CHAPTER V

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SELF: METAPHYSICAL IDEAS
AND IMAGERY IN DAE LEWIS'S POETRY
In "Notes To Transitional Poem", Day Lewis says that the theme of the Transitional Poem is the "single mind" and that the four parts in the poem represent four phases of personal experience in the pursuit of single-mindedness. According to him, transitions are intended from one part to another implying spiritual progress. "As far as any definitions can be attached to these aspects", says Day Lewis, "they may be termed (1) metaphysical, (2) ethical, (3) psychological while (4) is an attempt to relate the poetic impulse with experience as a whole". The parts of the poem, he further explains, "fall with fair accuracy into the divisions of a theorem in geometry, i.e., general enunciation, particular enunciation, proof corollaries". The explanation given by Day Lewis regarding the theme and the division of the parts in Transitional Poem indicates that the metaphysical element in his poems is not accidental but intended. In a letter to Reymond Tschumi in 1949, Day Lewis says that his method in the first three volumes of poems was "to move round an experience in a sequence of poems, approaching it thus at a number of different angles and trying to discover, from the facts it offered, what truth lay beneath". If one sets for oneself the task of getting
as close to the original as possible, "of sounding
the depths of life, of feeling the pulse of its spirit
by a sort of intellectual asculation", one can be called
a true empiricist. Viewed that way, Day Lewis is an
empiricist and, as such, his poetry is both meta-
physical and philosophical.

Day Lewis seems to be in agreement with
Socrates on the point GNOTH SEAUTON 'know thyself'.
There cannot be, he seems to feel, any real philosophy
until the mind turns round and examines itself. Like
Bacon, he thinks that "a man is what he knoweth".  
Like Spinoza, he believes that "the endeavour to
understand is the first and only basis of virtue" and
that "the greatest good is the knowledge of the Union
which the mind has with the whole of nature". Knowledge
to Day Lewis, as it was to Spinoza, seems to be both
power and virtue.

The approach to knowledge through experience
in Day Lewis is based on 'doubt'. He does not seem to
accept any philosophy without an examination; like
Voltaire he seems to think that the learning of the
learned should not be his credulity. He evinces a keen
passion for the knowledge based upon his experience. As Voltaire said 'Let us trust to ourselves, see all with our eyes', Lewis also examines everything with his own eyes trusting to his own experience. He considers experience as a text to which reflection and knowledge are commentary and substance. Schopenhaur has said that one can receive philosophic ideas only from the authors, where by 'authors' he means 'creative writers'. Day Lewis seems to be one such author.

To doubt everything and not to accept any truth without the test of experience seem to be the two ideals in the poetry of Day Lewis. The image of the Sphinx in Day Lewis represents doubt and, wherever the image is found, it is employed to represent the same idea. In Transitional Poem Day Lewis says:

The aimlessness of buttercup and beetle
So pestered me, I would have cried surrender
To the fossil certitudes of Tom, Dick and Harry
Had I known how or believed such a surrender
Could fashion aught but a dead Sphinx from the live Sphinx.
The Sphinx in Day Lewis seems to be the symbol for the question mania which is inherent in him. To Schopenhauer, the image of Oedipus confronting the Sphinx symbolized the unafraid investigator. Theodor Reik thinks that the image of the Sphinx symbolized "the question mania";¹¹ both the senses are conveyed by the image of the Sphinx in Day Lewis.

The doubt in Day Lewis is the outcome of the conflicts and contradictions found in life. The study of philosophy itself is a source of conflict in Day Lewis because the argument of each philosopher seemed to be 'irrefutable' until he read the opposing viewpoint. The doctrine of opposites and the unity behind contradictions have also influenced Day Lewis through Rex Warner. Day Lewis says that he was confused by Rex Warner's quoting the statement of Lao-Tze, "Of everything that is true, the converse is also true".¹² The philosophers contradicting one another with their seemingly irrefutable logic made Day Lewis's mind, as he says in his autobiography, "a battle field with antinomies locked in rigid, unyielding struggle all the time".¹³ Every condition of thought or things - every idea and every situation in the world - leads to its opposite and then unites with
it to form a higher or a more complex whole. The man suffering from the contradictions in a passive state, unable to resolve the factious, is described by Day Lewis in the *Transitional Poem*:

> Behold man's droll appearance
> Faith wriggling upon his hooks,
> Chin-deep in Eternal Flux
> Angling for reassurance.14

He believes, as the note appended to the line 'and the mind must sweat a poison' from *Transitional Poem* indicates, that "a method must be thought out of healing and understanding and purifying" the mind at the beginning. The first thing Lewis seems to desire for in his early poems is to accept one complete philosophical outlook. He does not like reconciliation or compromise; he does not wish to put two philosophers side by side and accept the middle position. He does not want 'the golden mean' of Aristotle.15 The arrangement of character into triads, where the first and last qualities are the extremes and where the middle quality is a virtue, is not to the taste of Day Lewis. He says that he has no wish to "trade upon neutrality".16 He affirms that
The time has gone when we
Could sprawl at ease between
Light and darkness, and deduce
Omnipotence from our Mean. 17

On the other hand, he says that 'we must seize one horn
or the other of the anti-thesis'. 18 The same attitude
is continuously maintained: "I must have life unconditional
or none", 19 he says. He conceives of himself as one
in whom two massive powers are at war and whom "neutrality
cannot cheer". 20

