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I SING A PLACELESS AND A TIMELESS HEAVEN:  
A STUDY OF SEVERAL THEMES IN THE POETRY OF VERNON WATKINS

by

Jane Lee McCormick

A Dissertation  
Presented to the Graduate Committee  
of Lehigh University  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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To

Ray Livingstone Armstrong

"He was aware that her unthinkable beauty was neither that of age nor of youth. That her eyes were the only things you thought of looking at, and that to be her was terrible, whereas to be with her was the only joy."

and to

The Memory of Vernon Watkins

## Abstract

I Sing a Placeless and a Timeless Heaven:

A Study of Several Themes in the Poetry of Vernon Watkins

by Jane L. McCormick

This dissertation is a study of the themes of time, art, nature, religion, and myth in the work of the Welsh-born poet Vernon Watkins (1906-1967). Watkins' sincere Romanticism complemented and supported his equally sincere Christianity, which in the poetry is expressed in the traditional metaphors of the Mystic Way. Of the five themes the most important is time, Watkins' attitude to which deeply affects all other aspects of his poetry. His dialectic of Time and Eternity is the foundation of his attitudes to all forms of human awareness: art is seen as the eternal aspect of man's inherent ability to create; transfigured nature is the eternal aspect of temporal nature, perceived by man only on the eternal plane; religion, especially Christianity, is the eternal aspect of man's inherent mythologizing. Certain poems are of especial importance in analysis of Watkins' themes; these, the Taliesin poems, "Cantata for the Waking of Lazarus," "Thames Forest," "The Sunbather," "Griefs of the Sea," "The Forge of the Solstice," "The Strangled Prayer," and "The Collier" are examined in some detail. I use a number of others to illustrate Watkins' frequent repetition of themes, imagery, and symbols. The dissertation also includes a short biographical sketch.

## Chapter I

### Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the themes of time, art, nature, religion, and myth in the poetry of Vernon Watkins. The texts are Watkins' Ballad of the Mari Lwyd, hereafter referred to as BML, The Lamp and the Veil (LV), The Lady and the Unicorn (LU), The Death Bell (DB), Cypress and Acacia (CA), Affinities (A), and Fidelities (F). I have also used, however indirectly, numerous texts the poet gave me when he was my tutor at the University of Wales, his radio scripts and various essays (see Bibliography). An edition of these prose works, with newspaper articles and a few unpublished items, was my master's thesis.

Watkins' poetic manuscripts are in three large collections at the British Museum, the University of Washington Library at Seattle, and the National Library of Wales. I studied the BM collection for several weeks in the summer of 1967 and made extensive copies (they were as yet uncatalogued and not available for Xeroxing; I was allowed to see them only at Watkins' request). I saw the Seattle collection, also before cataloguing; I have a complete Xerox of it, the gift of Professor Ralph Maud.

The biographical information used in this dissertation was obtained in casual conversation with Mrs. Watkins before and after the poet's death, Prof. Neville Masterman, Mr. and Mrs. Wyn Lewis of Pennard, Dr. and Mrs. Iorwerth Jones of Swansea, and of course with Watkins himself.

A special problem will confront every serious reader of Watkins' poetry. In a way, those who do not see the manuscripts are lucky--not because they are in disorder, I hasten to add, for every one is beautifully typed, signed, and usually dated--but because of Watkins' method of composition. After his conversion in his early twenties, at which time he destroyed everything he had written, thousands of manuscripts, his outlook firmed up (or froze), and he began writing on a series of themes which were to occupy him for the rest of his life. A poem of Watkins, finished in 1967, the year of his death, may not differ in content, imagery, or even style from one finished in 1942. One reason for this is his deeply religious nature; though such a man may grow in grace, his essential message will not change. Secondly, the 1967 poem may have been begun in 1942. It was Watkins' custom to work on a poem for some time, putting it aside whenever difficulties arose, taking it up again when he thought of it, and not submitting it for publication until he was certain it was finished. (Very rarely did he change his mind after publication.) I

recall that on my first visit to the Watkins' he casually pulled out a drawer from a dresser and said, "Oh, and this is where I keep my poems." Individual poems sometimes stayed in that drawer in the damp hallway for years--"The Childhood of Hölderlin," for example, was in and out of it from 1953 to 1963.

A result of this difficulty is that one cannot speak of a progression from BML to F without qualifying one's remarks. I feel that there is considerable maturing and deepening of Watkins' sensibility, and that it can be demonstrated in the poems. He did, after all, write some poems later than others, and the manuscripts usually show which. Even more to the point, he carefully chose the poems for his collections to represent his position at the time. They do not represent, as the works of many writers do, the pieces written since the last volume. BML is least difficult in this regard; its 41 poems date from 1934 to 1941, most being finished or at least worked on between 1938 and 1940. CA is a problem, however (see p.275 below). Its 50 poems date from 1932 to 1958. One poem, "Ode," seems to have been written in a single month (but I have seen only one manuscript). Another, "Loiterers," boasts manuscripts dating from 1932, 1934, 1935, and 1952. It will be interesting to see how the future editor of Watkins' collected poems will handle this difficulty.

For obvious reasons I have not attempted to treat

Watkins' poetry chronologically. If the date of the manuscript of a particular poem seems important, I mention it; otherwise, only the date of the collection is relevant.

The arrangement of this dissertation is meant to be organic, but it is of necessity artificial. To divide Watkins' preoccupation with time (Chapter Two) from his mystic-visionary perception of the world (Chapter Four) is to create a division Watkins would not have recognized, which may even have disturbed him. It has become a commonplace that a poet's work must be read as a whole: here is a case in which this is no cliché but a real problem for scholars and other serious readers. Poem after poem repeats the same themes, images, symbols; even phrases and lines are repeated in a grand orchestration of themes and variations. His intense concentration on form is more than a function of his Romanticism; perhaps he realized that only strict form would keep his poems from blending too much. He also insisted on titles, making an issue of them with Dylan Thomas. As it is, the lesser poems fall into each other, while the finer elegantly complement one another.

Given this interweaving of themes and images, it is sometimes necessary to wrench them apart to look at them. When I comment on a poem as representative of Watkins' views on art, I may mean that I am regarding it in that light for the time being.

For the most part I treat Watkins as a Romantic, which is what he considered himself, but I am aware that in a number of poems a different approach could be taken. A comparative literature study of Watkins with several German Romantics would be fruitful, as would a source study or a philosophical study, but I do not attempt any of these. On the other hand, Watkins' ultimate rejection of Platonism does not keep Platonic idealism from appearing in many poems, and I occasionally point it out. I do not attempt to define "Romantic" or "mystical," and I do not wish to get into the Anglo-Welsh Review controversy over the precise meaning of "Anglo-Welsh." Watkins classified himself as an English poet, and I see no reason to challenge him.

Chapter Two comments upon Watkins' perception of the immensely difficult problem of time; Chapter Three, on his views of art; Chapter Four, on his dialectic view of nature; Chapter Five, on his religious poetry; and Chapter Six, on his complex attitude to myth.

The quotation in the dedication is from The Sword in the Stone by T. H. White, New York, 1939, p. 243.

## A Biographical Sketch of Vernon Watkins

Vernon Phillips Watkins was born June 27, 1906, in Maesteg, a small town in southeast Wales. Both his father, William Watkins, the local Lloyds Bank manager, and his mother, Sara Phillips Watkins, the daughter of a gentleman farmer, were Welsh-speaking, but he was not taught modern Welsh as a boy. His middle-class parents rightly considered their native language a drawback to their brilliant son's possible advance.

Watkins had a happy, sheltered childhood, establishing lifelong friendship and love with his parents and two sisters. Though perhaps his father, the strict Victorian type, repressed his love sufficiently to cause the boy to depend too heavily on his mother, Watkins continued to love and speak well of his father long after the elder Watkins' death. When I first visited his home, the first thing Watkins showed me in a house of artistic and literary treasures was a photograph of his father. He continued to telephone and write his mother weekly until the time of his death.

Watkins' education began in Swansea at Swansea Grammar School (1916-1917), which Dylan Thomas, later his friend, would attend. He then attended Tyttenhanger Lodge at Seaford (1918-1920), Repton School (1920-1924) and Magdalene College at Cambridge (1924-1925), where he read French

and German. He took the English verse, French, and German prizes at Repton, and the first-year Language prize at Cambridge. Family financial difficulties and psychological disappointment (not academic) led to his return to Swansea, where he became a clerk in his father's bank. Though no one could have been less suited for this job, he held it forty-one years.

In his early twenties, suffering from nervousness and the sex-based difficulties of the adolescent, he experienced a temporary but distressing loss of contact with reality which one may as well call a nervous breakdown (though I have heard conflicting reports of how it was regarded at the time). The importance of Watkins' breakdown is not that he had it, but that he recovered. It was one aspect of the mental and spiritual reversal characteristic of the first stage (Awakening) of the Mystic Way. It is not unusual, though not customary, for the recipient of an act of grace to act nervous and confused, as "The Hound of Heaven" shows. Certainly Watkins began the long-avoided struggle with God that is the mystic's first step toward spiritual rebirth, and from then till the day of his death, love of God remained foremost in his life. He emerged determined to become whole, and grew convinced that he was a true poet, that he had been born to write poetry.

Two other psychological aspects, or results, of his breakdown are of importance. As he remarked of Kenneth

Grahame, in one level of his consciousness he never grew up. He never became cynical or ironic; he never approximated a materialistic view of the world. He retained a freshness of vision, a sense of wonder and awe. His job at the bank, whatever the nightmares he suffered, was no more than a truce with the "real" world. As a result of his breakdown and recovery, he conquered the demon ambition, a remarkable achievement for one so young. The example of his father initially led him to prize ambition and honor ambitious men. The elder Watkins' financial setback may have contributed to his revulsion from ambition, but his mystical revelation was more important. The Mystic Way itself cannot be classed as a form of ambition; Watkins wanted nothing for himself, except to save his own soul--which he believed to be the purpose of man's sojourn on earth--and to help build the City of God through his art. If Watkins had thought his mysticism in any way ambitious, he would have been willing to sacrifice it; at his most transcendent he was utterly selfless.

At the age of six, Watkins had decided to become a poet, and he began writing then. He wrote steadily all his life, with a break of about a year while at Repton. But the experience that made him a poet also turned him against publication; it seemed too self-seeking. It was not till 1937 that Dylan Thomas persuaded him to begin regular journal publication (one poem had been published some years

earlier), and it was 1941 before his first book, BML, was issued by Faber and Faber. It was well received and went eventually into two editions and several printings. This modest success frightened him a little; though he began new poems nearly every week of his thirty-year publishing career, the total of poems from both journals and and collections (depending on how one counts) is only 339.

The release of BML coincided with the mobilization of her author. Six years in the Royal Air Force changed Watkins. He realized for the first time what it meant to be physically and mentally superior to other men, thereby gaining a quiet confidence which remained with him for the rest of his life. Though he was promoted fairly rapidly (which shows that the military can recognize talent whatever the package), he was not a very good soldier. His occasional swearing in German probably upset some people, and his inability to perform tasks thought of as merely routine--such as lowering the flag and turning on a hose--must have been disconcerting. (To the day he died Watkins had trouble unlocking doors.) He was once yanked out of a parade by a superior officer after tangling himself in his rifle sling. On the other hand, he was clearly superior mentally, he had the highest rating on the base in target shooting and unarmed combat, and he was well liked.

He was sent to Officer Candidate School, where as one might expect he did well. At a final interview in which the

promising candidates were screened, he was asked his civilian occupation. His reply indicates that, deep inside, he did not wish to be an officer. "I am a poet," he said, and the officers, taken aback, laughed. One said, "Well, you'll have to forget all that once you're commissioned." Watkins replied, "My poetry must always come first." He was then asked a question which only a military-dress fanatic could have answered and dismissed.

But his new-found confidence led to a surer relationship with people, something far greater than the mere assumption of authority. He met Gwendoline Mary Davies, nineteen to his thirty-six, in many ways his opposite--vivacious where he was solemn, practical where he was clumsy or unrealistic, and adaptable where he was stern. He did not court her, he did not promise happiness, he did not speak of love; he simply announced that they were to be married. Her many, valid, and strongly expressed objections to this conjunction of strong wills had no effect upon his obstinacy, though she found him impossible to ignore. His tactics were successful: they were married in London, October 2, 1944.

In January 1946, though awaiting Intelligence duties in Germany, Watkins received a compassionate discharge. The bank accepted him back, and he moved, with his pregnant wife and baby, to the Uplands in Swansea. By the time the family had been extended to three children, they moved to The Garth, Pennard, on the Gwr<sup>^</sup> (Gower) Peninsula overlooking

Three Cliffs Bay. To avoid living in town Watkins suffered every inconvenience and inflicted numerous indignities upon his family by living in a battered plywood hut prey to vile sea-winds, at the end of a boulder-strewn, bomb-pitted trail, commuting to Swansea every morning on the erratic, swaying bus. He was aware that the city of his happy youth had not really survived the immolation of 1941. Yet he remained devoted in theory to that incredibly ugly town, retaining "fidelity to the unfortunate dead," nostalgia for friends and places that were the Swansea of his youth.

The twenty years after Watkins' return to Wales saw a gradual increase in his popularity as a poet, reader, and lecturer, his slow rise marked by occasional conspicuous honors. He was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1951, and twice received, in 1952 and 1956, the Travelling Scholarship of the Society of Authors. He also received the first Guinness Prize, the Levinson Prize of Poetry (Chicago), the Quarterly Review of Literature Prize, and two Fulbrights. But in Watkins' eyes these and other honors were unimportant, though the money involved was always useful, his family having grown to five children. He cared only for the writing of poetry, ensuring the happiness of his family, and making new friends.

In 1966 Watkins retired from the bank. He was saved from the horror of supporting himself and six others on

a small pension by University College, Swansea, which gave him a D. Litt. and created for him the post of Gulbenkian Fellow in Poetry. Amazed at this metamorphosis from bank clerk to professor, Watkins began his duties with some enthusiasm, which gradually turned to distress as he realized his students did not share it. More congenial to his concept of poetry and the poet's mission was the next position offered him, that of Visiting Professor at the University of Washington, where he had taught for the spring semester of 1964. Though he was not well--he had had at least one heart attack, though it was never properly diagnosed--and did not wish to leave Wales, he accepted the offer for financial reasons.

Watkins' shy, gentle nature masked a stubbornness that cared nothing for fate. He had never allowed duty, whether occupational, familial, or military, to interfere with the writing of poetry (though things always got done), nor did he let practical matters influence his imagination. Similarly, his very active life was symbolic to him of fitness and of youth, and he did not realize that illness and age had changed him. Furthermore, as he believed art, love, and spirituality to be wholly non-competitive, all his competitive tendencies had been forced into sports; and when contemporaries sensibly refused to play tennis or squash, he would seek younger opponents. When he arrived in Seattle, he accepted several offers to play tennis as

casually as he did invitations to tea.

Watkins died October 8, 1967, on the university tennis court, after playing a much younger opponent for nearly four hours. His body was cremated, taken back to Wales in December, and buried in January, 1968 at St. Mary's in Pennard.

## Chapter II

### I Sing a Placeless and a Timeless Heaven

Vernon Watkins, Christian mystic and Romantic poet, was fully aware of the traditions from which he drew subject and form, aesthetic theory and poetic practice. Rarely does a poet so clearly recognize his own antecedents and strive so to be at one with them. Watkins' self-immersion in the flood of German and English Romanticism made it inevitable that he share an obsession of both strains in his psychological and aesthetic makeup: a pre-occupation with the many-faceted, paradoxical subject of time.

Mysticism has been for thousands of years a practical, organized discipline, the aim of which is the transcendence of time and its material counterpart, space, and union with God in the eternal and infinite. The mystic uses prayer and meditation in an atmosphere of yearning love to escape the fallen time-space world. The Romantic poet, especially Blake, who was Watkins' spiritual and poetic example, transcends time in his use of the imagination, which is God within. Both poet and mystic are acutely and painfully concerned with the chasm between the fallen and eternal worlds, between man's heritage of eternity and his present

low estate, between the frozen world of abstract mechanical philosophy and the glowing world of the divine imagination. For Watkins it is time, not life which is invariably divine, that "stains the white radiance of eternity," and it is time, not death, that is the enemy of life, for death is but the "end of sleep." For Watkins, Shelley's many colors become the "first five colors," or the natural world, the material result of time.

A mystical Romantic, Watkins sees meditation and prayer as creative and the use of the imagination as an act of prayer. For him even more than for Blake the two traditional ways of conquering time are one. Watkins' main theme is the durationless moment, paradoxically occurring in and out of time, yet good for all eternity, in which the divine imagination sees "the world in a grain of sand." This moment of transcendental awareness, of perceiving the essential unity of all things in one great Mind, is the matter of many of Watkins' poems. It must be understood as the "given" of all the rest.

One may say, then, that the central question of Watkins' poetry is this: how does man escape time while yet in this life, and how can he assist himself and others toward the eventual ruin of time? For Watkins, as for many authors--Vaughan, Blake, Wordsworth, Emerson, Shelley, Whitman, Tennyson, and Carlyle, for example--time is transcended by flashes of insight, the source of which, variously

called Imagination or Pure Reason, Genius or Inspiration, is a faculty beyond and above the everyday mortal senses. For Watkins, while all men have this faculty, only some, at least in this stage of history, are sufficiently imaginative to help man toward that timeless condition called heaven, Golgonooza, or the City of God. These are the "discoverers" or artists, men whose deeds are the building blocks of the City of God. Their accomplishments are, specifically, works of art (Chapter 3), escape of the limitations of the temporal senses and temporal nature (Chapter 4), love of God and man (Chapter 5), and imaginative breaking of the shackles of myth, history, and superstition (Chapter 6).

In Watkins' poetry there are many conscious and sometimes self-conscious symbols of time: trees, rivers, fountains, the sea, hour-glasses and clocks, sand, and ruins. Most of these are more complex than a first reading will suggest. Fountains, for example, are obvious representatives of time for the same reason streams and waterfalls are, by virtue of the vast amounts of water that go through them, yet go nowhere and remain unchanged. But for Watkins--as, indeed, for his Romantic ancestors Wordsworth and Coleridge--a fountain also suggests the "fountain within," the imagination. Trees, symbols of time because their rings, of all living things, most clearly reveal the passing years, also represent poetry for Watkins;

and, unsurprisingly, they also represent the great Romantic archetype of organic growth. Ruins, which are negative images for Watkins as for Blake and usually signify utter lifelessness, are also associated with archaeological pursuits. Sand is usually a negative image of the sterility of time, but in several poems God is represented as speaking from a whirlwind of sand, suggesting his superiority over time.

In Watkins' poetry the same image will be seen from two perspectives at once, the divine, eternal, or imaginative, and the worldly, clock-time, or material. Watkins often seems unduly ambiguous for this reason. Critics have accused him of a wilful vagueness, presumably the result of his mysticism. Rather, the truth is that his ambiguity is functional and usually irreducible. The ambiguity of an image that can be both positive and negative, both temporal and eternal, was for him a product of intense realism. Paradoxes ought not to be resolved in art if they are not resolved in life. It was a frequent saying of his that all paradoxes are indeed resolved, in the slime at the bottom of graves. The basic theme of Watkins' poetry, the great paradox of time and its transcendence in creative activity, is not resolved in time; and the written page, whatever the poet may do, is a product of time and exists in time.

In addition to symbols of time, Watkins uses many words

that of themselves indicate time or duration: moment, midnight, day, year, hour, age, and of course the word time itself. Scarcely a poem escapes the use of at least one word indicating duration. The "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" bears the weight of 161 repetitions of "midnight" chanted to the ticking of a grandfather clock. In the 285 poems published in collections, the word "time" appears on 298 occasions and "night" or "midnight" on 349. One major poem, "Peace in the Welsh Hills," but 56 lines long, contains, to represent time of day or year, "Spring," "dawn," "September," and "wintry"; to suggest units of time, "age" and "days"; and the conjunctions, adjectives or adverbs "when" (four times), "new," "now," "still," "earliest," "first," "always," "continually," "never," and "yet." In connection with this type of time-reference, there are hundreds of direct and indirect references to the cycles of time.

A third kind of reference to time and its complexities in the material world is less obvious. Watkins uses, in Romantic fashion, hundreds of images that suggest time either because they are material objects that take ages to produce, such as sand, diamonds, ruins, and stone, or because they are artificially but customarily associated with time. Bells, for example, do not automatically suggest time, but Watkins associates them with funerals and death. (This particular emphasis occurs so often that when he

mentions wedding bells in "A Bell Unrung" it sounds somewhat sinister.) A frequent reader of Watkins will think immediately of a long poem about time, "The Death Bell," which gave its name to his fourth collection, but the image appears in one of his first published poems, "The Collier":

The slow grey bells they rung a chime  
Surly with grief or age.

(BML, 11)

To emphasize that man is enmeshed in the cycles of time, Watkins will sometimes describe a thing as old, or a duration as long, when this could not be so. Mourning the truth that once we are born we begin to die, he describes his second son Tristan as old though he was but a baby in the crib ("Serena," CA 45). In "The Heron" (DE 46), "the cloud-backed heron" is described as having existed as long as "the grey woods [have] been green," in which he resembles Keats' nightingale.

Time is wholly abhorrent to the man of imagination, yet if any aspect of it is more repellent than others it is the endless recurrence of cycles. Watkins accepts Judaeo-Christian mythology for the most part, especially when he considers it relevant in the context of his poem, and he sees the Fall of man as the entirely avoidable origin of time. Cycles, especially those of nature, began at the same point, for, as Watkins argues in a departure from the myth, the Garden of Eden existed in eternal autumn. The

cycles of nature are Watkins' main image-set, and he sees them as existing by themselves in agony:

White must die black, to be born white again  
From the womb of sounds, the inscrutable grain,  
From the crushed, dark fibre, breaking in pain.

("Music of Colours---White Blossom...", LU 11)

Other cycles include the Romantic notion that maturity repeats childhood, expressed in "Returning to Goleufryn":

It is Goleufryn, the house on the hill;  
And picking a child's path in a turn of the Towy  
I meet the prodigal town.

(LU 15)

and the lunar cycles, evoked in poem after poem, usually in a tone of horror:

Now each rock wears disguises,  
Each darkened stone deceives,  
And louder the wave rises  
With a noise of rustling leaves.

("Ballad of Culver's Hole,"  
DB 92)

The power of the moon over the lives of men and animals is also an aspect of the lunar cycle and appears, for example, in "The Broken Sea" (Selected Poems 1948, p. 69) and "The Eastern Window" (BML 1947, p. 62). Myths are cyclical by definition. Watkins' poems on the supplanting of the old myths by Christianity emphasize that the circularity of Graeco-Roman and Hebrew myth will be ended by the second coming, itself completing the Christian cycle, after which there will be no other.

Some cycles are not endlessly self-perpetuating but

require the aid of man; this is especially true of the grotesqueries of human history. For Watkins, as for Blake, the purpose of history is to provide metaphors for poetry (or, more generally, a base for creative acts), an honor it shares with philosophy, science, and indeed all human endeavor. But even so single-minded a poet as Watkins had to realize a practical application of history, to assist man in mastering his own times. He found, victim of the twentieth century like the rest of us, that men of power, all of whom he lumped together under his term of supreme contempt, "politicians," far more often aid the impersonal forces that override man, thereby perpetuating the old myth of cycles of history. The most familiar example of this is Hitler's war, before which the few preventive efforts of the men in power were feeble and unimaginative.

This contemporary evil, the perpetuation of cycles by those best placed to end them, is a theme of one of Watkins' most famous poems, the brilliant tour de force "The Collier":

When I was born on Amman hill  
A dark bird crossed the sun.  
Sharp on the floor the shadow fell;  
I was the youngest son.

And when I went to the County School  
I worked in a shaft of light.  
In the wood of the desk I cut my name:  
Dai for Dynamite.

The tall black hills my brothers stood;  
Their lessons all were done.  
From the door of the school when I ran out  
They frowned to watch me run.

The slow grey bells they rung a chime  
Surly with grief or age.  
Clever or clumsy, lad or lout,  
All would look for a wage.

I learnt the valley flowers' names  
And the rough bark knew my knees.  
I brought home trout from the river  
And spotted eggs from the trees.

I coloured coat I was given to wear  
Where the lights of the rough land shone.  
Still jealous of my favor  
The tall black hills looked on.

They dipped my coat in the blood of a kid  
And they cast me down a pit,  
And although I crossed with strangers  
There was no way up from it.

Soon as I went from the County School  
I worked in a shaft. Said Jim,  
'You will get your chain of gold, my lad,  
But not for a likely time.'

And one said, 'Jack was not raised up  
When the wind blew out the light  
Though he interpreted their dreams  
And guessed their fears by night.'

And Tom, he shivered his leper's lamp  
For the stain that round him grew;  
And I heard mouths pray in the after-damp  
When the picks would not break through.

They changed words there in darkness  
And still through my head they run,  
And white on my limbs is the linen sheet  
And gold on my neck the sun.

(BML 11-12)

Here Watkins writes on one level of the tyranny of English coal interests over the lives of Welsh miners. The Biblical parallel shows that the poet equates the boy-miner's sufferings with those of Joseph. A second parallel is less obvious but equally important: the poem

is a companion piece to Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper," which is also about the perpetuation by men of customs already evil but performed in an unimaginative void. Thus the tyranny of the mine owners equals the tyranny of owners over sweep-boys, equals the tyranny of (first) his own people and (later) the Egyptians over Joseph. The poem, then, is on three time-levels: Biblical, eighteenth-century London, and twentieth-century Wales. The reader can supply other relevant times and places.

The Joseph story itself is obviously cyclical. His father's favorite, he was betrayed by his brothers, righted himself in Egypt, was betrayed again, then restored himself. The boy collier, a favored child, is betrayed by his brothers (the slag heaps), restored (if we associate "interpreted their dreams" with the obvious Biblical parallel), but falls again in the cave-in. At the end he is restored to "gold"--in this case, the natural sun, but see p. 29 below. Thus cycles recur within Joseph's life and are repeated in Dai-Jack the collier's.<sup>1</sup> Joseph's being cast into the pit, the sweep-boy's being thrust into the chimney, and Dai-Jack's descent into the mine shaft are echoes of the original Fall and therefore symbolic of man's subservience to time. It is an important function of the imagination to perceive the great archetypes in lesser cycles; here, Watkins sees in the ups and downs of one life the image of the original Fall. Child slavery in

itself is a reminder that man has fallen. (Jack's mine shaft is also a cave image, of which more later.)

Joseph's rise to power was really a fall, for it was the immediate cause of the Egyptian captivity of the Jews. Dai-Jack's not being raised to a position of any prominence (that is, any position above ground) indicates the cruelty and avarice of the English mineowners in keeping the Welsh slaves in their own land. The servitude of the Welsh miners is a kind of Egyptian captivity; How Green Was My Valley may be sentimental, but it has truth.

But the treatment suffered by all three boys also represents the lot of most people of all times, forced into moulds not of their making or desiring; in Watkins' century, this is the curse of the wage-slave:

Clever or clumsy, lad or lout,  
All would look for a wage.

Though the men in power are most responsible for this evil, too many citizens acquiesce in their fate, allowing the cycles of time to override them: there is a world of condemnation, and perhaps some self-condemnation, in the phrase "clever or clumsy." Watkins was himself a wage-slave.

It is part of Watkins' contention here and elsewhere that cycles can be prevented or broken off by imaginative effort. In this poem he refers mainly to the cycles of history and myth, but elsewhere he argues (in hyperbole, but seriously) that even the cycles of nature can be altered

by the imagination:

The sea will run back if he breathes a sigh.  
He can hide the sun...

("The Sunbather," BML 23)

and

Here I  
Unsheathe a dagger to pierce the sun.

("Climbing Above the Cave,"  
DB 38)

The most horrible thing about archetypes--and, indeed, their principal fascination--is that they continually recur in spite of man's awareness of them and power to stop them. Joseph need not have been cast into a pit; Blake's sweep need not have been confined in a chimney; Dai-Jack need not have been gravely wounded in a mine collapse.

The power of the imagination to confront time is shown in the specific events of Dai's life. His birth is marked by an omen; he is the youngest son, who in the folk tales and Joseph story is gifted with insight and imagination. At the County School he "worked in a shaft of light," which for Watkins always represents the imagination (never temporal knowledge). He attempts an understanding and loving conquest of nature, but time is passing ("still"), and he is struck down by impersonal forces ("they"). His mark of favor, the coat of many colors, representing the temporal world, assists in his undoing. The colors of Joseph's coat are the "first five colours," or fallen nature. When the imaginative boy puts on the coat he is re-enacting the

Fall, when Adam and Eve covered their bodies, meant for eternity, with temporal objects. Dai is also Adam in a general way, for Adam too was cast out of eternal nature, where he had a loving and understanding mastery, into inimical fallen nature.

The strangers Dai meets and talks with ("crossed" implies this, though it may also refer to empty religious ceremony) are unable, because themselves unimaginative, to help him. Some recognize his ability (stanza 8), but others scoff (stanza 9). "Guessed" is the unimaginative man's sneer at what he cannot see as a power and therefore considers a weakness or, worse, a pretension. He argues that the imagination (here, the power to interpret dreams) is not "raised up" when the light of the natural world is extinguished, which happens in a serious cave-in. (Their lamps go out, snuffed by poisonous gas, afterdamp.) But he is wrong; though the others mouth prayers, Jack alone is left to reflect upon their last words ("still through my head they run").

The last two lines of the poem should contain the point of this small allegory. Watkins was annoyed when John Heath-Stubbs suggested that the collier is dead at the end of the poem; this interpretation offers no resolution and suggests that the imagination has not the strength to survive the vicissitudes of temporal nature. I feel that the boy's restoration from the pit to the natural world

("sun"), which he has tried to understand, is a sign of redemption. At the very least, he is being given another chance. This is also the best conclusion if one looks at the poem as one boy's rite de passage. In Blakean terms, caves, pits, and the like represent a fall of the true Self into selfhood, which in Northrop Frye's words is a "state of animal self-absorption," the only possible cure for which is "vision."<sup>2</sup> Dai-Jack has descended into the selfhood--brought about, perhaps, by his pride in the coat, of which he has no more reason to be proud than Joseph had, or for that matter Adam--but is raised up by his act of vision ("interpreted their dreams"). Blake's "selfhood" would surely question the validity of the imagination ("guessed") and mouth empty prayers. Dai's being restored to the natural sun directly echoes the Blake poem ("and shine in the sun"), which Watkins apparently did not interpret ironically.<sup>3</sup> (The mine shaft is also one of those dark other-world images in which the folk-tale hero gets lost--Watkins' ballads are, in a very general way, folk-inspired--but this reference is not necessary to the central meaning of imagination versus time.) The importance of the Blake parallel is that the selfhood represents the giving in of the true Self, Jack-Joseph as visionary, to the evils of time, shown by his becoming proud of undeserved favor, and , as a result, falling into a pit. Dai's too easily giving in to Fate

and attributing his faults to impersonal forces ("they" ... "they" ... "strangers") are also characteristic of man subject to time in a fallen world.

"The Collier," then, suggests that the imagination alone of man's qualities is sufficient to upset the recurrence of cycles. Whether Dai will prove to be a man of imagination we do not know; it depends on how we take the last line. That the boy is in a hospital with the golden sun shining on him as it did when he went to the County School may signify regeneration and rebirth, but the word "gold" is usually sinister in Watkins, and the natural sun is the very archetype of cycles. (Rarely does he adhere to the more familiar associations of the Golden Age and the golden world.) That the gold is on Dai's neck is likely to indicate man's servitude to time, for his captivity and Joseph's are symbolized by chains of gold. The chain given by Pharaoh as a symbol of Joseph's power really shows his servitude and his people's eventual subjugation to the haughty Egyptians; in the same way, the "chain of gold" that Dai-Jack will receive after "a likely time"--the gold watch and chain given to retiring men--demonstrates his slave status. A golden chain is a time-cycle image of the utmost irony, for men come to value the traditions that hold them in bonds just as they value gold over imagination and beauty. Each link of the chain represents a cycle, and the chain as a whole represents

the fate by which men believe themselves bound, not realizing how easy it is to break that golden chain.

The idea of recurrence appears in a somewhat later poem, "Elegy on the Heroine of Childhood" (BML, 14-15), in which Watkins compares his romanticized childhood impressions of war with his experience of World War II. He associates the recurrence of wars for the same avoidable causes, and with the same predictable results, with the idea that maturity repeats childhood. The smaller cycles of a man's life are helplessly caught up in the larger cycles of fate. The two ideas of recurrence and of childhood repeated in maturity also appear in "The Broken Sea" (Selected Poems 1948, 69). Frequent references to Blake, Milton, and the Bible remind us how the idea of war is allowed to perpetuate itself. Men, instead of using the imagination to obviate or transcend the difficulties that lead to war, become proud of the archetypes it spawns: the glory of meaningless bloody death, heroism, pointless self-sacrifice, mass murder, all things the imagination abhors. And each succeeding war is therefore worse than the previous, because men love it more.

Dai the collier is an imaginative boy too caught up in the natural world and the perplexities of fate to take the necessary step into the transfigured world. In this he is like Joseph, who is responsible for his people's slavery despite his prophetic powers, and Blake's sweeper,

who is too easily satisfied with the double-talk of a sterile religion in which God is an old man in the sky. Watkins' representative of the mature imagination is the sixth-century Welsh bard Taliesin ("shining brow"). The approach of mysticism, prayer and striving, is combined with the transcendence of the time-space world through imaginative perception in one of Watkins' finest poems, "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision." As this exquisite poem is central to the problem of time as Watkins perceives it, I quote in full pp. 20-21 of CA.

#### Taliesin and the Spring of Vision

'I tread the sand at the sea's edge, sand of the  
 hour-glass,  
 And the sand receives my footprint, singing:  
 "You are my nearest, you who have travelled the  
 farthest,  
 And you are my constant, who have endured all  
 vicissitudes  
 In the cradle of sea, Fate's hands, and the spinning  
 waters.  
 The measure of past grief is the measure of present  
 joy.  
 Your tears, which have dried to Chance, now spring from  
 a secret.  
 Here time's glass breaks, and the world is transfigured  
 in music."

So sang the grains of sand, and while they whirled to  
 a pattern  
 Taliesin took refuge under the unfledged rock.  
 He could not see in the cave, but groped with his hand,  
 And the rock he touched was the socket of all men's  
 eyes,  
 And he touched the spring of vision. He had the mind  
 of a fish  
 That moment. He knew the glitter of scale and fin.  
 He touched the pin of pivotal space, and he saw  
 One sandgrain balance the ages' cumulus cloud.

Earth's shadow hung. Taliesin said: 'The penumbra of  
 history is terrible.'

Life changes, breaks, scatters. There is no sheet-  
anchor.

Time reigns; yet the kingdom of love is every moment,  
Whose citizens do not age in each other's eyes.  
In a time of darkness the pattern of life is restored  
By men who make all transience seem an illusion  
Through inward acts, acts corresponding to music.  
Their works of love leave words that do not end in the  
heart.'

He still held rock. Then three drops fell on his  
fingers,  
And Future and Past converged in a lightning flash:  
'It was we who instructed Shakespeare, who fell upon  
Dante's eyes,  
Who opened to Blake the Minute Particulars. We are the  
soul's rebirth.'

Taliesin answered: 'I have encountered the irreducible  
diamond  
In the rock. Yet now it is over. Omniscience is not  
for man.  
Christen me, therefore, that my acts in the dark may  
be just,  
And adapt my partial vision to the limitation of time.'

Watkins chose his mask deliberately. Taliesin was an historical bard whose name appears in later works, chiefly twelfth century, as that of an archetypal bard. In the latter guise he disputes with Myrddyn in the "Afallenau" and accompanies the head of Bran (or Bendigeidfran) on its wonderful journey through the Other World. (This incident occurs in "Branwen Daughter of Llyr," the second branch of Y Mabinogion.) The historical Taliesin, whose poems are found in the Red Book of Hergest, was (as Robert Graves describes him in The White Goddess<sup>4</sup>) "a straight-forward court bard of the skaldic sort." (This is not entirely fair; "The Battle of Argoed Llwyfain" and "Death Song for Owain ab Urien," to name but two, are good poems in the

elegiac tradition.) The historical bard accompanied several kings on military expeditions, about which he wrote appropriately patriotic verses. He was also well known for his elegies of the various royal figures to whom he had been attached. It is easy to say that Watkins was not interested in the historical Taliesin; after all, he (Watkins) thought very little of war and less of men who wasted their talents praising it. When Watkins wears his Taliesin mask he is thinking primarily of the later bard, the probably mythical hero of the Hanes Taliesin (also found in the Red Book of Hergest). But to argue that Watkins is interested only in the more romantic of the two figures, the archetypal Taliesin rather than the historical, is to miss part of his point in choosing that particular name. The attraction of Taliesin is that he is both historical and mythic. To Watkins this suggested a poet who by his creative perception escaped the fallen world and was translated to the mythic or divine level, thus providing an archetype for what, Watkins felt, it is every poet's task to do. (A classical parallel for the Taliesin myth is that of Orpheus, to which Watkins does make a number of references.) The hero of the Hanes Taliesin claimed to have lived in many forms in all ages. This suggested to Watkins his belief in the omnipresence and endurance of the creative principle, which is what Taliesin ultimately represents in his poetry.

Watkins does refer, on at least one occasion, solely to the historical Taliesin. In the long ballad "Yeats in Dublin" (Selected Poems 1967, 25), record of a conversation between the Welsh poet and the Irish poet-statesman, Yeats asks if the Welsh will be able to revive "The fire of song and dance." Watkins replies,

"Though leaders sway the crowd"...  
"Power is underneath.  
The sword of Taliesin  
Would never fit a sheath."

This reply is meaningless if Watkins refers to the mythic bard; obviously he is referring to the soldier-bard who fought the English in the sixth century. Watkins equates Welsh artistic independence in the twentieth century with social independence in the sixth.

Watkins' sources for the figure of Taliesin include the Red Book of Hergest in translation and a number of poetic archetypes unrelated to the Taliesin myth. He was familiar with the Romance of Taliesin, which includes the famous Hanes Taliesin. But the most important sources of Watkins' Taliesin are neither medieval nor bardic. Taliesin represents the poetic principle, and the chief archetypes of this principle are Shelley's Prometheus, Charles Williams' Taliesin, Emerson's "The Poet" and Merlin, and Hölderlin's Hyperion. Shelley was the inspiration of Watkins' youth (see p. 97 ) so it is not surprising that Watkins' ideal poet has elements of Prometheus and of the famous defense of poetry. Charles Williams' Taliesin through Logres and The

Region of the Summer Stars (the latter title is from the Hanes Taliesin) make Taliesin a religious figure of the Arthurian period. Even if it were not obvious that Watkins' Taliesin shares mystical vision and a tendency toward metaphysical brooding (among other things) with Williams' bard, it still would be easy to deduce a relationship between the two from Watkins' lovely tribute "Three Sonnets for Charles Williams." I have not the space to discuss less direct sources, nor is it my purpose, but it is interesting that the difference between Emerson's Merlin and Uriel is just about the difference between the two Taliesins, which are united in Watkins' poet, traditional bard and rebellious angel.

Watkins' Taliesin has nothing to do with the Graves interpretation of the Hanes Taliesin. The date of The White Goddess precludes this anyway (1948), for by that time Watkins knew the Charles Williams versions and had already written about Taliesin in two poems, "Yeats in Dublin" and "The Broken Sea." I doubt that Watkins ever read The White Goddess; he read little prose, certainly not anti-Christian prose, and he disliked both Graves' personality and his poetry. If in spite of this he did read it, which I am sure Gwen Watkins will someday establish, a comparison with "Taliesin in Gower," written in 1949, will show that Watkins has something entirely different in mind. Watkins' Taliesin is no half-mad cultist

deliberately concealing esoteric knowledge from all but initiates. Those who insist on this sort of nonsense as a possible meaning (or, incredibly, the real meaning) of the Taliesin poems forget that Watkins was a Christian and that Taliesin also happens to represent Watkins.

