DYLAN THOMAS'S ANIMAL SYMBOLOGY IN CELTIC TRADITION: THE INNER VOICE OF A POET

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Dylan Thomas was born with the gift of poetry: in his poems, meaning and form become the most perfect symbiotic achievement. Yet, the exposure of his inner soul as related to the world, far from owing its success exclusively to inspiration, has also evolved as a result of a carefully applied technique, which focuses on the combination of sounds within the whole, the byzantine selection of words and the elaborate quality of the metaphors. The subject matter, basically reduced to the author's preoccupation for his own survival in Cosmos, becomes the essential matter within Thomas's production. This theme is carefully ostracized from the poem through its focus on symbolic figures, mostly balanced in a system of opposites. The poetic struggle between naturally confronting animal symbols descends directly from Welsh Celtic cultural tradition, as these pages will subsequently evince. Thomas thus intimates that personal allegiance to cultural values becomes the only possibility for redemption in the chaos portrayed in his modernist universe.

Thomas's perception of the symbol is totally modern in its concern with poetic *mimesis*. Paul De Man recalls that "the opposition between 'good' and modern poetry [...] and not so good and not so modern poetry [...] is made in terms of contrast between poetry of representation and a poetry that would no longer be mimetic" (de Man, 1971: 170). Yet, if poetry is not *mimesis* anymore, what do symbols stand for? Paul Ricoeur, drawing most conveniently from Cassirer, alludes to symbols as "quasi-texts" or "symbolic mediation" and distinguishes between "an

implicit or immanent symbolism", which provides an initial readability "in opposition to an explicit or autonomous one" (Ricoeur, 1984: 57) that is subject to interpretation. According to this second view, the symbol aims at but never successfully represents; its function becomes mere mediation. Consistently with his views, de Man asserts that "truly modern poetry is a poetry that has become aware of the incessant conflict that opposes a self, still engaged in the daylight world of reality, of representation, and of life" (de Man, 1971: 171) and later he completes this idea by concluding that "loss of representational reality (*Entrealisierung*) and loss of self (*Entpersönlichung*) go hand in hand" (de Man, 1971: 172). In order to fight the questioning of self, a revision of the function of symbols must be attempted. Edinger, who similarly defines the symbol as "a mystery communicating living, subjective meaning" (Edinger, 1992: 109), believes that the ego becomes a victim of symbols that are experienced but not perceived. Because symbols are "spontaneous products of the archetypal psyche" (Edinger, 1992: 110), Jungian psychology proposes to bring symbols to the state of consciousness in order to be able to recognize the archetype (Edinger, 1992: 113). By defending the inability of words (that he calls "symbols of speech") to grasp total meaning, Jung brings us back to the concept of *mimesis*. Significantly, he hints at the correlation between symbol and myth when he points out that: "words came in the end to have a substantiality with which the ancients could invest their Logos only by attributing to it a mystical value" (Jung, 1993: 29).

The rejection of *mimesis* is shared within a tradition of visionary poets who share a vision of Cosmos similar to that of Thomas, who elaborate on archetypal images, and who use visual representation to access a humanized universe. Thus, the image of fountain water in the opening lines of Thomas's "Rain Cuts the Place we Tread" quickly brings to the reader's mind Blake's visions. As a matter of fact, Blake's influence descends on Thomas via Yeats who, not only discusses him in such pieces as "Symbolism in Painting", for example, but also acknowledges Blake's open authority over a long phase in his production. Blake's poetry, however, presents a number of features that mark a distance from Thomas's notion of reality: Blake is much more abstract in his consideration of truth and he is also more conventional in his avoidance of distortion; in addition, Blake is conscious of the difference between experience and its symbolic interpretation, while the modernist poet is not. Notwithstanding these limitations, Thomas shows a similar concern for his relationship to reality: like Blake, he believes that art is not mimetic but aims at the truth. That truth, Blake proposes, can only be reached by "participating in the symbol-making process and seeing through symbols to the reality they only partly express" (Damrosch, 1980: 76). Thus he accesses the concept of archetype: "He ransacks various mythologies for symbols while claiming that they all reflect a single unity" (Damrosch, 1980: 72), which becomes his ultimate link to Thomas.

Yeats uses the same concept of archetype when he borrows images and themes from Celtic myth and he goes further in the use of animal symbols such as heron, gull, eagle and swan. At a purely theoretical level, his connection to Thomas must be understood through "his early discovery of the French Symbolists through Arthur Symons [who] had taught him to admire them, but he was aware of their limitations" (Henn, 1966: 128). As a poet and a critic, Yeats succeeds in blending emotional, intellectual and archetypal symbols and later actualizing them within Celtic myth as a means of recreating well-known images that he relates to significant aspects of his life. In this context, symbols respond to his need to explain the relationship between the system that he creates and the meaning he seeks for. There are two consequences: on the one hand, Yeats's succeeds in creating a personal myth resulting from his own living experience; on the other, "the animal and bird symbolism is steadily reduced as Yeats grows older. Irish myth is foreshortened, discarded unless it can be made relevant to the present" (Henn, 1966: 146).

The picture would not be complete if we overlooked Ted Hughes, the modernist poet best known for his use of animal symbols. In an attempt to reflect upon his animal symbols, entitled *Poetry Is*, he starts from the following statement: "In a way, I suppose I think of poems as a sort of animal" (Hughes, 1970: 9). The poet later analyzes his relation to the animal world from the age of three, when he became obsessed with modeling in plasticine and drawing, all through his childhood in Yorkshire until "finally, [...], at about fifteen, my life grew more complicated and my attitude to animals changed. I accused myself of disturbing their lives" (Hughes, 1970: 11). At about the same time, he began to write poetry. Clearly, Hughes's view of his craft became inextricably bound up with the idea of hunting: the poem is an animal itself. Endowed with life, the poem energy is drawn from its harmonious structure: "It is better to call it an assembly of living parts moved by a single spirit. The living parts are the words, the images, the rhythms. The spirit is the life which inhabits them when they all work together" (Hughes, 1970: 11).

Born and bred in earlier Twentieth century Wales, Thomas found himself within the poetic tradition directly evolved from Welsh rhythmical patterns, while at the same time, he made a positive effort to detach himself from the Welsh small town mentality,

> Thomas's Welshness is an important part of his make-up. He never spoke or understood the Welsh language, and he very early taught himself to speak English not with the slight Welsh sing-song but with what he himself described mockingly as a 'cut-glass accent'. He disliked Welsh nationalism, and, indeed, all types of nationalism, but Wales remained to him home (Fraser, 1977: 6).

It is well known that Dylan Thomas's father, a product of a newly implemented public education system, grew up to become a strict literature teacher who managed to interest his only son in poetry through his gift for declamation, "He loved to read aloud in clear, rich tones, barely flecked with an accent. It was the style on which his son came to base his own sonorous delivery, that way of reading poems and telling funny stories that some found unforgettable, others fraudulent" (Ferris, 1989: 19). As a consequence, Dylan Thomas's early poetry, which was written before his sixteenth birthday, evinces a strong taste for traditional rhythms. This combination of popular culture and strong poetic feeling defines Dylan Thomas as a *rara avis* within the patterns of modernism (Spears, 1970: 42). Daiches comments on the estrangement of Thomas who, "[...] has been held up by some as the antithesis of Eliot and his school, renouncing the cerebral orderliness of the 1920s and the 1930s in favor of a new romanticism, an engaging irresponsibility" (1966: 16).

