CHAPTER VII

Imagery

Thomas writes about his own poetic method thus —

A poem by myself needs a host of images because its centre is a host of images. I make one image — though 'make' is not the word, I let, perhaps, an image be 'made' emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess — let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make of the third image bred out of the dangling over the formal limits, and dragged the poem into another; the warring stream ran on over the insecure barriers the fullstop aristrocra was pulled and twisted raggedly on into a conflicting series of dots and dashes.

... the life in any poem of mine cannot move concentrically round a central image; the life must come out of the centre; an image must be born and die in another; and any sequence of my images must be a sequence of creations, recreations, destructions, contradictions. I cannot ... make a poem out of a single motivating experience. I believe in the single thread of action through a poem, but that is an intellectual thing aimed at lucidity through narrative. My object is, as you say, conventionally to 'get things straight'. Out of the inevitable conflict of images — inevitable because of the creative, recreative, destructive and contradictory nature of the motivating centre, the womb of war — I try to make that momentary peace which is a poem. I do not want a poem of mine to be, nor can it be, a circular piece of experience placed neatly outside the living stream of time from which it came; a poem of mine is, or should be, a water-tight section of the stream that is flowing all ways, all warring images within it should be reconciled for that small stop of time.1

Robin Skelton remarks, 'Thomas's poetry is inimitable; his remarks are maybe not capable of universal application, but in his attempt 'to get things straight', in his realization of the dynamic nature of the pattern, and in his desire to find the heart of the emotional conflict, the 'still centre' where all the forces are balanced, we can see his determination to perceive the central pattern of the experience.'2 The organic processes in outward nature has its parallel in the technique of Thomas's poetical composition. The conflict in his
mind has its corresponding expression in conflicting images. His imagery has a natural organic process of development. The movement in his poems is the result of "an unreconciled strife of conflicting elements, a continuous spiral of feelings and images which can never reach a point of repose." His dialectical method of composition aims at a moment of peace, but Thomas often fails to achieve that desired calm. He admits that in his earlier poems "I was not successful in making a momentary peace with my images at the correct moment." We can see this dialectical method in The Force that through the Green Fuse drives the Flower. (CP 9). The gun-powder conceit of the first line of the poem dialectically breeds the image of blasting the roots of trees and 'the wintry fever'. The force in the 'green fuse drives the flower'. 'Blast' is an image of explosion and of disease. The suggestion of disease continues in the 'wintry fever'. The life force drives both flowers and human beings and thus they explode into birth, maturity, and death. There is a unity in all modes of being in this cyclical inevitability of existence. 'My youth is bent by the same wintry fever'. The force that brings 'wintry fever' to the old and taints the rose blights youth. 'Wintry fever' combines "hot and cold that refers to the sterility of love in age and adolescence alike" and unfulfilled sexual desires.

In After the funeral (CP 87-88) the poet mourns the death of his aunt. All the major images of the poem, W.T. Moylan tells us, 'stem from a "central seed", and that seed is a boy grief-striken by the death of an aunt and a poet who wants to memorialize that grief and the love that warranted it'. And further, 'The way Thomas made the "seed" into a poem was by expanding a metaphor. The metaphor he
chose was a perennial one: water is life, dryness is death.

A. Thwaite thinks, "The main images on which this poem turns are A) the fox and the fern, and B) the real Ann and the Ann whom the poet creates in his mind, 'a monstrous image blindly magnified out of praise'. These images are expanded, recreated and tied."

C. Day Lewis finds "a pair of images, each played contrapuntally against the other" in the passage beginning with "But I, Ann's bard". He says that the poem shuttles backwards and forwards between the real living Ann and the dead mythical Ann. ... "Within the contrapuntal framework, pairs of secondary images are also playing off against each other. ... There is an opposition between the natural woman and the religious object she has become, an opposition ... realized through conflicting images — 'hearth' or 'ferned and foxy woods' on the one hand, and on the other, the calling of 'the seas to service', the 'hymning heads': and sometimes the two concepts are made to clash directly and resolve in a phrase: 'wood-tongued virtue'; ... At the end of the poem these wood-symbols are merged into each other; by the dialectical method Mr. Thomas described, each has in a sense turned into its opposite; the fox has become something like a fern (The stuffed lungs of the fox twitch and cry Love'), the fern moves like a fox ('And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill')." C. Day Lewis further observes, "It helps us to understand what Mr. Thomas meant by his phrase 'a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed'. We notice, also, a constant breaking down of the distinction between the senses,
so that aural, visual, tactual qualities are perpetually interfused within the image sequences and even within separate images, as they are in the poetry of Hopkins and Edith Sitwell."

All the images in the poem are subservient to the subject. All the images relating to Ann's death and her character, the burial, the mourners, and the homage paid to her, are tied together. The hypocrisy of the mourners is painted in 'saul praises', donkey-like braying over the dead body, 'the spitted eyes', 'the salt ponds in the sleeves' (CP 87). Against this is set 'muffle-toed tap/Tap' (CP 87) to show that all tears and ritualistic mourning are ineffectual. The child 'shed dry leaves' (CP 87). His tears are equally fruitless. The image suggests the merging of human and vegetable life. The 'room with a stuffed fox and a stale fern' (CP 87) is an image of sterility. In this dead and sterile world, in the 'snivelling hours', the child remembers

... lopped Ann
Whose hooded, fountain heart once fell in puddles
Round the parched worlds of Wales ... (CP 87)

Ann is an image of love, and like a fountain brought life to the arid world around her.

The marvellous image created by the poet is contrasted with the figure of Ann. Ann is a simple cottager, and has 'her scrubbed and sour humble hands' (CP 88) cramped with dead, conventional religion. Her humble hands are contrasted with 'cloud-sopped, marble hands', 'her threadbare/Whisper' (CP 88) with 'monumental/Argument' (CP 88), her
'flesh ... meek as milk' with the 'skeward statue' (CP 87) carved by
the poet. The physical agony of Ann is caught in the line -- 'Her fist
of a face died clenched on around pain' (CP 98).

