlew in "In the White Giant's Thigh" and "He Reproves the Curlew": "O, curlew, cry no more in the air,/ Or only to the waters in the West;/ Because your crying brings to my mind/ Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair/ That was shaken out over my breast:/ There is enough evil in the crying of the wind."[13]

According to Robert Horan:

> Certainly he [Thomas] finds fathers in Donne and Blake and Hopkins, not in technical indebtedness only, but in a similar conflict between the forms of conviction and desire, expressed in the religious imagery of Donne and Hopkins, and the helpless, mystical terminology of Blake. Although Thomas is not committed to a specific orthodoxy, he is susceptible to the rigorous claims that personal religion or historical myth makes upon emotion. His rhetoric reveals a reflection of Elizabethan richness and drama, of Shakespearian tempo and detail.[14]

Compared to other poets, even though it demonstrates various influences, Thomas's poetry will always bear its own specificities and will probably seem more obscure. He has also been compared to surrealists but unlike in their works based on association, there is a logic in his technique, as Louis MacNeice suggests his "is never the obscurity of carelessness."[15] His love poems are certainly less traditional in content than Donne's or even Yeats'. Despite their celebrating the same thing, Thomas has bent the iron of English to a greater extent.[16]

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[12] W.B. Yeats, *A Selection from the love Poetry of William Butler Yeats* (Churchtown: The Cuala Press, 1913) 24.
[13] Yeats 8.
[14] Robert Horan, "In Defence of Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 138.
[15] Louis MacNeice, "The Man," *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 85.
[16] See footnote 7 of the Conclusion.

Chapter 2: "Beginnings."

The three poems contained within this chapter: "Especially When the October Wind", "Where Once the Waters of Your Face" and "If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love" all come from Thomas's first collection *18 Poems*. All three of them deal with different natural elements: wind, water (or the sea) and the physicality of love. "Especially When the October Wind" and "Where Once the Waters of Your Face" really deal with natural elements as such and also with love of the Welsh countryside. The last poem "If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love" contains a beginning in a different sense of the word. It is full of newly discovered physicality and also of language tricks and play. It provides an ideal end for the first chapter because Thomas's sense of humour when he plays with the reader through his puns can be precisely demonstrated on this poem. He asks in the last stanza: "And what's the rub?"[1] as if he actually posed a question to the reader: And what is love? And ends with a statement: "Man be my metaphor."

2.1 "Especially When the October Wind"[2]

"Especially When the October Wind" describes the natural world, the wind, the sea, the Welsh countryside. Since the narrative voice of the poem is the "I" of the poet it conveys a personal emotive stance, a fondness for the Welsh landscape as well as "the wordy shapes of women" and "the star-gestured children". What is particularly interesting about Thomas's poetic language in this poem is that to convey this vivid situation it describes the natural elements via linguistic terminology. According to John Bayley: "A kind of external convention is produced, in which the poet formally attaches the terminology of language – 'Vowelled', 'wordy', 'syllabic', 'signature', 'speeches', 'signs' – to the world of nature –

[1] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 13.
[2] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 16-17.

water, women, birds, and so forth."[3] In addition to this, Bayley states that this is the key to the success and originality of Thomas's early poems because

> Thomas does achieve in these early poems an objective identification of his subject matter with the language in which he describes it. [...] He speaks of words, blood, women, in the same breath, and with the same almost terrifyingly intense awareness of their *existence*. It is an awareness of everything as vocal, as talking to him as he talks himself. For Thomas, not only seeing is the language, as Coleridge remarked: *being* is a language too.

As Thomas himself once said: "When I experience anything, I experience it as a thing and a word at the same time, both equally amazing."[4] Bayley also observes that this technique forces the reader to think about the words differently, "to wonder about the nature of the words" and to analyse them. Moreover, Thomas also uses this technique the other way round. Not only does he describe natural elements via the means of language, he also describes some aspects of the medium of language through natural phenomena such as "the oaken voices" or the "water's speeches". This tendency is even extended when Thomas ascribes human characteristics to various natural elements and animals, although the "frosty fingers" of the October wind certainly are metaphorical, "the raven cough in winter sticks" is rather literal as well as the "raven's sins".

Bayley also comments on Thomas's use of language in connection with the reception of his poetry by the critics: "The critical uncertainty which must still be felt about Thomas's real status as a poet arises from that fact that we still do not know whether language is capable of what he tried to do with it; or rather whether the consciousness of the receiver can

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[3] John Bayley, "Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas*, ed. By C.B. Cox (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 155-157.
[4] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1953* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993) 187.

adapt itself to such a variety of linguistic stimuli."[5] The "variety of linguistic stimuli" is particularly richly represented in this poem. It displays Thomas's fondness for using invented compound words such as "star-gestured children" or "dark-vowelled birds". One of Thomas's main devices is invention of words and improbable combinations of words. In this respect Thomas's poems definitely pose a challenge to the reader's imagination. As Alastair Reid puts it: "The words [of Thomas's *18 Poems*] seemed to me as absolute and inevitable as air, and I could not conceive of them as ever having been written by anyone. Even now, through the clutter of literary know-how that accumulates itself round our reading, I think the poems insist on a similar innocence from anyone who wishes to read them well."[6] In other words, the receivers should come to read Thomas's poems unprejudiced against his specific treatment of language and by creative thinking and analysis arrive at their own interpretations. One such example would be the interpretation of John Ackerman: "The epithet 'star-gestured' suggests the outstretched legs and arms of the children hilariously at play, and bears associations of heaven and innocence (related to Thomas's idealization of childhood)."[7]

Despite Thomas's highly innovative and specific use of language, the structure of this poem is surprisingly regular. All the four stanzas are more or less regularly rhymed in pattern ABBA. Thomas's rhymes are mainly masculine which makes the occasional feminine rhyme more prominent: "Some let me make you of the vowelled *beeches* (italics mine)/ Some of the oaken voices, from the roots/ Of many a thorny shire tell you notes,/ Some let me make you of the water's *speeches*. (italics mine). Thomas also uses alliteration to stress the connection of his invented phrases and combinations of words such as in "frosty fingers", "caught by the crabbing sun", "cast a shadow crab".

[5] Bayley 145.
[6] Alastair Reid, "The Man", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 53.
[7] John Ackerman, *Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 59.

Another technique abundant in his poems in general and in this one in particular is repetition with slight variation, parallel structures and echoes that contribute to the cohesion of the poem, which seems to hold the central theme together. The parallel structure "Especially when the October wind" opens the very first and the very last stanza of the poem and thus makes a stage, a borderline of the poem's development. The phrase "some let me make you of [...]" has a similar function that is repeated throughout the second, the third and the fourth stanza of the poem. It stands for the act of creation, as if the poet wanted to form the countryside around him in poetic terms, it develops from the words that nature utters, something innocent "vowelled beeches", "oaken voices" and "water's speeches" and reaches its climax in something evil and dark, connected to the human element, "Some let me make you of the heartless words." Furthermore, as John Fuller asserts: "These echoes in the poem's formula" function as a "way of tightly organizing the poem's structure, without having to manage a flexible development or argument. All the poet needs to do is to ring the changes, and the poem circulates splendidly around the formulae at its core."[8] Even though Fuller finds this device helps Thomas avoid creating a central theme or a flexible development, this does not apply to this particular poem. The motif of the windy October day and the poet's affection for what he sees around him is clear enough. The echoes, apart from contributing to the coherence, also help create the magical spell of the poem, its rhetoric.

The aspect of love for the Welsh countryside is contained in the echo "some let me make you" and in its creative aspect. W. S. Merwin in his essay defines Thomas as a "Celebrator in the ritual sense: a maker and performer of rite."[9] In addition to this, he claims that: "The poem, 'Especially when the October wind', takes this development a stage further: here the poet first fully assumes his Orphic role, celebrating a particular day, a particular

[8] John Fuller, "The Cancered Aunt on her Insanitary Farm", *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 201.
[9] W.S. Merwin, "The Religious Poet", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 236-238.

place, in autumn, offering to *make* it, or aspects of it, and as he names and celebrates them, doing so." This "Orphic role" as Merwin puts it is one of the aspects of love contained in the poem. Another intense aspect of a sort of love-making in the poem is, as C.J. Rawson calls it, its narcissistic aspect, "where the elements are described as wholly occupied in caressing him as a lover or a favourite child, 'punishing' him tenderly as a schoolboy, and furnishing him with heady feelings of bardic omnipotence and Romantic Agony."[10]

John Ackerman also suggests that the poem describes Thomas's poetic creation as such.[11] According to Ackerman: "The words 'busy heart', 'syllabic blood' suggest the emotional and personal nature of Thomas's approach to poetry." and the second stanza "deals with his isolation as a poet." The poem ends in the silence of the final sea scene and as Ackerman puts it: "There is no resolution of theme or image on an intellectual level. At the close of the poem there is only a dying of experience, [...] a return towards emotional stillness." Thus the poem, which started in an emotional tumult with the caressing of the "frosty fingers" of the wind and a "busy heart who shudders as she talks," closes with the emotional stillness of the waves and only the "dark-vowelled birds" are to be heard "by the sea's side".