A preliminary reading of Thomas's pieces usually leaves in his audience a sense of old-fashioned confusion, a somewhat altered state of mind, perhaps, as a consequence of some form of modernist insomnia. Each piece requires a further attempt, however, which opens the possibility of decoding a solid structure, generally articulated on a system of contraries. Eros and Thanathos are portrayed by Thomas as pushing from opposite extremes and thus, generating a feeling of anxiety that very often suggests some form of authorial madness. Agony and discomfort appear to inspire a poetry suspiciously generated in the vapors of alcohol, as a consequence of a tremendously challenging personality from the point of view of his creativity, although somewhat difficult to handle in a more personal perspective: "He toddled about the bars and bookshops, asked women to take him to their beds, talked to other poets, and behaved outrageously at literary parties" (Fitzgibbon, 1965: 308). Such feelings would be experienced by the poet throughout his entire life, which becomes easily perceptible in the content of his poems. In those, the rejection of the center is curiously replaced by an emphasis on the destructive breach of two opposing forces that, pulling from separate ends, respond for the development of meaning within each piece.

The subject matter of his poems is an issue that has long concerned critics even from the period when the poet was still alive and active. Perhaps, the most interesting view that we have encountered is that of Alphonsus M. Reddington, who defines Thomas as "a poet who thought before he wrote and who had something significant to say" (Reddington, 1968: 7). This quality is what causes the critic to view Thomas's poetic evolution as a journey "which Thomas proposed to be taking by focusing upon his internal conflicts" (Reddington, 1968: 5); this becomes an ever present poetic subject throughout his production. If we must accept the idea of a journey, however, Thomas's failed search for its center

stereotypes him as an anti-hero. However, as happens in the mythic journey, it is not the end that embodies the valuable hidden truth, but the poetic process itself and that process, undeniably, stands around the figure of the poet's ego.

Coincidentally, Annis Pratt shows an analogous view to that of Reddington in her analysis of Thomas's images, identifying myth as a necessary component in his metaphors and locating their value in symbolism.

> From the universal and embarrassing agonies of puberty he forges presentations of ritual initiation into manhood that achieve the style and stature of myth. By 'myth' I mean, in this context, both the social, pseudo historical folklore handed down through tradition and the inward, integrative symbolism which the individual shapes into art (Pratt, 1970: 52).

Although this study is not directly concerned with Dylan Thomas's images, Trolley has an observation that is relevant to my argument: "He [Thomas] seems to have 'built up' his poems out of phrases. In so doing, he appears not merely to have been working towards 'meaning' but also towards a maximizing of intensity" (Tolley, 1975: 274). It would seem, then, that the poet initially built associative images as a step by step process. This *modus operandi*, which seems to be highly productive for a poet who certainly aims at communicating a valuable thought, is much less felicitous for his readership when it comes to dealing with the intricate complexity of form, as Daiches, again, points:

> [...] But the fact remains that the poem is congested with its metaphors, and the reader is left with a feeling of oppression. A fair number of Thomas's earlier poems are obscure for this reason. It is not the obscurity of free association or references to private reading, but an obscurity which results from an attempt to pack too much in a short space, to make every comma tell, as it were (1966: 21).

Fortunately enough, Thomas uses symbols as natural decoders of the poetic extravagance he aims to build around a central core of meaning, where he hides one single idea: that of his essential conflict, "Thomas uses words or images at a level more fundamental than that at which the conventional notion of 'meaning' applies. He thus gets literary respectability as a 'symbolist' [...] a sort of Welsh Mallarmé cum Rimbaud" (Tolley, 1975: 273).

The combination of dual principle and symbolism helps the reader greatly, since, as Tolley hilariously remarks in comparing Thomas to Empson: "[...] It is necessary to grasp the single and often highly specialized aspect of a metaphor that is literal and to ignore the rest: then, the poem becomes comprehensible" (Tolley, 1975: 275). As a matter of fact, most of Thomas's poems become easily transfigurable once we learn to identify the underlying Manichaean principle:[1]

> The most basic of these antitheses is that of light and darkness, which Thomas himself mentioned. Flowing from these two is a host of others. The following are the most representative: life (resurrection) and death; eternity (immortality) and time (mortality); creation and destruction; certitude and doubt; soul and body; innocence and sin; love and sex; union and isolation; trust and fear; joy and grief; peace and suffering. For clarity and convenience, the sources of conflict will be reduced to three major heads, relating to philosophical, moral and theological issues respectively (Reddington, 1968: 6).

Coincidentally, there are a number of critics who support the view that this dualism, all essential in Thomas's conception of reality, is a direct consequence of the poet's ascestry. Thus, John Ackerman states that, "the art of composition in Welsh poetry owes much to [an] apprehension of the duality of existence. The poem itself tends to be a pattern of the experience, but given without a narrative design" (1966: 31). Pratt holds a similar view on the same subject: "The 1930-32 Notebook leaves little doubt that at one time he shared the Welsh chapel tendency to split the world into a Manichaean division of heaven and hell" (Pratt, 1970: 85).

As to the opinion that the Welsh tradition promotes a view based on the dramatic division between two opposing poles, we must strongly disagree. On the contrary, Celtic druidism proposed a philosophical model consisting of the perfect identification between God and Cosmos, otherwise known as pantheism.[2] This essential fusion of the natural and metaphysical world is nevertheless compatible with the hypothesis of a primitive chaos emerging from the combat between the forces of light and those of darkness, which gave the present world its origin. Traces of such a battle are to be found in all Celtic mythologies; thus in Ireland, the *Leabhar Ghabhala* portrays the fight between the Tuatha Dé Danaan and the Formorians:[3] "Fearful indeed was the thunder which rolled over the battlefield, the shouts of the warriors, the breaking of the shields, the flashing and clashing of the swords" (Rolleston, 1994: 117). Similarly, in Wales, *The Book of Taliesin* presents a battle of trees where one of the sides is led by Arawn, king of Annwn, the Welsh Otherworld, and the other by Gwydyon (Markale, 1992: 358).[4]

Those episodes were later circumscribed into the characteristic Celtic harmony that enforced such concepts as transmigration of souls, continuity between the living world and the Otherworld and unity with the Supreme Being through natural contemplation. This being so, Ackerman's opinion that "another important feature of old Welsh poetry is an awareness of the dual nature of reality, of unity in disunity, of the simultaneity of life and death, of time as an eternal moment rather than as something with a separate past and future" (1966: 30) can only be applied to Thomas under the Celtic principle that opposing extremes must be understood as an integral part of the supreme whole (Markale, 1989: 184).

Directly linked to the underlying structure is the tradition of the symbol. The presence of symbols in Thomas's poems is justified by a number of coincidental factors, namely symbolist poetics, the poet's aim to express a destructive inner struggle and, last but not least, the incidence of Welsh cultural traditions, "since he knew no Welsh, this influence came through the two channels already mentioned: contact with Welsh-speaking relatives and friends, and through translations of Welsh poetry and prose" (Ackerman, 1966: 27).

The ultimate relevance of Celtic patterns in Thomas's verse is hinted at by such factors as lexical items, rhythmical structure and the nature of the symbol itself. Color, for instance, which Thomas uses profusely,[5] becomes one of the most characteristic examples of Celtic influence, since it is "[...] another feature which is characteristic of Celtic texts and distinguishes it from other ancient and Mediaeval literatures" (Jackson, 1967: 183). In his use of animal symbology in two poems, Thomas surprisingly endows certain objects with color connotations that are contradictory (positive and negative). In "Poem in October", there is an implicit allusion to color in the mystic connotations that Thomas attaches to herons: "And the mussel pooled and the heron/priested shore" (3-4). Similarly, in "In Contry Sleep", more concerned with country memories, Thomas ciphers his well known system of opposites by using a color code: "Fear or believe that the wolf in a sheepwhite hood" (3).

Another factor, rhythmic design, was also borrowed by Thomas from popular sources. Its influence lies mainly in the sound structure. This Welsh metrical pattern, called *cynghanedd*, confers such musicality on the pieces as to justify the ancient bardic notion that a poem is composed to be listened to,

> The word *cynghanedd* means harmony, and in poetry is a means to giving pattern to a line by the echoing of sound, consonantal and vowel. There are three main divisions of *cynghanedd*: *cynghanedd gytsain* consists of multiple alliteration; *cynghanedd sain* has alliteration and rhyme within the line; and *cynghanedd lusg* has internal rhyme only (Ackerman, 1966: 32).

