CHAPTER - IV

THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC WORLD -- C.DAY LEWIS'S

THE BURIED DAY

The Post-War Vision

The Buried Day is not just a chronological account of the main events in the author's life, but an attempt to discover his own identity. In doing so, he presents some sort of picture of his true self, out of the various conflicting selves he gradually discovered within himself when he evolved as a poet and a writer. To achieve this, he uses certain themes from his poetry and relates them back to their sources and the people who helped to form it.

The period of twenties and thirties -- the times in which Day-Lewis grew up was a very crucial period as the post-war vision of the Wasteland was shaping up in the minds of the post-war generation and the threat of another war was looming in front of them. So, the poetic generation of this decade was tormented by the unnecessary violence and bloodshed caused by the war. Auden brings out the feelings of the time in a joint editorial of the student magazine "Oxford Outlook" written by him and C. Day-Lewis. He writes:

On the other hand, the chaos of values which is the substance of our environment is not consistent with a standardization of thought, though, on the political-analogy it may have to be superseded by one. All genuine poetry is in a sense the formation of private spheres out of a public chaos: and therefore we would remind those who annually criticise us for lack of homogeneity first, that on the whole, it is environment which conditions
values, not values which form environment; second, that we must hold partly responsible for our mental suave-qui-peut, that acedia and unabashed glorification of the subjective so prominent in the world since the Reformation.  

The preface states clearly the problems of the day and also the set of values inherited by the young generation as symbolized in Eliot's Wasteland. Samuel Hynes says about the preface:

The role that the preface assigns to the artist is a strenuous one, and the terms used are "active and energetic": words like conflict, struggle, effort, and discipline. It is on this point -- the idea that in a time of public chaos art becomes a mode of action -- that the preface most, anticipates the critical debates of the thirties -- and it is no doubt for this reason that it was later referred to as 'the Oxford Poetry Manifesto'. One might say that the thirties really began here.

The post-war times were devoid of values and this probably was the cause of anxiety amongst the writers of the day. Along with this fear was the fear of the economic bankruptcy which the people had just witnessed in the form of the Wall Street Slump of 1929. This resulted in inflation and joblessness -- in short, a chaotic economic situation describing the decade as threadbare thirties. However, at the end of the decade, there was a change in the feelings about the First World War amongst the people. This was probably because it struck the minds of the people that there was the possibility of another War being forced upon them. They stopped thinking of themselves as post-war and began to feel that they were living in the period preceding the next Great War.
The Conflict

It was but natural that the poets or writers of that time were subjugated to a severe trauma in their art -- whether to write art for art's sake and ignore the public events or take part in the hectic activities going around them. Most of them opted for the latter as they realized they could not look at life from a corner. They had to be actively involved in the public events. This created a conflict in the poet's mind. C. Day-Lewis was one of the first poets to realize this conflict. He writes in *A Hope for Poetry*:

So there arises in him (i.e. the modern poet) a conflict; between the old which his heart approves and the new which fructifies his imagination; between the idea of a change of heart that should change society and the idea of a new society making a new man; between individual education and mass economic conditionment.

C. Day-Lewis here speaks not only for his generation but for himself. His own self was always being torn apart by this conflict. This becomes apparent when one just goes through a list of his poems -- "The Misfit," "Marriage of Two," "Double Vision," "The Conflict." Even the phraseology used by Day-Lewis indicates that there is a constant war in his mind -- "the heart divided," "the single mind," "in me two world's at war trample the patient self." The constant oscillation between choices as to which is good and which is bad puts him in a state of eternal conflict -- enriching his vision of life and enhancing his private vision through his public view.
The continuous struggle between the private and the public world is apparent almost throughout the thirties so that it is often impossible to distinguish between the public and the private -- so that it almost adds up "to a single semiotic." Cunningham elaborates on this to say:

People and events, fictions and facts have a way of fitting together; they can be detected responding to each other's pressure, moulding each other, being made together. It's impossible, then, finally to separate what is to be discovered, made out, from what is made up, invented; to distinguish (using the Yeatsian metaphor) the literary and textual dancer from the historical dance. So the dominant images of the 1930's do have a way of turning out to be ultimately one with the events of that time, and vice-versa.

Day-Lewis seems to be saying much the same in his autobiography, when he goes through a magazine, detailing the events of the war:

I went through from beginning to end with an extraordinary feeling of recognition ... It is, perhaps, a dominant trait of such natures as mine that we come to reality -- such reality as we ever do compass -- at one remove, unconsciously holding it off until our conception of it is fully formed within us, or our response is ready; and then a phrase, a scene, an illustrated magazine releases from within us what is not so much an experience as a re-creation (TBD, pp.84-85).

The new generation of poets was affected by the socio-economic conditions prevalent at that time, which further necessitated a radical change in their poetic style. The two great influences of the age were Marx and Freud. They broadened their perspective and helped them understand
the chaos which was present as an aftermath of the War. The other formative influences were Hopkins, Eliot, Yeats and Owen. These poets influenced the younger generation of poets, but, according to their own individual sensibility. Auden's particular consciousness made him more scientific and analytical; Spender was more receptive to the different styles; Day-Lewis was more concerned with the social obligation to the society and loyal to the country, he lived in.