Taliesin's paradoxical attitude toward time stems from his encounter with the witch Caridwen, described in the Romance of Taliesin. The boy Gwion, whom Graves identifies as the son of Gwreang of Llanfair (Gwion=Finn), is asked to stir a cauldron (the famous Cauldron of Inspiration) while Caridwen is busy gathering herbs. By accident the boy tastes three drops of the mixture, which Caridwen has been brewing to make herself omniscient, and becomes omniscient instead. Perceiving that she intends to kill him, he flees from her in various forms. Finally he becomes a grain of wheat, but she changes into a hen and eats him. Nine months later she gives birth to him as a baby and throws him into the sea, but he comes ashore near Aberystwyth. (Watkins has him washed up on the Gower coast.) There he is found by Elphin, Prince of Gwynedd or North Wales. (Watkins also has him found by Elphin, without explaining what the prince was doing so far south.) Elphin names the boy Taliesin, has him educated, and eventually makes him his bard. While still a lad, however, the future bard rescues Elphin from the clutches of the prince's evil uncle, and it is on this occasion that he recites the Hanes

Taliesin, a poem in which he claims to have lived in all ages.

Ask me my age:  
You shall have no answer.  
I saw the building  
Of Babel's Tower.

I was a lamp  
In Solomon's temple;  
I, the reed  
Of an auguring wind.

("Taliesin and the Mockers,"  
A 77-78)

In Welsh poetry time is usually conceived of as an eternal moment. For Watkins this idea negated the reality of clock time, as did Taliesin's claim of agelessness. This sense of time which disregards both past and future--Watkins often describes the moment of revelation as that when "Past and Future meet"--is primitive and philosophically indefensible, but Watkins was a Romantic poet, not a philosopher. Nor was he interested in modern scientific theories of time, for the scientific approach of necessity leaves out the dimension which was his primary interest. The more sophisticated approach to the problem of time, that encountered in the poem about to be commented upon, he learned from Blake, Hölderlin, Novalis, and possibly Wordsworth.

Taliesin "tread [s] the sand at the sea's edge," that boundary between earth and sea that is both, yet neither. I have seen Watkins walk in a near-trance so close to the sea's edge that his feet sank in with every step and the advancing tide lapped his shoes. He was fond of paradoxes

concerning indivisible places or moments. The "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd," perhaps his most ambitious poem, is about that divided, yet dimensionless, moment that is neither the end of one year nor the beginning of the next but is, of course, both; "The Turning of the Stars" begins with that moment at which Daphne is neither nymph nor laurel; a number of poems refer to the instant neither of death nor of life. Here, Taliesin is not in time's realm nor out of it, for he represents a virtuous pagan trembling on the verge of Christianity.

Sand is a favorite symbol of time and lifeless nature, what Northrop Frye calls "the limit of opacity."<sup>5</sup> The repetition of the word stresses Taliesin's preoccupation with the subject of time. He is thinking about it as he walks across the sand of (probably) Three Cliffs Bay on the Gower coast; thinking to some purpose, in fact, for "the sand receives [his] footprint." Line 2 is just an inverted cliché ("Footprints on the sand of time"). But the sand addresses Taliesin in a series of paradoxes. He is told that he who has striven most to escape time is closest to it, most aware of it, and most oppressed by it. The historical Taliesin, who has fought in battles and wandered from place to place at the behest of royal patrons, has both "travelled the farthest" and "endured all vicissitudes." This last word is significant for an archaic meaning Watkins appears to employ here. "Vicissitude" can imply

an acceptance of constant change and tribulation as inevitable, a pagan attitude adopted by some Romantics. This idea is the negative aspect of the great Romantic concept of becoming and organic growth. Therefore "endured all vicissitudes" is an ambivalent compliment, implying both that Taliesin is gifted with steadfast courage and that he is too prone to accept the vagaries of time and fate. "Travelled the farthest" also applies to the mythic bard, who has existed in all places.

"Cradle of sea" is a reference to the mythic Taliesin's strange birth. According to the Hanes Taliesin, the boy was put into a bag, but Watkins, in "Taliesin and the Mockers," has him found in a coracle to emphasize the Moses parallel. In either case, he was found in Elphin's salmon weir, so the sea was indeed his cradle. But it is also the ultimate cradle of all men, for life originated in the sea. Since there would be no sea if man had not fallen, Taliesin's "vicissitudes / In the cradle of sea" also represent his struggle against time. The possibility of "Fate's hands" being an appositive, as Watkins' grammar is sometimes loose, does not change the meaning; it is another image of the power of time and possibly an indirect reference to Taliesin's prophetic role. Both the historical bard (simply by virtue of being a bard) and the mythic were accredited with prophetic powers, the latter in the ordinary sense of seeing the future and the former in the

true sense of the Old Testament prophets. "The spinning waters" recall the vortex, a powerful image for the cyclic workings of time. Time seeks to draw man ever downward in its cyclic power; the spirit of man strives upward in a spiral; and the net result is Yeats' gyres, which are also suggested by the next line. "Present joy" is unmeasurable without an awareness of "past grief"; whatever heights the spirit may reach, they are meaningless without a tally of sorrow. At this point, Taliesin still distinguishes three tenses.

In spite of the highly negative suggestions of ll. 3-5, the song of the sand is encouraging. Taliesin, of all men, is time's nearest, but he is also God's nearest, for the voice speaking out of the whirling sand is surely God. At this point, however, there is little to suggest but a primitive concept of God as the vindictive ruler of a frozen time-space world; it seems but the God of the Old Testament who demands sacrifices ("all vicissitudes") and enforces meaningless moral codes. In truth it is not this or any pagan god who speaks, but the loving Christian god (Watkins was a Christian); it is just that Taliesin has not yet the perception to see this. But he is praised for endurance and steadfastness; though he may have had an inadequate concept of God, he is still God's nearest and "constant." Watkins, who could be as vague as any Romantic, nonetheless rarely used individual words imprecisely, and

I think "constant" here is a noun used in the mathematical sense of a value that remains the same in relation to some other value. Taliesin, bearer of the creative imagination, is truly a constant, in the mathematical sense, of his Creator.

As the bard has endured all vicissitudes, he is clearly trembling at a verge. A virtuous pagan, he has gone as far as he can in the time-space world on the strength of inborn goodness and courage. As he has suffered in the past, he is about to be given ("present") the greatest and most immediate ("present") of all joys, a direct vision of the divine.

Taliesin is no longer able to weep at the blows dealt him by chance. He has been omniscient, thanks to the Cauldron of Inspiration, but as he lacks Christian love he is powerless to act against fate. His tears have dried "to chance"--that is, in accompaniment to the successive blows of fate. That his tears have dried also implies that he is beyond self-pity. "Now" implies "from this moment henceforth"; Taliesin is to shed tears of "present joy" at the revelation ("secret") to be given him. Line 7, then, seems to mean this: Taliesin has wept, for himself and others, at the cruelties of life lived by a pagan ethic dominated by external chance. But the winds of chance that have blown him from adventure to adventure have finally dried his tears. The greatest of bards is not himself

sterile or dry, nor ever could be, but he is at a point in his life when something must happen. (Taliesin was ageless, but Watkins was in his early twenties when this stage of awareness was reached.) That exact moment ("now") being arrived, his tears of joy and sympathy will spring from an internal source, his conversion to Christianity. His joy will be "secret" because the mystical experience is essentially incommunicable and because it is given to so few. The change, then, is to be from a sterile ethos dominated by time to a fecund internal source of joy which (l. 8) cannot be confounded by time.

"Here" is not a place, but the "secret" of the previous line. That is, time's hourglass (but also mirror) breaks in the instant of union with God in the infinite. The secret is also Taliesin's creative imagination, which the bards (who were perhaps too fond of mystery) considered a secret part of their initiation and training. So "here" is also the poem Watkins is writing in his guise as Taliesin. The composition of a poem, which will last forever whether written down or not, shatters time's glass. Such a poem may be the honorable life of a creative person; it need not have words or music in the temporal sphere, though in the eternal it will certainly have both. Time is like a mirror placed so that it produces images into past and future, and the real object, the present, is lost. Taliesin's vision shatters this lying mirror.

"The world is transfigured in music." The mystics have often claimed that the moment of transcendence is accompanied by divine or celestial music. I am reminded of Rolle's Incendium Amoris, which consistently employs musical images and metaphors; St. Francis speaks in the Fioretti of a "heavenly melody." The third stage of the Mystic Way, Illumination, Evelyn Underhill calls "the state of song."<sup>6</sup> But the line can also be taken more literally: music transfigures the world. Music, here echoing "secret" in the previous line, is both the divine music Taliesin hears, which seems external, and the wholly internal gift of imagination. Both what is happening to Taliesin, the God-given vision which is a frequent but not inevitable part of the mystic experience, and what he accomplishes himself ("travelled the farthest") transfigure the world. Music is divine and unfallen, the world material and fallen.

The grains of sand whirl to a pattern, another image of the vortex, again reminding us of time. But images in Watkins must be seen from both earthly and divine perspectives; and a pattern is a pattern, which implies a Creator. "Pattern" for Watkins means something specific, the form of a poem or the divine plan of the universe, rather than the abstract concept of pattern-ness. The best that can be said of the cycles of nature is that they embody a pattern obviously created, hence suggesting the greater creation

beyond them. This is the closest Watkins came to the doctrine of correspondence. Sterile sand, the limit of uselessness, is made to move and sing. Taliesin is frightened; anyone who wonders at this has not read Exodus or "The Hound of Heaven." He is a pagan suddenly addressed by the God of the New Testament.

Taliesin flees to the "unfledged rock." It is gently ironic that he runs, as Francis Thompson did, from God into God. He seems to assume that rock, because inert, will protect him from his, and its, Creator. "Unfledged" is primarily a transferred epithet, for it is Taliesin, in spite of his undoubted suffering, who is but a fledgling, especially in terms of his limited knowledge of God. But rock is also "unfledged" in Watkins' Blake-like mythology, for it is lifeless and unfulfilled. Again, Watkins is most precise in this adjective. Rock is capable of becoming fledged, for in another of the versions of Taliesin's transformation, "Taliesin in Gower," he addresses "the praying rock of Pwlldu," and in "Taliesin at Pwlldu" the rocks that are initially lifeless have veins. Rock and sand have their active functions in the transfigured world.

The cave image is difficult. I believe that Watkins' initial revelation, or at least a very important vision early in his mystical journey, came at Three Cliffs Bay on the Gower Coast. He showed me a cave there, even though it involved some splashing about in the tide. His powerful

and daring inversion of the cave image springs from experience. Since Plato caves have been images of the brooding, timid, ignorant spirit, huddling within itself, afraid to face the light, unaware of or indeed antagonistic toward the divine forms that a little effort will open to it. Watkins is largely a Platonist, but here he flatly contradicts the Platonic archetype. He was also a follower of Blake, who had a low opinion of caves--vide, for example, Urizen in his underground retreat:

Times on times he divided, & measur'd  
Space by space in his ninefold darkness  
Unseen, unknown! changes appear'd  
In his desolate mountains rifted furious  
By the black winds of perturbation ...

Book of Urizen, Plate 3, stanza 4

As Urizen means "Your Reason," or so Watkins argued, Blake associates caves with mechanical philosophy as well as time and space, darkness, desolation, and chaos. Obviously Watkins dismisses this archetype as well, for he links Taliesin's cave with mystical vision, the opposite of temporal reason. Two other archetypes are ignored or refuted in this poem by Watkins' use of the cave, traditional associations of the mystical experience and equally time-honored ideas about darkness. For most mystics, contemplation is an interior process that can occur anywhere, but visions of the sort described in this poem tend to occur out of doors, in gardens or wild nature, accompanied by light, music, and warmth. In the great Bellini portrait of Francis, the saint

has come out of his cave habitation and is gazing upward, standing in a landscape of the most exquisite natural beauty. His desire to commune with God in, or through, nature is emphasized by a brilliant touch: though Francis is heavily robed, he has left his sandals behind in the cave. But Watkins ignores this archetype, and has Taliesin run from a scene of majestic beauty.

Associations with darkness are more complex. Through mystical literature there runs a strain in which the Light of Lights is seen in terms of darkness: "There is in God (some say), A deep, but dazzling darkness." This is the strain to which Watkins, with Juan de la Cruz and Henry Vaughan, belongs, here and elsewhere, though he also uses the more conventional images of light. The more usual image of darkness in mystical literature is that of the Cloud of Unknowing, a darkness that must be penetrated by the aspirant on the Mystic Way.

In any case, Watkins wishes to emphasize two aspects of the cave: darkness and interior. Taliesin cannot see in the cave; that is, not with his mortal eye. The "light of the senses" has gone out; when the literal sense of sight, the fallen sight, is extinguished, the mystical sense is freed. The fallen senses are of time, the mystic or imaginative of eternity. The former do not participate in the later stages of mysticism, for they give us but images in the mirror of time. That mirror is broken:

Taliesin is blind.

Inwardness is also emphasized by the cave image. It is the basic paradox of mysticism that a God who has always seemed outside and above is found within. Retreating into the cave, Taliesin is entering his true self--a product of time, surely, or the process would have little point.

Lines 12-13 contain one of the greatest images of mystical poetry, comparable to the opening lines of Vaughan's "The World," the sun image of Donne's "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward," or the central image of Hopkins' "The Windhover." In the instant of revelation both Taliesin and the rock become fledged, for when a man transcends time and space, he perceives nature in her eternal perspective as well (that is why nature is beautiful). The rock, which but a moment before was inert matter, is now perceived to be "the socket of all men's eyes."

Taliesin touches "the spring of vision." On the material level, the bard has put his hand into a small depression in the cave's side, where water has leaked and formed a pool. Here, as in many other Watkins poems, water seen from a perspective of temporal nature equals time itself, as in line 1, but seen from the perspective of the divine is the Water of Life from the rivers of Paradise that feed the Tree of Life. In an image beyond praise,

Taliesin sees God as a weeping eye.

The bard has "the mind of a fish / That moment," an image complex in origins. The reference to Christ is obvious. The revelation comes in such a way that the pagan bard is converted to Christianity, which is, given his time and place, a likely outcome. The reader of mystical literature will know that "converted" is not always an apt description of the mystic experience, for it is not necessary to be converted to or from anything, but in Taliesin's case the word is appropriate. Art and mysticism are both timeless, but man, thanks to his own ineptitude, is in time, so both become tinged with the accidents of time. (Neither Watkins nor his bardic counterpart would have seen his Christianity in quite this way, however.) The reference to Christ as a fish does not mean that Taliesin somehow becomes Christ, though if the line were Blake's it would. Man and God do indeed become one in the final stage of the Mystic Way, but this event, called contemplation or union, is an act of grace and wholly a gift, no matter what the mystic has done to deserve it; therefore, the fish image serves chiefly to indicate an imaginative perception of Christ.

"A fish" is also another specific fish, the Salmon of Wisdom of Celtic folklore. Taliesin received his omniscience from the Cauldron of Inspiration, to which there is a reference in l. 25, but was later found in a salmon

weir. The implication of this folklore reference is that Watkins sees the divine moment as bringing perfect knowledge in a flash--eternal knowledge, as opposed to the temporal knowledge given Taliesin as a bard. Without this interpretation, l. 30 seems even stranger than it is.

Talesin transcends the time-space world, but he is a primitive and a poet. For him, nature cannot be left behind, and his vision is of the world "transfigured in music." I do not deny the influence of Plotinus in this; Watkins read him, and, by the nature of mysticism, could not have escaped the influence anyway. There is no doubt that this poem describes the flight of the alone to the Alone; Taliesin even chooses to remain alone at the end of the poem, for he will be the only Christian in his society. But the God Taliesin perceives is not the abstract One of Plotinus, but a loving and instructive Three, and he perceives him in natural terms--he knows "the glitter of scale and fin." This is another paradox: the primitive, who already knows nature far better than the twentieth-century man reading the poem, transcends nature, yet in his vision is granted a deeper insight into nature than before.

The bard touches the "pin of pivotal space" and sees on how fragile a thing, one pin, the material world rests. The implication is that one day God will pull out that pin, and the whole solid-seeming fabric of the material

world will disappear. "Pivotal" is another transferred epithet and applies to both "pin" and "space." The idea of space is pivotal to fallen man's fallen thought, but Taliesin touches it with his transfigured senses and knows it false. He sees that one sandgrain, the least significant part of the fallen world, can "balance the ages' cumulus cloud." Any instant of time can balance all time because both are equally fallacious. No matter how extraordinary, a lie is a lie.

For a durationless second Earth stands still, its shadow (all the effects and constants of the temporal world) unmoving. On the divine perspective there is no need of the "movement of suns." The pageantry of stars and planets is as nothing to the splendours of the transfigured world. What this world is, is not the subject of this poem, nor of very many others. It certainly is not the hymn-singing sexless place that the average Christian thinks of as heaven when he thinks of it at all. When Watkins writes directly of the eternal world, its lineaments seem to be largely coincidental with those of the Gower Peninsula. In this identification of the indefinite with the known Watkins was following a good example: Blake saw stairways to Paradise rising out of Chelsea.

Taliesin sings of his revelation. A poet who has recited the battles of the past, he is suddenly aware of the horror he has been celebrating and encouraging: "The

penumbra of history is terrible." "Penumbra" looks forward to "time of darkness" and back to "Earth's shadow." The idea of all three is the same: the fallen material world is in darkness. The very concept of history in a world in which "there is no sheet-anchor" is terrible. There is no consistency; even life itself "changes, breaks, scatters." But in this same world of meaningless upheaval is a "kingdom of love ...whose citizens do not age in each other's eyes." This kingdom is every moment. If men would only love, creation and vision would be not only possible, but the province of all. If men would love, which it is their birthright to do, time would no longer reign. It is at this point that Taliesin realizes he is being addressed by a different God. Watkins has in mind Christian love when he says "kingdom of love," but he never denies the validity of simple acts of brotherly love nor of sexual love, which is the closest the ordinary man comes to imaginative creation. Love conquers time: that is the burden of Taliesin's revelation, easier to say than to act upon, as he himself realizes.

The "time of darkness" is any time of war, poverty, famine, and disease, any time at all, for whatever hinders life is a concomitant of time. In such a time, the imaginative man, the true Christian (for Watkins, like Blake, very nearly equates the two) restores the "pattern of life." "Pattern" here implies the plans of eternity, not the

grinding circles of fate. These men, poets and Christians, "make all transience seem an illusion." This is the function of art, as it is of life well lived.

But things are transitory. Nothing good can be sustained as long as man lives in the world of sense. The vision this poem is about cannot be sustained. While the mystic is truly out of time in a divine perception and the creative act truly transcends the world of experience, until mankind is entirely redeemed the mystic and poet must return to the world of sense. Some transience, obviously, can be obliterated. The very act of writing a poem negates, or overbalances, the inevitable decay of the papyrus, vellum, or paper it is written on. An act of love cannot be wiped out regardless of how the participants come to feel about one another, if it was true at the time. But to reduce utterly all transience to an illusion is the prerogative of God; poets can only make time "seem an illusion," no matter how profound their own perception of the infinite may be.

The "inward acts, acts corresponding to music," are acts of love, creation, and vision, in order of ascending efficacy. These works, all based on love which is necessary for creation and vision, "leave words." The music they correspond to is the divine music of 1. 8, and they may well leave music rather than words--Beethoven's last quartets, for example, or the Mozart Requiem, neither of which "end in the heart." But the poet inevitably thinks of words as

more efficacious for communication of "inward acts," and the Christian poet associates words with the Word.

Why do the "words" that are the direct result of "works of love" not end in the heart? Several reasons suggest themselves: because an act of vision cannot result in a work of mere sentiment, or a deed of the same smallness; or because a work of art does not appeal mainly to the emotions. More importantly, a work cannot end in the heart because the heart, unlike the deed, is mortal. All creative acts come to rest--or, more accurately, to work--in the City of God.

Taliesin's hand is still outstretched as he contemplates what he has seen. "Still" is good, for it reminds the reader that all that happens takes place on two planes, temporal and eternal. Taliesin's flash of perception is occupying both time and space on the temporal level; in fact, Watkins rather harps on this ("while"... "that moment" ... "shadow hung" ... "Time reigns" ... "every moment" ... "still"). This insistence on time passing indicates that the vision is not over. The reason is clear enough: what Taliesin has seen so far could be the awakening of a virtuous pagan and no more. "Kingdom of love" could refer simply to the amalgam of perceptive or imaginative acts that Blake sees as the eventual ruin of time. Therefore Watkins reminds the reader that Taliesin is still touching "the spring of vision," and moves on to an announcement of the identity

of the voice speaking from the water. The "three drops" are the Christian Trinity, appearing in the form of the water of life, but they also have a Welsh origin in the Romance of Taliesin. They are the three drops the boy Gwion accidentally tasted while stirring Caridwen's pot. There is a slight touch of humor in the repetition of the three drops on pagan and Christian, temporal and eternal levels. This image, together with the fish image of l. 13, helps to explain l. 30.

The moment of total transcendence comes when future and past are merged into an eternal present. Taliesin is addressed by the three drops, representing at once artistic inspiration and the three-personed God. Shakespeare, Dante, and Blake are mentioned as past although they are, from Taliesin's point of view, future. Time-orientation is gone.

Watkins refers to these three poets in particular as a trinity of the imagination, organic influences upon the poets to follow them. As always in Watkins, there is personal relevance as well. The reference to Shakespeare may be so much lip-service, but Dante and Blake were of great personal importance to him. Like so many other poets he attempted to translate Dante (what I have seen of the results is very good, without being of the quality of his North Sea), and Blake was the major influence on his work. He mentions the concept of the Minute Particulars as if it were the most important contribution of the three poets.

This intensely Romantic idea, which Watkins believed in and practiced, probably had its origin in Duns Scotus' concept of haecceitas or "thisness." It reflects the Romantic emphasis on the particular as opposed to the abstract, the personality as opposed to the mass, and the detail as opposed to the whole. Things are real only insofar as they are distinguished from other things. Watkins equated the minute particulars with Hopkins' "instress," one of several Romantic notions Hopkins held in spite of himself.

The three drops are also the "soul's rebirth," a familiar phrase for the mystical experience, echoed in the request of the transfigured bard to be baptized. For the person who has experienced such an awakening, it must seem an absolute denial of time, a shattering of any previous time-reference, the chance for a new life.

The poem deliberately ends on an anti-climax, marked by separating the last stanza after the natural climax ("soul's rebirth"). The "irreducible diamond / In the rock" signifies time in all its guises, for it takes longer to produce a diamond than anything else, but it is the irreducible diamond that matters, the ideal diamond and by extension the ideal realm. The image suggests the bright gem of knowledge which Taliesin rejects in favor of "acts in the dark," or spiritual acts in a spiritually dark world. A diamond is formed of raw materials fused by vast

pressures, as abstract thought is formed from the material of experience. Taliesin means that he has found the reality beyond which there is no further reality, but that is an abstraction and of no immediate value to his imaginative mind.

Taliesin rejects not the vision, which is good for all eternity, but the intellectual and contemplative ways of life. He sees that his former omniscience (of the temporal plane only) was valueless without a perception of eternity. Nor will his days be spent in pursuing further divine knowledge, but performing "acts in the dark." (The poem ignores that the contemplative life need not be devoid of action.) He rejects omniscience because he feels that it is the prerogative of God, not, in Taliesin's time and place, of man. Several other poems stress this point, the most important of which, "Swedenborg's Skull," was published in the same volume, CA. The grave robbers who desecrated Swedenborg's tomb

could not break down or interpret the skull  
in its privacy  
Nor take him away from his time.

(CA, 61)

Watkins felt that to deny one's own time and place, which would involve becoming an ascetic or ivory-tower intellectual, was to deny one's fellow men and the God who created them. Here we have another paradox: to yield wholly to time-space is to deny one's heritage of eternity and amounts

to living on the material plane below the animals, who at least have the virtue of timelessness; to seek to live wholly on the eternal plane is vile. (There are exceptions, the great imaginations who rise far above men yet never lose humanity--Shakespeare, Dante, Blake. The great imagination can live far above the temporal plane, but Taliesin was not of that calibre, and Watkins knew himself not of it.) It would follow, and indeed it was so, that friendship would be of great importance in Watkins' life. Taliesin rejects, not the vision of timelessness, but knowledge, however complete, in time.

The bard asks to be christened because "omniscience is not for man." If he had all knowledge, he would not have to believe. Taliesin chooses belief over knowledge and his own time over eternity; he knows he will eventually receive eternal life. He will endeavor to live as an example of justice "in the dark," and he will adjust what he has seen so that it may be useful to others in time. This is a position of the utmost unselfishness.

Why does Taliesin not choose the full vision? What would it involve? The answer lies in, among other works, Malory: it would involve bodily death. Galahad's vision, for all its great beauty and the intense striving that led to it, did no one good but Galahad (Percival and Bors have their own, different, visions). Perhaps Galahad asks for death partially because he realizes he would no longer be

of any use, as well as having gone as far in the spiritual journey as it is possible to go in this life. Taliesin feels that there is little use in a poet's seeing God if he does not write about it. The longer a man lives, the more creative acts he may perform, the closer he helps man come to the City. The very act of writing a poem denies time both in the time-sphere (the poet hopes that it will last) and in the eternal sphere, where it has always existed anyway. "Poetry was all written before time was."

"Taliesin and the Spring of Vision" was written after Watkins decided to speak directly of his own mysticism and the specific vision that began it. An earlier poem, "Thames Forest," is more concerned with the tyranny of time.

#### Thames Forest

Years are divine rings: moments are immortal.  
The months are saplings, centuries are oakenshaws.  
Lightfoot the soul goes. Impressive is the shadow  
Cast by those time-groves.

Darkness of the sycamore flies across the river.  
From a pattern of foliage see the spirit struggling  
Through meshes like memories, woven of their terror,  
Wondering, emerging.

Thought, 'like a thread, still glitters on his fingers.  
Still from the dark earth, mythical and gleaming,  
Draws he the life-skein, flying ever forward,  
Wound by a dead hand.

Light on the wet ground, lighter on the leafmould  
Dances that energy, rising to the sunbeam.  
Black flies the shadow, asking of the dead leaf  
Garment for burial.

Stilled on the charmed world, upward the life looks,  
Stunned by that oracle speaking from the tree's root:

'One that is strange-born, one that dies to-morrow  
Dances to-day here.'

Dumb roots are whispering; light breaks in darkness;  
Frail fibres grasp there, clinging to the close clod.  
Under the warm green vellum of the meadow  
Trance-wise the seeds break.

Light is a great pool. Look, the clouds are flying.  
Of all forms living, man alone deliberate  
Scrawls on a leaf the impression of his going.  
These leaves are numbered.

Fate unforeseen, deformer of the branches,  
Will grapple the great tree, lay it in the low field.  
Out of such torment, fingers draw the Spring's  
Evocative ritual.

Easily time, and quickly, can forsake him,  
Leave, in a moment, intricate the shuttles  
Idle, the still thread, while the mighty loom works  
Suns ever turning.

(BML, 49-50)

The rings of trees, which show the passage of years, are "divine" because the cycles of the seasons and the imposition of time on man are of divine origin. Like Blake, Watkins accepts the possibility of the divine origin of evil. Mystics do not care to setup philosophical dualisms, such as explaining the presence of evil by a "demiurge." Watkins portrays God as capable of error and doubt. The image of divine rings recalls the image of similar meaning in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," that of the sands which "whirl to a pattern." Both are images of the cycles of time on the literal level but of eternity on the transfigured level.

On the eternal level, rings are divine because a ring symbolizes eternity. The idea here is not that of the

worm ouroboros, the serpent with its tail in its mouth, but of timelessness. "Moments are immortal" is Watkins' central paradox. As long as man is trapped in the time-space world, the fact of any given moment's having occurred persists. In the case of the tree, moments become immortal matter when the accumulation of clock time is seen in the revealing rings of age.

Watkins, like many Romantics, uses a tree--here the Biblical and Blakean Tree of Life--as a central symbol of the poetic process and the imagination. The rings of trees are therefore divine in the sense that all creative acts go to build the City in the way that moments build up the rings of years. In this grove of sycamore and oak, the human soul goes "lightfoot," resting lightly in time, knowing its heritage is elsewhere and beyond time. It also goes with light on the foot: Watkins likens flashes of inspiration to the light filtering through leaves, which a person wandering in a forest may see on his own foot as he steps in and out of lighted patches. This is a powerful image.

Forests represent the natural world, dark, frightening, the fallen equivalent of the Garden of Eden. After the Fall rivers became oceans and the Garden became forests; that is, natural things became dark perversions of themselves. They are also likely places to get lost in, just as temporal man may become so lost in the time-space world that he

forgets entirely about eternity. But Watkins has already, with the words "divine" and "immortal," reminded us of the imaginative plane. The soul is in a dark forest lit only by flashes of inspiration; he is the imaginative man who has not yet had a vision of the eternal and must still struggle (l. 6) in the dark forest that is the natural world and (inevitably) his own dark selfhood.

The shadow cast by the time-groves ("the penumbra of history"), which implies everything that they affect, is indeed impressive, in both the temporal and eternal senses. The shadow of clock time is the fallen world, which Watkins elsewhere calls "the sleep of Adam's tree" ("The Tributary Seasons," CA, 72). It is not at all unusual for a given set of symbols to be negative in one perspective and positive in the other. The shadow of the Tree of Life is the City of God.

"Darkness of the sycamore" continues the negative imagery. It flies across the river because its influence is pervasive and omnipresent. The Thames is mentioned because moving water is another image of time. It may have been chauvinistic of Watkins, or merely ungallant, but the rivers of Wales--Tawe, Teifi, Usk, and Wye--usually represent the waters of Paradise, while the Thames signifies the dark water of a lower region. (In "Westminster Bridge" the Thames is the Styx, which the living dead cross, "coincanked in dubious disguise.") In any case, the Thames

of this poem is the fallen river, not, as in Blake, the resurrected.

The spirit that went "lightfoot" in the first stanza has fallen afoul of clock time. It struggles to overcome the fallen world through imaginative acts. The "pattern of foliage" is both the shadows of leaves lighted from above and, more importantly, the over-all pattern of the centuries (l. 1). Again, even the negative side of the image has a positive aspect, for patterns do not appear by themselves in either world. The spirit struggles through "meshes like memories." The intertwined branches of the trees form a net to catch the soul and reduce it to the fallen perspective. The meshes are like memories because, as the branches form nets, so the units of time that the trees represent make up memories, whether of men or of nations. The concept of memory is largely sinister in Watkins as in Blake. In the theory of poetry Watkins came early to believe in, poetry is not made of recollection in tranquillity, but quite the opposite: re-creation in heightened activity. (Wordsworth came to the same conclusion.) Watkins was not a subtle theorist, as his prose, however pleasant, shows, and the contemporary Romantic defense of poetry he hoped to write in his old age was not finished. But the sinister use of "memories" cannot be explained otherwise than by reference to his theory. Memories are past events seen from the fallen perspective

and lead inevitably to imitation and, eventually, mechanical abstract philosophy and other pointless exercises. Re-creation, whether of something "past" or external or not, partakes of the divine perspective. Any theory of art based on memory or, by extension, imitation, is therefore pernicious.

Watkins' pronoun reference is sometimes difficult, but "their" probably belongs to "memories" and "woven" to "meshes." That is, the meshes are woven of the "terror" of memories, which are terrible because they tie the struggling spirit to the fallen world. But the spirit emerges from these meshes (I read "struggling . . . wondering, emerging"), signifying that time can be overcome. It emerges "wondering," for it is first seeing from the divine perspective. This is an image of new birth. A forest, with its constant reproduction of life and of death, serves as a symbol of the reproductive process. Seen from the perspective of time this constant death and rebirth is unfortunate, for if the creation did not put forth life time would have no power at all, and the last sequoia falling in the last forest would mark the end of its domination. The poem was written before man had acquired the power to cause this end, but Watkins immediately recognized the possibility. But seen, as here, from the eternal side, the same image serves to represent rebirth--not metempsychosis, which is a particularly vicious manifestation of

cycles, but a genuine rebirth into the new Adam. And there is no doubt who this Adam will be: he is the creative man who this time will choose the Tree of Life.

"Thought" in this case is a reference to the ideal realm, the line being an echo of Wordsworth's child who trails clouds of glory. The new-born soul is still wrapped in threads, like a butterfly from the chrysalis--this continues the mesh image--and the still-wet threads of thought from the ideal realm glitter, reminding man of his origin outside time. But thought also implies ratiocinative processes, which have no place in either poetic creation or matters of faith, both of which are inspired. This is not to say that the poet never thinks, but that he finds all systems of thought equally fallacious and merely uses them as his inspiration dictates, just as he does not care to imitate fallen nature but uses it as image and symbol, as he pleases. (In this sense, and in this alone, the utterly impractical Welsh poet was something of a pragmatist.) I do not think this belief of Watkins is necessarily another influence of Blake; he often spoke strongly against the adoption of systems in interpreting human existence. He was fond of remarking, with a slight curl of the lip, "I know the meaning of no word ending in 'ism.'"

The re-born soul draws the "life-skein," a slightly inaccurate umbilical-cord image, out of a "mythical and

gleaming" earth. The "thread" glittering upon the spirit's fingers is from the higher realm, but he is still linked by a "life-skein" to the temporal world, "mythical" here suggesting "cyclical." An umbilical cord is itself a symbol of the linkage between cycles. The reborn soul cannot wholly escape the fallen world, just as Taliesin realizes time is passing though his vision is out of time; poems are made of images from that world. "Still" means "yet" or "nevertheless" or (just possibly) "quietly." Another cause of Watkins' obscurity is his occasionally allowing the same word ("still") to mean two different things in the space of half a line.

The "life-skein" also suggests the life-thread of classical myth. The spirit, or imaginative person, is equated with the Fates in one small sense only, that he too can create or destroy. But stanza three does suggest a sinister image, when one tries to visualize it, of a mythic male figure operating ("draws...wound") a spinning wheel.

The phrase "mythical and gleaming" illustrates a favorite trick of Watkins, the unattached qualifier that hangs between two objects and often means something slightly different in relation to each. "Mythical and gleaming" looks back to "dark earth" and forward to "he." Earth, here being Mother Earth in a pejorative way, is of course dark--wombs are dark and humus is dark. But the earth is

"mythical and gleaming"; it is of unfathomable antiquity, and gleaming in the sense of "shining" and "attractive." The imagination cannot help being attracted by the real beauty it perceives even in fallen nature, which gleams at least partially because mythical.

The spirit, or poet (for such he is, and his name is Watkins), is also "mythical and gleaming." The great myths all contain archetypes of the imagination: Prometheus, Baldur, Myrddyn, Buddha, Taliesin, Jesus. Even though the same myths glorify and perpetuate the cycles of fallen nature, "mythical" is not pejorative when applied to the poet, but emphasizes the universality of his claim to inspiration. He is gleaming because newly born, another hint of a reference to Wordsworth's great "Ode." The "life-skein" is mythical, as mentioned above, in the classical sense; but on the eternal plane it suggests not the hastily-cut thread of mortal life but the indestructible "golden string" that, wound up, leads us to Blake's Jerusalem gate.

"Flying ever forward" seems redundant, but perhaps Watkins meant to emphasize the speed at which mortal time passes for those on a different plane. It is not the poet's hand that is dead, but that of the being winding up the skein. One can only speculate on the identity of this third hand. "Wound" indicates that the "life-skein" is collected on a spindle, to be preserved or used. The poet creates life, spinning it out of the earth. What he creates

must be preserved, so it is "wound." As Watkins was a Christian mystic, perhaps the "dead hand" is that of Christ, who for the Christian artist must be the first archetype of the imagination. A more sinister interpretation which fits the classical reference and balances stanza 3, is that the "dead hand" is Fate.

The spirit, now called "energy" because of Watkins' emphasis on creation and because a man functioning on the creative level is closer to energy than to flesh, dances on the wet ground. Watkins takes Yeats' image of the dance and makes it representative of the artist creating in pure joy without a thought of application. The dance is also a frequent symbol of a mystical apprehension of the universe. The energy is light in both senses of weightless, because liberated from the useless mortal flesh, and of the noun "light." The image also echoes l. 3. He dances "lighter on the learmould" presumably to avoid stirring it up; in two poems contemporary with "Thames Forest" Watkins remarks that "the skeletons of leaves have rest" and that the poet toils "to set the dead at rest." Therefore it seems that, in this poem at least, the poet does not wish to disturb the dead, here represented by dead and decaying leaves, a fairly common image deriving perhaps from Shelley. The energy "rises to the sunbeam" because its essence is light.

While the poet dances, the shadow of l. 3--here, as

"black" indicates, the time-shadow--is also flying, or moving forward in linear time. It asks "of the dead leaf / Garment for burial," which echoes the idea implicit in "leafmould," that moments are buried in the fallen leaves. Time is also buried in leaves in that they support new growth, thus ensuring the perpetuation of cycles.

This stanza is lovely. The divine impulse, poetic energy, dances and rises to its proper level of light. Its enemy and opposite, clock time, seen as a shadow of the natural world, finds its proper level in the "leafmould" at the poet's feet.

But the fact of the physical world cannot be denied. The poet is "stilled"--made still or hushed--"on the charmed world." It is not his business to be awed; his function is to understand and create. When the world appears to be charmed, the poet is being drawn away from his task. He looks upward, beseeching a transcendental God for the answer to the tree-roots' riddle (ll. 19-20), but he is "stunned" by the voice of fallen nature speaking to him from the roots. Elemental nature, whose usual attitude towards any attempt to transcend it is scorn, speaks of the life as "strange-born," or inherently foreign to the world of sense. This reflects the tendency of the unimaginative to scorn the poet on the grounds of strangeness or impracticality, as if familiarity and obtuseness were virtues. Nature warns the poet that he will die, speaking in a tone

of incomprehension that one should dance today who will die tomorrow. This is always the attitude of the sensible, or fallen, mind toward the work of the artist. Why should a man paint or write when his work is bound to crumble into dust? "Oracle" is ironic. The worldly mind conceives of itself as wise, and speaks as though it knew all, but its condemnation of the artist shows that it is lacking a plane of existence. Watkins does not condemn the fallen senses because they exist, nor the common man because he wishes to enjoy sensual pleasures; that would be to blame every man for Adam's fall, not Watkins' attitude. Instead, he hopes that man will come to appreciate the spiritual plane as well. Given our time and place, the two planes are not incompatible in the life of a man. Watkins was no prude, and he appreciated sensual pleasures all the more for his understanding of them.

The superb sixth stanza continues the imagery of fallen nature and its incomprehension of eternal man. The stanza is about the tenacity of life in the fallen world and its perverse preference for that level of existence. Like most Romantics, Watkins sees nature as constantly changing and full of burgeoning life, and here he reminds us that such change goes on invisible to man. The dumb roots tell by their very existence that man is fallen. The light that "breaks in darkness" is here, as elsewhere in Watkins, the germinating seed. "Trance-wise" repeats the idea in

"stilled" and "charmed"; the seeds break and grow in a charmed state, the self-perpetuating cycle of the seasons. The poet's sorrow is intensified by the realization that the seeds, and all perpetuators of the fallen world, do so without any comprehension of the cycles of misery they are extending.

"Vellum" does not imply that the meadow looks like wrinkled green parchment. The poet has function in mind, not appearance: vellum either binds or is itself written upon. Here, what the meadow-vellum binds is the Book of Nature, an image Watkins also uses in "Music of Colours--White Blossom..." and "The Turning of the Stars." But the vellum is also written upon; far from seeing the meadow as Wordsworth's "speaking face of nature," Watkins, like Blake, sees it as a manuscript page upon which he must inscribe his impressions of mortal life and immortal. The general impression left by the stanza, of the fallen creation endlessly and mindlessly reproducing itself in darkness and in trance, is lightened by this reminder, that the poet takes all nature as his book.