The conflict, if expressed in philosophical
terms, can be called a conflict between materialism and
idealism or, between phenomenalism and nominalism. The
philosophy that refuses to accept the reality of the
mind and considers mind as matter, on the one hand, and,
on the other the philosophy that negatives the possibility
of matter and argues that the world exists only in the
mind and that the body is only idea, clash in him and
make his heart a battle field for the "antinomies". Day
Lewis finds a way out of this conflict by accepting
Spinoza's interactionism. The concept of Spinoza that
mind and matter are not two entities and two processes
but one entity and one process seen inwardly as mind and thought and outwardly as matter and motion appears dominant in the poetry of Day Lewis. By accepting the viewpoint that "the decision of the mind and the desire and determination of the body...are one and the samething", Day Lewis could feel happy because such a metaphysical attitude is in harmony with his social thought also. Spinoza says that "nothing can happen to the body which is not perceived by the mind". According to this concept, any idea of transforming the world must first be strongly felt by the mind, if one wants to put that idea into practice. Since mind is the source of order, all transitions that are felt necessary must first be accepted by the mind as such. Therefore, the desire to change the world is the first requisite for a social reformer.

Agreement with Spinoza inevitably leads Day Lewis to give importance to "desire". Desire, being an instinct, pleasure and pain are its satisfaction or hindrance. Consequently, one does not desire things because they give one pleasure, but they give pleasure, because one desires them. The desire to understand being the first and only basis of virtue, Day Lewis
desires to study his passions, which are inadequate ideas. Further, pleasure and pain in Spinoza are not states but transitions; they are transitions from either ignorance to knowledge or vice-versa.23

The themes of desire and transition thus appear consistently in the poems of Day Lewis. He feels that "Desire is a witch/And runs against the clock".24 "Desire needs no other proof than its own fire". But desire, however, can be directed to a purpose; the mind can influence the body because a change in the attitude of the mind causes a corresponding change in the body. Therefore, Day Lewis says:

O man,
Feed Cronos with a stone.
He's easily decoyed
Who perched on any throne,
Happily gnaws the void.25

'Cronos', Lewis tells us in his "Notes to Transitional Poem", is employed as a symbol for desire.56 Desire can be controlled and it can be directed towards a purpose in fixing a way of life. Through controlling and directing desires Lewis aims at effecting transitions
in himself by "casting" away the "schoolboy clout". 27

Behind all the physical change there is something constant. The selves in man undergo changes through transitions; there are many selves in man but there is a constant link behind all these selves which is the constant and underlying principle. Day Lewis finds the transitions both within and without. What seems a flux in reality is only appearance; constancy is the only reality. The earth does not lose its pride when the 'green flags' of summer are taken; she has no mind, to force

The seasons from their course
And no remorse for a front line
forsaken. 28

The 'athletic field' wrestles a fall with rain and sleet.
What seems to be temporary death of the vegetation in winter, is only the beginning of resurrection. The only reality is the phoenix. Birth and death are also transitions in the process of eternity. The crocus, the daffodils, the rose, and the almond tree tell us that there is life to come and go; they "call resurrection from the ground and bid the year be bold". 29 The mother need not feel sorry for the beauty she lost due to
pregnancy and parturition as "the child shall recreate mother". Falling leaf falls only to renew "acquaintance with old contours", a world in outline. Radiance arises from ashes, says Day Lewis and "willow herb grows on abandoned slag-heaps"; "dawn buds scarlet in a bed of darkness".

It is due to this idea of transition that Day Lewis considers himself 'a moving house' and 'St. Anthony's shirt'. Nothing in nature ever dies; the past self comes alive at one remove through imagination. The old selves are travellers going forth and returning. He says in the poem, "The Lighted House", to his past self:

You were also the dead-beat traveller out of the storm
Returned to yourself by almost obliterated tracks,
Peeling off fear after fear,
revealing love's true form.

He calls his young-self a skin that he has long since cast, and 'a ghost' he now carries. He often wonders:
What links the real to the wraith?
My self repudiates myself of yesterday;
But the words it lived in and cast like a shell keep faith
With that dead self always.  

He questions himself:

What unseen clue
Threading my pearl-sliding hours, what symmetry
My deaths and metaphors pursue?

He calls himself a phoenix which 'ends in fire as it began'. He says that at every stage he needs 'a death, a new self' to reveal him. He feels sorry that he has to die 'so many deaths'.

The idea of transition is fully and clearly discussed in a passage in An Italian Visit in the form of a conversation between Tom, Dick, and Harry:

Harry: Can the human animal ever return, though to its old form?
Tom: The form may remain; but the animal being a mere sequence of current sequence could not recognise it.

Dick: You are wrong. The HUMAN animal carries his form.

Harry: Like a shell?

Tom: Like a prison — where but for me you'd be starving in solitary confinement.

Dick: Neither a shell nor a prison. Say rather an X, a potential within him that cell by cell has to incarnate, until it sloughs him off one day and emerges more or less perfect. 38

The idea that the human animal has to 'incarnate cell by cell' in the process of transitions towards perfection appears again and again in the poems of Day Lewis. In the poem "Ideal Home", he tells himself that "the old romantic phantom" in him confounds his need for roots with a craving to be unrooted. 39 In "Saint Anthony's Shirt" Lewis calls himself "a moving house" and questions:

This moving house of mine — how could I care
If wasting and renewing cell by cell
It's the ninth house I now have
tenanted?...
This acting, speaking, lusting,
suffering I
Must be a function of this house,
or else
Its master principle. Is I a sole
Tenant created, recreated by
What he inhabits, or a force which
tells
The incoherent fabric is its whole... 