2.2 "Where Once the Waters of Your Face"[12]

"Where Once the Waters of Your Face" is a poem elegiac in nature and according to Walford Davies it already foreshadows Thomas's later elegiac nostalgic poems.[13] This poem as E. Glyn Lewis points out comes out of Thomas's "obsessive concern with and delight in

[10] C.J. Rawson, "Randy Dandy in the Cave of Spleen: Wit and Fantasy in Thomas (with Comments on Pope, Wallace Stevens, and others), *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays,* ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 74.
[11] Ackerman 57-61.
[12] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 11.
[13] Walford Davies, "The Wanton Starer", *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays,* ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 155.

sea imagery."[14] The main theme of the poem concerns sea imagery and water as one of the elements. At its centre is a water channel that due to some human interference went dry. The poet mourns this using highly personal metaphors, mainly sensual language, such as "Invisible, your clocking tides/ Break on the lovebeds of the weeds;/ The weed of love's left dry". The poem expresses love for something that was, nostalgia, and regrets the change caused by reckless human interference, and the sexual imagery, such as the dry lovebeds of the weeds, effectively emphasizes the sudden emptiness within. Dylan Thomas uses sexual imagery in most of his earlier poems; this kind of sexual language usually stands for something active, a creative process that has been, in this particular poem, interrupted.

In "Where Once the Waters of Your Face" Thomas not only proves himself to be a poet of feeling but also a visual poet. Even though some of his images might be considered obscure, some vividly recall the setting in an original way, such as: "Where once the mermen through your ice/ Pushed up their hair, the dry wind steers/ Through salt and root and roe." To express the consequences of this process of going dry, Thomas employs the contrast of the former channel full of water with "the dry wind" that steers it now, the "dry weed of love's bed". The poem describes the human interference metaphorically: "Into the tided cord, there goes/ The green unraveller,[the human agent]/ His scissors oiled, his knife hung loose/To cut the channels at their source" and this image again recalls the sexual connotation of a umbilical cord being cut, the child, in this case the channel, no longer nurtured by the mother.

The poem also conveys a sense of measurement of time, in the intervals of the no longer working sea channel: "Invisible, your *clocking* (italics mine) tides/ Break on the lovebeds of the weeds". Time is further explored in three different aspects: the past with the

[14] E. Glyn Lewis, "Dylan Thomas", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 178.

once flowing waters, the present drought of the channel and the desirable future that concludes the poem in an idealist sort of way with a "shall" sequence :

> Dry as a tomb, your coloured lids
> Shall not be latched while magic glides
> Sage on the earth and sky
> There shall be corals in your beds,
> There shall be serpents in your tides
> Till all our sea-faiths die

Thus in its very ending the poem alludes to Thomas's later work which in particular deals with faith and religion. Consequently the harsh undesirable reality of the main theme, the channel gone dry, barrenness and infertility is reconciled in the magic of the faith that still enables us to see the channel with corals in its beds and serpents in its tides.

The main linguistic difficulty of this poem, as Elder Olson puts it, is that Thomas "is fond of confusing the reader as to what is metaphorical and what is literal; for example, 'Where Once the Waters of Your Face' leads the reader to suppose 'waters' metaphorical and 'face' literal , whereas the reverse is the case."[15] Quite correctly, these two different interpretations of the title also significantly alter the reader's understanding of the poem. As one of the main techniques in this poem Thomas again employs repetition of the part of the title "where once" that contributes to the structure of the poem, especially to its elegiac quality. The parallel structures in the final stanza: "There shall be" also contribute to the dramatic effect of the ending.

As Elder Olson interestingly points out, there are three kinds of symbolism at work in Thomas's poems: natural symbolism (where light stands for something positive and darkness has negative connotations), conventional symbolism "dependent for interpretation upon

[15] Elder Olson, "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 235.

knowledge of the conventions" and most importantly, Thomas's specific private symbolism "that can be best interpreted by following him from work to work [...] and observing his habits."[16] This notion might be very accurately demonstrated on "Where Once the Waters of Your Face". Because as Olson further claims:

> One observes, thus, that he tends to use wax as a symbol of death, oil as a symbol of life, the sea as the symbol of the source of life, salt as a symbol of genesis in the sea. Scissors or knives are symbols of birth (on the ground that the birth-caul is cut open, the birth-string cut) or death (on the ground that the threat of life is cut) and of sexual connection.

Thus we might in "Where Once the Waters of Your Face" interpret as Thomas's private symbol the sea as a source of life that has been dried and the knife and the scissors as a symbol of death that has a sexual connotation.

2.3 "If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love"[17]

The last poem in this chapter contains some typical aspects of Thomas's early work that are not represented so abundantly in the previous two poems, mainly the ironic voice of the poet, puns and vivid imagery of physical love, the adolescent sexual lure threatened by the imagery of the first sin and biblical punishment. According to John Ackerman: "His [Thomas's] Puritan conscience did not live in harmony with his animal, human self. The poem 'If I were tickled by the rub of love' is a release of these conflicts. [...] Sex is desirable, but with it come

[16] Elder Olson, "The Universe of the Early Poems", *Dylan Thomas*, ed. C.B. Cox (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 50-51.
[17] Dylan Thomas, "If I were tickled by the rub of love", *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 12-13.

associations of fear and guilt and death. He is aware that what attracts him also repels him: and cannot come to terms with himself."[18]

The theme of love in this poem is connected to sexual lure which attracts as well as repulses the speaker at the same time. On the one hand there is a sexual frustration when the desire remains unfulfilled, on the other it is the fear and guilt of what happens when it is fulfilled. In addition to this, as A. Davies points out, Thomas's early poems full of sexual imagery such as this one deal with "the relation between man's capacity for love and the sexual act. "and that "From the beginning of his career as a poet, Dylan Thomas's task was centred in an attempt at an unravelling of this mysterious complication of human existence." Therefore, by acknowledging this mystery, "the poet passes through the more superficial aspects of sexuality to the fundamental truth concerning man as a being capable of love."[19]

As Ackerman points out: "In this poem there is a profound moral conflict. [...] The poet tells us he is in love, but this is not the customary poetical convention of 'love-madness.' He is 'daft with the drug that's smoking in a girl': the drug of sexual desire makes him daft."[20] Moreover, this idea of drug stupor is connected to the image of the devil: "This world is half the devil's and my own/ Daft with the drug that's smoking in a girl/ And curling round the bud that forks her eye." Thus the adolescent desire of the speaker is in his remorse compared to the devil's intensifying its sinful nature.

The stimulation of senses is especially prominent in this poem: the smoke is curling round the girl's eye, the girl is the drug and she lures him with her eyes. It is a visual as well as olfactory stimulation. As Ackerman also suggests: "The drug has been planted in the girl by the devil: she is not responsible for her sexual nature."[21] The physical nature of this poem is also stressed by the fact that the speaker "sees the girl anatomically, not in pretty, romantic

[18] Ackerman 49-50.
[19] Aneirin Talfan Davies, *Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1977) 24.
[20] Ackerman 51.
[21] ibid.

terms."[22] For him she is: "A rooking girl who stole me for her side." Thomas's symbolism is again evident in this characteristic, the image of the raven (rook) connected to sin, the verb 'stole' tries to suggest the innocence of the speaker, his role was passive because the sinful girl "stole him for her side". As Ackerman emphasizes, it is "a very impersonal, almost contemptuous designation of the beloved."[23]

The speaker is threatened for his sin by biblical imagery: "I would not fear the apple nor the flood." In contrast to these religious symbols such as the apple or the flood, the poem is full of vivid physical images: "the cells", "the blood", "the flesh". This contrast enhances the speaker's dilemma, the moral conflict and tension of the poem. In the second stanza the poem deals with the stage of life in the womb and its first sexual tinkling: "If I were tickled by the hatching hair/ The winging bone that sprouted in the heels,/ The itch of man upon the baby's thigh,". The animality of this poem is underscored by the sort of verbs Thomas uses when describing the process of the embryonic development characteristic for the natural world of plants and animals such as "hatching" and "sprouting." Consequently, in Thomas even the purest image of innocence, the unborn child, is connected to the already awakening physical tendencies, the desires of the flesh.

This early stage of development continues into the next stanza where "Thomas passes to the sexual appetites of adolescence."[24] At this stage sexuality is associated with sin for the first time: "the devil in the loin." The idea of masturbation is also indicated: "I would not fear the muscling-in of love/ If I were tickled by the urchin hungers/ Rehearsing heat upon a raw-edged nerve." The invented composites "muscling-in of love" and "raw-edged nerve" are Thomas's characteristic device, giving a sort of exotic flavour and touch of irony to his poems. As Francis Scarfe points out:

[22] Ackerman 51.
[23] Ackerman 49.
[24] Ackerman 50.