The light imagery continues. As before in the poem, it suggests the creative impulse, which sheds light on the "dark earth," the mysteries of the fallen world. "Light is a great pool" is just a reversed cliché, "pool of light," referring to the sun's rays hitting a bare patch in the forest, but there is more. At any given time only so much

creative power exists among men, and this amount, if that is the right word, does not change; hence there is a pool, or reservoir, of "light." The comparative artistic dryness of certain periods of history is the result of the wilful perversion of the artistic impulse into matters less than artistic, such as the freak Warhol's freak soup cans, or into sterile, abstract, verse such as the undoubted geniuses of Pope and Johnson were guilty of. That such a "pool" exists helps the imagination, for it enables a poet or artist to partake of the "sensibility"--Watkins' word--of a previous artist. Watkins told me that he felt he partook of the "sensibility" of Taliesin and possibly of Blake. I also think this is part of what Blake meant when he "became" Milton.

The flying clouds are but an echo of the "life-skein, flying"; that is, another time-symbol. As in Blake (Watkins spent the 1930's reading Blake when he was not actually working) the heavens are but further symbols of the cycles of time, cold and abstract, flying through nothingness to eventual dissolution. The poet addresses the reader with urgency and a touch of exasperation--we have so much to do, and so little time.

"Deliberate," modifying "man," contrasts with "trance-wise" of stanza 6. Man alone has the potential of breaking the cycle of death and birth. He may choose to remain in the world or to transcend it. Those who prefer the

latter "scrawl" on leaves. The pun on "leaves" is instructive, for one who writes on a page aids the eventual downfall of time. "Scrawls" is not entirely ironic, for Watkins believed that there should always be an element of nonchalance in a poem.

The fallen/eternal symbolism is clearly seen in "These leaves are numbered." For the temporal mind, the thought of a definite limit to the world is frightening, as is the idea of death, which is really the same thing. But seen from the eternal perspective, this line is positive. The leaves are numbered in the Biblical sense, as the hairs of one's head are numbered, and in the sense that an end of the material world is implied.

The central tree image, the Tree of Life, returns in the eighth stanza. "Fate" is another word for the shadow of the first and fourth stanzas, and for time. Fate is simply time seen from the fallen perspective and personified by the unimaginative who thus seek to worship and placate the unknown and who do not perceive that the world they choose to live in follows the cycles of the seasons and of history. Fate "deforms" the branches of the tree because even the imagination can be dragged down, and sometimes defeated, by the sense world. If an artist grows blind with the years, he does not lose the imagination, to be sure, but his effectiveness as a communicator to men of their truths is lessened. In any case, even the imaginative die.

To the insensitive mind, this is the final defeat, so that even the great struggle pointlessly against it, as in Marlowe's Tamburlaine.

The "torment" of l. 31 is the process of time and its horrors. The struggle of "Fate unforeseen" and "the great tree" is the source of the "evocative ritual" of the seasons. The fingers belong to the "dead hand" of l. 12. "Evocative" is realistic in that spring does call out the "dumb roots" and breaking seeds, but it also reminds us that spring has traditionally been a time of special significance for poets. For Watkins it is usually a time of distress rather than joy, a time of conflict between the cyclical spring and its eternal archetype of permanent rebirth. The torment, then, is not simply the struggle of vast forces going on above the heads of most men, but the poet's personal grief. The ritual of spring is also evocative in the sense that the poet, more than any other man, not only appreciates its material beauty but also perceives how permanently beautiful it could be on the transfigured plane, or how stunning it would be to senses superior to the temporal five. It is horrible to the poet that the "evocative ritual" of spring, which he loves in spite of himself, should be produced by the tyrannous cycles he hates.

The last stanza continues the imagery of stanza 3. "Him" refers to the poet, who is the weaver suddenly abandoned by time, his loom left to operate by itself. Of course

time forsakes him; it owes him nothing. This poem, like "The Collier," touches on several aspects of the poet's life, his birth (stanza 2), duties (stanzas 3, 4, and 7), struggles (stanzas 2 and 8), and death. When the poet dies, the loom of fate, which he has been with difficulty controlling, is left to grind out the fabric of the universe --cycles, seasons, and suns.

This poem, like "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," ends on an anti-climax, perhaps lamely. It is one of the few Watkins poems in which the eternal struggle of the imagination versus time ends in a draw.

The "immortal moment" of "Thames Forest" and of "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," the moment that changes a man's life and serves thereafter as a base for all endeavor, is also the subject of Watkins' major poem "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd." The 593-line ballad, with its equally lengthy companion piece "Ballad of the Outer Dark," is much too long to be commented upon here, but it must be mentioned. Briefly, one way of seeing the central allegory is this: the Mari Lwyd is the imagination, the Muse, a goddess of the underworld (for, like Blake, Watkins sometimes equates the imaginative man's "hell" with the unimaginative man's "Eden"), an intruder from the world of the dead, leader of the world's outcasts. She leads the Dead, who are the artists, poets, and other imaginative people, cast out by the Living, who are men of sense, the unimaginative. Very

generally, the Dead are beyond time, the Living in it and engrossed by it.

The two groups meet at midnight on New Year's Night; that is, "the last night of the year," or what Americans call New Year's Eve. The durationless instant between 12:00 of New Year's Eve and 12:00 of the first morning of the following year is the single most important unit of time for Watkins. (There is no point in arguing that it is an artificial distinction, or that Watkins made the error, familiar to ancient philosophy, of interpreting as discontinuous what is continuous. Of course he makes both errors, or, rather, adopts them for the sake of the symbolism.) It is the moment at which the eternal perspective conquers the fallen, at which the imagination conquers time. That the Dead eventually trade places with the Living is not revealed until the end of the sequel, "Ballad of the Outer Dark," for both works are really more about the tension between the two groups than anything either side actually does. (I understand this makes stage performance difficult.) Watkins calls the moment in which the imagination confronts time "the moment of conscience":

It is New Year's Night.  
Midnight is burning like a taper. In an hour,  
in less than an hour, it will be blown out.  
It is the moment of conscience.  
The living moment.  
The dead moment.

("Ballad of the Mari Lwyd,"  
BML, 69)

The word "midnight" occurs 161 times in the poem,  
mainly in the five refrains.

A knock of the sands on the glass of the grave,  
A knock on the sands of the shore,  
A knock of the horse's head of the wave,  
A beggar's knock on the door.  
A knock of a moth on the pane of light,  
In the beat of the blood a knock.  
Midnight. Midnight. Midnight. Midnight.  
Hark at the hands of the clock.

(BML, 72)

Structurally, this repetition helps tie together a poem that has some vagueness; more important, while the disputants put forward their sides in the case, the repetition of "midnight" reminds the reader that the real subject of the poem is time. Not the passing of time: the entire ballad, both parts, is conceived of as having very little duration, of taking a minimum of mortal time. It is just before midnight in the prologue, and midnight throughout the main body of the poem. It is true that Watkins requested that the BBC taping of the Ballad be accompanied by the ticking of a grandfather clock. (I recall how miffed he was at being forced to settle for a metronome.) The ticking is meant to emphasize the importance of time, not its passing.

Much is done, not as obviously as the above example, to emphasize that the real conflict is between time and eternity, not life and bodily death. When the Dead claim that their Mari, a ribbon-decked horse's skull,

knows all from the birth of the Flood  
To this moment where we stand  
In a terrible frost that binds the blood  
In a cramp that claws the hand,

(BML, 74)

they claim for themselves what we have seen was Taliesin's:  
the destruction of time through knowledge, even omni-  
science. They, too, have lived in many times and places:

'O pity us, brothers, through snow and rain  
We are come from Harlech's waves.  
Tall spears were laid on the mountain.  
We hid in the warriors' caves.

. . . .

We hid all night in the cowl of the wave;  
Chariots and kings we saw  
In Goliath darkness, bright and brave  
Felled by an ass's jaw.'

. . . .

We bring from white Hebron  
And Ezekiel's Valley,  
From the dead sea of Harlech  
And mountain-girt Dolgelley,  
All that singing way  
From Cader to Kidwelly . . .

. . . .

Deeper sadness knowing  
Than death's great melancholy,  
We journeyed from Calgarw,  
From that skull-shaped hill.'

(BML, 74, 75, 77, 78)

Time is said to be extinguished, at least (paradoxically) for the duration of the Ballad:

Locked-out lepers with haloes come.  
Put out the clock: the clock is dumb.

(BML, 71)

The Announcer of the Ballad is speaking, directing us, the reading or listening audience, to put aside our concepts of fallen time. When the clock is extinguished, time is gone just as light is gone when a lamp is put out. The

clock is dumb, in the sense of not ticking and because the idea of clock time is stupid and unimaginative.

The Dead have escaped time through, of course, death; but death here means not so much bodily death as a separation from the normal so profound as to seem death from the fallen perspective. These men and women have separated themselves physically:

'Starving we come from Gruffydd Bryn  
And a great meal we have lost.  
We might have stayed by the fire of the inn  
Sheltered from the frost.

(BML, 73)

spiritually:

A starlit crucifix hits their knees  
And a chain of bloodstained beads  
Drops to the fork where the fingers seize  
Their good and evil deeds.

(BML, 83)

and imaginatively:

'She has those precious secrets  
Known to the minstrel solely,  
Experienced in the marrow,  
Quick to tame beasts unruly.'

(BML, 78-79)

As always, the fallen world does not perceive the eternal, and to the Living the Dead, or Exiles, are mad, profane braggarts, all the things Plato's cave people call the discoverer:

now they tear through the frost of the ground  
As heretic, drunkard and thief.

. . . .

Hark, they are coming back, those fellows  
Giving the stars another name,  
Blowing them up with a pair of bellows  
From a jumping, thumping, murderous flame;  
Men of the night with a legion of wrongs,  
Fists in the dark that shudder with shame,  
Hated lechers with holy songs,  
Bastard bodies that bear no name.

(BML, 7C, 77)

But there is more to the exiles' transcendence of time than this separation, however terrible, and the condemnation by their fellow men. An artist may live miles from any center of civilization and shun the company of all but his own kind, which anti-social act accomplishes the essential separation, but it is in creativity that he escapes time. The Living seem to have some idea of this; in the passage just quoted, they refer to the Dead, with bewilderment and resentment, as

those fellows  
Giving the stars another name.

The sensible mind sees no reason to tamper with the stars as we know they are: he can see the shadows on the cave wall!

The Dead have struck unerringly at that very place where for Watkins the temporal and eternal worlds come together:

For they have burrowed beneath the graves  
And found what the good gave most:  
Refuse cast by the righteous waves  
In fossil, wraith and ghost.

(BML, 70)

This "refuse," as the Announcer calls it, is that body of immortal deeds which go make the great City. That the Mari and her disreputable crew have "burrowed beneath the graves" indicates that they have found the place "where contraries are true."

In an effort to escape the cycles of myth and history without losing their poetic value, Watkins tries here and elsewhere to draw all those myths with which he is familiar to a focus in the uncommon rite of the Mari Lwyd. Despite the love born of long and welcome familiarity, I am not sure Watkins succeeds here. Eliot is more successful at the same sort of thing in "The Waste Land," and David Jones more successful still in In Parenthesis and The Anthemata. But the tactic, even if more fortunate elsewhere, accounts for some stunning juxtapositions in the Ballad of pagan and Christian myth. "Mari Lwyd" is Welsh for "Grey Mare," and the New Year mummers carry as a symbol of their right to challenge the Living a ribbon-decked horse's skull, which is addressed as "a white horse frozen blind," "the horse ...of the wave," "A horse's head in the frost," and "Mari foaled of the starry skies." But superimposed on the Welsh folk tradition is the Christian; Mari is also Mary. (Hence the reference to Mari's being "foaled by the starry skies," which is either an Immaculate Conception of sorts or suggests being put in foal by the starry skies.) This synthesis in itself puts time out of joint:

'Great light you shall gather,  
For Mari here is holy;  
She saw dark thorns harrow  
Your God crowned with the holly.'

(BML, 78)

A later poem on the mystery of time is "Taliesin at Pwlldu," a companion piece to "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision."

#### Taliesin at Pwlldu

Through leaning boughs I see the veil of heaven,  
Through leaf-ears fluted from ancestral playing  
To inward darkness, to the windblown tree,  
Marvel of time, caught in a living cell,  
Daphne enshrined, in this pure moment given  
To air, all leaves!

I look, and hear them saying:  
'In boundless light only the bound are free';  
And music flows through me as through a shell.

Clear is the shell upon these watery sands  
And, washed with light, leaves break in these dark  
woods.

Streams dance and glitter, and the rocks have veins.  
My Master from the rainbow on the sea  
Launched my round bark. Through darkness, trailing  
hands,

I drifted. Wave-gnarled images of gods  
Floated upon the whale-backed water-plains.  
I looked; creation rose, upheld by Three.

And there are three about me where I stand.  
Ah secret place within the source of tears  
Caught by stream's light, uniting all that's gone:  
Pure stream, by pebbles masked and changing skies,  
I touch you; then I know my native land.  
Pride cast the pattern from primaeval years,  
The avenger's knives in glacier-driven stone  
Changed by God's peace, transfixed where morning flies.

(F, 37)

Clearly Watkins never lost interest in describing the "immortal moment" of visionary perception, here called the

"pure moment given / To air." I do not think it necessary to speculate whether the experience described in the several Taliesin poems (others are "Poet and Goldsmith," "Taliesin in Gower," "Sea Chant," and "Woodpecker and Lyre-Bird") is the same mystical moment, for the whole point of the experience is that time is obliterated. Mystics go on to visions, and, on a higher level, contemplation, beyond the original one. I would say that the vision of "Taliesin at Pwlldu" belongs to stage one of the Mystic Way and that of "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision" to a later development, probably the third stage, Illumination. In any case the reader finds the distinction unnecessary.

As in "Thames Forest" the bard is looking through leaves upward to the ideal realm. "Through" also indicates that the trees are agents in the vision; very often in Watkins, as to a lesser degree in Wordsworth and a greater in Blake, nature serves as an agent to transcend itself and, when the vision is over, as a set of symbols to describe the experience. "Veil of heaven" is in both the Platonic and mystic traditions; the mystic often regards the temporal world as a veil of the eternal. Taliesin-Watkins sees through the "leaning boughs" and "leaf-ears fluted" to "inward darkness," which reminds us of both the dark Thames-side forest and the cave of Taliesin's later vision. The bard lowers his gaze from the highest boughs to the center of the copse, where he perceives a "windblown tree," the "great tree" of

"Thames Forest," the Tree of Life. The wind that strives to "lay it in the low field" is the ill wind of perpetual change, of time. The "inward darkness" that is literally no more than darkness at the centre of a dense copse near Pwlldu on the Gower coast becomes the Divine Dark. (If the phrase "to inward darkness" is taken to modify "ancestral playing, which it well may, Watkins' slippery syntax being what it is, I do not see that the meaning changes, for the "inward darkness" to which the leaves play can ultimately be none other than their Creator.) The "wind-blown tree" is what time marvels at, for it cannot be destroyed by all time's wiles. The literal or temporal tree, here a laurel though elsewhere Watkins prefers sycamore or oak, is a "marvel of time" because of its growth through the years and of course because its rings reveal its age.

The line "To inward darkness, to the windblown tree," with its parallel phrases, seems to indicate that the darkness and the tree are equivalent on a literal level as well as the symbolic. But I cannot imagine Watkins putting on his bardic mask and Taliesin robes to announce that trees are dark inside.

The syntax of this first stanza is difficult, even awkward. Either Taliesin sees through the boughs to the darkness and to the tree or the leaf-ears are "fluted from ...playing / To ancestral darkness." The question is: to what--poet or leaves--is the phrase "to inward darkness,

to the windblown tree" attached? In the former, less complicated reading the bard is given a more active part; it implies that he perceives the veil and struggles to pierce it, hoping to see the "inward darkness." "Leaf-ears" repeats "boughs" in l. 1, but "boughs" is more literal; the leaves of l. 2 have become "fluted," or convoluted, through long development ("ancestral playing"). Taliesin is highly conscious, indeed nervously so, of time; seeing the leaves, he thinks of their ancestral development rather than of their beauty or their place in nature. He marvels not at the strength or majesty of the "windblown tree" but at the way it captures time in its living cells (or, more strictly, is a living cell that captures time). Watkins used to deny that he was obsessed with the paradoxes of time, but these lines alone give him the lie.

The alternate reading, "from ancestral playing / To inward darkness," would indicate "having become sensitive or attuned ('fluted') through the race-long process of interpreting the outer world to the inner," which as we have seen is the function of nature in the poem. "Playing / To inward darkness" also recalls the brooding inwardness of the seed or leaf-bud communing with itself darkly in the days before germinating or uncoiling. In any case, it is really Taliesin's perception that is "fluted": man's sensitivity has, over the years, far outstripped the development of the leaves. Because of this, and because Taliesin

represents the primitive, Watkins at first emphasizes the senses and their functions. The first stanza, which depicts the bard just before and at the beginning of his vision, recalls primitive man's greater reliance on the senses. "see," "leaf-ears," "fluted" (for a musical metaphor may be implied as well), "playing," "look," "hear," "saying," and "music" are all words invoking the senses. The second octet has "light," "glitter," and "looked," the third, only "light" and "touch." By the third stanza, Taliesin has endured a Christian vision, or even transformation, and neither "light" nor "touch" implies any literal senses.

The reference to Daphne reminds us again of Taliesin's unique awareness of all times and places and of Watkins' desire to fuse the myths into one timeless myth. Whether or not the historical Taliesin knew the Graeco-Roman myths --they could hardly be part of his bardic training--the mention of unfortunate Daphne's metamorphosis is more than an oblique literary reference. For Taliesin, the tree is a repository of divine life; he takes the myth more literally than ever the Romans did. The tree is a "marvel of time" (one of Watkins' characteristic unattached phrases) partially because it represents for him that durationless fragment of time when the tree was neither Daphne nor Apollo's tree. "To air, all leaves" is syntactically hopeless--both "moment given / To air" (meaning the divine vision itself) and "tree...given / To air" are possible. "All leaves," in

either case, repeats "leaf-ears," which are equally "given to air." The former reading perhaps strains the already difficult syntax ("I see...through leaf-ears...to the windblown tree...in this pure moment"), but the ambiguity is necessary to preserve the lovely phrase "in this pure moment given / To air" as a description of the mystic experience. The tree is also "given / To air," with "Marvel...enshrined" serving merely as modifiers of "wind-blown tree."

Taliesin continues to gaze at the leaves of the tree and hears them (all leaves) addressing him. Nature initiates the vision. The speakers indicated by "them" are ultimately the "three" of ll. 16-17, who speak through the leaves to the bard. Their message is at first cryptic: "In boundless light only the bound are free." The mystic moment reveals the eternal plane, Eden, the "heaven" of l. 1; this Taliesin perceives as "boundless light," which is the "great pool" of "Thames Forest." The bound are those who choose (as ll. 16-17 show) Christ, thereby seeming bound from the sensible point of view; but from the eternal perspective they alone are free. This must have seemed a very profound concept to a sixth-century pagan bard. "The bound" are also the poets who composed by strict rules, a group to which Taliesin already belonged. Watkins always argued that to ignore the rules of composition, especially metre and strict form, was to "leave the imagination in

chains."

As in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," the revelation is accompanied, and in part accomplished, by music. The bard compares himself to a conch being blown; like the leaves, he is "given / To air," the divine breath. This metaphor is especially interesting because it indicates to what extent Taliesin is being acted upon. Getting music from a shell is like getting blood from a stone, which happens in l. 11, and both are of a difficulty like that of forcing man to abandon his smug temporality and confront dangerous eternity.

Taliesin walks along the "watery sands," which are the "sea's edge" of "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision." As in that poem, the bard is in both realms: the metaphorical shell of l. 8 is also the real (and symbolic) shell of l. 9. The first octet shows nature initiating the vision and directly addressing the poet. The second gives Taliesin's perception of living nature, active and burgeoning, transfigured nature shown in its eternal phase. The shell is transparent; "clear" emphasizes that Taliesin sees beyond temporal nature, sees through to the greater reality it usually conceals. His vision is full of life and movement: the tide moves in, leaves break from their buds, light sweeps and splashes about the leaves, the streams "dance and glitter." In this world the rocks, temporally the lowest limit of existence, have (human) veins, pulsing with blood.

Suddenly Taliesin, perhaps in a trance-state, certainly in a state of heightened perception, recalls the trying experiences of his (second) childhood and sees them in a different light. After his contest of wits with Caridwen, he found himself placed in a coracle and set adrift. He floated, according to Watkins, across the Bristol Channel to Pwlldu ("I was cast ashore on wild Pwll-du"). The reader, glancing at a map of Wales, will suspect this last of being too neat a trick, it being unlikely that anyone cast adrift in Dyfed would end up on the Gower. But since it was psychologically important to Watkins that Taliesin be an inhabitant of the Gower, we will postulate a magic coracle and move on.

The cryptic lines 12-13a may refer to the bard's parentage. Charles Williams calls him the son of "Henwg the saint ...miracle-commissioned." Perhaps the reference to Taliesin's being launched from "the rainbow on the sea" echoes Williams' claim for a divine mission; it would, like the *Mari's* being "foaled" by the skies, indicate divine intervention from the start. In any case, "Master," usually meaning Elphin who fished him out of the weir, seems here to mean God. Taliesin, looking back at his trials from within the mystic vision, sees that his mission was divinely ordained.

In an almost surreal passage the terrible journey is described. Taliesin is a Moses figure, as shown by his

shining brow and his being found in a small boat by a royal person; he too rejects "images of gods" in favor of a newer, more philosophical religion. The darkness of l. 13 is Taliesin's pagan background, which afforded him little spiritual light. We are also reminded of the bard's primitivism by the wonderful lines 14-15. Watkins, with Blake and Wordsworth but against the taste of his own time, disliked the primitive, yet here he uses an Old English-like kenning for sea that is as good as "hwaæl-rode." The images of gods, "wave-gnarled" by the sea that is time the destroyer, float by making little impression on the pagan darkness or on the voyager. The "images," as shown by "gnarled," are probably tree-boughs. They float because they are dead and useless; the religions they represent are sterile and without substance. The boy afloat in his coracle does not realize this, of course; it is the mature bard's trance-like recollection that reveals, from its Christian orientation, the futility of pagan beliefs.

But even as a pagan the bard had experienced flashes of insight into the true basis of creation. Still a boy-- and a helpless boy on a singularly perilous journey at that --he looks, and sees that the fabric of creation, the temporal world, requires the incessant will of God to exist at all.

Taliesin's thoughts return to the present. The change from "Three" to "three" (which is not a misprint, as the

manuscript shows) is beautiful. Taliesin, aware as a youth of God as Creator only, has in maturity come to know the God of love. The dropping of the capital indicates not a lessening of respect, but a growth of familiarity and love. The pagan, though sensitive and upright, sees only the majesty of the Creation; the Christian, the love implicit therein.

In the first stanza, though the bard is devout, he is still looking upward and outward. The divine music flows through him, but he is still being acted upon. In the second stanza, the experience is more immediate than before, but l. 16 still shows outwardness. In the third, the experience is wholly immediate and internal. The "secret place within the source of tears" is "caught by stream's light," indicating that the internal vision is spurred by the outer, but, even here, the stream is more internal than not. In many of Watkins' poems the imagery is not so much a real thing as the act of perceiving it. The shell of ll. 16-17 is of no importance as an object on the shore; what is important is that Taliesin suddenly sees through it.

Time is distorted in the poem, or, rather, there are so many levels of time at once that time reference ceases. The first person present is the sixth century of Taliesin, the 1924/1925 of Watkins' earliest mystical experience, the "now" of writing--1966--and whatever year the reader happens to be reading. The classical reference is in the same

tense, for the tree is "Daphne enshrined" even as Taliesin speaks, but of course the reader casts his mind back to ancient Greece to identify the specific incident. Taliesin reflects on his childhood, then, in a flash of insight, on the Creation. The child Taliesin's vision of the Creation is so immediate that he loses time entirely. The first line of the third octet returns the reader to the present, whenever that is, of l. 1. But the rest of the stanza, in fact l. 18 alone, makes it clear that not time nor space but that realm which suffers neither is the subject of the poem. "Uniting all that's gone" is a reference to Taliesin's having lived in all ages and the complete collapse of time in a visionary flash.

The "secret place within the source of tears," which suggests the human eye on a literal level, should be synonymous with "pure stream" if the sentence is not a fragment. Certainly the streams that come from the eye are compared to Bishopston Stream. But the true "source of tears" is time, symbolized as usual by a running stream. The "secret place" within, or surrounded by, time is eternity, a secret to all but a few living men. Both the "tears" and the "secret place" are "caught by stream's light." The glitter of light on water surfaces acts for Watkins, as mist did for Wordsworth, as an announcement and concomitant of the visionary experience (no, Wordsworth was not a mystic). The "secret place" unites "all that's gone," obviously, but

so do tears. While I find in Watkins' poetry no mention of the Fortunate Fall, there is here at least a suggestion that one effect of time is that man must learn compassion. Tears of sympathy and grief "unit[e] all that's gone" insofar as they are creative or imaginative; a grieving or compassionate man is at one with all who grieve or sympathize. A chain of imaginative events unites man with the past. This line is another indication of transcendence of time in a vision.

"Pure stream" is at once the flood of tears from the human eye, pure in its imaginative essence; Bishopston Stream which wanders through lovely reserved land to Pwlldu; and the water of life, a river of Paradise. Grammatically it is the equivalent of "secret place," or the eternity hidden within temporal nature. The "pure stream," the water of life, is a "secret place" within temporal Bishopston Stream. In another poem about mystical vision in the Bishopston Valley, Watkins also uses the temporal stream as a mask of the eternal, which can be penetrated by imaginative desire:

Wait for no second stream in Bishopston Valley.  
 Once, once only it breaks. If you plunge your fingers  
 In the stream, all secrets under the Earth grow  
articulate  
 In a moment, and for you only.

("The Return of Spring," LU, 41)

Watkins put this paradox even more simply in the lovely Sapphic "Bishopston Stream":

Even by day you run through a continual darkness.  
Could we interpret time, we should be like the angels.  
Always against your sound there is a second river  
Speaks, by its silence.

(A, 71)

Pebbles mask the literal stream because they change its direction and appearance: they mask the eternal, "second" stream in that people see only them, the pebbles that represent time. Rocks are automatic symbols of time; pebbles even more so, having been worn down and rounded by the years. The "changing skies," synonymous with "veil of heaven" in l. 1, "mask" the "pure stream" as pebbles do. This is a reflection image. Reflections are automatically misleading and put things at a remove. If to look directly at the sky is to see a veil, here one sees a reflection of a veil.

Watkins' poetry is full of lovely tactile images. Here the bard rapt in vision touches the surface of Bishopston Stream. As the rock served in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," so serves the stream here. Taliesin touches not the temporal stream of pebbles and changing skies, but the pure, divine stream hidden under time. The bard's "native land" is of course Wales, but, as we know, his ultimate birth lay elsewhere. Charles Williams, in whose Taliessin Through Logres we see the chief source of Watkins' particular version of the bard's life, has him say:

My heritage is all men's; only my age is my own.  
I am a wonder whose origin is not known....  
I am more than the visions of men and my own vision,  
and my true region is the summer stars.<sup>7</sup>

When the bard touches the "pure stream," he becomes aware of the "summer stars," his true native land.

The reference to his native land reminds him of Eden and the origin of time in the Fall. As in stanza 2, while observing the stream he casts his mind back to wonders seen as the omniscient bard. As in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," the last few lines are sobering and anti-climactic. Line 22 is of irreducible ambiguity. It can be read "Pride (of Adam and Eve) threw away the (eternal) pattern out of the beginning of history" and (not or) "Pride set (as in casting metals) the (temporal) pattern ever since the primaeval years." "Pattern," as I have shown, is always a loaded word in Watkins' poetry. Taliesin laments that God's original plan for mankind was replaced by the cycles of time and matter; the central fact of the Fall, then, is not so much that Adam sinned (he was not meant to be perfect, although he was not meant to destroy Edén either) as that eternity had to be replaced with time. Nor has man, realizing that pride was the original cause of time, become less proud; indeed, pride has become part of the pattern. Worse, man has become proud of the accidents of time: proud of all the separations from his fellow men, proud of his pride. Considering how important the theme of time and man's perceptions of it is in Watkins' poetry, it is not surprising how many poems end downbeat.

The phrase "The avenger's knives...God's peace"

modifies "primaeval years," or, more precisely, is a parenthetical expression appropriately enclosed in commas. "Changed by God's peace," an uncharacteristically limp phrase, applies to "years," "knives," and "stone," all of which are synonymous anyway. "The avenger's knives" are the passing years, thrown at man one by one by an avenging God, the God of the Old Testament. The knives are of "glacier-driven stone," again emphasizing the slow passage of time. But it is only the Old Testament God who wishes to avenge himself on man for the latter's disruption of his plans. "God" in l. 24 is of course the Christian God, or the Christian way of perceiving God, who no longer seeks vengeance and has helped man to conquer time. "Changed," however, is a curiously weak verb to indicate this development, or anything else.

The reader is left with the phrase "transfixed where morning flies." It strikes me as largely synonymous with "Changed by God's peace," time being "transfixed" where God has the upper hand. In the context of the poem, it is Taliesin's vision that transfixes time, although he is still "where morning flies," in time's realm.

Certainly the problem of time preoccupied Watkins all his life. His own personal serenity only made him all the more aware that time is the greatest enemy of ordinary men. Yet he eschewed all the more obvious solutions, philosophy, science, or selective amnesia. He believed in the

immortality of the individual human soul and in general accepted Christian belief in the context of the Church of England. But he wanted to confront eternity in this life. Whether or not one chooses to believe him, the poems clearly say that he did.

### Chapter III

#### The Muse Is Not a Lady

Of Watkins' major themes, art is the easiest to single out. The poet is clear, specific and belligerent about his wildly unfashionable views on the subject. As a Romantic he continued to believe in the concept of the poet as a man apart, seer and unacknowledged lawgiver, a man whose insight penetrates the surface of things, a child of the divine fire, "isolated among his contemporaries by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits, that they will draw all men sooner or later,"<sup>1</sup> a sayer by birth, an eternal man who speaks "not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life," a "liberating god."<sup>2</sup> When Watkins died in 1967, the belief that poets are liberating gods died with him, which is probably just as well.

Watkins thought of poetic inspiration as the "Promethean element," thereby betraying the influence of Shelley as well as that of Emerson. What this element, symbolized by light or lightning, is, is suggested by "A Note on 'Earth-Dress'":

The will of Prometheus, which is also man's will, is right in defying the elements, but insofar as it defies the lightning itself, it represents

a warning to man. The lightning, poetic genius in one of its manifestations, godhead itself in another, is inaccessible to mankind except through a Mediator.<sup>3</sup>

Taliesin's identification of the three drops from the Cauldron of Inspiration with the Christian Trinity is thus explained: they are ultimately the same. The bard's preference for acts in a spiritually dark world when he could have had omniscience is also explained by this identification of poetic insight with the mystic experience:

The Promethean element in man's nature will endure anyway, so long as he does not lose the reflections of that eternity to which his soul belongs; but here he must trade in time; and the comfort and charity necessary to him are also found to be divine attributes.<sup>4</sup>

Taliesin loses nothing by giving up knowledge because his inspiration "will endure anyway" as long as he does not lose the freshness and immediacy of the original vision.

Imagination is the prime element in poetry. It is important, as we have seen, for the poet to know his times and his fellow men. If he does not he will produce academic verse, which rarely survives, or imitative verse, which is merely fashionable. Nor may he be divorced from the speech of the ordinary man:

Poetry that is divorced from...the speech-idiom of today runs a great risk of being artificial, and therefore losing its power to move.<sup>5</sup>

But it is not enough to be au courant; the inspiration must be there. It is better to risk being artificial than to risk losing the "Promethean element."

Poetry is, after all, artificial in structure; it is artifice, and the poet who believes only in the order of natural speech will neglect that other, compelling order, the order of imaginative emphasis.<sup>6</sup>

"The order of imaginative emphasis" means more than awkward syntax, though that may be a result. Watkins believed that imaginative poetry aims for timelessness, not reputation, and that the special concerns of the imaginative man may well transcend any obvious relevance. Surely it is better to aim for immortality and fail than to be Rod McKuen.

Watkins believed that the poet recognized his calling in a single crisis, a "revolution of the heart, such as Keats described in The Fall of Hyperion." He liked to quote (for example in his essay "The Poetry of Wilfred Owen") a famous quatrain of Blake's:

Each man is in his Spectre's Power  
Until the arrival of that hour  
When his Humanity awake  
And cast his Spectre into the Lake.

(Jerusalem, Plate 37, 32-35)

For Watkins, the moment in which his Humanity "cast his Spectre into the Lake" was a mystic revelation, as we have seen, though it may take many forms. For Siegfried Sassoon the moment in which his Humanity arose was that immortal moment when he threw down his rifle and refused to kill. Such a crisis may of course occur in the life of a man not an artist--Samuel Sewall, for example, became a man, and great, when he admitted his guilt by error in the Salem witch trials--but Watkins was primarily interested in the

necessity of such a moment in the life of the artist. Before this crisis, the poet may have been a woman or man of talent and technical ability (Watkins was), but the gift of the imagination was missing. It follows that a young person cannot, by definition, be a true poet; Keats and Rimbaud were the only two exceptions Watkins would admit.

Clearly the imagination, then, is the primary source of poetry, but it does not come to man in its pure state. Man, not as brave--or as foolhardy--as Semele, requires a "Mediator," whose origin is obviously divine, but whom Watkins often calls the Muse or even "The Instrument." He refused to elaborate his concept of the Muse whether asked by reporters, critics, scholars, film directors or his own students. In the graceful BBC film of the Watkins' daily life, Under a Bright Heaven, the poet is asked by the unseen narrator to explain his belief in the Muse. Watkins replies that he does not know who she is, never having met her face to face, but that she customarily interfered in his affairs and indeed insinuated herself into the most intimate situations. "I do not know who she is, but she is not a lady."

Watkins uses conventional symbols of the imagination. I have mentioned the Water of Life, the drops from the Cauldron, "poetic lightning" and the "great tree." Other images include birds, especially birds of prey; fire; wine, especially sacramental wine; Christ himself, lamps, as in

The Lamp and the Veil; the "great pool" formed by the souls of "mighty poets in their misery dead"; bread, both literal and sacramental. The movement of light on water is often an concomitant of inspiration.

Imagination and Muse aside, however, "The artist is a maker." Watkins frequently argued that the critical cliché that poetry holds up a mirror to nature is nonsense; nature is not worthy of imitation in the first place, and the poet is a maker, not an imitator. Poetry is artifact and need have relationship to the world of nature and human endeavor only as the poet sees fit. I once naively asked Watkins if poetry reflected the real world; he replied, "No; whyever should it?" Critics too often find against Watkins because his Gower and Swansea are not the "real" world. They are wrong on two counts. Watkins did not intend to represent the "real" world in any way, and it is hardly fair to judge him for not doing things he never meant; one critic found him "Too Timeless," obviously not appreciating his aims. The second difficulty lies in the tacit assumption that the grotesqueries of human history are somehow realer than the glories of the transfigured world. Which was real. to Galahad, the murdering lawless comfortless world in which he lived, or the Grail? I think Watkins found his gruesome bank job less real than the vision he describes in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision."

The poet does not imitate nature; he uses it as he



"Music of Colours--Dragonfoil and the Furnace of Colours," the overblown imagery of which kept haunting him until he finished the poem against his wishes. But so egotistical an explanation of his purpose never occurred to him. In his essay "Problems of Communication," published under the foolish title "The Joy of Creation," he argues that the need for communication does not arise until the work is finished, and therefore cannot be its cause or purpose. What is more, the artist or poet must forget this need, however strong, while engaged in composition:

A work will not wholly communicate itself unless the need of communication is banished. If the attention of the artist is intercepted by that need, the work will be incomplete.<sup>7</sup>

Nor is the function of art primarily education. Certainly that is part of its intent; in "The Feather," Watkins admits a didactic purpose:

I stoop to gather a seabird's feather  
Fallen on the beach,  
Torn from a beautiful drifting wing;  
What can I learn or teach,  
Running my finger through the comb  
And along the horny quill?

(LU, 49)

Many of Watkins' poems are consciously didactic in the same way: if the poet is a man of superior and different intelligence, it follows that his pronouncements may be enlightening. Thus do poets like Emerson, Wordsworth, Eliot, Yeats and indeed Watkins himself gain reputations as teachers

though they rarely thought of themselves as such.

Aesthetic pleasure is not the main function of art because such pleasure can be found in any number of other ways. For Watkins, the aesthetic element was largely a matter of form.

The one constant offered to the mind is unity within the possibilities of form, and this is what determines the artist's or poet's choice, the outline of his work. It is impossible to pay too much attention to form.<sup>8</sup>

Nor is the purpose of art the building of the poet's reputation. "A shallow artist is disenheartened by failure, but a shallow one is more likely to be disenheartened by success."<sup>9</sup> On the whole, he felt it bad for an artist to acquire a reputation in his own time. Vanity aside, the artist is likely to wind up imitating himself--Picasso and Watkins' friend Thomas are obvious examples.

For Watkins the purpose of art is the building of the City of God. It has been waiting for man since the world began, but he must build it himself. If the world was created in joy, may it not be restored in joy?

This is the crux of Watkins' poetic theory. This belief that man must build his own heaven, timeless and placeless, explains why he was so impatient of movements and fashions, so critical of the young poets and artists of his day, and so hurt when the thrust of his own work was misunderstood. If a man actually believes that only that work can endure which goes directly to the building of Paradise, he will be

easily disappointed with his contemporaires.

Along with Watkins' belief in the importance of form went an emphasis on metre and the music of verse:

I believe that lyric poetry is closer to music than to prose, and that it should be read as exactly as a musical score.<sup>10</sup>

As the quotation implies, Watkins undervalued prose.

Although he read prose written by poets and standard prose works as necessary reading at school, it is rarely safe to assume that he read any given work. During a pleasant dinner at the Watkins', the historian Neville Masterman asked me what book, beside the hypothetical collected poems of our host, I would take with me to the proverbial desert island. I amazed Dr. Masterman, and myself, by saying Moby Dick. Watkins looked up from his trifles and asked politely, "Indeed? And what is that?"

The inevitable influence of Arnold shows in his insistence on seriousness, but the reader need not take it to heart. Watkins wrote supposedly comic verse himself (I think "Poem to Conrad" in Fidelities is meant to be such) but published little. His solemnity and emphasis on timelessness often gave him an overly serious air, for which he was attacked by critics less worried than he about the City of God (for example, "Visionary, Drear," to which Watkins' only response was, "There is no such word as 'drear.'") Along with this somewhat Victorian solemnity went

a belief in the necessity of suffering, a tenet rarely held in these days of grants and fellowships. Watkins suffered sufficiently before his few grants arrived. "Suffering is a great teacher; we know nothing until we know that."<sup>10</sup>

Watkins was unconventional, even radical, in his insistence on the value of tradition. "Poetry must be ancient as well as fresh," he remarked more than once, and "Write for the dead." He encouraged respect for the achievements of the past, not for the past itself, which is automatically suspect because a creation of memory. He agreed with Emerson that "Every age must write its own books."

The actual writing of the poem proceeds by definite stages. First, of course, there is an inspiration, which may vary from subconscious meditation on a theme or image-set to the "blinding flash which makes mortals into seers." Watkins told me that he never chose the form, that it came to him as the poem progressed on paper. Numerous manuscripts show him struggling with problems of form very late in the composition. The long dramatic ballad "Mari Lwyd" occupied him for several months before he realized it was to be long, dramatic, or a ballad. The period in which he worked and reworked the poem was of course the longest, occupying from a few weeks to a few years. Shortly after his death I was invited to see the Seattle manuscripts, most of which are now in the University of Washington Library. Among the manuscripts of recent poems, some worked on in the

last few hours of his life, I found a yellowed piece of paper with a line from a poem published in 1945.

The poem would be finished with the help of a second inspiration. Watkins called his work "poetry of the second pressure," emphasizing the need of an inner voice or "instrument" to indicate that the poem was finished. "A true poem renews itself at its close" means both that the published poem renews itself for the reader and that the inspiration must be renewed for the poet.

