VERNON WATKINS, METAPHYSICAL POET

by

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Ph.D., The University of British Columbia, 1984

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of English)

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

May 1984

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Date April 26, 1984
The Welsh poet Vernon Watkins (1906-1967) can best be characterized as a modern metaphysical poet. Not only does he stand in relationship to certain "Metaphysical Poets" of the seventeenth century like Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne, but he is metaphysical in the more comprehensive sense of being concerned with the revelation of a transcendent order hidden within the world of time. Throughout his canon he speaks in a unique voice of the traditional metaphysical and ontological questions of God's relation to man, time to the timeless and the Platonic many to the one. A close reading of many of his poems reveals the conceptual and symbolic unity of an imagination centered on the idea of the "overthrow of time." Though the thesis places special emphasis on the lyrics—particularly on two series of linked poems (the "Taliesin" and "Music of Colours" sequences) where Watkins views nature sub specie aeternitatis—his prose writings and longer dramatic lyrics are also taken into consideration. It is found that symbols recurring throughout his work take on added resonance and depth when seen in the context of the carefully woven matrix of which they are a part. The thesis constructs a traditional and historical context for reading Watkins' poetry by exploring five interrelated aspects of his essentially metaphysical imagination: 1) his integration of Celtic myth and Christian belief in the sequence of poems dealing with the sixth-century bard, Taliesin, 2) his use of Platonic
and Neoplatonic concepts and symbols in the "Music of Colours" sequence, 3) the relationship of his choice of traditional verse forms and a musical, vatic style to his metaphysical outlook, 4) his affinities with the seventeenth-century poets, Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne, and 5) the impact of the two modern poets who had the greatest influence on his style, W. B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas. Watkins' profound comprehension of the delicate interrelation of the temporal and eternal worlds, coupled with his impeccable craftsmanship, place him among the finest lyric poets of the modern period.
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for Mark
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the Trustees of the Isaak Walton Killam Memorial Fellowships whose financial support during the past two years enabled me to complete this project. I am also immensely grateful to my supervisory committee at the University of British Columbia, Chairman, Dr. I. S. Ross, and members, Drs. L. M. Johnson and A. T. L. Parkin, for astute advice at all of the thesis' crucial stages of development. Finally, I would like to offer special thanks to Mrs. Gwen Watkins whose incisive comments in both letters and personal interview enriched my appreciation of her husband's work; to my typist, Mrs. Mary Haddock, for the generous donation of her time and care in the preparation of the final manuscript; and to my father, Donald A. McCaslin, for his invaluable help with proofreading.
ABBREVIATIONS

Books by Watkins cited in text (for full documentation see bibliography):

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher, Year</th>
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<td>Ballad of the Mari Lwyd and Other Poems</td>
<td>Faber, 1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>The Lamp and the Veil</td>
<td>Faber, 1945</td>
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<td>LU</td>
<td>The Lady with the Unicorn</td>
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<td>BW</td>
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Introduction

"Christen me, therefore, that my acts in the dark may be just,
And adapt my partial vision to the limitation of time."
(from "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision")

When Vernon Watkins was in his twenty-third year, before he had emerged as a published poet, and during a time of severe emotional crisis, he underwent an experience he was to refer to later as "a complete revolution of sensibility."¹ It was not a conversion experience in the ordinary sense of the word, since he was already a practising Christian (confirmed in the Anglican Church) when the event occurred, but involved a complete transformation of his way of viewing the nature of time, and a renewal of his commitment to the poetic expression of his Christian experience. He spoke later of how Christ "drew him back from the abyss" and forever altered his view of time.² In an instant he had seen that an invisible, eternal realm informs temporality at every point, and recognized that he could never again write a poem, as he put it, "dominated by time."³ This essentially Platonic theme of the relation of the temporal world to an everlasting, purposeful, timeless one became the central issue informing the whole of his poetry. In essence, his imagination centers on an ontological issue regarding the nature of reality and how various levels of being, primarily distinguished in his mind as the temporal and the timeless, stand in relationship to each other.

Since the kind of art that most attracted him reflected inward, individual and personal glimpses of such an eternal order, aesthetics and metaphysics became inseparably wedded
in his mind. In both his poetry and scattered prose he implied that poetry's highest function was (insofar as possible) to embody or incarnate eternal or universal truths in language. His well-known and often-anthologized "Music of Colours, White Blossom" revealed his complementary sense that the ultimate reality, the absolute "whiteness" of eternity, was unrepresentable. Therefore, his primarily lyrical impulse channelled itself into mediating, mainly through nature, intuitive glimpses of eternity, and into suggesting the presence of an ineffable, timeless order hidden beyond, behind and within the physical one. The epigraph that opens this section announces through the mask of Taliesin, a sixth-century Welsh bard, that the spiritual dimension Watkins had perceived was to govern the whole of his life and poetic expression; that the assumption of transcendency, and nature viewed sub specie aeternitatis, lay at the core of all he wrote; that his art would draw from that aspect of the imagination which allows man to transcend time.

My intention in this thesis is to explore several related aspects of what can be called the "christened imagination" of this twentieth-century metaphysical poet. In the chapters that ensue, I shall be attempting to construct a traditional and historical context for reading Watkins' poetry by exploring 1) Watkins' integration of Celtic myth and Christian belief in the sequence of poems dealing with Taliesin, 2) his use of Platonic and Neoplatonic concepts and symbols in the "Music of Colours" sequence of poems, 3) the relationship of his choice of traditional verse forms to his metaphysical vision, 4) his affinities with the seventeenth-century poets, Donne, Herbert,
Vaughan and Traherne, and 5) the impact of the two modern poets who had the greatest influence on his work, Dylan Thomas and W. B. Yeats. My ultimate purpose is to begin to establish an adequate method for interpreting the work of a deep, but too little-read modern, lyrical poet working uniquely in the metaphysical mode.

Though I am concerned with the question of influence in Chapters IV and V, the findings of my thesis suggest that Watkins was not confounded by what Harold Bloom in his recent book, *The Anxiety of Influence, A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), sets forth as the modern poet's crippling sense of inundation by the past. Watkins, in contrast, actively links himself to his chosen literary predecessors without losing his own individuality. In fact, he actively invokes and celebrates his relation to a vital stream of tradition, confident that what he has to say and his way of saying it will (if carefully resolved and crafted) assume a place in that stream. With poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, David Jones and Edwin Muir he can be characterized as a seeker after continuities and a traditional view of the world.

In the process of examining these related aspects of Watkins' essentially metaphysical vision I hope to demonstrate the astonishing unity of his imagination. Throughout his work he develops a complex network of interrelated symbols that recur in a variety of contexts. Watkins uses his poetic images not merely as counters or ciphers for his imaginative experience, but as universal symbols that "partake of the reality which they render intelligible" in the best Coleridgian sense. A study of
how these symbols recur to accumulate meaning from poem to poem reveals that individual poems are part of a single fabric, that Watkins' lyrics (like those of Yeats) take on their full significance only when read in the context of his work as a whole. The demonstrable wholeness of his work argues that he should be seen as a much deeper and more serious poet than is generally assumed.

In spite of the thematic importance of Watkins' early dramatic poem, "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd," in establishing his concern with the relation of the worlds of the living and the dead, time and eternity, I shall be touching on it only superficially in order to focus on the shorter lyrics where Watkins' religious and metaphysical themes receive their fullest and (I believe) most mature treatment. "The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" has already been studied in detail by Dora Polk in her Vernon Watkins and the Spring of Vision (Christopher Davies, 1977). Rather than cover the territory of his use of Celtic myth already well-mapped by others, I shall be focusing instead on Watkins' incorporation of Welsh and classical motifs within the context of his Christian faith.

It is obvious that both metaphysical and professedly Christian poets are in a minority in the twentieth century. The traditional language of religious experience has become not only fraught with ambiguities, but the basis of it called into question. It is essential, therefore, to provide at least provisional definitions of some of the terms I shall be using to describe Watkins' poetry. I shall be arguing that he is both a metaphysical and a religious poet. By "metaphysical" I mean to
suggest not only Aristotle's categorization of all the speculative knowledge beyond that of the physical sciences (ta meta ta physica), or his search for a first cause, but the Platonic sense of metaphysics as that which deals with experience of a transcendent nature, that which surpasses time, mutability and process and is the source or origin of the temporal order recognized by the five senses. In designating Watkins' special interest to be in that branch of metaphysics known as ontology, I am not suggesting he approaches the philosophical questions of the nature of "being" like a systematic theologian, but that the question informing most of his poetry concerns how the temporal world relates to ever higher levels on a scale originating in God. In terms of epistemology or the science that seeks to define the basis of human knowing, Watkins assumes that man may make deductions from the senses and through the reason, but that there is additionally a more intuitive, a priori and direct faculty in the mind for grasping ultimate reality which Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth called "Imagination," and the early Christian mystical theologians, St. Augustine and the Neoplatonists identified with "the inner light" or "divine spark." Watkins' poems suggest that the imagination, though a part of reason, ultimately transcends it and gives man direct access to eternity.

In Chapter IV, I shall be developing my argument that Watkins is close in spirit to the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, particularly to Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne, who drew on some of the same Platonic, Neoplatonic and Christian sources, and who shared the mystics' sense of the
inwardness and individualness of direct revelation. He is a "metaphysical poet," then, in the secondary sense of standing in conscious relation to the poets of that earlier tradition whom history has designated as "Metaphysicals." In this he is not alone, since both Yeats and Eliot, two of the major writers of the period, took an active interest in the English Metaphysicals.