After a series of questions and comments, Lewis comes
to the conclusion that "the I, though multiple, is still
unique". Behind all the temporal modes is the essence;
the reality; he makes it his aim to find and understand
that reality. To understand the form of things, to seek
the unity in diversity, and to catch a moment from the
flux of time seem to be the ideals that Day Lewis wanted
to achieve for sometime. The single mind which Lewis
wanted to attain might be the ataraxia of Lucretius; it
might be the comprehension of forms in Bacon; it
might be an attempt at forming adequate ideas in Plato;
or it might be the grasping of the substance in Spinoza
by viewing things sub specie aeternitatis or things
in their eternal order.
In the face of a complex world where all things change every minute, there seems to be no better wisdom than in ataraxia, to look on all things with a mind at peace. There are some passages in Transitional poem which are closely linked with Spinozism. Day Lewis approaches matter from an intellectual point of view when he says:

It is certain we shall attain
No life till we stamp on all
Life the tetragonal
Pure symmetry of brain.46

To the lines is appended a note from Spinoza's 'Letters':

I would warn you that I do not attribute to nature either beauty or deformity, order or confusion. Only in relation to our imagination can things be called beautiful or ugly, well-ordered or confused.47

Good and bad in Spinoza are relative to human, and often, to individual tastes and ends, and as such they have no validity. To think of something as ridiculous or absurd or evil only indicates the partial knowledge of
the thinker of the eternal order of things. The same thing can be good, bad, and indifferent to different people at the same time. "For example", says Spinoza, "music is good to the melancholy, bad to mourners, and indifferent to the dead." And again the same thing can be good, bad and indifferent to the same man according to his mood. Therefore, man should be able to view things in their eternal order and relationships. Day Lewis expresses this idea of Spinoza in the following lines:

For individual truth must lie
Within diversity;
Under the skin all creatures are
one race,
Proved integers but by their face.
So he, who learns to comprehend
The form of things, will find
They in his eye that purest star
have sown
And changed his mind to singular
stone. 49

Towards the end of *Transitional Poem* Day Lewis suggests his feeling of contentment:
Then trod the air, content
With contemplation till
The truth of the valley and hill
Should be self evident. 50

In a note to the lines cited above, Day Lewis quotes Spinoza where the word perception is defined as "that wherein a thing is perceived in its essence". The source of all perception being mind, Day Lewis seems to feel that contentment is not possible unless the mind is controlled. The mind, therefore, in Day Lewis, is always presented in terms of images which suggest control. The mind is 'the tug' which controls the 'barges' of sense; 51 The world is the 'symmetry' and 'architecture' of the mind. The mind is the string that controls the "kite", which suggests man's perceptive ability.

Look where the cloud squadrons are
Stampeded by the wind,
A boy's kite sits as calm as Minos
If the string be sound. 52

The mind 'keeps the cable tense'; it is 'the eye' that marks the flaws.

The concept of the mind as the source of order and control and the idea that there is an eternal order
of things behind the temporal modes influences Day Lewis's thought about time and eternity, life and death and the finite and the infinite. 'Eternity', in Day Lewis, does not possess the meaning of duration as it is generally supposed to suggest; on the other hand it is 'instant realised'.53 The idea of time as a temporal mode and eternity as the essence appears continuously in the poems of Day Lewis. He challenges Methuselah and Abraham and tells them that he can live a more real and meaningful life than theirs if he is given 'an instant realised'. He says:

In that one moment of evening
When roses are most red
I can fold back the firmament
I can put time to bed.54

It is not duration, but the 'brief act of beauty' and the shortest moment of realised life that give the experience of eternity'. While talking of flowers, Lewis says:

For they, whose virtue lies
In a brief act of beauty, summarize
Earth's annual passion and leave
the naked earth
Still dearer by their death than
by their birth.55
'Love is proved in its creation; not eternity', says Lewis, where Lewis seems to be using the word eternity in the sense of duration. The Magnetic Mountain is beyond time and space; it is the mountain where 'time chases its tail'. While writing of his childhood, Lewis describes one of his dreams, where he saw

Eternity stretched like a howl of pain;
He was tiny and terrible, a new pin
On a glacier floor.

Time is compared by Day Lewis to ice under which the traveller (man) numbly sleeps. There will be, however, occasions when the traveller shakes the ice off and escapes time's net. The crocus and the daffodil take their time to come out of earth; the proud flower burns away its prime. Eternity, Day Lewis feels, 'lies in the seed'. The image of the seed, pregnant with creativity and potentiality, though seemingly lifeless, suggests the paradox of eternity—life and death chasing each other endlessly.

Time, in its divided phases of past, present and future, is another theme of interest in Day Lewis. For
him the past is 'cast iron'; something moulded and fixed and unalterable; the future is 'plastic', something that could be influenced, but the pity of it is that the next moment in life always eludes the grasp. To overreach time, to subdue and liberate time from the timeless is immortality and eternity. In "New Years' Eve" Lewis says that we are caught,

all of us, in time's net,
Walled up in time; yet still we seek a secret
Spring, a weak mesh, where we may Break out and be immortal.

Just as Day Lewis wanted to escape the 'walled garden' during the thirties, he now wants to escape "time's net" and time's "wall" to attain eternity. By associating time with the image of net, Day Lewis has implied that man is a helpless fish caught in the net of time. The idea of man's helplessness against time gains a greater dimension when expressed through the image of 'time's net'. Man is bound by the curse of living in the future, which is 'living in his own death'. Living in the present, man always looks forward eagerly into the future projecting his dreams into the blue. To realise the present is very difficult; man, like a child,
... picking flowers near home from flower to Flower enticed, will find Himself the next moment lost in another country.