> The invention of words is inevitable in the expression of the half-perceived, incoherent sensations and ideas. And as his pen hovers between a host of choices, seeking some short-cut to expression [..], Dylan Thomas invents such terms as 'man-iron', 'all-hollowed', 'seastruck'.[...] The presence of puns in these composites indicates his pedantic dry humour.[25]

These composites help indicate the vividness of the process such as in this case the intensity of love-making and the self-practised "rehearsing heat upon a raw-edged nerve." The idea of rehearsal in this sense also conveys a strong sense of irony.

Not only does Thomas successfully play with creating his own new composites, he also effectively deconstructs those which already exist in the English language and thereby creates puns. Such as in the fourth stanza which starts with a variation on the refrain: "If I were tickled by the lovers' rub" and thus introduces the more frequent presence of puns in it. "Time and the crabs and the sweethearting crib/ Would leave me cold as butter for the flies." The slight variation in "crab" and "crib" creates the internal rhyme of the line and "cold as butter for the flies" is an ironic pun on butterfly. Interestingly, it is arguable whether "butterfly" actually is a composite in the first place. Therefore Thomas's irony is not only in the allusion to butterfly but also in the fact that he deconstructed something which is not, in fact, prone to deconstruction at all. Consequently, it shows that in his play with language, Thomas has no scruples whatsoever.

Furthermore, in "If I were tickled by the rub of love" there is what C.J. Rawson calls "the operations of the phallus."[26] Rawson claims that the introduction of the penultimate stanza: "And that's the rub, the only rub that tickles./ The knobbly ape that swings along his sex" contains an element of "fantasy-humour" because "the operations of the phallus in Thomas's

[25] Francis Scarfe, "Dylan Thomas: A Pioneer", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 98.
[26] C.J. Rawson, "Randy Dandy in the Cave of Spleen: Wit and Fantasy in Thomas (with Comments on Pope, Wallace Stevens, and others), *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 89.

dream-landscapes and erotic imaginings typically combine a visually striking effect which is yet visually impossible or incoherent [...].” Moreover, “the phallus acquires an oddly independent existence, separating itself from its owner and becoming a gigantic piece of detachable apparatus.”[27] In his depictions of the sinful physicality of nature Thomas knows no restraints in representing the phallus so boldly and creating an additional ironic effect.

The last stanza, especially rich in assonance and alliteration tries to resolve the dilemma of the poem by a pun, thus leaving the ending open. The assonance in: “Your mouth, my love, the thistle in the kiss?” underlines the duality of the poem: the attractiveness of the kiss and the repulsive “thistle” in it. The ending of the poem also brings in the opposition of physical love and death:

> And what’s the rub? Death’s feather on the nerve?[...]
> My Jack of Christ born thorny on the tree?
> The words of death are dryer than his stiff,
> My wordy wounds are printed with your hair.
> I would be tickled by the rub that is:
> Man be my metaphor.

Raymond Stephens asserts that: “Against this mortal ‘rub’, the poet attempts a personal transcendence, which is the power of his creative ‘metaphor’ to transform one level of reality into another.”[28] The inevitable reality of death in connection to sin is thus faced by creativity, the capacity to make puns and not take anything seriously. After all, man as well as love and death may be just a metaphor. As Scarfe asserts: “So the life-death problem in Dylan Thomas is as unresolved as the sex-sin problem.” [29]

[27] C.J. Rawson 89.
[28] Raymond Stephens, “Self and World: The Earlier Poems”, *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays,* ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 39.
[29] Scarfe 101.

Chapter 3: "Experience."

In this chapter, four of the chosen poems will be analysed, all from *Deaths and Entrances*: "Love in the Asylum", "Paper and Sticks", "On the Marriage of a Virgin" and "In My Craft or Sullen Art". All of them represent love as a medium that enables one person to experience something crucial through another and causes a consequent transformation of one of the people involved. In contrast to the first chapter that depicts either love for the countryside or love as a physical desire of the flesh, the poems in this chapter view love from a more mature perspective. Adolescent physical needs are replaced by love as a transforming emotional experience. As E. Glyn Lewis puts it, Thomas has in this collection developed a "mature and imaginative sympathy for persons in spite of what may appear to be their defects and weaknesses."[1]

"Love in the Asylum" is the fantasy of a mad girl and the richness of her imagination that open the narrator's eyes; "Paper and Sticks" has love deformed by money and unfulfilled illusions; "On the Marriage of a Virgin" shows the transformation of a girl after her first sexual experience; and lastly "In My Craft or Sullen Art" has love as an inspiration for creation, in other words it is meaningful to create only for love. As Rushworth M. Kidder puts it: "*Entrances* [...] are the beginnings of a mature poetic style, a concern for the ordering and understanding of past youthful and sexual experience. [...] As its basic overall subject, this body of poems takes the remaking of character by the deaths of old things and the entrances into new [...]."[2]

Moreover, the poems also have a similar structure, they are comparatively shorter than the ones in the previous chapter and for example "Paper and Sticks" and "In My Craft or Sullen Art" are also written in a clearer, more concise style that is not so heavy with puns and

[1] E. Glyn Lewis, "Dylan Thomas", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 184.
[2] Rushworth M. Kidder, *Dylan Thomas: The Country of the Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 155.

metaphors as the above mentioned poems. According to A. Davies, this collection conveys "an impression of light, of illumination. This movement towards light is also accompanied by a simplifying of style, and an attendant gain in lucidity."[3]

3.1 "Love in the Asylum"[4]

As C.B. Cox points out, the title of this poem has a double meaning: "with love as refuge and madhouse".[5] This duality of meaning also sets up the tension of the poem. The poem opens with the emergence of a mad girl: "A stranger has come/ To share my room in the house not right in the head/ A girl mad as birds." By comparing the girl to birds Thomas continues with his technique of organic representation typical of his earlier poems. The bird the girl is compared to enhances her fragility and also classifies her as a bringer of something new, a contributor of a new vision, new hope, as well as in Thomas's other poem analysed in this thesis: "A Winter's Tale." The basic dilemma of "Love in the Asylum" is: who is the madman in the poem. A girl with natural sensibility compared to birds or the narrator of the poem who occupies 'the male wards' that the girl is haunting?

The poem consists of six triplets which fall into two divisions of three, the first rhymed ABC, the second, DEF. As William York Tindall rightly observes: "In each division the first triplet has two short lines and the other two triplets, reversing the pattern and the rhythm, have two long lines."[6] This recurring pattern of long and short lines creates a vivid visual impression of the structure and stresses the dreaminess, the fluent flow of varied imagery, of the poem.

In the second stanza, the girl is: "Bolting the night of the door with her arm her plume./ Strait in the mazed bed/ She deludes the heaven-proof house with entering clouds."

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[3] Aneirin Talfan Davies, *Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1977) 65.
[4] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 108.
[5] C.B. Cox, "Introduction", *Dylan Thomas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. By C.B. Cox (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 5.
[6] William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962) 191.

This stanza refers to the house as both a refuge and a prison. By bolting the night with her plume, when she is further compared to a bird, the girl protects the house from the darkness outside and thus the aspect of safety of the refuge is underscored. On the other hand, however, the house is heaven-proof, which might symbolise the speaker's lack of faith and hope as he is limited within the walls of his confinement. Moreover, as Tindall points out, "strait" implies a strait jacket, a further imprisonment.[7]

The use and variation on the word "delude" that appears in the second, third and fourth stanza implies the speaker's initial lack of trust toward the stranger-girl, she might just as well be a mere product of his rich imagination. Yet she "deludes the heaven-proof house with entering clouds" and "admits the delusive light through the bouncing wall,/ Possessed by the skies." Therefore the girl admits light into his prison and being possessed by the skies, an allusion to her being a bird which carries a religious connotation as well, she creates the exact opposite to the "heaven-proof house", bringing in new light and hope and in the end of the poem makes the house "roofless": "And taken by light in her arms at long and dear last/ I may without fail/ Suffer the first vision that set fire to the stars." R. M. Kidder sees this revelation enabled by the girl as "rejoicing in the thought of sexual experience as an entrance into a religious vision, [which] ends on an image suggestive of the Creation."[8]

The poem therefore intermingles sexual and religious imagery and implies that the process of revelation is painful, a sacrifice, since it is connected to suffering. On the other hand, there is an emotional aspect to it as well. The girl takes him into her arms and therefore opens his eyes to the new vision by means of physical and emotional closeness. Consequently, it also reveals the thin borderline between a delusion and a vision as well as there is a thin borderline between love as a creative vision or imprisoning madhouse.

[7] Tindall 192.
[8] Kidder 164.

