CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

In the end, we come to the conclusion that Yeats, Day-Lewis and Spender -- whether in their autobiography, poetry or prose -- are concerned with one thing -- to depict their self in the making. In depicting their self, they managed to evolve a pattern out of their life while recapitulating their past. In doing so, they tried to achieve a pattern and a structure that was, in each case, his alone. As mentioned earlier, each individual is unique and so the pattern evolved was unique too. While pursuing the pattern they had evolved for themselves, they tried to translate their transitory actual existence into the eternal life of their work of art.

These works represent a continuous effort by Yeats, Day-Lewis and Spender to find a style and structure adequate to a treatment of their own growth and development. This seems to suggest that all the three in their autobiographies as well as poetry generated a self-reflexive, analytical work with a universal appeal.

Memory plays an important part in autobiography. It is not mere recollection, but reveals the process of inner growth in a man:

It seems, as one becomes older
That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence
Or even development: the later a partial fallacy,
Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution, Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of disowning the past.1
Memory helps the autobiographer to write in the present while he knows that the origin of the emotion is off the page and anterior to it. The writing of it changes it; in fact, these autobiographers interpreted their past to a better understanding of their self and not of the events that occurred. Paul Jay sums up the relationship, if there is any between the three. He says:

If there is a relationship between the self, writing and the past, it is a paradoxical one: the past may be a "source," but it is a "used-up" one, a dry well whose meaning is lost in the obscurity of time. A "truthful" rendering of the past -- when the past enters into the work at all -- will be fragmented, repetitious, and full of gaps.

Yeats understands the same use of memory. He wrote to Joseph Hone:

What I do not see but may see or have seen is perceived by another being. In other words is part of the fabric of another being. I remember what he forgets, he remembers what I forget.

This can be identified as the self and the anti-self, man and daimon in Yeats. According to Yeats, the self and anti-self, part and whole, self and others must merge even though diametrically opposed. He begins with his self and ends with a need for others in order to be whole. James Olney remarks in this context:

Yeats obliterates memory -- traces of this world so that he may recall the forms of another world; he forgets what passes in time so that he may remember what does not pass in eternity; and misremembering, with a fine disregard, the names, dates and places of a
merely individual life, he seeks to embody in
the archetypal portraiture and the anecdotal
artistry of the Autobiographies the very
essence of being, purified now of what he in
one place calls the "accident and incoherence"
of existence...Yeats redeems the time by simply
abolishing it in favour of eternity, for, as he
says through one of his shadow men (John
Atherne), "I think that Plato symbolised by the
word 'memory' a relation to the timeless"
(Vision, p. 54) Yeats does the same in the
performance of the Autobiographies.

Memory plays another role -- of being selective in
his writings. It was a double phenomena for him. He had a
very poor memory for certain things, while he remembered
other things very vividly. His description of other people
is far removed from reality. He changes the description of
others utterly to depict an ideal type and not the
individual character. This holds true for Spender and Day-
Lewis too.

One reason for this may be that they forgot facts
easily, but possessed a creative memory and always recalled
the ideas lying behind the names and faces. Hence Yeats, in
his Autobiographies, replaces John Synge, the living and the
dead with an ideal artist; Lady Gregory, the woman with the
ideal aristocrat; Maud Gonne with the ideal beauty. Day-
Lewis does the same when he portrays his friends Charles
Fenby and Rex Warner. He attributes qualities far greater
than what they possessed. Even his portrayal of Margaret is
highly praiseworthy and ideal. He gives her all the due for
extricating him out of the labyrinth into which he had
strayed (TBD, p.149).
Both Spender and Day-Lewis make a caricature of their fathers, disliking their habits and way of life immensely. One reason for this may be that they forgot facts easily, but had a creative memory and always recalled the ideas lying behind the names and faces. Hence, this particular trait exists in each of the autobiographers studied here, to idealize, and in other cases, caricature the portraits of the people they came into contact with, in their life-time. So, we can safely conclude that the "autobiographical truth is concerned with both fact and the meaning the autobiographer attaches to the facts."