Our fears make 'a myth of the future' as our love does of the past, says Day Lewis. The ability to comprehend and control the present, to live life to the fullest extent are difficult to achieve. Experience is not continuous since memory consists of a minute here and a moment there. There are few mornings in man's life that really shine. That is why Day Lewis often wonders at the present:

Oh fleeting, magical presence! Oh time drops caught in a few Workaday filaments!

To master the 'now' is one of the ambitions of Day Lewis. Therefore, he praises the man who can control the present:

But he who can look with the naked eye of the Now— He is the true seer, able, To witness the rare in the common, and read the common Theme for all time appointed To link our variations....
Probably the concept of 'now' in Day Lewis is based on the concept of time as expressed by Plato in Timaeus. Plato thinks that the "past and future are created species of time which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence. We say was, is, will be but the truth is that is alone can be properly applied". Viewed that way, man comes into contact with only one instant—the now—"just as the bicycle wheel is in contact with only one point of the road". If this concept of time is grasped, as Lawrence Durell tells us, "we can just as easily situate death in the present as in the future". Lewis seems to be thinking of time in such terms as Durell explained when he says that man lives in his death while living in the future,

Bound by the curse of man —
To live in the future, which is
to live surely
In his own death—we endure the embrace of the present
But yearn for a being beyond us.

The same idea is expressed when he says "all flesh lives with its death". The only sane approach, then, is to seek the 'always' in the 'now'. Day Lewis says that he has sought in a melting "Now", "the formula of
Always. "Always", again Day Lewis thinks, "is the word the sirens sang on the bone island" indicating that it is difficult to master it. He feels that he can catch the 'Always', behind the 'now' if he can catch one vanishing moment.

Could we compel
One grain of one vanishing moment
to deliver
Its golden ghost, loss would be
 gain
And love step naked from illusion's shell.

But Lewis feels that "Time vanishes like a mirage of water". It is difficult to compel the vanishing moment, but there can be times when the flux is stopped and the flash taken. The escape from time into the timeless is possible only in moments of absorption and psychic awareness, in a state such as the one that Lewis describes:

Here and now was flawless, the past
could not encroach,
on its charmed circle to menace or to
 taunt her.

The 'charmed circle' might be, an indirect reference to
the shield of Perseus. If we take it thus, it implies that man can reach the state of 'timelessness' through the absorbed perception, which, according to Lewis is the first step in image-making. Even if it is not the association, the 'charmed circle' might refer to the magician's art of summoning everything in nature to his presence. That is to say, in a moment of absorption, the mind can create order out of chaos. This is an instance where the idea gains a greater dimension when expressed through imagery. At such unique moments, Lewis says that he "found Terra Firma" "testing the shifty face of Now". Such moments are, however, rare; and Day Lewis exhibits his love for the vanishing moment in a large number of his poems. He feels that man alone is unfortunate in losing time through his love for the past and the fear of the future. Youth and age, another recurring theme in Day Lewis, sheds light on the inability of man in grasping the unique minute.

In the poem "O Dreams, O Destinations", Day Lewis writes of four stages in life, namely infancy, childhood, 'youthtime', and 'being older'. Infancy, as described by him is a state where the baby enjoys 'the repetitive rhythm'. For infants 'time is a humming shell'.
They are oblivious to the 'turmoil of the earth' and 'what hungers for the corn'. They live as if in a dream. Children, on the other hand, are more active than the infants in that they want to do instead of undergoing things. They impatiently await the next movement of the day. 'Their fingers itch to tear' the morning mist and see what lies ahead. They are full of anticipation; they are not content with the here and the now; they want to pry into the future. In childhood can be found man's inherent defect for the first time—he begins, as early as a child, to live in the future. Such eagerness for the future, Day Lewis feels, 'was the fatal move' and 'the ruination of innocence'.

Reaching towards the far thing we
begin it;
Looking beyond, or backward, more
and more
We grow unfaithful to the unique
minute
Till from neglect, its features
stale and blur.
Fish, bird or beast was never thus
unfaithful —
Man only casts the images of his joys
Beyond his senses' reach ....

The main reason for the unhappiness in human life lies
in man's inability to grasp 'the unique minute'. The young man, being over ambitious, is not satisfied with the commonplace; he wants a revelation behind everything. He expects a burning bush everywhere; he forgets his limitations. Desire "breeds fierce abstractions on the mind", 72 "his expectations jump beyond" what is real. 73

The old, on the other hand, are satisfied with a limited objective. They realise that most of the ambitions of the young are dreamy and unreal. 74 They accept and prize the 'half-loaves' and the 'half-truths'. Unfortunately they lack something which is a very vital passion. They live in the past; their real passionate selves no longer exist. The ambition and the eager anticipation fade away; as Day Lewis describes, for the old,

Lost the archaic dawn wherein we started,  
The appetite for wholeness: now we prize  
Half-loaves, half-truths—enough  
for the half-hearted,  
The gleam snatched from corruption satisfies. 75

Having lost the romance of anticipation they begin accept
reality as it is. When passion disappears from life, the desire 'to escape time, always to start anew' also disappears.

Old age is the opposite of youth. If the young live in the future through anticipation, the old live in the past through nostalgia. But, Day Lewis thinks, the real man must live neither in the past, nor in the future. He must live in the now. Through understanding and capturing the now alone does man rise to the state of becoming from the state of being. Day Lewis says:

Let me take some figure of the dance, so fleeting fiercely exulting
That it quickens and seed of loss, my seed, and itself is halted
And magnified thus, a still from the moving picture, framed
In parting's hard embrace some beauty flushed, fleshed and tamed.
Separation is my metier, then, sifting through form the formless;
Creation my end, to subdue and liberate time in the timeless.