Unlike Spender, Lehmann, Auden, Isherwood and Forster who were always on the move, from one pension to another, trying out different cities, islands and even countries and were symbols of a restless period — C. Day-Lewis was a settled man. He did not visit any country and made his first trip over-seas to attend a rally in Paris in 1938 which was "For Peace and Against the Bombardment of Open Cities." Even here, he stayed close to his friend Rex Warner, who also would not converse in French and stayed away from the travel-enthusiasts. In fact, "Day Lewis's exclusive concern with politics accounted for polemics in his poetry."6

Day-Lewis also pointed out Owen's influence on the poets of his generation. They felt that they could also make poetry out of the violence and horror of the War, as Owen had done. He speaks of Owen's relevance to their age:
Owen commends himself to the post-war poets largely because they feel themselves to be in the same predicament; they feel the same lack of a stable background against which the dance of words may stand out plainly, the same distrust and horror of the unnatural forms into which life for the majority of people is being forced. They knew exactly in their hearts what Owen meant when he said 'the poetry is in the pity'.

It was inevitable in the thirties that a poet had no choice but to be influenced and involved by the past and present historical events around him. Day-Lewis tried to distinguish between his personal and public life, but he realized that they could not be separated as an individual is a single unit. Clifford Dyment also observes that there is a continual changing of position between the two loyalties. If one side is temporarily subordinated, the other springs back to re-adjust itself, so a constant, reshuffling or adjustment carries on -- in a continuous process without coming to any solution. Dyment sums up his observations:

In so far as one of these loyalties is to self and the other to the community, the poet's problem is at once a private and a public one, his questioning of himself seeking a social as well as a personal answer.

The poem that best depicts this state of mind is "Transitional Poem" in which the reader becomes deeply involved with the struggle in the poet's mind:

Now I have come to reason
And cast my schoolboy clout,
Disorder I see is without,
And the mind must sweat a poison,
Keener than Thessaly's brew;
A pus that, discharged not thence,
Gangrenes the vital sense
And makes disorder true.
It is certain we shall attain
No life till we stamp on all
Life the tetragonal
Pure symmetry of brain.⁹

He wishes to attain "pure symmetry" within as well as in "all life." He is not content with things as they are. He sees disorder in the society around him and wishes to restore peace and order. There is discontent brewing within his self also. In fact, the discontent with his self has always been there, right from the days of Oxford, when Rex Warner would quote to him the saying of Lao-Tze, "Of everything that is true, the converse is always true" (TBD, p.166). Sean Day-Lewis goes on to say about his father:

Few people can have been more consistent in their contradictions than Cecil. That is the central axis of this story and explains why his search for himself, the continuing thread of his life and poetry, was so difficult. Cecil's autobiographical views of his young self as he entered and left Oxford thus have to be read, like many of the statements about himself in The Buried Day, as the truth, nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth.¹⁰

The Growth of the Self

The autobiography of Day-Lewis and his poetry, too, becomes a creative act in self-knowledge. We cannot judge what is right or wrong as it is the author's own creation, made out of his own subjective experience. The awareness of the experience and not the actual experience becomes the subject of the narrative. As he once retorted to his father
in an argument, "What use is 'experience of life' if you so hopelessly misinterpret it?"11 This attitude can be seen in the following lines too:

Let logic analyses the hive,
Wisdom's content to have the honey:
So I'll go bite the crust of things and thrive
While hedgerows still are sunny (CP, p.30).

Day-Lewis explained the structure of the poem in a note at the end of the poem. He attributes the single mind as the central theme of this poem. According to him, the poem is divided into four parts, which represent four phases of personal experience in the pursuit of single-mindedness. In his own life too, he continually experienced a rift, unable to decide where his loyalties should be. He elaborates on this shifting of aspects by dividing it into four different sections which he terms as (1) metaphysical, (2) ethical, (3) psychological and (4) an attempt to relate the poetic impulse with the experience as a whole. He clarifies more on their roles, "Formally, the parts fall with fair accuracy into the divisions of a theorem in geometry, i.e. general enunciation, particular enunciation, proof, corollaries" (CP, p.55).

In this, as well as in the parts that he wrote for the Oxford Poetry preface, the problem is the same -- how does one relate the private world of the poet's mind to the public one? This also constitutes one of the prominent
dilemmas of the thirties generation. In *A Hope for Poetry*, he voiced his feelings about the relevance or utility of pure poetry:

> Pure poetry theory seems to me often the subtlest form of escapism, a compulsion exercised on the poet by the blocking of his ambition by neglect, by disillusionment with civilization. ... Apart from its academic tendency to divorce form from matter, I cannot believe that any such theory of poetry, built on a neurosis, is admirable or adequate.\(^\text{12}\)

The social consciousness helped to condition the formulation of the poetic theory of the poets. In "The Transitional Poem" too, he tries to analyse the problem — the scientific ideas, the growth in industry and destruction in the previous war are probably the main causes for the loss in a man's faith. All these feelings are portrayed in the poem and in doing so — he also portrays the oppositions, the turmoils going on in his self. It reminds one of Yeats — the difference being that Yeats was content to live with his antimonies, whereas Day-Lewis is not and is rather unhappy about his state of affairs. The oppositions are prevalent in mind/body, finite/infinite, love/fear, eternity/time and are borrowed from Yeats.