In Twenty-four years (CP 99) Thomas celebrates his
twenty-fourth birthday. The central image of the poem is an embryo in
the womb preparing for a journey to the tomb. All other images are
related to this main image. Implicit in the poem is the familiar idea
that the moment of conception is the beginning of death. The poem re-
views life as a progress from birth to death. The embryo in the womb,
like a tailor, 'sews' the 'shroud' for his life and death. His fleshly
dress is also a winding sheet. The embryo in human form comes into the
outside world through the mother's 'natural doorway'. 'The groin of
the natural doorway' (CP 99) is an image of womb where the child is
'crouched like a tailor'. 'Dressed to die', he walks 'to the grave in
labour' (CP 99) under the 'meat-eating sun' (CP 99). The 'sun' here is
an image of destruction. 'Dressed' for death, the child, like a dandy,
is also dressed for love. His advance towards the grave is also an
advance towards sexual experience. In his 'sensual strut' man spends
his vital force, his sensual potentiality, represented in the 'red
veins full of money' (CP 99). He faces forwards 'in the final direction
of the elementary town' (CP 99). The 'final direction' is a predeter-
mined course towards the 'elementary town' of the first elements, of
"subhuman nature, to whose endless processes and shiftings he must
return."

'I advance for as long as forever is' (CP 99). 'Forever',
in one sense, means the duration of Thomas's existence. He will die and
merge into the processes of nature for an endless renewal of life.

'Maintaining the idea of the journey, the speaker advances forever toward the "elementary town", his life is a constant movement back into the elements.'

Emery has pointed out the thematic and imagistic contrast between Twenty-four years and Poem in October (CP 102.4), written in August, 1944, six years after the poem, Twenty-four years:

'There ['Twenty-four years'] with tears, he looked back to the death-touched beginning of himself on his own in a low-ceilinged, confining place. Here ['Poem in October'], morning-sounds from a beneficent nature call him outside into an expansive dawning day. There the imagery is of social things -- clothes and money. But the town mentioned is the lonely grave. Here, the poem is populated with shells, birds, horses, trees, fruits; and the town, though asleep, is full of living people. There he encounters a carnivorous sun; here a "springful of larks" in a summery October sun on the hill he has climbed to escape an autumnal shower.

In each poem the past is evoked; but only in the latter does the glory and the freshness of youth appear. In the former, the mother is reduced to a groaning; in the latter, she ... walks with him through the parables of sunlight.'

In a letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson written in early November 1933, Thomas says,

"What you call ugly in my poetry is, in reality, nothing but the strong stressing of the physical. Nearly all my images, coming, as they do, from my solid and fluid world of flesh and
blood, are set out in terms of their progenitors. To contrast a superficial beauty with a superficial ugliness, I do not contrast a tree with a pylon, or a bird with a weasel, but rather the human limbs with the human limbs. Deeply, of course, all these contrasting things are equally beautiful and equally ugly. Only by association is the refuse of the body more to be abhorred than the body itself. Standards have been set for us. What is little realised is that it was only chance that dictated these standards. ... While life is based upon such chance conventions and standards as these, it is little wonder that any poetry dealing impartially with the parts of the anatomy ... and with the functions of the body, should be considered as something rather hideous, unnecessary, and, to say the least, indelicate. But I fail to see how the emphasizing of the body can, in any way, be regarded as hideous. The body, its appearance, death, and disease, is a fact, sure as the fact of a tree. ... All thoughts and actions emanate from the body. Therefore the description of a thought or action — however abstruse it may be — can be beaten home by bringing it to a physical level. Every idea, intuitive or intellectual, can be imaged and translated in terms of the body, its flesh, skin, blood, sinews, veins, glands, organs, cells, or senses.

Through my small, bonebound island I have learnt all I know, experienced all, and sensed all. All I write is inseparable from the island. As much as possible, therefore, I employ the scenery of the island to describe the scenery of my thoughts, the earthquake of the body to describe the earthquake of the heart. 14

In another letter to Charles Fisher (February 1935), Thomas writes —

I like 'redeeming the contraries' with secretive images; I like contradicting my images, saying two things at once in one word, four in two and one in six. ... Poetry, heavy in care though nimble, should be as orchestral and organic as copulation, dividing and unifying, personal but no private, propagating the individual in the mass and the mass in the individual. I think it should work from words from the substance of words and the rhythms of substantial words set together, not towards words. Poetry is a medium, not a stigmata on paper. Men should be two tooled, and a poet's middle leg is his pencil. 15
The poetic processes are expressed by Thomas in terms of masturbation.

He holds the wire from this box of nerves. (CP 10)

Light breaks where no sun shines (CP 24-25), Foster the light (CP 60-61). The force that through the green fuse drives the flower (CP 9), "meditate the relation between man and his universe as one of microcosm and macrocosm". The physiological functions of the body seems to have its similar corresponding functions in the outer world. It may be said that both man and external reality are tied to each other by the 'green fuse', by the same compulsive life force. "The body is a microcosm, all its parts obey the same dictates, display the same behavior as the elements of the external world in which it is located. In a very real sense, the body is nature, for the two are inseparable. Only consciousness, spirit, the mind — call it what you will — hinges over the operations of matter, meditating on resurgence and decay." W.T. Maynihan tells, 'since Thomas saw the origin of the universe as analogous to that of man, it naturally follows that cosmic and sexual activities may be seen as comparable functions. Thus the moment of conception is depicted as light breaking "where no sun shines"; and the process of embryonic growth takes place when "the fruit of man unwrinkles in the stars."' 18

Light breaks where no sun shines;
Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart
Push in their tides;
And, broken ghosts with glow-worms in their heads;
The things of light
File through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones (CP 24)
Light breaks where no sun shines' suggests the first day of Genesis. Metaphorically taken, 'light' as life or preexistence 'breaks' "within the embryo, as the blood pushes through its veins like the tides of the ocean." The circulation of blood has its counterpart in the tidal movement of the sea. "The literal action of the poem is a description of human generation, but implied in this action is the generation of the world." Bernard Krieger thinks that 'where no flesh decks the bones' refers either to the eyes or to the vagina. So the poem is either "about the acquisition of knowledge and its effect," or about sexual intercourse. W.H. Tindall says, "the dawning of awareness or the coming of knowledge seems as likely a theme as any."