By designating Watkins a "religious" poet I mean to argue not only that he adheres to a traditional view of the world that assumes the existence of an objective, eternal realm, but that he is concerned with the more pragmatic question of how man can relate himself to it, or, in more Christian terms, of how God has provided a way for man to be so related. His specifically theistic outlook leads him throughout his work to assume the existence of a personal Deity who is concerned with man's welfare, that man is part of a purposeful cosmos, and that the soul is immortal. These basic assumptions are true of religious and metaphysical traditions other than the Christian, and it is obvious from the poems (both early and late) that Watkins was able to incorporate pagan, Platonic and classical mythoi and symbolism within his essentially Christian view of the world. "Religio," as Watkins' friend David Jones uses it in Epoch and Artist (1959), originally meant "a binding" or tying of the soul of the individual to the larger or universal pattern of the whole, and for Watkins the word retains this early etymological association as well as its more restricted sense of attachment to a particular historical tradition or ritual practice.
Though the basis of Watkins' Christian belief is at root experiential, and rests on personal illumination, his vision is far from private or solipsistic. His enormous concern with the past comes out of a need to place his religious experience within a universal context of visionary experience and belief. Yet he is uniquely centered on the mystical side of the Christian and Platonic traditions as encountered in figures from his reading as diverse as Plotinus, Richard Rolle, Henry Vaughan and William Blake. As the subsequent investigation of Watkins' use of earlier metaphysical traditions should demonstrate, his emphasis is less on the doctrinal, liturgical, ecclesiastical side of Christianity, than on the more personal, mystical way.

When speaking of the mystical element in Watkins' work, I do not mean to suggest that he is a mystic in the strict sense of one following the traditional path of purgation, illumination and union with God, but that as a poet he is especially concerned with moments of direct contact with an ultimate reality—that such moments of illumination leading to a greater awareness of a divine presence and purpose form the substratum of his art. He assumes that revelation is primarily a solitary experience placing the individual in a vital stream or line of thought sustained by the artistically immortalized experiences of like-minded poets, artists and saints in other ages. His deepest "affinities," to borrow a term he uses for the title of his sixth volume, lie with the visionaries and mystics of whatever age who speak of the ineffable "inner light," and the sense that God reveals Himself intimately and inwardly to the individual.
Whatever the nature of Watkins' personal experiences as he trod the initiatory steps of the traditional mystic way, he is essentially a poet, and the focus of the dissertation is on the poetic expression of his uncommon religious sensibility. I wish to emphasize that Watkins' sweeping metaphysical vision and his exalted notion of poetry go hand in hand with a strict sense of form and disciplined craftsmanship. The choice of carefully worked, mainly rhymed and metrical poetry is, in fact, in his mind the logical outcome of his metaphysical assumptions. The central theme of timelessness struggling with time reflects itself in the tensions between form and content in the poems. Like the work of the English metaphysicals to whom his work is linked by personal affinity, his poems are hieratic, well-wrought, artificial in the best sense of the word. Form is never arbitrary but symbolic, significantly and organically related to content throughout as if to embody in the world of language the great dialogue between time and eternity. As eternity is to time, so for Watkins is the creative inspiration of Spirit (sometimes personified in his work as "the Muse") to the words of the poet that incarnate it.

Both his metaphysical vision and his Christian commitment set him apart from those of his contemporaries who had rejected a traditional religious or metaphysical view of the world. In short, he stands aloof from the mainstream poetry of psychological crisis in the twentieth century, and must be placed among those with whom his spiritual and literary affinities are greatest, the poets he names, invokes and echoes in his work. Because of the early presence of a central core of
belief evident throughout his work, Watkins' poetry is less a record of struggle and search than a celebration, affirmation and exploration of a vision discovered in a flash of insight long before his career as a published poet got underway. Though there is growth and development in his vision, it is the kind of growth that occurs when one gradually discovers the fuller implications of that which was given whole and essentially a piece in the beginning.

Watkins' work was well-received in both Britain and the United States at the time of its first publication by Faber and Faber on the advice of T. S. Eliot in the forties, fifties and sixties, but little detailed and searching critical work has been written in the interim. Since Watkins' death in 1967, a limited number of critical articles, and at least three doctoral dissertations have appeared. I have cited the articles relevant to my topic and all of the theses and dissertations in my bibliography.

In the critical work that has appeared to date much has been said in general terms about Watkins' sense of timelessness. Kathleen Raine, Brian Keeble, Leslie Norris, Jane McCormick and Roland Mathias have all spoken of the visionary or metaphysical quality of his work. McCormick deals in her doctoral dissertation, "I Sing a Placeless and a Timeless Heaven" (Lehigh University, 1975), with his sense of timelessness in terms of his relation to the Romantic tradition, and Mary Polk in her dissertation, "Vernon Watkins: An Ambience for Reading the 'Ballad of the Mari Lwyd and Other Poems'" (University of California, 1970), with the Celtic backgrounds
informing his work and his probable knowledge of esoteric Celtic lore. Leslie Norris' dissertation, "The Poetry of Vernon Watkins" (Southampton University, 1972), presents a systematic appraisal of Watkins' first seven volumes of published poetry, arguing a development toward a more chiselled and self-assured style in the later poems. He asserts that the affirmation of a transcendent realm is of key importance in an understanding of Watkins' vision, and sees the figure of the poet in Watkins' poems acting as a mediator between the world of time and a higher order. Yet he does not pursue the implications of this for Watkins as a specifically Christian metaphysical poet. Kathleen Raine, one of the first to draw attention to Watkins' work, emphasizes his roots in a traditional metaphysical view of the world, his affinities with Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, and his relation to the Welsh bardic heritage. Louis Martz suggests Watkins' close relation to the English tradition of metaphysical and meditative poetry of the seventeenth century, but does not develop his suggestion through an analysis of the poems. Most of the short articles and reviews published during the poet's lifetime and since his death, while suggesting directions of thought worth pursuing in regard to Watkins studies, do not give detailed exegesis of specific poems. In short, critical and analytical study of this poet is still in its infancy, and much of his work stands untouched by scholarship. It is hoped that the subsequent detailed exploration of specific poems and groups of linked poems as seen in the context of the whole development of his work, will reveal him as the truly incomparable modern metaphysical poet the best of his
work argues him to be.
Biographical Sketch

Few twentieth-century poets have waged as complete and unremitting a warfare against time as did the Welshman, Vernon Watkins. If his practical life appears at all in his work, it is in a most indirect and transmuted way. Except for "Earth's" remark in the poem "Dialogue" from Fidelities (1968) that she "keep[s] an exact account," there is little indication from the world of timeless and carefully hewn symbols that comprise his poems to suggest he spent over forty years as a bank clerk. Eschewing worldly ambition, he carefully avoided promotion to managerial status to become, in his own words, Lloyds' "oldest cashier."¹ Yet the position at the bank provided him with the means necessary to support his wife and five children while remaining entirely dedicated to a lifelong, arduous crafting of his intricate and disciplined verse. The careful exclusion of the mundane and contingent for its own sake from his poetry, and his decision to use the particular only as it revealed a universal and hidden order set him apart from most of his contemporaries. His conscious choices force the reader to approach his work on its own terms as a modern expression of a metaphysical dialogue between time and eternity.

Vernon Phillips Watkins was born on June 27, 1906, in Maestag, a small colliery town in the Llynff Valley in southeast Wales. Though memories of mining communities like Bridgend and Llanelly may be the basis for his early poem, "The Collier," where Watkins transforms the abused worker into a biblical figure of Joseph betrayed by his brothers, and therefore a type of
Christ, the landscape of most of his poems is that of the rugged and picturesque Gower coast where his family moved when he was ten. It was there amidst pastoral beauty bounded by the sea (an ever-present symbol in his work) that he was to remain for the rest of his life, except for a brief interlude in the R.A.F. during the Second World War. Like Dylan Thomas eight years later, Watkins attended both the Mirador and Swansea Grammar Schools in nearby Swansea. At the latter institution Thomas' father was later to serve as schoolmaster. Watkins remembered and celebrated the Swansea of both his youth and adult years in "Elegy of the Heroine of Childhood" and "Ode to Swansea."

Watkins was the second of three children, the only son of middle-class parents of Congregationalist faith. His mother, formerly Sarah Phillips, was the daughter of a gentleman farmer from Carmarthenshire, a country district in southwest Wales that was to become the setting for Watkins' later idyllic invocation of childhood, "Returning to Goleufryn." His father William, in whose footsteps Watkins was to follow professionally, was a successful branch manager of Lloyds Bank who came originally from Tynewydd, Taff's Well, near Cardiff. Though both his parents were staunch Congregationalists of Welsh Non-conformist background, they sent their son at the age of fourteen to Repton, an English public school in Derbyshire where the religious emphasis is that of the established Church of England. It was there that the young Vernon was confirmed as a member of the Anglican Church to which he adhered throughout his life as a loyal and committed Christian. It is no coinci-
dence that the church tradition in which he found himself was the same that nourished earlier seventeenth-century metaphysical poets like Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne, with whose work his own can fruitfully be compared. Though non-doctrinaire in his religious outlook, he can be seen to share much common ground with poets who drew from the mystical side of the Anglican tradition. Poetically he is an heir of its rich traditional symbology.