Certainly, Thomas portrays a great number of rhythmical effects carried through by means of figures of speech or simply by the more casual effect of his own poetic intuition, underpinned by the traditional structure of *cynghanedd*. Instances of *cynghanedd* are easily found in Thomas's production, as in "I make this is a warring absence": "And opium head, crow stalk, puffed, cut, and blown" (10).[6]

Yet, the most important feature that Thomas borrows from his Celtic forefathers, both in terms of its frequency and its value as focus and decoder, is the symbol, and more specifically, the animal symbol. The range of animal images that Dylan Thomas introduces in his lines is extensive as it includes general terms such as

"beast", "animal", "insect" or "bird" and also more specific nouns like "crocodile", "whale", "spider" or "sparrow".[7] Although the lexical list is very comprehensive, for the practical purposes of this essay, we intend to focus on an analysis of animal symbols that are specific to Celtic imagery and that, in addition, are used by Thomas as symbols instead of mere images.[8]

The figures are eloquent enough. Dylan Thomas's *Collected Poems* includes more than eighty-five references to the generic "bird". The high occurrence of this item can hardly be chance, but responds to conscious poetic expression. Certainly, a closer analysis identifies this "bird" clearly as a symbol: in the first place, it concentrates abstract meaning; secondly, it functions as a significant reference within the line and, most importantly, it correlates a set of values that remain permanent throughout Thomas's production.

In his *Dictionary of Symbols*, Jack Tresidder states that birds are the "embodiment of both the human and cosmic spirit —a symbolism suggested by their lightness and rapidity, the soaring freedom of their flight and their mediation between earth and sky" (1998: 25). In fact, there are a number of poems in Thomas's production in which the bird symbol involves certain transcendence. One such instance is "Sometimes the Sky's Too bright", where the poet establishes a correspondence between birds and heaven itself: "Sometimes the sky's too bright / or has too many clouds or birds, / and far away's too sharp a sun" (1-3). Similarly, in one of his birthday poems, "Poem in October", birds anticipate the poet's desire for eternity: "My birthday began with the water- / birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name / above the farms and the white horses" (11-13). This idea of freedom is further expressed in "Ears in the Turrets Hear" where the poet feels imprisoned in his human body and uses the bird symbol in order to express the idea of a transition:

> Beyond this island bound
> By a thin sea of flesh
> And a bone coast,
> The land lies out of sound
> And the hills out of mind.
> No birds of flying fish
> Disturbs this island´s rest (10-16).

Together with the association of birds with heavenly matters[9] and the positive connotations carried by the symbol, like its assimilation to the realm of light,[10] birds, in Thomas's poetry emphasize a more notorious cultural meaning that acquires significance when understood against the poet's Welsh background. In the Celtic world, birds, of all symbols, worked out different layers of meaning as a consequence of the introduction of Christianity with its a complementary set of values. One of those is particularly characteristic of Thomas's poetry:

> Birds are especially close to the Druids and poets, who sometimes decorated themselves with feathers. [...]. The ability to understand birds represents the highest art that a poet can achieve. Merlin (Myrddin) achieved this ability after he lost his mind and withdrew into the forest (Heinz, 1998: 85).

Thus, in "Poet: 1935", the poet talks about himself as "O lonely among many, the god's man" (47) because he has the gift of vision: "Out of a bird's wing writing on a cloud / you capture more than man or woman guesses" (53-54). According to the same underlying principle, in "Especially when the October Wind",[11] the poet views himself as an interpreter of supernatural signs and, very interestingly, transforms himself into several animal symbols that allow him to observe the world from the perspective of first a crab, and later, a spider. In this context, the birds appear in a parallel structure in line five: "By the sea's side, hearing the noise of birds" and later, in line thirty-two: "By the sea's side hear the dark-vowelled birds". Considered jointly, the sequence of lines involves the idea that the poet embodies the supernatural qualities of a bard who is capable of interpreting natural signs (as a pantheistic manifestation of God himself) as encoded in the secret language of birds and trees.

Another example is "Over Sir John's Hill", a very rich poem which opens with the image of the poet expressing his feelings of closeness to the divinity from his perspective up on a hill: "Over Sir John's hill / the hawk on fire hangs still". The small birds of the bay that appear in line four will be the conductors of the poet's vision, which goes beyond reality: "Death clear as a buoy's bell" and grieves at the contemplation of the souls incarnated in the birds: "We grieve as the blithe birds, never again, leave, shingle and elm". Again, at the end of the poem, the poet reveals himself as a bard who listens to the signs of nature:

> [...] and I who hear the tune of the slow,
> wear-willow river, grave,
> before the lunge of the night, the notes on this time-shaken
> stone for the sake of the souls of the slain birds sailing (59-62).

In general terms, there are a number of indicators to consider when analyzing the bird symbols appearing in Dylan Thomas's production. In the first place, their relevance in Thomas's discourse is related to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. This essential idea is contained in Celtic texts such as *Imramm Curaig Mael Dúin*: "in eoin adcidsi dano isna crandaib, ol se, anmanda mo claindisi 7 mo chenéoil etir mna 7 firu at é sút ic irrnaidhi laí bratha" (Oskamp, 1970: 138).[12] Birds represent in Dylan Thomas's poetry the souls of the dead. Thus, in "Out of the Pit", full of Biblical allusions, Thomas's birds announce their allegiance to God as the companions of the saint who, "Still in his hut, [...] broods among his birds"

(102). They explicitly appear after death occurs: "And took to feeding birds with broken crumbs / of old divinities split bits of names" (85). In similar circumstances, "it is the sinner's dust-tongued bell" that progresses from the initial idea of a sin committed against the child and, retrospectively, against sex. In this context, the bird stands as an epitome of the immaculate soul: "And from the pacing weather-cock / The voice of bird on coral prays" (19). However, perhaps the poem in which those values become most evident is "After the Funeral", where the poet proclaims himself Ann's bard and he chants: "Bless her bent spirit with four, crossing birds" (26).

As stated above, the productivity of birds as poetic symbols lies in their double embodiment of both flesh and spirit. This paradox is carefully unbalanced by Thomas on the introduction of a significant color code that contrasts birds of life and birds of death. Thus, "I make this in a warring absence" opens with a mythical counterbalance represented in two animal symbols: the crow "And opium head, crow stalk, puffed, cut, and blown" (10) and the pigeon "And a silk pigeon's guilt in her proud absence" (17). Those birds adjust to the color code that comes directly from the mythic idea of a battle between light and darkness. In this poem, the birds act as agents that actualize the process of transcendence: "Destruction, picked by birds, brays through the jaw bone" (36) and following it, the intervention of two Celtic symbols introduce the idea of rebirth: "The cauldron's root through this once-rindless hand / Fumed like a tree, and tossed a burning bird" (55-56).

The tree is a well-known universal symbol of origin and of center. In Ireland, sacred trees were called *bile* and they are referred to in the *Dinnsenchas* as the source of sacred wisdom. The sacred space within the forest was known as *nemeton* (Green, 1995: 56). The *nemeton* was a place of worship and a symbol of the center "L'atteinte du Paradis implique, pour le commun des mortels, le passage par la mort et ses pérégrinations agoissantes et périlleuses" (Burgos, 1972: 85). The cauldron, on the other hand, is a specifically Celtic object and its relevance is directly related to the rite of passage, "El caldero es para los celtas un objeto relacionado con el conocimiento, la vida y la muerte y tenía un gran valor religioso y simbólico" (García Casado, 1995: 68). Celtic texts recorded the significance of three cauldrons: the cauldron of abundance, belonging to Daghda; the cauldron of resurrection, belonging to Bran, and the sacrificial cauldron.