'A candle in the thighs' in the 2nd stanza of Light breaks where no sun shines is a phallic candle which 'warms youth and seed' (CP 34) and burns age. 'Where no wax is, the candle shows its hairs' (CP 34) means that "though the mortal body burns away, its wick of energy remains." According to H.W. Stearns, the image means, "'where no wax is,' where there is no flesh or vitality, 'the candle shows its hairs'; the dead wick or the fleshless bone remains." Moreover, he says, "This stanza contrasts the states of being young or old, virile or impotent." Stearns thinks that the poem is a description of the state of existence; the theme is the process of living."

The correspondence between man and the universe determines the images of stanzas 3 and 4.

Dawn breaks behind the eyes;
From poles of skull and toe the windy blood
Slides like a sea. (CP 24)
Consciousness dawns in the brain. The blood in the body flows like the tides of the sea between the poles of head and toe. The body is a microcosm.

Nor fenced, nor staked, the gushers of the sky
Spout to the rod
Divining in a smile the oil of tears. (CP 24)

Man is not separated or fenced off from nature. The energy of life ('oil') works through both man and nature. 'The gushers of the sky/Spout to the rod' is a sexual image. Its function in man is similar to its function in external world as an image of life - giving rain. Thomas says this image to be "a metaphysical image of rain and grief." Lita Hornick assumes an image of the Cosmic Man in the third and fourth stanzas: "These two stanzas present us with an image of the universe in the form of man. Dawn breaks from his eyes, the sea is his blood (windy because fertile), the rod and gushers of the sky are his sexual organs... and the alternation of day and night is involved in the processes of his body."

Thomas works from words. For him words have a substance of their own. The 'wordy shapes of women', the 'star-featured children', the 'vowelled beeches', the 'oaken voices' (CP 18), show how natural objects are transformed into corporeal word and emphasize for Thomas the identity of word-sound and object. He writes in a state of mind where objects and words are essentially the same. Paul Ferris says —
Words had a disturbing quality for him. In the poem
"Especially when the October wind" ... he seemed to
enter a dream-like or nightmare-like state, shut
inside "a tower of words". An everyday scene - park,
children, trees, birds - and the words to describe it were
somehow fused together, "as though" (says one critic)
"there were no gaps between language and reality". In an
earlier, unpublished version of the poem, Thomas made words
sound like a punishment. "Chained by syllables at hand and
food", he sought to escape into an ordinary way of life,
"be no words' prisoners". ... Glyn Jones remembers that one
of his favourite quotations was the Biblical "In the begin-
ing was the word". ... Once, in America, Thomas told
Alastair Reid that "when I experience anything I experience
it as a thing and a word at the same time, both equally
amazing." Failure to see that an image is only an image,
not the reality, may have been, for Thomas, not a failure at
all, but a positive capacity that was at the root of his
perception.

The reality of words is the basis of much of his religious symbolism.
The two extremes of human experience, birth and death, are translated
into words.

> In the beginning was the word, the word
That from the solid bases of the light
Abstracted all the letters of the void;
And from the cloudy bases of the breath
The word flowed up, translating to the heart
First characters of birth and death. (Go 22)
Birth and death are often expressed in Biblical terms. The Bible is the source of much of Thomas's imagery. The Book of Genesis and the Crucifixion provide imagery to the poet to express the opposed but united poles of birth and death. In *Before I knocked* the poet writes:

You who bow down at cross and altar,
Remember me and pity him
Who took my flesh and bone for armour
And doublecrossed my mother's womb. (CP 3)

'The "Double-crossing", while stressing the ambiguity of the central figure of the poem, man-Christ, is a punning reference to the crossing of the womb — birth, and the Crucifixion — death.

I was mortal to the last
Long breath that carried to my father
The messenger of his dying christ,

where a description of the physical act of procreation is expressed through imagery consistently connected with Crucifixion. In this way a powerful synthesis of the two fundamentals of generation and death is achieved through the ambivalence of the diction used.' Thomas was convinced that poetry should begin with the substance of words. Paul Ferris says, 'Perhaps words were preferable to the reality of things themselves. The physical world was always capable of giving him the horrors. ... The final horror may have been his body. Without a feeling that he was caught in the machinery of his own flesh and blood, presumably the anatomical poems would not have been written. His body
was a trap. One notebook poem talks of "man ... like a mole within his fleshy prison"; another of "the jailing skin". Thomas often expresses secular matters in Biblical terms and thus gives universal value to them. In order to realize more fully his view of existence, Thomas often assumes different roles, those of Adam and Christ. Christ in Thomas's poetry is an archetypal symbol of all men. Christ symbolizes the identification of birth, death, and general sufferings. In his birth, death, and suffering, each man is a Christ (cf. Before I knocked). "I care not a damn for Christ, but only for his symbol, the symbol of death," writes Thomas.