3.2 "Paper and Sticks"[9]

Interestingly, after proofreading the *Collected Poems* Thomas wrote a letter to his publisher at the last minute to cut "Paper and Sticks" out, because he has "the horrors" of it.[10] Nevertheless in order to keep the volume intact and prevent Thomas's last minute aversion to this poem from condemning it to oblivion, it has been preserved in the present volume of *Collected Poems 1934-1953*.[11] It is true that the style of this particular poem significantly differs from the previous ones. It is structured into six triplets with a very simple and regular AAB, CCB etc. rhyming pattern. Hence, in terms of structure and diction this poem belongs to Thomas's simplest.

The central theme of this poem represents love (possibly homosexual) as selfish material and physical exploitation, a form of parasitism even, and its transience is intertwined with the imagery of starting a fire and cleaning the grate after it has died away. The simple form of this poem is enhanced by the frequent use of alliteration as a structuring device. The material values of the particular love relationship in the poem are connected to physical and material satisfaction, the two sins of lust and greed. This is represented in the second stanza: "Once I had a rich boy for myself/ I loved his body and his navy blue wealth/ And I lived in his purse and his heart." This stanza evidently ironizes love by putting purse and heart on the same level. As a result, the Western symbol of genuine love, the heart, is also made a mere container.

The fire imagery is connected to colour symbolism in the poem: "When in our bed I was tossing and turning/ All I could see were his brown eyes burning/ By the green of a one pound note." The alliterative "burning brown eyes" are thus distorted by "the green of a one

[9] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1953* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993) 97.
[10] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1953* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993) 238.
[11] Thomas 160.

pound note" illuminating them. There is again irony in the clash of the spiritual, remembering the colour of the lover's eyes, and the material, the green as the typical colour of banknotes.

The anaphora of initial "I" in stanzas 2, 4 and 5 underscores the egoistic strain of the poem. It contrasts and clashes with the change of tone in the fifth line where instead of insisting on his own welfare solely the speaker offers to share some of his money with his or her lover: "I'll share my money and we'll run for joy." Furthermore, this clashes with another, even more profound, change in tone of the poem in the very last stanza. It moves away from the positive selfish tone, joyous from exploiting the handsome and rich lover, towards a negative and even destructive note: "Sharp and shrill my silly tongue scratches/ Words on the air as the fire catches/ *You* never did and *he* never did." The alliteration of "sh" and "s" becomes onomatopoeic at the same time because the sounds evoke the rasping noise of something being scratched. It is further enhanced by the fact that it is an oxymoron, something as soft and moist as tongue cannot scratch, and thereby it stresses the helplessness and failure of creating words that would make some sort of impact on the lover.

Moreover, the repetition of "I" throughout the poem clashes with the *"you"* and *"he"* of the last line. The ploce of never points at the final failure of the speaker to fulfil his love affair and in this line he also changes the means of reference to himself using "you" instead of "I". The grammatical simplicity and the short pronouns in the last line underscore the desperate and barren note, the disappointment of the speaker, the final impossibility of establishing a harmonious relationship on material values. As the editors of *The Collected Poems* point out: "Admittedly, 'Paper and Sticks' does not have this same relatedness to the style and themes of its period; it is essentially a minor dramatic monologue [...], it can usefully stand as the first example of new tendencies that were, increasingly in the 1940s, to enter Thomas's work as a whole: a more dilute style and racy realism."[12]

[12] Walford Davies and Ralph Maud, "General Preface to the Notes," *Collected Poems 1934-1953* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993) 160.

3.3 "On the Marriage of a Virgin"[13]

"On the Marriage of a Virgin" consisting of two seven-line stanzas also displays Thomas's technique of mixing religious and sexual imagery to create a poem both about the consummation of physical love and the spiritual miracle of the Virgin's conception. It might be seen as an epithalamion, a poem written for the bride on her way to her marital chamber. As its first line tells us: "Waking alone in a multitude of loves," the poem which speaks about the multitude of loves is manifold too. There is a marked contrast between the first stanza with its religious imagery that refers to the virgin as the Virgin Mary and the miraculous creation; and the second stanza that returns toward a virgin-wife sleeping beside her husband. The reality of marriage concludes the poem as a contrast to the miracle of creation that opens it.

William York Tindall observes the varied character of the poem as follows:

> This poem is clever – witty in the seventeenth-century sense of discovering ingenious analogies or of putting apparent incompatibles together. In this elaborate conceit of conceits, the elements at loving war with one another are the Christian and the pagan, the divine and the human, spirit and flesh, the fabulous and the real, abstraction and individuality, woman alone and woman accompanied, the serious and the frivolous, and more. [...] Not wit alone but clever allusion distinguishes this poem on "a multitude of loves." Iris, Mercury, Aphrodite, the golden shower of Danaë, and Leda's swan surround the Virgin Mary and the less miraculous married virgin at the end.[14]

The first stanza opens with waking: "Waking alone in a multitude of loves when morning's light/ Surprised in the opening of her nightlong eyes/ His golden yesterday upon the iris". The main creative force in this first part of the poem is "morning's light" that is personified – surprised in the virgin's eyes with "his golden yesterday on the iris." There are

[13] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 127.
[14] Tindall 219-220.

two main sets of imagery in the poem: the first one is connected to sense-perception mainly visual and sensual and the other is the religious imagery of light: the "golden yesterday" and the "golden ghost" of the second stanza which create the initial opposition of the poem.

The Virgin in the first stanza is the Mother fertilized by the golden light: "And this day's sun leapt up the sky out of her thighs/ Was miraculous virginity old as loaves and fishes", there is the mentioned contrast of the pagan light and the Christian God. The "loaves and fishes" are, moreover, allusions to Jesus. Thus in this first phase, the virgin is a mother of the first sun in the poem, the religious and spiritual force. There is also an emphasis on the word "alone" throughout the poem: the virgin is "waking alone" and "once she married alone". As Tindall puts it, it stresses "the paradox of 'miraculous virginity', reveals the trouble of divine love"[15]. The divine love that requires the virgin to be alone and enables her to conceive alone is contrasted with "real marital love" conditioned by physical nearness and mutuality initiated by the "golden ghost."

The counterpart of the procreator in the first stanza, the golden light, is the "golden ghost" of the second stanza who, although it carries a reference to the Holy Ghost, represents the husband of virgin-the-wife and opens her eyes, he usurps and dazes her senses through the newly created desire he reveals to her and thus reverses her loneliness:

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

[15] Tindall 220.

The "golden ghost ringed" the virgin, gave her a ring and married her, as Tindall puts it: "'Ringed' means married, and a wedding ring is gold. His gold alchemically weds her mercury [...] like a porter he delivers his 'golden luggage' through her eyes, below the 'lids of her windows.'"[16] Interestingly, the entrance both of the spiritual force of "the golden light" and the husband "the golden ghost" happens via the eyes where the first one enters "surprised in the opening of her nightlong eyes" and the second "hoists his golden luggage" both without invitation.

The man has occupied all her senses and forced out the "first sun" while "she learns through his arm/ that other sun, the jealous cursing of the unrivalled blood." According to Tindall: "[...] Instead of abstract and composite virginity, we have to do with an actual woman [...] no longer alone but miraculously with a husband in bed. A product of many comparisons, this blood is incomparable. But possessive and triumphant – jealous of all rivals, human or divine."[17] Thus, the "unrivalled blood," incomparable to any other, wins over the spiritual golden light. According to David Aivaz: "A man replaces the sun or the Son, pagan or Christian god, as the virgin's lover. [...] Finally with the multitude gone, blood is 'unrivalled' yet 'jealous'. The shift is not only from god to man, but also from the one to the one-of-many, from celebration to choice."[18]

Even though the poem rhymes in a more or less regular pattern and uses alliteration and assonance; Tindall even compares the structure to a sonnet: "as in Shakespearean sonnet, the two last lines are conclusive"[19]; it is not its structure that makes it appealing but Thomas's use of words, the multiple character of the poem and its surface movement. As Francis Scarfe asserts: "Technically, Dylan Thomas has achieved nothing new. His alliterative and inventive tricks are as old as poetry. [...] His outstanding merit, when

[16] Tindall 220.
[17] Tindall 221.
[18] David Aivaz, "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 204-206.
[19] Tindall 221.

compared with other young poets, is his rich vocabulary, his sensual appreciation of words, his intense persuasive idiom which reveals him as one who is reaching towards all that is most living in our language."[20] In addition to it, Thomas is also reaching towards all that is most living in humanity, the vividness and immediacy of spiritual and sensual experience that are both contradictory and co-mingled as parts of the same poem.