Thomas goes further into the contrasting idea of life and death as represented in bird symbology in "A Winter's Tale", a poem portraying a number of animal symbols. Here, the continuity of the bird symbol helps the reader understand the true nature of the process taking place. The poem's starting point occurs in a natural setting and later moves towards a truly legendary scene: "Once when the

world turned old" (11), where the hero appears: "As the food and flames of the snow, a man unrolled / the scrolls of fire that burned in his heart and head" (13-14). This man, in strict application of the mythic scheme described by Propp,[13] develops a need, "His naked need struck him howling and bowed" (39), and the birds are linked to the image of death. "Hunger of birds in the fields of the bread of water [...] when cold as snow he should run the wended vales" (42-45). The moment of death is represented in the mythic union between the hero and the mother goddess: "Alone and naked in the engulfing bride" (53) and the nightingale intervenes using his natural abilities: "And spells on the winds of the dead his winter's tale" (59). After this turning point, the birth of a she-bird marks the successful transformation of the soul: "A she-bird rose and rayed like a burning bride" (69) and the hero reappears made one with nature: "And the sky of birds in the plumed voice charmed / him up and he ran like a wind after the kindling flight" (88-89). The sacred nature of the process is secured again through the image of birds, "When black birds died like priests in the cloaked hedge row" (62) and the resurrection is thus guaranteed: "And the bird descended" (76). In other words, all through the poem, bird symbols assist the reader to perceive the mythic nature of the tale:

> Bird, he was brought low,
> Burning in the bride bed of love, in the whirl-
> Pool at the wanting centre, in the folds
> Of paradise, in the spun bud of the world.
> And she rose with him flowering in her melting snow (126-130).

This representation of a rite of passage is symbolized in the natural qualities of birds as heralds of annual cyclic change. This is the reason why Thomas represents them associated with the classical topos of *carpe diem* in "Hold hard, these ancient minutes in the cuckoo's month", as evinced in the title itself. This poem, constituting a lament on the passing of time, beautifully exploits the quintessence of the symbol as associated with the living cycle: "Lie this fifth month unskated, and the birds have flown" (9).[14]

In Thomas's production, the generic "bird" that we have been analyzing so far, is later broken into a variety of species. Remarkable for their place in Celtic culture are the owl, the eagle, the crane, the crow, the swan, the cock, the goose, and the dove, all of them used by Thomas in his poems.[15]

The most common of these birds in Dylan Thomas's poetry is the raven. Contrary to the common symbolic reference in today's world, in Celtic tradition the appearance of the raven was not a negative omen, but a positive sign related to the prophetic gifts of the bird (Green, 1995: 88). Associated with this bird were the Irish goddesses Macha, Bodh and Moir-Rígan who, acting more like Viking

walkiria than mother goddesses, visit the warriors to warn them of their impending death in battle, as seen in the epic *Táin Bó Cualgney*: "Now it was the Morrígan settled in bird shape on a standing stone in Temair Chuailnge, and said to the Brown Bull: Dark one are you restless / do you guess they gather / to certain slaughter / the wise raven / groans aloud" (Kinsella, 1988: 98-103). In Welsh myth, the raven becomes the totemic animal of Branwen's family, also associated with a magic cauldron of rebirth and a war between Wales and Ireland which culminates with her brother's, Bendigeit Bran's, death (Rolleston, 1994: 371).

Dylan Thomas uses this tradition in order to build a similar set of values on the symbolic referent. Thus, in "The Ploughman's Gone", the poet expresses his wishes for the man: "You shall go as the others have gone, / lay your head on a hard bed of stone / and have the raven for companion" (16-18). "The Woman Speaks" opens with an appeal for an afterlife: "No food suffices but the food of death" (2) where the sibyl appeals to the raven as a transformer: "The heart lies ready for the raven's mouth" (8), who will eventually succeed in carrying death to the hero, "And ravens fed confection to their young" (59). Particularly interesting is the presence of this symbol in one of Thomas's birthday poems, "Especially when the October Wind". Here, the raven appears at the beginning of the piece, when the poet starts a regression towards his past: "By the sea's side, hearing the noise of birds / Hearing the raven cough in winter sticks" (5-6), and also at the end, once he is back to his present reality and looks forward to the future: "Some let me tell you of the raven's sins" (24). Finally, in "All and all the dry world's lever", the raven fulfills its functions of anticipator of the Otherworld: "Know now the flesh's lock and vice, / and the cage for the scythe-eyed raven" (20-21).[16]

Less important than the raven is the owl. Far from esteem that the owl enjoys in present times as a symbol of wisdom, in ancient European legends, this birds seems to have been invested with a sinister symbolism as a guardian of the night. In Welsh myth, transformation into an owl is described as a form of punishment inflicted on Blodeuwedd. Curiously enough, Blodeuwedd's husband, Llew Llaw Gyffes,[17] was injured by her and later transformed into an eagle which,

> in Welsh tradition [...] is considered one of the three oldest animals and people have wanted to transform into this bird in order to, for example, survive in the Otherworld. The eagle also stands for wisdom and visionary ability, which gives it royal dignity (Heinz, 1998: 103).

Owls and eagles symbolize different qualities in Dylan Thomas's poetry. The eagle appears rarely in his texts and its relevance is directly related to a scene of death appearing in early Celtic Christian texts,[18] where the *curagh* sailing to the Otherworld becomes engulfed by essential whiteness, which gives it access to a superior dimension. This is what happens in "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait",

where the eagle stands for the royal symbol of god, once the boat has reached the world's limits: "The polar eagle with its tread of snow" (80). The eagle is much more popular in Thomas's early poems that in his main production; this is perhaps due to the fact that the further he progresses in his art, the more he departs from conventionalism. Thus, "In Admit the Sun", the eagle borrows classical values allusive to the sun: "Admit the sun into your high nest / Where the eagle is a strong bird" (1-2), whereas in "I have come to Catch your Voice" and "My River" the symbol acquires a truly Celtic meaning which refers to survival in the Otherworld as associated with love poetry: "Oh, eagle-mouthed, / I have come to pluck you, / and take away your exotic plumage" (10-12).[19]

The owl, on the contrary, is present in Thomas's best known pieces, usually belonging to a later stage in his production, and containing a great display of animal symbols. We have selected three examples, namely "Poem in October", "A Winter's Tale" and "Lament". In all these pieces the appearance of the owl is directly associated with the first immersion in the sacred space. For instance, in "Poem in October" the snail that symbolizes home (church and the castle) is transitioned into an owl as shown in line 34: "Brown as owls", indicating thus the path to the poet's future projection. Another poem, "A Winter's Tale", is significant because of its description of a rite of passage. Prior to the initiatic experience, significantly, the owl sends its warning: "the far owl warning among the folds" (7-8), and by doing so, it introduces the first hint that something praeternatural is likely to occur in later stanzas. Later, in "Lament", the owl points the way to the realm of magic: the forest, "I tiptoed shy in the gooseberry wood, / the rude owl cried like a telltale tit" (4-5). The wood, considered *nemeton* or sacred space, was regarded with reverence by the Celts, as recorded in *Senchus Mor* and *Capitulatio de Partibus Saxaonie* (Kendrick, 1997: 197).[20]

Another symbol, the cock, adjusts to the figurative values that the Celts, particularly in Gaul, associated with it. The emblematic connotations acquired by the rooster in Celtic texts are identified in three different anthropological *strata*, namely life, fertility and war. As "the announcer of the new day, embodying the active side of life" (Heinz, 1998: 93), the cock is highly regarded in Thomas's poems. This is the case of "Our Eunuch Dreams", where the cock is invested with powers over life and death: "For we shall be a shouter, like the cock, / blowing the old dead back" (37-38). Similarly, in "Especially when the October wind", the poet alludes to the power that "flies on the shafted disk, declaims the morning and tells the windy weather in the cock" (18-20). Secondly, as "a symbol of lust for love and life and of fertility" (Heinz, 1998: 93), the man is compared in "Altarwise by Owl-Light", to "Old cock from nowheres and the heaven's egg" (8), and in "Over Saint John's Hill" Thomas links the color code and the opposite forces of nature in "green cocks and hens" (55). Finally, the fighting qualities of this animal,

recognized in the Celtic tradition, are depicted in "If my head hurt a hair's foot" in reference to "All game phrases fit your ring of a cockfight" (6), and later in "I, in my intricate image", where the cock is placed in the context of a "decaying army, / The sexton centinel, garrisoned under thistles, / a cock-on-a-dunghill" (56-58).[21]

As a conclusion to this section on bird symbols, especial mention needs to be made of the water birds that play an important role both in Celtic myth and in Dylan Thomas's poems. Swans are constantly present in secondary stories related to Celtic sagas, such as the story of the children of Lír, Midir the Proud and Étain, the fairy, and the story of Oeghus mac Oc, son of Great Daghda and the Celtic God of Love. Their appearance in texts, like the dove, started to acquire importance from the expansion of Christendom onwards. Possibly, due to its white plumage, swans are now a symbol of purity and divine power, but in the Celtic world, "the transformation into swans, as a form of punishment later became a well-known motif in the European world of fairy tales" (Heinz, 1998: 117). For the most part, "they are capable of destruction, but they are mostly birds of temptation or escape from the Otherworld" (Heinz, 1998: 113).