The lines just cited seem to convey a similar idea expressed by Nietzsche about the inspiration he felt
at the time of writing his *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. The Philosopher says that when he conceived Zarathustra, 'there was only/the day, the lake, the noon, time without end'. For a conscious being existence is change, change is maturing and maturity is the creation of one's self. The secret behind the moving picture, as Bergson says, is that it does not move; it is not a picture of motion; it is only a series of stills or snap shots. The moving picture is an illusion, whereas the still is the reality. Lewis seems to be thinking of the famous analogy of Bergson while writing the passage cited above. The direct perception of a thing, in Bergron's terminology is 'intuition' and it is very much like Spinoza's *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Strangely enough, there is very little in Day Lewis of the fear of death or the death wish generally found in some modern poets. On the other hand, there is found in his poems a predominant will or passion to live. The absence of the fear of death in his poetry may be due to his concept of change and transition; for one who considers himself a house where a self is born at the death of another self every minute there is very little to fear death. He accepts death as something inherent
in nature; he feels that death is but a prologue to birth. That is why he speaks of death and birth mostly in terms of seasons like Spring following Winter. In the very opening lines of *From Feathers to Iron* he asks the question whether a sudden death can be called a premature death or whether it can be 'a text for sorrow', and immediately gives his answer:

> Say what endurance gives or death denies us.
> Love's proved in its creation, not eternity;
> Like leaf or linnet the true heart's affection
> Is born, dies later, asks no reassurance.

Day Lewis reaches the conclusion that 'what death cannot diminish needs no replenishing' and, therefore, 'to live is better'. In a different section he thinks of life as a journey from one dark room through light to another dark room. Life is a journey from womb to tomb. The negative becomes positive in the womb and once again becomes a negative in the tomb. Day Lewis accepts the truth about life and death that
We may not undo
That or escape this, who
Have birth and death coiled
in our bones.  

Physical death is a natural process. Human life, however, Day Lewis seems to believe, does not end with the human body; the spirit is deathless and eternal. The idea of the immortality of the spirit seems to be based on Spinozism, once again. The individual's feeling of separateness of the human being is illusory because he is a part of the stream of law and cause; i.e., he is a part of something greater than himself, which never dies. As Spinoya explains the concept, "our mind, in so far as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another mode of thinking, and this one again by another, and so on to infinity, so that they all constitute at the time the eternal and infinite intellect of god". We live on living earth 'whose trees enlarge their fruit without misgiving or excuse'. "Even if we fall to raise not again", he says, "from our horizon sons begin". He believes that heroic spirit has no death. The explorers who face the risks are those who have the power of ambition burning in them like
'forest fires'. Even after their death,

Their spirits float serene above
time's roughest reaches
But their seed is in us and over
our lives they are ever green. 86

It is remarkable that the image of the seed constantly appears in association with the idea of eternity. If the heroic spirit seemingly dies, its seed is there in humanity, since the heroic spirit is only a part of the law of the world. Even if one is not heroic and ambitious, there is little use in fearing death since fear does not solve anything practically. Instead of suffering from the fear of death, it is better if one learns the moment's sanity - 'to be warm in the sun and to accept the falling shadow'. 87

But unnatural death — death due to meaningless wars — is something disgusting to Day Lewis. His Overtures to Death deals with the theme of the 'absentee promoters' of death. Even in that poem, he says that he does not hate death, as he tells Death directly, 'but those who force your intervention'. Death is in nature; the politicians and the warmongers who play with the
lives of the innocent are not only unnatural, but more
cruel than Death himself:

If I am too familiar with you, Sir,
It is that these have brought you
into contempt.
You are in nature. These are most
unnatural.
We shall desire your peace in our time;
But with those, your free-lance and
offcions gunmen,
Our war is life itself and shall not
fail. 88

The war-mongers force the early intervention of death
and so Lewis expresses his hatred for them. Sometimes
Lewis seems to feel that all men are responsible for the
death of innocence. The guilt of humanity is the cause
for the death of the innocent children. He expresses
this idea in the poem "The Christmas Rose":

What men are we that, year
after year,
We Herod-wise
In our cold wits devise
A death of innocents, a ruler
of fear? 89

Day Lewis also feels very unhappy about man's greed
for the nuclear power, which leads him to destruction. He feels sorry that men are playing for safety with dangerous power which might wipe out 'the tissue of creation'. The people who encourage nuclear research and who hold nuclear weapons are those who have "humanity's programme for suicide".

Except in such passages where Day Lewis refers to wars and nuclear weapons, his attitude to death is highly philosophical. Man can overcome the fear of death either through total ignorance or knowledge. The brute beast enjoys an eternal sty till the hour of death 'ignorant that he must die'. Day Lewis says that he would not be one counting hours to death and fearing every minute of existence. In fact, Day Lewis seems to believe, that death is an inevitable and essential part in the pattern of life. Strife is essential to life and without strife life will be nothing but a long stretch of ennui and boredom. Day Lewis says

Treasure and snake entwined
Image love's transience,
The gold unvalued if
No guardian sting the mind
To think it must be resigned.
Meanwhile, let us preserve
A discipline of living
Under the law of death
Honouring still the nerve
And need of mortal love.

Death increases the value of life: without death, the long duration of life results in ennui. Therefore, death is an essential condition of life; it is the natural consequence for the sequence of life. There is nothing to be feared in death: the falling leaf falls only to 'renew' the old contours of life.