The Congregationalism in Watkins' background meant awareness of democratically appointed clergy for each congregation and a tradition of puritan yet cheerful Godliness going back to Milton's sect of Independents, who were early Congregationalists. The shift to Anglicanism was to a formality of service greater than before, an appointed hierarchical system of clergy, and to a "posher" sort of congregation in terms of social class, though not necessarily in wealth. It also meant a less puritanical approach to drink and life in general, a better prayerbook in literary terms; though probably a decline in the standard of hymn singing, and (depending on the particular clergy) a less vigorous pulpit rhetoric. Though Watkins draws little directly from the prayerbook and liturgy, the Anglican formality and literary sensitivity (sensitivity to symbol and ritual) is reflected, I believe, in Watkins' more formal and hieratic style of writing. Though he retains in his mature work the Congregationalist's sense of intimacy with God, the tradition he adopted seems altogether more amenable to his personal and poetic sensibilities than the more popular puritanism of his inherited background. Dylan Thomas, more than Watkins, carried
into his verse the energy of Welsh pulpit rhetoric and the sense of personal reprobation and guilt of the Nonconformist sects.

Watkins' poem, "Revisited Waters," written in 1957 to celebrate Repton's Quatercentenary, idealizes his time there from 1920-24 as a golden age of youthful camaraderie with peers who shared his literary and poetic enthusiasms. In spite of academic success, a single, unfortunate parting encounter with the school's Headmaster, Dr. Fisher (later Archbishop of Canterbury), foreshadows Watkins' later rejection of the academic world as fundamentally inimical to the poetic spirit. On the last Speech Day when Vernon stepped on the stage to receive the Howe prize for poetry, the Headmaster joked that the young poet would "never earn so much per line again." Watkins left with the distinct impression that this representative of academic authority had no comprehension of the poet's high calling.  

Though both Watkins' parents were Welsh-speaking, they did not transmit the spoken form of the language to their son, who considered the resources of English fully adequate for his own poetic expression. South Wales at the time of Watkins' upbringing had undergone the steady process of Anglicization begun in the 1870's, and it was fashionable among the "respectable" classes to seek for their children a more English education. Thanks to his father, who read to the young Watkins the poems of Aneirin, Taliesin, Llywarch Hen and Dafydd ap Gwilym, he was in later life able to read Welsh with the help of a dictionary, and retained a sensitivity to the mythic heritage of Wales, as witnessed by his later use of a Welsh folk custom in his
"Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" and of the figure of Taliesin in his sequence of poems dealing with that ancient bard. It was probably his mother, however, who encouraged Watkins in the pursuit of an English education and a broader, more continental outlook. She herself had attended a finishing school at Bolkenhain in a German-speaking region between Czechoslovakia and Southern Poland where she developed the strong interest in European languages (including German) which her son, who was to become an adept translator, was to inherit.

Watkins was sent first to a preparatory school at Tyttenhanger Lodge at Seaford, Sussex, before going on to Repton. From there, with considerable academic success behind him in modern languages, he went up as a Pensioner to Magdalene College at Cambridge in 1924 where he set out to specialize in French, German and Italian. Within the year (and not for academic reasons), Watkins grew disillusioned with the positivistic, analytic spirit that dominated Cambridge at that time and left abruptly in 1925 after a sharp exchange with the Master of the College, A. C. Benson. This second conflict with authority parallels his earlier reaction to Dr. Fisher at Repton. In an interview with Benson at the end of term, when questioned as to his academic intentions for the coming year, Watkins responded that he was "interested only in writing poetry and that he didn't intend to stay in Cambridge and see it criticized out of him." Benson's insensitive retort—that if he wanted to become a poet "he would curse the day he was born"—drew from Watkins the terse reply that "he had cursed it many times already." The interview ended dramatically with Watkins slamming
the door behind him as he left the room.

It is clear that Watkins withdrew from Cambridge of his own volition over what he conceived as a matter of principle, and not for academic reasons, having just won the Peskett Prize for placing well in his exams. It was a choice that was to affect the rest of his life, an effectual burning of bridges that forced him back upon the economic necessity of a job in the bank. He retained into later life a thoroughgoing antipathy toward the kind of empirical criticism he identified with Cambridge in the 20's--the Cambridge that fostered I. A. Richards and William Empson, two of his contemporaries whose work stands in decided contrast to his own. In light of his unique development as a religious poet, his choice seems more than justified.

After his unprecedented withdrawal from Cambridge, Watkins' father, who up to this point had been extremely tolerant of his son's "impracticality," refused to support him for the year of travel in Europe Watkins naively suggested as an alternative to a university education. He insisted instead that his son promptly take up banking. It was likely this sudden confrontation with ordinary reality which precipitated the "nervous breakdown" that ensued in the autumn of 1927.

Watkins decided to become a poet at the age of six and had been writing poetry more or less continually, except for a year at Repton, since the age of eight. By the time he was twelve he had collected most of the English poets by what his widow describes as "the simple and economical method of giving them to his family as birthday and Christmas presents." At Repton,
he experienced a passion for the Romantics (particularly Shelley), and the Georgian poet Rupert Brooke, identifying with the extreme Romantic notion that poetry is direct inspiration, an unpremeditated flow requiring little or no revision or reworking. He was to repudiate this view in later life in favor of a sense of the necessity for subtle craftsmanship combined with direct inspiration. At the period preceding his breakdown his consuming interest was William Blake whose "giant forms" suggested an integrated world of imaginative energy distinct from the world of ordinary reality. Blake, who continued to be important to him in the work of his maturity, in fact played a vital role in Watkins' imagination at the very time of his emotional collapse. In his biographical analysis from the "Writers of Wales Series" on Watkins, Roland Mathias describes the incident that led to that crisis:

....[H]e [Watkins] returned to his lodgings on the Taff embankment in a state of high tension. He had been reading Blake again, and rushed hither and thither about the room shouting that he had conquered time and could control both his own destiny and that of others. This penultimate stage was abruptly ended when he heard an enormous crash outside: on going to the window he saw a motor-cyclist dead on the ground and his pillion passenger staggering up the path towards him, his face covered in blood. Immediately--the underlying tenderness of his nature supervening--he was convinced that he had willed this and himself collapsed. 

Directly afterwards, Watkins took the train to Repton and tried to assault the old Headmaster, Dr. Fisher, who years before had told him that he could never make a living at poetry. In Watkins' delirium, the headmaster became an exaggerated symbol of the philistine world that stood in opposition to the poet.
Yet the most intense and formative experience of Watkins' life was to follow at the convalescent home in Derbyshire where he was sent to recover from the hysterical outburst just described. There, as he recalled later, he was suddenly shown the nature of time and saved miraculously by Christ from "the horrors of the abyss." He was to come to speak of this experience, and the healing and reintegration that followed from it, as part of a profound "revolution of sensibility."

In my twenty-third year I suddenly experienced a complete revolution of sensibility. I repudiated the verse I had written and knew that I could never again write a poem which could be dominated by time.

The theme of the overthrow of time through awareness of the vital interrelation of time and eternity was to become his central poetic concern. The experience just described assumed in his mind retrospectively the shape of a religious "conversion" to a new way of viewing the origin and purpose of life that was to transform his art. He burned all the poems he had written up to that time, and henceforth spoke of himself as a Christian metaphysical poet. His widow has written that, "His Christianity was the centre of his life, and he wrote only to praise and affirm that belief."

Though the obvious conflict between Watkins' uncompromising ideals and the world's demands led to his breakdown, ironically the commitment to the bank became his means of reintegration. Slowly Watkins came to accept the monotonous routine at Lloyds as a way of protecting his poetry without compromise. In later life, during an "Address to the Poetry Society of Great Britain" on May 7, 1966, he proudly and with some humour
compared himself to Eliot, Masefield, the Greek poet Cavafy and other poets who worked in banks:

When I joined Lloyds Bank in Sept. 1925, T. S. Eliot had just left it in the same year, the 8th of his service. He was so versatile that he was able to write the European article for the Lloyds Bank Monthly Review and *The Waste Land* at the same time.\(^{11}\)

In that same address Watkins relates how when he first started at the bank he unintentionally set fire to a packet of bank notes; and there are other colourful tales, one of him running after a customer to whom he gave an immense sum of money by mistake, and another of his leaving the bank unlocked so that a policeman had to come to his house for the key. In spite of the comical stories about Watkins' ineptitude, which he himself helped to perpetuate, he was by all accounts a competent clerk. After a day of work in Swansea, he would commute home by bus to his house on Pennard cliffs, and after supper return to his study to draft and redraft the poems he produced almost continuously throughout his life. Because he was such a meticulous critic of his own work, destroying at a whim poems that dissatisfied him, less than 400 poems survive in print, including those published in both journals and collections.

After settling into his career at the bank, Watkins met Dylan Thomas in the early months of 1935. The vital personality and unusual poetic gifts of the younger poet were to have a dramatic impact on Watkins both personally and poetically. Thomas encouraged Watkins to begin journal publication by submitting some poems, including "Griefs of the Sea," to the first issue of Kiedrych Rhys' *Wales* in 1937, and he introduced him to a community of poets, writers and artists including Daniel
Jones, the composer, Alfred Janes, the painter, and John Ormond, the filmmaker. Watkins' edition of Thomas' letters, *Letters to Vernon Watkins* (Faber and Faber, 1957), testifies to the strength and duration of this extraordinary literary friendship, and reveals the two young poets' utter dedication to the minutiae of their craft.

The other important twentieth-century figure Watkins most admired during that same period was the Irish poet W. B. Yeats, whose work he first read in 1928, and continued to study as it appeared throughout the thirties. Though Thomas had an immediate impact on Watkins' style, and a lasting one on him personally, it was Yeats who was to have the more enduring poetic influence. In 1938, Watkins visited the old Yeats in his Dublin home in the spirit of pilgrimage and wrote the long poem, "Yeats in Dublin," as a result.