The mythological implications of this symbol are obvious in the two poems dedicated to the subject of Leda which, although belonging to Greek sagas, prove that Thomas considered myth as a starting point from which to develop his own themes. Such is the case in "Poet: 1935", where the author's considerations about himself are introduced, and later epilogued, by means of a parallelistic construction that reinforces his supernatural nature as a poet and a bard: "See, on gravel paths, under the harpstrung trees / he steps so near the water / that a swan´s wing / might play upon his lank locks with its wind" (1-3). This "God's man"(47), capable of "capture more than man or woman guesses" (54) ends the poem with a rhetorical question suggested by the swans: "Who are his friends?"(63), and the answer, implicit in the poem, is nature.[22]

It seems nevertheless obvious that, of all the animal symbols that Thomas deals with, the one that seems to enjoy the privilege of becoming the poet's first choice is the heron. The heron appears in Thomas's later and most frequently analyzed pieces. Thomas seems to discover this animal symbol at a relatively late date, although it acquires a high relevance in the poet's search for eternity. Treatment of the heron in its association with the poetic *persona* is evinced in Thomas's birthday poems. Thus, in "Poem in October" the heron is chosen as an appointed witness to Thomas own biography: "And walked abroad in a shower of all my days. / High tide and the heron dived when I took the road" (16-17). Although in Irish mythology herons associated with Midir the Proud and with the god of sea, Manannan mac Lir, had certain negative connotations (Green 66), the fact is that in later Celtic sagas, their image would be purified into the opposite value as a bird that "sometimes appeared in allegories of Christians rising above the storms of life, as the herons surmount rainclouds" (Tresidder, 1998: 102).

The continuity of the heron symbolism in yet another of Dylan Thomas's birthday poems, "Poem on his Birthday", affirms the identity of this totemic image of the poet, appointed to carry his soul to eternity, as evinced in the poet's lament: "Oh, let me midlife mourn by the shrined / And druid herons' vows / The voyage to ruin I must run" (77-79). Those "sacred herons" are made to appear in this poem at the end of the poet's life and, further, they continue to accompany him on his path towards his future, as a symbol of a prospective spiritual success: "Herons walk in their shroud / The livelong river's robe" (27-28). After this earlier statement, the heron becomes a constant in Thomas subsequent work. In "Over Saint John's Hill" Thomas elaborates on the initial idea that takes the heron for a good omen and now invests the bird with a sacred veil: "and slowly, the fishing holy stalking heron / in the river Towy below bows his tilted headstone" (12-13). This "saint heron" (37), a soul mate during the poet's journey, can be found five more times in this long poem, "The heron and I"(35, 42), being the recurrent phrase that evokes communion between their souls.

In spite of their being numerically the most frequently mentioned animal symbols in Dylan Thomas's poems, birds are not the only icons to be found there. One of the most important non-bird animal symbols illuminating Thomas's stanzas is the worm. Contrary to what might be expected, the worm becomes for Thomas a symbol of positive catastrophe, as David Daiches asserts when commenting on "A Refusal to Mourn": "We need not wince at the suggestion that "long friends" means (among other things) worms; worms for Thomas were not disgusting, but profoundly symbolic: like maggots they are elements of corruption and thus of reunification, of eternity" (1966: 19). In such poems as "Written for a Personal Epitaph" and "Before I knocked", the worm is associated with the images of the womb and life after death, thus implying the relevance of this symbol as a transformer of dead matter into living spirit. As was the case in Celtic Ireland where "worms feature as ancestral emblems, taking up the symbolism of larval metamorphosis" (Tresidder, 1998: 231), the worm becomes thus, not only a destroyer of human flesh, but an agent of the living cycle through its function as an inducer of the fusion between the corpse and nature. This is the sense of lines 5 and 6 in "A Process of the Weather of the Heart": "Blood in their suns / Lights up the living worm" as it is in the closing lines of "The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower": "And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb / How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm" (21-22).[23]

Interestingly enough, this symbol is primarily associated with the serpent. While in Christendom the snake becomes a symbol of the Devil (due to its role in the myth of Genesis), earlier in heathendom, the serpent had acquired a different set of values altogether. The snake is a mysterious symbol in Celtic myth although, as a matter of fact, not a single snake has ever been found in Ireland; this is a fact that Irish legend explains by alleging that Saint Patrick expelled them from the Irish soil, thus using again the Biblical symbol as a metaphor for the Christianization of pagan territories. The serpent is, nevertheless, one of the most important symbols in Western lore due to its reference to life and fertility: "Emblematically, the snake was in touch with the mysteries of the earth, the waters, darkness and the underworld" (Tresidder, 1998: 184). The capacity of this animal to change its skin favours its suitability as a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation, as Thomas proves in "Altarwise by Owl-light": "Pour like a halo on the caps and serpents. / This was the resurrection in the desert" (118-119), and in "O Chatterton": "Life neat's a better poison than in a bottle, / a better venom seethes in spittle / than one could probe out of a serpent's guts" (5-7).[24] Not only is Thomas's snake remarkable for projecting the idea of rebirth, as the Celts believed, but also for setting up a correspondence with the water cult (Heinz, 1998: 23), as he does, for instance in "Where Once the Waters in your Face": "There shall be corals in your beds / There shall be serpents in your tides, / Till all our sea-faiths die" (22-24), and later in "Poem on His Birthday": "And far at sea he knows / who slaves to his crouched eternal end / under a serpent cloud" (30-32). As an ambivalent symbol, the snake "equally create[s] and destroy[s]" (Heinz, 1998: 26) according to the rhythm of the seasons, and as such, it personifies the Lord of the Otherworld. It is precisely as this character that Welsh myth established "the connection between snakes and dragons [which] is presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth in The Prophecies of Merlin" (Heinz, 1998: 27).

On the other hand, Thomas seems to admit a symbiotic relationship between the worm as a converter of flesh and the bird as a soul-bearer. Thus, in "I See the Boys of Summer", the "The bright-eyed worm on Davy's lamp" (35) combines its action with that of the birds in line 39, and in "Request to Leda" the worm that appears in a parallel construction in lines 3 and 9 complements the bird in line 4 that is contrasted to William Empson: "Not your winged lust but his must now change suit" (6), this change alluding to the character's death.[25] Their respective functions become thus complementary: the worm acts as an agent that induces the fusion of the human being into mother earth; later, the bird carries his soul into the Otherworld. Together, they fulfill the three steps in the rite of passage: death, transition and resurrection.

