CHAPTER VI

Green and Golden

Thomas explores the development of man from prenatal existence to death, from innocence to experience. In some poems of his middle period he evokes the visionary world of childhood in pastoral surroundings. It is said that the naive resort to the child is a regressive stage which celebrates infantilism. But Thomas views his easy, carefree life of childhood with nature consciousness. The nostalgia for the state of childhood is not a regressive wish nor a desire to avoid adult responsibility by being lost in the visionary world of childhood. Thomas seeks a harmony of being. This he tries to achieve by gaining the spontaneity and freedom of the innocent child. He can enter into the world trailing clouds of glory. The shadows of the prison-house close in as he progresses from the innocent blis of childhood to maturity. The state of childhood shows what we were. Thomas seeks to recapture that blissful state and thereby attain the harmoniousness of being in his state of maturity. To the adult this harmoniousness does not come easily as a gift of nature, but this is to be achieved by conscious effort and culture. Thomas strives to incorporate childhood simplicity in the higher harmony of maturity. His conscious view of childhood shows his awareness of the inescapable process of time and death which he integrates in the general vision of the development of life from infancy to death. Thomas wants to have the innocence of childhood on a higher plane. To have the innocence of childhood is not to remain children.

Thomas evokes the joy and spontaneity of childhood in pasto-
real surroundings. This pastoral surroundings seem to be an answer to the industrial civilization which has produced.

Mechanized society

Where natural intuition dies.

Thomsen reacts against this mechanical aspects of life, since he feels that machine has made invades into the intimate regions of the heart. His mind is saturated with the sea and the countryside. What he says of Edward Thomsen is equally true of him: "He loved the fields, the woods, the winding roads, he knew a thousand country things, the diamonds of rain on the grasshoppers, the ghostly white parsley flowers, violets and rufus and robin, each year's first violets, the mixed - thump that loves juniper, lauriston berry, mesd - tuff, new-mown hay, the mastic oying over the untouched clay, churchyard, graveyards, farms and byres, children, wild goose, horses in the sun." In Thomsen's poetry the countryside is deeply felt. But the presence of the pastoral note is felt more after 1900. Pastoralism shows an important phase of development in Thomsen's poetry. In his later years Boccaccio looks back on his early innocent childhood with joy and longing. In the early poems seen as "thought of as the garden where the apple was eaten," it later becomes associated with the pristine innocence of the earth. The earth is seen as recapturing that innocence at times, in token of the redemption. The flood in a terror in the early work; in the later, there is refuge from it in the Ark.

In Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence, pastoralism is a central theme. Northrop Frye points out, "In the nineteenth century the relation of country to city was often thought of, in writers who had begun
to hate and fear the rise of metropolitan civilization, as a relation of innocence to experience, of the healthy natural virtues of the country corrupted by the feverish excitement of the town 4. He further observes, "In Miller and Lawrence this pastoral theme is less sentimentalized and more closely connected with the more deeply traditional elements of the pastoral: spontaneity in human relations, especially sexual relations; the stimulus to creative power that is gained from a simpler society, less obsessed by satisfying imaginary wants; and, at least in Lawrence, a sense of identity with nature of great delicacy and precision." 4 This pastoral note is not absent in Thomas's early poems. The line "and in the mighty winnings of the earth" (Innocence and Evil) foreshadow the tone of Fern Hill.

In After the Funeral, A Winter's Tale, Poems in October, Fern Hill, the last poems written during 1937-38, and Summer’s Day, we meet Thomas's rustic Wales. Fern Hill frequently appears in Thomas's prose reminiscences of childhood in the stories collected in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. "Fern Hill was at least as much a part of his lost Garden of Eden as was Caedmon in Park, indeed almost certainly more." In the late thirties, Thomas extended his art to include other human lives to gain a superseded life in the life of others. Pastoral-like once as an aid to that, leaving Swansea in 1934 he begins to celebrate the lost paradise of his childhood. "It looks as if two requirements which faced Thomas from the late thirties on were the establishment of a context (a poetic 'world') to replace what he once called 'the drawing-room tragedy-comedy of my most uneventful life' and the extension of his art to involve and include human lives outside his own -- to gain,
in George Eliot's phrase, a 'superseded life in the life of others'. Pastoral came to be the common factor in both remedies..." The poetry of the early period of Thomas is full of dreadful horrors of death and sex, and of the poet's struggle for light. The poetry of the middle period is charged with feeling for others. The poems of the later volumes are, for the most part, 'solitary expressions of his faith and love... He does not move from that Inferno to a Paradise, but he has recaptured, in the charming natural world of Wales, something of the lost Eden and something of a foretoken of Heaven. There is undoubtedly a development from doubt and fear to faith and hope, and the moving source is love: he comes to love of God by learning to love man and the world of nature." The tone is one of hope and exaltation. He is actuated by a spirit of love. This love moves him from a state of uncertainty to a state of hopeful repose.