In 1939 the nation mobilized for war, and Watkins joined the Home Guard. Again in 1941 he volunteered to serve in the R.A.F., first as a service policeman and then in Intelligence where he remained until receiving compassionate discharge in 1946. As with his banking career, numerous anecdotes abound relating Watkins' comic unsuitability for military life, stories of how he was found marching to an important ceremonial parade without his rifle, how he accidently turned a hose on the entire front row of his squad and how he accepted chocolate bars in place of passes for entrance into the base. In a radio broadcast of 1947 Watkins portrays himself as a misplaced person in the military setting:
During the war I found myself in an environment and in a role which I had never expected. I was an R.A.F. policeman, and guarding a camp where I was always losing my way, since I invariably confused one building with another. In circumstances such as these there seemed to be no place for my poetry, nor, indeed, for me; but at night when I stood at the gate examining passes I had a critic's authority, for my task was to understand in a moment all that was set before me.\textsuperscript{12}

When he left the police he is said to have parted jocularly with the words, "I don't suppose I'll ever meet a bigger bunch of crooks."\textsuperscript{13}

It was during the war on October 2, 1944, that Watkins married Gwendoline Mary Davies, nineteen years to his thirty-six. Though she was later to complain of his unsuitability for married life due to his (in her eyes) almost fanatical dedication to "the Muse," they seem to have had a harmonious partnership, raising five children, four boys and a girl. Now a well-educated woman herself, Gwen Watkins continues to edit and comment critically on her husband's works, having recently published a book on Watkins' friendship with Thomas, \textit{Portrait of a Friend} (Llandysul, Dyfed: Gomer Press, 1983).

Besides poetry and the joys of domestic life, Watkins' next great love was that of sports. He had been an avid player of tennis, cricket, squash, hockey and other competitive games since his schoolboy days at Repton and later at Cambridge. These were the only pursuits that could distract him from his poetry. He was by all reports athletic, agile and active throughout his life, a great lover of the outdoors, capable even in his later years of scrambling up cliffs and striding on the Gower sea trails, outdistancing younger men.
Happy in relative isolation on the Gower, Watkins did not actively seek literary acclaim. He believed that publicity was debilitating for the poet, who must work in secret. Yet his career as a published poet developed quietly and steadily parallel to his commitments as husband, father and bank clerk. In 1941, just before his entry into the R.A.F., Watkins' first volume of verse, *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd*, was published by Faber and Faber, receiving favorable notice from Eliot himself who was one of the first to praise his work. Another significant appearance in print in 1941 in an anthology called *The White Horseman* tended to link him with the so-called "New Apocalypse" group of poets, a loosely associated body of neo-Romantics led by Henry Treece. From that time onward Watkins was to publish regularly in journals like Wales, *The Welsh Review, Life and Letters Today, Horizon* and *The Listener*, eventually establishing a solid reputation in both Britain and the United States. From 1941 to 1968, Faber brought out a series of seven volumes of Watkins' poetry, in addition to a *Selected Poems* (1967). Some of these were reprinted in America by New Directions. The Faber volumes include *The Lamp and the Veil* (1945), *The Lady with the Unicorn* (1948), translations of Heinrich Heine's *The North Sea* (1951), *The Death Bell* (1954), *Cypress and Acacia* (1959), *Affinities* (1962) and the posthumous *Fidelities* (1968) which Watkins saw through the press. Since Watkins' death a number of posthumous volumes of his poems have appeared in print including *Uncollected Poems* (1969), *I That Was Born in Wales* (1976), *Selected Verse Translations* (1977), *Unity of the Stream* (1978), *The Ballad of the Outer Dark* and
Other Poems (1979), and The Breaking of the Wave (1979), all of which are duly noted in the bibliography.\textsuperscript{14} In addition, Leslie Norris has edited a memorial volume with tributes to Watkins by a variety of artists and critics, Vernon Watkins 1906-1967 (1970), and Jane Lee McCormick has edited Watkins' scattered prose gathered from various journals, radio broadcasts and previously unpublished notes in her Master's thesis, "The Prose of Vernon Watkins" (Simon Fraser University, 1969).

Watkins' translations of French, German, Italian, Spanish and even Hungarian poetry provided him with a substitute for critical work (which he shunned) and afforded him a way of sharpening his own poetic skills.\textsuperscript{15} His choice of poets reveals a keen interest in the French Symbolists and German Romantics, particularly Heine and Hölderlin who were to him unique exponents of the high and noble Romantic dream he never relinquished of poetry as a mediation of the divine. He also appreciated the manner in which they were able to integrate the classical (Greek) and the biblical traditions. The general critical consensus on Watkins' translations is that they combine scholarly accuracy with a poet's feeling for the spirit of the original. Watkins has written an essay, now published with his posthumous Selected Verse Translations (Enitharmon Press, 1977), on "The Translation of Poetry," developing his own theory of the art of translation.

In spite of the relative modicum of criticism on Watkins during his life and since his death, he did receive numerous literary honours in the last two decades of his life. In 1951 he was appointed Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and
in 1953 won the Levinson Prize from Poetry (Chicago). His volume *The Death Bell* earned him "First Choice" of the Poetry Book Society in March in 1954, and in 1957 he claimed the Guinness Poetry Award for the poem, "The Tributary Seasons."

In 1966 Watkins retired from the bank. He was granted an honorary D. Litt. from the University of Wales (1967), and in that same year became the first holder of the Calouste Gulbenkian Fellowship of Poetry at University College, Swansea. The Times of October 11, 1967 reported in his obituary that he was being considered seriously for the Laureateship at the time of his death to replace the post left vacant by John Masefield. Therefore, despite his refusal to seek honours, Watkins received some measure of recognition in his lifetime, and his reputation continues to mount as more of his work is published and more critical work appears. What is most needed now is a "Collected Poems" that would provide readers with a sense of the wholeness of his work; for, as suggested earlier, his canon appears to have the kind of thematic and symbolic unity we find in the work of a major poet like Yeats.

Before retiring, Watkins had already taken time off from the bank in 1964 to serve a term as a visiting professor of English at the University of Washington in Seattle. Washington asked him back again in 1967 to resume that same position. After only three weeks of class on October 8, 1967, at the age of sixty-one, Watkins died unexpectedly of a heart attack during a vigorous game of tennis, his longtime favorite sport. For a poet who asserted that death is but a shifting of consciousness it seemed somehow an appropriate way to die. His
body was transported to Wales where he was buried in the church he had attended throughout his life, St. Mary's at Pennard. Watkins' own words from his last volume, *Fidelities*, may best serve as an epitaph:

For me neglect and world-wide fame were one.
I was concerned with those the world forgot,
In the tale's ending saw its life begun,
And I was with them still when time was not.
CHAPTER I

THE FIGURE OF TALIESIN:
POET AS BARD AND PROPHET
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Poet as Bard and Prophet

In a radio broadcast on the Welsh Home Service on November 25, 1953, Watkins introduced the figure of Taliesin in his poem, "Taliesin and the Mockers" as follows:

The Welsh poet Taliesin, who claimed to have lived in all ages, is to Welsh poetry the archetype of inspiration, as Orpheus was to the Greeks.¹

Watkins was to call on this figure of the early Welsh bardic poet recurrently in a series of poems scattered throughout the published volumes of his verse, beginning with "Taliesin in Gower" in The Death Bell (1954).² Internal evidence reveals that in spite of being published in separate volumes the Taliesin poems were originally linked as a series, and intended by the author to be read as an interrelated sequence.³ Common to the poems is the theme of the timelessness of poetry, a poetic conjoining of Welsh myth and Christian vision to the poet's personal experience, and a similar landscape in which the images of sea, sand and rock take on a heightened, symbolic significance. Dr. Ruth Pryor, who has studied the unpublished manuscripts, points out that the Taliesin sequence remained unfinished at the time of the poet's death, and that another draft dating from 1967 entitled "Taliesin Considers His Calling" exists in incomplete form.⁴ The poet's continuing interest in the Taliesin theme, beginning as early as 1938 when he drafted his first Taliesin poem,⁵ and lasting until his death in 1967, indicates that Taliesin was of abiding impor-
tance to him poetically. In this chapter I shall examine the Taliesin poems in order of their appearance in the published volumes to explore what they reveal of Watkins' sense of the relation between a pre-Christian and Christian mythos, as well as his sense of himself as a poet of metaphysical vision. I wish to demonstrate that although the poems can be read and appreciated separately, they take on added resonance when read as a whole.

Watkins' early interest in the Celtic material dealing with Taliesin is apparent in "The Salmon," a poem first published in 1949, where he incorporates the Irish legend of Finn and the sacred salmon of wisdom, which bestows immortal life on whoever is able to catch it, into the stories surrounding Taliesin. In that poem, Watkins alludes to Taliesin's receiving of the three miraculous drops of inspiration and to the incident of his being discovered as a child by the man Elphin in the salmon weir as detailed in Charlotte Guest's translation of The Mabinogion (1906). The reader may refer to the Appendix for a synopsis of the Taliesin story. The revised version of "The Salmon" (typescript dated 1960) in The Ballad of the Outer Dark (1979) makes reference to the Welsh meaning of the name "Taliesin," or "radiant brow." Both early and late versions allude to the child's swallowing of the drops of inspiration:

In Elphin's weir the child was caught. All ages then were hung.
The radiant forehead by those drops that lit upon his tongue Knew all the changes from his birth. His inspiration freed
Souls from the swinish devils that mocked the Savior's creed. (BOD, p. 30)

Even in this relatively early poem it is clear that the Taliesin figure enables Watkins to combine his interest in the Welsh material with his sense of the timelessness of Christian vision; for Taliesin as a transformational agent present in all ages, on whom "all ages then were hung," represents the power of poetic inspiration and the poetic imagination to surmount the limitations of time. In a manner characteristic of the Taliesin poems as a whole, "The Salmon" draws together allusions from The Mabinogion and the gospels—in this case the incident from the synoptics (Matt. 8: 28-34) where Christ drives demonic spirits into a herd of swine. Taliesin's knowledge, here associated with the purgative energy of "the Savior," is "freeing" because it involves the ability to see time from the perspective of eternity. As in the poems that follow, Watkins focuses upon the poet as a "divine child" whose knowledge is that of the prophet, encompassing past, present and future, and whose tongue is inspired with a kind of timeless wisdom. A tone of controlled but intense exultation complements this theme of the poet as "vates" or prophet throughout the series.