Birth, on the other hand, is always associated with joy in Day Lewis. He asks all people to 'take a whole holiday' in honour of the birth of his first child. The theme of From Feathers to Iron, as already stated, is child-birth. In another poem written much later, "The Newborn", Day Lewis speaks of the newborn child as the mannikin 'who broke the prison'. The poet feels every new-born child a sign of resurrection.

Every newborn seems a reviving seed
Or metaphor of the divine,
Charged with the huge, the weak
power of grass
To split the rock. How we need
Any least sign
That our stoneage can break,
our winter pass. 95

He says that he felt as though 'mankind is begun again'
in the child. In "The Christmas Rose" he identifies
the Christmas Rose with Christ and declares that the
birth of the rose 'thaws' his 'wintering life' and 'melts
a world's despair'.96 Birth, in a similar way, is always
associated with resurrection, hope and pleasure. The
advent of Spring, which is very often a symbol for birth
or rejuvenation, is employed to suggest happiness.

Cease denying, begin knowing.
Comes peace this way, here comes
renewing
With dower of bird and bud knocks
Loud on winter's wall on death's door!97

Day Lewis considers the child as the spirit of man breaking
the prison walls and entering into the world of freedom.98

It is time to think of you
Shortly will have your freedom.
As anemones that renew
Earth's innocence, be welcome. 99
Each newborn child is a new hope; a hope of a better life and better world where guilt is overcome with innocence.

Day Lewis places love as the opposite of death and war. Though there are some references here and there to physical love and sexual passion, his main attitude towards love seems to lie in his belief that love is the reason for one’s living. Love, in its physical aspect, gives pleasure, but it also isolates the lovers from society by drawing them into an island of ease. Physical love, or passion for the sex, is a tower which makes the lovers oblivious to the rest of the world. The lovers hardly know 'the sour contagion of the streets and men'. But, physical love, though undesirable, is still capable of freeing man from self-love and pride. It develops man's capacity in that it makes it possible for him to love somebody else besides himself.

The passion for love, inevitably, creates fear, for the simple reason that every dominant passion begets a dominant fear, the fear of its non-fulfilment. But at the highest power love and fear become their equilibrium. Day Lewis says that in that 'eminent hour' when the
equilibrium is attained, the single mind also is attained. The equilibrium is the 'star-solved equation of life with life's negation'. Love is fusion, but it 'still keeps apart' the lovers; the keeping apart indicates the value of the passion in love, which emphasizes a higher heaven. Therefore Day Lewis says,

Bearing my skin to every bruise
Love gives, I'll the more; since they
are but dues
That flesh must pay to bone
Till each is overthrown. 

For Day Lewis, love is the reason for living. If life is the 'dangerous valley of the shadow of life', love is a 'causeway'. 'Love restores the nerve' and 'love is under our feet resilient'. Love is more powerful than time, as 'time can't assail love'. Love also helps the lovers in realising life passionately — love helps them 'to walk out of Time! Day Lewis says,

Nor fear we now to live who in
the valley
Of the shadow of life have found
a causeway;
For love restores the nerve and
love is under
Our feet resilient. Shall we weary?

Some say we walk out of Time altogether
This way into a region where the primrose
Shows an immortal dew, sun at meridian
Stands up for ever and in scent the lime tree.104

'The valley of the shadow of life' is an echo of 'the valley of the shadow of death' found in the Psalms105 as well as in The Pilgrims Progress. Mr. Christian, in his pilgrimage to the celestial city passes through the valley of the shadow of death, which is "a wilderness, a land of deserts and pits; a land of drought, and of the shadow of death; a land no man passes through, and where no man dwelt".106 But Mr. Christian could pass through the dangerous valley because he found a 'pathway' and because he had faith. By referring, though superficially to religious faith, Day Lewis suggests that his religion is love. The valley crossed by Mr. Christian is not the 'valley of death'; it is only a valley of the shadow of death, though it has all the ugliness of death in it. In the same way, man.
does not live the full-life now; his life is an approximation to life, a life lived at intervals and in parts; it consists of many fragments of the intensely realised moments. What a pathway is for Mr. Christian, is the causeway for Day Lewis. Again, Mr. Christian, after facing all the hardships with his unflinching faith, reaches the celestial city which "shone like the sun". Love in Lewis is supposed to take man to a land where the sun is always 'at meridian'. Love is the faith necessary for man's progress through life. In fact Day Lewis believes that love is stronger than faith.

Faith may move mountains, but love's twice as strong
For love can raise
A mountain where none was...

Love is a necessity because it is only through love that 'the Danube' -- the spring of altruism -- swells from man. Child-birth is the junction of love since the child links the lovers with society. Love, through the pange of separation due to parturition, teaches man of pain and the sacrifice. The lovers who isolate themselves from the mainland due to physical attraction for each other return to society purified, with the child as ambassador.
But physical love is of little consequence in Day Lewis. Physical love, which is possessive, is more a hindrance than a help to the progressive mind. Love in the physical aspect, is instinctual and hence can be tolerated rather than welcomed. "Let love be like a natural day. That folds her work and takes to bed..."109 says Lewis. The theme of physical love disappears from Day Lewis's poetry as the poet grows older yielding place to 'pietas', or the love for the whole of mankind. Love in The Magnetic Mountain and in the poems written after 1933, is generally the love for mankind. The Magnetic Mountain is a world of universal brotherhood. Lewis asks for volunteers 'who have tempered their loves and fears In the skilled process of time'.110 On the 'miraculous mountain' love 'shall be more than guest' and 'men shall be glad of Company'.111 Lewis declares that love is 'the affirmative in all living, blossom, dew or bird'.112 He asserts the value of love in the face of war and destruction. He says:

