CHAPTER III

Alterwise

Alterwise by Owl-light (CP 71-76) is a sequence of ten "sonnets". The plan of the whole poem was larger than the ten sonnet-like stanzas Thomas composed. As Vernon Watkins says, "He intended to write more and make it a much longer work." The first seven of these 'sonnets' were published in December 1937 in Life and Letters To-Day, XIII, 3, pp. 73-75. The other three were published in 1936 in Contemporary Poetry and Prose, No. VIII in May, Nos. IX and X in July. The ten poems were brought together as a sequence in Twenty-Five Poems, pp. 42-47. Collected Poems, pp. 71-76.

Alterwise by Owl-light is difficult because of exceptional concentration and interweaving of imagery. A final interpretation of the poem can hardly be given. Each successive reading will yield never meaning. Different critics have offered different interpretations of the poem. Studied in the context of Twenty-Five Poems, of which the sonnets constitute the last poem, Clark Emery says that "the sonnets are likely to be either negative — an outcry against Time—tainted life leading to death, or an attack upon the sentimental Christian interpretation of life; or positive — a non-Christian affirmation of life in Time, or that plus a statement of belief in some sort of post death continuity, or an acceptance of the Christian position." Emery likes to consider "the first twelve lines of the opening sonnet as an introduction, the third-person omniscient, written by Thomas, and the rest of the sequence as a first-person exposition delivered by Christ
... providing Thomas ... with an eagle's-eye view of the history and
meaning of Christianity." W.T. Hoyinian observed, "The sonnets have
a loose chronological framework based on references to various periods
in the process from birth to maturity." "The narrator is above all
the poet who is archetypally associated with Christ. ... But the poet
is also associated with Adam as the prototype of the human race.
... The sonnets deal not only with the voyage of an individual but
also with the man - Christ - poet composite ... the voyage of the
sonnets is essentially that of a young man and a poet seeking to
learn the purpose and meaning of life, ..." It appears from a study
of the sonnets that Thomas eagerly seeks to attain a view of life
which will lighten the 'burthen of the mystery' of human existence.
Thomas desires to learn not simply 'the history and meaning of
Christianity', as Kery says, but 'the purpose and meaning of life'
as suggested by Hoyinian. An understanding of life is gained by a
voyage through life. The voyage of life is attended by doubts, fears,
wonder, and uncertainty. The poet in his perplexity hungers for a
spiritual certainty in this time-tainted, death-ridden world. He
seeks to understand the value of suffering and sacrifice in life and
in the scheme of the universe. Thomas attempts a conventional
Christian interpretation of life - and - death antagonize, but hardly
finds it satisfactory. Is death the end of all? Thomas tries to
answer the question in the sonnets. Thomas in his 'fearful struggle'
with God is poet, Christian and Everyman. The thematic image of the
sonnets is a voyage and in this respect he has kinship with Romantic
poets. The Romantic poets often narrate a voyage of some kind,
undertaken usually by the poet himself. Thomas takes this image because "the figure of a journey is a natural image of impression in which to embody the development of the self-consciousness, the soul, the creative imagination, common themes of the Romantic poets: their interest in figures such as Cain, the wandering Jew, Don Juan, and other travellers, is a reflection of this." The end of the voyage is death, or some kind of defeat of death. It is the defeat of death that Thomas envisions in the last sonnet. Another thematic image of the sonnets is provided by the myth of Meleager whose life was measured by the burning of a stick. It affirms the identity of creative and destructive powers in the life of an individual. A son's birth is father's death. The young dog bites out the mandrake of his father. The creative thrust of the father is self-consumptive. Allied to the Meleager myth is the pelican image of Sonnet II. "Like Meleager's burning brand, the legendary sacrifice of the pelican, suckling her offspring on her heart's blood, exemplifies the consumptive condition of creative thrust. In the sonnets, and indeed in Thomas' poetry as a whole, this relationship prevails: the child's rise entails the parent's decline as surely as one bicycle pedal requires a complement." The mother is "the planet-ducted pelican of circles" who "weans on an artery the gender's strip"— (Sonnet - II).