The identification of the archetypal structure in the poems analyzed, together with the analysis of the symbol as considered individually, confirm the Celtic tradition

of the animal symbol. It is a fact that druidic religion established a bi-directional relationship between this world and the next: "Los celtas no temían a la muerte, la consideraban tan sólo como un momento en mitad del largo camino de la vida, un cambio de estado tras el cual continuaba la existencia" (García Casado, 1995: 66). The spiritual connection should be satisfied through a rite of passage aiming to return the human soul to god-nature. By so doing, the living cycle was completed and a step towards the understanding of the abstract nature of Cosmos was also taken. The identification between man and animal intervenes to stress the connection between the human group and the animal group, considered, as a whole, as a further manifestation of a pantheistic vision of God.

Of the animals preferred by the Celts many were used by Dylan Thomas in his poetry. The fish, for example, with its classical association with "fecundity, sexual happiness and the phallus" (Tressider, 1998: 83), becomes a symbol of the fertility of water in Thomas's poems. This is earlier seen in "Then was my Neophyte" where the "water sex" (11) is related to "labyrinths" (13) "furled on the fishes' house and hell" (17); and it is also extended to the dolphin that is present in "Where once the Waters of Your Face" associated with "The lovebeds of the weeds; / the weed of love left dry" (14-15), and to the eels that show an evident sexual symbolism: "Give over, lovers, locking, and the seawax struggle / Love like a mist or fire through the bed of eels" (89-90). In Celtic tradition, however, the fish carried an additional value as "bodies of transformation and later become carriers of souls, such as that of Cú Roi" (Heinz, 1998: 131); this peculiarity in Welsh mythology is associated with the rite of passage experienced by a mythical bard called Gwion Bach (Taliesin). These values are necessarily considered by Thomas in "Poem in October": "Summer time of the dead whispered the truth of his joy / to the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide" (56-57), and in "Ears in the Turrets Hear": "No birds or flying fish / disturbs the island's rest" (15-16).

Similar to this case is that of the horse. In "Rain Cuts the Place we Tread", Thomas proposes the symbol of the horse as an announcer and a soul-bearer. The starting point here is the image of fountain water that represents baptism into a new life: "Rain cuts the place we tread, / a sparkling fountain for us / with no fountain boy but me" (1-3), and later progresses to the idea of an ending: "And, as we watch, the rainbow's foot / stamps on the ground / A legendary horse with hoof and feather, / impatient to be off" (15-18). This is a support necessary to emphasize the concept of transcendence, which is the objective that the poet aimed at: "Our boat is made to rise / By waves which grow again / Their own melodious height, / Into the rainbow's shy embrace" (32-35). This poem proves the validity of the horse as a "sun sign, which is also associated with the water cult, combining in itself life and death (development, healing, rejuvenation)" (Heinz, 1998: 37).

The importance of the horse in Celtic territories largely explains the number of divinities (belonging to all provinces of Celtia) that adopt this symbol as their personal emblem. We can name Mebhdh,[26] Macha and Étain as well as Eochaid Ollathir (also known as Great Daghda, the Irish *Dispater*);[27] in Welsh legend, we can cite the case of Rhiannon and "a cycle of Welsh triads, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, is concerned exclusively with the horses of British rulers and at the same time reflects Celtic color symbols" (Heinz, 1998: 39). Finally, in Gaul, the horse notably decorates the apparitions of the universal mother goddess, Epona,[28] who "was worshipped in the 1st through 4th centuries A.D. from Britain to North Africa, and her feast day was held on December 18th" (Heinz, 1998: 37). Most importantly, "she accompanies those she protects throughout life and into the Otherworld. For this, the horse later receives wings. Life and the birth and the death of heroes are therefore bound together to the life of the horse" (Heinz, 1998: 39).

This long tradition of the symbol was understood by Thomas, who uses its value as an announcer of approaching death and as a conveyor of souls into the Otherworld. As an epithome of time and eternity and, therefore, the sun of eternal life, this symbol can be analyzed in four poems, namely "Rain Cuts the Place we Tread", "Today this Insect", "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait" and "Fern Hill". Both in "Rain Cuts the Place we Tread" and "Today this Insect" the poet becomes increasingly concerned with time and its natural consequences: "Death: death of Hamlet and the nightmare madmen, / And air-drawn windmill on a wooden horse" (19-20). In "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait", however, the horse is linked to the fish in order to stress the idea of death and subsequent rebirth: "She longs among horses and angels, / The rain-bow fish bend in her joys, / Floated the lost cathedral / Chimes of the rocked buoys" (33-36). Finally, in "Fern Hill" the movement of the sun, marks the successive steps of an initiation that goes beyond death: "All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars / flying with the ricks, and the horses / Flashing into the dark". These horses intervene anew under a different sun, once the new cosmic dimension has been reached and, therefore, they are not associated with death now, but with the idea of rebirth: "And the sun grew round that very day. / So it must have been after the birth of a simple light / in the first spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm" (29-31).[29]

The animal symbols considered so far amount to a considerable number of references in the context of Thomas's poetry. Yet, Thomas's stanzas contain a wider variety of animal symbology that, notwithstanding its lesser exploitation by the poet, it certainly participates in Celtic myth and beliefs. One example of this kind of symbols is the deer. Thomas's takes this emblem of the Celtic god Cernunnos (the Irish Conall Cernach) Pwyll, Lord of Dyfed and even Merlin (Heinz, 1998:

49),[30] and he borrows the values from Celtic myth, making it function as a "symbol associated with the East, dawn, light, purity, regeneration, creativity and spirituality" (Tresidder, 1998: 62). With this meaning, the deer makes its most important appearance in two pieces: in "Hold Hard, These Ancient Minutes in the Cuckoo's Month", the deer is endowed with the qualities of summer: light and fertility, "the deer fall in their tracks, / This first and steepled season, to the summer's game" (11-12). In "Song", the deer becomes the center of a magic triangle that confronts him with the tigress in the fertility game and with the mole in its association with summer light: "Love me, as loves the mole his darkness / and the timid deer his tigress" (13-14).

Cattle also appear in Thomas's production as an expression of fertility. Cows, for example were the emblems of the Celtic goddess Brigit, an anthropomorphic representation of the mother goddess, who was also known as the white cow.[31] "In the White Giant's Thigh" Thomas intimates that cows, like deer, were associated with fertility rites and rebirth in conjunction with the female principle. The poem is directly concerned with the idea of transcendence as achieved through sex: "the night's eternal, curving act"(9), hence its images of lust: "The horned bucks climb / quick in the wood at love" (32-33) and of anatomy: "Their breasts full of honey" (37). In this context, the intermingled images of the human hero and the divine cow goddess are used to depict the very act of man entering eternity: "Light on his thighs, spreadeagle to the dunghill sky, / Or with their orchard man in the core of the sun's bush / Rough as cows' tongues and thrashed with brambles their buttermilk" (23-25).

In the same poem, Thomas uses a different symbol of transmigration, largely used in "cultic rituals connected with agricultural fertility" (Tresidder, 1998: 151): "Hill. Who once in the gooseskin winter loved all ice leaved / In the courter's lanes, or twined in the ox roasting sun" (12-13). The ox becomes thus a pre-announced image of rebirth, as present in "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait": "The cattle graze on the covered foam, / The hills have footed the waves away" (183-184), linked to the symbols of water, horse and birds (gulls) as soul-bearers. Once the connotations are established, the poet reveals the authentic nature of the symbol that affects, once more, the rite of passage: "The furious ox-killing house of love" (200). Furthermore, the classical value that Thomas draws from Celtic myth and later pours into this symbol is evinced in a meaningful stanza belonging to "I, in my intricate image":

> This is the fortune of manhood: the natural peril,
> A steeplejack tower, bonerailed and masterless,
> No death more natural;
> Thus the shadowless man or ox, and the pictured devil,

In seizure of silence commit the dead nuisance:
The natural parallel (19-24).