Watkins claimed much more for poetry and for poets than anyone else in his century was likely to assert. Certainly he did not share that modern sophistication requiring the artist to deprecate his own and others' work. Though a mystic, he could never have been a priest, for poetry was his calling, and his vows were to the Muse. She was not a metaphor to him, not even a metaphor for divinity; I think he believed more deeply in her, as he saw her, than any poet has since Vergil himself. Sometimes, as an ironic sop to the century he was unfortunate enough to live in, he called her "The Instrument," a term which, by the way, Enrico Caruso, with a similar ironic perception, used to designate his voice. That the Muse occasionally decides to conceal whose side she is on is demonstrated by the highly ambiguous symbolism of the Mari Lwyd. Watkins' belief in a literal Muse who "called up words" so that the poet may "write them down" explains his hatred of critics and scholars,

uninspired idolaters all.

In Watkins' work there are several types of poems about poetry. I have mentioned the Taliesin poems, in which he associates poetic inspiration with the Beatific Vision, and the well-known bird poems such as "The Heron" and "Woodpecker and Lyre-Bird," in which nature and art are associated more closely than is usual in his work. More generally, there are poems about poets, of which "The Childhood of Holderlin" is the loveliest and most important; about poetic theory, such as "Demands of the Muse"; and what may be called background poems, about what it takes to be a poet, how a person decides to become one, and the risks involved therein, for example "Fidelity to the Living." Watkins, of course, never thought of his poems in categories.

I consider the tributes to Watkins' "affinities" and "fidelities" his weakest poems, a judgment he would have protested (but then he protested all judgment of poetry). He took his "affinities" with a chilling seriousness that made one wish for a handy copy of the Beerbohm drawing of Arnold. Perhaps his Welsh blood helps to explain this; the Welsh are hero-worshippers. Specifically, the old Welsh bards considered the writing of tributes, to royal persons and to other poets, an important function of their craft. The Romantics are not quite as prone to celebrating one another's genius as the bards were, but the worship of the

imagination is there.

Though Affinities and Fidelities, his last volumes, have this adoration as their main theme, it was important from his earliest publication. BML has "Yeats' Tower," "Portrait of a Friend," "The Mummy" (an elegy on Yeats), "The Shooting of Werfel," and "Discoveries." Of these, I find "Portrait" the most interesting, mainly because it is Watkins' first recorded commentary on Dylan Thomas, on whose poetry he had more than a little influence. In this poem we are told that it is the poet's function to announce truths, not argue or merely suggest them; he is not to theorize or speculate, but announce what he knows by imagination and insight to be true. For this purpose the poet has certain qualities like those of nature:

Who for annunciation has  
The white wings of the sheldrake,  
Labouring water's praise,  
The blind shriek of the mandrake...

(BML, 36)

"Annunciation" implies that Thomas, here representing the ideal poet, has certain prophetic duties. Watkins' ideal of the poet-prophet is usually represented by Blake, Yeats, or Holderlin. Here Thomas is an archetypal bard clothed with all the appropriate magical characteristics, but there is no connection with the historical Thomas.

The only poem obviously lauding an affinity in LU is the rather fulsome sonnet "Blake." In addition, "The Fire

in the Snow" praises what may be called the poetic instinct of his friend Francois Dufau-Labeyrie, and "Driftwood" is in direct imitation of Hopkins. "The Healing of the Leper" declares Watkins' admiration of Sandro Botticelli and shows how seriously he expected all great artists to share the same qualities:

What Sandro Botticelli found  
Rose from the river where we bathe:  
Music the air, the stream, the ground;  
Music the dove, the rock, the faith:

And all that music whirled upon  
The eyes' deep-sighted, burning rays,  
Where all the prayers of labours done  
Are resurrected into praise.

(LU, 77)

The "river" of the second line in the quotation is the water of life, partaken of by mortal men in baptism or in mystical vision. The river also symbolizes that "great pool" mentioned in "Thames Forest," the body of imagination that remains constant throughout the generations. Botticelli found inspiration in nature ("Music the air"), as every artist must who has elected to live in this world, but his deepest source is his faith.

In CA affinities are Alun Lewis, the Welsh poet killed young in World War II; Dylan Thomas; Donne, Beethoven, and Milton ("The Immortal in Nature"); Swedenborg ("Swedenborg's Skull"); Shelley and Keats ("In the Protestant Cemetery, Rome"). Of these, "Birth and Morning" (about Dylan Thomas)

and "Swedenborg's Skull" are among Watkins' finest poems. "The Immortal in Nature" is ambitious but uneven; it has quite the worst couplet I know of:

Beethoven's music nature could not stun.  
Light rushed from Milton.

(CA, 53)

"The Forge of the Solstice," also in CA, is a tribute to Watkins' friends David Jones, Alfred Janes, and Ceri Richards.

### The Forge of the Solstice

The best are older: with the unrest time brings,  
No absolute remains to bind them fast.  
One scrawls on rock the names of hallowed things,  
Letters and hieroglyphs that yet shall last  
When darkness measures with a martyr's eye  
The glories shed by life's unchanging tree.

Another, curbing vigour on his page  
To movement, makes the abounding life his own  
And rhythmic finds in a discordant age,  
Singing like living fountains sprung from stone,  
Those unifying harmonies of line  
Torn from creative nature. Light is born

Under believing fingers. Men refute  
By inward protest what their masters teach,  
Seeking a deeper meaning. One is mute,  
Fearing far more the heresies of speech  
Than watchful waiting. Figures move; they pass  
Across the cave. Before them flies heaven's glass,

And out of it now falls the winter sun,  
Leaving a ceaseless myth of moving waves,  
Till darkness quiets all things. Man is one:  
The identity survives its many graves.  
First was the hunter, then the prophet; last,  
The artificer, compounding in one ghost

Hunter and prey, prophet and witness, brought  
Into that circle where all riddles end.  
Love gives their art a body in which thought



The first of the "older" artists is David Jones, born in 1896 and 61 at the time of writing of this poem. Jones, a twentieth-century Blake, writes poetry (In Parenthesis, The Anathemata) and paints ("Merlin Appears in the Form of a Child to Arthur Sleeping," frontispiece to In Parenthesis, "The Annunciation in a Welsh Hill Setting"). "Scrawls on rock" is a reference to the artist's love of engraving words, sometimes names, on pieces of stone, knives, and the like. (My favorite is a knife handle reading, mysteriously, STEPAVLE; perhaps this, or the fat little stone that reads CYMRV, is among the artifacts referred to in l. 3.)

The reference to Jones' fondness for "scrawl [ing] on rock" reminds us of the inevitable envy of the poet, whose medium is words-on-paper or words-in-air, for the sculptor, whose medium is more durable (or at least was, before people made sculpture out of old pizzas and bicycle tires). "Scrawls" is good; the artist who is genuinely heedless of time yet confident of eternity can afford to spend his mortal hours "scrawling." The deeply religious Jones "scrawls...the names of hallowed things," in itself a religious and mythic act. The function of the poet is analogous, for he too is a namer. Watkins named "hallowed things" to a generation that had no interest or respect for them. This, regardless of his times, is the artist's function: to name both holy and profane, and to make his perception of them as permanent as he can. Jones' scrawlings will last

until temporal darkness, representative of every kind of lightlessness, a "martyr" (ironic) to the dawning of the city of light and love, "measures" (takes the measure of-- also ironic) the finally revealed wonders of the unchanging Tree of Life. Again, "when" does not refer to a measurable point in time. The imagery may be a little cluttered, but the point is clear.

"Another" is the artist and musician Ceri Richards (died 1972), whom Watkins admired deeply and loved as a friend. "Curbing vigour" reflects Watkins' conviction that Ceri's "images...belong to a clenched source of power."<sup>11</sup> When Watkins writes of Richards, what he says often applies equally well to himself. "The abounding life" is that fruitful artistic and religious life the poet himself aimed for and achieved. Like Watkins, Richards struggled in "a discordant age" to reproduce the "unifying harmonies of line / Torn from creative nature."

These four powerful lines deserve some comment.

"Discordant" means more than "lacking music," but describes our age not only because of the wars, pollution, systematic annihilation of races, atomic bombs and the like, but also because of the hideous turns the world of art has taken. It is not so much that the movements have degenerated, although they certainly have, as that there are movements at all. Watkins' rage at being classified with anyone's movement,

especially the highly misnamed Apocalyptic, was justified; his aim was to write timeless poetry. He did not even like being called Romantic if the term were meant to limit or classify him. "Discordant" is also a sour commentary on the feeble productions of all the century's poets save its greatest few. Watkins disliked the endless production, printing, and adulation of bad prose that deemed itself poetry because it did not justify. "Rhythmic," which modifies both "Another" in l. 7 and "harmonies" in l. 11, is the opposite of "discordant." Richards' life is "rhythmic" in that he exemplifies those artists who are engaged in the building of the City and because he is in harmony with creative nature. His work is rhythmic because of the man he is--another old-fashioned idea of Watkins'. "Rhythmic" also implies Watkins' belief that art is different from and better than things that are not art. Line 10 modifies "harmonies of line" as well as the artist himself. The "living fountain sprung from stone" refers to Exodus 17:6; art is miraculous, but Moses' ability to do miracles depended at least in part on his own virtue. "Harmony of line" is thus associated with the water of life, the river of Paradise, and the stream struck by Moses from the rock. These unifying harmonies represent metre and "metre-making arguments" in poetry, and technique, composition, and significance in art. Watkins was no scholar of art, but he knew that drawings of soup cans did not have "unifying

harmonies of line / Torn from creative nature." "Torn" repeats the idea in "vigour," that Richards' works are distinguished more for strength and verve than for delicacy and detail. Watkins also implies that the beauties of creative nature are inevitably "torn" from their source by the artist. "Creative nature" also means the artist's own nature, his inherent creativity. Inadequate art torn from the artist's own perceptions and sufferings, however narrow, is better than mere imitation. The "living fountain" is, as elsewhere in Watkins, art, which must find its images and metaphors in nature and time ("stone").

"Unifying" reflects Watkins' belief that a work of art must be a coherent whole, united by metre, music, and something worth saying. But rhyme, metre, and other aspects of form must not be imposed upon the subject from without.

"Light" is Watkins' usual symbol for a complex of artistic and religious truth, involving the artist-believer's personal vision and the benefit he hopes to bring to others. This light, then, is "born," which implies that it has come from another realm into this one, or at least from another state of being; it also implies that truth is always new to men. Every artist's perception is new to him and to his audience, at least in the particular form it assumes.

"Light" here specifically means one of Richards' paintings, "born" under fingers that believe in the artist's mission.

"Believing fingers" also emphasizes Richards' sincerity, a quality rarer in twentieth-century artists even than in poets. If the artist's very fingers do not believe in the worth of his painting, how can a potential audience do so?

Lines 13b-15a describe all three of the "older" artists as well as Watkins himself. He rejected Cambridge and the "masters" who told him he had no poetic ability; every poet in a general way rejects the work of his elders, or he would be a mere imitator. That Watkins qualifies this inevitable protest with "inward" is typical of his gentle rebellion against the times. He saw no point in outward protest, believing that a man's inner life was ultimately of more importance than his reputation. "Men... teach" comments on Richards' choice, like Watkins', of a tradition older and stricter than that he was taught. The effect on Watkins was a traditional art that was unconventional for his times; on Richards, an unconventional art. "Teach" rhymes nicely with "speech," but the choice is deliberate. Watkins thought little of academic learning.

The "One" of ll. 15b-17a is Alfred Janes, whose "Madonna and Child" hung in Watkins' living room. Janes was best known for meticulously detailed still lifes of fish and fruit, done in a careful painstaking way. "Mute" means simply that he did no writing; but it also implies

"inward protest." He feared the "heresies of speech," outward rebellion, more than "watchful waiting," the steady contemplation of his ultimate task. Watkins suggests, also, that speech is always dangerous, to the self because its sources are deep and to others because its results are always unpredictable. "Watchful waiting" is a compliment to Janes, the reference being Milton's sonnet, but it is also a small joke at his expense. Dylan Thomas asked Watkins, in a letter of April 27th, 1946,

How is that blizzardly painter, that lightning artist, that prodigal canvas-stacker? Has he reached the next finbone of the fish he was dashing off before the war?

(Letters to Vernon Watkins, 134)

I do not think Watkins really understood artists who could not express themselves in words. He adored art and music, but his experience and appreciation of them were comparatively uninformed. His ideal, not surprisingly, was Blake, whom he regarded as the supreme poet and supreme artist in English history. Janes' muteness makes him lesser.

The cave image of ll. 17b-18a is the familiar Platonic one, here offering a contrast to the artistic accomplishments of the previous lines; the cave, or the phenomenal world with its unawakened inhabitants, is also the object of the artist's "watchful waiting."

"Pass / Across...glass" is just clumsy, and certainly unlike Watkins in its harshness. From the deceptive

sky ("glass" here suggests mirror and hourglass) "falls the winter sun," emblem of sterility, which "leaves a ceaseless myth," time in the objective form of waves. The imagery may not be of a metaphysical purity--the winter sun does not cause the waves, nor does it fall out of a glass. Literal darkness no longer "quiets all things," but the darkness that for many mystics does symbolize a new world puts an end to "all things," all material objects. This apocalyptic imagery reinforces the similar idea in ll. 5-6.

Throughout the poem contemporaneity is contrasted with the eventual coming of eternity. Though a true artist, and David Jones beyond all doubt is such, may produce artifacts that will last to the end of time; though Ceri Richards certainly tapped the "living fountain" that Moses discovered in a different situation; though Alfred Janes sought and discovered the "deeper meaning" that affirms art through the centuries, still there is awareness of the incompleteness of each artist's work. Every artist must be aware that most men spend their time in the cave and see only the sun of time. Jones' artifacts are scrawled on rock; unlike the poet, he must deal with material things, must try to make a lasting impression on the phenomenal world. Like Taliesin, these artists must adjust their vision, not to the times, but to the "limitations of time."

Yet "Man is one." This is the most lasting perception of the mystic, and part of the given of any true artist.

"The identity" is not the Selfhood, the personality, but the Self, the "eternal man" (Emerson), the new Adam. Watkins sees man developing in three stages, hunter, prophet, and artificer. A man may repeat these stages in his own life: few are they who are born artificers (though Watkins may have been one). In this poem, Jones represents the hunter (though he certainly grew into an artificer), Richards the prophet, and Janes the artificer. The hunter is that man concerned entirely with temporal affairs; most men alive and dead are of this class. Jones humorously represents the hunter here, though no man cared less for the temporal, because he painted "The Hunt" and less humorously because he fought in World War I and, in spite of everything (detailed in In Parenthesis), still believed he did right. The hunter is he of purely physical instinct, who creates gods in his own image or those of nature; his life is spent in the pursuit of happiness. The prophet is a step higher in awareness. Here the term does not indicate Blake's concept of the prophet--Watkins uses "artificer" to indicate Blake's idea of the fully imaginative man. (When he speaks of Blake as a seer and prophet, however, he means it in Blake's own sense.) The prophet here is the critic of society and the interpreter of law, Biblical, social, and moral. He cares more for man in general than for himself, but he is still aware of his own importance. He has considerable vision,

but is still convinced of the importance of the temporal. Some very great artists and poets belong in this group, the term "prophet" being loose, as do all statesmen and rulers. The third category--if anything so vague can be called a category--is the artificer, the true artist. Janes here, also humorously, represents the artificer because of his emphasis on preparation, painstaking and detail. The maker-sayer-namer may not claim direct licence from God as the prophet does, but his inspiration is ultimately from that source. Semi-divine, he summarizes in himself the development of the races. "Hunter and prey," his sympathy is with both: "I praise the falcon and the dove," he says in "Buried Light." "Prophet and witness," he knows the law but understands the transgressor. He brings them --all the rest of mankind, in effect-- "Into that circle where all riddles end." The "circle" here is not the familiar serpent-tail image, for in that circle riddles continually begin and are never answered. "Circle" implies here "gathering of intimates," which is surely what the poet envisions for his "placeless and timeless heaven." Man is one in that circle, and that he ends there is largely the work of the artificer.

"Love gives their art a body." The true material of which art is fashioned is love, of God, of the other sex, of mankind. Watkins does not mean the stereotype of the

smitten half-crazy lover who sits down to pen romantic tributes to a "not impossible she." That sort of thing may get him into her bed, but it will not assist the building of the future City. In this body of love the artist's "thought" (here meaning "Pure Reason" in Carlyle's sense, or Wordsworth's imagination) dwells not on the accidents of time but on eternal "wisdom." This is a frequent Romantic idea nicely put. "Bend the solstice" is another image of conquering time. The final image, and the title of the poem, seems to imply that the artist beats or hammers against time as against an anvil, producing art, the "white... young stars." Time, or the solstice in this poem, is thus recognized as a vital part of the artist's given. A man must have something to beat or struggle against if he is to make a significant statement. Beating against time throws off "young stars," implying the infinite new worlds of the imagination, "the place where worlds are made."

"In the Protestant Cemetery, Rome" commemorates Watkins' second visit to that sacred place. It is a bad poem, with at least one vile rhyme ("eats...Keats," which I would have thought Watkins incapable of) and one of his patented bad couplets:

He knew Hyperion, knew his pall,  
But did not know the unfinished Fall.

(CA, 74)

But there are some fine things in the poem, and Watkins thought highly of it; the title of the volume comes from it. One good thing is Watkins' recollection of himself as a much younger and more sentimental man unable to comprehend or accept the deaths of Keats and Shelley, his immediate poetic ancestors. The first section concludes:

I, like one who was gagged and bound,  
Having no words but in the ground,  
Defying time and memory,  
Sought to resolve their tragedy.

(CA, 93)

The death of Keats continued to be of great symbolic importance for the Welsh poet, as indeed for many others. I think he associated the unfortunate career and death of Dylan Thomas with that of Keats, seeing in the archetypal death of the young poet a paradigm of the relationship of the artist and society.

Affinities, as one may guess from the title, contains a number of poems dedicated to Watkins' spiritual and poetic ancestors. Some, like "Nijinsky" and "Wordsworth," are simple tributes, no better and no worse than one might expect. More ambitious, and better poems, are "A True Picture Restored. Memories of Dylan Thomas," "Three Sonnets for Charles Williams," "To Holderlin," "To Heinrich Heine," "Browning in Venice," and the rhapsodic, utterly beautiful "Childhood of Holderlin."

The most absorbing aspect of many of these "affinity"

poems is Watkins' concern to see his own deepest beliefs fulfilled in the works of others, both past and contemporary. Biographies and critical studies of the "affinities" often indicate quite otherwise. Nijinski, for example, was hardly a "demigod" and the superior of Orpheus; nor is it easy to see how the dancer's hands "united the ages." "A True Picture Restored" gives us Watkins' version of the Thomas saga, but it is no truer than the legend. Thomas was not the Blake-like prophet Watkins makes him, nor do I see in Thomas' poetry the reverence for "proud nature ... [in] its pristine state" that Watkins highly praises.

Poetic theory is a theme for every poet, however indirectly and whether or not he writes a Defense of Poetry. Watkins' views on the source and function of poetry are expressed as early as "Griefs of the Sea," "Thames Forest," and "A Prayer against Time," and many of his poems, perhaps a majority, make statements about poetry. Indeed, if a man living in 1967 chooses to publish a sonnet, and call it "Sonnet," he is making a point about poetry.

Watkins believed that poetry should be, above all, timeless. This does not mean, depending on the poet, that contemporary references need be avoided; in fact, Watkins fervently insisted on the right of the artist to deal with whatever appeals to him. In his own poetry, as it happens, there are very few reminders of his own century; aside from

the natural imagery, there are few things at all. Pasteurized milk makes an embarrassing appearance in "Sonnet (Pit-Boy)"; a photograph is mentioned in "Portrait of a Friend" (but the word "photograph" never appears, and the reader assumes that the object in question is a painting); a typewriter is mentioned in "The Touch-Typist," an epitaph; "Yeats in Dublin" contains both "a lady's photograph" and the word "psychology." Not surprisingly, contemporary references appear most frequently in the war poems. Bullets and planes are briefly mentioned in the very long "Broken Sea"; "radium" appears once in "Sea-Music for My Sister Travelling"; "bombs" in "The Spoils of War"; pontoons, shrapnel, bombs, and machinery in "Unveiling the Statue" (this poem is mainly about how awful the twentieth century is). Boats with motors appear in "Sardine Fishers at Day-Break," whereas most of the boats in Watkins' poetry are sailing vessels. "Niobe" briefly mentions "dark fission and the atomic cloud"; death comes from the air in "Ode"; a tractor shyly plows through "A Man with a Field." An oil slick is implied, but not mentioned, in "Hunt's Bay," and "The Return" implies an air-raid. "A True Picture Restored" mentions "reel and arc-light" and the London blackout. A lorry appears in "Trees in a Town," and "Napkin and Stone" may (or may not) have something to do with man-made satellites. A phonographic recording of Dylan Thomas reading is implied,

but certainly not stated, in "At Cwmrhydyceirw Quarry."  
These few instances, half of them only implications, are  
the objective evidences of the twentieth century in his  
poetry.

Watkins cultivated this timelessness to the point of  
anonymity; indeed, I have heard him say that poetry should  
be anonymous, and that in an ideal world a poet would not  
need, for whatever reasons--ego, family pressure--to  
append his name to his work. By "anonymous," however, he  
meant primarily that the poem should give the impression of  
having been found intact, as one finds a seabird's feather  
on the beach. "Poetry was all written before time was."

Watkins' Romantic theory of poetry may be deduced  
from many poems, including the great Ballad, the Taliesin  
poems, "The Tributary Seasons," the poems about other poets,  
and indeed most of the poems he wrote. But of those poems  
specifically about poetry "Demands of the Poet" and "Demands  
of the Muse" may serve as examples.

#### Demands of the Poet

I set my heart against all lesser toil.  
Speak to me now more closely than the birds.  
That labour done, on which I spent my oil,  
Avails me nothing until you test the words.

How much the beating pulse may hold the years  
Yet write the athletic wisdom on the page  
You alone say. You bring the authentic tears  
Which recognize the moment without age.

No lesser vision gives me consolation.  
Wealth is a barren waste, that spring forgot.  
Art is the principle of all creation,  
And there the desert is, where art is not.

Here Watkins' "demands" are more like begging. One of his occasional comments (not complaints) about the writing of poetry was that the Muse could not be peremptorily summoned, or cajoled, and that she certainly is not amenable to demands. In the context of this poem, "demands" indicates the minimum that the poet may expect of his source: to be inspired. In spite of all the trouble that causes, the difficulties of producing true art are still less than the deprivation of having only a "lesser vision."

The poem concerns the need for a second inspiration, the ability to tell when the poem is finished. For Watkins, finishing the poem called for aid even more than the beginning. The poet's "labour" has been pointless if he is not sure of the result when the words have been tested. This testing faculty, more important than the original inspiration, he sometimes called "The Instrument."

Lines 5-7 indicate that it is up to the Muse to decide whether the aging poet will mature or lose his second inspiration. (Wordsworth, for example, never ceased to be inspired, for there are wonderful lines in the later poems, but he did lose the "instrument.") This poem was written April-May 1956, just before Watkins' fiftieth birthday. I doubt that the virile, athletic poet, father of a large young family, endured any of the psychological upheavals

men of that age are prone to, but the coming of his fiftieth birthday is inevitably significant to the Romantic poet, thanks to the archetype, however false, of the poet dying young. When Watkins reached fifty, he at least knew he would not meet Dylan Thomas' fate. "Hold the years" also indicates that the "beating pulse" of the poem may hold back the years. In any case, the Muse alone may determine the time, nature, and effectiveness of the "athletic wisdom."

"Authentic tears" reminds us of the Romantic tendency to overstress the pain of creation. This complaint was not characteristic of Watkins, except possibly in that youthful period from which no poetry remains. The mature poet got over youthful complaints, accepting his position as semi-outcast while maintaining his family in a fairly conventional way. Still, he suffered greatly in his early twenties, and it may have been of this psychological trouble he was speaking when he remarked in "Poets on Poetry" that "Suffering is a great teacher." As it was this trouble which brought him to the initial realization of the evil of time, the tears are "authentic" and "recognize the moment without age."

"No lesser vision" repeats l. 1. Watkins, who wanted no reputation, nevertheless did not want his poetry published in 2200 in a collection called Silver Poets of the Twentieth

Century. A true poet aims for the vision beyond time and space. "Wealth" of l. 10 is roughly equivalent to "lesser vision." Material wealth, or the sort of reputation available to poets willing to dilute their talents, is a barren waste without spiritual meaning. "That spring forgot" is pleasantly ambiguous: spring has surely forgotten the man who forsakes his vision ("that spring").

Lines 11-12 contain an inevitable conclusion from Watkins' beliefs about the making of the universe. If God made the universe out of the joy of creating--that is, for artistic purposes--and man caused it to fall, then it can be resurrected only by further creation. "Art" here means any truly creative act, any act which helps to build the City. It has been foreseen, but it must be made. Where the creative principle is not, is but desert; the poet sees this in society and sometimes in himself.

The companion poem, "Demands of the Muse," is characteristic of Watkins' anachronistic but engaging attitudes toward the sources of his art. The Muse herself speaks.

#### Demands of the Muse

I call up words that he may write them down.  
My falling into labour gives him birth.  
My sorrows are not sorrows till he weeps.  
I learn from him as much as he from me  
Who is my chosen and my tool in time.

I am dumb: my burden is not like another.  
My lineaments are hid from him who knows me.  
Great is my Earth with undelivered words.  
It is my dead, my dead, that sing to him  
This ancient moment; and their voice is he.

Born into time of love's perceptions, he  
Is not of time. The acts of time to him  
Are marginal. From the first hour he knows me  
Until the last, he shall divine my words.  
In his own solitude he hears another.

I make demands of him more than another.  
He sets himself a labour built of words  
Which, through my lips, brings sudden joy to him.  
He has the illusion that at last he knows me.  
When the toil ends, my confidant is he.

Vision makes wise at once. When then must he  
Wait through so many years before he knows me?  
The bit is tempered to restrain his words  
And make laborious all that's dear to him.  
So he remains himself and not another.

Why is he slow to praise me when another  
Falls at my feet? What conscience moves in him  
To make a stubborn stand before he knows me?  
It is reluctance that resolves his words.  
I have been cursed, indeed, by such as he.

Yet, though a school invoke me, it is he  
I choose, for opposition gives those words  
Their strength; and there is none more near to him  
In thought. It is by conflict that he knows me  
And serves me in my way and not another.

(A, 21-22)

Here the Muse speaks, not to the poet, but directly to the reader. Without attempting to justify herself, she points out some of the difficulties the poet encounters while trying to know her and serve his fellow men. Line 7 remarks the greatest problem: "My lineaments are hid from him who knows me," she admits, probably with a snigger. Another difficulty is that the poet must act as spokesman for suffering humanity (l. 3), nor is their misery real until he weeps. There is more than a hint, also, at the twentieth-

century poet's bewilderment over what the profession that chose him demands. As the Muse cannot reveal herself in her eternal aspect, he cannot know what she is, nor (as the whole poem implies) exactly what she demands.

Lines 9-10 remind us that when Watkins says "Write for the dead" he is not talking about some Jungian collective unconscious but a permanent body of art in which the Muse's "dead" do in fact live. "Their voice is he" emphasizes the continuity of art and the necessity of paying attention to one's poetic origins after frankly acknowledging them. The Muse is thus identified with the total of poets who have gone before; they sing to the individual poet in "this ancient moment," the moment that is the ultimate subject of all of Watkins' poetry. The identification is completed in l. 10: "their voice is he."

Stanza three is particularly interesting because of its specific application to Watkins as well as its general statement. "Love's perceptions" is a striking phrase which would seem to imply that the artist's parents inevitably conceive him in an act of true love, an obviously false notion. What Watkins means, I think, is even more shocking: the birth of a poet is the special province of divine love. His birth requires an act of grace, as do the initial steps of the Via Mystica. "He is not of time." Watkins' insistence on this point sharply separated him from the other

poets of his own time, who from the Imagists to the Concrete poets sought a modern idiom. In his case, the "acts of time" were marginal not just in theory but in practice; Watkins was never there, could never give his attention to a mundane problem. He was not the most efficient of Lloyd's clerks, and affairs of his time rarely crept into his poetry either. Matters of daily life, far from being the main interest of art, are irrelevant.

Lines 13b-14 seem to indicate considerable passage of time, implying that a man's productive life may be very long. Certainly Watkins realized his vocation early in life. On the evidence of Mrs. William Watkins, in a letter I have lost, her only son announced at the age of six that he was to be a poet; and I gather that no one pretended to be amused.

"Divine" in l. 14 indicates that the poet overhears, rather than merely receives, "a conversation out of time." The inevitable guesswork in adapting a timeless vision to the limitations of time is equally frustrating to artist, mystic, and philosopher. The poet hears this instructing voice in solitude, which is both the separateness of the artist from society and the necessary physical solitude. Watkins found solitude easy enough to obtain in youth, but more difficult in the Royal Air Force and after marriage. Still, the long walks along the cliffs near his home and on

the rocks of Oxwich Bay continued to the year of his death. These walks were not necessarily periods of composition, as they were for Wordsworth, but a time of spiritual restoration.

"Labour" in stanza four sharply modifies Watkins' theory of inspiration. The Muse may give the traditional poet his impetus, including subject, and the ability to tell when the poem is finished, but the work in between is all his. The bitterness of experience speaks in l. 19. Though Watkins did not consider himself a theorist, and "theory" is probably too abstract a word to describe his beliefs about poetry, his schematization of the creative act is reasonable and based on experience. Surely every poem, painting, or mathematical theory begins with an intuitive leap, which is not any less intuitive if based on previous knowledge. The "closing" of the poem or the integration of the finished theory into existing lore is, for Watkins, also an intuitive or inspired act. What passes between depends entirely on the artist, his talent and perseverance, and he alone will receive praise or blame when time ends. The point is, of course, that claiming inspiration does not relieve the poet of responsibility for whatever idiocies he may commit. The judgment does not rest with his fellow men, however; Watkins felt that a man's contemporaries were the worst qualified to see his work in perspective, and he

refused to review a living author.

Watkins puts the responsibility of building the City on the shoulders of every man. Though destructive acts will drop away, committing them certainly brings us no closer to the end, nor does the omission of a creative act. His objection to extremism in art was based not so much on its being extreme (writing elegies in Horatian alcaics in 1960 was extreme too) or even the damage to the artist's soul (that is his concern, and he may deny that he has one), but on the notion that only creative acts are of importance. The artist who claims he must destroy, unless it be the mere accidents of time he sets himself against, merely seeks reputation.

All of this makes Watkins an elitist. He was against the separation of the artist from society; he was not an alienated person. But he was aware of being cast out, quite a different matter. His "city for which all long" is a brotherhood of creative people, and he was fond of remarking that eventually all men, including Plato, would have to become poets before the City was complete. But in this life art is not something to be collected in the hopes that its price will rise, nor is the life of the mind measurable in any temporal terms. A creative deed may be as solid as the great pyramid at Giza or as brief as the plucking of a worm from the heart of a rose; in either case its existence

is elsewhere.

Stanza five reminds us of "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," in which the bard declares himself better suited to a "partial vision." I do not think l. 21a is a reference to any sort of arcane knowledge, but it does no harm to the poem to read it that way. Mystical and creative vision, which are two aspects of the same thing, do indeed "make wise at once," but total passivity is not a state the poet wishes to cultivate. Many great souls have spent contemplative lives without adding to the Gross National Product, yet surely advancing the spiritual development of man; but the functioning artist is meant for a different life. Without labor vision is sterile and grows less,

Lacking what the quick supplies,  
Mirth, movement, tenderness.

("Stone Circle," F, 67)

"So many years" refers to two different sets of years in Watkins' life. From six or seven to his early twenties he composed nonstop, save for a break at Repton. (One wonders how Watkins got a reputation as a dreamer while at school; he was either writing or competing for all available prizes or engaging in one sport after another, especially that hectic game, tennis.) During this period he considered no sort of composition beyond him, even attempting the Arthur epic Milton decided against. He assured me that this juvenilia, reeking of imitations of, and lines stolen from, Yeats

and Shelley, was nearly imbecilic, but this assertion may be modesty of a sort. A second preparatory stage lasted until Dylan Thomas persuaded his friend to publish.

Watkins was slow to praise the Muse; a poet is inevitably more reluctant to heap praises on her than are critics and scholars, who do not know her. This slowness prevents his mistaking a mere idea for a revelation; it is also indicative of his nervousness over the necessary labor. Watkins' treatment of his family while he was composing indicates the tension it induced in a normally self-controlled man. "Stubborn stand" reflects the poet's determination to know whether the poem is viable or stillborn. When Watkins thought he might have finished a poem, or when he could no longer work on it, he put it in a drawer.

Line 29 is bad, but the point is clear. Watkins was a reluctant poet, slow to prepare himself, slow to compose, and slower to send things out. This was not fear of rejection. He had the friendly backing of, first, Dylan Thomas, and, later, of T. S. Eliot, whose support was encouraging and effective. Watkins knew that Faber and Faber and any number of magazines (Poetry, The New Yorker, Hudson Review, The Listener) would print almost anything he had to say, a comfortable position for any poet. Written words are "resolved" by the poet's "reluctance" also in that, after struggling for months over something, he is not likely to

publish it out of vanity.

The last stanza makes it clear that Watkins considers a true poet one who belongs to no school nor forms one. The former is done out of lack of vision; the latter, out of pride. To shelter in a school, however metaphorical, is to admit the production of inferior work. Watkins was amused at being called an Augustan by a French student, but the smile vanished when I remarked that "School of Yeats" is closer, which it is. "Opposition" echoes both the idea of reluctance and of separation from the bulk of men. Psychologically, Watkins gathered strength from opposition, and in his time opposition to a traditional poet was easily had.

Watkins argues in this poem that artists are born such, as they are chosen by the Muse as a mystic is singled out by an act of grace. This contention is also true in the sense that our genetic and environmental makeup limits us; but they are not the cause of the work of art. Watkins knew that some event must reveal the artist to himself, and this revelation is intuitive.

Just as the theme of time, even when not central, is present in nearly every poem, the theme of art need not be the principal matter of the work in which it appears. Since Watkins' view of time is a constant of his overview of poetry and the poet's function, every poem about time says

something about art. Every poem that is rooted in time is merely an exercise in syntax.

Of poems that are mainly about time but embody his theory of art "The Collier" is an example. The sensitive lad who "learnt the valley flowers' names" and interpreted dreams is not unlike the artist who is cast into a pit by society because he understands the truth behind its professed aims ("dreams") and "guesses its fears by night." Dai's ability reflects a belief Watkins shared with Emerson, Blake, and Yeats, that prophecy is a secondary but important function of the poet. Because he sees most clearly of all men the reality beyond temporality, his pronouncements often appear to ordinary men to uncannily predict the future. Like Dai, the poet survives where others fail, as his deeds are immortal.

Watkins' one sociological poem, "Sonnet (Pit-Boy)" has art as a secondary theme.

#### Sonnet (Pit-Boy)

When sleep's propped scenery falls about the house  
And dancing women vanish, quick to unmask,  
The brick world wakes up, willing to espouse  
The child whose parents left the empty flask.

When sleep's propped scenery falls, alarms rouse  
Children of light, each to his dreaded task.  
Around Laocoon and his children's brows  
Strangling their violence with venom, three serpents  
bask.

Harnessed to mines, who shall inherit wealth?  
To whom, here praying, shall pasteurized milk bring  
health?  
What horror of dawn shall hide our born disgrace?

Torn, with torn satchel, reared in grit and filth,  
His misery shows a town taken by stealth,  
And all the accusing heavens in that Welsh face.

(EML, 13)

Here Watkins introduces the Laocoon myth, one of the great archetypes of the artist trapped by the unimaginative codes of society and, more generally, of immortal mortals trapped in the illusions of the created world. But, though it seems at first irrelevant, the reference offers an alternative to the sociological explication. "Sleep's propped scenery," since dreams are products of the imagination, may represent art. The poem would therefore present Watkins in an uncharacteristic ironic mood, for a moment despairing of the ultimate victory of art over inanity. "The brick world," the created world, is associated with reality, art with dreams; Watkins here may be taking a cue from Wordsworth, in whose poetry dreams are frequently held to be realer and fresher than waking life. The poet laments that inspiration is frail and "quick to unmask" (the reference is to Greek masks of comedy and tragedy). The child who awakens is the artist, or Watkins himself as a youth, whose spiritual parents (the nineteenth century Romantics) have left an "empty flask" instead of the divine intoxication. As "dancing women" is not hyphenated and may mean "women who are dancing at the moment" rather than "women whose profession is dancing," Watkins could mean those archetypal

females the Muses, who certainly are "quick to unmask" and reveal to the would-be artist that access to the fountain of inspiration means only more work.

The uncharacteristic irony continues in l. 5. Only once elsewhere does Watkins suggest that the world of the inspiration needs "props" of any sort, when in "Elegy on the Heroine of Childhood" he comments that the artist (here, Pearl White) "rides the real fear on a propped screen." "Alarums" probably indicates nothing more sinister than the morning alert of an alarm clock. "Children of light" are the artist trapped, like Watkins, in the workaday world; the line also reminds us of his extraordinary confidence in the average man.

Lines 9-10 are Watkins at his unexpectedly pompous worst. Unfortunately, the man himself was capable of stern and extended pomposity, manifested whenever inferiors (students, for example) disagreed with any of his pet prejudices. It was unwise to criticize Yeats at his most foolish; Watkins did all sorts of verbal cartwheels to justify A Vision. But this tendency rarely appears in the poetry because he usually felt no necessity to defend himself in his own work. The lines offer an apology for both the artist who does not produce as he would like and the average man who never makes anything of his life. "Wealth" indicates both the material wealth obviously never inherited

by the poor and the spiritual wealth that cannot be passed on by the artist who is prevented by circumstances from doing his best. The singularly inept reference to pasteurized milk suggests not so much the impotence of modern science to do any real good, although that is part of the point, as the impotence of creative men (Pasteur) to have any direct and lasting effect upon the lives of men. "Here praying" is bitterly ironic and would provide evidence for anyone superficial enough to think Watkins could have wavered in his Christianity as late as 1941.

The wonderful last line would seem to support this slight allegory. The "accusing heavens" represent the prophetic power of the true artist, who perceives trends in history and, unlike the historian, tries to do something about them--in this case, writing about social injustice. Hence the poem, such as it is.

As the theme of poetry appears in Watkins' only sociological poem, so it appears in what seems to be one of his very few love poems. "The Dead Words" is about the poet burning a rough manuscript and/or a lover burning a love letter, which for Watkins is essentially the same thing.

#### The Dead Words

So flies love's meteor to her shroud of winds.  
The crisp words couch in their last battling-place  
Where widowed silence, threaded like black lace,  
Held a dumb minute, stabs the dark like pins.  
It is so breathless. There the flower begins  
To seed, we know not how. There blows the race



point of view the image is also apt; to those who are neither poet nor astronomer the chief characteristic of meteors is that they are flashes of light in profound darkness; so poetry. Watkins also uses the idea in "Thames Forest," where "light breaks in darkness."

"Shroud of winds." The dead words, now burnt fragments of paper and ash, float on the breeze, which envelops them. What was inspired and potentially divine is now property of the capricious winds. Yet it is fitting that the words should end this way. Like other Romantics Watkins thinks of inspiration as coming from above and outside; as the breeze is associated with inspiration, it is an appropriate shroud.

"Crisp" reflects Imagist doctrine, to which Watkins was not immune; the words of a poem must be crisp--precise, fresh, and well chosen. Here there is also a slight pun, for the words are burning. "Couch" is very suggestive and precise. It suggests "cower" or "crouch," and this meaning fits, but if Watkins meant "crouch" he could have said so; the reader can hardly imagine by this point that Watkins would offer an incomplete alliteration when he could have had a better ("crisp...couch" instead of "crisp...crouch"). "Couch" also suggests "prepare for germination" or "lie down preparatory to sprouting." The act of burning the words in itself produces further poetry: this poem and the one that follows it in BML, "The Keen Shy Flame," as well as the

longer "Mana." This image of natural regeneration is echoed by the phoenix image of the last line.