What holds true for the autobiographer, does not necessarily mean that it is true for the reader or even for another autobiographer. Also, the truth of one age is totally different from the notions of truth held in another. In St. Augustine's time, a truthful account of the self meant a religious account. Rousseau saw truth as something totally different from that pertaining to religion or soul, but conceived of truth as being faithful to the self. Then came the Victorians who did not agree with Rousseau's concept of individuality and preferred a historical account. The twentieth century autobiographers, however, changed that and today, autobiography means something totally different than a simple historical or religious account, as can be seen in the three poetic autobiographies. These autobiographies do
not follow a simple chronological account, but achieve a timeless quality by tracing the development of the self. They also realize that it is not possible to tell the complete truthful record of oneself. It is beyond the capability of man, as a human being is forever becoming. Also, a truthful account is beyond the limitations of an autobiographer, as he does not possess complete power over his unconscious self. Freud and Jung revealed the working of the unconscious and how it may repress some of the unwanted elements in a person's life. In fact, Yeats, Day-Lewis and Spender constantly warn the reader not to expect the whole truth and give half-veiled clues that they are distorting truth or idealizing themselves to a certain extent. J.N. Morris says of this characteristic in the autobiographer that his "manner has to do not only with how he tells truth; it is itself the truth."6

The interpretation of reality conforms to the social reality outside. The reality of the thirties made it impossible for Day-Lewis and Spender to ignore it. They were compelled to do something for the society they lived in, and one finds a prominent political streak running throughout their works. To a certain extent, they were always involved with the events outside. Yeats, on the other hand, lived in solitude. It is true, he was an Irish nationalist, but his nationalism is marked by what he called "the Anglo-Irish
Even his beliefs about poetic and dramatic art, natural and supernatural worlds could be shared by only a few people.

In the thirties, Yeats excluded Owen from the Oxford Book, and this revealed his judgement of the Socialist poets. He justified his views by stating that "passive suffering is not a theme for poetry." By "passive," he meant, shaping the mind from without, as in a "primary temperament." This was opposite to the shaping of experience by mind, as in an "antithetical" temperament. He does not speak of Spender, and Day-Lewis in the same vein. He was attracted towards them and said he had read their work "with some excitement." These poets were sensitive to the suffering of the masses, yet they retained their individuality and self-hood. Auden remarks in this context:

Looking back, it seems to me that the interest in Marx taken by myself and my friends... was more psychological than political: we were interested in Freud, as a technique of unmasking middle class ideologies not with the intention of repudiating our class, but with the hope of becoming better bourgeois.

This makes it clear that they were more spiritual and psychological than social and political, in retrospect. Ultimately, for them too the self was of more importance than anything else. He says in his autobiography that his life:
was one of complete submission to experience, which I approached with no preconceived theoretic attitudes... I had no confidence in myself as a dominating intellectual force, but a secret and profound belief in myself as someone acted upon by experiences and capable of revealing the truth of my feelings about them. I combined immense faith in myself with immense doubt. In what I created I could be what I was (WWW, p. 61).

These doubts and hesitations form an integral part of him and Day-Lewis. They were always doubtful about their involvement in politics, as they were poets, first and foremost. However, they do manage to acquire a certain experience through this confusion and extricate themselves from this mire. This experience also helped to provide them with a clearer outlook of their own being and to a better understanding of themselves. C.Day-Lewis means the same thing when he stresses on the writer's need to be sensitive if he wants to be successful in his work. If he is insensitive, "he ceases to be vulnerable, he is finished, a dead end, a mind immobilised within its own defences, like a body with its pores all blocked" (TBD, p. 81).

It is essential for an autobiographer to be aware of the reality outside and then interpret it, later on, according to his understanding. Nevertheless, one thing is sure, that all the autobiographies deal with one problem -- how to use one medium -- language -- to represent another medium -- being. William Spengemann defines the term
autobiography as follows, "Without a self, one cannot write about it, but whatever one writes will be about the self it constructs. Autobiography thus becomes synonymous with symbolic action in any form, and the word ceases to designate a particular kind of writing." So, an autobiographer tries to tell the truth, or rather, the spiritual truth while trying to maintain certain aesthetic criteria of structure and form. This makes every autobiography different as well as unique from the other. The three autobiographies studied here, also transgress the usual norms of the genre, as every successful autobiography, according to Todorov, creates a new genre in itself:

The major work creates, in a sense, a new genre and at the same time transgresses the previously valid rules of the genre (with which it is most closely associated) ... One might say that every great book establishes the ... reality of two norms: that of the genre it transgresses, which dominated the preceding literature, and that of the genre it creates.