As the poem dealt with the modern problems of the day, it was hailed as a revolutionary poem. This was probably because it dealt with the images of the modern civilization mingled with the poet's personal conflicts. He was torn between his revolutionary ideas and attachment to
his family and way of life. Otherwise it was quite a conventional poem. Samuel Hynes remarks:

Certainly the most striking thing about 'Transitional Poem' is how conventional it is, how well it attaches itself to the English tradition: the verse forms are regular, the allusions are classical, the natural details are Romantic. Romantic too, is the constantly present 'I', the poetic sensibility focussed always upon its own condition.

The following lines from the poem convey this single minded pursuit of the poet:

I sit in wood and stare
Up at untroubled branches
Locked together and staunch as
Though girders of the air:
... But there is naught surprising
Can explode the single mind:-
Let figs from thistles fall
Or stars from their pedestal,
This architecture will stand (CP, pp.9-10).

The classical influences to be seen in the poem are of Donne, Marvell and a trace of Yeats. Conceits like the ones used by Donne can be glimpsed in these lines:

When her eyes delay
On me, so deep are they
Tunnelled by love, although
You poured Atlantic
In this one and Pacific
In the other, I know
They would not overflow (CP, p.27).

The similarity to Yeats cannot be ignored:

I felt, in my scorning
Of common poet's talk
As arrogant as the hawk (CP, p.9).
While going through the similarities, one cannot, however, come to the conclusion that Day-Lewis' poetry is only pastiche and has no value. Clifford Dyment observes that these different influences are successfully assimilated and woven into the texture of the poet's own thought and diction. He praises the poem by saying:

The poem is, indeed, remarkable for its satisfactory quality of wholeness: the variety of the vocabulary employed, the aptness of the many unfamiliar and technical terms utilized, the skill with which abstract principles are turned into concrete immediate situations, the clarity and movement of what could have been a turbid static-water-tank of didacticism — all these different elements are made one by means of deft craftsmanship and an exceptional acuity and comprehensiveness of mind.

The poem also refutes the point of view that a poem should function only at a poetic level and not at an intellectual, conscious level to express an idea. "Transitional Poem," however, shows us that verse in which the intellectual motivation is primary is just as poetic as verse in which it is secondary or non-existent.

Day-Lewis' new book Feathers to Iron was more personal than "Transitional Poem." Even though, it is deeply personal regarding the birth of the poet's child, the social influence on it cannot be ignored. The social element is intertwined and manifests itself in the birth of the child as the birth is seen as a hopeful or fortuitous moment for
the degenerating society to invigorate itself. The following lines mark the interplay between the private and the public:

But born to essential dark,  
To an age that toes the line  
And never o'ersteps the mark  
Take off your coat; grow lean:  
Suffer humiliation:  
Patrol the passes alone,  
And eat your iron ration  
Else, wag as the world wags --  
One more mechanical jane  
Or gentleman in wax.  
Is it here we shall regain  
Championship? Here awakes  
A white hope shall preserve  
From flatterers, pimps and fakes  
Integrity and nerve? (CP, p.83).

The tone of the poem is dominantly pastoral -- the poet has gone back to the countryside and is awaiting the birth of his child. The gestation period and the mother's state are compared to the changing seasons and it ends in the joyous birth of his son.

Though the poem is deeply personal, yet the images used tend to give it a different meaning making it more contemporary, placing it in the thirties era. Michael Roberts wrote of the new book:

Mr Auden's poems ... showed the first marked advance, and now, in 'Feathers to Iron', we have the full solution: these images are used, not for their own sake, not because the poet's theory makes him choose images from contemporary life, but because they are structural: the thought requires precisely that expression.15

The prominent contemporary images used are -- railheads, engines, turbines, frontiers, passes, soldiers, airmen, miners, climbers -- showing how deeply involved he
was with the events taking place around him. In poem XV, he starts with railway symbolism and the frontier he has to cross — but, then changes over to the natural imagery of birds and primroses which is more suitable for the theme of pregnancy and parturition. Day-Lewis, himself, was unaware of any political or social relevance in his work. As he remarks in *A Hope for Poetry*, that the MacSpaunday poets were prone to socialising their works, but in this particular case, the sequence contained "a political significance of which I was quite unconscious while writing it." Michael Roberts, who was the leading anthologist of the group wrote about the poem, using a new fashionable word for it — "propaganda." He said that Day-Lewis had provided "propaganda for a theory of life that may release the poet's energies for the writing of pure poetry as well as provide him with definite standards which will make satire possible again." According to Roberts, the poets had been trying to find a philosophy of life, since the beginning of the century that would make them realize that they were participants in the social order and not rebels, and they had been trying to do this by using the new images and metaphors from the area of applied science. Day-Lewis too aspired to achieve this state, consciously or unconsciously as in this poem. Samuel Hynes elaborates on this point:
Why, then are these images in the poem? Partly because he wanted to be a poet of his generation and that seemed to require contemporary materials. But also partly, I think, because he felt, though not yet very clearly or precisely, that the contemporary world of industry and action, of frontiers and dictators was a hovering threat to his private world, and had to be acknowledged that a poem would not be a version of immediate reality that did not include some such references.  