The voyage of life described in the sonnets is both Christian and secular. As a result Thomas's imagery strides on two levels—Biblical and sexual. Or we may say, sex, birth, death, and renewal are expressed through the Christian analogy of Birth, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Christ is the archetypal image of life. The journey of
life begins from the womb ("The halfway house", Sonnet I) towards the
tomb ("graveyard"), carrying the doom of sacrificial death (Altarwise')
with it. This is a fallen world through which the child makes his
journey. "Abaddon in the hangnail cracked from Adam" (Sonnet I).
The presence of Abaddon shows mortality implicit in life created by sex.
Abaddon is the Destroying Angel of Revelation (311). Adam, the
prototype of the human race, represents life. Since a son's birth is
father's death, son and father do the functions symbolised by Abaddon
and Adam.

And, from his fork, a dog among the fairies,
The atlas-eater with a jaw for news,
Rut out the mandrake with to-morrow's scream.
(Sonnet I)

Thomas says, "A "jaw for news" is an obvious variation of a nose for
news", and means that the mouth of the creature can taste already the
horror that has not yet come, or can sense its coming, can thrust its
tongue into news that has not yet been made, can savour the enormity
of the progeny before the seed stirs, can realise the crumbling of dead
flesh before the opening of the womb that delivers that flesh to
tomorrow." The legend of mandrake and journalistic images ("atlas-
eater", "a jaw for news", "to-morrow's scream") create a sense of horror.
The birth of a child is an important event and to-morrow's screaming
headline of newspapers proclaim the event with its implied death or
Crucifixion. Kleinman suggests, "The scream also reminds us that
Christ, like the dog, must die to uproot man from his fallen condition.
This is the Redemption. 'Old cock from nowhere and the heaven's egg'
(Sonnet I) is a beautiful image of the Sun (God) or Son (father and son).
and indicates the inexplicable mystery of birth. 'Hatched from the windy salvages on one leg' (Sonnet I) is an image of Crucifixion and Christ's second nativity. The wind is the breath of the world of mortality. The created world of God is a 'windy salvages', a 'salvage' because it is the thing saved by Christ. 'Hatched on one leg' is crucifixion. It is also a sexual image. Death, imaged as 'penis-eyed' and 'bones unbuttoned' (Sonnet I), escapes the child in the cradle. Death can savour the enormity of the progeny before the seed stirs. 'I am the long world's gentleman, he said,' And share my bed with Capricorn and Cancer' (Sonnet I). The cosmic role of the father as the 'long world's gentleman' who shares his bed with Capricorn and Cancer is in time. In their creative and destructive role, father and son are locked in time. This is an affirmation of natural continuity in a mortal world. On the Christian level, this is resurrection. The 'long world's gentleman' is one with all the slain and resurrected gods. Christ, the 'walking word' (Sonnet I) of God, was vanquished by death, which in turn was vanquished by Christ.

Life sparked off in the 'shapeless country' (Sonnet II) of the womb shoots up and 'soon sets alight a long stick from the cradle' (Sonnet II). The child soon becomes sexually strong. He attains manhood, and sets another cradle rocking as he proceeds through life.

Life's journey to light ('Jacob to the stars', Sonnet II) is a movement towards death. Horrors of life which attend the voyage are imaged by the prohibitory and menacing 'cross-bones' (poison labels) of Abaddon and 'the cavern over black stairs' (Sonnet II). Growing up in cliimbing a ladder of sin and death, a ladder made of 'the horizontal
cross-bones of Abaddon' and the 'verticals of Adam' (Sonnet II). Death is the ultimate reality. 'Death is all metaphors, shape in one history' (Sonnet II). The 'short spark' is an electrical image of life force that 'set alight a long stick' (Sonnet II) which consumes itself and at the same time sets alight new life.

Though the course of life gives token only of death, the hope of renewal, of continuity, of triumph over death, is offered in the last four lines of Sonnet II.

Hairs of your head, then said the hollow agent,
Are but the roots of nettles and of feathers
Over these groundworks thrusting through a pavement
And hemlock-headed in the wood of weathers.

There is a constant transformation of life into different forms through the agency of death, 'the hollow agent'. The 'hollow agent' may well be the Holy Spirit, as suggested by Clark Ashton. 'And what he says breathes more of hope than of despair.' The crumbling flesh nourishes 'the roots of nettles and of feathers' which raise their heads out of the earth into 'the wood of weathers', of seasons, of reality. There is an ever renewal of green life which in death-ridden, 'hemlock-headed'. 'Over these groundworks thrusting through a pavement' is the life force. The orthodox Christian means, sexual intercourse, and immersion into the life-stuff are the three ways of attaining immortality. These three ways to immortality which defeats death are suggested here.

Sonnet III marks the arrival at adolescence. The unfolding
of the sheep from spring lamb to spring ram is expressed through ovine imagery: 'Adam's wether in the flock of horns ... Horned down with skullfoot ... The black ram ... Alone alive among his mutton fold'.