Paul Ferris points out the biographical basis of some phrases in Thomas's poems, especially in early ones, that suggest "a preoccupation with subconsciously sexual fears, in particular a fear of having his sex organs mutilated. These phrases revolve around images of tailors and scissors." Such images stem from STRІNDELPETER, an illustrated story book which Thomas knew and which contains a sinister tale of "Little Suck-a-Thumb," a child who is punished. The child's thumbs are cut off by a 'grisly tailor with flying hair and enormous scissors, the "great, long, red-legged scissors-man"'. Various lines of poems -- such as the "scissors stalking, tailor age" of "When, like a running grave" -- can be cited as evidence of how his earliest fears worked their way into the open via the scissors-man. So can some of the early stories, like "The Hound and the Woman", which has "a child who had cut off his double thumb with scissors". The image of tailor and scissors has its biblical parallel. It is found in Isaiah: 'thou hast cut short my life like a weaver who severs the web from the thrum' (38:12). The
metaphor of tailor and clothing is to be found in *When, like a running grave* (CP 18-19), *Twenty-four years* (CP 99), *Once below a time* (CP 132-33). In the role of a creator, God appears as a tailor in *Once below a time*. Man's body is tailored — 'pinned-around-the-spirit/Cut-to-measure flesh' (CP 132). God is a tailor, 'my maker/The cloud perched tailors' master with nerves for cotton' (CP 133). The adolescent poet, after his birth, his emergence from 'bursting sea' (CP 132), into the literary world, made his journey 'in common clay clothes disguised as snakes' and 'astounded the sitting tailor' and 'set back the clock faced tailors' (CP 132), the conventional mankind. The 'bay of common thread/The bright pretender' (CP 133), with his manners and poems,

... Rocketed to astonish
The flashing needle rock of squatters,
The criers of Shabby and Shorten,
The famous stitch droppers. (CP 132)

The stitch-dropping firm of Shabby and Shorten made Thomas's first suit.
'Since, however, a tailor cuts as well as sews, and since the "cut-to-measure" flesh is doomed to death, the tailor image, like all images of creation, implies destruction as well as creation. ... It is in this destructive role that Thomas sees the embryo "crouched like a tailor/Sewing a shroud for a journey" ("Twenty-four years, CP 99")."

The sea is an important image in Thomas's poems. The sea in his imagination symbolizes at once life and death. The sea is the source of life, and it is where all life ends. Life evolves out of the
sea and terminates in it. The sea-imagery is unavoidable for a person who spends his childhood in that part of Swansea where Thomas was born on 27th October 1914 and where Thomas passed his early life. Constantine Fitzgibbon writes —

If the house in which he grew up was as standard to his parents' condition as is the thrush's nest to the thrush, the distant sea and the nearby park gave it that character of its own which lives on in his poems and in his stories of childhood. Gwenddolin Drive is an extremely steep street, ... And it points straight down to Swansea Bay, a mile or less away, to the sea that is always there, summer and winter, by day and even by night as the lights of the little ships cross its waters and the Mumbles Lighthouse spits.

To go to the sea was a journey for the little boy, but the park was almost part of his home. Opposite No. 5 was playing field,

... a capsized field where a school sat still
and a black and white patch of girls grew playing.

It was capsized because it was horizontal, while the street was so steep as to seem nearly vertical. It was capsized because it was, for a field, as small as a schoolboy's cap.

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Beyond the field, which was really a part of it, lay Gwenddolin Park. With the exception of Fern Hill it was the most important place in his childhood. It recurs again and again in his poems and in his prose, sometimes by name, sometimes thinly disguised as in the lines of 'Lament', one of his last poems in which he returns once again to his innocent childhood.

I tiptoed sly in the gooseberry wood,
The rude owl cried like a telltale tit,
I skipped in a blush as the big girls rolled
Shinapin down on the donkey's common.

Gwenddolin Park appears in The Hunchback In the Park
(CP 111-12). The reference to the park is made in Should lanterns
shine:

The ball I threw while playing in the park
has not yet reached the ground. (CP 63)

"The park became one of Thomas's reference-points, a locked corner of
childhood to brood over." In "Reminiscences of childhood" Thomas
writes, "And the park itself was a world within the world of the sea
town; quite near where I lived, so near that on summer evenings I
could listen, in my bed, to the voices of other children playing ball
on the sloping, paper-littered bank; the park was full of terrors and
treasures. The face of the one old man who sat, summer and winter,
on the same bench looking over the swarmed reservoir, I can see more
clearly than the city-street faces I saw an hour ago; and years later
I wrote a poem about, and for, this never, by me, to-be-forgotten
'Munchback in the Park.'"

The sea is so intimately connected with Dylan Thomas that
it is never absent for long from his poems. "Water and the sea are
naturally associated with conception and birth; the physical processes
involve fluids at every stage, seminal to amniotic." Insemination
and gestation are generally symbolized by water-imagery:

1. when the galactic sea was sucked
   And all the dry seabed unlocked,
   I sent my creature scouting on the globe. (CP 4)

2. Sleep navigates the tides of time;
   The dry Sargasso of the tomb
   Gives up its dead to such a working sea. (CP 5)
3. the fathomed sea
Break: on unangled land. (CP 6)

4. Before I knocked and flesh let enter,
With liquid hands tapped on the womb,
I who was shapeless as the water
That shaped the Jordan near my home. (CP 7)

5. And time cast forth my mortal creature
To drift or drown upon the seas
Acquainted with the salt adventure
Of tides that never touch the shores. (CP 8)

6. Where once the waters of your face
Spun to my screws, your dry ghost blows,
The dead turns up its eyes; (CP 11)

7. I dreamed 
Twice in the feeding sea, ...

Laugharne seascape inspires the natural description of the poem, Poem in October (CP 102-4). The poet is in complete harmony with nature. The wood is his neighbour. The morning beckons, the water prays, and seagull and rock call. The shore is 'heron/priested'. The sailing, fishing boats 'knock' 'on the net webbed wall' (CP 102). J. M. Brinnin observes, 'For years a particular image from one of Dylan Thomas' poems has always pleased me immensely — and that image is, 'the heron-priested shore'. To me it has always conjured up a druidical series of tall birds standing as if in performance of some ritual along a water's edge.
... But now that I have seen herons along the very shore where Thomas sees them, I am delighted to find that while my first impression has a literary validity, my new impression is based upon the observation that herons do stand in sacramental attitudes, as if they were perpetually extending benedictions, and that, when they are surrounded by killywakes and oyster-catchers, they do recall priests crowded about by parishioners. ... We accept his most exotic images with absolute confidence that they do not only grace the iconography of his poems but they are generic to the landscape of his country."