Close relative to the cow and the ox is the bull, which Thomas similarly borrows from Celtic myth in "Lament". In this instance that "Or hickory bull in milky glass" (41) stands for "power, potency —a protean symbol of divinity, royalty and the elemental forces of nature" (Tresidder, 1998: 31), as it does in "Ceremony after a Fire Raid" where the bull is compared to Christian *personae*: "I know not whether / Adam or Eve, or the adorned holy bullock / or the white ewe lamb / Or the chosen Virgin / Laid in her snow / On the Altar of London / Was the first to die" (33-39).[32] This poem contains a clear reference to the white bull as a sacrificial animal in heathen Celtia, as opposed to Biblical figures, before and after the appearance of sin. It is not surprising that its outstanding value in Celtic economy has caused it to become an ever present symbol that stars in the most common type of bardic structure: the *táin* or cattle raid.[33]

It is precisely an ever famous text of this kind, the *Táin Bó Cualgney*, that helps us introduce another of Thomas's symbols: the hound. In the *Táin*, the solar hero Cuchulainn, is fostered into the clan of the hound through his relationship with Culann, the smith.[34] This common association is taken into account by Thomas in "Out of the Pit": "loved dogs and women / I have desired the circle of the sun" (72-73). In a different poem, "Hold Hard, these Ancient Minutes in the Cuckoo's Month", Thomas portrays the dog: "Time, in a folly's rider, like a county man / Over the vault of ridings with his hound at heel" (4-5) as a symbol of healing and also of loyalty and protection: "Dogs are benign symbols in Celtic iconography, the companions of many goddesses associated with healing, and of hunters and warriors" (Tresidder, 1998: 65). In "The Hunchback in the Park", however, the connotations remain on the male side that "stands for hunting, fighting and death or its announcement" (Heinz, 1998: 71). The poor beggar living in the park thus represents the beaten soul of a dog in the moments previous to his murder, which becomes symbolic in the embodiment of swans: "And the old dog sleeper / Alone between nurses and swans" (25-26).

The hound is a good example of the relationship between the presence of animal symbols and a cultural tendency towards totemism. In fact, it becomes easy to observe the survival of such cultural patterns in Thomas's prolific use of animal symbology. We know for certain, that in the cultural fusion known as Celtic civilization gods were not organized in a pantheon with sub-divided areas of influence, and consequently, animal emblems were essential to figure the particularity of the divinity that was being celebrated. Yet, the fact that animals were pictured with deities in all Celtic areas, does not imply the existence of animal worship. We must listen to Freud, who detects a link between the presence of the

totem animal as associated with a clan or a tribe, and a prohibition related to it (Freud, 1970: 9). This religious prohibition or taboo was called in Old Gaelic *geis*, and *gessa* are well-documented, as in the example of Cuchulainn.[35] Cuchulainn was a solar hero born of Dechtire, the sun god Lugh Lamfhada being his father. His real name was Sétanta,[36] but he received his nickname after an episode when he killed Culann's, the smith's, hound becoming thus the boy, Culann's apprentice: "I [Cuchulainn] will be your hound, and guard yourself and your beasts" (Kinsella, 1988: 84). *Cú* means "dog" in Gaelic and the same root is to be found in his uncle's name, king Conchobar. Not surprisingly, one of the *gessa* imposed on Cuchulainn consisted of a prohibition to eat dog meat, which he did right before his death. This is one of the main characteristics of totemism: the prohibition is sacred and must be observed, and if it is ignored the consequences are catastrophic.

The application of this theory to Dylan Thomas's production is now evident. Blake builds up symbols as connectors between reality and vision, while Yeats aims at full allegory when representing mythical time and space in his animal symbols. Yet, only Hughes and Thomas go beyond the metaphor: the poem, Hughes says, is not LIKE an animal; the poem IS an animal. Thomas shares this view and undergoes a process of mythical transformation enabling him to impersonate the inner qualities of the animal himself. By becoming part of the animal soul, Thomas gives full scope to the Celtic notion of a bardic poet.

That Thomas uses a great variety of animal imagery is evident to anyone who reads his poetry; that those images are genuine poetic symbols was argued earlier in this article; that the tradition of the symbol is Celtic in its origin, constitutes the core discussion throughout these pages. The last question is whether the spiritual belief that led to the multiplication of animal symbols, finds some sort of projection in Thomas's work. Our final answer is certainly in the affirmative.

In the first place, the values of the animal symbols in Thomas's verse correspond both in their use and in their symbolic values to those found in Celtic texts. In other words, their appearances complement in the author's notion of the symbol. Secondly, the same animal symbol bearing the same pagan values is perfectly integrated into Thomas's modernist universe, which leads the reader to the conclusion that the metaphysical values it proclaims are universal. Thomas seems to perceive a continuous line from his forefathers to his present self. Finally, the presence of rites of passage, as observed in "A Winter's Tale", is highly indicative of the mythological transcendence of the truth that Thomas, as a bard, is about to reveal. One must point out that in the famous case of the Welsh bard Taliesin his coming to the 'light of knowledge' (in Gaelic, *Imbas Forosnai*) was reached after a triple transformation into a hare, a fish and a bird —and eventually, into a grain of wheat (Rolleston, 1994: 414), representing the four elements: earth, wind, water

and fire. Not only does Thomas employ animals anthropologically symbolizing all four elements, but most importantly, he declares himself a bard, as he proves in many of his poems in an attempt to echo the Welsh concern for the relation between the individual and God.[37]

Dylan Thomas was an outstanding poet whose contribution to universal literature is undoubted. Part of his greatness came from his inspirational force and part of it came from his peculiar profile as an individual. Thomas's concern with the individual self, his internal conflict and his spiritual survival to physical death justifies the selection of his three main subjects, namely, childhood, sex and religion. All of them cautiously revert to the central figure of the poet that sends his message to the world by means of a combination of synthesis, dualism and symbolism. Paradoxically, however, his animal symbology is not a unique elaboration of Dylan Thomas's own self but rather, it becomes an individual expression of the traditional Welsh pantheistic concern for the relationship between the individual and God.

Notes

[1]. Theological view based on the belief that the universe is controlled by the opposing powers of good and evil.

[2]. Theory based on the belief that God and the universe are the same reality.

[3]. "The second battle of Moytura took place on a plain in the North of Co. Sligo. [...]. The battle with the Formorians is related with an astounding wealth of marvellous incident" (Rolleston, 1994: 116).

[4]. This is a very well known episode, also existing in Greek myth. Gwydyon's brother, Amaethon, had stolen from Arawn the secrets of agriculture. Gwydyon transformed the Breton army into trees with the aid of magical powers in an attempt to help his brother and, eventually, won the fight by guessing his opponent's real name (Markale, 1992: 104).

[5]. Dylan Thomas uses color so much that he has even been compared to Rimbaud: "The poetry of Dylan Thomas has obviously much in common with that of Rimbaud and Hopkins, and with the word expedients of conventional surrealism as well" (Bayley, 1966: 140).

[6]. Just as common is the incidence of parallelistic structures, as in "Request to Leda": "The worm is (pin-point) rational in the fruit" (3) or figures of repetition, as in "Greek Play on a Garden: "Among the garden trees a pigeon calls / A pigeon calls and women talk of death" (29-30).

[7]. The complete list is very long: albatross, animal, bat, bear, beast, bee, beetle, birds, blackbird, bug, bull, camel, calf, cat, chameleon, chicken, cock, cockles, cow, crab, crane, crocodile, crow, cuckoo, deer, dogs, dolphin, donkey, dove, duck, eagle, eels, fish, fleas, flies, fox, goat, goose, gull, hen, heron, herring, horse, hounds, hyena, insect, kangaroo, lamb, leech, lice, lion, lizard, maggot, magpie, mammoth, mole, mouse, mule, mussel, nightingale, octopus, ox, owl, pelican, pheasant, pig, pigeon, rat, raven, seal, serpent, sheep, snail, snake, sparrow, spider, squirrel, swan, swine, tiger, toad, whale, wolf, worm.

[8]. Images are metaphors and, consequently, they are spontaneous, intense and are susceptible of emotional potential, but they do not represent a conventional substitution of the referent.

[9]. Although birds are favorite symbols in Celtic mythology, their incidence increased in pagan texts as a consequence of the progress made by early monks in the evangelization of Ireland.