Finally, interweaving the sexual as well as the religious the poem deals in detail with both spiritual creation and the physical contact of the flesh, consummation of marriage during the wedding night, it has the dual quality of representing in detail both divine love marital love. However, as Martin Dodsworth observes: "what is remarkable in Thomas's poetic practice is the way in which, whilst insisting upon the precise physical aspects of sexual creation, he nevertheless preserves its essential mystery."[21] "Preserving its essential mystery" which touches upon the mystery of God's creation and stressing the emotional fulfillment of marital love which puts physical love on spiritual level too enables it for both contradictory qualities to be embraced in one poem. Yet the human aspect that represents the climax of the conclusion does for Thomas have a greater appeal. Since it is the sensual love that can even embrace the spiritual and participate in the mystery of creation and thus unite both elements into one; in contrast spiritual love will always require the Virgin to be alone.

3.4 "In My Craft or Sullen Art"[22]

"In My Craft or Sullen Art" is one of Thomas's most famous and shortest poems. The poem consists of two stanzas and has quite a regular rhyming scheme and clear structure: both stanzas begin with an ABCDE sequence and end in a CCA sequence. Even though the

[20] Francis Scarfe, "Dylan Thomas: A Pioneer", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 110-111.
[21] Martin Dodsworth, "The Concept of Mind and the Poetry of Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 123.
[22] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 128.

first stanza is shorter than the second, they both start and conclude with the same rhyming pattern which underscores the incantatory quality of the poem and the development and refurbishment of its argument.

The simplicity of the structure also contributes to the lucidity of the content. The imagery is not obscure as in Thomas's other poems and the shortness of the lines helps establish the clarity of the content with a certain finality and firmness, as if just saying precisely what is necessary to reach the desired impact and avoiding redundant decorative devices. Even though the argument in this poem is developed quite clearly, the poem cannot deny some of Thomas's characteristic poetic techniques. One of them is a certain form of personification, attributing human properties and features to abstract notions or material objects, such as in "sullen art," "raging moon," "signing light".

The situation of the poem is double, like "On a Marriage of a Virgin", there is the poet who "exercises his craft or sullen art in the still night" and "the lovers who lie abed with all their griefs in their arms when the moon rages." Therefore the poem makes the reader see an image of two separate windows, two secret situations, a solitary poet labouring painstakingly to create a poem in the dead of night, and two lovers abed embracing each other, these scenes are viewed only by the "raging moon" which therefore becomes a visual connector of the poem. To enhance the quality of the poet's private solitariness and quiet solitude whilst he creates, Thomas employs assonance of 'i' and 'ai': "In my craft or sullen art/ exercised in the still night [...]/ I labour by signing light." This is further emphasised by means of antithesis: 'still night' (and the lying lovers) is in an antithetic relationship towards the 'raging moon' which creates a contrast between stillness and restlessness, passivity and feverish activity.

Moreover, the poem is told via first person perspective and the poet, who is the speaker, humbles himself throughout the poem by comparing his 'sullen art' to craft and

consequently ‘labour for the common wages.’ This attitude stresses the laborious and uneasy nature of his creation unappreciated and underestimated by the world as well as its precision and sense of detail. The notion of craft in connection with language is also often mentioned concerning Dylan Thomas himself, i.e. Geoffrey Moore calls him “a carver-out of phrases.”[23] Here, W. Y. Tindall brings forward the ambiguous nature of the conjuction ‘or’ in “craft or sullen art”: “Does ‘or’ imply the identity of craft and art or a distinction between them? [...] Preserving a distinction, ‘or’ implies a connection.”[24] Thus it has two functions at once. In addition to this, the multiple character of the adjective “sullen” is significant in creating the stratified nature of meaning of the poem: as W. Davies points out in the “Notes” to the *Collected Poems* the central meaning of sullen comes from Latin solus ‘alone’, therefore “’sullen’ means not only morose but also solitary, emphasizing that the poet’s task is essentially companionless, without the rewards and comforts of society.”[25] This definition stresses the double situation of the poem: the “oneness” and solitude of the poet and the “twoness” of the embracing lovers, united in their closeness. However, in other aspects, the definition is only partially true: the lack of appreciation and fame is not only something that the poet must suffer but also a choice that he makes, he rejects those worldly values in order that his creation be meaningful and true.

To develop the argument Thomas uses the technique of definition by negation:

> I labour by signing light
>
> Not for ambition or bread
>
> Or the strut and trade of charms
>
> On the ivory stages
>
> But for the common wages

[23] Geoffrey Moore, “Dylan Thomas,” *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 263.
[24] Tindall 222.
[25] Walford Davies and Ralph Maud, “Notes,” *Collected Poems 1934-1953* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993) 241.

Of their [the lovers'] most secret heart.

By means of his negating statement, the poet proclaims that he does not write poetry so as to gain material security ('Not for bread') or ambition or the false glitter of empty meaningless fame. Thereby he rejects material as well as worldly values such as pride or ambition. Moreover, by comparing the theatre to 'trade of charms' he stresses its pretentious aspect, the showing-off and emptiness from within together with charlatanism, according to him, the show does not reveal the true value of art but only attracts the audience's attention. In addition to this, Tindall defines it as: the public pretensions of the poet [...] or poetry as business, the exchanging of magic spells for cash."[26] Here, the antithetic contrast of "ivory stages" and "trade of charms" also enhances the outward expensive and luxurious construction and its cheap content. Moreover, the "ivory stages" also contrast with "the common wages of their most secret heart" which is the only thing the poet requires as the compensation for his efforts. Yet quite contradictorily, the 'ivory stages' are in fact common within whereas the 'common wages' contain the deepest and strongest kind of motivation: the lovers' "most secret heart".

In the second stanza, the rejection of worldly values and the definition by negation are developed in further detail:

Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Nor for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages

[26] Tindall 222.

Nor heed my craft or art.

The ‘spindrift pages’ might be seen to represent the delicacy and frailty of the poet’s work in progress as well as its passing nature and ephemerality in contrast to the notion of eternity contained in the reference to death, possibly fame even after the poet’s death and eternal remembrance. The poet rejects this idea of eternal fame as well as writing for the praise of God and instead sees love as the most meaningful motivation for creation, as something deep, ever-lasting and absorbing the “griefs of the ages” and thus transcending time. The secret of the lovers’ hearts is an eternal quality of mankind, empathy and love, contrasted with the false pretence of showy art. In the poem, not only is the motivation for creation secret, “the most secret heart”, but the process of creation is also secret in its solitariness thereby reflecting its true value and isolating aspect in contrast to the empty yet social art of the theatre.

The latter part of the second stanza, nevertheless, also reveals the poet’s disappointment with the lovers’ lack of appreciation and attention and thus decodes the second meaning of “sullen art” which demonstrates the ungratefulness of the poet’s task and partly a certain pride in his creation. However, he decides to write poetry in spite of it, mediating to the reader the real value of selfless and truthful creation, meaningful only in relation to deep affection. T.H. Jones describes “In My Craft or Sullen Art” as follows: “it is a poem which says, clearly and beautifully, what the whole of his [Thomas’s] work says.”[27] In accordance with this statement, in “In My Craft or Sullen Art” Dylan Thomas shows that it is not important to impress the masses, after all, fame has a relative value, but to touch the lovers’ secret heart, since love is not relative but far-reaching and eternal.

[27] T.H. Jones, *Dylan Thomas* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963) 111.

4. “Return to Nature and Faith”

The fourth chapter of the thesis aims to examine three poems that represent the development of Thomas’s later literary career and the shift of focus from the examination of personal relationships in lucid and short structures dealt with in the previous chapter, to the longer balladic poems that deal with natural and religious themes. In contrast to the poems in the second chapter which represented new beginnings and sexual awakening, all the poems in this chapter confront death together with a retreat to Thomas’s memories of the Wales he knew as a child. Therefore they create a symbolic conclusion of the thesis structure. The poems analysed in this chapter are: “A Winter’s Tale” from *Deaths and Entrances*, “In Country Sleep” and “In White Giant’s Thigh” from Thomas’s last collection *In Country Sleep.*

As G.S. Fraser points out, in comparison to the earlier poems where Thomas attempts “to grasp the whole of life, human and natural, as an apparently confused but ultimately single process, in his later poems, he more often seems to be, quite consciously and much less bewilderingly, *celebrating* that process [...] religiously and with sacramental imagery.”[1] Moreover, the poems chosen in this chapter are what Fraser calls: “the recaptured-childish-landscape, semi-fairy-tale, semi-ode” or “the long poem of formal celebration.” And as he correctly observes they move away from the earlier obscure and condensed images, “the quality of cloudy pregnancy”, to create “bright, expansive effects. Their landscapes are always partly magical landscapes.”[2] Combined with Thomas’s vision of the Wales of his childhood and a religious vision, they also present a reconciliation with death.

[1] G.S. Fraser, *Dylan Thomas* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957) 11.
[2] Fraser 22-24.