'Climbing grave' is the womb where life grows towards death. The image of copulation is to be found in the following lines:

That Adam's wether in the flock of horns,
Butt of the cone-tailed worm that mounted Eve,
Horned down with skullfoot and the skull of toes
On thunderous pavements in the garden time.

(Sonnet III)

'Adam's wether' who 'horned down with skullfoot' 'on thunderous pavements in the garden time' is father. The father in his creative but self-consuming thrust conveys vital stuff to the son. 'I took my marrow-ladle out of the wrinkled undertaker's van' and put on 'the descended bone' (Sonnet III) of sex and death. He is now 'the black ram' 'alone alive among the mutton fold' (Sonnet III), alive among the ewes. The vital continuity through propagation is maintained. 'We rise from the vaults of death and put on the descended bones of death, and in turn die to provide the marrow of another's life.'

The black ram, shuffling of the year, old winter,
Alone alive among his mutton fold,
We rung our weathering changes on the ladder,
Said the antipodes, and twice spring chimed.

(Sonnet III)

This is a description of both generation and regeneration. The earth regenerates itself in the spring. The antipodes ring the cyclical
changes on the ladder of life and death.

Sonnet IV marks the age of questions. Questions about put by the boy embarrass the 'wounded whisper', the mother. Questions are equally nagging to the Christian faith. It is now a sceptic who asks questions. These questions reveal the birth of greater awareness in the poet. Through scepticism the poet moves to light, undergoes the process of spiritual re-birth. Questions of the sceptics are embarrassing.

What is the metre of the dictionary?
The size of genesis? The short spark's gender?
Shape without shape? the shape of Pharaoh's echo?
(Sonnet IV)

Life is mysterious. It is beyond the comprehension of the mortal intellect. What is the size of being before it takes shape? What is there be soul divorced from body, shadow from shape? What is the sex of 'the short spark' which is the generative force? 'What of a bamboo man among your acres'? Can the scarecrow of the bamboo poles be the father of the child in the mother's or Mary's womb? The growing boy in his voyage through life becomes aware of death. 'A bamboo man may also refer to marrowless skeleton. 'What of a bamboo man'? 'Questions are hunchbacks to the poker marrow' (Sonnet IV). These questions 'about the meaning of life are deformities, hindrances, to the natural inclinations of the "poker marrow", the life force, the newly discovered sexual drive'. Sceptics are 'hunchbacks' to the man of faith. The 'honeyards' is a metaphor of
mother's body. A 'crooked boy' is a sceptic.

The image of photography sets at rest all the questions of the sceptic. The answer to all questions is in one word Love. The emblem in the mother's womb, 'the broad-sided field', bears the stamp of love, since it is conceived in love.

Love's reflection of the mushroom features,
Still snipped by night in the broad-sided field,

(A Selection IV)

Section V shows the religious experience of the boy and his discovery of the hypocrisy of conventional religion. Thomas takes him of Gabriel's apocalyptic Trump and of preaching in the chapel.

And from the windy East came two-gunned Gabriel,
From Joan's sleeve trumped up the king of spots.
The sheath — docked Jacks, queen with a shuffled heart;
Sad the fake gentleman in suit of smocks.
Black-tongued and tipsey from salvation's bottle.

(A Selection V)

Gabriel, an angel of the Annunciation and the Last Trump, comes as a riding of a western two-gunned marshal. 'Trump' introduces the imagery of playing cards, and this also suggests trickery. The trickster 'two-gunned Gabriel' 'trumped up' from 'Joan's sleeve' 'the king of spots', 'the angel of death, the hosts of the sinners, and the throng of papists!'
The trickery of the chapel consists in the 'salvation bottle' which makes one 'tipsey', but the boy remains 'black-tongued'. The preachers of religion are 'fake' gentlemen and hypocritical liars. Thomas, the
the 'Byzantine Adam,' revolts against the preacher's idea of salvation and damnation.

Rose by Byzantine Adam in the night. (Annot VII)

This rising in the night, i.e., erection, symbolizes the protest against the life-denying abstinence preached by the religious preachers.

And Jonah's Holy snatched me by the hair,
Cross-stroked salt Adam to the frozen angel.
Pin-logged on pole-bills with a black odour
by waste seas where the white bear quoted Virgil
and sirens singing from our Lady's sea—stress.