The words are in their "last battling-place"; physically this means that ink for a second stands out clearly on a burning page, and that black ink may remain on a charred page. The words appear to be fighting obliteration to the extent that even the ink forming their mortal, objective part resists burning. More importantly, the manuscript is the "last battling-place" of any poem as far as Watkins was concerned; he felt he needn't fight it once it was published. He respected Yeats' changes after publication (for example) though he deplored Yeats' practice of continuing revision. But as an example of idiocy he always cited Auden's change from "we must love one another or die" to "and die."

"Where" for once in Watkins indicates something corporeal, the burning paper.

"Widowed silence" is a startling phrase analogous to "love's meteor." He claims for himself and other poets perception beyond ordinary sense; this suprasensual feeling he calls "silence."

Verse is a part of silence. I have known  
Always that declamation is impure.

("The Turning of the Stars,"  
DB, 25)

The burnt poem is returning to its place of origin like a soul leaving the body. It is "widowed" because the mortal

part (masculine here) is dying. "Threaded like black lace" is a fanciful but pleasant image of words, black because ink and ashes are black, arranged in a structure as threads are arranged in lace. Black lace, associated with mourning as in a veil, repeats in idea in "widowed silence." Watkins later compared the inspiration of poetry to lace in "Lace-Maker":

Lace, fragile, fine,  
In a magic, a moving design,  
A silence, in which I see  
Through the sea-engendered vine  
A glory, not of the sea.

(LU, 82)

"Held a dumb minute" may indicate no more than the mute awesome moment when the poet commits what is still his life's work to flame. But it seems to me that the phrase has a more general meaning: inspiration itself is "held" for but a "dumb minute," and even a finished poem that sees publication and admiration is still fully apprehended for only a "dumb minute," "dumb" indicating both "partaking of eternal silence" and the more obvious "awesome." The paradox implied in "dumb"--that what is written down and spoken is nonetheless "a part of silence"--is a central paradox of mysticism and of Watkins' poetic beliefs.

The subject of the phrase "stabs the dark like pins" is "widowed silence." "Battling," the dead words pierce the dark, suggesting rays of light (the inspiration). Even

the destruction of the physical part of the poem gives off light. "Stabs" suggests what was for Watkins the necessary enmity between the poet and the temporal plane.

"It" in l. 5 indicates a sense of awe at the whole proceeding of ll. 1-4, at both the burning of the manuscript and the phoenix nature of the inspiration. The fragment of time during which the dead words--dead because they are burning, of course, but chiefly because the poet has rejected them--fight extinction is familiar to us; it is that "breathless moment" without duration between life and death, between the two natures, between inspiration and darkness. At this point "the flower begins to seed" (an image already seen in "Thames Forest"). The flower is both the timeless creative principle, of which Watkins' usual symbol is Taliesin, and the poem itself, rising from the ashes of the manuscript. Watkins' comparison of flower and poem is unsentimental and apropos. Modern science, for all its self-award of prizes, has no more idea of how the flower begins to seed than Adam did; like him, they think the naming of a thing explains it. We do not know how the flower begins to seed, or why, nor does the poet know how the sacred rite of burning, a burnt offering to the Muse, becomes itself an occasion for poetry.

Time and again critics have accused Watkins of not conveying enough of the occasion of the poem. I think I

have shown that many poems are autobiographical or at least rooted in an occasion, though the specific time and place may be gone. The poem being commented upon is an example of a work growing directly out of a series of events. The subject of the sonnet is in fact the mysterious process whereby an event becomes a poem. Watkins admits that he does not know how this happens, which is refreshing. Even many poems that show no immediate evidence of autobiography are occasional in the best sense. In Watkins' poetry there occurs a certain combination of events and images, so frequently that it may be called a stock situation. A traveller of some sort--a wandering bard, the poet himself, a sunbather, a fisherman, or even a bird--walks along the edge of a sea or through a forest or both. Frequently he looks unseeingly upward; often he is "thought-blind," either thinking so seriously about something that he no longer sees or hears his surroundings or already is past thought into wordless meditation. In this state, which may be called by the mystic's word for it, "contemplation," he has, or endures, a revelation. This may be a vision, as when Taliesin sees the sand whirling in a vortex, or it may be "something far more deeply interfused," as when Taliesin in the same poem learns the source of the imagination, but it is always expressed concretely. This situation is autobiographical in two

ways. Watkins' mystical experiences are the ultimate source, and his poetry is thoroughly autobiographical in that so many poems derive from his mysticism. More obviously, he spent many hours walking on the rocky beaches of Oxwich Bay, Pwlldu, and Three Cliffs Bay. Of course, the traveller on a quest, spiritual or worldly, is an archetype; but Watkins' poems are no less personal for being archetypal, nor less archetypal for being occasional. He combines the medieval quest, complete with a sixth-century bard, with the Romantic quest for the self and the mystic quest for the eternal-in-the-infinite. Thus, no matter how occasional, he always sounds timeless.

"There" is still the "battling-place" which is also a point in time; "blows" simply repeats the idea in "shroud of winds." "Race of spirits" represents souls that have been freed from the body as the "dead words" are freed from the burning page; specifically, the souls of poets. The souls of dead poets act as tutelary spirits to the poem and wherever the creative impulse is in play.

The wonderful image of ll. 7-8 reflects the poet's belief that he is a special concern of the "race of spirits," an attractive mythic stand. The souls paternally watch the "stiff leaves" of burning paper, which "brace" against death. Their "last look backward" is a nice touch strengthening the central phoenix image. Both the spirits and the

"stiff leaves" look back to the "town of sins," Sodom-Gomorrah, or the temporal world.

"There" is the same as the two previous uses of the word. The "close fist" is the poet's, holding the sooted page through wreathes of smoke and "wraith" of flame. But on the higher plane, the "fist" is the hand of God, or the Muse; the poem is touched by the poet and by a higher agency. On the "sooted" but not wholly burnt page "the sly words" can still be seen. "Sly" is very good, equally revealing of theory and of man. The words are clever, to be sure, or they would not have the necessary effect upon the reader; but Watkins also feels they are "sly" to remain on the page when he is trying to destroy them. I am fond of the later poem "Music of Colours--Dragonfoil and the Furnace of Colours," and asked Watkins some mild question about the natural imagery. He remarked with some tartness that he disliked the imagery and wording thereof. He burnt a number of versions, "but the words kept coming back." This is the phenomenon happening here; the words keep coming back, and burning them is not sufficient. This phrase is psychologically interesting, as is the whole poem, in view of Watkins' method of composition. The struggle to compose is often evident in his work.

"Wrought like golden wire" repeats the idea in "threaded like black lace." Watkins emphasized the careful work necessary to the writing of poetry, a work like making lace

or drawing and using gold wire. Again, the comparison is instructive. In the working of lace or drawn gold, attention to detail is most important. "The epic depends upon detail," Watkins commented, "upon the Minute Particulars."

"The sly words glitter with an angel's breath" because "golden"; they are inspired and divine, in however small a way. "Glitter" emphasizes the effect of the words on the poet, entranced by the flames. "Love's moistening seal" is a difficult phrase; one thinks of Donne's "ecstasy," or a sexual image, or someone licking the envelope of a love letter (which makes sense only in the secondary interpretation of the sonnet). "Love" repeats "love's meteor"; it is any kind of love that may be the source and purpose of art. "Love's...seal" in any case indicates the inspiration that makes the poet's work authentic, that holds it together, or puts the seal to it. It is "mastered entire" by the poet in working with it, and because it is eventually burned away.

The poem develops beautifully, which one would not bother to point out if it were Donne's or Eliot's; but Welsh poetry is not distinguished for this faculty, and a poem of Watkins' may be entirely static. The manuscript first "battles" the flames, giving the poet his new inspiration. While the physical part of the manuscript dies, though struggling, the spiritual part blossoms in the poet's

thoughts. Hence the rebirth imagery (couch...seed... glitter...priestlike). The images of inspiration (meteor ...lace...stabs the dark...flower seeds...golden wire... angel's breath...seal) culminate in the lovely phoenix image of the last line.

"Love's moistening seal" is "mastered" by the poet when his inspiration reveals the nature of the poem he is dealing with; in this case, a sonnet "The Dead Words." At this point, the wind, the "shroud" of the burning paper, but also the breeze of inspiration, "proves" that the "cinders are priestlike." The hanging phrase "when they are dressed for death" modifies "cinders." They are "dressed for death" because black, but also because they remain in the temporal world, where alone death is possible. A literal meaning, if needed, of this wonderful image is that when wind moves through smouldering embers they suddenly flare up. The idea is partially borrowed from the great Hopkins sonnet, which this poem rivals:

And blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

"Priestlike" again links the inspiration with a mystical or religious perception; that is, a true priest by his actions shows forth divine light ("tale of fire") in the same way that the "cinders" of the poem tell a "tale of fire"--the new poem. Priests, like cinders, are "dressed for death," for they wear black and theoretically are

always prepared for death.

Watkins' beliefs about poetry are usually presented in concrete terms, through a series of images, as in "The Dead Words." These images are predominantly natural, but as a rule they bear little relationship to the phenomenal world. This paradox, so important to any understanding of Watkins' theory and practice, is discussed in Chapter IV.

## Chapter IV

### I Am in No Way a Nature Poet

For Watkins there were two natures, the temporal world and transfigured nature, the world in which "nothing is left but earth and stones" and the eternal plane seen as a green world. His philosophical background is Plato, whether or not he eventually rejected Platonism; the imagery is drawn from myth and nature; and the immediate source of both Platonism and mythical imagery is Blake. Like Blake and Wordsworth, Watkins had an almost Oriental sense of the transience of this world and a contempt for the natural senses that immediately makes all sensual imagery in his poetry ambivalent. On the one hand, he was, like Wordsworth, a keen observer of this world. Strolls with Watkins had a way of turning into nature walks by way of his tendency to lecture on flora and fauna; his knowledge was experiential, not organized. (He was proud of his awareness of the natural world. Once after a walk along the sands of Oxwich Bay I asked him, "Do you fear the sea?" He replied, "No; the sea fears me. I know too much about it.") On the other hand, he did not value temporal nature for itself, only by preference to the city. Wading through knee-deep yellow and

purple gorse above Three Cliffs Bay, he remarked, "I would give all this for one poem of Blake's."

Though we do not have, and almost certainly do not want, Watkins' early work, I doubt it ever passed through the "nature never did desert the heart that loved her" stage. Certainly in Watkins' later work to love nature for herself or in preference to man is blasphemy. Until an official biography is written, admirers of Watkins' poetry cannot comment with any surety on the possible influence of his early years, but it seems to me that his dualistic attitude to the concrete world was not wholly philosophical. The psychologists would have us believe that birth itself is traumatizing: Watkins was born during an earthquake. He spent the first four years of his life in a small, typically ugly, mining town; even after that, when the family moved to Swansea, though they lived in one of the more attractive sections, they were still in Swansea. The visits to his grandparents in the country must have seemed like trips to another world. Later, of course, he realized that rural Glamorgan is not the transfigured world, but he continued to use the imagery of the Gower to represent the eternal plane.

When Watkins remarked with some vehemence, "I am in no way a nature poet," he meant more than "Do not compare me with Alfred Austin," although that was part of his intent. He meant that his vision was of eternal nature,

that praise of the phenomenal world had no place in his poetry. Though Wordsworth was no mystic, he knew with Watkins that "nature in her eternal forms" could be reached by contemplative man. The most frequent situation in Watkins' poetry, the wanderer's sudden vision of the other world, is familiar to us from Wordsworth. Both are based on experience, but the parallels are literary.

As Watkins' perception of nature is dialectic, with two sharply different levels, it is no surprise that his poems that concern themselves with nature express both levels, with less emphasis on the temporal. The dichotomy of nature is a theme of Watkins' first published poem, "Griefs of the Sea," which is found in BML, the volume most concerned with nature.

#### Griefs of the Sea

It is fitting to mourn dead sailors,  
To crown the sea with some wild wreath of foam  
On some steep promontory, some cornercliff of Wales  
Though the deaf wave hear nothing.

It is fitting to fling off clothing,  
To enter the sea with plunge of seawreaths white  
Broken by limbs that love the waters, fear the stars,  
Though the blind wave grope under eyes that see,  
limbs that wonder,  
Though the blind wave grope forward to the sand  
With a greedy, silvered hand.

It is a horrible sound, the low wind's whistle  
Across the seaweeds on the beach at night.  
From stone to stone through hissing caves it passes  
Up the curved cliff and shakes the prickly thistle  
And spreads its hatred through the grasses.



wave. The imagery is surprisingly sexual, which implies that Watkins recognized the attractiveness of nature for the ordinary man. Her other side is emphasized in the next stanza, however; death in the form of the cold, sharp winds of South Wales follows the poet with an enmity that seems personal.

The picture of nature presented in the first three stanzas is bleak indeed. It is unappeased by the deaths of sailors and indifferent to the speaker's propitiatory act of self-surrender. But submission is not the only possible response to the fearsome power of nature. Stanza four suggests a second possibility, defiance, and stanza five a third, understanding.

"In spite" means "to spite," or "for the purpose of spiting"; the poet deliberately recalls the dead, feeling that his act defies the power of the sea to dispose of men at will. That shaking one's fist at the sea because sailors have drowned in it is rather foolish is admitted in the last stanza, but the gesture can be psychologically satisfying. To "imagine clearly" the dead is to do more than remember, and far more creative than mere defiance. Nature itself can remember; fallen nature perfectly reproduces patterns over and over. Nature remembers, man re-creates through imagination. Memory is an aspect of the fallen mind; imagination, of what remains from before the Fall. Once this distinction is made, Watkins' insistence on the

fitness of mourning seems more important. It is fitting for man to "imagine clearly" and to do it in spite of temporal nature. Man must, because it is fitting to him only, "deny the language of the thistle" (that is, biological determinism) and "accuse the sea-god."

But why quarrel with a "phantom unawares"? Little can be gained from quarreling with nature on her own terms. Temporal nature is limited; bounds are set, and nature in the end must give up her dead. When the poet comes to understand that the "sifted life" must "slip free," he realizes that unity with nature and defiance of her are equally meaningless.

An early poem, "Griefs of the Sea" is not especially subtle in meaning, though the mechanics are sophisticated enough--note, for example, the interior rhyme and alliteration, especially in the cynghanedd of l. 5. Only one line shows the more mature belief in an eternal nature beyond yet implied by the temporal. That the hour-glass in every grain of sand is "holy" reminds us of this.

The final stanza of "Prime Colours," another early poem, is more representative.

Born of mud, innocent light he sees,  
The cornerstone in crumbling masonries.  
His washed eyes, marvelling, resurrect the mountain  
Where love's five colours leap into light's fountain.

(EML, 16)

Man is born of mud in the Biblical sense (Genesis 2:7) and

in Watkins' usual symbolism; for mud, dust, sand, and the like represent unfulfilled nature. But man can nevertheless perceive ("see," as usual, is metaphor) "innocent light," Shelley's "white radiance," the pure light of heaven. The "cornerstone" is the truth that can be found at the center of myth, at the heart of nature, holding them up; it is "crumbling" because no longer necessary, having been superseded by Christ, whose birth was the turning point of history. Gramatically, the phrase that asserts the inadequacy of nature ("crumbling") also reminds us that it still retains a core of truth; l. 22 is an appositive of "light." "Washed eyes" is a direct reference to Blake, for the man who sees through temporal nature to the reality beyond has "cleansed the doors of perception." "Mountain," which is here mostly to rhyme with "fountain," need suggest no more than nature in general, but in context may represent the several mountains of significance in the life of Christ. Man's perception through "washed eyes" of the reality of nature beyond time "resurrects" nature. "The first five colours" mentioned in the first stanza of the poem represent unredeemed nature, the five senses; "love's five colours" are transfigured nature, and the five redeemed senses. "Light's fountain," almost a cliché in Watkins, represents both the eternal plane itself and man's imagination, which is reason on that plane.

Watkins often uses, as in "Thames Forest" and the

Taliesin poems, temporal and eternal in the same poem, as did Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" and "Resolution and Independence," and Coleridge in "The Ancient Mariner." In the greater Romantics, there is usually a signal that the other world is the subject; in Watkins, there may be only the introduction of an appropriate image. In "From My Loitering," the mention of "green eyes" is such an image:

But where green eyes look up,  
Eyes that are blind with sun,  
Uncertain fingers grope  
Around the vine-leaved cup.

(BML, 19)

Green may be a symbol of transfiguration in Watkins, as indeed for any artist forced to use natural imagery to describe trans-natural matters. The green eyes are "blind with sun," or overwhelmed by the natural world; when this happens, the poet's grip on his true subject, here symbolized by a "vine-leaved cup," becomes "uncertain." Vines suggest the poet's ability to lie dormant when necessary to preserve his art, as well as the tenacity and long life of art in general.

In a Platonic image reminiscent of Shelley, Watkins often speaks of nature as a disguise or veil of the eternal. In the exquisite "Turning of the Leaves," he argues against accepting nature on her own terms:

Ask the rain.  
No drop, though round, through that white miracle  
Will sink, to be your oracle.

Similar imagery is used in "The Sunbather," another poem dating from 1936-1937.

The Sunbather

Inert he lies on the saltgold sand  
And sees through his lids the scarlet sky.  
The sea will run back if he breathes a sigh.  
He can hide the sun with a roselit hand.

Loitering, he crossed the sningle-shore  
Where his eyes looked back at the glint of shells.  
With a quoit of stone he startled the bells  
That sleep in the rock's vibrating core.

Thought-blind to the chosen place he passed.  
The seagulls rose, and circled, and dropped;  
And there, throwing down his coat, he stopped.  
He, touching the mould of the world, lies fast.

The noon-sun dodges around his knee.  
The sand at his head now trembles pale.  
The wind at his temples carries a tale  
And before him flies the bewildered sea.

The sun, the sea and the wind are three  
But he narrows them down with a dreaming eye.  
With his hands at rest and his drawn-up thigh  
He can imagine the sacred tree.

For a point of light has seeded all  
And the beautiful seed has come to rest  
For a sunblown moment in his breast,  
A tree where the leaves will never fall.

'Come back. You were with us ages ago.  
We have thrown your bones to the carrion gull.  
To the dripping cave we have sold your skull,  
And the delicate flower which was born to blow

Is lost in the flow of the marble sea.  
We have made seaweeds of your locks,  
And your star-white bones in the vaulted rocks  
Lie broken and cold, like shells in the scree.'

So Shades converse, and the world's dumb thud  
Muffles their argument, Man, more strong,  
Gives, to console their frightened song,  
The beat that consoles them most, his blood.

Here the power of the imagination is asserted from the first, but the bather is inert, not using his gift.

"Inert" is the lowest a man can be; he is like the sand he lies upon. As in "From My Loitering," the poet/Everyman is "blind with sun," staring at the sky through closed lids, seeing it as colored by his own nature ("scarlet," the color of the blood in his veins). He is also "thought-blind," as is typical in Watkins' basic situation. Like Taliesin, he is both preoccupied by thought and actually blinded by thought to the nature beyond nature. (Watkins is probably the most intellectually anti-intellectual of Romantic poets.)

"Loitering" is an occasional theme of Watkins, being of importance in, with "From My Loitering" and "The Sunbather," the much later "Loiterers." The word means more than the usual connotation of moving about indolently or not moving at all. Watkins uses a moralistic meaning: "to linger on the way when sent on an errand or when making a journey...to waste time when engaged in some particular task" (OED). The sunbather is wasting time while on the journey of his life, as well as on the journey he is making at the moment (he has missed "the chosen place"). The majority of men merely loiter here, forgetting both the end of their journey and its divine beginning.

The first two stanzas are heavy with censure for man.

He has allowed himself to become inert; he ignores his function in life; he makes the dangerous mistake of allowing nature to dictate her terms. His skipping stones is a further indication of this aimlessness, for he is playing with inert things, and the sound of rock hitting rock is itself sinister.

The third stanza is transitional. Though man is "thought-blind" he "touch[es] the mould of the world." "Mould" here echoes "saltgold sand," sand being used in casting moulds; the metaphor does not really work as sand appeared long after the earth was in its molten state. To lie fast on the mould of the world indicates being tied to that world, yielding submissively to it. Yet at the same time seagulls, nearly always representative of the imagination in Watkins, whirl and dip above, ignored by errant man. They should serve as an example to him, as the falcon does in Hopkins' "The Windhover," in their relationship to the rest of nature.

The great power of the imagination to confront and control nature in a way science never thought of is a theme of stanza four. Sun and sand, Watkins' most frequent symbols of temporal nature, fear this, man's only real power. The elements behave as though still subservient to man, as they were in Eden. Line 15 is not a classical reference; the "tale" carried by the wind is the Book of Nature, a familiar metaphor in Watkins, echoing Emerson's remark that

nature is both "noun and verb."

Man narrows the false trinity of sun, sea, and wind down to the one enemy they are, time. The sunbather, seeing the behavior of the elements (stanza four) and perhaps recalling his Edenic existence, begins to exercise the imagination. "Dreaming" is not the equivalent of "loitering," as one might at first suppose; rather, it is the opposite of "inert" in l. 1 and "loitering" in l. 5. Man's "dreaming eye," his inner sense or imagination, enables him to see nature for what it is. (Watkins' identification of dreaming with the imagination is Romantic, not Freudian.) That the sunbather, who is in one respect the poet himself, is physically at rest does not mean that Watkins necessarily adopted Wordsworth's belief of emotion recollected in tranquillity. Certainly the Welsh poet found restoration of spirit and imagination in such walks as the poem describes, but he did not need to be "at rest" to "imagine the sacred tree." The phenomenon described in this stanza is, however, a frequent subject of Wordsworth, stated once and for all time in "Tintern Abbey":

Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.

As for Wordsworth, this supra-natural state is for Watkins a state of intense spiritual activity. In spite of

Wordsworth's stipulation that the body is asleep and Watkins' that the sunbather is prone and at rest, the impression of both passages is of striving and intensity. Both emphasize the spiritual power that can be reached in such a state.

The sunbather imagines the "sacred tree," which is the cross, Yggdrasil, the Bo tree, Buddha's Tree of Enlightenment, and the standard Romantic symbol of organic nature. It is the poet's function to imagine, to make images of, this tree and other appropriate symbols. "Sacred" signals that the sunbather perceives the eternal level, for nothing temporal is ultimately sacred. This imagining clearly can be done only when the mock trinity of sun, sea, and wind is "narrowed" with the "dreaming eye."

The "point of light" is a common mystical symbol for God the Father, the Absolute. It has "seeded all," created the universe, but it has also granted man a soul ("seed in the breast"). The soul that grows in man's breast is likened to the sacred tree itself, whose leaves can never fall (life cannot be wholly destroyed). "Sunblown moment" is Watkins' eternal moment, expanded by the sun (representing the cycles of nature) into a lifetime.

Shades then, conversing, are heard dimly by the sunbather and remind him of the ideal unity of mankind. The "delicate flower"--man's soul, the "beautiful seed" of stanza six--is "born to blow," to be free in eternity, but

in fact it is "lost in the flow of the marble sea." The sea is "marble" because cold, indifferent, and ultimately powerless. So the poem has progressed. At first the sunbather seems inert, lying on "saltgold sand," surrounded by the mocking activity of sea and wind. But his vision of the "sacred tree" reminds him of the ongoing, organic nature of reality, the power of the imagination, and, finally, the unity of mankind.

The phrase "world's dumb thud" is reminiscent of the magnificent cave scene in Forster's A Passage to India (1924). Here it represents, as it does in Forster, the mystery at the heart of nature and the impossibility of ever completely understanding her on her own terms. As the "dull thud" Mrs Moore hears in the Marabar Caves mystifies her and comes to symbolize for her the unbridgeable gap between races, so it does here. It "muffles" what the shades are attempting to tell the sunbather, keeping living man from realizing the truth about eternity which they, being dead, know. Not only does nature dull man's perceptions simply by crippling him with a body, but also by luring him from his pursuit of eternity with rival attractions, chiefly her own beauty.

The last stanza probably means no more than that Man gives himself to the "consoling" of the shades'"frightened song"--that is, to a life of imagination. There is nothing sinister about "consoles"; surely we want to console the

dead when, as is frequent in Watkins, they are worried about the idiocies and ineptitudes of the living. But another meaning suggests itself in the odd capitalization of "Man," which occurs in both manuscripts as well as the second edition of BML and Selected Poems. The interpretation that Man=Christ does not alter the basic import of the poem, that man must break through the temporal to reach the eternal, that he must use his imagination to establish the unity of mankind, thereby "consoling" the fearful dead. Christ is for Watkins the archetype of the imagination, who could have caused the sea to run back, but chose to be limited by the Incarnation. What appears to invalidate this interpretation is the word "coat"; certainly Christ did not need to throw off his "coat"--his aspect of temporal nature--to "imagine the sacred tree."

Watkins believed that every man had an innate imagination, a belief shared by Blake and, of all people, Hopkins. Certainly Christ could make the sea run back, and did so symbolically by his sacrifice, but so can man, by love.

"Sycamore" is an early poem Watkins continued to use in public readings, including one given in the fall of 1966 at Coleg y Brifysgol Abertawe.

#### Sycamore

O, I am green and fair:  
Is there a fairer tree?  
Who is it underneath  
Sleeps the sleep of death?

There is no answer there.  
There is no answer there.

Centuries made me firm.  
Far I have spread my roots.  
I grip the flying stream.  
Aching, I drop my fruits.  
Who is it sleeps below?  
Who is it sleeps below?

My wood made long ago  
Lutes of true, hollow sound.  
Lovers still carve them out  
Above this burial mound.  
Who is it sleeps below?  
Who is it sleeps below?

Who sleeps? The young streams feed  
My boughs. The blind keys spin.  
Hark, he is dead indeed.  
Never shall fall again  
My natural, winged seed  
On this small-statured man.

(BML, 25)

That the tree addresses the reader is almost certainly the influence of Vaughan's "Timber," in which the tree is held to have a memory. The tree is Watkins' Romantic symbol, of course, but specifically the tree of Luke 19: 2-10, Zacchaeus' tree. It is also a symbol of poetry itself-- "Aching, I drop my fruits." "Grip the flying stream" is marvellous. The Tree of Life of course "grips" the Water of Life, the river of Paradise, with its roots; Zacchaeus' tree, representing Christian faith, grips, and eventually will strangle, that other stream, the river of time. "The blind keys spin" represents the falling seeds of the sycamore. (I cannot say if Watkins was aware that the tree

translated in the KJV as "sycamore" is in fact an ever-green, the fig-mulberry, Ficus sycomorus.) They are keys to the future, holding in themselves all generations to be of that particular plant; as they do not know where they may end, they are blind. (The phrase is also a Watkinsism for the passing of time.)

The tree knows who sleeps below it: Zacchaeus, the the small-statured man, long dead. But it taunts man with its six-times-repeated question to remind him of Zacchaeus' instinctive faith, to remind him how little faith modern man has, and, one suspects, how rotten his poetry is (not necessarily artistically bad, but morally corrupt, arid). The tree mourns the loss of the "small-statured man" whose soul was far greater than modern man's.

I mention this simple lyric only because it is a lovely example of Watkins' ability to use an ordinary natural object to describe something far beyond nature. From the first line it is clear that the tree is speaking to us from a different realm. The references are more complex than the poem itself: literary, Biblical, Romantic, and mystical.

A gentler attitude to nature than is typical of Watkins, early or late, appears in the exquisite lyric "Yeats' Tower."

## Yeats' Tower

Surely the finger of God that governs the stars  
And feels the flashed mystery of the moving world  
Stirring the water to leaves in fold on fold  
Now touches this, this long grass in the field:  
O under grass, O under grass, the secret.

Surely the seed that stirs beneath this touch  
Hears in its ear the wand within the wind,  
The miraculous fire from which all years have waned.  
This, if it moves, must heal the martyr's wound:  
O under grass, O under grass, the secret.

Surely from this the snow-white blood is blown;  
Gold marguerite's doom that never comes, comes soon.  
Dead saints, white clouds, they stop not near the shrine  
But cross the skeleton harp, the unplucked bone:  
O under grass, O under grass, the secret.

Ivy entwined about the walls of pride  
Clings, where the tales of time in centuried scrawl  
Compass the delicate mind, the hand of skill  
Touching this fire which never formed a school:  
O under grass, O under grass, the secret.

The wired walls hold a castle of desertion.  
Already round the gate the nettle springs.  
Old, wily murmurs have usurped those songs.  
Sheer over this the kestrel ruin hangs:  
O under grass, O under grass, the secret.

Children pass by for whom a bell has chimed.  
Hunters pass by: for these a bell has tolled.  
Horns echo backward, but the tower deep-welled  
Hangs in the stream with all its woven scroll:  
O under grass, O under grass, the secret.

(BML, 27)

This poem, sent to Yeats out of love and respect, baffled the Irish poet, I think because he took it to be a direct commentary on himself. Rather, it is Watkins' attitude to nature and art that is being examined. Did the atheist, or near-atheist, Yeats ever feel touched by the finger of God, at Thoor Ballylee or anywhere else? Here is a classic

example of faulty reasoning: Yeats writes true poetry; true poetry is inspired by God; therefore Yeats was inspired by God. The poem concerns the necessity of divine intervention in nature and the firm faith of the poet that nature is governed directly.

What is under the grass, as Yeats apparently did not comprehend (and who can blame him?) is "the place where contraries are true," the bottoms of graves. It is "secret" because it is the source of all paradox and hence of all art. The secret is that death, apparently the triumph of fallen nature, is really the conquest of nature.

The seed of l. 6 is, again, symbolic of cycles, but it is also man's soul, as in "The Sunbather." Surely the seed (soul) senses in its inner "ear" that God's will (the wand), not merely the wind (Fate) causes the cycles and all man's joys and unhappiness. As the temporal seed has no gift to distinguish between wand and wind, between God and the aimless forces of nature, Watkins must be referring to the transfigured plane. "Miraculous fire" balances "wand," the will of God. "All years" have waned from it because every year takes us farther from the Creation without noticeably bringing closer the Day of Judgment. The next line is rather wistful because of a word rarely found in the poetry of belief: "if." If God so chooses, the divine fire may "heal the martyr's wound"--or, alternatively, if the martyr hears God's will, as the seed does, his wound will heal.

The slight difference in meaning is not as important as the unusual use of the conditional. "Wound" means not necessarily a physical injury, but psychic stigma; the mystic may well think of himself as a martyr after the sufferings of Purification or the Dark Night of the Soul, and of the psychological indignities as wounds. The stanza, then, appears to argue that an appreciation of transfigured nature will make the sufferings of the martyr worthwhile.

A central paradox of nature is then stated. "Gold marguerite's doom that never comes, comes soon." The idea is familiar to anyone who has read Keats' "Nightingale" or almost anything by Dylan Thomas. The additional dimension here is Watkins' idea that the real "doom" of the species--their "true death"--is the end of time. This seems, to man, never to come; to a man like Watkins, who could escape time in moments only, it must have been particularly galling (were it not for faith) to reflect upon the remoteness of the Second Coming. Yet he would surely have said that a Christian must act in anticipation of the end of time.

Nature's sinister delight in taking over places deserted by man is evident in stanza five. In returning to nature, the tower is also yielding to the wily old lies of myth. I feel that Watkins is criticizing Yeats here, though I have never heard him do so. "The delicate mind" is surely Yeats', or there would be little point in naming the poem "Yeats' Tower." It was Watkins' greatest praise of the Irish poet



first three stanzas is equally a commentary on what Watkins considered superior to nature: art. The "long grass in the field" is "leaves of grass"; that is, the poems of The Tower. God touches not only the literal grass of Thoor Ballylee but the metaphorical grass, the poems. The stanzas about sinister nature seem more sinister in this interpretation. If the tower is The Tower, and by extension Yeats himself, as stanza four would suggest, Watkins argues that Yeats allowed himself to abandon the spiritual perspective, symbolized here by the tower's conquest by nature. In this connection "kestrel ruin" is especially good. Ruin by natural forces is like that by a raptor, and nature is indeed a raptor, red in tooth and claw. But the ambiguous phrase also means "ruin of the kestrel," the kestrel ("king of small hawks") being another of Watkins' symbols of the inspired poet. "Horns echo backward," a phrase that mystifies me, seems to mean that Yeats' poetry has taken an unjustified turn backwards to his early, mythical stage.

The poem closes, as it opens, on a positive note. The tower is "deep-welled," implying that that group of poems, at least, will remain for posterity. The reflection of the tower where Yeats worked hangs in the stream as The Tower hangs in the mainstream of English poetry, as indeed does Watkins' own work. "All its woven scroll" is lovely, the greatest compliment one poet could give another.

It says that The Tower is an integrated, well-knit volume, a part of that great poem to which all artists aspire. The ending of "Yeats' Tower" also implies that art will ultimately reconstruct nature, just as the beginning implies that God ultimately has nature in his sway.

"The tales of time," which "compass," or limit, the great poet's mind, are partially blamed for what Watkins considers Yeats' decline. These "tales" are the myths, which for Watkins are in lasting battle with Christian truth, but also the varying aspects of temporal nature. If it seems bizarre to accuse a man of being led astray by nature, Yeats could have answered that his poems after all grew out of his own nature. In a sense, he did so. Watkins sent him this poem shortly after its completion in August of 1937. I doubt that it made any real impression; it's not a very good poem, the argument is not clearly put, and a man rapidly approaching blindness and death does not worry about the opinions of young upstarts. But some in Yeats' circle of intimates had expressed similar ideas, and "The Spur" (7 October 1936) had been written to answer them, or to apologize for his "lust and rage." To Watkins' charge of depending on myth and nature, Yeats could have replied simply, "What else have I to spur me into song?"<sup>2</sup>

The image, seen in "The Sunbather," "Sycamore," and "Yeats' Tower," in which a seed=the human soul=the poem

itself, is repeated in "A Prayer Against Time."

Seeds in the silent grave  
Contain the breathing tree;  
Keep fast this dumb belief:

We approach youth in death,  
The ecstatic dance in age.

(BML, 38)

Watkins was fond of this image. The lying fallow of the seed, its necessary death before spring, he compares to the periods of aridity in poetry and the mystic life, reminding the reader that nature contains transfigured nature as the seed contains the next generation of plant or animal.

"The Mummy," a companion poem to "Yeats' Tower" though written somewhat later (August 1940), is an elegy in memory of William Butler Yeats. This is carefully concealed from the reader. Watkins was affected by Yeats' death, so much so that he did not care to exhibit his grief in a classical elegy. The alternative, with its pale imitation of Shelley ("His eyes are closed. They are closed.") and its impenetrable symbolism, is not on the level of the best lyrics of "In Memoriam," but it has some superb lines. In memory of Yeats, sand, which is animated elsewhere in Watkins, "cries this theme":

Valiant, alive, his voice pursued the lands,  
Ruled the white sea, held mountains in his keep.  
Leave him with delicate instruments formed for  
delicate hands;  
In this locked room of treasures let him who chose  
them sleep.

(EML, 41)



And the mind its ways,  
But the spirit is loyal  
To what, before time stood,  
Was single and royal,  
Alone in multitude,  
Thought and unthought.  
Everything made must be  
More exquisitely wrought  
Than human eyes can see.

I would awaken eyes  
Time has made unaware  
Of wonders of world-size;  
But when hawk-hovering air  
On the unsheltered road  
Scours for divinity  
The beggar and the god,  
Men clutch mortality,  
Cling the ruinous,  
Perishing fabric of things,  
To build the grave's dark house,  
Terrified by those wings.

(Stanzas 5, 6, and 7 omitted)

Age, Winter, solitude  
Hover, and hem him in.  
But the eagle is renewed  
Like gold when it grows thin.  
Where clothing is cast away  
The diver drops to swim  
And naked in the spray  
All light is worn by him.  
Exulting in his youth  
He tenderly sings  
Though the ravages of truth  
Tear him, with claws and wings.

Strike him; his strength is rougher.  
Bow him; but braced, he will  
Dare thought, dare to suffer  
Till he has thrown his hill,  
Mole-like and eagle-like  
Turning the scales of the wind,  
Turning the clouds that strike  
A Titan that has sinned.  
Night, hell and hail are nothing  
To his great heart, Earth-born,  
Knowing its natural clothing  
Of elemental scorn.

(BML, 45-48)

The very title, "Earth-Dress," suggests that nature is a cover, or veil, of eternal nature.

"The naked one" is Orc, Blake's figure of the Imagination, but also any specific young poet, including Watkins. He is naked because in a spiritual or idealized state, like Adam in Eden; and, like Adam, he is offered "shining raiments," which are at once the human body, the clothing that feeble creation must wear, and, by extension, the beauties of the natural world. Watkins had not yet adopted the figure of Taliesin to represent the imagination and poetic wisdom, being preoccupied throughout the thirties with the non-Welsh voices of Blake and Yeats. Here the Blake referent is, in addition to America, the famous drawing of Orc as Albion, usually called "Glad Day." (The reference to "glad day" in l. 64 of this poem is not Shakespearean but Blakean.) Orc is tempted by natural beauty but resists; as Frye remarks almost in passing, Orc is "the power of the human desire to achieve a better world" (Fearful Symmetry, p. 206). The "shining raiments" are not enough for the great imagination, though a minor one may well be content with a lesser vision. This "human desire" is the reason great minds have often been revolutionaries, unable to accept the world as it is. But Watkins, I think, was less suspicious of natural beauty than was Blake. He conceded that imagination could begin in an appreciation of nature, the difference between imaginative perception and

unimaginative lying in the seer, not the seen.

Given, however, that the imagination must, as Taliesin would later perceive, live in time, Orc is likely to be used by sky, sun, and wind, another mock trinity. It is difficult to define how Orc is used, but it is clearer how this manipulation ultimately results in nature's "lasting shame": the cross is a symbol of victory, not degradation, and the veil of the temple was rent by sacrifice, not by an earthquake. The one well-known example of an imaginative man being used by nature in Watkins' sinister sense is Wordsworth in The Prelude, I, 356 ff, in which nature leads him to steal a boat, then mocks him for doing it (but as this episode is presented as a moral lesson, even this example hardly fits).

"Proud, bounteous sun" states a familiar paradox of nature: though the sun is unjustly proud of its "whirling spin / Of winds and days," it is necessary for life. Given the Fall, man has no chance for eternal life without the temporal. Dionysus needs Apollo: Orc needs Urizen.

The sufferings of Orc as poet-mystic (not precisely the way Blake saw him) "write a true redeemer's name." If the male figure in "The Mental Traveller" is Orc, then the identification with Christ is Blakean, but in any case even passive suffering re-creates in a small way the passion of Jesus. Here Watkins reminds the reader that the "true redeemer" created the earth with sun and suffering ("them"

in l. 8 indicates "skies" and "sun"). Christ himself "projects the fourfold man"; that is, Christ is also a prototype of the imagination. The "fourfold man," both Christ and the poet, is man at his imaginative best. "Proudly anonymous" describes Watkins' ideal poet and Watkins himself; paradoxically enough to delight even a man as fond of paradox as Watkins himself, he had a considerable reputation for being utterly unconcerned about his reputation. I am no psychologist, but I still felt uncomfortable about Watkins' pride in the paucity of his income from poetry, lack of reputation and small following. "Proudly anonymous," he knew well that "all pride is vain" (meaning "in vain"), but he certainly was proud of his poetic vocation and the "anonymity" thereof. In fact, though I liked him personally, I did not accord him any reverence such as Dylan Thomas was supposed to have received from certain Americans, but I found that I was expected to. He even let it be known that I had come to Wales to study his poetry although he knew perfectly well that I had not heard of him until a few hours before I met him. I am afraid that "proud anonymity" is wearing on others.

Stanza two concerns the possibility of a thoughtless act of kindness bearing fruit years after its commission.

The natural imagery continues in stanza three. References to snakes are always loaded. Here Watkins rejects the familiar symbol of the worm ouroboros, symbolizing infinite

time (not true eternity), in favor of the symbol of change, the shedding of skin. In an atmosphere of constant flux, the mind changes its ways, a reminder that man is part of nature too, and that there are fashions in thought as well as in clothing. Regardless of these fashions, the spirit, as opposed to reason, is loyal to what existed before time: eternity and eternal principles. None of the aspects of temporal nature are among these.