The autobiographer strives, in each case, to depict in his writings, the experience of being human in which the opposites, partials and contradictions in daily life are all reconciled or resolved in the very act of self-realization. He endeavours to find his image in the self. The subjective or poetic autobiographer is dedicated, in his poetry, to a metaphoric recreation and celebration of the realities of the human condition both individual as well as universal. Through these metaphors, he gives us a clue to his search
for the self. This struggle in finding the self does not prove to be easy and is difficult to comprehend fully. But, it is partially solved and made easy for the responsive reader. It is solved in the sense that the questions of philosophy or poetry are validated in experience in the inner world of thought and emotions. If one thinks he has reached an understanding of the self, then it is so, even if it is a subjective and interim solution. As Yeats wrote in "A Prayer for My Daughter":

all hatred driven hence  
The soul recovers radical innocence  
And learns at last that it is  
Self-appeasing, self affrighting,  
And that its own sweet will is  
Heaven's will (SP, pp. 102-03).

So, the solution lies in every individual to seek within himself as Yeats, Day-Lewis and Spender sought for themselves and found spiritual truth, corresponding to their selves in that situation. They make it easy through their writings for the reader of their autobiography to solve and resolve the matter in his own life and thought. Any responsive reader can make this discovery for himself as the writer places no limitations and conditions on who can play the game. The role of the reader is full of potential and by becoming a finder he can achieve a position that is the intellectual and aesthetic equivalent of the autobiographer himself, and thus turn his life into a pattern, impervious
to time and transcending the barriers of personal identity of the writer.

That is precisely why Yeats, Spender and Day-Lewis are still breathtakingly alive for us even today, when we read their poetry and other written works. They seem to have eternalized moments of experience in beautiful and concrete images depicting through their changing style, the ever becoming self. Their history, in the words of T.S. Eliot, becomes the history of our time and this is enough to ensure immortality for them.

Their history is the history of our time because every human being, irrespective of time and place endeavours in whatever field he might be engaged in -- especially in the fields of poetry and autobiography -- to know the experience of living and being human. The autobiographers, studied above, achieve this, by creating metaphors. In the words of James Olney, they create metaphors in their poetry and autobiography which recreate in the reader's experience -- the realized self.

The creation of metaphors -- involving their transposition into a self-reflexive literary text involves a kind of struggle. This struggle becomes a productive, creative nexus in the texts. Yeats, for example, is generated in a confrontation between the writer and his ideas of mythology, nationalism, occultism and personality
and it is out of this confrontation that his self emerges. He tried, during his lifetime, to hammer his thoughts into unity and by doing so, find some sort of pattern in life. His main aim was to achieve Unity of Being. Though he failed in this impossible task of achieving unity for himself and for Ireland," his effort to unify life and art into an immense achieved form -- a complex, organic interconnected whole which, real microcosm, could contain in image all the universe -- comes breathtakingly close to success." \(^{14}\)

Spender and Day-Lewis also tried to resolve the conflict between their public and private selves. This, turned further on, into an encounter between life and art, personal and impersonal, internal and external perspectives. Out of this conflict, emerged their true self. Spender confirms in his own unique and individual self in his autobiography, when he says, "it lay in a strong grasp of my uniqueness in time and space, in my simplicity. I was aware that I was different from everyone else in the same sense in which everyone is different from everyone else" (WWW, p.41).

Day-Lewis also believed in a pattern followed by the self -- even though that pattern is not the same after each shake-up. He further states that he finally understood the paradox that the poet comprehends the reality and portrays it through his own understanding of the medium and reality (TBD, p.243).
This process of knowing oneself does not end — it is continuous and does not finish with the book. Because man is forever becoming. He does not stop developing or changing after a certain stage. This being is not of a temporary nature, but timeless belonging to the other realm of now and forever. The poetic autobiographer strives to find it -- in the creative and recreative experiencing of his poetic autobiography.

This makes it necessary to rely more on capturing the truth of experience, with its uncertainties and aspirations without giving much importance to the historical facts and chronology. This makes the autobiographical form move away from "the certainty of knowledge into the 'mystery of being'."\(^\text{15}\)

Thus, these autobiographers pass into eternity because of their attempts to know the self. It can be rightly concluded of them:

Only the process of becoming is essential; if the book reveals that process, it endures, like a poem, forever.\(^\text{16}\)

Their autobiographies and poems, revealing their image of the self thus become everlasting and provide us with momentary illusions of order which give us courage to live.
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