Before turning to the Taliesin poems in the published volumes where Watkins explores this exalted notion of poetry, it is important to establish his sources for the myth. As Leslie Norris points out, Watkins would have been aware of the early Welsh materials dealing with a historical Taliesin, as well as the more mythical image of the bard, through his
reading of H. I. Bell's *The Development of Welsh Poetry* (1936). The original sources for the story are the *Llyfr Taliesin* (*The Book of Taliesin*, 1275) and *Llyfr Loch Hergest* (*The Red Book of Hergest*, c. 1400), medieval manuscripts containing conventional "skaldic" type poems ascribed to the historical Taliesin, a warrior-hero said to have lived in the sixth century. *The Book of Taliesin* contains a separate section of "saga" poems and miscellaneous poetic fragments dating back possibly to the ninth century, presenting the utterances of a more mythical Taliesin. It should be noted that the historical figure is also mentioned in the *Historia Brittonum*, a Latin compilation by the Welsh monk Nennius (c. 800 A.D.) purporting to give an account of early British history from the time of Julius Caesar to the end of the seventh century. Nennius locates Taliesin as a sixth century bard. Finally, a prose *Romance of Taliesin* found in sixteenth-century manuscripts (*The Penniardd MSS.*), but believed to derive from medieval sources, tells the earliest stories of a mythic child called Gwion Bach who became the bard Taliesin through a miraculous transformation. The *Hanes Taliesin* (or *Lay of Taliesin*), the central poetic fragment presenting the so-called "transformational poems" or the riddling song of the bard, derives from the earlier *Book of Taliesin* (1275), while the prose *Romance* containing "The Tale of Gwion Bach" and its sequel, "The Tale of Taliesin," comes from the sixteenth-century manuscript of Elis Gruffydd, who (with Nennius) sets the tale of Gwion Bach in the sixth century during the days of Arthur and Maelgwn Gwynedd.
Though Watkins' father used to read English translations of the older poetry to him as a child, Watkins himself did not speak or read more than a smattering of Welsh. His primary source for the Taliesin myth, therefore, came from his reading of Lady Charlotte Guest's translations of *The Mabinogion* (1848 and 1906). It is important to realize that her translation of the Taliesin material, placed at the end of her book and not essentially a part of the "Four Branches" of *The Mabinogi*, is very much a creative composite drawn from various earlier sources. She incorporates the poetic fragments from the *Hanes Taliesin* into the prose narrative of the story of Gwion Bach, weaving them together in her own ingenious manner. As we look at Watkins' poems in relation to her translations, it is helpful to be aware that she based her text on eighteenth and nineteenth-century Welsh manuscript versions—a quarto-sized MS. from the Welsh School in London, dated 1758 and the Iolo MSS. of Iolo Morganwg edited in 1848. She did not have access to the sixteenth-century work of Elis Gruffydd on which most modern scholarship relies. Iolo Morganwg (b. 1747), whose real name was Edward Williams, was a notorious Welsh fabricator of ancient texts who attempted to prove that Glamorganshire bards had preserved a continuous tradition going back to the prehistoric druids. Like the fabrications of the "Ossianic" translations of the Scottish James Macpherson, these corrupted texts contributed greatly to a more romanticized image of the ancient bards, but also presented enormous problems for later scholarship. Through Guest, Watkins is dealing with what by scholarly standards may be regarded as "contaminated" sources.
to arrive at his own more romantic notion of the bard.

It is also possible that Watkins' interest in Taliesin may have been renewed by the publication in 1948 of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, which attempted to decipher the Gwion Bach riddle of the *Hanes Taliesin*. Watkins' interest, like Graves', seems certainly to have centered upon the poetic fragments, the "transformational poems," presumed to have been the prophetic speaking of an archetypal, magical figure of myth and lore—one associated with a native prophetic strain characteristic of the wandering minstrels rather than with the static professionalism of the court bards.

A final important source for Watkins' Taliesin as a figure of mythologized history is Charles Williams' Taliesin in *Taliesin Through Logres* (1938) and *The Region of the Summer Stars* (1944). From the first publication of these long poems, Watkins was deeply interested in Williams' effort to unite the Taliesin material with the Arthurian sagas. His "Three Sonnets for Charles Williams" in *Affinities* represents an effort to do homage to the dead poet not only by imitating his style and recasting his subject matter, but by confirming his vision of "Taliesin the nightingale" (*A*, p. 37) as an idealization of the poet. Both Watkins and Williams were concerned with reshaping the Celtic material within a more specifically Christian context.

In his Taliesin sequence, Watkins follows Guest in blending elements from both the prose *Romance* and the *Hanes Taliesin*—namely, Gwion Bach's acquisition of the magical drops of poetic inspiration from the "witch" Caridwen's cauldron, his
pursuit by Caridwen, his rebirth as Taliesin, his discovery in a coracle by Elphin, and his challenging of the court bards (see Appendix). The Taliesin of myth, as Watkins receives him, is clearly a supernatural figure, a shape-changer, and a kind of shamanistic bard, capable of transmigration and rebirth in a myriad of forms. However, as Jane McCormick points out in her unpublished dissertation, Watkins makes reference in some of his poems to the historical bard, and it is probably a mistake to argue the irrelevance of the historical figure in his mind. McCormick writes:

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.

The issue for Watkins is the translation of history into the timelessness of myth; and Taliesin, being associated both with temporal events, and with prophetic awareness beyond time, affords him the elements of potential synthesis.

The first of the Taliesin poems to appear in the published poems, "Taliesin in Gower" (from The Death Bell, 1954), begins and ends with the image of the "violent, colossal, reverberant, eavesdropping sea." Both here and in the later "Taliesin's Voyage," Watkins relocates the myth of his hero at Pwlldu (Welsh for "black pool") on the Gower coast near Pennard. He alters the myth by casting Taliesin up on the shores of his own coastline rather than "on the strand between
Dyvi and Aberystwyth" as in Guest's translation. By so doing, Watkins assumes a closer identity with the bard, one which enables him to claim as Taliesin's native land the landscape he most intimately knew and loved.

In the opening stanza, Taliesin emerges from the sea as in the original myth, and claims Wales as his true homeland—the place of his origins. The imagery establishes his full identification with the landscape:

My country is here. I am foal and violet. Hawthorne breaks from my hands.

A complete reading of Watkins' canon reveals that the above images of foal, violet, and white-blossoming flowers set up complex cross-references with a number of other poems. The poems dealing with foals and mares ("The Mare" and "The Replica" in CA) and the Mari or "gray Mare" of "The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" establish the importance of horse imagery in Watkins' poetry. The "Music of Colours" sequence, which I shall explore in the next chapter, begins with a meditation on falling, white blossoms. However, a longer poem in Affinities (1962), "The Childhood of Hölderlin," provides the best clue as to what foals and violets symbolize in the context of his poems, and how the two images are linked in his mind. That poem opens with the following lines:

Surely the racing foal has discerned through darkness
The light out of which man came, and the violet-root
Has sucked the fountain over which Dante bent
And found the river of light. (A, p. 57)

Here, both foal and violet represent aspects of nature which have contact with a hidden and invisible order of life associated with "light" and "the fountain." "Light" and "the
fountain," in turn, are recurrent symbols in Watkins' poetry for the origin of things in time, images of eternity. And in "Taliesin in Gower" it is these eternal aspects hidden within (but originating beyond) the natural order that Taliesin has come to celebrate and redeem. We note also that the reference to Dante as a poet of visionary experience is also present in a Taliesin poem yet to be discussed, "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision."

The "I" of the poem is at once merged with the forms of nature, and their acute, semi-omniscient observer.

I watch the inquisitive cormorant pry from the praying rock of Pwlldu, Then skim to the gull's white colony, to Oxwich's cockle-strewn sands.

The description of nature in these rhymed (abab) and rolling seven-stress lines is precise and particularized. The rhythmic line attempts to echo the motion of the sea as well as to establish the oracular quality of the voice. The speaking voice is that of one who claims intimate knowledge of nature, and the ability to read its secret script—to hold the key to the interpretation of its manifested signatures.

I have seen the curlew's triangular print, I know every inch of his way....

I have been taught the script of the stones, and I know the tongue of the wave.

As in the transformational fragments from the Guest translation, Watkins uses the "I am....I have seen" pattern of declamation to suggest the speaker's omniscience.

In the third stanza, the landscape to which the poet comes as a "witness" becomes increasingly symbolic:
I witness here in a vision the landscape to which I was born,
Three smouldering bushes of willow, like trees of fire,
and the course
Of the river under the stones of death, carrying the ear of corn
Withdrawn from the moon-dead chaos of rocks overlooking its secret force.