"Alone in multitude" is an important concept found in all mystical literature. God himself is "alone in multitude" for Christian and Hindu; beyond Christ and the Holy Spirit there is the Absolute, beyond Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu there is unapproachable, unqualified Brahman, beyond the aspects of God in any religion there is the Alone. Man has long found it too difficult to be loyal to God the Father or Brahman, yet this is what the mystic requires of himself. If the created universe must be constantly maintained by the Creator, if the world and its extraordinary cargo of life is but the dream of Brahman, then men can be forgiven for preferring to love the creation rather than the Creator, the dream rather than the dreamer. But the mystic will not have this. The spirit must be loyal "To what, before time stood, / Was...alone in multitude." This point can hardly be emphasized too much where Watkins' poetry is concerned. Like all mystics, he recognizes that man too is "alone in multitude." In the

Bhagavad-Gita Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, "There is true knowledge....To see one changeless Life in all lives; in the separate, to see the One Inseparable." The changeless Life is the undifferentiated Godhead, "Thought and unthought." This last phrase may be meant to remind the reader of the conflict of time and eternity, thought being associated with the former and "unthought"--the knowing beyond thought--with the latter. Watkins may also be making a point about philosophical thought--or, rather, sidestepping a point. The idealisms of Berkeley and Kant appeal to the mystic mind when it thinks of eternal matters (as opposed to experiencing them). Though an idealist himself, Watkins deplored categorizing people according to ism. Here he dismisses the issue by saying that man must be loyal to God, "Thought and unthought"; it does not matter whether nature has some objective existence.

"Everything made" is the creation, and any creation such as a poem; because man's senses are fallen, it may not appear "exquisitely wrought" to the human eye. Again I am reminded of Blake, who is behind so much of Watkins' early poetry. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (plate 7) he asks:

How do you know but ev'ry bird that cuts the airy way,  
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your  
senses five?

and in "A Vision of the Last Judgment"<sup>3</sup>:

What it will be Questiond When the Sun rises do you  
not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a

Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the  
Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord  
God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vege-  
tative Eye any more than I would Question a Window  
concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it.

Those who look with the fallen senses see the "guinea" sun;  
those who look through them see something "exquisitely  
wrought." This distinction was to remain a central image,  
metaphor, and symbol for all of Watkins' poetry, and indeed  
a guiding principle of his life.

"Everything made" is also any work of art, and, as I  
have shown, Watkins laid emphasis on the making of art  
though he believed in inspiration. Blake's bird that hides  
"an immense world of delight" becomes for Watkins the eter-  
nal body of art, unfortunately perceived only by a few,  
unfortunately conceived by only a few. It is not the  
"Corporeal or Vegetative Eye" that sees an artist's meaning,  
or indeed sees anything but paint and canvas. The uncom-  
promising nature of Watkins' belief is emphasized by "must."

The speaking "I" is Watkins himself, not a narrator.  
This didactic streak makes Watkins no less sophisticated; it  
is possible even in the twentieth century for a poet to  
address his reader. To those who will listen, he states  
the aim of his writing:

I would awaken eyes  
Time has made unaware  
Of wonders of world size.

The artist would like all men to live on his level, but  
they "clutch mortality" and cling to nature, the perishing

"fabric of things." The world is too much with us. Men do this, as they should, to "build the grave's dark house." Mortality is now necessary, for man must suffer the outrages of nature if he is ever to be free of them. The only other possibility is non-existence, an alternative Watkins did not believe in. But men also "clutch mortality" for a less noble, and indefensible, reason: they fear divinity, even the divinity that is within them; or perhaps especially that internal gift, for "hawk-hovering air" would not "scour" them if there were nothing to look for. The phrase "hawk-hovering air" is ambiguous and on two levels. On the first, hawks represent nature "red in tooth and claw," the raptors which man in his primitive state must fear. The very air seems opposed to man when he sees with the vegetative eye. But on the eternal level, "hawk-hovering" is reminiscent of Hopkins' "The Windhover," and the phrase suggests "divine breath." It is a characteristic of mystical literature that God "scours" men "for divinity," causing them to suffer, physically or psychologically, as they pursue, and are pursued by, him.

"Age, Winter, solitude" are three aspects of the "lifeless," the principle of sterility, also mentioned in "Niobe" and other poems as man's primary opponents. Symbolizing the principle of art is the eagle, who in folklore and Christian symbolism may, by flying into the sun, be reborn like the phoenix.

The next four lines are reminiscent of "Griefs of the Sea." The clothing that must be cast away is not just a love of material things, but a whole way of existence, pre-conceptions about nature and God. Watkins was no rebel in the usual sense--he did not choose to waste his gift in shouting obscenities in metreless verse, or fight in the Spanish Civil War--but he does urge the reader to shun what keeps his mind from eternal matters, a rebellious pose indeed. Still, I do not think Watkins expected his readers to cast away their emotional, physical, and metaphysical "clothing" and be transfigured in the "spray," the water of life. Such a second baptism comes to few, though many claim it.

The youth who "tenderly sings" is Orc/Prometheus, the creative spirit who does his best for mankind though torn by "the ravages of truth." Watkins in several places ("Angel and Man" is another example) emphasizes that truth, however obtained, is always painful. The claws and wings that assault Orc are those of l. 48 ("terrified by those wings"), Zeus' repellent vultures, representing Fate, or things-as-they-are. But beyond man's inevitable suffering at the will of nature, truth itself is painful to find and more painful to hold. Watkins did not find it easier to face truth as he aged, either; in a very late poem (1966), "Eyes of an Eagle," he again uses the eagle to represent

the seeker of wisdom, and compares the philosophic quest with the legendary ability of the eagle to stare into the sun's light. In "Semele," another late poem, he compares a fresh encounter with truth to the brilliant cause of Semele's tragic death. The sun, or the brilliance of Zeus' true shape, represents not so much wisdom itself as the painful radiance thereof.

The final stanza shows Orc/Prometheus ("A Titan that has sinned") rejecting the false trinity of "Night, hell and hail," as well as false attitudes to nature. He refuses both naturalism ("His strength is rougher") and philosophical fatalism ("he will / Defy thought"). "Night, hell and hail" are no threat to Orc, who has finally rejected the "shining raiments" of l. 1, nor to the poet, who, though existing in time ("Earth-born"), is stronger than "all vicissitudes."

Scorn is not always the poet's attitude; or, at least, he recognizes that lesser men must adopt a more realistic solution of the dilemma when they perceive it at all. The relationship of Dai-Jack as a boy to nature is more realistic than that of the "naked one" in "Earth-Dress," the child in "The Eastern Window," or the poet himself in "Angel and Man." Jack is given the real choice of many of Watkins' countrymen: poverty in the crowded city or mining town, with the possibility of violent death; or poverty in the beautiful countryside, with the possibility of starvation. He must choose between "The tall black hills," slag heaps,

perversions of the natural earth, and the "valley flowers." As Watkins later made clear in "Peace in the Welsh Hills," there is really no choice. Fallen nature, whatever its limitations, is still preferable to the temporal and fallen city, even though the final form of eternity is a city. Man cannot be expected to do anything about fallen nature except preserve it as well as he can. But man, who should be working on the City, instead has produced perversions so hideous that the sight of the true City has been lost. Given time and the fallen world, clearly it is better for the ordinary man to align himself with the preservation of nature than, say, the construction of parking lots in downtown Swansea. Such was exactly the subject of one of Watkins' last poems, "Trees in a Town," in which he decries the unnecessary felling of "two chestnuts where the two roads cross." After giving an obvious reason for the preservation of the trees--their beauty in a town where very little is beautiful--he proceeds to a less apparent but more important argument:

They rob the Present who despoil the Past;  
In all Utility's cold eye has seen  
Beauty's profusion yields to what is mean,  
And yet a fallen leaf can still express  
Man's exile, his lost innocence, his dress.

(F, 54)

This is really two arguments, one for the public and one for the poet. Watkins felt that for the ordinary man an attitude of "elemental scorn" was unpractical and unhealthy;

a fallen leaf could mean so much to him, in whose life so little beauty was seen. But for the poet himself, and for all those capable of seeing the "other making," the fallen leaves are more important still: nature speaks of unfallen nature, man's innocence, and his "dress," the body and its surroundings. The conclusion of the poem is Watkins' clearest statement of his preference of fallen nature to the fallen city.

Trees in a town, how long will they survive  
The merchant's axe for all that looks alive?  
How shall miraculous blossom, leaf and seed  
Breathe life into the body lulled by speed,  
Racing to nothing in an asphalt place?  
Something is lost. The trees' obstructive grace  
Seems to slick progress wasteful and obscene,  
Whose highway must be useful and be clean.

Watkins' hatred of "slick progress" is almost a minor theme, appearing early in such poems as "The Collier," "Sonnet (Pit-Boy)," "The Shooting of Werfel," "Money for the Market," "Unveiling the Statue," and "The Broken Sea," and such late poems as "Trees in a Town" and "Sonnet" ("The prose purveyors of doubt"). His feeling here is that materialistic progress inevitably makes the ordinary man an enemy of nature for the wrong reasons, and gives him nothing to replace it. As always on some level of Watkins' work, the trees also represent art, which "slick progress" would like to obliterate just as thoroughly as it has taken care of nature.

Watkins also contends that the trees gave him themes

for poetry:

By the instant luck of life, I saw themes fork  
Into the boughs, where thought could learn as much  
As sight will learn...

In this way the trees were more useful than the "four-square block" that replaced them. Nor is Watkins being fanciful or selfish. Since man has long given up attempting to build, of brick and stone, the City of God (was Brook Farm the last attempt?), any real work done toward it now can be no more than our medieval acquaintance Good Deeds; and a poet's good deeds are his poems.

The Tree of Life is Watkins' main symbol of eternal nature; the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, of fallen nature; and trees in general of the nature confronted or loved by the ordinary man. An equally important symbol taken from nature is the bird, which usually represents the artistic principle or the poet himself. This symbolism occurs in all his volumes, whether as the main image ("The Heron," "Art and the Ravens," "The Coots," "The Peacocks"), a secondary theme ("The Fountain"), or an incidental ("Portrait of a Friend").

There are numerous literary precedents for this symbolism. One thinks immediately of Keats' nightingale and Shelley's skylark, if not of Keats' "To Charles Cowden Clark," "Sonnet to Byron," "Song," and "The Poet," and Shelley's "Woodman and Nightingale." Even more relevant to Watkins' use of the symbol is Yeats' symbolism in "Sailing

to Byzantium," "The Tower," "1919" ("Some moralist or mythological poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan" --a reference to T. Sturge Moore's "The Dying Swan"), and "Byzantium" ("miracle, bird or golden handiwork, / More miracle than bird or handiwork"). But even if Watkins used the symbol in the exact manner of these precedents, which he does not, they still would not explain his obsession with the image. One reason for his frequent use of birds is his general tendency toward nature symbolism. Natural imagery is far better suited to a religious poet of Watkins' kind--it might be called the poetry of celebration--than artificial or purely poetic symbolism. Watkins' choice of birds to represent poetry may also have roots in a mythology which was dying before Christianity became the official religion of Wales. In British myth, the god Bran, patron of the arts of whom Taliesin was a follower, and who was himself a bard, took his name from the raven or crow. The three birds of Rhiannon, who sang songs compared with which all others songs seemed unmelodious, had the unusual ability to sing the dead to life and the living into a sleep like death. There is a parallel here with Watkins' concept of the function of poetry; not only does he seek a poetry of pure beauty, but also speaks of writing for the dead, and insists upon the identity of dead and living. The Birds of Rhiannon also were able to suspend time, as in the incident of the Noble Head, and Watkins felt that the poet must attempt to

"wear time down."

That birds are associated with art in Watkins' verse must have been obvious to the first readers of BML. In "Prime Colours" the swallows represent the Christian poet. Using only natural imagery, he requests a return to the simplicity of the early Church:

Swallows come back to their first house of mud  
Knowing no wider rainbow can be made;  
And that first nest, eclipsing heaven, that roof,  
May find its image in an ass's hoof.

(BML, 16)

Similarly, in "Portrait of a Friend" Biblical and natural imagery are combined to sketch a portrait of Dylan Thomas, whose poetic genius is compared to the flight of a white bird ("Who for annunciation has / The white wings of the sheldrake"), and whose inspiration is held to be divine because, like Elijah, he is "fed by the raven's bread."

In "Earth-Dress" the poet compares himself first to a hawk, then to an eagle. In the sonnet "Stone Footing," the poet feels separated from the rest of mankind, but seeks out for shelter a rock "familiar to birds." The eagle in "The Safe Soul" is another of the birds into which Watkins projects himself. Though the poet must endure "all vicissitudes" to produce anything of value, he ultimately triumphs because he is steadfast, like the eagle:

Stone-like the eagle drops, shakes off the air  
Of murdering winds, of storms that tower and mock,  
Safe. Though his plumage glitters for despair,  
All that he loves lies naked in the trock.

(BML, 61)

The first poem which consists of an extended metaphor of bird and poet is "The Coots." Like "The Safe Soul," it expresses both the struggles and constancy of poetic creation. The male coot is Watkins, the female on one level his wife Gwen, on another the poet's audience. Watkins associates himself so closely with physical nature in these poems that they would seem at first to contradict his insistence on the two natures. But Watkins loved birds at least partially because they seemed to him not to be of this earth. While he did not think of birds as blithe spirits--he thought of them as birds--he did feel an imaginative sympathy for them, and envy their flight, as most men have done. The bird metaphor therefore reminds me both of his unfashionably high concept of art and his belief in the two natures.

The poet, like the black and white coot, is a "common thief on the pond of light," a Promethean figure. Instead of the fire metaphor, however, Watkins uses that of a bird who steals materials ("loot") for his nest. "Pond of light" indicates that the birds' nest, the poet's works, is in another dimension. The poem also implies that nature offers camouflage to the poet, as it does to the birds. "Dancing foliage" hides the import of the poem, whether in a cryptographic fashion (as in Dylan Thomas' poems) or in the way nature hides Watkins' meaning. Any number of Romantic poems can be read on the level of natural imagery

alone--but anyone who thinks Wordsworth's "Daffodils" is "about" flowers has been misled by nature.

The boys who intend to stone the coots, or their nests, I have long suspected of being critics and other people who do not care for latter-day Romantic poetry. They also represent people who cannot perceive eternal nature or art; they are left with stones, for Watkins always symbolic of the lowest aspect of nature. The phrase "pond of light" (where the coots live) repeats "light is a great pool" from "Thames Forest." It represents the poet's claim to partake of a body of knowledge and inspiration which is the same for all ages. There is a humorous (to me, not to Watkins) summation of the ideal audience: mankind, represented by the female coot, should view the poet's toil "with critical eye," but should "express no doubt / As to why he chose it." This poem, with all the other bird poems, shows Watkins' considerable natural observation; essential rejection of nature was not coupled with an indifference to its attractions and defects.

"The Peacocks" also corresponds male bird and poet, female bird and mankind.

#### The Peacocks

She pecks about in shells and flint,  
Fearing the dangerous tail displayed.  
Vibrating plumes behind her glint  
With sacred eyes. His violence made  
Her choose the hard and gritty ground,  
The circumspection of her day;  
A peahen, pausing on her round,

She hurries, yet has time to stay.  
He follows her with giant tail  
Eluded by her stone-chilled eye;  
The stricken level of her jail  
Reflects and apprehends his sky.  
Her safety is the natural sun;  
The natural earth supplies her needs;  
Glimpsing her task and life as one,  
She pecks for pods and sunflower-seeds.  
Her lord, who hates her gift of sense,  
Puts on new glory where she goes.  
Her lack of interest makes him tense,  
Until at last a splendour flows  
Down the divine, contracting plumes,  
And there, while she unearths a pod,  
His hurricane of light consumes  
All but the terror of her god.

(LU, 28)

Here the distinction between the two natures is clearer than in "The Coots." The hen determinedly remains on the literal level of temporal nature despite the efforts of her mate to awaken her to "wonders of world size." The shells she pecks about in are dead, sterile things representing time; the flint, her primeval nature (flint being used in primitive weapons). She behaves in this foolish way because she fears the other nature, the "dangerous tail displayed." "Dangerous" is interesting; the gift of the imagination is dangerous not only for the poet himself, who often feels compelled to spend his life in its service and can never lead a "normal" life, but also for anyone, his wife and children, who happens to get in its way. The peahen also fears the tail (imagination and the beauty of the spiritual plane, but also a sexual connotation) because she cannot feel the joy of the eternal plane, fearing the

annihilation of the temporal. This is a stumbling block for those who would direct our minds to eternity. Reading the exhortations of the great mystics, I often think how tiring the undivided pursuit of God, Allah, Brahman must be. The argument that God will uphold those who truly desire him strikes me as circular, and it does not appeal to the peahen, either; she prefers her "shells and flint."

One other contrast is being established in the first lines. I asked Watkins if he was the peacock. He laughed and replied, "Yes; I was very busy then," referring to the pursuit by the male bird of his casual and materialistic mate. The reference is partly to the poet's necessary courting of his audience, but there is also a more personal relevance. Gwen Watkins was the practical member of the family, the builder of fires, the mender of small broken things, sole caretaker of house and children. "He had all the pleasures of marriage without any of the responsibilities," was her sad but uncynical comment shortly after his death. I suppose his reply would have been that peacocks must not soil their tails.

The eyes of the peacock's tail are "sacred" in mythical terms, put there by Juno in a fit of pique; they are also symbolic of the divining power of the imagination. That the eyes are blind only enhances the symbolism. "Violence" suggests the bird's mating display. His apprehension of the other world forces her to cling ever more

closely to the natural; she simply has not the vision to follow him. She chooses the "hard and gritty ground," temporal nature at its least productive, and the "circumspection of her day," the cycles of time. "Circumspection" also implies "inspection in circles" or "looking around" (circumspicere), which brings up the deadly circle image. "Round" repeats "circumspection" and the circle idea, emphasizing the futility of a life spent pursuing nature on her own level. "Yet has time to stay" is ironic; "has time" does not suggest a moment of leisure as much as it emphasizes her deliberate choice of time over eternity. "To stay" means both that she could, if she tried or even wished, pay attention to her mate's gorgeous display, and that she could stay, or stop, time. So the charge against her is really a serious one.

The male, undaunted but getting tense, follows her about, but she does not even look at him. "Stone-chilled eye" is a Medusa image; for Watkins, the natural world can, eventually, turn us Medusa-like to stone. Her wholly natural state is a "jail" which reflects--that is, casts back without using--his preternatural view. She senses that her safety lies in natural things; she confuses the role she must play for survival, her "task," with her true purpose, not realizing that the purpose of man is to seek eternal life. Instead, she "pecks for pods"--empty things--and "sunflower-seeds," fruits of the sinister plant that

willingly follows the sun.

"Her lord"--Watkins was a male chauvinistic, and Wales is a primitive country--"hates her gift of sense" because it prevents her from appreciating his true worth. The poet is envious of the materialistic beliefs that keep his audience from him; also, I think Watkins' considerable vanity was wounded by his wife's preoccupation with what he considered lesser matters. At the time of writing of this poem, May-June of 1945, they did not yet have any children; Watkins' frustration increased with every succeeding child. "Her lord," however, more appropriately indicates the relationship of artist and society. The notion that the artist is no better than the society he serves is another concept of the twentieth century that Watkins could not accept.

He "puts on new glory" to impress her, fanning out the tail, then, apparently, gives up, at least on one level of the poem. If one follows only the sexual implications, the poem is doubly sad, because she is busily ignoring him.

One more level of this poem remains. "Sacred," "his sky," "lord," "divine," "hurricane of light," and "god" all suggest that the peacock is Christ, the hen his church. The sexual imagery does not preclude this; the mystics frequently use it to symbolize the union of Christ and his Bride, who is either the Church or the individual believer. The assertion that the Church may "fear" her lord is not

especially shocking. For nearly two thousand years most Christians have feared to put the principles of their supposed master into practice, preferring instead to "peck about in shells and flint"; that is, concern themselves entirely with temporal and material life on a level very much below their spiritual inheritance. Line 17, an excellent line whatever the interpretation, is particularly good in this context. The Son of God, sent to redeem man, hates man's insistence on common sense, natural things, business matters. Common sense says there is no god; nature more often conceals than it reveals; business matters usurp the time man could use in seeking eternal life. "Gift" is ironic, for the senses are part of the curse of time, brought upon man by himself, but at first thought of as a revelation, or gift, by Adam and foolish Eve. Christ has put on "new glory" by accepting the Incarnation; this is a wonderful irony, that the taking on of a temporal nature must be the means to the greatest manifestation of eternal nature. He has taken on "glory where she goes," that is, in time, on earth. The Incarnation also explains why the "spendour" flows down the divine plumes, from heaven to man.

In this connection, the last six lines are far more joyous (and make more sense). The mystical experience is often a "hurricane of light," coming upon unwary man while he "unearths a pod," poking around in insignificant matters.

This "hurricane" overwhelms the unwary and probably unwilling recipient, consuming "all but the terror of her god." All that is left for the new believer is sacred terror.

The indifference of the peahen to her mate thus appears to have more serious overtones. The basic dualism of this effective little poem is Platonic, but the tradition from which the symbolism and situation come is that of mysticism.

Watkins' bird poems are his finest compliment to nature, and, except for his most glorious mystical poems, his most beautiful use of natural imagery. Larks, ptarmigans, plovers, and grouse are symbols for the poet in "Birds of Joy and Care," and St. Francis logically becomes the patron of verse. Watkins urges the poet to accept Christian belief as "in light the lark / Dares diamond heaven-break." His antirationalism and distrust of schools merge in this plea for the poetic tradition:

Pledge with your heavenly ring  
These birds, by faith made wise,  
That though the songs men sing  
Follow the fashion's guise,  
They still may cleave to heaven, and sing with  
praising eyes.

(LU, 76 )

Here he shows how nature herself may be raised to the higher plane: faith will raise us, and nature with us.

"The Crane," a poem which, as one might suspect from its subject matter, belongs to the period of composition of The Death Bell rather than Affinities, in which it

appears, is of much sparer imagery than the nature poems of BML and LU, and emphasizes more than they the divine nature of the poet's inspiration:

He [the male crane] moves to certain strings  
Stretched between earth and sky  
That enforce a rigid stance.

(A, 25)

Here the bird's very posture (the poet's given) is said to be controlled by his apperception of the divine perspective. The female bird, however, is no more interested in him than she was in LU:

A bead or trivial thing  
Beckons her steps away  
From the live, dramatic wing.

This poem balances a deep frustration and supreme confidence in a manner typical of Watkins, for whom every truth is the outcome of a paradox. Though the male bird has every reason to object to his lonely state, he is aware of "the extremes from which they meet," which she is not; and he only "simulates despair," for he knows that night, the end of earthly time, "will bring them together."

The bird poems represent Watkins' kindest approach to nature. In "The Strangled Prayer," the first poem of DB, his attitude is much sterner, with a note of apprehension.

#### The Strangled Prayer

Look down at midnight when my strangled prayer  
Calls through night-leaves the shades of ancestors,  
Midsummer night, Eden of windless air,  
Coiled with strange creepers where the moth-wing stirs.  
Conscience fights echoes, footprints on worn stairs,

And my ten fingers separate the stars.  
Bless my strained heels. I drown in a child's hair.

The boards are full of voices. Through my vow  
Insects run out. The cricket chirps Amen.  
Plumb on the floor I kneel. Stark midnight now  
Touches the skin and pricks desirous men;  
They dance, they leap, they gratify the moon.  
Bones make a circle round my naked moan.  
Above this sheet the Pleiads and the Plough

Are white with ancient music. Mars is red  
With violent fury, glowing with vine-must.  
The crested darkness hovering overhead  
Has eyes of serpents. My great prayer is crossed  
By all the travelling beasts. My proud loins lust.  
Snatch up, untwist me, twelve-tongued Pentecost,  
For Nature makes me mortal in her bed.

(DB, 15)

The poet, attempting to pray and to produce a body of poetry acceptable to his "ancestors," is successively distracted by "strange creepers where the moth-wing stirs," "voices," crickets, all the celestial bodies, and moonlight. His prayer must fight through "night-leaves," memories, and sexual desire. Here the desire of male for female is used in a manner opposite that of "The Peacocks." Watkins seems more conscious of the body here and in later poems. In early poems I notice references to eyes and ears, usually symbolizing the fallen senses rather than any concrete things done with eyes and ears; here are fingers, feet, heels, hair, knees, skin, the male organ (l. 11), bones, and loins. What is more, the sensual imagery is not primarily symbolic; it functions well on the literal level. What is keeping the poet from his mystic task is no more

than the functions of the body.

Watkins laments, as elsewhere ("Dust in the Balance," for example) that he has a body at all. What he mourns is, of course, the Fall; but here it is in a concrete and immediate way. Line 13 signifies that he has a body, no more; but he puts it in such a grotesque way that the reader may not grasp his intent at first, trying to envision something unpleasant. (The "bones" in question are his jaws.)

The "sheet" in l. 14 is an image used elsewhere ("The Fire in the Snow" and "Bread and the Stars") to represent a layer of snow. Here, because of the time the poem supposedly takes place (Midsummer Eve) I assume it suggests the surface of nature, the easily visible part of nature, or the veil which gave its name to his second book of poetry, The Lamp and the Veil. The reference to the constellations reminds us of the cycles of nature again, as well as the astrological implications.

However one takes this poem--it may strike one that, among other things, the colors of Mars and the Plough are irrelevant--Watkins' attitude to nature is clear enough. It interferes, mocks, "twists" him, and makes him mortal (the greatest charge against nature in any age: it is our nature to die). Yet in a poem written less than a year later, the beautiful and mysterious "Pledges to Darkness," he makes a strong pledge to the natural world:

Dear love, could my true soul believe  
The wide heavens merciless, I still would not forsake  
The man-tilled earth to which bones cleave  
While horses race across  
The neighboring field, and their hooves shine  
Scattering a starlike wake.  
Magnanimous morning, if we change no line,  
Shall pierce stone, leaf and moss,  
And the true creature at light's bidding wake.

(DB, 22)

As Watkins has stated in "The Strangled Prayer," only a few pages before "Pledges to Darkness," that the wide heavens are merciless, perhaps he means here the conventional idea of heaven as a place of stern judgment rather than the transfigured world. Certainly if he were forced to believe in the Puritan concept of the elect, with its necessary damnation of most men, he would cling more closely to the "man-tilled earth." Instead, he believes that "magnanimous morning," the end of time and dawn of eternity, will break through, or "pierce," the veil of "stone, leaf and moss."

It probably would have been easier for Watkins to accept the Romantic doctrine of correspondance (anything more modern would never have done). Nor could he accept the Oriental idea of maya, nor the unthinking Christian's simple belief that this world is a vale of tears, to be got through as best we may, though he sometimes acted as if he did. Though he often expressed disdain of philosophy he left it to the philosophers to analyze the exact relationship of man, nature, and eternity. In his best poems

the concept of nature seems to be this: transfigured nature is for most of the time hidden by temporal nature, which is itself indifferent or inimical to man. Transfigured nature partakes of the timeless and immaterial; earthly nature, of time and the concrete. But there are timeless moments when the poet sees through the veil, "strikes through the mask." Because he remains bodily on the temporal level, he may well see the eternal in terms of the temporal, or at least be forced to communicate his vision in those terms. In "Taliesin at Pwlldu" he sees rocks, but rocks with living veins. In any case, because the mystic is a poet, he must use familiar images to speak to those who have not seen what he has. Therefore, transfigured nature seems to be within the temporal, as a vision of eternity is experienced within time. This phenomenon is not unusual in mystical literature. In Matthew 17: 1-9 the Transfiguration is described largely in natural terms--mountain, sun, light, garments, and a cloud. Nor do Peter, James, and John doubt that the glorious figure they see is the man they know. In the Bhagavad-Gita the revelation of Sri Krishna as Brahman is overwhelming, but even Arjuna's vision is described in terms of things we know.

When Watkins says in "Music of Colours--the Blossom Scattered," "I cannot sound the nature of that spray," he is admitting the ultimate mystery of material nature. Blake would admit of no mystery out of assurance; Shelley, out of

pride. Watkins, wearing his Taliesin mask, confesses only a "partial vision." The mystery is not entirely in the origin of the world, for he accepts the Biblical-Blakean explanation, nor is it precisely in material nature, for, like Blake, he scorned man's feeble attempts to know nature on her own terms. The mystery lies in whether one becomes the other, exists within the other, or, being on a completely different plane, is approached through the other. Asking why the blossoms are scattered, he replies that it is an "earthly mystery." Those with faith need not "sound the nature of that spray" or resolve the "earthly mystery."

Certainly his ambivalent, dualistic view of nature owes little to twentieth-century materialism and less to twentieth-century science. He saw science in operation during the war and, predictably, thought little of it. All abstraction was abhorrent to him, and science consists of amoral abstractions put to entirely immoral purposes. If this is naive, he was naive; but then, so were Christ and Gandhi. Watkins accepted evolution and genetic development the way he accepted sunrise and sunset. Every age has its own scientific truths no more and no less valid for the time than those of previous eras. Evolution and sunset are just two morally neutral aspects of temporal nature. Genetic deficiencies must be transcended whenever possible, like earthquakes.

Watkins' Platonism is tempered by his keen awareness

of evil. His sheltered childhood and relatively sedate job did not blind him to evil; even if they had, the war years would have opened his eyes. (I do recall his saying that he had no idea of just how evil individual men could be until he met his fellow recruits.) Again, he accepted the Biblical explanation of evil. Because of this awareness Watkins, unlike many Romantics including Emerson and Whitman, did not see nature as progressive--dynamic, yes; it was part of his dislike of nature that it proceeds wholly by mindless and mutually antagonistic forces. Man progresses, however; not in the aggregate (we are not evolving into a superior species) but in individuals, who are the poets.

## Chapter V

### The Religious Poetry

Watkins' Christianity is inherent in every poem. Not a verse survives from the period before his conversion; not a line expresses doubt, not even those describing the Dark Night of the Soul. Whatever ambiguities Watkins may have perpetrated, and there are many, no one having more than a passing acquaintance with his work could think him anything but a Christian mystic. He handles myth so confidently because he is sure of his Christianity, not because he felt the pull of myth or was tempted to worship the White Goddess. In poem after poem he celebrates the conquest of myth by Christian belief, both in himself and in history.

Very few mystics are poets; very few poets are mystics. In English poetry, only Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Thomas Traherne, Richard Rolle, Francis Thompson, Robert Southwell, Gerard Hopkins, and Vernon Watkins were practicing mystics. "Mystical poet" is really a contradiction in terms, the mystical experience being ineffable and ultimately incommunicable. The final stage of the Mystic Way, Union or Contemplation, cannot be described save in metaphors of union, often with sexual imagery. Poets tend to describe

the stage of Illumination, also called the epiphany. In non-mystical poets, whether myth-makers, religious, or Romantic, epiphanical revelation of nature or divinity is a frequent subject; such a revelation may resemble, or be, a mystical experience. But the Way is a process, not an event, however shattering. A poet steeped in Neoplatonism, like Shelley or Emerson, or one who writes profoundly about nature, like Wordsworth or Whitman, may use the images and situations of mysticism without being mystical. The sensual, transcendental "Song of Myself" is a classic of Illumination, as is "Tintern Abbey," but neither author was a mystic in life. Only a mystic can write of Purgation and the Dark Night of the Soul, unless the pattern is used merely as metaphor.

Watkins does not give us, as Vaughan and Hopkins do and some would say Herbert does, a sense of development. The Way is not complete till death, even if Union be attained, for death is the culmination and blessing of life for the true believer. But if the final stage be attained at a recognizable point, the poet may speak as though the journey were over. In Watkins' poetry, though different stages may with some difficulty be distinguished, one usually feels that the quest is over. Taliesin says, "Now it is over," and accepts a "partial vision." In the modern world, mystics form a society only metaphorically; Watkins often writes as if he has joined that society and has other

things to do.

Taliesin, as we have seen, is Watkins' archetype of the mystic who has proceeded far enough along the Way to benefit his fellow men and has decided to be satisfied with less than ultimate vision. That Watkins identifies with Taliesin is partial evidence that the former never reached a Unitive state; but it is balanced by the evidence of "The Strangled Prayer," a poem convincingly about the Dark Night of the Soul. Watkins' archetype of the perfect mystic, with whom he does not seem to identify, is Lazarus.

#### Cantata for the Waking of Lazarus

There sang a fountain in a Syrian courtyard leaping  
Near to the place where Lazarus, the loved of Jesus,  
lay,

Lazarus, four days dead, alone in shadow sleeping.  
Some say that in the sepulchre where mute he lay  
There on the burning rose of resurrection-day  
His eyes were sleeping fixed, although his veins were  
cold.

They bathed his feet beside the eucalyptus tree;  
They gave him simple burial, neither myrrh nor gold;  
Yet did the fountain-drops cry out that he could see,  
Cry out that he could feel although his hands were cold;  
The fountain cried that he, in that grave shadow  
sleeping,  
Alone could see God's face, and blind with sun were  
they

Who climbed the mountain slowly on the rocky way.  
Now did the sun climb heaven, but one who cast a shade,  
Seeing a white crowd near the tomb-mouth with much  
weeping,  
Prayed for him with closed eyes; with love's great  
strength he prayed:

Lazarus dead, rise up: for you the doves obeying  
The voice of light within the water's utmost crown  
Change all the drops to glory. In their cloud delay-  
ing,

Pity at last the rich, consumed by their renown.  
A winding-sheet has veiled the silence of love's glory,

Earth purified by love, no life not full of light;  
Sleep in the sepulchre, believe that ancient story,  
That ancient sun believe, on Moses' tablets raying,  
Yet see these petals breaking near the source, and

white  
Roses on thorny stems, and white acacia swaying  
Where glinting birds alight above the ringing cup.  
Crumble this crust of birth to throw to ring-doves  
playing.

Rise through the waking earth; Lazarus dead, rise up.

Come to me, God, who sleep, who know that holy stave  
Sung when hands laid me down within the fallen tears,  
Wound in a winding-sheet, a caul about my ears,  
Who must endure this dark, the freshly covered grave;  
The Romans drove you out, they hunted you with spears,  
Yet you have pieced my flesh, have knit me, bone to

bone,  
Have kindled here this force, behind the sombre stone,  
To wake, yet not to wake, who hear that holy stave.

Then, as the people passed, the fountain ceased from  
leaping,

While yet unawakened by the Son of God he slept.  
By this were many gathered near the tomb-mouth with  
much weeping.

Then did the fountain stop. That moment, Jesus wept.

Then sang those little birds upon the very stone  
Where the dead spoke for that first time and all the  
folk drew near;  
And they drew back amazed; it shook their hearts with  
fear

To see the young man walk. Then that white retinue  
Knew that their own last resurrection had come near.

Come, O Redeemer, come; come down, and make Earth new.

Love, newly born, come down: for you the fountain  
playing  
Leaps into light, then spills, and fills the fountain's  
brim.

Water gives life to stone, and light renews our saying:  
For you the sages wait, and listening cherubim  
Support the fountain's weight around its marble base.  
For you the ages wait, old prophets are not still  
Around this font of birth; they strain to see your  
face.

For you his winding horn a Triton's lips are playing;  
His crooked eyes in water watch the fountain fill.  
For you the doves of light return from their far  
straying,

Too long away, too long, in that Italian town.  
Open my eyes at last, my eyes long shut with praying,  
And let me see your eyes: love, newly born, come  
down.

(DB, 63-65)

I should point out that it is impossible to tell from the poem as printed in DB whether there should be a break between lines 29 and 30. I feel there should be, on the grounds of the manuscript, which clearly calls for different speakers, and sense, which requires that lines 30 to 37 be spoken by Lazarus.

This magnificent poem is one of Watkins' few religious works not directly about his own experience.

Lazarus has transcended time and nature, not in the "blinding flash" which makes mortals seers, but literally: he has died and been reborn. The old man lived on the temporal plane; the new, on the eternal. This symbolism is quite different from the more conventional symbols of mysticism. Saul is blinded but regains his sight and a new identity as Paul; the snake changes its skin; the seed metaphorically, but not actually, dies before the tree grows: these are all metaphoric deaths and rebirths, excellent symbols all, but there is only one literal mystic death. Transfigured nature, which Lazarus enters at the point of death and which he perceives in his suspended state, tries to speak to ordinary man to tell him of Lazarus' victory, but remains unheard. Lazarus is the archetype of those who "pierce leaf, root and moss" to find the greater nature

beyond them.

The Incarnation is an important symbol in mysticism, involving godhead coming down; that is, grace, a necessary element of mysticism and invariably the first act on the Way. And of course Christ is the model of behavior for the mystic. But Lazarus is an equally appropriate model. A man and nothing but, he beholds and recognizes God; through that grace, he dies and is reborn. Lazarus' literal death is the Mystic Death Watkins celebrates in the figure of Taliesin.

The fountain is, as always, ambiguous. Palestine is a real place in time, and an ordinary fountain in the sterile world represents time. But a fountain that sings and leaps suggests the imagination; the implication, then, is an act of the imagination occurring in time. For Watkins the mystical impulse is virtually identical with the poetic.

It is interesting that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus is peculiar to John, the most mystical of the Gospels. John 11: 1-44 identifies the "Syrian courtyard" as the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany. Bethany is near Jerusalem in what was Judea then and Israel now. I cannot imagine Watkins' not knowing this; presumably he moved Bethany into Syria for the sake of the alliteration.

Lazarus, sleeping in a trance between life and death, lies in "shadow," neither light nor dark. Watkins thus diffidently answers the perplexing question of where the

dead man was during those four days; he lies in "shadow" just as Taliesin walks on the verge of sea and sand. Like Taliesin, he lies between two worlds, pagan and Christian. At the point of time in which the poem takes place, Lazarus is also at the very juncture of time and no time: death. That the experience takes four days (the Biblical number) only emphasizes the suspension of time. Watkins is careful to reiterate that Lazarus has really died, and that the resurrected body is just that, not a phantom. "Alone" emphasizes that his experience is unique, and signifies the solitude of the mystic, the flight of the alone to the Alone. "Mute" in l. 4 also emphasizes the solitude.

"Some" in l. 4 are they who perceive that Lazarus looked upon his own resurrection while lying in the grave, the inspired, the mystics who see in Lazarus' awful ordeal the model of their own deaths. As Lazarus looks on the end of time, so does the mystic in ultimate vision. "Mute" indicates the central paradox of this vision, that it cannot be communicated. In fact, Lazarus remains mute after his rebirth. He is mentioned briefly in John 12: 1, 2, but disappears thereafter without any comment on his unusual experience. "Sepulchre" instead of "grave" suggests a parallel with Christ's resurrection, as well as maintaining the alliteration.

That Lazarus' eyes, though "fixed" on resurrection, are still "sleeping" indicates the suspension of the fallen

senses. Eternal vision supplants temporal sight. "Veins were cold" repeats the same idea as well as reiterating that Lazarus is really dead. The mystic rose is a fairly common symbol of the desired union, but it fits into Watkins' system (if that is not too harsh a word) in a slightly different way. This rose is burning, like Moses' bush; only in eternity do roses burn unconsumed. The distinction is that Watkins, speaking for himself as poet and mystic, may hold a rose in his hand and use it to symbolize any number of things--the temporal or eternal beloved, nature itself, beauty, Yeats' Ireland--but this rose has no earthly existence. It is the rose of Paradise, burning and thornless. "Rose" may also indicate a color, the color of the dawn of that distant day. (More conventional interpretations of the rose symbol do not fit here. The white rose generally symbolizes purity of belief; the red, martyrdom. Lazarus' faith is pure, of course, but Watkins is not stressing that aspect of the myth; nor is Lazarus precisely a martyr--more the opposite, in fact.)