The Munich Crisis in September 1938 had an impact on the people equivalent to Hitler's rise in 1933 or the Spanish Civil War in 1936. English writing was greatly affected as the threat of another war loomed ahead of them. Day-Lewis brought out a new book of poems, Overtures to Death in October. The poems in this collection also portray the conflict in the poet's mind. Hynes remarks that apart from the Georgian, nature-poet sensibility and the political militancy, there is a third kind of poetry present in this volume which is poetry of passive waiting -- for disaster. The other post-political poems that he wrote were "Bombers," "Newsreel." These poems were different from the earlier political poems like "The Nabara" which was just an account of the battle and not a searching examination of the self debating the right course of action. I quote from one of the poems, "Maple and Sumach" from this volume:

... but no such blaze
Briefly can cheer man's ashen, harsh decline;
His fall is short of pride, he bleeds within
And paler creeps to the dead end of his days
O light's abandon and the fire crest sky
Speak in me now for all who are to die.
Elizabeth Bowen who reviewed the book, at that time says of it:

Art keeps its immutable values, but if we are to draw strength from art (and we do need strength) we must have art that speaks in our own terms, that comprehends our entire experience. Mr. Day-Lewis's poems seem most great now because of their double relevance -- they have a poetic relevance to all time, and are at the same time relevant to our perplexing day.20

Day-Lewis even wrote in his autobiography that no one who did not go through the political experience during the thirties could realize how much hope there was in the air then. Some of them even thought to the extent that they could put the world right under Communism. Apart from the religious tone, Day-Lewis's Communism had an element of romance, according to his son. He says that his father "took a romanticized view of the British worker which could not survive too much contact; and a romanticized view of the enemy, the forces of reaction, as 'a sort of composite caricature' taking in the government, the church, the press, the law and other branches of what is now identified as the Establishment."21

The seventh volume of verse that Day-Lewis published was Noah and the Waters. The main character Noah is also a divided person like the poet:

I was always the man who saw both sides
The cork dancing where wave and backwash meet,
From the inveterate clash of contraries:
A spurious animation.22

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The play was not well received and the unfavourable reviews helped him to come back to personal poetry. Ironically, he was approached, after four days, by Brian Harvey to join the Communist Party. C. Day-Lewis was, as usual, going to take long to make up his mind. But, in the same month, Hitler's forces reoccupied the Rhineland for Germany, thus threatening the rest of the world. The emissaries of the party persuaded Day-Lewis to imitate his Noah. Even then, he was not completely sure of himself. According to his son:

Yet, even as this self signed on the dotted line, his poetic muse was unconsciously beginning to move in precisely the opposite direction, thanks to its newly found recognition that he was not Noah. The honest consistency of his inconsistency, of his continuing dilemma as a divided man, could hardly be more sharply revealed than it was here in the first half of 1936.23

The Role of the Poet

Day-Lewis, through out his life, tried to reduce the differences between the poetic and the political, by trying to find an answer as to what was the role of the poet in the thirties period of crisis. He wrote in "The Poet's Task," an inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford that the poet's mind is both — the archaeologist and the site. He says that the poet "must dig into himself, by a process of intense yet dispassionate meditation, first
to discover the general layout of that experience, then its innermost meaning." He goes on to explain that it is the raw material of experience which undergoes transformation in the memory into groups of images which form the poetic matter.

Elsewhere, too, he elaborates on the interplay and close connection between the revolutionary and the poet. In his essay, "The Poet and Revolution," he wrote in detail about the functions of the revolutionary and the poet's role in the revolution:

If the capitalist system is dead, his poetry will expose the fact; it will have a dead ring; it may be none the worse poetry for that. If there is new life about, you may be sure he will catch it: he has sharp ears. It is for you to prove the new life, for him to record it.

This is the paradox of the revolutionary and the poet. Each destroys, transforms, makes, from the fundamental and integral necessity of his nature; yet the true revolutionary does not function for revolution's sake, nor the true artist, for art's sake... It is as meaningless for a revolutionary to call poetry unimportant in the hour of revolution, as it would be for a poet to call revolution unimportant in the hour of poetry. We have both heard voices, we are both positive.

As is clear from above, Day-Lewis adopted politics as his new faith instead of religion. His next volume, "The Magnetic Mountain" also testifies to this spirit. The work deals with the ills of the present society and finding a new country beyond the railhead, an iron mountain that is sturdy and steadfast as compared to the "feather values of
old life." The poet, however, is not completely joyous about leaving behind the past and comes back to take another nostalgic look at what is left behind. His love for his country and nature's glory is brought out in the following lines:

You that love England, who have an ear for her music
The slow movement of clouds in benediction,
Clear arias of light thrilling over her uplands,
Over the chords of summer sustained peacefully;
Ceaseless the leaves' counterpoint in a west wind lively,
Blossom and river rippling loveliest allegro,
And the storms of wood strings brass at year's finale:
Listen, can you you not hear the entrance of a new theme?
(CP, p.150).