4.1 "A Winter's Tale[3]"

"A Winter's Tale" is one of Thomas's longest and as its title suggests it is a narrative poem which represents an act of communication, mutual exchange with its frequent references to "telling", "listening" and "looking." that address the reader and thereby also refer to the "hearthstone tales" of "In Country Sleep." According to William Y. Tindall, the poem "shows a crafty delight in alliteration, rhythm, structure, texture, and concerted vowels."[4] Indeed, it is often seen as one of Thomas's most elaborate poems in terms of structure, not only does it abound in alliteration but also in internal rhyme, echoes of the same words and images re-appear in the poem as the narrative develops. Each of the 26 stanzas begins with short initial line. Run-on lines are very frequent, even between stanzas, for example the final line of the third stanza connects with the first line of the fourth stanza: "Torn and alone in a farm house in a fold// Of fields.[...]" The rhyming scheme is very regular with an ABABA pattern; moreover, all the terminal words of the first stanza contain 'ei' and all the final words of the second stanza 'ou,' by the means of onomatopoeia the regularity of the rhyming scheme is perfected into further detail.

The poem draws its partly dreamy, partly factual story based on a myth which W.S. Merwin defines as "a mid-winter ceremony of the re-birth of the year", whose presiding deity was a Welsh goddess "often represented as a bird."[5] With the myth standing at its core, the poem makes use of various oppositions to create its fairy-tale-like fragmentary quality. The imagery is based on a marked contrast of frost and fire, each of which describes different phases of the poem. Frost refers to the dreamy surrounding snow-covered background, the winter landscape with its solitary detached quality that introduces and frames the poem:

[3] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 119-123.
[4] William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962) 209.
[5] W. S. Merwin, "The Religious Poet", *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 244.

It is a winter's tale

That the snow blind twilight ferries over the lakes

And floating fields from the farm in the cup of the vales,

Gliding windless through the hand folded flakes,

The pale breath of cattle at the stealthy sale,

The vivid image of the peaceful and muffled winter landscape with the routine of farm life and its first activity stirring and waking in the morning presents a parallel to spiritual awakening of the male protagonist in the "quick of the night," a man "in his firelit island ringed by the winged snow" who is "at the point of love, forsaken and afraid." There are two possible interpretations of this second "feverish" phase that has the man's "nameless and naked burning need" at its centre as opposed to the barren whiteness of the wintry world. It might point to a religious vision with its reference to the falling star and the cold night of Jesus' birth: "Once when the world turned old/ On a star of faith pure as the drifting bread" or an anticipation of an erotic union where the she bird with its pun on "bride" represents the white goddess, who brings the first traces of spring in the middle of winter, turns out to be the protagonist's beloved. Therefore with its broad focus on faith, death, natural world, the past and love "Winter's Tale" ends with a similar glimpse of creation as "Love in the Asylum" does, intermingling religious and sexual imagery in Thomas's characteristic way.

The first introductory stanzas reveal the interplay of the elements in the poem: Thomas employs them all: fire, water (applying sea imagery such as 'ferries', 'floating', 'windless' and 'sail' to the winter landscape), wind or air and the earth represented by the frequent references to the farm, fields, dust and seed. To evoke the chill and dreaminess Thomas exploits animal imagery that enhances the contrast between the frozen folds and the animal warmth such as "the pale breath of cattle", "the sheep white smoke of the farm house cowl", "the hen roosts sleeping chill till the flame of the cock crow."

The major shift of focus takes place in the sixth stanza when it partly moves away from the "snow blind twilight" and the poeticised morning at the farm outside to the man 'kneeling, weeping and praying in the cabin' by the "log bright light" inside. Interestingly, the same images are used in both sections yet with different connotations: the "cup of the vales" and "star of faith pure as the drifting bread" in the outside section become "the cup and the cut bread in the dancing shade" of the man's fire. Whereas the first refer to natural and potentially religious phenomena, the latter rather to material objects. Tindall, however, sees "the lonely man as forsaken as Jesus on the cross [...] and interprets his 'cup and cut bread' as "the remains of his last supper."[6] This section also plays a variation on visual impressions concerning blindness where Thomas travels from the initial "snow blind twilight" to the "duck pond glass and the blinding byres alone" which ends at the man's "snow blind love." The glass of the pond is also a visual image of a glossy eye turned blind and snow blind love intensifies the man's craving and foreshadows his headless quest to catch the she bird "in the always desiring centre of the white inhuman cradle and the bride bed forever sought." The white icy centre is the man's desire transformed into a white-hot furnace and it also points to the conclusion with the she bird rising in "her *melting snow*" [italics mine].

The open sexual imagery appears in the eleventh stanza for the first time in the poem:

> Deliver him, he cried,
> By losing him all in love, and cast his need
> Alone and naked in the engulfing bride,
> Never to flourish in the fields of white seed
> Or flower under the time dying flesh astride.

The 'engulfing bride' that absorbs him might refer to sensual ecstasy as well as religious fervour and 'seed' to renewal and creation. As Tindall further observes: "'Astride' is sexual

[6] Tindall 211.

and temporal riding and the riding of dream. [...] The word 'time,' emerging from this puzzle, introduces the recapture of past time in the following stanzas."[7] The negation of 'never' concerning the 'flowering' and the 'seed' is reversed at the end of the poem when the she bird delivers him: "And she rose with him *flowering* [italics mine] in her melting snow." thawing the ice and replacing it with warmth by means of an organic and emotional "whirl-Pool."

With the twelfth stanza he begins to refer frequently to the past, connecting the narrative to music: "Listen. The minstrels sign/ In the departed villages." As Tindall argues, the snow here becomes a preserving agent conserving the past: "'Time signs' from the dead and intricate snowflake that preserves it."[8] Here, the real telling of the winter's tale starts, the bird – a nightingale – has a similar function to the bird-girl in "Love in the Asylum." She, too, is a bringer and contributor of new information and new vision. For the first time in the poem the she bird breaks the darkness of the man's refuge and replaces it with light: "In the long ago land that glided the dark door wide [...]/ A she bird rose and rayed like a burning bride./ A she bird dawned, and her breast with snow and scarlet downed.[...] For love, the long ago she bird rises. Look." Therefore, the section introducing the past phase and the she bird is enfolded in sense perception of "listen" and "look" that open and close it respectively. The she bird becomes a sun, a burning vision, an envoy of spring and love to be followed, 'dawning' and 'downing', her breast like the scarlet daybreak of winter sun, "a phoenix, in whose light the hero, dazzled by sound, enjoys a vision."[9]

Gradually towards the end of the poem the introductory images reappear. It is a visual return to the man's cabin "by the spit and the black pot in the log bright light." The hero's quest to overtake the she bird begins: "and the sky of birds in the plumed voice charmed/ Him up and he ran like a wind after the kindling flight." He is following the vision born out

[7] Tindall 212.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Tindall 213.

of love far away despite the snow and various impossible obstacles: “All night lost and long wading in the wake of the she-/ Bird through the times and lands and tribes of the slow flakes.” His prayer and pursuit through the snow functions as purification, recalling and reviving in his mind the past images of heaven and death. The man is mumbling in a frenzy of his fragmented exclamations when he comes nearer and nearer to reaching and fulfilling his vision: “And the bird descended [...]/ And the home of prayers and fires, the tale ended.” Throughout the final shakings and spasms of the man’s incoherent ramblings reflecting the past images, prayer and purification become a paradise:

> [...] the bird lay bedded
> In a choir of wings, as though she slept or died,
> And the wings glided wide and he was hymned and wedded,
> And through the thighs of the engulfing bride,
> The woman breasted and the heaven headed
>
> Bird, he was brought low,
> Burning in the bride bed of love, in the whirl-
> Pool at the wanting centre, in the folds
> Of paradise, in the spun bud of the world.
> And she rose with him flowering in her melting snow.

By letting the she bird “bring the flowers of heavenly spring”[10] Thomas creates a variation on flow, water and flower, reuniting and reviving the mythical core of the poem from winter’s ice and snow to the renewed spring, regardless whether the agent is religious or erotic love, the mythical goddess rises like the sun to shatter the winter’s and the hero’s world to engulf it in the gushing ecstasy of re-birth. As W.S. Merwin nicely put it: “He [Thomas] has ‘made’ the myth whether or not he invented the skeletal story, for it is his own

[10] Tindall 215.

imagination which has given it its immediacy and power, which has seen love-in-death, the 'she-bird', with such certainty as heavenly and all-powerful, which has made articulate within the metaphor itself the triumph of the rite which is life."[11]

4.2 "In Country Sleep[12]"

Similarly to "A Winter's Tale", "In Country Sleep" belongs to Thomas's longish fairy-tale-like poems. According to Rushworth Kidder the style of the poems in *In Country Sleep* "is fluid and easy; sentences tend to be long and graceful; and the lines of these syllabic poems, open and interconnected by similarities of sense and syntax, contrast greatly with the end-stopped lines of much of Thomas's earlier poetry."[13] The structure of the two-part poem is, with its ABCBAAC rhyme and meter, very regular indeed. However, the tight, regular structure contrasts with the content which is fragmentary and non-traditional. It co-mingles elements of the fantastical, mythical and religious with traditional fairy-tale stories. There are three protagonists in the poem: the speaker, who is also the poet, the girl often addressed as "my dear" and the mystical "Thief as meek as the dew." The thief, as the central figure of the poem, that might provide the reader with the final decoding of its meaning, is an enigma. Therefore, there are several possible interpretations of the theme of love in the poem.