"They," Mary and Martha, are a subgroup of "some" in l. 4. We know from John 11: 24, 27 that Martha was among those who believed before the raising of Lazarus. Mary, however, seems to belong with those who insist upon miracles, though she later also becomes an archetype of the mystic. Line 8 shows that Mary and Martha do not wholly appreciate the situation. They give their brother "simple burial,"

which is appropriate to their humble station in life, their Jewish heritage, and their hope of the resurrection. But Watkins specifically says "neither myrrh nor gold," which Christians associate with the birth of Christ as well as with burial. (Only John, the latest Gospel, states that the body of Jesus was in any way embalmed--John 19: 39, "with a hundred weight of myrrh and aloes.") The point is that the sisters, though faithful, do not comprehend that Lazarus' death is a birth, that the death of the physical body gives life to the mystic body.

The fountain-drops, representing the imagination, "cry out that he could see," trying to tell mortals what is happening, but cannot. This represents the difficulty art and belief have in any age in communicating with the philistine and materialist. "Feel...cold" emphasizes that Lazarus is now blessed with transfigured senses. The fountain itself says that the mystic alone "can see God's face," a secondary meaning being that the artist alone transcends fallen nature.

In an exquisite image I have noted before, the mourners (they who have not realized that death is the beginning of life) are "blind with sun." Because they elect to remain on the temporal level, symbolized by the sun that is the governor of seasons and cycles, they are blinded to the world beyond. Lazarus can see although in "shadow," although his eyes receive no earthly light; the "white

crowd" ("white" is ironic) have all the light of the sun, but cannot see. The sun "climb[s] heaven," indicating the natural world's assault on true heaven, but Christ, "one who cast a shade," prays for Lazarus to rise. Here the Incarnation is stressed; also, the "shade" Christ casts reiterates "shadow" in l. 3 (repeated in l. 11). The philosophical reason for mentioning his shadow is to establish the corporeality of the Incarnation. That is, Christ was not a phantom, not even in the sense that Sri Krishna is in the Gita. The Incarnation is especially important to a mystic. If God can come down in the flesh, then man can ascend in the flesh; the Incarnation has forever ennobled humanity. Watkins' insistence, here and elsewhere, on the corporeality of Christ may also owe something to Yeats' perfectly dreadful play "The Resurrection" (1931), in which a Greek is astonished to find that the risen Christ has a body, while a Hebrew has expected it all along. Watkins was fond of the piece, and mentioned it to me more times than occasion could have called for.)

"Love's great strength" indicates, of course, Jesus' love for Lazarus as one person, but it also evokes the special love of God for the mystic, manifested in grace. The journey of the mystic life must begin in an act of grace; not all of Lazarus' faith could have brought him back, which is another reason Watkins does not emphasize faith. As the mystic is the spiritual forerunner of

mankind, the line also speaks of God's love for all men.

Watkins answers only indirectly the one question that readers of the passage in John must ask. Why did Christ raise Lazarus? That he loved him is no answer. It is no favor to a man to bring him back from heaven to earth, from the contemplation of eternity to time. The intention, if man can master it, must be what Watkins indirectly contends, that Lazarus was raised to serve as an example to all mankind. This is a likely interpretation of John 11: 42, "And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." Here Jesus is addressing God the Father; "it" is of course the command for Lazarus to come forth, and those who stand by are Watkins' "white crowd." Lazarus is asked to "pity the rich," those who have only temporal and material possessions; he may show his pity by coming forth and leading a representative life. (Jesus does not demand here that Lazarus rise, as he does in John 11: 43, but gives him a series of alternatives.) Just as important, John 12: 11 states that the Jews wished to kill Lazarus along with Christ because his rebirth had caused many to believe. This interpretation is only somewhat vitiated by Lazarus' virtual disappearance from scripture after his rebirth; he has been held up as an example ever since.

In praying for Lazarus to rise, then, Christ is

praying for the ultimate resurrection of all men.

The doves of l. 17, not unexpectedly, symbolize the Holy Spirit and baptism. In the second section of the poem the Holy Spirit acts as mediator between God and nature. Line 18 refers to God the Father, at whose behest the Holy Spirit, instrument of grace, opens the transfigured world ("glory") to Lazarus. (The syntax is difficult here. Line 18 is the object of "obeying," and "change" is the verb of the subject "doves.") The central metaphor is that of baptism. The "drops" are those of the fountain in section one, the imagination and the water of life, the drops the priest puts on an infant's head in baptism. The "voice" within this water is the voice of God, especially as at baptism. Lazarus is being offered the new baptism, such as Christ had from John the Baptist, if he will come forth. Watkins' recognition that rebirth into human form is not of itself desirable for a man contemplating his own resurrection accounts for his deviation from the Biblical version.

"In their cloud delaying" refers to both the unspoken "you" and "rich" in l. 20. Christ asks Lazarus to delay a bit on earth, in the "cloud" that the rich inhabit. It will be a delay for Lazarus, who may, if he chooses, enter Paradise; the rich too are delaying, their preoccupation with material things bringing them no closer to heaven. The obscure phrase "at last" may suggest a parallel with another Lazarus. The earlier reference in which the materially

wealthy were not pitied is the parable unique to Luke, 16: 19-31. (I am not suggesting that Watkins confuses parable and miracle, which is inconceivable; he is more likely to have confused two of his children than two Bible passages.) When Dives, in hell where he belonged, asked that Lazarus the beggar be sent to his "five brethren" to apprise them of the evil of their ways, Abraham rightly refused. Christ himself would like to refuse, and understands that Lazarus may be reluctant as well. "At last" is an indirect way of revoking or reversing the intent of the parable; that is, Christ is telling Lazarus that he is to ignore the parable.

"Consumed by their renown" is a minor theme in Watkins. The effect of fame and earthly rewards upon a man's soul is to consume the substance thereof, unfitting him for eternity or much else.

The "winding-sheet" is both the wrappings of Lazarus' body (John does not explain how anyone could come forth wrapped in a shroud), symbolizing the separation of the dead from the living, and the veil of nature, which keeps ordinary men from seeing transfigured nature, here called (as elsewhere) "silence." Silence is appropriate here to signify transfiguration as Lazarus, dead and alive, is "mute."

"Glory" is a word Watkins occasionally uses to mean "godhead." In painting "glory" usually signifies a combined

nimbus and halo, reserved for God and Christ as judge. That the Spirit "change[s] all the drops to glory" therefore indicates an event of greatest importance. "Love's glory" is the radiance of the transfigured world and the beauty of Lazarus' sacrifice. "Earth purified by love," an appositive of "love's glory," signifies the transfigured plane and reminds the reader of the necessity of love. Jesus, addressing Lazarus, reminds him that only an act of love can "purify" earth, removing the material dross. As Christ prays for Lazarus out of love and requests him to respond with love, so does the mystic seek God with a longing love. A further appositive (Watkins' poetry is full of them) is "no life not full of light." He believed that every man had the possibility of imaginative vision. Lazarus' sacrifice will assist men to realize their own visions, which must happen if the City is to be accomplished.

Then Jesus offers Lazarus clear alternatives. He may continue to "sleep in the sepulchre," awaiting the resurrection which he sees in vision, or he may "rise through the waking earth." In Watkins' poetry rest is always rejected in favor of active creation. Lazarus, and of course mankind, may continue to "believe that ancient story," the Old Testament religion of sterile law ("Moses' tablets"), with all it implies, or he may "see these petals breaking near the source," transfigured nature being the source. (These petals, unlike the earlier roses, are fairly conventional in

symbolism.) Against the sun and the stone tablets of Moses Christ offers petals, white roses (resurrection, purity of faith) and acacia (immortality of the soul, eternal life). Life (the acacia) is associated with "glinting birds," which presumably are glinting, or glittering, with water from the fountain. Birds in Christian art tend to symbolize the resurrected soul, the soul with wings.

"Ringing cup" is mysterious, but it rhymes nicely with "rise up." It may be an oblique reference to the fountain, or to the "cup" of the Last Supper, still in the future by a week or so but clearly foreseen. In the latter sense, the birds would be the previously mentioned doves, the Holy Spirit sometimes portrayed seeming to alight on the Holy Chalice. "Ringing" suggests "having repercussions," which is certainly true.

"Crust of birth" may mean nothing more than material things in general, or Lazarus' material body, or even the winding sheet. Nothing in the poem so far justifies "this," which implies that we know the referent of the pronoun. A picture of Lazarus stalking out of the tomb ripping off his grave-clothes and tossing them to the birds is what the line suggests, but I am not sure it is what Watkins meant.

"The waking earth" is a promise to Lazarus that his rebirth will help to bring about the "new heaven and a new earth."

Then Lazarus speaks. He realizes that he is addressed

by incarnate God and asks for assistance in the dreadful task laid on him. He comments that he was sentient (though not with the fallen senses) during his own burial. "That holy stave," a hymn or chant sung during the ceremony, is also the heavenly chorus he hears in ecstatic vision. "A caul about my ears" (caul here meaning a cap used especially for burial, with overtones of the caul of birth) stresses that the dead man did not hear with any mortal senses.

Lazarus knows that he, and the mystic who wishes to see God in this life, "must endure this dark," which is the dark of the earthly grave and the Dark Night many mystics must endure. Both are paradigms of the necessary waiting between death and the Day of Judgment. The mystic is aware that he suffers and joys in advance of, and for, other men.

Lazarus then addresses Christ directly and reveals a vision of the future in which he sees Jesus' death at the hands of Roman legionaires. He marvels that Christ, about to die, "hunted...with spears," could have cared enough for Lazarus to "knit" him, "bone to bone," and "kindle" his awareness "behind the sombre stone." "To wake, yet not to wake" indicates that Lazarus understands Jesus' purpose in asking him to rise. He will awake in time though he expected with reason--being among the original believers--to wake in Paradise. Also, he wakes as the new man, not the old.

The fountain stops just as the people go by. Perhaps the fountain's temporarily ceasing to leap reflects the

deadening lack of imagination of the mourners as they walk by. People who mourn the elevation into Paradise of a good man are insufficiently imaginative.

The fountain stops, not because Lazarus is dead, but because the people are so dull as to weep as if something dreadful had happened. When the fountain, imagination and inspired religious belief, stops, then Jesus weeps. Watkins' interpretation of the familiar verse is thus quite unusual. Taking the hint from John 11: 36-38, Watkins assumes that everyone involved misunderstands why Jesus weeps. To make the fountain leap again, he must raise Lazarus, against his will although he had foreseen that it would be necessary (John 11: 11). Relevant verses are John 20: 29, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," and 4: 48, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe," Jesus' sad comment on the raising of the nobleman's son. Christ has even less reason to mourn Lazarus' death than the "white crowd" have, but excellent reason to bewail their lack of imagination. The fountain's brief stilling is an objective correlative of his great disappointment.

The birds, again representing human souls, begin to sing because they realize that Lazarus' rebirth is the model of their own. "That very stone" is the stone that covered Lazarus' grave (John 11: 38). The next two lines are not strictly true, as Watkins knew from I Kings 17: 21-24,

Matthew 9: 18-26, Matthew 10: 8, and Luke 7: 11-17. He emphasizes first because Jesus' own death and resurrection are to follow. John the Baptist is a type of Christ's ministry; Lazarus, of his resurrection. "He they knew" reiterates that Lazarus is not a phantom or a ghost. This section, spoken by the voice of section 1, clearly shows the purpose of the raising. Though the people at first draw back in fear, just as men who rightly consider themselves Christian nevertheless "shrink from...singleness of heart," fearing the intensity of mystical vision, they then realize "their own last resurrection had come near."

According to a manuscript I have seen, the next line is spoken by the voice of section 2, namely Christ. In the printed version it is more likely that this line, and the rest of the poem, is spoken by the poet (Third Voice). The line refers not to the situation in sections 1-5 of the poem but to the poet-mystic's desire to re-create that situation. The new earth is to be brought about in two ways, which are really two aspects of the same event. The Second Coming is referred to here, but the necessary concomitant is that man deserve so great a manifestation of grace. He argues elsewhere that the Parousia cannot occur until "the last footprint walk upon the sea" ("Driftwood," LU, 59). Nor can earth be made new until man can appreciate its newness. This attitude is very different from the apocalyptic vision so popular in our century and to a lesser extent in the

last, a vision of chaos in which man is punished and the universe destroyed. Watkins never mentions punishment, and he wishes the universe to be re-created, made new, certainly not annihilated.

The regeneration of earth is to take place in a flash, at the divine moment of the end of time. Watkins did not believe in ameliorism, and he approved of social change for a negative reason only: he hoped it would avert chaos. But making man fit is a gradual process accomplished by the sacrifices and love of creative men. (So did Watkins adapt Shelley's remark about poets and legislators.) If this sounds unrealistically optimistic, at least it puts the burden on man himself, not on a wholly erratic principle of evolution or an amoral social force. The force that accomplishes the "city for which all long" is love, specifically Christian love. But earth will be made new by men of all religions. Watkins denied any validity to ancient myth and occasionally comments on what he sees as the sterility and narrowness of Judaism, but he would not have denied the efficacy and usefulness of any deeply felt visionary impulse. He tried to turn Blake, Shelley, and Yeats into Christians by reading their poetry slantwise, a doomed but fascinating project.

"Love newly born" is Christian love, new in every act of creativity. Love comes down in special acts of grace. The fountain, imagination, "plays" only for love, whether

mystical, sexual, or brotherly. The spouting and falling back of the fountain reminds us of the inevitable connection of imagination and sex. That the fountain "spills" is reminiscent of Psalm 23: 5, "my cup runneth over," representing the fulness of grace. The imagination and mystical vision "leap into light"--artistic and religious vision, by a leap of faith, reach the eternal realm ("light"), but they inevitably "spill" back. Fortunately, the vision "fills the basin's brim"; it fills and sustains him until the need for it comes.

"Water gives life to stone," a wonderful metaphor for the ability of the imagination to raise nature to a higher realm, is also literal. Water changes dead stone to living soil by cracking it or wearing it down: this is the miracle of nature, that it perpetuates its best aspects by turning lesser into greater. In the context of the whole poem, "water" is the imagination, the religious impulse; the stone fountain, the physical body of the artist-believer. Inevitably "leap" suggests sexual activity, which is the closest the ordinary person approaches to true creativity.

"Light renews our saying." "Saying" refers to the rest of the poem, which is Watkins-as-poet addressing Christ; it is also a word he used occasionally, with "making," to indicate artistic achievement. The line therefore suggests that the water of life and the divine light the poet sees sustain him.

One's feeling that the "Syrian courtyard" has its real existence elsewhere is confirmed by ll. 53, 54. The mystic is reassured that he has divine help. Once a man sets foot upon the way, to which he is summoned by an act of grace, all that can keep him from finishing is his own infirmity. The fountain's weight, the material element, stone or dross, is supported by "listening cherubim."

"For you the ages wait" merely repeats Watkins' oft-expressed conclusion that Christianity is the ultimate culmination of the religious impulse. The "old prophets," recognizing that their own works, though brave and worthy, were incomplete, eagerly await the Second Coming. Even pagan myth, wrong-headed as it was ("crooked eyes"), awaits the true religion. "The doves of light" are the doves of the Spirit, as in ll. 17-18; here, they also represent Noah's dove who, after "far straying," returned with greenery.

The last two lines are the soul's direct prayer to her groom for union. The speaker's eyes and mind are closed to material things; he will not open them until he looks upon the heavenly city and the eyes of its lord. Though I feel uncomfortable about making a distinction, the last stanza of this poem seems to describe the Contemplative stage.

The poem as a whole shows how closely Watkins associated the mystical impulse, the divine imagination, and scriptural Christianity. Any study that concentrates on

Watkins' supposed mythic qualities to the exclusion of his Christianity is worthless. It is any scholar's right to regard Christianity as just another myth, but not to treat Watkins' poetry as if he felt so. Louis Martz' comment that "there has not been such religious poetry since the seventeenth century"<sup>1</sup> is appropriate here. Watkins is like Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne, and Donne not only in employment of similar themes and images, but in the organic relationship of these themes to his daily life. Watkins' poetry was his life in a way that has become very rare. In our century poetry is just another occupation; it was not so for him.

Watkins' major religious themes are six in number (I am sure they could be analyzed differently). They are: Christianity as the inevitable outcome of the religious impulse in man; Christ's conquest of time, nature, and myth; the Mystic Way, especially Watkins' own struggles on it; the importance of Christian belief in his own life; the perennial theme of death and rebirth; and specific Biblical legends or days. As I have shown, in Watkins' poetry the themes tend to intertwine. "Cantata" contains all six, which is why I mention it first; the same could be said of "The Eastern Window" (BML), "The Broken Sea" (LV), and "The Turning of the Stars" (DB).

Watkins' treatments of Biblical passages are always interesting. The delightful "Ballad of the Trial of Sodom"

might almost be called religious light verse. Abram (the early name is used for exigencies of the ballad line) is portrayed sympathetically and with a touch of humor. He does not understand why God wishes to destroy Sodom, "That golden city / Of sin and joy," but he knows that he must not "resist God's ban."

Then Abram, trying  
To save that place,  
Thinking of the dying,  
Fell upon his face.  
'Lord, if there were fifty  
Righteous men  
In Sodom, Sodom,  
Sodom, Sodom,  
Men who were steadfast,  
Would you destroy it then?'

(DB, 93)

It is like Watkins to add the wonderful touch, "Thinking of the dying." Abram, trying to find the "fifty righteous men," "counted up his friends," another characteristic Watkins touch. Had he been asked to save Swansea, a town far riper for fire and brimstone than Sodom could ever have hoped to be, he would have begun by counting up his friends.

Though the future partriarch has never experienced the vulgar attractions of the city, he tries to imagine them:

He saw hell's demons  
In a midnight dive  
In Sodom, Sodom.

Obviously he has not had much practical experience of sin.

The sympathetic Abram, "sweat [ing] his life out then / For Sodom,"

....heard Hell's demons  
Beating on a drum.  
He saw men carried  
Under long, slim poles  
Through Sodom, Sodom.

In the end Abram realizes that he alone has sufficient faith to deserve salvation; he is forced to admit that the majority of men are not ready.

Abram the father  
Counting up the cost  
Saw faith plainly  
And knew that he had lost.  
God looked at Sodom  
In that pleading place,  
Sodom, Sodom,  
Sodom, Sodom,  
Down looked Abram,  
And he lost his case.

Watkins' versions of Biblical legends are usually this sympathetic and personal; in fact, "The Collier" has often been taken for autobiography, wrongly in the historical sense (Watkins would never have made a miner) but right psychologically speaking. Just as the discovery of evil in others was shocking enough that there is personal feeling in "Sodom," so was his breakdown serious enough to seem like Joseph's betrayal and being cast into a pit. His retelling of the Joseph legend is also a small paradigm of the mystic experience. Even in childhood Dai is set apart; an omen at birth, a shaft of light falling on him at school, the colored coat. He at first identifies with nature, perhaps a mistaken approach to God but better than none. This initial religious experience corresponds to Awakening,

the first step of the Way. He is given some favor, which corresponds to Illumination ("The lights of the rough land shone"), but is then tossed into a pit. This is like, though it may not consciously represent, the Dark Night. In any event, Joseph-Jack's Awakening, a mark of divine favor, seems to be balanced by the necessary Purgation. The others in the pit, tempters of a sort or even demons, mock his belief. In the last stanza, he is raised from darkness into "sunlight," perhaps signifying the fruition of his belief.

The single most important aspect of Watkins' mysticism as it appears in the poetry has already been commented upon: it is the point at which time becomes no time, the eternal moment of the "Mari Lwyd" and "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision." When the basic metaphor is nature, the mystic moment is the point at which nature gives way to transfigured nature. When the poet is commenting on his art, the mystic moment is the point at which a man becomes a true artist, no longer slave to a system, no longer dominated by time. A poem on this topic is the lovely "The Turning of the Leaves":

Not yet! Do not yet touch,  
Break not this branch of silver-birch,  
Nor ask the stealthy river why it laves  
Black roots that feed the leaves.

Ask first the flickering wren.  
He will move further. Ask the rain.  
No drop, though round, through that white miracle  
Will sink, to be your oracle.

Not yet! Do not yet bend  
Close to that root so tightly bound  
Loosened by creeping waters as they run  
Along the fork's rough groin.

Ask not the water yet  
Why the root's tapering tendrils eat  
Parched earth away that they may be  
Nearer the source those fibres must obey.

Behind the bark your hands will find  
No Sycorax or flying Daphne faned  
And the brown ignorant water bindweed breeds  
Not caring there what brows it braids.

Light in the branches weaves.  
Hard is the waiting moment while it waves,  
This tree whose trunk curves upward from the stream  
Where faltering ripples strum.

See how it hangs in air.  
The leaves are turning now. We cannot hear  
The death and birth of life. But that disguise,  
Look up now, softly: break it with your eyes.

(BML, 22)

Here the poet warns true believers against the impossibility of finding "the death and birth of life" in nature. The turning of the leaves is, however, a natural symbol for the death of the old man and the rebirth of the new. Watkins writes as if there were a point at which the leaves die. He did not believe in gradual change, which is why he was so disappointed at the social measures taken in his lifetime, but in sudden transformations, flashes of wisdom, the lightning of intuitive belief.

Like "Poet and Goldsmith," this poem is about "nature, and transfigured nature," the difference between the two being the different perceptions of mystic and non-mystic.

Only belief will answer the question "why?". "The stealthy river" could not in any case answer man's inevitable question, being but the river of time. To enquire of the river why it encourages the growth of trees is to ask nature to interpret herself, an obviously futile undertaking. The breaking of a branch (in this case silver, not gold) is no key to another world.

The pathos of stanza one, the anguish of the true believer seeing mankind seek truth in what he considers a false manner, becomes irony in stanzas two and five. Very well, he says, "Ask...the ...wren," see what answer you get. "Ask the rain." Its drops, "though round"--that is, having perfection of a sort--will not "sink" (ironic) to answer. Here Watkins emphasizes that the truths of religion do not lie in nature. There is no harm in asking the rain what it is, or where it goes; the question it is forever restrained from answering is "why?". "Though round" is an interesting qualification. Watkins does not mind admitting that even fallen nature is exquisitely fitted, beautiful, and intricate. Far from it, or he would not use "little birds" to announce Lazarus' resurrection or the leaves' coloring to represent the sudden transfiguration of the soul. But it is not enough on this earth to be "round." An extra dimension is required of man.

Stanza three comments upon the inherent irony of nature, which unlike the other world of the mystic must at

once tear down and build up. The root that is "tightly bound" in the earth is at the same time "loosened" by the river of time; man is told not to "bend / Close" to this phenomenon. Only when he has leapt into belief is it possible for a man to get close without being corrupted.

Stanza four is a slightly clearer version of stanza three, and it makes the same admonition. The interrelationships of nature are admitted, even grudgingly praised. The waters that loosen the roots of trees are sought out by the same trees for their necessary sustenance. The mystic who sees beyond this "fitting and fitted" (as Blake mockingly called it) recognizes in it a greater fitting, that of the man who has his roots in transfigured nature and lives on the water of life.

In stanza five Watkins rejects any relevance of myth. If man insists on knowing nature with his hands, by science or simple appreciation alone, he will find no mystery, solve no mystery. In the pine he will not find Sycorax (apparently Watkins misread the reference in The Tempest), nor in the laurel Daphne transformed. The imagination may find them and use them as archetypes; that is why Watkins mentions Sycorax, unique to Shakespeare yet surely a product of the myth-making mind. But neither will satisfy the quest for religious truth, hence "No...Daphne faned." "The brown ignorant water" is equally uninterested in the result of its indiscriminate breeding.

"Light" is Watkins' signal that the eternal plane is at last reached. It moves back and forth as the branches sway, but more importantly it is weaving that other world, made of light. It is difficult ("hard") for even the practiced mystic to ascertain the precise moment of transfiguration, and hard for him to wait. "This tree" appears to be an appositive of "it," an odd construction; perhaps the reader's having to wait for the identification of "it" reflects the suspension of time described in the stanza. The tree, in previous stanzas representative of no more than the interrelatedness of nature, is perceived to be the Tree of Life, its leaves "turning" from one dimension to another. This same phenomenon is described in another poem, the wonderful "Music of Colours--White Blossom...", in which the blossoms in spring "swing from world to world."

"It" of l. 25 is the "waiting moment," suspended for the believer. It can be "seen" hanging in air only by the transfigured senses, and not "heard" (by the fallen senses) at all. "That disguise" is the fallacy of materialism, the despair caused by accepting the natural phenomena described in this poem as final. This last stanza, and the whole poem, is amazingly optimistic. Watkins believed that any man had the capacity to make the distinction made in this poem. He does not so much tell the reader about his experience as invite him to share it. Though he does not appear to have had a sense of audience--indeed, such a

feeling may lead a poet widely astray--he did wistfully envision a group of followers to whom the injunction "break it with your eyes" would be practical advice.

Another important secondary theme is the natural outgrowth of Christianity from man's inherent religiosity. Here, perhaps, does Watkins allow some value to myth. In "Sonnet: Infant Noah" the development of at least some aspects of Christianity out of Judaism is illustrated in the figure of Noah, type of Christ.

Sonnet: Infant Noah

Calm the boy sleeps, though death is in the clouds.  
Smiling he sleeps, and dreams of that tall ship  
Moored near the dead stars and the moon in shrouds,  
Built out of light, whose faith his hands equip.  
It was imagined when remorse of making  
Winged the bent, brooding brows of God in doubt.  
All distances were narrowed to his waking:  
'I built his city, then I cast him out.'  
Time's great tide falls; under that tide the sands  
Turn, and the world is shown there thousand-hilled  
To the opening, ageless eyes. On eyelids, hands,  
Falls a dove's shade, God's cloud, a velvet leaf.  
And his shut eyes hold heaven in their dark sheaf,  
In whom the rainbow's covenant is fulfilled.

(BML, 57)

"Noah" concerns the fulfillment of Judaic myth in the Christian ethos. Under the Hebrew, death is still "in the clouds," the rainclouds of the Flood. The "tall ship" is of course the Ark, but also the means of escaping death. That is, for Watkins at any rate, Noah is a type of Christ, and his Ark a precedent of the Cross. Stars and moon, the major images of myth, are dead, the moon being shrouded by

the death-dealing clouds. But though the myths are dead, being supplanted by Judaism, that religion too is insufficient, so the Ark is "moored" to the dead myths. "Time's great tide" must fall--the Deluge represents the apparent victory of time--before it becomes apparent that "God's cloud" holds life as well as death.

The Creator as supreme artist has "imagined" the Ark. Watkins accepts the Blakean concept that God can err; he doubts his wisdom in making man. This is also a possible interpretation of Genesis 6: 7. That God's intentions, which man cannot fathom, were in this case for his ultimate good is emphasized by "built out of light." The "tall ship" is made of light, the fabric of the eternal world, and the hands of him who will sail it are equipped with the only nautical knowledge required: faith.

"All distances" were certainly "narrowed" to Noah's waking realization that his boyhood dream of ships and mythic symbols is true; no distance would exist if Noah had not undertaken the terrible duty of preserving animal and human kind. Line 8 reflects that God is aware of the burden and sorrow he puts on Noah. For the second time God has cast man out of a refuge; this will happen once more, when Abram, also equipped only with faith, will lead his unruly people into the mountain city of Zoar. References to cities are always loaded in Watkins' verse. Here the

reference is a reassurance, however cryptic, that the City is built, though only labor will get man there.

Lines 9-14 are, because of the typology, ambiguous. The eyes opening after the flood are Noah's, ageless because he is the first saviour of humanity, and eternally to be remembered as such. The dove, clouds, and velvet leaf (the sprig of olive) are important in Noah's life, and the "rainbow's covenant" is fulfilled in earth's repopulation by Noah's family. The emphasis, however, of l. 9 is that of great time, greater than the forty days and nights of Genesis 7: 12 or the 150 days of Genesis 8: 3. The "great tide" represents, if I count aright, 53 generations from Noah to Christ. (Matthew I names 42, Genesis 11 the rest.) The "ageless eyes" that open after all those years are Christ's, on whose eyelids and hands fell the "dove's shade" (Matthew 3: 16), referring to the baptism by John. "God's cloud" indicates the transfiguration, "a velvet leaf" the palms of the triumphal procession into Jerusalem (John 12: 13). "His shut eyes" suggests that Christ in memory or meditation beheld heaven. As a sheaf is any group of things laid together lengthwise, Watkins does not transgress in calling eyelids a sheaf, but as the awkward usage serves only to remind us of the more obvious rhyme, "grief," I wonder why he bothered. Though Noah's peaceful and long life as progenitor of all humanity fulfills the covenant, Christ as the new covenant is more fitting here.

This poem is not one of the great sonnets (though I know few lines better than 5 and 6), but it is a fine effort in so small a compass at so large a subject. I am again surprised at how personal and charming Watkins can make a Bible passage so familiar as to be part of the reader. The pleasant conceit that Noah as a boy dreamt of the great ship I find moving. Also, while Watkins has no intention of treating God in the same way, the God of this poem is somewhat more approachable than he of Genesis. Again, the mild typology is interesting, though the poem survives without it.

"The Strangled Prayer" is Watkins' only poem about that state of terrible aridity in which the soul feels it has lost the Beloved, and in which the believer may feel that prayer has become useless, hence "strangled." The intensity of this poem reminds me of Hopkins' "Terrible" sonnets, now considered classic examples of this stage of the Way. This excellent poem is not, however, one of Watkins' imitations of the earlier Welsh poet. A more useful comparison is with Vaughan's "Distraction," found in Silex Scintillans 1650. It is one of Vaughan's "begging" poems, in which he pleads with God to refresh him with new grace. After asking to be "knit" (a word Watkins uses in "Cantata" with the same unusual connotation), Vaughan continues



condition somewhere between the two is the subject of stanza 2; the believer, guilt-ridden with desires yet not realizing that the errors are his own, envies average men content to live solely in the natural world. The surrender of will necessary for mystical contemplation is difficult for even the sincerest believer.

This poem is the mystic's plea to God to end the Dark Night, which he knows he must endure. Evelyn Underhill divides mystics into those whose "consciousness of the Absolute [takes] the form of a sense of divine companionship" and those for whom "the need for conformity between the individual character and the transcendent has been central."<sup>2</sup> Watkins, with his images of love and union and his lifelong belief that God personally cared about him, clearly belonged in the first category. In none of his poems or prose do we find the familiar mystical emphasis on rules and organized worship; though Watkins belonged more to the Neoplatonist category than to any other psychological or philosophical category, we find no talk about Unconditioned Absolutes and no images of this concept. When a mystic who thinks of himself as the Bride of Christ (not necessarily in those terms) suddenly falls into the aridity of the Dark Night, he cannot help feeling abandoned by the Beloved. Hence "midnight" in the first line, for he feels that he has encountered darkness where, in the Illuminative stage, there was only light. Hence, also, the feeling that his

prayer is "strangled." Anyone who has read mystical literature knows that God has not turned his face away, but the Dark Night is, like madness, one thing to read about and another to experience. Thousands of years of experience guide the believer, so he knows intellectually that he is not deserted; but he feels differently.

To the believer suffering the Dark Night, especially a poet or artist, the natural world seems cold or actually hostile. He must fight through "night-leaves"; he feels surrounded by "windless air / Coiled with strange creepers." These images well convey the mystic's sense of airlessness in a world suddenly foreign. Therefore the poem begins with an emphasis on the distance of the Beloved. As Watkins sings "a placeless and a timeless heaven," it is unusual for him to designate both time (midnight) and place (above, as implied in "Look down") for divinity; this in itself shows something is wrong. The prayer is "strangled" partially because the poet is aware that it, too, is temporal and material. Distance from God is also shown by references to midsummer and Eden. Midsummer is traditionally a night, like All Hallows' Eve, when evil is let loose upon the world, the height of madness, once a time of blood and fire sacrifices. "Eden" is ironic in two ways. The poet admits the attractions of temporal nature by calling it Eden; as the pull of pagan rites and beliefs is strongest on Midsummer Eve, so are the beauties of nature. The believer is

at his lowest, nature at her most beautiful and seductive. There is further irony in the poet's thinking about Eden rather than "the city for which all long," which he never associates with Eden.

"Calls through night-leaves" emphasizes the mystic's feeling that he must fight through nature to get to God. "Shades of ancestors" does not indicate that Watkins has suddenly espoused Buddhism; he means his ancestors in Christ, the saints. He calls upon the great mystics of the past to aid him, by supplication and example, in his quest. The "strange creepers" are no more than vines, but they "strangle" the prayer. The moth, the traditional inhabitant of night, is, like the desperate believer, diaphanous and futile in its struggle towards the light.

Line 6 is an excellent image of the mystic's transcendence. With his hands he "separates the stars"--spreads them apart. He attempts to rip open the veil of nature to see through to the greater reality. Any number of poets have realized the existence of this Platonic veil: Shelley, Wordsworth, Emerson, Whitman ("Song of Myself," "The Sleepers"), Blake of course. But it is one thing to make this philosophical and unoriginal observation, and yet another to live, as the fulfilled mystic must, with that higher plane always in mind. That Watkins feels this last to be possible the poem makes clear.

The poet's heels are "strained" from reaching to the

stars; but the line also expresses a wish to be blessed for his physical effort. Contemplation, the mystics agree, is a strenuous business.

Line 7b is connected with line 5 in meaning; both lines refer to childhood memories now impinging upon the believer's consciousness and distracting him. The "voices" of l. 8 are of course the sounds of night (night is very noisy on the beaches of the Gower), but they are also real voices from the past. "I drown in a child's hair" may therefore suggest that the believer is overwhelmed by childhood fears, childish misunderstandings of the reality of God and nature, and unpleasant (or distractingly pleasant) memories of a sheltered, loving childhood. The line is, admittedly, evocative; but I fear that if Watkins is not a major poet it is because of lines like it.

"The boards are full of voices" is a nice line cribbed from the Vaughan poem. One necessity of mysticism, as indeed of any endeavour, is intense concentration, which is exemplified by stanza 1. But the mystic's concentration on what is distant and absolute is too easily distracted by things present and imperfect. In "Distractions," as in many other poems, Vaughan is acutely conscious of his own imperfections. Watkins' slight change in the line makes a more organic image. It repeats the idea in "strained heels" --the weight of the poet's mortal body causes the creaking of the floorboards. In any case, in both poems the

"voices" are an unpleasant characteristic of the Dark Night. Vaughan and Watkins were visionaries in both senses, tending to see reality as largely symbolic ("The air is full of symbols," Watkins said, not joking); and both had visionary experiences. Vaughan's "Regeneration" and Watkins' "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision" may serve as examples. Vaughan is not specific about evil visions, though his descriptions of death and corrupting bodies may be connected ("Resurrection and Immortality," for example); Watkins is. The creepers are "strange," there are footprints on the stairs (that is, he is haunted by the past), and insects run out of his vow. These visions grow more cosmic and even less pleasant. The poet thinks first of creepers and moths, familiar things seen in a strange way; then he has a vision of lesser men worshipping the moon; then a transcendent vision of cosmic evil.

"Lower impulses force their way into the field of consciousness," Underhill comments, and indeed Watkins sees "insects." That is, lower created things and lower desires thwart his determination to keep to the narrow Way. "Insects" in general, and "cricket" specifically, indicate the depth of his depression and fear. Among everyday created things, nothing is lower than insects, for they have only a corporate identity. Oriental mysticism seeks such an obliteration of personality. Some Christian mystics feel the same, especially those who have attempted to

reconcile their beliefs with those of the East, but for the most part Western mysticism is a highly individual undertaking, a solitary and lonely journey to God. The poet's solitude in this poem is not one of his dangers. The old Adam ceases to be, but is replaced by the true Self. So the cricket's chirping Amen is particularly ironic. It is not an image of nature's suddenly acquiescing in the mystic's prayer--I think in Chapter 3 I showed that to be quite impossible--but one of irony and mockery. The creature that has not even an identity mocks the believer's search for his true identity.

The poet gives up straining for the stars and kneels, recognizing that humbly appealing to godhead is more likely to be effective than fighting nature. But he is beset by a vision of nature worship, of pagans whose only approach to the transcendent is material and objective; that is, magical. Men dance, leap, and "gratify the moon" in hopes of material and physical gain, or because the ritual is psychologically satisfying; the mystic is trying to leap over these matters entirely to know the reality beyond. But in the Dark Night he may for a moment envy those who are content to "gratify the moon." Still, his distance from them is emphasized: "men," "they...they...they." The pagan who first realized that his tribe's most elegant and complex rituals did not bring, or keep away, the big rains must have been an unhappy man, wishing he had never

had such a revelation. All the more could the mystic, near despair, envy those never called to the Way.

"Stark moonlight" represents another of Underhill's "lower impulses." Nature at her most elemental and seductive ("stark") "touches the skin and pricks desirous men"; the poet is interrupted by thoughts of sex. The image is especially good in this poem, one of Watkins' more Metaphysical, even if it does associate physical desire with madness, both being brought on by the moon. The "dance" performed by desirous men is the sexual act, which gratifies the moon, symbolizing things-as-they-are, the cycles of time and nature. "Dance" also represents the dance of death, the elephantine cosmic dance. Whatever the arguments are for continuing the species Homo sapiens, it is indisputable that the fruits of desire "gratify the moon"; that is, the thoughtless procreation of millions of children every year sees to it that the cycles of time and nature are perpetuated. Surely this mindless populating takes man farther and farther from his heavenly city, for war, famine, plague and madness are incompatible with the aims of both poet and mystic. Watkins argues that earth will not pass away until "every footprint walks upon the sea"; clearly "gratifying the moon" is at odds with this higher aim.

While other men, looked upon with some longing by the poet, are busy perpetuating the cycles of nature, he kneels and prays. But he is constantly aware that "bones

make a circle round his naked moan." Bones are obvious symbols of time and mortality; "naked" emphasizes the mystic's loneliness and near-despair. His prayer does not go out clothed with ritual and prescribed words (we have seen him aware of the need for ritual words in "Earth-Dress"), but unadorned save by yearning. The line also reinforces the idea of the poet's existence in time and space being a hindrance to his knowing God.

"This sheet" is a coarse way of describing what he also calls "this crust of birth," the veil between man and God. "Sheet" may also continue an idea of the previous line, the fear of death; the body is the winding sheet of the soul. "Pleiads and the Plough" echoes "stars" of l. 6. The "ancient music" would seem to be the music of the spheres, here not with traditional associations, but suggesting the movements of the heavens, the way things are.

I think it charming of Watkins to rearrange the summer stars for the sake of a little alliteration. The Plough, or Charles' Wain, describes the seven bright stars in Ursa Major. The seven Pleiades compose a galactic cluster in Taurus; they are Watkins' favorite star-group. The difficulty is that Taurus and the Bear cannot both be seen at midnight on June 24th. Taurus is a late autumn-winter constellation. What is he trying to do? He was fond of paradox for the sake of paradox, it is true. Certainly he is not mistaken. With his excellent mathematical ability

and gift for natural observation, the man might have been an astronomer. As the Plough can be seen in midsummer, the mistake was not necessary for the rhyme. I think Watkins is simply emphasizing his indifference to the facts of temporal nature; it does not matter to a man who fears that God has abandoned him what constellations whirl above his tormented head.

The "eyes of serpents" are the stars, and the serpents are the "travelling beasts," the twelve constellations. "Hovering" and "eyes of serpents" suggest that the poet feels he is being watched, which he is. Representing both poet and mystic, Watkins takes himself as archetypal of men who must build the City. When that work is done, the "hovering" darkness and the "travelling beasts" will disappear. Psychologically speaking, the feeling that the very darkness has eyes is understandable, for the Dark Night is a period of imbalance, of which a transitory paranoia may be characteristic.

The protagonist here is both Watkins, a real man standing at a window of his home in Wales, and a representative mystic-poet. The man did not think of his vision as important for anyone but himself, but the archetypal figure (Taliesin, usually) realizes his far-reaching importance. Hence the phrase "my great prayer," which denotes the prayer the poem is about and the poem itself. The "travelling beasts," the constellations of the Zodiac, are the cosmic

equivalent of the "strange creepers" of l. 4. They too "cross" the prayer by their very existence, but the unhappy mortal in his distress sees them as actively antagonistic. In most of Watkins' poetry this is not so; it is easier to fight an enemy who acknowledges that you are worth fighting. The poet's frustration is more often caused by cosmic indifference (cosmic irony), an influence of the poetry of Hardy and D. H. Lawrence.