[10]. This relates both to their presence in the summer and to their symbolism associated with the idea of "rebirth", for example in "The Spire Cranes": "Those craning birds are choice for you, songs that jump back / To the built voice, or fly with winter to the bells / But do not travel down dumb wind like prodigals" (14-16).

[11]. Remarkably, this poem shows a very strong influence of the Welsh poem "Cad Goddeu" as in line 10: "On the horizon walking like the trees" and later in lines 14 and 15: "Some let me make you of the vowelled beeches, / Some of the oaken voices, from the roots" (13-14).

[12]. "The birds then which you see in the trees", he said, "are the souls of my children and my kindred, both women and men who are yonder awaiting Doomsday" (Oskamp, 1970: 139).

[13]. Chart III. Sections 57 to 61 (Propp, 1972: 182).

[14]. Poems portraying generic bird symbols are very numerous. For further reference, there can be suggested: "We Will Be Conscious of Our Sanctity", "No Thought can Trouble my Unwholesome Pose", "No Pigeon, I'm Too Wise", "It's light that Makes the Intervals", "I know this vicious minute's hour", "The Morning Space for Leda", "The Spire Cranes", "Youth Calls to Age", "No Man Believes", "The Woman Speaks", "The Sun Burns the Morning", "I See the Boys of Summer", "I, in my Intricate Image", "Do You Not Father Me", "Altarwise by Owl-Light", "Foster the Light", "How Shall my Animal", "Because Pleasure-Bird Whistles", "Unluckily for Death", "Once Below a Time", "There was a Saviour", "The Countryman's Return", "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait", "Love in the Asylum", "The Hunchback in the Park", "New Quay", "Vision and Prayer", "This Side of the Truth", "In Country Sleep", "In the White Giant's Thigh", "Poem on his Birthday" and "In Country Heaven".

[15]. The incidence of the last two symbols in Thomas's poetry is not essential to his work. The dove was introduced in Celtic tradition only after the influence of early Christianity was felt and consequently, although referred to in Celtic texts, it is not essentially genuine material. The goose was considered by the Celts as a holy animal that was associated with warriors and, less generically, "in the Welsh tradition, the appearance of geese in the night is an evil omen, since they were then viewed as witches" (Heinz, 1998: 121). Both of them have a marginal incidence in Thomas's poems. In addition to their number being insignificant, their appearance is mostly connected with other farm animals, and they do not have the symbolic values above mentioned. For further reference, see "To Follow the Fox", "We Have the Fairy Tales by heart", "The Hand that Signed the Paper", "Because Pleasure Bird Whistles", "A Winter's Tale", "In Country Sleep", "On the Marriage of a Virgin" and "Lament", regarding both symbols.

[16]. For further reference, see "Pillar Breaks", "The Air you Breathe", "Greek Play on a Garden" and "Into her Lying Down Head".

[17]. The name of this character means "lion".

[18]. For example, in *Imram Brain*: "Fosceird iar sen a muir n-aill cosmuill fri nell 7 andar leosom nis faelsad fein nach an curach" (Oskamp, 1970: 144). Translation: "Thereafter, they came into another sea like a cloud and it seemed to them that it would not

support themselves nor the boat" (Oskamp, 1970: 145).

[19]. Belonging to "I have Come to Catch your Voice".

[20]. Other piecess in which Thomas uses the figure of the owl with similar connotations are "Altar-wise by owl light", "Foster the Light", "Once below a time", "Ballad of the long-legged bait", "Fern Hill", "In Country Sleep", "Over Sir John's Hill" and "In the White Giant's Thigh".

[21]. For further reference see this symbol in "In Country Sleep", "A Winter's Tale" and "Fern Hill".

[22]. The validity of swans as soul-bearers is later proved in "The Hunchback in the Park" where the association of the homeless with swans alerts the reader to the tragic ending of this character's life as a consequence of human intolerance (26).

[23]. For further reference, see "Here in this Spring", "Our Eunuch Dreams", "Especially when the October Wind", "All, All and All the Dry Worlds Lever" and "If my Head Hurts a Hair's Foot".

[24]. Together with the above mentioned Celtic symbolism, there coexists the already mentioned Christian symbolism, ever present in Thomas's work through his Welsh chapel learning in such poems as "Out of the Pit", "Grief Thief of Time", "Incarnate Devil" and "Today, This Insect".

[25]. For further reference, see "High on a Hill", "Here in this Spring", "Especially when the October Wind", "When I Woke" and "Ceremony after a Fire Raid".

[26]. Marriage with a horse was part of a ritual called "Sacral Kingship". In the case of this queen of Connaught, she married Eochaid Dala.

[27]. Although their society had matriarchal roots, the Celts believed in the existence of a superior male deity of foreign origin. This god, was earlier associated with the earth goddess as a consort and later developed a mythology of his own.

[28]. The name of this goddess refers to her function, since "epos" means "horse" in Celtic "p", or Britonic Celtic, as oppossed to the same animal name translated as "Equos" in Gaelic Celtic.

[29]. Unlike other animal symbols, the value of which coexisted in Thomas's work with that of other traditions (namely, Biblical references), in the case of the horse, its use is that it mainly had in the Celtic tradition. For further reference, see "The Ploughman's Gone", "Because Pleasure Bird Whistle", "Poem in October", "A Winter's Tale" and "The Song of the Mischievous Dog".

[30]. According to the Welsh tale of Gereint.

[31]. In Wales, it is Achren who, appearing naked during the battle, is called a shameless cow.

[32]. For further reference, see "Grief Thief of Time" and "A Saint about to Fall".

[33]. Celtic economy was based mainly on cattle breeding.

[34]. This association appears in a great number of other legendary characters such as Cú Roi, Conchobhar and the Welsh Llewelyn, owner of Gelert, the dog.

[35]. Freud mentions *The Book of Rights*, the oldest copies of which date from 1390 and 1418, as the manuscript containing the fullest collection of *gessa* (Freud, 1970: 66).

[36]. A warrior's real name was in itself a *geis* that should be kept secret in order to avoid negative magic. There are only three extant examples of real names that have been preserved: one of them is Cuchulainn, another one is that of the god father, Great Daghda, whose real name was Eochaid Ollathair, and the last one belongs to Finn mac Cumhaill, whose real name was Demne (Rolleston, 1994: 255).

[37]. For example, "Poet: 1935", "Especially When the October Wind", "Over Sir John's Hill" and "After the Funeral".

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SENTIMENTAL COMEDY IN MARTIN AMIS'S "STATE OF ENGLAND" AND "THE COINCIDENCE OF THE ARTS"

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Although Martin Amis has been a well-established writer since the publication of *The Rachel Papers* in 1973, his latest work of fiction *Heavy Water and Other Stories*, released in 1998,[1] has attracted surprisingly scarce critical response. This is partly due to the fact that this collection, comprising nine short stories culled between 1975 and 1997, appears somewhat fragmented when compared to *Einstein's Monsters*, Amis's first attempt at short fiction, which deals with the nuclear threat. Yet, while this might be regarded as a structural flaw that explains the paucity of critical texts, some of the unflattering comments made by reviewers remain unjustified. For instance, in her scathing review entitled "Fat Men, Thin Lives", Natasha Walter finds fault with the supposed grossness of most stories, the ludic component of which allegedly fails to elicit the reader's involvement: "You know these tales aren't about you, really; and though you can sit down and spend an hour playing some game with them, you know that, in the end, it's exactly that: a game" (Walter 1998: 82). The only compliment paid to the collection concerns Amis's style, an opinion shared by Thomas Smyth in *World Literature Today* ("Language here is Amis's strongest suit" [Smyth 2000: 155]) or by Tom Shone in *The Times Literary Supplement*: "when he is writing well, his sentences appear to have written themselves" (Shone 1998: 21).

Such slightly disparaging analyses do not however do justice to the contents of this collection. Since it is impossible, given the restriction of space, to examine the nine

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