Now, as never before, when man seems born to hurt
And a whole wincing earth not wide enough
For his ill will, now is the time we assert
To their face that men are love.113
Though love is 'an angel', it is not a 'free-gift'. Man should learn to love everything around him; he must understand that he lives in a world of love. Love has many forms and man should learn to comprehend its essence behind all forms:

Love's the big boss at whose side
for ever slouches
The shadow of the gunman: he's mortar
and dynamite;
Antelope, drinking pool, but the tiger
too that crouches.
Therefore be wise in the dark hour to
admit
The logic of the gunman's trigger,
Embrace the explosive element, learn
the need
Of tiger for antelope and antelope
for tiger. 114

Day Lewis personifies love and asks her to 'tell us how false we are'. He asks love to correct humanity's pride and purpose. No argument for living could long sustain the ills of life but love. Man needs a faithful eye "to have seen all/Love in a droop of lash and tell it eternal". 115
Love, however, has something deceptive about it in that it leads lovers to the unreal. Human loves protract themselves beyond reality. It is very difficult for the lovers to know when they are crossing into the illusory, for "There's no margin where / substance leaves off, the illusion begins". Human loves, by being stretched to the point of unreality, are generally drained off their virtue. Infinite extension requires, or insists, no new dimension. Love illudes us that we can lightly move into a new dimension where

The bounds of being disappear
And we make one impassioned cell.
So wanting all in all
Each for each, a man and woman
Defy the limits of being human.

Such an extension of boundaries in love is sheer illusion; because man and woman, through illusion lose identity and individuality, and become ghosts. Man should understand love and learn to love, but he should not be swept away by it. To be swept away by love is to be swept away by a passion; and passions are to be controlled by man. Unless man controls his passions he is not free to act; he is only, Lewis seems to believe, the natura naturans, the one who undergoes things. And love is not
always freedom; lovers are not always equals. Love, however, is irresistible. Man, unless he masters his passions, is powerless against any kind of passion. When 'the naked eye of love' selects a man or woman there is nothing that he or she can do except 'lie down, lie down'. Love involves the surrender of lovers; each surrenders to the other. Then they feel that 'everything opens into a paradise garden', and for a time 'winter seems two life times away'. In love man thinks of the woman as 'the dark unknown'. He begins to explore. The animal in him 'speaks with an angel's tongue'; 'the brute becomes a poet in flatteries and lies'.

Another interesting idea of Day Lewis that is associated with his philosophy of love is the inequality of sexes. Love, and especially physical love, subordinates the mind to the body. The moment man's lust for love is satisfied, he becomes the lord and woman 'the tumid ocean he rides and reaps'. When the lust passes,

A woman beautiful as a myth
Turns mortal eyed and plain
Demanding reassurance with
Quenched grace, domestic tongue.
The angel in man too disappears, and he becomes a man of the practical, every day, mundane world. He finds a ghost in the once beautiful woman. The illusion that they were angels disappears and they learn of their mortality feeling disgruntled everafter.

Day Lewis's poetry, as indicated in the foregoing pages of this chapter, reveals an empirical approach to the phenomena. The eternal problems of philosophical speculation like Time, Eternity, Birth, Death and Love are approached by Day Lewis from a metaphysical and philosophical angle. The 'metaphysical self' in him does not allow him to be content unless he makes an attempt at grasping the real behind the apparent and the pattern beneath phenomena. We have also seen that a large number of the philosophical ideas of Day Lewis are based on Spinozism, mainly because, Spinoza also, like Day Lewis, believes in mastering reality by comprehending it clearly. The knowledge of a passion brings that passion under control; the man who comprehends the form of things and the unity behind the diversity alone can master reality. It is through knowledge that a man advances to the state of becoming from a state of being, and poetry, for Day Lewis seems
to be the method through which he wanted to control and master the reality around him.

An interesting point about the expression of the metaphysical ideas in Day Lewis's poetry is that he generally employs images from nature in a functional manner as steno-images. The images that are employed in dealing with metaphysical themes and ideas, as revealed in the foregoing discussion, are generally images from nature. Images from science and technology are hardly employed to express the metaphysical thought. Apart from such traditional images like the Sphinx, the crocus and the Christmas Rose, most of the images employed to convey metaphysical thought are non-recurring, and generally less sensuous than the other kinds of images. The metaphysical thought in Day Lewis seems to be expressed generally in what may be called the images of thought or the intellectual images rather than the images of impression. Further, the images used to express the metaphysical element are more symbolical than evocative. The Sphinx, the unicorn, the crocus, etc., are not expected to be visualised; the poet does not seem to want it. On the other hand, each image is tethered to an idea making the image denotative and
symbolical, as the Sphinx representing doubt and the crocus denoting resurrection. The images recur whenever the poet discusses the ideas they stand for, and as such they seem the obsessive images in Day Lewis only as short cuts to the literal expression of given ideas.

'Metaphysics' has been defined as 'the inquiry into the ultimate and fundamental reality' by Will Durant. The examination conducted so far in this chapter reveals that Day Lewis's poetry contains metaphysical thought because it attempts at clarifying and understanding experience and view things in their eternal order or sub specie aeternitatis. A large number of themes such as 'doubt', 'conflict', 'neutrality', 'conflict', 'desire', 'transition', 'selves', 'control', 'time', 'eternity', 'birth', 'death', and 'love' are examined in the chapter and it is shown that Day Lewis thinks out his ideas in dealing with these themes. Now it remains to be examined how the metaphysical ideas of Lewis are introduced in his poems through images.