At about the same time Day-Lewis wrote a prose piece, "Letter to a young revolutionary." It was published in Michael Robert's anthology, New Country, in 1933. The letter was addressed to a Jonathan Smith, a twenty-five year old university student thinking of joining the Communist Party. He wrote in the letter that the revolutionary should first "investigate the temper of the people" and "the methods of capitalism" before embarking on anything else. He says that he should promote the will to obey among the people and not bully them into submission.
He wrote in the letter:

Not the obedience of man to his machine, his instrument, but the submission of a man to his natural leader. Create -- recreate, I should say -- that will in yourself and the people, and half your task is done. That is to say, if there is in you and your friends the new life which alone is justified in demanding spiritual submission. Which brings us back to the beginning again. Be still in your own soul, as Lawrence would say: do you feel new life springing there?

Political consciousness was at its height during this time -- from the defeat of the Labour Party in Nov. 1931, to the beginning of Hitler's Chancellorship, in January 1933. Thus, the heightened Auden imagery, as Auden was the undisputed leader who had managed to resolve his poetic and political or rather private and public problems, at least, in his poetry. In "The Magnetic Mountain," Day-Lewis rejects the personal aspects of life in favour of politics and unlike Auden, it becomes more of propaganda poetry. He shuns away sexual advances in favour of a more fulfilling faith which has the promise of a new life:

Not hate or love, but say
Refreshment after rain,
A lucid hour; though this
Need not occur again ...

Hands off! The dykes are down.
This is no time for play.
Hammer is poised and sickle
Sharpened, I cannot stay (CP, p.130).

This faith leads one to start on a journey to the mountain which is a symbol of strength and security -- leaving behind the disorder, chaos and social stagnation. He
attributes these symbols to the mountain in the following lines:

Near that miraculous mountain
Compass and clock must fail,
For space stands on its head there
And time chases its tail.

There's iron for the asking
Will keep all winds at bay,
Girders to take the leader
Strain of a sagging sky

Oh there's a mine of metal,
Enough to make me rich
And build right over chaos
A cantilever bridge (CP, p.109).

The men who undertake the journey are comrades and the names of two are given -- Wystan and Rex. It was due to this that Louis MacNeice coined the phrase, "myths of themselves." He wrote:

The personal element is a bridge between the topical and the heroic; these poets make myths of themselves and of each other (a practice which often leads to absurdity e.g. Day-Lewis's mythopoeic hero worship of Auden in "The Magnetic Mountain"). This personal obsession can be collated with their joint communist outlook via the concept of comradeship. ... Comradeship is the communist substitute for the bourgeois romance; in its extreme form (cp. also fascism and youth-cults in general) it leads to an idealisation of homosexuality.27

Myth-making was the inevitable off-shoot of the Old Boys group of the thirties. So, cliques too, became necessary in the thirties. Grigson, however warned in the last number of New Verse that one should make sure that the clique consists of the best and truest and most lively
writers of the time, otherwise it might puff the wrong people. This also explained the mutually dedicated texts to each other. They admired and promoted each other's works openly. Auden's *Paid on Both Sides* (1930) was dedicated to Cecil Day-Lewis; Rex Warner's *Poems* (1937) to Cecil Day-Lewis. Day-Lewis's "Transitional Poem" (1929) was dedicated to Rex Warner. Poem 34 of "The Magnetic Mountain" (1933) was dedicated to Warner's wife, but the whole poem was for Auden. The translation of Virgil's *Georgics* (1940) by Day-Lewis had some stanzas dedicated to Stephen Spender.

It did not end with the dedicatory pages, for the authors carried on the glimpses of their personal lives into the public world, so much so, that it sometimes became difficult for the reader to decipher the meaning. The coterie was formed because of the similar backgrounds of the authors. They were born and brought up with more or less similar attitudes and assumptions in life. They all formed part of a group which had almost similar family backgrounds and had studied in the same kind of public schools. So, they formed an Old Boys Network which consisted of their friendships and relationships which further found expression in their writings.

Samuel Hynes remarks in this context that, "this dense mingling of public and private, school and war, nature and machinery, which in the poetry of the 'thirties becomes
a familiar landscape. 'Auden Country' makes all seem subject
to one natural law of dissolution."28 In other words, every
poem is to some extent, a reflection of the life it stems
from -- it cannot be disengaged from life, treated in
isolation as a piece of artistic mechanism. F.R. Leavis
comments:

Questions of technique, versification, convention,
relation of diction to the spoken language, and so
on -- cannot be isolated from considerations of
fundamental purpose, essential ethos, and quality
of life. That is, one can hardly say where
technical questions turn into questions that one
wouldn't ordinarily call technical.29

In the thirties, too, the lives of the poets was
reflected in their poetry. Most of the poets, including. C.
Day-Lewis were actively engaged in politics, and this gave
their poetry a social implication which could not be
ignored. In fact, Auden remarked that poets were "reporters"
-- claiming to report the truth directly and objectively.
The social element which was unavoidable always tended to
create a conflict in Day-Lewis's poetry -- the conflict
between individual and mass salvation. The involvement of
the thirties poets with the climate of their times was
inevitable. Day-Lewis quoting Michael Roberts in his
autobiography, says:

We had also, as Michael Roberts claimed, a certain
shared basis of thought -- 'the recognition that
onself is no more important than a flower in a
field', a sense of the impersonality that 'comes
not from extreme deteachment but from solidarity