Pass in October (op. 108-0) begins the celebration of childhood which culminates in Pass Hill. In the poem the poet finds the world beautiful and joyous, he escapes from the limits of domestic life into the visionary world of green and golden childhood. In the sophisticated phase of adulthood Thomas seeks to realize the spontaneity and freedom of childhood for a harmonious existence. "The wish to return to childhood is, in most instances, a regressive wish — a desire to abrogate adult responsibility and a return to a state of dependence, but this wish may also have another aspect. To seek after the spontaneity and freedom of the secure child is a different matter..." 

"In early autumn the poet climbs a hill that overlooks the town and the harbour and suddenly comes into October sun. There
he finds

A spring of lakes in a rolling
cloud and the roadside brush brassing with whistling
blackbirds and the sun of October

On the hill's shadown. (CP 102)

But the present scene evokes a past and the poet is momentarily lost
in the imaginative vision of his lost childhood. This is one of the
privileged moments when a man attains a vision that makes everything
full of blessings. The poet gets a vision of the forgotten summer of
childhood at Bensoy and Tom Hill.

... a wonder of summer
with apples
Pears and red currants
and I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
forgotten meanings when he walked with his mother
Through the pastures
Of sun light
And the legends of the green chapels. (CP 103)

In this timeless moment the child and the poet, two times, and two
places, have become one.

That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved
in mine. (CP 103)

The child seems to have held a mystical communion with nature and
participated in the joy of the 'woods the river and sea' and 'the
trees and the stones and the fish in the tide' (CP 104). The vision
of childhood makes him conscious of his age and the passage of time.

It was my thirty

Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon

Though the town below lay veiled with October mood.

John Askeman points out, "The New Testament imagery of 'Even Hill' and 'Even in October' is strikingly different from the Old Testament metaphors of the early poetry. Thomas now speaks of 'the parables of sun light', rather than 'The meat-eating sun'."

Even Hill (CP 12-53) evokes the innocence of childhood in pastoral surroundings. The poet's purpose is to evoke the easy, carefree life of his childhood passed in Ann Jones' farm. The poet was 'easy under the apple boughs' and 'happy as the grass was green' (Stanza One). The poet's joy of childhood is not prompted by any metaphysical thoughts as in the case of Wordsworth. Wordsworth turns to childhood memories to soothe his weary heart. For the loss of animal pleasures of his boyish days Wordsworth has abundant recollection. Thomas celebrates the local landscape and his joy therein rather than a landscape of the soul. He creates a child's world through the eyes of the child. The whole scene is full of visible, actual things. Thomas convinces us of the authenticity and significance of his vision of childhood by giving concrete details of the child's world and the incoherent manner in which the child recounts the glory of a day.
The imagery of the poem are drawn from the farm: the apple boughs, barns, happy yard, chimneys, green grass, the ricks, the stables, the farm 'while/with the dew', and with 'the cock on his shoulder' (CP 150). Thomas makes extensive use of images drawn from natural life, animal and vegetable. The boy is an integral part of the environment. He is 'honoured among foxes and pleasant by the gay 'house' (CP 150).

"When the boy wakes in the morning, the farm appears like the Garden of Eden, a revelation of innocence. It is typical of Thomas that this new awareness is expressed in concrete terms. When dealing with comparable experiences, Wordsworth moves away from the actual towards a mysticism beyond the world of the senses. ... Thomas's sense of wonder comes from participation in life itself, for the glories in what is revealed through the senses, and does not look beyond." Images such as 'the hay/Fields high as the house' evoke a sense of abundance. The holiness of creation and joy is conveyed through the lines

And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy stream. (CP 150)

The farm to which the boy wakes after his night's dream appears to him as Eden appeared to Adam and Eve. The farm has the pristine glory and innocence of the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve moved carelessly.