The one view most frequently held by various critics is seeing the poem as a representative of father's love for his daughter who is telling her a good-night story. As Tindall put it: "Yeats wrote 'A Prayer for My Daughter.' 'In Country Sleep' is Thomas's

[11] Merwin 245.
[12] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent &Sons, 1952) 162-166.
[13] Rushworth M. Kidder, *Dylan Thomas: The Country of the Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 193.

prayer for his."[14] This story should function as a lullaby to calm her down and reassure her there are no dangers waiting for her while she is "spelled asleep":

> Never and never, my girl riding far and near
> In the land of the hearthstone tales, and spelled asleep,
> Fear or believe that the wolf in a sheepwhite hood
> Loping and bleating roughly shall leap,
> My dear, my dear,
> Out of a lair in the flocked leaves in the dew dipped year
> To eat your heart in the house in the rosy wood.

To establish the calming dreamy and drowsy effect of this part of the poem, Thomas often employs alliteration and parts of fairy-tale stories such as "Little Red Riding Hood" or "Hansel and Gretel." There are frequent variations on falling asleep or sleeping, reminiscent of "Sleeping Beauty" such as: "spelled asleep," "Sleep, good, for ever, slow and deep, spelled rare and wise,/ My girl ranging the night in the rose and shire" , "Lie fast and soothed,/ Safe be and smooth [...], "sleep spelled." The speaker or "the father," reassures the girl that neither "the wolf" nor "the witch" can harm her since she is protected in her country sleep: "From the broomed witch's spume you are shielded by fern/ And flower of country sleep and the greenwood keep." Therefore the introductory part of the poem is a stage with the girl as the protagonist where different animals and magical protective herbs such as "fern," "greenwood" and "flower of country sleep" appear and disappear.

After all, as he claims at the beginning, there is nothing to worry about, the country will not interrupt your sleep: "For who unmanningly haunts the mountain ravened eaves/ Or skulks in the dell moon *but moonshine* [italics mine] echoing clear/ From the starred well?" Moonshine never hurt anyone and "no gooseherd or swine will turn/ Into a homestall king or hamlet of fire/ And prince of ice/ To court the honeyed heart from your side before sunrise."

[14] Tindall 273.

The romanticized rusticity of the poem is underscored by Thomas's alliterative non-hyphenated composites such as: "dew dipped year" and "honeyed heart." Moreover, this line reveals that in the girl's awakening, both factual and psychological, love is involved. Someone will come to court or woo her heart. Here, the unsuccessful wolf and prince are replaced by the successful Thief, who also becomes the only source and reason for fear in the poem: "Fear most/ For ever of all not the wolf in his baaing hood/ Nor the tusked prince, in the ruttish farm, at the rind/ And mire of love, but the Thief as meek as the dew."

Before the introduction of the Thief, the poem starts to use dense religious imagery:

> A hill touches an angel. Out of a saint's cell
> The nightbird lauds through nunneries and domes of leaves
> Her robin breasted tree, three Marys in the rays.
> *Sanctum sanctorum* the animal eye of the wood.
> In the rain telling its beads [...].

Despite its frequent religious references, the poem does not necessarily introduce official religion as such. It is a certain magical and natural faith since "the country is holy." The forest telling its beads does not only refer to the rosary but the beads are also simple and pure raindrops caught in the branches while it is raining. As Tindall defines it these are metaphors for nature, "But into this holy, natural, fabulous peace comes a greater intruder, the Thief."[15] Even though the thief is mysteriously undefined, he is tricky: "Be you sure the Thief will seek a way sly and sure/ And sly as snow and meek as dew blown to the thorn." He will always find a way. The first part of the poem ends symptomatically by a biblical image of an apple and assonance representing silence before the storm: "Apple seed glides/ And falls, and flowers in the yawning wound at our sides,/ As the world falls, silent as the cyclone of silence."

[15] Tindall 276.

The second part of the poem moves away from the dreamy shiny quality of the first part towards darker imagery, as Tindall asserts: "'Night' [...] grows darker over a more menacing countryside." [16] The poem moves from the initial fairy-tales and fables to mythological and biblical stories and sagas, hence the traditional structures are replaced by the mythical and obscurer ones: "And the wings of the great roc ribboned for the fair!/ The leaping saga of prayer!/ And high, there on the hare-Heeled winds the rooks/ Cawing from their black bethels soaring, the holy books/ Of birds! [...]" Moreover, the peaceful green imagery of the forest in the first part is replaced with black and red colours of blood and rooks or priest's attires: "Among the cocks like fire the red fox/ Burning! Night and the vein of birds in the winded, sloe wrist/ Of the wood! Pastoral beat of blood through the lace leaves!" The only echo of the previous calm imagery are the alliterative "laced leaves," however, a big contrast is achieved in terms of syntax. The lengthy flow of sentences from the first part suddenly becomes a series of short ominous exclamations.

This furious note indicates that the conclusion of the poem is coming near. It also shows the poem as being obsessed with story-telling with its variations on fairy-tales, sagas, biblical and mythical stories, gospels, chants and "All tell, this night, of him/ Who comes as red as the fox and sly as the heeled wind." All the stories fold back to the poem's centre, the Thief, the fox, who outwitted the clumsy wolf. There is a marked contrast between the innocence of the girl in the first part and her transference as the Thief's, the fox's, prey in the second. Moreover, all sense perception in the poem is confused, "Illumination of music!" and "Music of elements" replaces "the nightingale's din." It is at once a cacophony and a concert reaching its finale.

When

> Slyly, slowly, [...] he comes to my love like the designed snow,
>
> [...] Comes designed to my love to steal not her tide raking

[16] Tindall 277.

Wound, nor her riding high, nor her eyes, nor kindled hair,
But her faith that each vast night and the saga of prayer
He comes to take
Her faith that this last night for his unsacred sake
He comes to leave her in the lawless sun awaking

Naked and forsaken to grieve he will not come.
Ever and ever by all your vows believe and fear
My dear this night he comes and night without end my dear
Since you were born:
And you shall wake, from country sleep, this dawn and each
First dawn,
Your faith as deathless as the outcry of the ruled sun.

Therefore, the opening "never and never [...] fear or believe" is echoed in the concluding "ever and ever [...] believe and fear", the dusk and the good-night story to lull the innocent girl to sleep becomes dawn and her awakening, the "lawless sun" replaced with "the ruled sun" and faith that dies in "Where Once the Waters of Your Face" is, in the conclusion of "In Country Sleep," deathless. The stealthy Thief becomes for the girl a mediator of experience, via love or fear or faith. In spite of his efforts, he does not rob the girl of her faith. According to Walford Davies: "The father-daughter, daughter-maturity relationships of this 'conversation' poem are rooted in a landscape which offers natural emblems of growth and decay, innocence and experience. [...] Experience comes like a lover; and the child's forecast maturity is pointed in that her fear is only that he *won't* come."[17] Nevertheless, the Thief remains a mystery, as Tindall concludes his analysis of the poem: "Better not try to pin that Thief down [...], he seems to include whatever menaces all of us, sleeping or waking."

[17] Walford Davies, "The Wanton Starer," *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays,* ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 160.

The question is whether it is at all possible "to pin the Thief down." With the Thief not unravelled, the poem itself partly remains a mystery. In one of his proclamations Thomas stated that the poem:

> [...] was not addressed to a child at all, but to his wife and the Thief was jealousy. A third explanation was given in New York to a reporter. Thomas said, 'Alcohol is the thief today. But tomorrow he could be fame or success or exaggerated introspection or self-analysis. The thief is anything that robs you of your faith, of your reason for being.'[18]

Indeed, the Thief seems to be a universal menace, yesterday different than it was today. But as Thomas explained it: "If you are innocent of the Thief, you are in danger. If you are innocent of the loss of faith, you cannot be faithful."[19] No matter if it is faith in love, God or innocence of country sleep.

4.3 "In the White Giant's Thigh"[20]

"In the White Giant's Thigh" is the concluding poem, not only of this thesis but also of the whole volume of Thomas's *Collected Poems.* It remains faithful to Thomas's late poetic style; it is connected to rural nostalgia, religious imagery in nature and the theme of death as well as his other later poems. It also describes a magical landscape that is, however, in contrast to the one in "In Country Sleep" not fairy-tale like but elegiac. The landscape romanticized by references to other tales and stories is, in this poem, made magical by its

[18] Walford Davies and Ralph Maud, "Notes," *Collected Poems 1934-1953* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993) 250.
[19] Davies and Maud 251.
[20] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1952) 176-178.

connection to the past, fertility and joy of life of the women who used to live there and now "lie longing still/ To labour and love though they lay down long ago."