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Elaborating on the deep rift between the public and the private world in the poetry of their time, Day-Lewis says that the poets of his time did not accept the values of their society and so were like romantic rebels. On the other hand, by imagining a society they could identify with, in their poetry -- they were like the classics. So, there was naturally some ambiguity in their poetry, but one thing was definite -- the sense of commitment towards themselves and the society. Day-Lewis remarks in this context:

This was a period when it seemed possible to hope, to choose, to act, as individuals but for a common end; possible for us, as writers to bridge the old romantic chasm between the artist and the man of action, the poet and the ordinary man. It is not altogether correct, however, to think of us as a lot of starry-eyed suckers joyously leaping down into the political arena. On the contrary, we tended to feel political action, and the writing of verse with a social content, as temporary necessities; and we treated the slogans and rigid ideology of the extreme left with considerable levy or scepticism.

It is the logic of our times,
No subject for immortal verse --
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse
-- the temper of those lines existed years
before 1940, when they were written (TBD, p.218).

Day-Lewis meant the same when he wrote in A Hope for Poetry that pure poetry seemed to him the subtlest form of escapism which blocked the ambition of the poem by
neglect and disillusionment with civilization. Poetry for him, was more of an outlet to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, by making the people aware of the misery and hunger present around them -- pressing them into action. The involvement with the social and political problems came out spontaneously in the poems -- even when he did not want it. This is most obvious in his book From Feathers to Iron where the poems deal with the birth of his first child. While writing the poems, the poet felt that his own excitements and apprehensions linked up quite spontaneously with a larger issue -- which was the birth of a new world. Because of this similarity, he felt, he could use naturally for metaphors or metaphysical conceits the apparatus of the new world. Day-Lewis records these joyous moments in his autobiography:

Certainly, though our new world was proved like the young Wordsworth's, an illusion, the interplay of private and public meaning shed an atmosphere of exhilaration over the contemporary scene, giving familiar objects new value, or at least showing them up with the clarity, the apocalyptic, disturbing, attentive look of things seen in the brooding light before a thunderstorm (TBD, pp.218-19).

These feelings arose naturally in him and did not come as a sudden shock because he and his contemporaries had already been living under the shadow of war -- right from childhood. He took the faith and beliefs of his time for granted -- that there is a loss of values and confusion of
ideas. Also, the developments in science and technology became a necessary part of the lives of the thirties poets and was soon assimilated in their poetry. Elaborating on this point, he says in his book, *A Hope for Poetry*:

> There is a perpetual interplay of private and public meaning: the inner circle of communication—the poet's conversation with his own arbitrarily isolated social group—is perpetually widening into and becoming identified with the outer circles of his own environment—the political situation, the psychological states, the scientific creations of twentieth century man—are again and again used to reflect the inner activities of the poet. Such interchange of personal and (in the widest sense) political imagery, such interaction of personal and political feeling is to be found in poem after poem of the younger writers.30

Here also, he seemed to be referring to his volume *From Feathers to Iron* which compared the birth of his child and the machinery which was used to benefit everyone. This new mechanism could perhaps help this world to a rebirth.

1940 witnessed another volume of poems titled *Poems in Wartime*, that was written more from a sense of duty, rather than an inner need arising out of the poet, to express his feelings in a poem. The poems, "The Stand To" and "Watching Post" represent a mingling of the personal and the public since they show the perspective of war as seen by a member of the Home guard. The body of Home Guards was made up of a group of civilians who worked as soldiers after their working hours. Day-Lewis, himself worked in the Ministry of Information, giving rise to the eternal conflict of the personal and the public in him.
Resolving the Conflict

Day-Lewis tried to solve the problem partially by assigning a different role to each side of his divided nature. He tried to write morally for his political self and "a form of writing somewhat akin to music," and apparently without content, for his lyrical-poetical self.

He discussed the moral role of literature in his essay, "The Revolution in Writing":

That it is poetry, oddly enough which has the best chance of survival -- poetry and the fairy tale, the two simplest forms of literature. Poetry, partly through metaphor but chiefly through rhythm, can penetrate into strata of man's mind that noting else can touch. The fairy tale, the parable will survive, I believe, because it is a unique channel of education.31

Day-Lewis believed that poetry is valuable because it conveyed the inner feelings of the poet and it is valuable too, if written by a reactionary as it gave an insight into the state of mind of a group of people, as in the political thirties. But, even this belief was not totally bereft of some doubt. The conflict is apparent even in his attitude toward politics, which is obvious in his novel Starting Point. The most important character in the book, Anthony Neal is based upon him and his friend, Rex Warner. Like them, Neal too, tries to find the true meaning of life, in the form of some demand that sooner or later life would make upon him. He soon realizes that the social
and economic forces have an importance in the lives of the people which is beyond their control. Seen Day-Lewis remarks:

His greatest error was the initial one of regarding his plans for improvement, his chosen way of life, not simply in the light of their social value, but as an instrument and setting for his own personality. Oh, granted he was quite sincere in his desire to help those people he had known from his birth; but beneath that ideal was the self-seeking motive -- self-seeking was the right word, he had hoped thus to find himself his real purpose ... All he had accomplished was to learn that the individual could not battle alone against economic forces.32

Here, too, as in Day-Lewis's own life, the conflict is present -- between the individual and the masses, which was a dominant feature of the thirties. Another prominent trait of that period was the uneasiness, restlessness and general dissatisfaction the middle-class young men of the thirties went through. As in the case of Day-Lewis himself, he did not come to any solution, during his life-time to these problems. So does Neal, too, leave them unsolved, only wishing for a new world through a mass movement.