The "Three smouldering bushes of willow, like trees of fire," suggest both the miraculous burning bush of Moses on Mount Sinai, and the magical properties of the Celtic willow branch. Watkins may also be referring to the local custom of farmers burning bundles of twigs in the fields at the end of winter. The fact that there are "three" bushes recalls that the number "three" and triads in general are significant configurations in Welsh mythology, as well as representative of the Christian Trinity. Confirmation that at one level Watkins had the Trinity in mind when working on the Taliesin poems can be deduced from a draft of a poem entitled "Taliesin on the Beach," dated 1948-49, now in the British Library, which refers explicitly to the three persons of the Holy Trinity in the final verse. The allusion becomes more clear in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision" where Watkins writes, "I looked; creation rose, upheld by Three." The vision of nature aflame, and the image of the underground river carrying the "ear of corn," or possibility of regeneration, combine to create the impression that Taliesin is seeing nature "transfigured" through the eyes of vision, and reading its hidden meanings.

The "moon-dead chaos of rocks" overlooking the visionary landscape may represent those seemingly inanimate aspects of nature which have not yet been humanized, enlivened and
incorporated into his vision. In a commentary on another poem dealing with Taliesin, "Poet and Goldsmith," from *Cypress and Acacia*, Watkins makes an important distinction between "nature" and "transfigured nature," arguing that he is not a nature poet in the usual sense:

This poem...is about nature, and about transfigured nature. To those who have never looked through or beyond nature, if there are such people, it must be meaningless....[T]his poem is about Taliesin looking at the created universe from the standpoint of Christian faith, which I call the pivotal point between one way of writing and another.16

"Taliesin in Gower" and the other Taliesin poems are concerned with this pivotal moment in time when nature is seen from a transcendent perspective.

The fourth stanza presents the coming of spring through its numerous images of rebirth--the "breaking iris" and the "dripping branch" shedding its burden of frost. Taliesin reads the signs of spring's emergence from "Winter, season of death," and recognizes the presence of human suffering--"men's groans"--in this season of rebirth. As in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where "April is the cruellest month," spring in the poem is a time of painful awakening as well as a time of regeneration, and the poet's "task," as defined in stanza five, is the Blakean one of weighing time against an eternal pattern and somehow regenerating or restoring the landscape in terms of that larger vision:

Yet now my task is to weigh the rocks on the level wings of a bird,
To relate these undulations of time to a kestrel's motionless poise.

Taliesin's function is not only to celebrate the yearly cycle
of the regeneration of nature with the "holy creatures" who "proclaim their regenerate joys," but to open those cycles of time and relate them to that which, like the kestrel at its still point of ascent, is "motionless" and timeless. Here for the first time the image of the kestrel or hawk appears, which is to reappear in "Taliesin's Voyage." In many of Watkins' poems, including "The Curlew" and "Kestrel" (CA, pp. 54-55), birds are symbols of the poet, or that which it is the poet's task to celebrate and preserve.

In stanza six, Taliesin defines the landscape as a "mighty theatre" and enters that theatre as an actor--an active power present in "the rising pewit's call" and in the "last of the nine" waves. Watkins here alludes to the symbolic significance placed upon "nines" in Welsh myth. In the transformational poem, "Cad Goddeu" ("The Battle of the Trees") from The Book of Taliesin, the shape-changing speaker usually identified with Taliesin says,

Not from a mother and father was I made;  
As for creation, I was created from nine forms of elements:  
From the fruit of fruits, from the fruit of God at the beginning;  
From primrose and flowers of the hill, from the bloom of woods and trees;  
From the essence of souls was I made,  
From the bloom of nettles, from the water of the ninth wave.17

As in the Gwion Bach story, the "sea-changed" bard of Watkins' poem assumes many shapes, but his final form is that of Taliesin.

In a hundred dramatic shapes I perish, in the last I live and sing.

Taliesin's song or music begins as a celebration of
present forms, "sheep," "ravens," "Larks," "porpoises" and the "heron" of "Three Cliffs Bay" near his home in Gower. But in the tenth stanza, he begins to expand the song by imagining the history of earlier ages. Prehistoric animals, as well as what Watkins' friend David Jones would call "sacramental man" (man the sign-maker), emerge in the poem.\(^\text{18}\) The record of man's "script" left in the rocks is evidence of his artistic activity even from Paleolithic times. Like Jones, Watkins celebrates the gratuitous and sacred nature of sign-making as both a characteristically human and inherently religious activity. Jones writes in "Art and Sacrament,"

So it is here supposed that man is a creature whose end is extra-mundane and whose nature is to make things and that the things made are not only things of mundane requirement but are of necessity the signs of something other. Further, that an element of the gratuitous inheres to this making.\(^\text{19}\)

Here in the poem it is as if the poet recapitulates in himself the entire history of the race and the evolution of consciousness. His vision restores an earlier, prehistoric Wales when men were "makers" in Jones' sense:

Rhinoceros, bear and reindeer haunt the crawling glaciers of age
Beheld in the eye of the rock, where a javelin'd arm held stiff,
Withdrawn from the vision of flying colours, reveals, like script on a page,
The unpassing moment's arrested glory, a life locked fast in the cliff.

Watkins was excited by the recent archeological surveys (begun in 1943) of the remains of a Paleolithic burial chamber in a cave on Gower, and he celebrates the discovery of the "red lady of Paviland" (who turned out to be a young man) in his poems, "Digging the Past" and "The Red Lady" (\(F\), pp. 84 & 89).
In "The Cave Drawing" (LU, p. 99) he deals with the record of prehistoric man's artistic activity in the caves of Lascaux. Two poems from Affinities, "The Fossil" and "Expectation of Life," also explore the presence of prehistoric man. In his prose Watkins has written,

> It is necessary to dig the past up to understand the present, but all good artists have something ancient about them too, and the earliest trinkets and ornaments dug from Welsh clay may jostle against the work of a living contemporary who has looked on that mirror and then set his hand to his task.\

Both he and Jones, who carried on an active literary correspondence, were fascinated by this invasion of the present by the past, and the idea of the essential unity of all times. It is because Taliesin's vision encompasses both past, present and future that he can go on to claim a faith "surmounting the Titan," and assume a victorious stance over the land he greets. Through his song, he is able to capture "the unpassing moment's arrested glory" and release the life held in matter--"a life locked fast in a cliff."

In the final stanzas, Taliesin's assertion that he is "safe with an ear of corn" again evokes the original Romance where as a grain of corn or wheat Taliesin is swallowed by Caridwen, only to be reborn; and at the same time it associates him with the pre-Christian and Christian mysteries of regeneration. Watkins may also have in mind the passage from the gospel of John where the "grain of corn" is used as a symbol of the resurrected Christ:

> Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die; it bringeth forth much fruit. (John 12:24)
In the last stanza, Taliesin turns to his ultimate task, that of cutting the wood and measuring the strings for his harp "to make manifest what shall be"; for his poetic vision must encompass the future as well as the past and present if it is to be truly prophetic. He must be able to "sing" what man's and nature's forms will be, and aid in realizing their potential. The poem, "Three Harps" (CA, pp. 16-17), may help to clarify Watkins' sense of what is demanded of the poet who would play the harp of true inspiration. For in that poem the "third" and "shrouded harp" can only be played by one who has rejected worldly "renown" and has lain down in the grave with the dead.

Then at once the shrouded harp
Was manifest. I began
To touch, though pain is sharp,
The ribs of man.

Taliesin here is like the harpist of that poem, one who has experienced pain and suffering, and who has passed through the initiation of a death of many past selves.

Taliesin's final desire, "to loosen this music to the listening, eavesdropping sea," posed here as a question (How shall I accomplish this task?), suggests that the vocation of the true poet as Watkins sees it is to free or loosen the music of earth to the vastness and wholeness of the "sea" that is eternity. The sea, a predominant and somewhat ambiguous symbol in the Taliesin sequence and in Watkins' work as a whole, takes on a positive connotation in this poem, indicating that which encompasses the activity of man and the poet's song in a larger, harmonious order. It is as if eternity in the poem
is "eavesdropping" upon time. The line, "All earth being weighed by an ear of corn, all heaven by a drop of blood," with its allusion to both the pre-Christian and Christian sacraments of bread (corn) and wine (the sacrificial drops of Christ's blood), suggest that Watkins' effort in the poem is not only to draw forth the latent Christian implications of the earlier material, but to fulfill and complete what he believes to be lacking in it by raising it into the realm of Christian revelation. Taliesin, the faithful "Titan" or god-like hero, by cutting and playing his Orphic-Celtic-Davidic-Druidic harp, will make manifest in his song the truth of the Christian vision of sacrifice. It is this act that allows him to participate with Christ as a redeemer and restorer of the created order. In terms of his craft this implies that Watkins-Taliesin has chosen to write of "transfigured nature" in the lyrical mode from what he calls in his note to "Poet and Goldsmith," "the standpoint of Christian faith."

"Taliesin and the Spring of Vision" in Cypress and Acacia (1959) illuminates more fully than any other Taliesin poem the relationship between paganism and Christianity. It treats what Kathleen Raine in her essay on Watkins in Defending Ancient Springs calls "a deliberate baptism of the bardic spirit." Watkins' Christianity for her is "a seed or acorn into which the essence of the pagan cosmic sense...has been distilled." I would argue that here Watkins' Christian perspective becomes more explicit.