Thomas often uses images taken from the technical and scientific world. Gramophone, propeller, periscope, appear in his poems. Film terminology is to be found in *Our Enumach dreams* and *Then was my neaplyte*. The poet desires to show the true reality by exposing the barren, unreal world of cinema in *Our Enumach dreams*. In *The tomstona told, when she died* (CP 93) the poet comes to the gravestone of a young woman who died in childbirth. His thoughts about the woman's marriage and mating pass through his mind like movies.

I who saw in a hurried film  
Death and this mad heroine  
Meet once on a mortal wall  
Heard her speak through the chipped beak  
Of the stone bird guarding her.  

*(CP 93)*

Thomas comments, 'In the last line "And the dear floods of his hair," you'll see I've been daring, and have tried to make the point of the poem softer and subtler by the use of the dangerous "dear". The word
"dear" fits in, I think, with "though her eyes smiled", which comes earlier. I wanted the girl's terrible reaction to orgastic death to be suddenly altered into a kind of despairing love.

... "Hurried" film I just couldn't see; I wanted it slow and complicated, the winding cinematic works of the womb.'

Thomas is engaged in self-exploration through the erotic imagery of the cinema in our amuck dreams. The cinematic images of the poem are "a critique of certain kinds of infertility and unreality, in the poet himself as in our culture as a whole. Thomas was much given to cinema images, though he was not always able to exploit them, in the manner of our amuck dreams, as a means of insight." The cinema image in our amuck dreams explores the relations between "fantasy and the bodily solidities which it simulates. The activity of the screen lovers is tellingly exposed as a ghoulish parody of frantic animal energy and animal fear — as of rabbits scurrying: 'When cameras shut they hurry to their hole ...' ... Thomas compares the world of celluloid or dream fantasy with the daylight falsity of modern life, and ultimately rejects both in favour of a more real world of truth and flowering."

And we shall be fit fellows for a life,

And who remain shall flower as they love,

Praise to our faring hearts. (CF 15)

In other poems the cinematic images are often in themselves symptoms of infertility. In some poems the main incidents are distanced at the end by being shown on the screen, as a film, as it were, as in The Tomstone.
told when she died and then was my neophyte.

After the emotional affirmation that 'death shall have no dominion' (CP 68) Thomas shows the scientific awareness of time that murders in *then was my neophyte* (CP 69-70).

I saw time murder me. (CP 70)

The protagonist sees the evolution of his life as if projected on a screen. The evolution of a human being from its embryonic stage to maturity, an important theme of Thomas, is like the evolution of life from the sea till its emergence on land and its journey towards death. The neophyte begins his journey in the time-controlled amniotic sea where days and nights are green.

Ducked in the twelve, disciple seas
The winder of the water - clocks
Calls a green day and night. (CP 69)

Man, like snail, makes its journey in 'his ship', the earth, sailing through time and space, with heart burning with fires of love. The hermaphroditic embryo has foreknowledge of future "horrible desires" of "rock of light" (CP 69), of adult reality. Jesus comes as an analogy for all suffering men journeying graveward:

Knew all his horrible desires
The climber of the water sea
Calls the green rock of light. (CP 69)

The voyage through the amniotic sea being over, the protagonist leaves the womb, 'a moon-blown shell,' and
Escapes to the flat cities' sails
Furled on the fishes' house and hell.  (CP 69)

Photographs and paintings reveal grief on land and sea and all-embracing
love of God.

Stretch the salt photographs,
The landscape grief, love in His oils
Mirror from man to whale.  (CP 69)

Pictures and photographs become a cinematic metaphor.

He films my vanity.  (CP 69)

The protagonist's developing life is projected on to a screen while
from outside he is watching it. 'The "tide-hoisted screen" reminds
one of the beach at ebb - tide, with its stranded helpless sea-creatures
out of their element — severed, so to speak, from their homes and
parks.' Time is imaged in the poem as "The winding of the water-
clocks" (CP 70). The photographer whose 'realms and mystery'

The winding of the clockwise scene
Wound like a ball of lakes  (CP 70)

projects on the screen 'Love's image' (CP 70), the picture of childhood.
The protagonist "cannot be sure whether the film projects love's image
as illusion or the images of murdering time as reality.  ... In repro-
ducing the picture of his own past through the uses of memory, he hopes
to establish an enduring identity, but that is threatened by time which
can 'kill' his 'history', both past and future, and destroy his iden-
tity. The prospect is demoralizing and the reaction terror-stricken.
'I saw time murder me.' "Time with his sexual 'scythe and water blade' lames the poet on his flinty, 'year-hedged row' and kills his 'history' — his memory and his life."

The imagery drawn from the world of machine is to be found in the poem, I_dreamed my genesis (CP 28-29). There is the usual identification of the organic with the mineral, of flesh with metal, in the poem. The vital life-force operates through the 'girded nerve', 'iron in the grass', and forges 'metal/of suns in sizzling night' (CP 28). In Thomas's view the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds are one. Sexual imagery about the origin of life takes a mechanical form. Genesis is in 'breaking/Through the rotating shell, strong/As motor muscle on the drill' (CP 28). Penetration of the 'rotating shell' is "either of a female world or a psychic obstacle," or the sperm entering the egg. Characteristically Dylan Thomas reduces sexual activity to mechanical operation. In All and all and all the dry worlds lever. (CP 33-34) sexual act is indicated by "the tread", "the seeded milling", "the trigger scythe, the bridal blade", "the flint in the lover's mauling", "the jointed lever", "the screws that turn the voice" (CP 33). Sexual renewal is suggested by "the dry world lever" as well as by "the glided marrow", "the corpse's lover", "the foaming marrow" (CP 33). The image of a gramophone is suggested in the lines

Know, O my bone, the jointed lever,
Fear not the screws that turn the voice,
And the face to the driven lover. (CP 33)