(Annot VII)

In 'Jonah's Holy' two images are telescoped, the images from the 'H.M.' and 'Holy Dick.' 'H.H.' represents sensuality. Jonah always feels an inner inhibition accompanying sexual drive. The lustful songs of the sirens come from the waste seas alluring and tormenting the hero; the psychological fear is never absent. Evil and death are associated with sensuality, but not in any theological sense.

The initiation into life through sexual experience occurs in Annot VII. The voyager blows tallow from the 'tubes' of father's creative candle. Sexual experience is essential for the development of personality. The voyager unites father and mother principles in his new creative efforts.
through salient imagery. "tide-traced crater", "lava's light split through the oyster worlds", "burned sea allience", "pluck, lop", introduces surgical imagery.

Adam, time's joker, on a witch of cardboard
split out the seven seas, an evil index.
The bagpipe-breasted ladies in deadwood
blew out the blood pause through the wound of men wax.

*Adam, time's joker*, the father principle, writes, as on a page, *on a witch of cardboard*, the mother principle. Adam bagpipe; poenae. These poesæ spell out *the seven seas* which indicate the perilous journey that awaits the voyager. It is an *evil index*, since all voyage ends in death. In all creation winds are necessary though dangerous. Winds are always associated with death and casualty in Thoene. *The bagpipe-breasted ladies* blow out the pause (bandage) that prevents wounded men from bleeding to death, and thus extinguish the candle of men.

**Excerpt VII** states that the way to defeat time is to have faith, faith in the Lord. The Lord's prayer is the staff of life. The "book of trees" which is "Bible-loved" should be studied instead of the "book of woe" (Excerpt VII) which tells of time and death. In Thoene words are always associated with trees. All religions should be stripped to this tree. Religion stripped to its essence is the Lord (John 1:1).

Dove on dovecote at the wind — turned statement.

*Excerpt VII*
"The denial at a vind - turned statement is a denial of the lord's embodiment -- that is, of spirit breathed into body (incarnation) in the body's transformation -- on the road tree of death, such a denial denies the full natural cycle, done on such."

But Time seems omnipotent. 'Ladies with the teats of music' get the 'time's tune' (Sonnet VII). Time, like a sponge, soaks the faith of 'the ball-voiced man' and that 'long the world beginning' (Sonnet VII).

Time is the tune my ladies lend their heartbreaks.

(Sonnet VII)

Ladies give their heartbreak to their children. But the children are in time. They in turn will break the hearts of their mothers. 'Time's tune' grows out of their heartbreak. From the bare pavilion of the sky to the earth ('the house of bread') below, Time 'tricks the sound of shape on man and cloud' (Sonnet VII). Time leaves its print on all the objects of all seasons. Time pursues the near and idle, man and cloud, through their changes. So time is not so powerful as it appears. Individual life may come to an end but the cyclical continuity of life defies time. Clouds change but do not die. Life asserts itself through death -defeating continuity. Time stalks on everything that comes into existence, but it can never wipe it out. Life ever repeats itself and this Thomas was already said in Sonnet II.

Time's relentless pursuit of life brings the inevitable end to the voyagers.
This was the crucifixion on the mountain,
Time's nerve in vinegar, the yellow Grove
As tarred with blood as the bright theme I vept!
The world's my wound, God's Mary in her grief,
But like three trees and bird-peeped through her shift,
With pine for teardrops is the long wound's queen.

(Comment VIII)

'The world is my wound.' The 'world' is an image of the body of God or Christ and the 'wound' is an image of suffering and death. The suffering of the world is the suffering of God, God's Mary in her grief. The crucifixion of her son is her wound. Mary epitomizes all mothers. Mothers suffer heartbreak through the loss of their children when time strikes. Mary is the 'long wound's queen', the spouse of 'the long world's gentleman' (Comment I). She suffers the agony of childbirth. This is her crucifixion which all mothers suffer to maintain the continuity of life. She is 'bird-peeped through her shift', meaning she is bird-breasted. This recalls the image of the mother as 'the planet-directed pelican of circes' (Comment II) who sacriﬁces herself yielding her offspring on her heart's blood. Mary bent down in grief 'like three trees' is a striking image of capacity. The crucifixion of Christ is the sacriﬁce made for the health of the world, His sacriﬁce involves the whole world which is slow to realize its signiﬁcance. The death of Christ was predestined ('heaven - driven'). The cruciﬁxion is implicit in the nativity. It is in the scheme of the universe. Christ dies to nourish the life of others coming after, 'from pole to pole'.
This was the sky, Jack Christ, each sinstral angle
Drove in the heaven—driven of the nails
Till the three-coloured rainbow ran my nipples
From pole to pole least round the self-ensnared world.