In the opening stanza we encounter Taliesin in his traditional and symbolic place "at the sea's edge"--the meetingplace
of sea and shore, time and eternity. Watkins conveys the passing of time through the images of sand and the hourglass, images that recur in "Poet and Goldsmith" (CA, p. 36). Later in the poem (stanza 5) he borrows Blake's phrase from Jerusalem, "the Minute Particulars," to describe the discrete entities of experience as perceived by man in time. Watkins follows Blake in his use of the phrase to indicate those phenomena of time capable of reflecting eternity. In Blake, when the grains of sand fail to reflect the eternal due to man's lack of vision, they become opaque and harden.

Every Universal Form was become barren mountains of Moral
Virtue, and every Minute Particular harden'd into grains of sand....

In Blake's "Mock on, Mock on Voltaire, Rousseau," the grains of sand become Democritus's and Newton's particles of matter transfigured by imaginative vision:

- And every sand becomes a Gem
  Reflected in the beams divine....

For Blake as for Watkins, the highest good in art and life expresses itself through "Minute Particulars." As Blake writes,

- For Art and science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars
  And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power.

Like Blake's "Bard" in Songs of Experience who "Present, Past & Future, sees," Watkins' Taliesin has the visionary function of raising the "Minute Particulars" through his song. With Blake, Watkins is romanticizing the early bard as a prophetic figure. In his "Jerusalem" (Chap. II), Blake presents the prehistory of druidic culture as a "Golden Age," and Watkins
is establishing Taliesin as an apotheosis of the poet from an earlier period in a similar manner.

The Blakean "grains of sand" in Watkins' poem, here personified, sing to Taliesin, greeting him as "my nearmost," "my constant,"

'...you...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.'

Nature, or the temporal order, in its divine aspect claims a kinship with the poet who is capable of transfiguring the world through music. The reference to Fate suggests the classical Fates who are weavers or spinners. And the "spinning waters" remind us that Taliesin has been cast as from a vortex or whirlpool from the primordial waters—that he has endured a sea journey or initiation, and arrived at a new point of departure. He, as the "virtuous pagan" is a bard of experience—one who has known "past grief" as well as "present joy." In other words, he has experienced life as a Blakean tension of contraries.

Despite his experience and accumulated wisdom, Taliesin is not yet ready to respond to the song of the "grains" and meet them in the timeless moment of the shattering of "time's glass." While they whirl "to a pattern" (i.e., reflect at their own level the larger, unlimited patterns of eternity), Taliesin retreats into a cave, taking refuge "under the unfledged rock." The image of the cave is rich with significance,
suggesting both the Platonic cave of time where men are prisoners, and the dark, interior recess which holds a secret source of light. As in the "via negativa" strain of Christian mysticism, with which Watkins was familiar, the soul must descend into its own interior darkness and meet the "cloud of unknowing" or experience a "dark night of the soul" before it is ready to face the light of supreme reality.\(^{27}\) In Neoplatonic sources such as *The Enneads* of Plotinus and Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, which Watkins came to know through Yeats,\(^ {28}\) souls are said to enter the world of generation through a darkened cave. In Homer, Virgil and other pre-Christian sources, the mouth of a cave is often the entrance to the underworld or a place of mystic initiation—the abode of the Sibyl. As Mary Polk states in her thesis, "the otherworld of Celtic lore...was often thought of as located under a hill (as in the case of the Irish sidh[e] folk) or reached through caverns in the mountains."\(^ {29}\) For Taliesin, the cave is not only a place of refuge for the "unfledged" (the uninitiated into the Christian mysteries), but a place of discovery where he reaches the "spring of vision" by groping with his hands. The rock itself is "unfledged" (undeveloped) also in the sense that as a stone or inanimate thing its inner form has not yet been drawn forth and awakened by Taliesin's song. It is as if all nature is awaiting his discovery of the "spring of vision." The word "spring" of the title also carries more than a single meaning, suggesting simultaneously the season, a source of water, and a coiling or rebounding power. Here in the cave the momentarily blind Taliesin, with his eyes closed to outer
seeing, touches the source or origin (the spring) of human vision:

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 sand grain balance the age's cumulous cloud.  

Taliesin the shape-changer has his epiphany, his moment  
of transcendence, when in a flash of insight he finds the  
pivotal point of time that enables him to abolish it. By so  
doing he becomes temporarily omnipresent, that is, present at  
many levels of being. As in the earlier Romance where  
Taliesin takes the form of a fish to escape Caridwen, he here  
assumes "the mind of a fish," the image of which again suggests  
his identification with Christ and the Christian symbol of the  
fish. The pin or pivot is also a frequent image in Watkins'  
work for the point of balance between time and eternity. Here  
and in the following stanza, Taliesin is granted a picture of  
the "penumbra of history." History (time-bound experience)  
appears as a terrible shadow blocking man's vision of eternity  
symbolized by the sun. Doubly horrifying is the lack of a  
"sheet-anchor," a point of reference or stability that would  
relate temporal experience to a larger pattern. The domination  
of time would be insurmountably oppressive were it not for  
Taliesin's recognition of the transforming power of love. Here  
Taliesin begins to speak:  

'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.'

The notion of a "city" as a symbol of organized human existence where mutual exchange and love predominate is a favorite symbol for Watkins, and he would have found parallels to his own sense of the divine city of art in Blake's Golgonooza and Jerusalem and in Yeats' Byzantium. In "Peace in the Welsh Hills" (CA, p. 30), he speaks in similar terms of "a city we must build with joy / Exactly where the fallen city sleeps." This "kingdom of love," first built inwardly through acts of love, eventually comes to have its own objective reality. This is what I think Watkins means when he, through Taliesin, says that poets' "works of love leave words that do not end in the heart."

Through poetic utterance ("acts corresponding to music") man is capable of building the Blakean Jerusalem where "citizens do not age in each other's eyes" even in the midst of time and place. The emphasis here upon human love as a reflection of divine love strikes a theme in Watkins' work that parallels his sense of the temporal order as a reflection of a timeless one.

In the fourth stanza, Taliesin, who is still gripping the interior of the rock (which has now become his "sheet anchor"), receives from an interior spring the "three drops" of poetic inspiration that he requires to fulfill his purpose as one who transfigures the world through music—music being, as typically in Watkins, a symbol of creative expression in general and the poet's craft in particular. Again we are reminded of the Romance where Gwion steals from Avagduu ("utter darkness")
three drops from the cauldron of inspiration and is pursued by Caridwen for his deed. In the moment that the drops fall on his fingers, past and future converge "in a lightning flash," and the voices of Taliesin's Muses--the spirits of prophecy who inspired his literary forebears--speak:

'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.'

The three ancestors who are revealed in a moment of vision are Taliesin-Watkins' literary progenitors, and in a sense his collective Muse. Particularly through the references to Dante and Blake, poets who explored the cosmographies of heaven and hell, Watkins reveals his literary affinities with poets of visionary experience. 30

Taliesin's summation of his poetic stance in the final stanza is paradoxically a rejection of "the omniscience" of eternity in favor of the temporal world which greeted and claimed him through the voice of the sand grains in the first stanza.

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 limitations of time.'

Because he has encountered in a moment of vision "the irreducible diamond," the absolute light of eternity which is devastating from human perspectives and too great a weight of consciousness for mortality to bear, he requests that his "partial vision" be adapted to "the limitations of time." Partly
because he is not yet ready to sustain heightened consciousness, and partly out of a sense of willing sacrifice and commitment, he embraces the time-world of mortality and limitation. His "Christening," therefore, is in terms of a Christian acceptance of and descent into time. Insofar as Taliesin is a type of the Christian artist, we can say that Watkins chooses to write about the eternal from the standpoint of time in its most particularized and human aspects.

In an early Yeatsian poem, "Earth-Dress" (BML, p. 45), Watkins had written of the fear of human mortality before the absolute in terms similar to those of "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision."

I would awaken eyes
Time has made unaware
Of wonders of world-size;
But when hawk-hovering air
Of 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.

And in a note to that poem, he added the following comment:

Man, insofar as he is soul, is indestructible; but he cannot, while he is in the flesh, endure the lightning of poetic genius itself. He cannot confront eternity; to him, while he is living in time, it is terror....

The lightning, poetic genius in one of its manifestations, godhead itself in another, is inaccessible to mankind except through a Mediator. 31

Taliesin, a Promethean figure of man in time, "clutches mortality" out of such a realization. He aspires to absolute knowledge, realizes that he cannot sustain it while in the
flesh, and therefore asks to be "baptised," indicating the recognition of his need for a Mediator.

To comprehend fully the implications of Taliesin's Christian acceptance in this poem, it is necessary to refer briefly to several poems from The Lady with the Unicorn (1948) where Watkins makes clear what Christianity offers to man that paganism lacked. In "Zacchaeus in the Leaves," for instance, the biblical figure of the "small-statured man" (first mentioned in "Sycamore," BML, p. 25) who ascended a sycamore tree to view Christ is set against the pagan figure of Pan.

The myth above the myth,
Pan above Zacchaeus;
Zacchaeus climbing,
Mounted above his youth,
Alone in time
Seeking the heavenly death. (LU, p. 91)

As in Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," the deeper perennial wisdom of Christianity which incorporates history through the Incarnation (the point of intersection in which eternity penetrates time), puts the pagan gods to flight. What they in one sense have prefigured, supplants them because of the coming of a greater power of love. In Watkins' poem, Zacchaeus finally climbs higher than Pan because of his "seeking the heavenly death." That is, his vision of Christ from the pinnacle of the tree inspires him to a more self-sacrificing, altruistic order of love.