Day-Lewis, himself, was aware of the conflict going on in his mind. The poems, "The Conflict" and "In Me Two Worlds" depict the dilemma in the poet's mind. He says:

It is significant, that though they both end with a confident statement of the choice made, they are both poems of the divided mind, while the shrill, schoolboyish derisiveness which served for satire in other political verse of mine demonstrates the unnatural effort I had to make in order to avoid seeing both sides (TBD, p.213).
He tried to come to terms with his divided mind by shifting to a new place and clearing the overgrown hedges and old trees around it. This made him feel as if he were clearing his own life of tangles, excrescences, dead wood, rank growths (TBD, p.225). But before his first year at Brimclose was over, he realized that even this place would not be able to cure him of his divided mind.

For Day-Lewis, the most important element in the current situation was the interplay and consonance between the inner and the outward life (TBD, p.218). Right in the beginning of his autobiography, he tries to analyse the contradictory selves present within him. He feels his memory is selective and cannot recall the past completely in all its truth. He feels, "at the mercy of the insubstantial present, knowing there are so many thousands of days, so many layers of past selves buried within you, yet seldom able to recover one article of the hoard intact!" (TBD, p.24).

Switch love, move house -- you will soon be back where you started.
On the same ground,
With a replica of the old romantic phantom
That will confound
Your need for roots with a craving to be unrooted.33

Just as Yeats admits in the beginning of his autobiography, his inability to remember all the details -- in the same manner Day-Lewis also believes in representing not merely the facts but his search for the truth.
Commenting on the pattern of his autobiography, he says that his book can be called "an essay in reminiscence" as his memory consists of shreds and patches and then the mist rolls back again. Even in his poems, he realizes that, "Certain characteristics keep cropping up -- hero-worship, fear, compassion, the divided mind, a prevailing sense of the transience of things: and how ... there runs through it all, an unbroken thread, the search for personal identity" (TBD, p.24).

Through these clues in his poetry, he wants to start searching for his self and he hopes that they might even lead him to "the buried day." Also the search for his self will help in resolving the conflict. Further on, in his autobiography, which is appropriately titled The Buried Day, he tries to grapple with the meaning of life and says, "so whatever meaning there is in my life, being concentrated in my poetry, should unfold itself if I follow up the clues which the poetry offers: here -- masked, it may be, enigmatic, contradictory or distorted -- are the faces of experience, the many selves that jostle together within the loosely tied bundle that bears my name" (TBD, p.25).

In his father's biography, Sean Day-Lewis writes of his father's continuing search for his self through all the conflicts and contradictions which also led him to contemplate on everything with a sympathetic eye. He says:

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Mostly he meditated on his mirrors, looking into himself and, through himself, to his view of the universe. Sometimes women joined him on his vigil and for a time, as he saw it, they would sit together contemplating their ideal selves: happy beginnings leading to harrowing endings.

It is not of their transience I'm afraid,
But thinking how most human loves protract
Themselves to unreality -- the fact
Drained of its virtue by the image it made.

The feeling to know himself was present in Day-Lewis right from the beginning -- ever since he could remember, it had the compulsive force of waters that have stealthily massed behind a dam and before he realized it, he had thought of writing his autobiography. In his own words, it was, in fact, an explosion and not a decision. One reason for this, can be his wavering and introspective mind, which always led him on to the search of his self. He was helped in finding his lost way, by a friend who gave him a compass and a map of the country he was lost in -- a map of himself (TBD, p.150).

Day-Lewis's stay at Oxford further encouraged him to explore his buried self and experiment with it. He even went to the extent of trying different personalities and discarding them, if he disliked them. But, trying these different personalities, he became sure of one thing, what kind of role he wanted to assume in life. He says in his autobiography:
But my personae were nearly all tested against one measuring stick — the idea of the Poet: I wished to live like a Poet, walk and eat and drink and think like a Poet, above all be recognised as a Poet; an ambition which involved me in Protean changes for there were times when the poet could be himself only by appearing quite other than himself (TBD, pp.156-57).

Day-Lewis also realized during this period in Oxford, the crisis in the form of poverty and misery which people of his country were facing. Despite the turbulent times, the students at Oxford were encouraged to believe in themselves and thus know themselves better. I quote him again, from his autobiography, where he is describing his voyage of self-discovery:

It was ourselves, of course, that we were discovering thus — the range and quality and hidden resources of our minds; and we were fortunate enough to be doing so at a period of history which, though deeply disturbed, did not occlude the future, in a place where self-discovery was still valued as a cardinal aim of education (TBD, p.162).

The voyage of self-discovery, for Day-Lewis, began, right in the beginning as a small child. The question, "Who am I?" always seemed to preoccupy him and later on it turned into "Which of you is you?" (TBD, p.21). Day-Lewis's autobiography and poetry also subscribe to this inquiry and he presents before the reader such facts which might not be true reflections but mere representative truth, as he is constantly re-making himself. He confesses that words were his antennae, his touch stones, his causeway over a quaking

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log of mistrust and he writes or rather re-writes to lead him towards the real self within himself.