Day Lewis employs two kinds of images to express his metaphysical ideas. One kind of images are those which he uses, as in the case of his expression
of social ideas, to express ideas in an implied manner by making an image a kind of steno-language for the idea to be expressed. The Sphinx, Abraham, Methuselah, etc., are images of this kind. As images coming from classics or previous poets, they have established associations — the sphinx representing the question mania, and Abraham and Methuselah, long life in the sense of duration, etc. — and by gaining the advantage of those associations, the poet expresses his ideas precisely.

The second kind of images employed by Day Lewis are the intellectual images or the images of thought. These images can be called intellectual because they generally contain abstract words, and these abstract words convey the meaning of the image, though it is difficult to visualise anything from a sensuous point of view. For example, the image in the following lines, contains very little sensuous element, even though it is present.

Their spirits float serene above time's roughest reaches
But their seed is in us and over lives they are ever green.
It is difficult to visualise the spirits floating serenely over the 'roughest reaches of time' because the words convey no established emotive value or vivid sensuous pictures. However, they do have some latent sensuous quality, which, of course, makes the picture dull. While it is not possible to deny the latent sensuous quality of the image, it can be said that the sensuous element in the image is subordinated to the intellectual. In expressing metaphysical thought Day Lewis frequently employs images of this kind.

Since the metaphysical thought in Day Lewis is the outcome of his desire to understand and interpret experience, some of his memories too are at the base of it. In themes dealing with states of life such as 'youth' and 'age' such memories can be found, whose origins are explained in Chapter II.

The study conducted in this chapter also indicates the field of imagery employed by Day Lewis in expressing his metaphysical ideas. While the social thought is expressed mainly through mythological and geographical images, the metaphysical thought is expressed mainly through the images of nature. Most of the images expressing metaphysical ideas are drawn from flowers (the daffodil,
The results obtained from the study conducted in this chapter can be categorically summed up as follows:

1. Day Lewis's poetry contains thought which can be called metaphysical because he wants to conduct an inquiry through poetry, into the 'ultimate and fundamental reality' of phenomena and experiences.

2. Day Lewis employs two kinds of imagery in expressing his metaphysical thought, namely,
   (a) by employing images as 'steno-language', and
   (b) by employing images of thought or the intellectual images.

3. The fields from which Day Lewis employs images to express his metaphysical thought are two, namely,
   (a) classics, and
   (b) nature.

We have completed, so far, the study of Day Lewis's major concerns in relation to imagery in the third, fourth chapters and in this chapter. Now let
us examine the various ways of relationship between thought and imagery in Day Lewis's poetry in the next chapter.
Foot Notes


2. Ibid.


5. cf. "Know yourself ... But knowing do not presume/To swerve or sweeten what is fore-ordained". "Sketches for a self-portrait", CP., p. 252.


8. cf. Our priests are not what simple book suppose; Their learning is but our credulity.


10. Transitional Poem, CP., p. 15.


13. Ibid., p. 167.


17. Ibid., p. 15.


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., III, Appendix, p. 128.


25. Ibid., p. 29.

29. Ibid., p. 63.
30. Ibid., p. 76.
31. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 249.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ataraxia means "to look at all things with a mind at peace". The Story of Philosophy, p. 101.
43. Ibid., p. 134.
44. Ibid.
45. "Grasping things in their eternal aspects and relations". Ibid., p. 168.
47. Ibid.
48. Spinoza, "Preface", Ethics, IV
49. Transitional Poem, CP., p. 40.
50. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 16.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p. 35.
56. From Feathers to Iron, CP, p. 53.
57. *The Magnetic Mountain*, CP., p. 83. The phrase 'time chases its tail' might contain a reference to Spinoza. Cf. "And he [I.e. Spinoza] would say sometimes, to the people of the house, that he was like a serpent who forms a circle with his tail in his mouth; to denote that he had nothing left at the year's end". - Pollock, *Life and Letters of Spinoza*, (London, 1899), p. 393.


62. Ibid., p. 275.

63. Ibid., p. 277.

64. Ibid., p. 278.


68. *An Italian Visit*, CP., p. 345.

69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., p. 349.
72. Ibid., p. 218.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., p. 219.
75. Ibid.
76. An Italian Visit, CP., p. 316.
78. The explanation of the analogy of Bergson is taken from The Story of Philosophy, p. 454.
79. From Feathers to Iron, CP., p. 53.
80. Ibid., p. 61.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ethics, V, 40, note.
84. From Feathers to Iron, CP., p. 71.
85. "Learning to Talk", CP., p. 126.
86. A Time to Dance, CP., p. 142.
87. Ibid., p. 152.
88. Overtures to Death, CP., p. 181.
89. "The Christmas Rose", The Gate, p. 60.
90. Ibid., p. 161.
91. Ibid.
93. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
95. Ibid.
97. From Feathers to Iron, CP., p. 58.
98. "The Newborn", The Gate, p. 16.
99. From Feathers to Iron, CP., p. 66.
100. Transitional Poem, CP., p. 29.
101. Ibid., p. 41.
102. Ibid., p. 49.
103. Ibid., p. 35.
104. From Feathers to Iron, CP., p. 53.
105. Psalm XXIII.
107. Ibid.
108. From Feathers to Iron, CP., p. 65.
109. The Magnetic Mountain, CP., p. 89.
110. Ibid., p. 113.
111. Ibid., p. 118.
114. Ibid.
115. "In the Shelter", CP., p. 298.
120. Ibid., p. 28.