(SONNET VIII)

Child in the heavenly surgery, 'all glory's surgeon',
The unseen death, Christ in the death of death.
In this historic ascent sex is excited to love.

I by the tree of thievoc, all glory's sentence,
Under the skeleton this mountain minute,
And by this clock of witness of the sin,
Suffer the heaven's children through my heartbeats.

(SONNET VIII)

In the light of Hebraic legend and poetic image it may be said
that ‘the child-hood slain the symbol of potency, his father's phallic
ining', which enables him to 'suffer the heaven's children through my
hearts, the crucifixion and execution of the father."

'Hecate: witness of the sun' may refer to the darkness of the world
during the Crucifixion and the extinction of time. Thomas combines
closely physical life and spiritual life. Christ is 'time's nerve'.
His bitter sacrifice has made time weak. The continuity of life has
made death impotent. 'This mountain minute' is an image which combines
time and space; great and small. The Crucifixion on the mountain has a
great cosmic significance. Genesis, birth, growth, love led to this moment. All glory's essence offers his body for the life of others.

After the crucifixion in Sonnet VIII comes the theme of burial and resurrection in Sonnet IX. We are in a pagan world. Attempts have been made to gain release from the captivity of time and attain immortality. The corpse is preserved in Egyptian embalming and entombment.

... the queen in splints,

Hide to lint and cloth their nation footsteps,

Over on the glove of prints, dead Calro's arms

Pour like a halo on the cape and sorpents.

(Sonnet IX)

The spirit of the writer is entailed in writing in 'all and letters' (Sonnet I). The 'loose calligrapher' (Sonnet I) and calleeor offers a defiance of death and provide resurrection. But the biocalyphic - inscribed surny - cloth is the glove of the head of time which contains death and not life. 'This was the resurrection in the desert.' The scholar with their mask of scholarship finds death in the gold mask on the surny's face, infer 'death from a bandage.' The 'linen spirit', 'entombment in parchment and surny cloth' consign the phallic long gentleman to busts and relics in the pyramidal world in the sand.

This was the resurrection in the desert.

Death from a bandage, rents the mask of scholar

Gold on such features, and the linen spirit

Bids my long gentleman to dust and ashes. (Sonnet IX)
All the glories and infinities collected in the 'Odyssey' of life are dead weights of stones in the pyramid. "Set in a tree of life and a creative wand, as well as dust! and 'garland' is what a poet wears. 'The triangle landscape' is an image of the pyramid and the male principle. 'The dead around my neck' is an image of the albatross round the neck of the ancient Mariner and symbolically suggests the crime committed and the punishment that pursued the wanderer in his nightmarish journey through life.

World, in the sand, on the triangle landscape,
With stones of Odyssey for ash and garland
And silver of the dead around my neck. (Sonnet I)

There is no escape from death and Time. But the hint of life is given in 'the linear spirit' that unites the long gentlemens' phallic tool with 'dusts and furies'. 'Furies' are the deadly women, springing from the earlier montes where they represent feminine principle and sexuality which ensure the continuity of life.

What meaning has life to the voyager to view Christian teachings offer no substance? Sweet X attempts an answer.

Let the tale's caller from a Christian voyage
Altarwise hold halfway off the crews bay
Time's ship-suited gospel on the globe I balance.

(Sonnet X)

The 'tale's caller' will anchor halfway off the 'bays bay' (like harbor) of Christian faith and cease from the search for the meaning
of life in conventional Christianity and hold, like Atlas, 'Time's ship-wrecked gospel' on the 'globe' of his poetry. The sea fever has realised 'December's them screwed in a brow of lolly' (Sonnets). The polar opposites meet in life: pain is found in the midst of joy, birth in death. The single miracle of the world is the persistence of ever-recurring life through death and this has kept alive the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. Let the First Peter (Sonnets) ask: 'Shall father, pleading like a stick of stubs in mother's arm-blue channel to see the flesh of child Jesus and the Holy Child around a ghost?'

what stubs men pulled in her arm-blue channel
have seen a flying garden round that arm-ghost?

(Sonnets)

The child will rise and fall with its two back towers and the ever-present life will be 'green as beginning' (Sonnets). The two trees of life and death will become one and, on the Day of Judgment, the 'nest of serpents' will be built by 'the side, red phallic, which is creative and destructive at the same time. The 'serpent builds with 'venom', and venom contains new life. Golden 'straw' are those of mothers. Mercy is to be seen in the natural cyclical process of life and death in which nothing is lost.