As the previous example suggests, Thomas employs rich alliteration, assonance, evident in the title of the poem itself, and regular ABAB rhyming scheme. Part of the magic of the poem is again the contrasting regularity of the form and the fragmentary random quality of the content with frequent shifts of time perspective from the present to the past. The present time of the poem is oriented according to the speaker and begins with his solitary night walk: "Through throats where many rivers meet, the curlews cry,/ Under the conceiving moon, on the high chalk hill,/ And there this night I walk in the white giant's thigh/ Where barren as boulders women lie longing still [...]." As Tindall tells us, the major image of the poem, "the white giant" is "a primitive design on the side of a hill" and "is supposed to confer fertility." [21] If the white giant is the central icon of fertility, the "conceiving moon" and the "barren boulders" also refer to it. The moon might have an inspirational function for the poet as in "In My Craft or Sullen Art" and the boulders refer to death, a burial place where "the women pray,/ Pleading in the waded bay for the seed to flow/ Though the names on their weed grown stones are rained away,/." Interestingly, despite their death, the "women lie longing still though they lay down long ago." Apart from fertility and barrenness, the past and its remembrance in the present, the main theme of the poem is the inability of death to conquer all because: "Hale dead and deathless do the women of the hill/ Love for ever meridian through the courter's trees [...]". As Tindall puts it: "This poem praises life [and love] in death's despite."[22]

The women pray for fertility instead of barrenness so the land be preserved and the reflections and memories of the countryside they used to live in, love in and rest in, with it. The women "yearn with tongues of curlews for the unconcieved/ And immemorial sons of

[21] Tindall 292-293.
[22] Tindall 293.

the cudgelling, hacked/ Hill." According to Tindall, "the rivers bring fertility; and throats are for conceiving, crying and the sounds of poetry."[23] The poem thus moves from the poet's present to the women's "hedgerow of joys." T.H. Jones claims that the poem "is a celebration of sexual love" and compares its representation of sexuality to Thomas's early poems such as "If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love." "What had been and adolescent torment, horrifiedly seen in ineluctable relation to disease, decay and death, is now one of the 'tellings' or affirmations 'of the beautiful and terrible worth of the Earth.'"[24] He also emphasises that the speaker, or the poet, frees himself of his guilt and remorse and gains a more mature, objective perspective. Moreover, death is no longer seen as a threat but as an obstacle to transcend that can be overcome by love which is everlasting.

In this poem, the references to sex are not connected to biblical imagery at all but rather to the pastoral idyll:

> Who [the women] once in gooseskin loved all ice leaved [...]
> In the wains tonned so high that the wisps of the hay
> Clung to the pitching clouds, or gay with any one
> Young as they in the after milking moonlight lay
>
> Under the lighted shapes of faith and their moonshade
> Petticoats galed high, or shy with the rough riding boys [...]

Consequently, the feelings of remorse and guilt with "the rooking girl who stole me for her side" become feelings of carefree and simple rustic people who fulfil their natural needs in the fragrant heaps of hay that almost reach the sky. Love for the country, expressed in the earliest poems, lasts and is connected to physicality with the pure and simple lives and loves of the people in it.

[23] Tindall 294.
[24] T.H. Jones, *Dylan Thomas* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963) 101-102.

In the middle of the poem "a sequence of religious images, like those of 'In Country Sleep,' proves the country holy again."[25] The country is compared to a natural tabernacle where "the scurrying, furred small friars squeal [...] in the thistle aisles till the white owl crossed their breast" and "the mole snout blunt under his pilgrimage of domes." However, from the celebratory part that praises nature and the past, the poem's tone changes. The reference to the idyllic past suddenly becomes the present and the girls are "long dead and gone that barley dark where their clogs danced in the spring and their firefly hairpins flew, and the ricks ran round- ." There is an aposiopesis: the interrupted line is followed by a long parenthesis where the ground is proved to be "barren and bare." Tindall suggests that "Death and sterility become parentheses in the triumph of life and fertility."[26] The parenthesis, however, also works the other way round: death and sterility interrupt life and fertility.

Still, death and sterility do not have the last word in the poem. Despite the "rust" and the "dust" of the long gone women and the things of their everyday use, the poet begs them: "Now curlew cry me down to kiss the mouths of their dust. [...] Teach me the love that is evergreen after the fall leaved Grave." The women and the marks and memories they left in the countryside can still teach the poet their "love for ever meridian." The flow of time, in this poem, is not conclusive but cyclic, like the change of the seasons and the natural cycle of growth, death and rebirth. Love is not limited by time; it might be evergreen despite the gray grave "And the daughters of darkness flame like Fawkes fire still." The very last line of the volume by closing the cycle of birth, awakening and death ends in an image of rebirth, the Fawkes fire reminiscent of the phoenix whose body will rise out of the ashes.

[25] Tindall 295.
[26] Tindall 295-296.

Chapter 5: Conclusion.

The following thesis aimed to prove Dylan Thomas one of the most moving and interesting love poets, who has recently been a little neglected. The preceding discussion also tried to demonstrate that Thomas's love poetry has different stages and marks of development from the earliest more obscure poems toward love as a transforming experience in *Deaths and Entrances* and the reconciliation of guilt connected to the sexual theme in his last poems. Thomas's immense popularity has been accounted for in many different ways; some have claimed the obscurity of his work constantly demands readers' concentration, G.S. Fraser argues that despite this obscurity: "He is one of the few modern poets who can be read aloud to a large, mixed audience, with a confidence in his 'going down.' There is a massive emotional directness in his poems that at once comes across."[1] John Fuller's opinion is that "the truth for Thomas was closer to the heart than the head [...]."[2] Marshall W. Stearns sees him as the prototype of a poet who "has something original to say and an original manner of saying it."[3] And William Jay Smith argues that "His [Thomas's] poetry, written from the roots of language, goes to the roots of life; and it touches us all."[4]

William York Tindall's reasoning about Thomas's popularity rests with the idea of Thomas's personality playing a key role:

> In 1933, when Thomas burst upon London with his marvels, readers were dazzled. Here [...] were things beyond them yet their own, things from the madhouse or the analyst's couch, craftily rearranged. [...] As if Victoria had never laid her hand on Britain, here was something of more than Elizabethan abundance

[1] G.S. Fraser, *Dylan Thomas* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957) 6.
[2] John Fuller, "The Cancered Aunt on her Insanitary Farm," *Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Walford Davies (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972) 199.
[3] Marshall W. Stearns, "Unsex the Skeleton: Notes on the Poetry of Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 130.
[4] William Jay Smith, "The Man," *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 53.

> – deeper than the roots of aspidistras. Nothing in these extravagant riddles like the sociable verses of Auden or the austerities of Eliot [...]. Part of Thomas's impact was personal. He displayed his person everywhere: in bars, in parlors, on platforms, and on campuses [...]. More of us loved than hated the irresponsible, charming, outrageous man; for he was our bourgeois idea of what a poet should be. Wallace Stevens looked and acted like an insurance man. Thomas looked and acted like a poet.[5]

The most important perspective and reason for his popularity, is best expressed, however, by Dylan Thomas himself with his definition of and approach to poetry:

> Read the poems you like reading. Don't bother whether they're 'important', or if they'll live. What does it matter what poetry *is*, after all? If you want a definition of poetry, say: 'Poetry is what makes me laugh or cry or yawn, what makes my toenails twinkle, what makes me want to do this or that or nothing', and let it go at that. All that matters about poetry is the enjoyment of it, however tragic it may be. All that matters is the eternal movement behind it, the vast undercurrent of human grief, folly, pretension. Exaltation, or ignorance, however unlofty the intention of the poem. You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick, and say to yourself, when the works are laid out before you, the vowels, the consonants, the rhymes or rhythms, 'Yes, this is *it*. This is why the poem moves me so. It is because of the craftsmanship.' But you're back again where you began. You're back with the mystery of having been moved by

[5] William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962) 4.

> words. [...] The joy and function of poetry is, and was, the celebration of man, which is also the celebration of God.[6]

According to Thomas, a major property of good poetry is the ability to move by words. His poetry works with words in a novel way, Thomas did what Karl Shapiro called "bending of the iron of English."[7] But what distinguished his poetry most is his compassion for mankind, the interconnectedness of the subject of love or the erotic lure with things of the everyday. Through their craftsmanship his poems always express affections for what he loved most – God, man and Wales. Thomas's poetry moves because it has both the humour and the heart and is written "for the lovers, their arms round the griefs of the ages."

[6] Andrew Sinclair, *Dylan Thomas: Poet of his People* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975) 233.
[7] Karl Shapiro, "Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W. Tedlock (London: Mercury Books, 1960) 273.

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