Sex is the lever that renews the dry world.
Thomas seeks erotic self-exploration in fantasy-landscape. "The operations of the phallus in Tomm's dream-landscapes and erotic imaginings typically combine a visually striking (often cinematic) effect which is yet visually impossible or incoherent, and which almost invariably suggests an unconsummated element of fantasy-humour. In *If I were tickled by the rub of love*, there is a 'knobbly ape that swings along his sex'; in *I followed sleep* the dreamer 'planing-heeled, ... flew along my man/And dropped on dreaming and the upward sky,' the phallus turning into a kind of witch's broomstick. In both these places, the phallus acquires an oddly independent existence, separating itself from its owner and becoming a gigantic piece of detachable apparatus." C. J. Rawson points out that "the airy broomstick of *I followed sleep* becomes motorized in *I dreamed my genesis*, where the dreamer journeys 'In bottom gear through night-greased man.' The mechanization is a protest against the dominance of machine in modern life and shows Tomm's habit of describing sexual activity in machine metaphors. 'But in the line *In bottom gear through night-greased man* from *I dreamed my genesis* this unreality goes further. The phallus is both machine and ghost. The poem becomes a symptom, not an exposure, of 'mechanical operation of the spirit,' ... so that phallus finally turns to 'metal phantom.'" The phrase 'metal phantom' occurs in *In my intricate image*. "The phantom is not only a phallus fornicating with (in this case) flowers, but a dead body pushing up the daisies (in this case actually harebells):" 

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Beginning with doom in the ghost, and the springing marvels,
Image of images, my metal phantom
Forcing forth through the harebell ...
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This particular image of the life-cycle, of the circular interpenetration of death and rebirth, was a favourite of Thomas. The image of rebirth of the spirits of the dead in a new form of life is seen in When once the twilight looks no longer (CP 4-5):

Where fishes' food is fed the shades
Who periscope through flowers to the sky. (CP 5)

This is also seen in And death shall have no dominion (CP 68):

Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;

Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies. (CP 68)

The image of an obstetrician or a midwife making the full womb empty, bringing the child to birth, is found in

The green unraveller,
His scissors oiled, his knife hung loose. (CP 11)

or, in

... the unfolding to the scissors' cauld. (CP 20)

The image of surgical operation is vividly presented in the following lines:

Under the mask and the ether, they making bloody
The tray of knives, the antiseptic funeral. (CP 37)

Military image is used in The seed-at-zero (CP 42-43), published in Twenty-five Poems, 1936. The seed-at-zero is a poem
about begetting and conceiving. Consistently the metaphor of storming a citadel is used to indicate the assault of the seed on a virgin stronghold.

The imagery of locks and keys, present in Deaths and Entrances (CP 117-118), are found in Among those killed in the Dawn Raid was a Man Aged a Hundred (CP 135). 'On almost the incendiary eve' (CP 117) the lips are locked and bodies unlocked. 'Heart is luminous/In the watched dark, quivering through locks and caves' (CP 118). 'The locks yawned loose and a blast blew them wide', and 'all the keys shot from the locks' (CP 135). War is associated with the locks and key imagery. Besides these, we meet the metaphorical use of the image in There was a Saviour (1940) in which Thomas attacks conventional Christianity:

Prisoners of wishes locked their eyes
In the jails and studies of his keyless smiles.

(CP 123)

'Womb' is an important image in Thomas's poetry. It is a place of security and comfort as well of gestation. The image is thematically connected with the concept of life and death, and of the poet's emergence from darkness of light. Life begins in the womb. It is in the womb that the embryo begins its graveward journey. Womb is tomb. The birth of a child or a poem is a coming out of the darkness of the womb into light. Since creation is a major concern in Thomas's poetry, 'Womb' plays an important role. Various images express the concept of womb in his poetry. Here are some —
1. Sacred waters that no frost could harden: (Incas, Incas)
2. grave-groping place! (The dead, dead)
3. a holy room in a vault (It is the sinners' dust-tongued hell)
4. dead house garden! (My world is pyramids)
5. time-bomb town! (A world about to fall)
6. making house! (If my head hurt a baby's foot)
7. dark days (How shall my mind)

The birth of a child is a coming out of a place of safety into a world of horror, corruption, and disease. This idea is expressed in A world about to fall (CP 166-96), published in Poems, London, February 1938. In a letter written to Watkins in October 1938 Thomas says the following about the poem:

As to the big poem — only provisionally called "In September", and called that at all only because it was a terrible war month — I'm at the moment very pleased with it... The last line of the 3rd verse might appear just a jumble of old astronomical clichés, but if, in the past, I've used "burning brains and hair" etc. too loosely, this time I used them — as the only words — in dead earnest. Remember this as a poem written to a child about to be born — you know I'm going to be a father in January — and telling it what a world it will see, what horrors and hells... It's an optimistic, taking — everything, poems. The two most important words are "Cry Joy".

Thomas tells his son what a world he will encounter after his birth. Leaving behind the safe shelter of the 'time-bomb town'.
(CP 96) of mother's womb he will wake in the mud of the crotch of the squalling shores (CP 96), being 'flung from the carbolic city' (CP 96) (disinfected city) in a 'bed of sores' (CP 96). The sweet recollections of heaven will be overwhelmed by the 'sour floods' (CP 96) of the world. He will see 'The skull of the earth is barbed with a war of burning brains and hair' (CP 96). From the 'dark asylum' (CP 96) of the womb the child will wake to the horrors of death and sacrifice, to the 'horrif/face drip from the dismaying hands and the pressed sponge of the forehead' (CP 96). 'The dismaying hands and the pressed sponge of the forehead' is an image of Christ on the Cross. The birth, however, is a 'noble fall' (CP 96). Birth is in the cosmic process of life and death and involves the defiance of death, as 'Ode Joy' though the 'witch-like midwife second' of birth bullies the child from the 'girl-circle island' into 'rough seas' (CP 96) of life. The image of currency appears in (no work of words) (CP 96), published in Male, March 1939 (No. 6/7). The poem is a poignant expression of the experience of a lean period that Thomas faced in 1939, or earlier.