Line 19b is also psychologically convincing. The word "lust" is not much of a compliment to Gwen Watkins, but by the time of writing, September 1948, she must have been accustomed to, at least prepared for, lines like this. "Proud" is used in two senses. Sexual desire is often only a manifestation of pride, and lust cannot be anything else. Watkins also uses the word in its Shakespearean sense of "sexually excited."

The last two lines remind the reader that the Dark Night is also a period of growth. The poet has gradually realized that he is partially to blame for his slide into the depths. In the first stanza he stresses hurt innocence; though he prays, exerts his conscience against temptation, and separates the stars, his prayer is strangled by natural phenomena. But in the next stanza he admits to unpleasant visions; and in the next, to lust. This realization is in itself a sign of growth. In the last lines he begs to be changed--not heard or blessed, as in the first stanza, but

changed for the better. At first he begs God to look down, requesting a gift of grace; then he more wisely begs to be drawn up into God's grace. The imagery reflects this subtle but moving difference. The progression is from Earth to the Moon to Mars to the Zodiac as a whole to "twelve-tongued Pentecost," representing true heaven. The poem moves outward and upward and grows more cosmic.

Lines 20 and 21 are marvellous; l. 20 is among the greatest in mystical literature. The brusque harsh sound of "snatch up, untwist" makes up for the unlovely cliché of l. 16a; it has a wonderfully Vaughan-like sound about it. I hope it will be cited forever as proof that mystical literature is not invariably saccharine. "Twelve-tongued Pentecost" is an excellent phrase for the Holy Ghost. The believer is in this case a poet, who like all men of his calling badly needs the divine gift of tongues.

Line 21 repeats the idea of sexual temptation as well as the poet's general realization of mortality. The aim of mysticism is what some writers have called "deification," in which the believer has been made fit, by an act of grace aided by his own striving, for union with God. The mystic here admits that he has not reached this level and begs to be strengthened before an additional act of grace.

One further aspect of Watkins' religious poetry is his uncompromising attitude to myth, which is briefly commented upon in Chapter VI.

## Chapter VI

### The Myths Are Time's Imagery

Upon being asked whether he considered himself an Anglo-Welsh poet, Watkins replied, "I am a Welshman, and an English poet. English is the native language of my imagination."<sup>1</sup> He was not without Cymric--he once prepared a Welsh glossary for David Jones' "Tutelar of the Place"<sup>2</sup>--but he certainly was not competent in that language. Nor did he have much background in the myths, literature, and folklore of his own country. Educated at Repton and Cambridge, he knew what any literate person would know of Welsh literature: the Mabinogion as Lady Charlotte Guest saw it, some Daffydd ap Gwilym in translation, the great hymns. More important, he knew them as an Englishman knows them. Only his awareness of Taliesin is beyond the experience of the ordinarily well-read, and even there Watkins is more interested in the mythical bard than the real, in Charles Williams' version than in any more time-honored version, and most interested in his own identification with the bard. Yet several writers, including Kathleen Raine, who ought to know better, assume that he was steeped in Welsh language and lore.<sup>3</sup> Watkins was not a Welsh nationalist, or a man of the folk; nor was he a scholar. He knew

little of archaeology, though he helped out at digs; his understanding of language was a practising poet's, not a linguist's; his religious understanding was direct and intuitive, not theological. He was not an admirer of Robert Graves, and he certainly did not believe in any way, however metaphorical, in the White Goddess. He was a Christian mystic who used pagan myth to demonstrate the superiority of his own religion and for its value as image and symbol. He did not attempt to reconcile Christianity and myth--why on earth should he? Others, whose interests were different from his own, have done it satisfactorily enough. The mythological references in Watkins' poetry are overwhelmingly Graeco-Roman and literary, and the religious references are solely Judaeo-Christian. Both the poet himself, in conversation, and Mrs. Watkins, in a letter, told me that the poet read his Bible every day. Even allowing some exaggeration, clearly he read Scripture far more often than he read Frazer. The poems involving, always at a remove or several removes, the subject matter of Graves and Frazer, Jung and Campbell are interesting and important, but the total effect of Watkins' poetry is that of an educated upper-class Englishman who happens to know a little about myth, certainly not that of a primitive Welsh bard. When I wrote for him a modest paper comparing him to certain bards--not even suggesting that he was of their kind--he snarled, "Kindly divest me of those bardic robes."

Watkins' background is that of other major English poets: Greek and Roman myth, the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Bible, and all the English poets before him. A reader finding Watkins inaccessible would surely find, say, Pope, Milton, or Herbert inaccessible. The only characteristic which might make Watkins less readily comprehended is not his Welshness--Vaughan and Thomas were more Welsh--but his love of the German Romantics.

In the 290 poems published in volumes, 16 have direct or indirect references to identifiable Celtic myths. These are, from BML, the "Mari" itself; from LV, "The Broken Sea" and "Yeats in Dublin"; from LU, none; from DB, "Taliesin in Gower," "Woodpecker and Lyre-Bird"; from CA, "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," "Poet and Goldsmith," "Camelot," "A Wreath for Alun Lewis"; from A, "Three Sonnets," "Taliesin's Voyage," "Taliesin and the Mockers"; from F, "Taliesin at Pwlldu," "Sea Chant," and "Swallows." Of these, only the "Mari," "Camelot," two of the three sonnets, and "Wreath" do not mention Taliesin. "Camelot," "Three Sonnets," and "Wreath" contain Arthurian references, which I, following the arguments of Loomis and other Celticists, include here by courtesy, though I doubt Watkins considered Arthur a Welsh figure. The conclusion is obvious. Of Watkins' published poems, one, the great Ballad, is about Welsh myth. This does not make him a Welsh bard relying on his inheritance of myth and lore.

Watkins did not dredge his Taliesin poems out of vital memory, collective unconscious or--for heaven's sake-- his blood. He read Charles Williams. I do not deny that a general awareness of his Welsh heritage may have been in Watkins' blood; I do not deny it because the erratic and indefensible theories of Jung, Campbell, and others have become fashionable tools for the critic, but I would never claim it on Watkins' behalf. Watkins was a Christian mystic. Most of his poems about myth, and those using myth as well, argue the superiority of Christian love. "The pathos of pre-Christian love is in its incompleteness."

Watkins in a number of poems uses old myths to shape and illustrate a newer one, the Romantic myth of the poet. For Watkins, possession of the creative imagination signaled a semi-divine being. "Blake was immortal," he said, and meant it. The chief poem in this myth is the lovely "Childhood of Hölderlin." Where the standard myths are concerned, it is usually Watkins' purpose to show either how inadequate they were, philosophically and spiritually, or (more generously) how they lead into Christianity.

Northrop Frye's lecture-essay "The Archetypes of Literature states that every poet's work is a "private mythology, his own spectroscopic band or peculiar formation of symbols, of much of which he is quite unconscious."<sup>4</sup> (In Watkins' case, "kaleidoscopic" would be better, for all his poems are made of the same bits of glass--or diamond--

arranged in different ways.) In this sense, every poet must be said to be mythic. Frye continues, "In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycles of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal human being."<sup>5</sup> Watkins' work is mythic in this sense simply because he is a Christian, although he personally did not think of Christ as a sun-god. While he has no one figure--except Christ--like Frye's central symbol, his archetypal Romantic poet (Taliesin, Holderlin, Blake) is both the sun, creative fertility symbolized by trees and birds, and an archetypal human being who is partly a god (Blake was immortal, Holderlin is "man as demi-god," A, 64). While Watkins nowhere associates Taliesin with the sun, he cannot escape the meaning of the name ("shining brow"). He does refer to Schiller as a "classical sun." Christianity, by this definition, is a myth, the "central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual"<sup>6</sup> of writing poetry. The Hebrew and Graeco-Roman myths are hardly important in his poetry in the same sense, the Celtic not at all. Only the Romantic myth of the poet and Watkins' Christian belief are "central informing powers."

Watkins' mythic vision is, because Christian and Romantic, necessarily comic. Blake's vision, if it may be

called one or the other, is comic; Yeats', tragic. Watkins is nearer the earlier model by virtue of their shared Christian/Platonic bonds. Surprisingly in so serene a poet, whose philosophical and religious outlook was settled (or frozen) before he wrote any poetry now extant, many poems show a struggle between comic and tragic visions. A dialectic of sea and land, light and dark, is inevitable, but I also find a fluctuation, sometimes in the same poem, between images of comedy and those of tragedy. According to Frye, in the comic vision the human world is a community, and a central image of Watkins' work is the City of God, with poem after poem about "symposium, communion, order, friendship, and love."<sup>7</sup> But a number of poems express the horror of the isolated man (never, as in the tragic vision, his exultation). The "marriage or some equivalent consummation" belonging to the comic vision is celebrated in "Epithalamion," "Lover and Girl," "For a Wedding Anniversary," "A Lover's Words," and a number of others; and many in the form of the Mystic Marriage. It is not surprising in itself that the same poet also uses, in the "Mari" and "Niobe," tragic archetypes of "the harlot, witch and other varieties of Jung's 'terrible mother.'"<sup>8</sup> What is surprising is that this poet, serene mystic, uses conflicting archetypes.

Watkins' dialectic becomes more obvious in images from the animal world. Nor suprisingly the comic vision sees a

"community of domestic animals," and indeed there are so many sheep, birds, and horses in his poetry that one can scarcely hear the words over the bleating and chirping. There are even many poems that at first glance seem to be about sheep or "the gentler birds." But a frequent symbol of the poet is a raptor, the hawk, and in "Buried Light" he insists:

All hunting opposites I praise.  
I praise the falcon and the dove.

(CA, 82)

Watkins' imagery would therefore suggest that he had a more realistic and encompassing view of the world than most mystical writers.

In the comic mythos, the mineral world is "a city...or one...glowing precious stone," and Watkins' main symbol is the great city; there is also Taliesin's reference to a diamond. But his temptation to a tragic view (Watkins was a Celt) is clearly seen here too. Images of sand, sterility, rocks, and ruins abound--only to be rejected, of course, but even that suggests that he felt a need continually to reject them. In the light of Frye's addition to this category of "sinister geometrical images like the cross" it is interesting that Watkins very rarely uses the word or image, not even in "Good Friday." Perhaps his ambivalence is most obvious in images of what Frye calls the "unformed world."<sup>9</sup> The comic archetype of the "river, traditionally fourfold"

is one of his two or three basic images, and there is rarely any doubt in context what it represents: Eden (Genesis 2: 10), the earth, mankind ("fourfold life"), Wales and the city. But his other main image is the sinister tragic archetype of the sea.

Watkins' poetry lacks currently fashionable archetypes. Though it is extremely fashionable to write mythically, or at least to pretend that one is the creator of a new myth, he manages to cite all the wrong ones and even makes the gauche mistake of believing his own Christianity. Jung's, and Graves', White Goddess appears in only one poem, "Niobe," and there only as an alternative to be rejected. Frye comments that the basic function of criticism is to show how all works derive from the Quest myth, but the theme is largely absent from Watkins' poetry. A quest is often implied, for this poetry of religious fulfillment followed the believer's journey on the Mystic Way; but the journey was over before the publication of BML. This in itself is unfashionable; twentieth-century writing is a literature of search, loss, and decline, rarely of finding, never of having found. Critical attempts have been made to prove Watkins useless for this very lack. I, for my part, do not see why a man who has found God and a perfect life should wish to look farther. All myths of nationalism have been of hysterical importance in this century; he rejects all, however subtle. Though a Romantic, he rejects

most Romantic myth--"the speaking face of earth," the Romantic agony, what Morse Peckham calls Analogism, and its exact opposite, Hardy's cosmic irony (except as an alternative to be rejected). Unlike many Romantics, he puts no faith in science, itself a popular myth. One Romantic archetype he preserves, and indeed builds upon, is that of the Poet-Visionary (and rather self-consciously played the part).

Like Frye's several works on myth, Joseph Campbell's magnificent Masks of God offers a number of ways of approaching myth as well as, in Creative Myth (Volume IV), enlightening comments on its meaning for the poet. A careful reading of Campbell, the leading interpreter, with Eliade, of the Jungian theory of the collective unconscious, convinces me that Watkins does not rely on myth in any real sense. Several of Campbell's comments are useless--he defines myth as the "formless form of Form," for example, and a man of such reputation should not call a tattoo a "mythological epiphany"<sup>10</sup> unless it happens to be on the body of a harpooneer looking for a white whale. What may be a definitive view of myth is set forth on the last page (472) of Primitive Mythology: "a poetic, supernormal image, conceived, like all poetry, in depth, but susceptible of interpretation on various levels." "Levels" is right, for this definition applies to any human endeavor. In this sense, Watkins is a mythic poet, but so is any writer above

the level of the New York Daily News. Certainly he does not use what Campbell calls the major creative myths--sexual love appears in a very few poems, freedom not at all (it simply is not an issue for Watkins), the quarrel of the sexes rarely, the Waste Land by implication in a few poems, the dying god only in "Good Friday." He adds but one meagre poem to the Arthur saga, nor does he have anything to say about the myths characteristic of his own century--democracy, individual freedom, the death of God, existentialist preoccupations, situational morality, and nationalism.

Watkins did not see love as a myth in opposition to the sacramental system of the church; he saw them only together. Passionate love as a deliberate challenge to the established church does appear in one poem, "Camelot," but Watkins' version has more to do with Tennyson than with the archetypal sources or with any real sociological issue.

Watkins uses what Campbell contemptuously calls "collective myths," those aimed at inculcating belief. Even his interest in the Graeco-Roman myths, the Mari, Taliesin and Arthur stem from his Christianity. He makes the Mari equal, on one level, Mary; he thinks of Arthur as a Christian figure and, like Williams, of Taliesin as a pivotal figure between myth and Christianity.

Watkins uses few conventional religious symbols. The donkey Jesus rode appears once or twice, but Pegasus

far more often. The cross is not mentioned, but other trees, especially the laurel, are prominent. There may be Protestant iconoclasm in this, for though he spent his adult life in the Church of England his formative years were Nonconformist, and the switch was initially not a conscious one; he simply got confirmed with all the other boys at school. But his Nonconformist background cannot be the reason for his use of Greek myth instead of the more familiar (and usually Roman Catholic) symbols of Christianity. Like Blake, he felt that many religious symbols had been overworked even in the kind of poetry he intended to write. Blake created his own myths to obviate the use of symbols that, whatever their religious value, had lost their poetic value. Watkins, who did not have the mythologizing kind of mind Blake had, nor for that matter his philosophical understanding, chose to use symbols from Graeco-Roman myth, feeling with some justification that they had lain dormant long enough. Certainly they had not been used organically for decades, excepting only by Yeats. For the same reason, he used a few ideas from Welsh literature; here he was even more successful, Taliesin being less well known. Taliesin is as successful a representative of the divine imagination as Blake's Orc, Emerson's "Poet," or Williams' Taliesin.

Unlike Blake, Graves, Yeats, or Eliot, Watkins rarely uses myth for structure. The "Mari" uses the folk rite

for its minimal structure, and in the very few narrative poems--"Cantata," "The Collier," "Infant Noah"--the shape of the myth more or less determines the shape of the poem. In this connection it is interesting to note that Watkins' narrative ballads, save "Culver's Hole," use neither mythical imagery nor structure, but are really outside the ballad tradition, as Watkins himself insisted.

His dislike of systems ("I know the meaning of no word ending in 'ism'"), a legacy of Blake's, is part of the reason that myth is rarely the subject of a poem. Myths are expressions of a people, but they are also systems with the double purpose of inculcating belief (thereby giving priests power) and explaining the known universe. Watkins does not see his Christianity in either regard, but as personal and non-theological. His attitude to myth, Christianity, nature, art, and his own mysticism becomes clearer when one realizes that he does not offer his poetry as an interpretation of the temporal world. It did not matter to him if his beliefs were historically true. Campbell constantly inveighs against Christians' insistence on a literal virgin birth and an historical resurrection. For Watkins, unlike many Christians who need relics as proof of historicity, all that mattered was a leap of faith. When Ruth Pryor, writing in the Anglo-Welsh Review,<sup>11</sup> remarks in passing, "Kierkegaard is likely to prove a more prolific source of metaphor than Plato" she is absolutely

right. It is Watkins' mysticism and indebtedness to Blake that give him the Platonic cast. I am sure that, had he been forced to speak of his Christianity on a temporal level, he would have insisted on its literal and historic truth, but this is not an issue in the poetry.

The central belief of a Christian mystic, that of an infinitely transcendent God immanent in man's soul, is wholly inconsistent with pre-Christian Western myth. Even more so is it inconsistent with the Jungian theory of the collective unconscious, a modern psychological concept of myth. As Joseph Campbell argues carefully and at incredible length in Primitive Mythology, myths are no more than "innate response modules" (he affectionately calls these nonexistent doodads "IRMs") carried chemically by human and presumably animal genes.<sup>12</sup> If the dying and resurrected god, Christ's knock at the heart of man, Buddha's enlightenment at the Tree of Life, and Arjuna's supreme vision of Sri Krishna are but chemicals in the bloodstream, there is no world beyond time, there is neither resurrection nor damnation, and, in this life, there is neither sin nor love. Freud destroyed the ancient concept of guilt; Jung, Eliade, Campbell and others have destroyed individuality. I do not care either way, but I object when critics write about Watkins as if he were a follower of Jung. To argue that Watkins, who wrote of a world that the less enlightened did not see, actually believed in the collective unconscious

and relied on his Welsh blood, rather than his heritage of English verse, for image and symbol, is to accuse him of hypocrisy of Borgian proportions.

Duality of historicity and myth in a single figure is always fascinating to a poet. In the same archetype there may be an historical event, the myth itself, and the relevance of the myth to the time of writing. There are the historical Arthur, the vast Arthur corpus, and White's The Once and Future King, which has many pointed references to twentieth-century political and moral problems. Similarly, Watkins was interested in the historical Taliesin, as revealed in that poet's writings, and the mythical bard as revealed in Williams; Watkins' personality and beliefs were submerged in the mask of the Welsh bard. Of course Taliesin is related to several mythic motifs. The meaning of his name may indicate some connection with a sun-god; he is certainly a Moses figure, Moses himself being a sun-god type; and Taliesin, at least as Williams and Watkins see him, is also related to the Wise Fool motif, of which Parsifal is the obvious example. Yet clearly Watkins means him to be something beyond, and greater than, these motifs. He is an individual being who transcends time, who contains these motifs, however contradictory, within him. Taleisin does not transcend history by representing the collective unconscious as, say, HCE does in Finnegan's Wake or Merlin does in much of the Arthurian

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tradition. Just as Merlin in Lewis' That Hideous Strength is a real person brought back to life from a sleep of hundreds of years, so is Taliesin a real person existing in time as well as on the eternal plane. The collective unconscious denies man individuality, leaving him only a corporate identity, like the insects. Taliesin, for Watkins a representative mystic, therefore cannot represent the collective unconscious. He chooses to be limited in time.

A representative poem using myth while rejecting it is "Atlas on Grass."

Atlas on grass, I hold the moving year.  
I pull the compass to a point unguessed.  
Vast midnight flies to morning in the breast,  
All moves to movement, moves and makes a sphere.  
Rough Winter loosens leaves long-veined with fear,  
Then the seed moves to its unsleeping rest.  
Faith springs where beads of longing lie confessed.  
Time lost is found; the salmon leaps the weir.  
Death stops the mouths of graves, is coverer  
Shrouding and hiding what the pulse reveals,  
But he, too, moves to his Deliverer;  
Judgment will never stop the dancer's heels.  
What's gone forever is forever here,  
And men are raised by what a myth conceals.

(BML, 56)

Here the poet who must bear the psychological and philosophical weight of nature and time is likened to Atlas, bearer of the world as punishment. The myths are associated with temporal nature. Man in nature ("on grass") must bear the seasonal ("moving") year. But, as "hold" implies, he also has power over nature. The poet, or indeed any imaginative man, "pull[s] the compass to a

point unguessed" by nature; he may treat nature as he pleases in his work.

"Vast midnight" is simply the starry heavens, echoing "compass"; this flies to morning according to the never-ending cycle of sunrise/sunset. "In the breast" is a conventional association of midnight with ignorance and sunrise with enlightenment. The implication is that because the poet can "pull the compass" morning may dawn "in the breast." Line 3 echoes the suggestion of line 2, that the creative imagination can turn midnight to morning, "breast" being used instead of the more obvious "mind" because of Watkins' limited anti-rationalism (and the rhyme).

As a consequence of the cycles of the days and seasons, "All moves to movement." All things are in continual movement; this is the Romantic preoccupation with growth and change. "To movement" is an ironic pun. One meaning is that of the Neo-Classical clockwork movement, the vast geometrical scheme of things working itself out to the smallest detail, the cycles operated by the clockwork of Fate. Yet the line has a Romantic feel: even the "movement" controlling things "makes a sphere," an harmonious whole. That all things make a sphere is a major contention of Watkins' poetry, as of many mystics. Life is a "circle of beginning."

Movement and activity are emphasized in the second quatrain, which as it should develops beautifully out of

the main idea of the first quatrain. All the forces of nature move from winter to spring; even the seed underground is active, preparing for spring. It appears to be at rest, because buried; but, like the dead believer, is in fact preparing for a new life. The seeds are, like rosaries, "beads of longing"--longing, that is, for rebirth. They are confessed, shriven, and buried; as faith springs from the proper rituals performed in a creative way ("kind, habitual words"), so does the new plant from the winter ritual.

Here Watkins uses the material of myth against myth. The seasons are shown to be not just mechanically governed, but full of activity and life. Even death is not, as in the myths, the ultimate power, but a force that "moves to his Deliverer." Judgment, the Christian end of mortality, never stops the "dancer's"--the imaginative man's-- "heels."

Technically the sonnet is not bad. After stressing movement in the first quatrain and activity, an intensification of movement, in the second, the sextet brings all to a halt: "Death stops." After verbs of movement, pulling, springing, finding, leaping, the sextet commences with verbs of ceasing and concealment, a reversal of idea. The last two lines summarize the piece in a way more characteristic of the Shakespearean than of the Italian sonnet.

Line 13 echoes l. 8. Just as the poet recovers time lost in longing by imaginative perception, just as seedtime

leads to harvest, so what is gone is embodied in what is here. Even more than this, what myth tells us is gone can be found by imaginative re-creation. The "myth" of the last line is both myth in general and the specific myth of the power of death. Here Watkins uses the central image of myth--the seasons--to convey a Christian concept, the powerlessness of death. All myth attempts to placate death in one way or another: Christianity supplants it. But the last line also implies, mainly in the word "conceals," what Watkins also argues in "Infant Noah," that a genuine belief may be found under the layers of myth. To be sure, myth conceals the true faith, which alone raises men; but the perceptive man may find, under the obfuscation, some elemental truths.

For Watkins the myths are "time's imagery," at one with the seasons and the turning heavens; they are functions of temporal nature, but like nature they are signals of the reality beyond the temporal plane. But he was not interested in the myths for themselves. In "Yeats' Tower" he comments that they have too restraining an effect upon the imagination:

the tales of time in centuried scrawl  
Compass the delicate mind.

(BML, 27 )

In "Prime Colours" he sneers at myth and asserts the supremacy of Christian belief:

That winged horse of myth  
Seems now a circus horse, paid to be clever:  
The ride from Bethpage will last forever.

(BML, 16)

In "The Turning of the Leaves" he associates his disappointment with the myths with his similar disappointment with temporal nature:

Behind the bark your hands will find  
No Sycorax or flying Daphne faned  
And the brown ignorant water bindweed breeds  
Not caring there what brows it braids.

(BML, 22)

In "The Room of Pity" he questions the efficacy of Old Testament faith, then mocks the Roman myth:

Till the last cry rent wide the temple struck  
And showed blind ignorance running to a mould,  
The soldiers' god, the wolf that gave them suck.

(BML, 26)

"Two Decisions" also questions the validity of the Old Testament by itself:

Leave stillness, go away  
Beyond this leaf-drift,  
Leave the ten-windowed house  
And merely remark,  
The ivy grew too close:  
That house was dark.

(BML, 34)

"The Eastern Window" champions Christianity over previous myths:

A night full-starred  
Lent to the curtain-folds a scent of shrouds,  
The constant heavens exciting mortal lips  
To match earth's memories to the moving clouds.  
Then from the night the nursery in eclipse  
Learnt superstition while the head was still;

Then ageless leaves first found their roots in graves  
While a cold moon with stark, magnetic will  
Sucked through the trees the blind, unerring waves.

(BML, 62)

The myths "match earth's memories," which ought to be a source of knowledge and joy, to "the moving clouds." This is a great folly; men's lives must not be interpreted solely in terms of temporal nature. The myths are associated with death, beyond which they cannot see. "The nursery" is a reference to the speaker of the poem, Watkins as a child, but it also refers to the infancy of the race, the time during which the myths took root in impressionable minds. In this period the infant race "learnt superstition," the myths, though true religion could have been perceived. (Adam did not have to disobey God). "Head was still" implies the absence of thought necessary to take most myths seriously, but there is also a suggestion of sleep. The shamans and priests, witch-doctors and rabbis put to sleep man's inherent religious sensibility and made religion a series of empty gestures, "vain repetitions." The following lines contain a horrifying image of the moon-goddess, so gaily worshipped by men in "The Strangled Prayer," influencing the cycles of time.

These examples are from BML. In LU the myths are twice associated with the money economy, which Watkins the bank clerk abhorred ("Returning to Goleufryn," "Money for

the Market"). In the powerful last stanza of "Rhossili," he associates the Sibyl and Tiresias with shipwreck and other detritus of time. The "Sibyl's trance" is held responsible for the circle of birth and death endured by dolphins, representing human souls. In "Unveiling the Statue," one of Watkins' few war poems, man's belief in the possibility of a peaceful world is "short-circuited" by the coupling of Venus and Mars, the "small-drawn / Annihilators of faith." This is Watkins' most frequent charge against the myths: their unimaginative ("small-drawn") approach to life obscures the true faith.

In the third of the "Four Sonnets of Resurrection," an imitation of Hopkins, the reference to "pagan creeds" is also reminiscent of Milton's "Nativity Hymn":

The pagan creeds fly back, staining white stones, and  
Wheel the dark birds of Fate, while <sup>overhead</sup> rainbow dolphins  
play.

(LU, 59)

Here the myths are not only put to rout by Christianity, but they are so vile that they stain the purity of white things. In "The Song of the Good Samaritan" it is said of that hero that he "broke the classical falsehood." Later the Samaritan affirms that "The centaurs already are stone"; that is, the lowest limit of existence.

In DB, "The Strangled Prayer" includes this conflict of myth and Christianity. Mythical or pagan worship

cannot rise above the level of do ut des; hence the pagan worshippers "gratify" the moon. But on the whole DB reveals a less stern attitude to myth. Though Egyptian myth is firmly rejected in "Pledges to Darkness," it is presented sympathetically. The same is true of the tragic figure of Niobe in the magnificent poem of that name. While Watkins deplores that the victors of Marathon did not wait "for the life that death revealed"--this is his frequent claim that the myths did not see beyond the material facade of death--he does recognize in the myths a power so great that it may eventually "transfigure the whole sea": the human value of grief. It is the women of myth who endure for Watkins. He may be compelled to reject them all; he finds "no Daphne faned," the widow giving her mite is superior to the Egyptian princess in her sarcophagus, Niobe is ultimately a "dumb Pieta," uncommunicative of final vision. But he always presents women with considerable sympathy. Niobe is credited with seeking the true vision, though she never finds it; like "Atlas on Grass," she "bears the moving sky." In "The Turning of the Stars," the Roman myth is rejected, but the metamorphosis of Daphne is sensitively done. In the same poem, however, Copernicus, like the Good Samaritan, "denied the classical falsehood."

Few poems in CA betray outright rejection of myth. Rather, the emphasis is on the use of myth as metaphor. In "Pegasus and the Child," Watkins uses the winged horse to

represent his own work, a metaphor consciously rejected many years before in BML. (Watkins toyed with the idea of this poem, however, as early as 1936, even before "Prime Colours," in which he rejects Pegasus as a viable symbol. Apparently he did not feel that the poem adequately represented his position until 1959, when CA appeared.) I do not mean that Watkins came to take the myths more seriously, or that he came any closer to reconciling them with his stern Christianity. I mean that he uses them more familiarly, purely as metaphor, without feeling the need to reject them.

On the other hand, several poems written much closer to the time of publication, such as "Serena"(1952), express ideas closer to the thirties' and forties' poems. Myths are associated with time, and man is a frail "vessel whirling" without God, adrift in seas of Fate. Though Watkins sympathizes with Guinevere in "Camelot," she is reprimanded for lack of control. In "The Replica" he shows that the countless changes of nature and myth add up to nothing but themselves; only Christian belief, only a vision of the transfigured world, can take us beyond transience. In "Moonrise," though Watkins does not reject myth, he does counsel that man turn from the moon (=the moon goddess) to married love, Christian love on the sexual plane:

Do not succumb to the lure of strangeness. Trust  
Better the scarf you wear than light diffused.  
Words that once bound shall bind us when we are dust.

Trust narrow bonds; and when you have refused  
The enchanter's dissipation of light and shade,  
Tread with my heart that place where worlds are made.

(CA, 74)

The moon, representing the myths as she did in "The Eastern Window," is an enchanter (Watkins could not have written "enchantress's dissipation") distorting eternal matters and leading men astray. Men are to "trust narrow bonds" of Christian belief and love, the light of revelation, rather than the "dissipation of light and shade" cast by the moon.

Taken as a whole, CA is inconclusive on the subject of myth. By selecting passages from this volume one could show almost anything about Watkins' poetry. If one were so inclined, one could make a reasonable case that his attitude to myth softened and became more conciliatory over the years. But he never became a follower of Jung, he never established a mythic universe as Blake did, he never used myth as a basis of all human endeavor as Yeats did. The "central informing power" of his work continued to be Christianity.

Watkins' symbols of the union, or reconciliation, of myth with Christianity are Taliesin and Hölderlin. In all the Taliesin poems Christianity triumphs, but Taliesin is clearly a virtuous pagan who before his conversion deserved Paradise for his endurance of "all vicissitudes." In the figure of Hölderlin Watkins rightly emphasizes the Greek,

but even here several sections of "The Childhood of Hölderlin," especially Sec. 9, make the great German a Christian hero.

The long "Childhood of Hölderlin" sets the tone of Affinities. Standard myth is not important in this volume, but it is here that poets become mythic figures. (Again, I do not mean to imply that all the poems were written around the time of publication; they certainly were not. But I credit Watkins with careful and deliberate choice.) The artists so demi-deified are Dylan Thomas, Nijinsky, Charles Williams, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Heine, Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, Michelangelo, Taliesin, and, of course, Hölderlin. Some of these mythologizings are supportable by historical evidence. Certainly Michelangelo was the embodiment of "athletic genius," Keats "one whom Genius had preferred," and Wordsworth was so intimate with transfigured nature that it is not outrageous to call him a Pan-like figure. But Nijinsky did not "transfigure the mask of genius" no matter how well he danced, and it is difficult to see why D. H. Lawrence should be a nature divinity.

Standard myth is of little importance in A, but F returns to more conventional content. "The Sibyl," "The Parthenon," "Semele," "Sea Chant," "Sonnet," and "She That Is Memory's Daughter" all use Graeco-Roman myth in fairly conventional ways. In "Semele" Watkins' sympathy for the

women of myth is touchingly shown in his first-person identification with the doomed girl. Semele's longing to see her lover in his "true form" is likened to the longing of the poet to see "all radiance in one instant shed" --both the mystical vision and the vision, itself by nature semi-mystical, necessary to the writing of poetry.

From BML on, Watkins never denied all virtue to the myths. To the power of grief he adds, in "Injustice and Praise," the power of justice. In "The Sibyl" the prophet becomes a type of the Christian prophet; she knows that Fate cannot prevent a good man from "singing like a tree." Occasionally he combines Christian and mythic themes without stressing one or the other. The sonnet "Christ and Charon" is a remarkable assimilation of both.

#### Christ and Charon

After more terrors than the sea has waves  
Where vultures black beyond redemption stood  
Circling that boatman for his tithe of blood  
Guiding to Hell his boat's eternal slaves,  
I left that nightmare shore, and woke to naves  
Of daybreak; there men walked in brotherhood,  
Mutual forgiveness, love; their speech was good,  
Being governed by the music of their graves.

Then death's rank odour changed to scented balm,  
The sweat of horror to a holy gum,  
Fierce lamentations to that living psalm;  
There stood a cradle where time's waves were dumb  
Above which angels sighed: 'Your life is come';  
And every sigh a ship destined to calm.

(CA, 57)

The "I" of this poem is Christ, who passes from Hell to an idealized Christian community of the (probably very distant)

future. Watkins' vague "there" (l. 6) denotes not a material place but a level of being, in this case the community of imaginative mortals Watkins calls "the city for which all long." But the "I" is also the mystic who reproduces in little the life of his savior. Only rarely does a mystic insist on the objective reality of visions; indeed, a vision may be what this poem is, an intimate realization of the truth of an archetype, Biblical event, or theological concept. This poem is a vision in the way Vaughan's "Regeneration" is, or Watkins' "The Strangled Prayer."

Line 1 at once refers to Christ's descent into Hell and to the mystic's real terror during Purgation and the Dark Night of the Soul. Lines 2-4 suggest the latter. The vultures may represent those dark forms that reach up from the subconscious during the Dark Night to "strangle" his prayer. Lines 1-4 describe the sort of vision that may plague the distraught believer. "That boatman" "guiding ...his boat's eternal slaves" becomes symbolic of the opposite of Christ, a devil or abstraction such as Mammon or Antichrist, or simply the absence of Christ, who previously has guided the believer on the Way but seems to have deserted him. But it is not necessary to say that Charon here represents a devil, or the myths in general, but simply an undifferentiated evil force welling up from the subconscious. A clear choice is offered: a man either becomes one of Charon's eternal slaves or joins Christ where "men

walk in brotherhood." There is no alternative.

After the terrible descent into the Dark Night, the believer awakens "to naves of daybreak." After the "nightmare shore," at once Charon's landing and the deepest part of the mystic's depression, Contemplation is like break of day. "Naves" does not, I think, indicate that Watkins thought of the City of God as a big church. "Nave" can mean the center of a wheel; the poet envisions the city lighted by a number of radiating suns or even wheels (as in Ezekiel 1: 15ff), though not a temporal identifiable sun (Revelations 21: 23). "Daybreak" emphasizes Watkins' concept of a dynamic heaven, timeless and placeless, an abode of beginnings and development.

Poet that he is, Watkins remarks that the "speech" of the believer is "good." He lists the qualities which a believer needs to reach Paradise; qualities accompanying the mystic whatever his religion. The City is built of these. The mystic is "governed" by his impending death, knowing what music he will hear. Because Christian, he argues that only Christ's example encourages men toward brotherhood. In this respect the sonnet is anti-mythic; only when man has passed through the mythic stage (stepped off Charon's boat) is his speech "good." Watkins also implies that the mystic's yearning toward God "governs" his speech, again closely associating mystic perception with the imagination and the writing of poetry. "Death's rank

odour" and "the sweat of horror" represent the decay of the flesh of the believer. The line also refers to the dying of the Old Adam; more generally, to the fear of death characteristic of mankind, atheist and believer alike. The only cure of the fear of death is, alas, death. The "scented balm" and "holy gum" are the spices brought by Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Salome to the tomb of Christ (Mark 16: 1), or those of Nicodemus (John 19: 39-40). "Scented balm" also suggests the myrrh of Christ's birth and burial, as used by the poet in "Cantata."

"Fierce lamentations" again reminds us of the mystic's sufferings, as well as the inevitable sorrows of Christ's followers before the Resurrection (John 20: 11). "That living psalm" is the "holy stave" Lazarus heard in the grave, in contrast to the "ancient music" the mystic is tempted by in "The Strangled Prayer." Loosely, the "psalm" is the verse Christ speaks to Mary Magdalene (John 20: 15-17). The "living psalm" also suggests "psalm of living," the exalted life the mystic leads after enduring the Dark Night.

The cradle of l. 12 is not the oxen's stall of the barn near Bethlehem, which would make ll. 7-9 meaningless, but a symbol of rebirth for both god and man. Christ dies as man, passes through Hell, and is reborn as the Son of God, while the angels welcome him home. The mystic, passing through psychological terror, dies as the Old Adam

and is reborn in Christ, where he can live a life no longer dominated by time.

Though, as the poem shows, Watkins grew more willing to use mythological imagery without attacking it, he never reached a synthesis of myth and Christianity any more than he reached one of materialism and idealism, or of philistinism and art. His awareness of eternity could not permit him to praise, or seek to be reconciled to, a perception of the world which remained on the temporal level and could not see beyond death. This, ultimately, is the only criterion for Watkins: only the eternal perception of nature, only true art, only the deliberate conquest of time, only the mystic's knowledge of transcendent Godhead, see beyond death.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER II

1. There is a difficulty with the name of the hero of this poem. I feel that the ballad makes no sense of any kind unless the boy who cuts his name into the desk is the boy who interprets dreams. David John is a very common name in Wales; "Dai" is a nickname for David or Daffydd. Another possibility is that the "he" of l. 35 is not the "Jack" of l. 33, in which case the boy is simply named "Dai," but this makes Watkins' grammar very strange.

2. Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 58.

3. All three works mentioned, the Watkins and Blake poems and the Biblical story, could be seen ironically. Certainly Blake pities the sweep who believes in angels. The irony in the Watkins poem depends on how one takes the last few lines; if the boy has been saved just to go down in the mine again, then Tom and his friends, dead, are the lucky ones. The sting in the tail of the Joseph story is the Egyptian slavery of the Hebrews.

4. Robert Graves, The White Goddess, p. 75.

5. Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 135.

6. Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, p. 241.

7. Charles Williams, The Region of the Summer Stars, 7.

### CHAPTER III

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in Selections

from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen Whicher, p. 223.

2. Emerson, p. 235.

3. Vernon Watkins, "A Note on 'Earth-Dress,'" The Prose of Vernon Watkins, p. 236.

4. "A Note on 'Earth-Dress.'"

5. Vernon Watkins, "For the Reading of Poems at Greg-y-nog," The Prose of Vernon Watkins, p. 232.

6. "For the Reading of Poems at Greg-y-nog." In Prose.

7. Vernon Watkins, "The Joy of Creation," The Listener, April 30, 1964, pp. 720-721. In Prose.

8. "The Joy of Creation."

9. "The Joy of Creation."

10. Vernon Watkins, "Poets on Poetry," X, I, 2 (March 1960), pp. 153-154. In Prose.

11. Vernon Watkins, "Ceri Richards," Viewpoint, 7 (1964), p. 12. In Prose.

#### CHAPTER IV

1. William Butler Yeats, The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats, p. 283.

2. Yeats, "The Spur," p. 309.

3. William Blake, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David Erdman, p. 555.

#### CHAPTER V

1. Louis Martz, "New Poetry," The Yale Review, XLIV (Winter 1955), p. 308.

2. Underhill, pp. 389-390.

## CHAPTER VI

1. Vernon Watkins, "Reply to the Wales Questionnaire," Wales, VI, 2 (Autumn 1946), pp. 23-24.
2. Vernon Watkins, "Glossary," Poetry (Chicago), XCVII, 4 (January 1961), p. 209.
3. Kathleen Raine, "Vernon Watkins: Poet of Tradition," Anglo-Welsh Review, XIV, 33 (Summer 1964), pp. 21-38.
4. Frye, Fables of Identity, p. 11.
5. Frye, Fables, 15-16.
6. Frye, Fables, 15.
7. Frye, Fables, 19.
8. Frye, Fables, 19.
9. Frye, Fables, 20.
10. Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God, Vol. I, p. 117.
11. Ruth Pryor, "Review," Anglo-Welsh Review, XXIV, 53 (Winter 1974), p. 227.
12. Campbell, Primitive Mythology, pp. 30-49.

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