... to that Day
When the worm builds with the gold straws of venom
By nest of serpents in the side, red trees. (Sonnets)

'It is the power of love which remains as the vindication of life and survival; the fact that the processes of life go on, that the processes
of generation in man and nature never fails, and that the seasons change, is itself witness of some beneficent will at the heart of the universe."

REFERENCES


2. Francis Barnett says —

"These so-called 'sonnets' (they are 14-line poems) cannot be considered separately, as together they form a unit ('Poem 26'). ... Subjects, rather, for though the theme is the life-death antithesis, it is necessarily bound up with Old and New Testament mythology and sexual symbolism. It is rash to reduce such works to a formula, but for me they represent a stable pattern of Biblical and sexual imagery, the recognisable characters being Satan (identified with death and sin), sex (i.e., life, represented by Adam and even Gabriel), Mary (the justification of sex through child-bearing and suffering, but none the less a worldly symbol), and Christ (victim and blood-offering rather than hero)".


Nyman-Kindman believes that "the sonnets are a deeply moving statement of religious perplexity concluding in spiritual certainty. They reflect the wonder, awe, doubt, and faith of a young poet who could not reconcile the capacity of divine pity with the necessity of human sacrifice. The paradox of the incarnation and Passion affected Dylan Thomas early in his career. ... There is revelation in the sonnets of a fearful struggle of the poet with his God. Concentric to the theme of struggle is the theme of sacrifice; the agonizing story of Abraham and Isaac is implicit in the sonnets. Mount Moriah and Calvary loom large in this poem". (The Religious Sonnets of Dylan Thomas: a study in imagery and meaning, University of California Press, 1963, pp. 10-11).

W. J. Tindall says, "In general agreement with Thomas, I think that the theme is Thomas himself, the constant subject of his verse and prose. Although cheerfully allowing the presence of Jesus, Hercules, the stars, the Zodiac, and a generally neglected voyage, I think these analogies, not to be confused with theme, ... lead in the context of his other poems and his prose, these sonnets seem another portrait of the artist as a young dog — of 'a dog among
the fairies'. Beginning with his begetting, the story proceeds through childhood and ends with the writing and publication of poems". (A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas, London 1962, p. 137).


10. "'Netles' could imply the crown of thorns and 'Feathers' the holy ghost, both bringing hope of renewal." (Tindall, op.cit., p. 161).


12. "Since Thomas was born into a Christian home, and heard Christian talk as soon as he could hear, it may be said that Christ scraped at his cradle — as was said in Sonnet I. Thomas' no longer physically in a cradle, but he is undergoing a spiritual re-birth. So Christ scraped at his cradle a second time." (Emery, op.cit., p. 228).

13. "'Your acres' is a nasty obscene metaphor referring not only to Mary's body but a field where a farm hand might have lurked, waiting for Mary". (Kleinman, op.cit., p. 43).


16. 'Jonah's body is the spirit of evil, the Leviathan... who brings natural man, "salt Adam", to an awareness of spiritual or other worldly value, "the frozen angel". Adam is nailed, "stretched", in the sense of struck or bound, perhaps even in the sense of cross-stitched, to this "frozen angel", who proves to be a cross". (Moyhnan, op.cit., p. 123).

17. "Father provides the candle and lamp, and mother provides the page". (Tindall, op.cit., p. 147).
18. Kleinman says that Thomas's "description of mating, surgery, and birth in obstetrical imagery suggests a maternity hospital and operating room at the bottom of a Sargasso Sea, with a variety of jellyfish and sirens as nurses and midwives" (op.cit., p. 78).

According to Olson, "In Sonnet VI man and sun are discovered to be like burning candles. Man is wounded with the birth-wound; time will see that he bleeds to death of that wound." (op.cit., p.84).


21. "For this moment in time a world was made, a tree planted, a Son begotten. And in this moment in time the Son is transfixed to the tree for the world." (Kleinman, op.cit., p. 60).

22. Olson, op.cit., p. 61.

23. Tindall, op.cit., p. 163.

24. Tindall, op.cit., p. 163.

25. "Tree, always associated with word, suffering, and knowledge, must be this poet's poetry and his cross... his star-studded self, nailed to this great, composite tree finds hope of mercy there and hope of blossoming." (Tindall, op.cit., p. 153).