I bitterly take to task my poverty and craft. (CP 96)

Treasures are thematically connected with the idea of poverty. Three images run in the poem. The key image is money elaborated through rich, purse, poverty, pounds, treasures, surrender, marked, count, new, expensive, and rich. 'Muddy belly of the rich year,' 'big purse of my body,' introduce the image of organic life connected with the key image. The words lean, muddy, belly, body, hungerly, breath, seas, carry forward the image. The third is the image of Death 'that will wake at last all currencies of the marked breath,' Death is imaged.
crouched drawing in money with a rake. Energy points out that in the
line "ancient words of my blood, dash down to the nut of the seas," all
the three images are brought together: "Oek, return to your scorn state;
blood, return to your sea-water origin; and gambler's profits, return to
your initial investment (nut)."

The temptation of a poet in a lean season is to lift from
the 'treasures' of other poets and surrender integrity. To steal
'the currencies of the marked breath' is to surrender creative mystery. If
the poet fails to enrich the world with his creation, "ancient words of
my blood, dash down to the nut of the seas." Thomas has used images
taken from the world of sports and games. "Sack back the crowned tone
(CF 97)." "Sack," "back," "crowned," are all terms which belong to the
"ropes," "elated," evoke the scene of boxing in the same poem. If my
head hurt a half a drop (CF 97-98). "Sprint," "jump," "humor," take us
to the track and the field.

*** If the unpriicked ball of my breath
Bump on a sport let the bubbles jump out. (CF 97)

Ralph Henry observes —

"The phrase 'unpriicked ball of my breath' is a figure of
speech for the head, whose mouth has not yet been opened. The foetus is
thought to be holding its breath like a diver under water ... and the
mother is told to let the breath out if the head bumps on her.

***

Sooner drop with the worn of the ropes round my throat
Than bully ill love in the elouted scene.
I'd sooner die by being hung with the umbilical cord than hurt you in being born." Robert Graves ... asked why 'ropes' in the plural. The answer which also answers why 'drop', why 'bully', why 'clutched', is that the scene in these birth lines is already fusing with the boxing scene of the following stanza. The child has to fight its way out of the womb; so birth is a boxing match. Here the child says he'd rather lose the fight, strangled in the ropes, than win and make love ill with his 'Caesar blows'. The metaphorical use of 'ball' and 'bubble' of the first stanza of 'If my head hurt a hair's foot' is consistent with the life and death theme of the poem. Nevinson says, "In Thosae the ball is a metaphor for the world, and, in so far as the world is life, the ball often means life. Obviously, a ball is also a playing generally associated with youth; thus "ball", having these two links, may not only mean life but young life. A ball which is pricked loses its bubbles of air. Life, too, may be seen as a process wherein we eventually come to lose our air, our breath. ... "Bubble" is metaphorically related to "ball" in Thosae; it too is a synecdoche for life. More specifically, it is a metaphor substitute for breath."

As Richards says that irony, in one sense, "consists in the bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses." Pogge observes, "The principle of irony is apotheosized under the name of synaesthesia as the ultimate aesthetic experience. ... Synaesthesia is an equilibrium and harmony of various impulses, bringing into play all the faculties. By this equilibrium and harmony we are enabled to appreciate relationships in a way which would not be possible under normal circumstances. Though no other experience can the full richness and complexity of our environment be realized." Synaesthetic images are
found in Thomas. 'The whispering ears will watch', 'the lynx tongue cry', 'nostrils see her breath' occur in when all my five and country senses see (CP 51). The image 'moonshine enshining clear' (CP 153) appears in In Country Sleep. Synaesthetic effects of the following images remove the barriers between the wind and the sense-organs:

'Stone in my ears the light of sound,  
Called in my eyes the sound of light.  (CP 29)

The dominance of the imagery of sex, time, and death in Thomas's poetry has already been observed before. The mention of one or two examples may be made here. Death as an agent to an end is presented through the imagery of instruments, surgical operations, and war in Lim.

Death instrumental:  
Splitting the long eye open, and the spiral turnkey,  
Your coreckers grave centred in navel and nipple,  
The neck of the nostril,  
Under the mask and the thorn, they making bloody  
The tray of knives, the antiseptic funeral.  (CP 35-37)

Death shall have no dominion though it say  
Bring out the Black patrol,  
Your monstrous officers and the decaying army,  
The sexton sentinel, garrisoned under thistles,  
a cock-on-a-dunghill  
Crowing to Lazarus the morning is vanity,  
Dust be your saviour under the conjured soil. (CP 37)

Death's natural world is "one of scratches and screeches, such as would emanate from a worn-out record placed on a non-perpendicular spindle and
activated by a nodle."

Turn the sea-spindle lateral,
The grooved land rotating, that the stylus of lighting
Dazzle this face of voices on the moon-turned table,
Let the wax disk blaze.
Shame and the deep dishonours, the relic scraching.

( CP 37 )

Here we may mention Shakespeare's attitude towards
death. Caroline Spurgeon observed, "Shakespeare is very conscious of
the greed and destructiveness of death, especially in war or tragic
accidents, as in King Lear and Romeo and Juliet, and pictures him as
a warrior with jaws of steel "coursing the flesh of men", a skeleton
feasting, upon soldiers by the thousand, a "carried monster", a proud
and mighty being, who to supply food for his feast strikes down kings,
queens and princes "at a shot". ... The power of death, and men's
helplessness in his grip, are constantly kept before us, ... In
general it would seem Shakespeare does not rebel against death, but
accepts it as a natural process, a debt we owe to God, the cancelling
of the bond of life; he thinks of it fairly constantly as the end of
all we know, sometimes coming abruptly and harshly, as the untimely
frost on a flower, ... but on the whole, most often, in spite of
Hamlet's questioning and Claudius' ravings, an end wholly peaceful,
merciful and restful." Thomas shows his horror of death and
disease and finds death the natural end of all. "The cataracted eyes,
'the red-haired cancer" (CP 4) betokens inevitable death. Thomas
speaks of death in war: "shrapnel/rammed in the marching heart",
"Death on the mouth that ate the guava" (CP 33). In his last poems
Thomas is reconciled to the natural process of death.