The Buried Day, thus, is not just a chronological account of the main events in the author's life, but an attempt to discover his own identity and his true self. To achieve this task of documenting his unique, exceptional self, he uses certain themes from his poetry and relates them back to their sources and the people who helped form them. For him a poem was a visible tract of a poet feeling his way, step by step, into the heart of his own experience and towards the meaning or the poetic truth of that experience. He reviews his youth "with its intolerance and magnanimity, its incredible loyalites and the uncompromising innocence of its demands in an heroic age" in the following lines:

Lost the archaic down wherein we started
The appetite for wholeness; now we prize
Half-loaves, half-truths -- enough for
The half bread
The glean snatched from corruption satisfies
Dead youth, forgive us if all but defeated,
We raise a trophy, where your honour lies
(TBD, p.180).

The true meaning of the passage becomes clear not when we translate it into prose -- but when we translate it into the terms of our own spiritual experience. The reader recognizes the truth of these lines and feels it to be a true response of the writer to the situation -- not scientifically true, nor logically true, but sensuously,
emotionally or spiritually true. These are also the guidelines laid down by Day-Lewis in his book Enjoying Poetry.35

In his autobiography too, Day-Lewis communicates to us an experience which includes a heightened degree of involvement within himself as he painstakingly examines his own thoughts, doubts and quandaries. He establishes an inexhaustible sensibility by making his life and work speak for each other. In other words, C. Day-Lewis lives for the power to shape words that open up new realities in his mind. And since, this power is in himself alone, we can see why he is enthralled by his own experiences and gripped by himself. He tries to discover himself through his memories -- the conscious as well as the buried memories which are thrown up by some violent, emotional shake-up, making them accessible, to solve the riddle of his identity.

Paul Jay quotes Renza on autobiographical writing which collaborates Day-Lewis's version of his divided self. He says, "Autobiographical writing thus entails a split, intentionality: the 'I' becoming a 'he', the writer's awareness of his life becoming private even as he brings it into the public domain or presentifies it through his act of writing."36

And this, in a nutshell sums up what Day-Lewis has been trying to achieve in his poetry and autobiography --
the search for his self in the different states of his awareness and trying to resolve the conflict arising from the differences. In the postscript to his autobiography, he tries to analyse the journey to his inner self, speculating whether his account of that journey has been truthful. He says:

How far this book is truthful as a self-portrait, I cannot judge. What with all these sitters, each claiming to be me, jostling for the throne, and the need for mere decency's sake -- to touch in but lightly certain major features of my life, it is unlikely that the picture will be comprehensive. The figure is a composite one. But the facts are true enough as far as they go: for, although everyone, through the inner monologue that is his reflective commentary on experience, selects and subtly distorts the facts so as to make him more interesting or more tolerable to himself, in doing so he creates a personal mythology which, because it modifies him, does become representative truth (TBD, pp.242-43).

Though, as Day-Lewis admits, his memory is distorted, the present-day observations of the past inaccurate, he still hopes to come to terms with himself, through the words, to form a pattern to re-make himself. Elizabeth Bruss suggests that the autobiographer observes, "by turning his text back upon itself, to examine the vantage point rather than the view."37

This makes the autobiographers like Day-Lewis take a more optimistic view rather than view life at its ebb. And perhaps, this is why, he ends his autobiography on a promising note, waiting patiently for the new world around him and within him to bloom again with poetic significance.

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Quoting George Herbert, he expresses the joy that is bubbling inside him, to rejoice the mature poetic self:

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing .... (TBD, p.244).

This is the only thing that will bring him happiness -- whether the journey is fruitful or not -- it doesn't matter as it provided him with a meaning in his life.

He did not give up easily on anything. Even when he was seriously ill and should have been confined to bed he attended a dinner at the House of Lords for the Byron Society. He read extracts of Byron's maiden speech to the House. Doris Langley Moore wrote to the Daily Telegraph about Day-Lewis's last public appearance, praising his heroic and courageous gesture:

The Poet Laureate, though even then very ill, read the famous oration -- against the imposition of the death penalty on the Nottingham Luddites -- and it was a magnificent performance. His fine and fiery voice will never be forgotten by anyone who was present. I for one had never fully appreciated the courage and just indigation which had inspired a poet of 24 until I heard his words reads by a frail and mortally sick man of 67.38

After nearly three months, on 22nd May, 1972, Cecil Day-Lewis, breathed his last. There were many obituary tributes paid to Day-Lewis, but the epitaph that he had written for himself in 1944, sums up his feelings and
sentiments best. At last, he was at rest in one place, no
longer tormented by any conflict. The epitaph, in the words
of his son, Sean Day-Lewis, seems to be directing the
pilgrim back to the poems where he still breathes.

Shall I be gone long?
For ever and a day.
To whom there belong?
Ask the stone to say,
Ask my song.

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NOTES


5. Ibid., p. 2.


17. Quoted in Samuel Hynes, p.74.
18. Ibid., p.73.
23. Ibid., p.95.
34. Sean Day-Lewis, p.128.
37. Elizabeth Bruss, p.164.