The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day. (CP 150)

The sky gathers the simple light to spin the sun into a round ball. The miracle of creation is endlessly repeated for which the boy feels a sense of wonder and awe.
The child, in his joyful exhilaration, is oblivious of time and of his mortality. The hints of the change to come in the midst of exuberant joy of the child are given from the beginning of the poem. The process of time will bring about a reversal of fortune.

Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes. (CP 159)

This time-permitted joy will pass away in course of time. The suggestion of night appears in the day-time joy:

The night above the dingle starry. (CP 159)

The metaphor "rivers of light" in the line "Down the rivers of the wind-fall light" suggests an unceasing flow. The suggestion becomes emphatic in later stanzas.

Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means. (CP 159)

The suggestion of mutability comes from "All the sun long it was running" (CP 159), "happy as the heart was long" (CP 159). The line "In the sun born over and over" (CP 159) gives the sense of the process of time. The intimations of mortality are given in the realization that time allows no "few morning songs".

Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace. (CP 160)

The 'lamb white days' (CP 160), a biblical image, are over. "The moon", an image of mutability, "is always rising" (CP 160). The poet realizes, "Time held me green and dying" (CP 161). Time throughout is the chief antagonist.
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.  (CP 161)
The sea sings continually in the chains of sun and moon. So sings the
poet bound in the chains of mortality. He is full of infinite power
like the sea, but at the same time he is bound to a situation by which
he will finally lose his freedom and delight.

Throughout the poem Thomas emphasizes 'green and golden'
which are thematically associated with the natural process of growth.
In stanza one 'grass was green' and the child 'golden'. 'Green' means
young and inexperienced. In stanza two the child is both green and
gold. Ripeness is associated with 'golden' colour. Green and golden
are different stages in the process of maturation.

Time held me green and dying.  (CP 161)
Here 'green' means immature with an overtone of corruption. The poem
moves from green childhood to maturity and finally to death.

In Thomas, as Raymond Stephens observes, "The impulse, for
example, towards regressive stages of non-being in pre-natal existence
or infancy is explored, not indulged in. It is the maturing consci-
ousness of the reflecting poet who recapitulates his life development...

" It is the mature consciousness of Thomas which reviews the
development of life from childhood to maturity and finally to death. The
acceptance of death is an achievement which shows a higher harmony of
maturity in Thomas. The poet endeavours to incorporate the simplicity
to childhood in the experiences of an adult. By compounding mature
consciousness with the innocence of a child the harmoniousness of
being can be attained.

REFERENCES.

2. Dylan Thomas, Quite Early One Morning, London (Dent) 1954, p. 143.
7. Olson, op.cit., p. 20.

Mayhew observes, 'The contrast between the sacramental quality of nature in this October poem and in the earlier October poem \[ Especially when the October wind] is inescapable. Here is the hilltop vision in which both future and past appear as Summer, and a love which makes the present look beyond the "October blood" in the hope of continuing life. At the age of twenty, Thomas's heart was "drained". But at the age of thirty, his heart was apparently full.

O may my heart's truth
Still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning.'


10. "He does so first of all, by the concrete quality of the child's world that he recalls and displays to us. That world, as befits a child's world, is full of actual, visible, tangible objects: apple boughs, house, grass, the dingle, wagons, trees, leaves, daisies, barley, barns, the yard, the farm, the sun, the chives, the foxes, the pebbles, the streams, the hay-fields, chimneys, the
dew, the cock, the sky, the fields, pheasants, clouds, hay, the swallow-thronged loft. This is indeed a rich, full world, crammed with things, and all sharply and colourfully realised. ... The long, flowing rhythms, the piled-up sentences and the frequent use of the word "and", combine to give a suggestion of the breathless incoherence of a child recounting the glory and wonder of a day: "And I climbed the apple-tree, and these were horses, and at night I could hear the owls, and, and, and, and," In both these ways, then — in the presented wealth of concrete objects, and in the suggestion that it is actually a child speaking — the poem induces in us, without our necessarily being aware of the fact as we read, a willingness to believe what the poem is saying.¹ (T. H. Jones, Dylan Thomas, Oliver and Boyd, London 1963, Pp. 70-71.)