Thomas speaks of an image of time in *A Prospect of the Sea*:

"Consider now the old effigy of time, his long beard whitened by an Egyptian sun, his bare feet watered by the Sargasso sea." In *Early One Morning*, time is imaged as "an ancient man with a great beard and an hour-glass and a scythe under his night-dressed arms". In *When*, like a running grave, time is imaged as a hunter tracking creatures down. Again, time is a runner on a cinder track who shapes "an oval, an "O", a zero standing for the nothingness of death."

*** time on track
Shapes in a cinder death (CP 11)

For sexual imagery the poem, how shall my animal, may be mentioned here. Though sexuality is metaphorical here, the central and pervading image is the phallus. The prepuce is described as "The involved, enshrouding veil at the cap of the face" (CP 91). How shall the animal nature of the speaker "endure burial" (CP 91), his phallic extinction, when the phallus ought to be furious, "Hum as a vineyard snail, nailed like an octopus" (CP 91)? Gene Montague says that the speaker's animal nature can "endure burial" because it is the necessary cost of creation. Thomas introduces flaying image in the poem as later in *Ballad of the Long-Legged Jig*. The speaker fishes sexually "with a living skin, Tongue and ear in the thread" (CP 91). The "curl-locked and animal capsewells of spells and bone" which are also "the boul of wounds and weeds" are transparently female, and the reappearance "tentacled, nailed with an open eye" with its reappearance "fury" is even more unmistakably male and phallic. But the sexual struggle is basically unequal and, in a sense, self-defeating,
because the "beast" exhausts itself in capturing and conquering what it seeks (or, as the Renaissance more neatly put it, dies a little to create new life) ... As Samaon's strength was stolen by a woman, as Samaon moved from potency to temporary impotence, and as Samaon destroyed himself but achieved his purpose, so sexuality works its temporary destruction. The phallus, again with its "fierce eye," is conquered by the female parts (the "unconquered maiden mouth") and is left "dry" and "robbed." But Samaon regained potency. In this fashion, then, the animal nature does "endure brutal," by dying first in the limbs and then in the heart, but the death is temporary; it is part of a process, as most things are in the poetry of Dylan Thomas. The physiological imagery of the poem metaphorically expresses the creation of a poem. The scenery of his body has expressed the scenery of his thought.

Though the early poems of Thomas stem with sexual imagery, the poet's deeply-felt religious emotion is expressed in the volume of poems published in 1926. The imagery is religious if not always Christian. As the poet attains maturity, he perceives nature to be holy and his images become more and more sacred. The poet finds natural processes sacred. The holiness of nature is established through sacramental imagery. The sacred images we meet, for example, in A Refusal to Mourn the Death of Mrs. Olive of a Child in London (1945) - "the round/Zion of the water beard," "the synagogue of the ear of corn" (CP 192) - or, in Poem in October (1945) - "the parables/of sun light" (CP 193). In A Winter's Tale (1945) the world of nature is seen as the sacramental cup and bread. The tale takes place "Once when the world
turned old/On a star of faith pure as the drifting bread' (CP 119).
When the visionary miracle ends with the death of the man 'The rite
is shorn' (CP 123). The suggestion of Eucharistic bread in the 'cup
and the cut bread,' 'the fields of the bread of water' (CP 120),
'broad white hill over the supped farm' (CP 122), makes nature holy.
"The Christian images are everywhere: the valley is like a chalice;
the snow-flakes like napkins or altar cloths; the smoke the color of
the Lamb; snow is the bread of life; Peter's cock crows; the chimney
pot is like a cowl; scrolls of fire recall both Moses and the day of
judgement; the spit and black pot suggest the lams and the grail; the
sheep and her fire have pentecostal affinities." The image of the
Eucharist we meet in an early poem, This bread I break (1036). The
poem is based on the central image of the Eucharist, and the basic
concept is the oneness of the life of nature, man, and Christ in which
the mystery of transubstantiation is involved. "My flesh is real food;
my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood
dwells continually in me and I dwell in him" (John 6: 55,56,57). This
is the Real Presence of Christ in bread and wine of the Eucharist. The
substance of bread changes into the substance of Christ's body, and
the substance of the wine changes into the substance of his blood when
the priest repeats the words of Christ in his name at Mass. This is a
change of one substance into another. It is transubstantiation. Bread
and wine of the Eucharist come from the natural oat and grape. The
poet's flesh and blood become the poem. The vital force bequeathed in
sexual love to the mistress becomes the conceived child.

This wine upon a foreign tree
Plunged in its fruit. (CP 39)
Bread and wine of the Eucharist have a secular application. But the image of the Holy Eucharist lends an air of holiness to nature. "The poem registers a sense of the sacramental nature of the universe. ... The idea of a sacramental universe profoundly influences Thomas's later works."

Thomas's thematic struggle to come out of darkness into light has found corresponding expression in many of his images:

Who periscope through the flowers to the sky. (CP 5)
I sent my ambassador to light. (CP 5)
Awake, my sleeper, to the sun. (CP 5)
... the pitch was forking to a sun. (CP 23)

When logics die,
The secret of the soil grows through the eye;
And blood jumps in the sun;
Above the waste allotments the dawn halts. (CP 26)

There grows the hour's ladder to the sun, (CP 27)
... vision
Of new man strength, I seek the sun. (CP 29)
Rung bone and blade, the verticals of Adam,
And, manned by midnight, Jacob to the stars. (CP 71)
... my voice burns in his hand.

Now I am lost in the blinding
One. The sun rears at the prayer's end. (CP 148)
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10. Ibid., p. 126.


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25. Ibid., p. 126.
33. Ibid., p. 40.
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37. Paul Ferris, op. cit., p. 43.
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45. Walford Davies (ed.), op. cit., p. 44.
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50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., pp. 90-91
52. Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 45.
55. Moynihan, op. cit., p. 75.
58. Emery, op. cit., p. 316.
61. Quite Early One Morning, p. 18.
62. Olson, op. cit., p. 57.
64. Ibid., p. 423.
65. Emery, op. cit., p. 262.