In a number of related poems dealing with the figure of Zacchaeus and the image of the sycamore, Watkins seems to have been drawn by the personal element in the story to identify with the "small-statured man." In Watkins' iconography,
the sycamore becomes a kind of tree of life, and its "keys" or spinning seeds contain the possibility of regeneration. In "Poet and Goldsmith," a Taliesin poem originally entitled "Taliesin at Sunset," the poet sings a song which connects the images of Zacchaeus and the sycamore with the issue of the transfiguration of nature as it is treated in the Taliesin poems as a whole.

The poet sang: 'All ages bud like the sycamore. Brown keys spin down to beginning. There are two natures. Blest are the lost, packed hidden within life's door Like seeds in the husk. Yet since a small man climbed The crooked trunk, and groped, and sat in the branch, The minutiae of earth are changed, and the blackbird's praises Are now twofold: they speak and they speak beyond knowledge. Even so, these hands have touched the harp of the dead.'

This incredibly compact poem succeeds in drawing together the themes and images of the two sequences of poems by linking Taliesin with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus' moment of revelation in the tree is like that of Taliesin in the cave. Both have to do with the revelation of an essentially Christological perspective which changes "the minutiae of earth."

In "The Song of the Good Samaritan" (LU, p. 95), the ascendancy of the Christian mythos is even clearer. The classical "mythologies shrink," in Watkins' phrase, and are surpassed by the Samaritan's simple act of human love and compassion. Again, like the "oracles" in Milton's "Nativity Ode" they flee before the coming of a higher order of love.

....The mythologies shrink
And the nameless image is healed of its murderous goad.
Font of the fingers, water where asses drink,
Winged horses above you scattering, manes of the Norn,
And the heroic Pegasus, leap into light from the brink.

Swallows quiver, rounding the magical horn
Of fullness, emptied for John's wild honey. They break
Light with their wings, and the era of love is born.

He broke the classical falsehood, summoned awake
A world from dust with the secret worlds of his tears.
Shut in those heavens he heard the mythologies shake.

In this poem Watkins juxtaposes the "proud horses" of myth,
Pegasus and the Norns or Scandinavian Fates, to the Samaritan's
lowly ass, and the heroic values of classicism to Christian
humility. For Watkins, the heroic virtues of courage, endurance and grandiloquence were incomplete without the addition
of "caritas"—Christian love—the willingness to sacrifice oneself wholly for an ideal. Thus, he has the humble figure of
the Samaritan break the "classical falsehood" by bending in the
dust to aid a fellow creature. In so doing, the Samaritan is
bearing the wounds as well as sharing the joy of man:

'O moment,' he breathed, 'frail as the branch of a tree,
This act is secret, eluding all fabulous joys.
The wound I suffer, the joy I am bearing is he....'

The figure of the historical Taliesin would have embodied all
of the classical virtues, but he needs to be "baptised" at the
end of the poem because he has the potential for, but lacks,
such acts of love, mercy and humility.

Watkins' choice of the Samaritan as a figure of service
may have been suggested by this passage from A Vision of W. B.
Yeats, another of Watkins' literary predecessors who is to be
discussed in Chapter V. The Samaritan fits into Yeats' schema
as a representative of a Christian phase of religious expres-
sion:
...the Good Samaritan discovers himself in the likeness of another, covered with sores and abandoned by thieves upon the roadside, and in that other serves himself. Since A Vision first appeared in 1937 and Watkins' first volume not until 1941, Watkins could have easily had this strikingly similar passage in mind, but used it to present his own unique sense of Christian charity.

Though Watkins subordinates classical mythology in favor of Christian truth and biblical paradigm in poems like "Song of the Good Samaritan," I do not wish to suggest as Roland Mathias does in Triskel One that there is any essential "dichotomy between mythic inheritance and Christian belief" in the early poetry, or in Watkins' work as a whole. For even in the early published volumes, Ballad of the Mari Lwyd and Other Poems, The Lamp and the Veil, and The Lady with the Unicorn, classical allusions and mythical themes are liberally interspersed and integrated with biblical motifs. "Old Triton Time" (BML, p. 18), "Atlas on Grass" (BML, p. 56), and the "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" itself are obvious examples of his ability in the early poems to unify earlier mythological with Christian material. I believe it can be argued that Watkins is working consciously within the great European, Christian-humanist tradition as practiced by Dante, the Renaissance painters and Milton, in which there is no essential dichotomy, but a hierarchy of values where the poetic images of pagan myth are taken up and included, indeed, typologically fulfilled in terms of Christian revelation. Though like Milton, Watkins subordinates pagan to Christian myth in particular poems (see for instance "Prime Colours" in BML, p. 16), this subordination
does not constitute a rejection of early myth, but requires its transformation in new poetic contexts. Watkins' poetic effort is essentially synthetic and inclusive, rather than exclusive. From an early sonnet like "Atlas on Grass" (*BML*, p. 56), where the Greek figure of Atlas discovers that "men are raised by what a myth conceals," to later poems like "Christ and Charon" (*CA*, p. 57) or "Rhadamanthus and the New Soul" (*BOD*, p. 50), classical figures move easily in a Christian world. It is probable also that Watkins' long-standing interest in Hölderlin is attributable in part to that poet's ability to harmonize the Christian and the Greek.  

Watkins continues to work out a synthesis of the Welsh and Christian traditions in "Taliesin's Voyage" in *Affinities* (1962). Here he reestablishes the detail of the earlier legend, making reference to Taliesin's birth in a coracle (a small, handwoven wicker basket covered with hide); his relation to Caridwen, who in the original material functions as a kind of "terrible mother," pursuing the child Gwion through various forms in an attempt to destroy him; and his rebirth as the "minstrel," Taliesin.

The coracle carried me.  
The seawave tossed me.  
Hawk, hound harried me.  
Caridwen lost me.

Both in the original myth and in Watkins' verse Caridwen is an ambiguous figure, associated with nature in both its creative and destructive aspects. She is at one level an inspiring Muse, a maternal figure (originally a mother goddess associated with Rhiannon) and at another a jealous and devouring female.
Taliesin's (and Watkins') attitude toward nature in the poems partakes of the same ambivalence; for he recognizes it on the one hand as fallen and imperfect, and on the other as capable of embodying eternal verities—of revealing the infinite in the particular in the Blakean sense.

In his retelling of the myth, Watkins, speaking directly through the mask of the mature Taliesin, dwells upon the archetypal implications of the child Taliesin's sea journey or voyage in darkness and his rebirth or awakening in "dawn" light on "wild Pwlldu." During his long sea voyage to Wales we are told that the "hidden" Taliesin "Raved nor remembered / Earthly things." As in the Platonic notion of the divinely inspired poet, and in the case of the primitive figure of the shaman, Taliesin is associated with "divine mania," and bears the knowledge of the dark, the hidden and inner wisdom, a kind of wisdom not gained without suffering. He [Taliesin],

Raved, nor remembered
Earthly things,
But wide-ribbed, slumbered
Under those wings.

In his slumber (or shamanistic trance), Taliesin is borne by the swallow's wing—"I heard swift, swallow, / Fly through the dark." Here as in the romantic and classical traditions, birds are associated with divine inspiration, with the souls of the dead, and with the poet. Taliesin is carried under the wings of such divine messengers and under the flight of stars, both birds and stars being symbols of his divine mission. The voyage, like the journey of the shaman through the under and upper worlds, is a durationless moment; a kind of timeless "dream"
from the perspective of the bard:

The days of my voyage
When numbered are
As a glacier's age
Or a shooting star.

Swift and slow
In one rope twined
A sail did throw
On my dreaming mind.

Time I pursued
And saw the kill.
Life was renewed
Where time lay still.

Sand and the year
That seemed deranged
Are filled with grandeur
For all is changed.

At his birth, Taliesin reenters the world of time and observes the destructive powers, "the kill," that time perpetuates. Yet through his visionary perspective he is able to affirm that even the things of time, "Sand and the year / That seemed deranged / Are filled with grandeur." 

Taliesin turns finally to address the raven and the kestrel, a scavenger and a bird of prey capable of representing both the temporal cycles of destruction (the cycle of predator and prey) and higher wisdom. He wishes to learn from them in their higher capacity "the heart of sound," that is, the secret of music (poetry) that is capable of transfiguring the destructive aspects of nature, and raising them into timelessness. The "turning birds," then, become for Taliesin (like Hopkins' windhover and Yeats' falcon in "The Second Coming") symbols of that which circles about the "pivotal point" of the timeless. Taliesin would learn from them the secret music, and reveal to them in exchange his knowledge of the interrelation of time
and eternity. He desires to participate in a reciprocal ex-
change with the creation.

O raven, kestrel
Wheeling round,
Teach your minstrel
The heart of sound!

I, Taliesin
Know the cords
Between that pin
And the turning birds.

The issue of the poem is how Taliesin, the creative principle
or imagination, is able to transform the seemingly destructive
elements of creation into a vision of "grandeur"—harmony and
beauty.

In the last stanza Taliesin cries for "Destruction's key,"
for like the creative Logos he is identified with both the
creation and destruction of world cycles—the beginning and the
ending of things. Destruction bears the key to a secret, since
ultimately, through the principle of self-sacrifice, it is ca-
 capable of leading to the great mystery of rebirth.

Where have they left
Destruction's key,
Hid in what cleft
Of the crying sea?

Like nature, the sea in Watkins' work is another symbol
capable of holding a dual meaning in its association with gen-
eration and corruption as well as with the infinite—the eter-
nal. Watkins writes of this delicate paradox in his prose.
Here he is speaking of the visual art of Ceri Richards, a Welsh
contemporary:

Art springs from conflict, and the conflict here is
between two eternities, that of the sea assimilating
all things into its movement toward ultimate oblivion
and that of the cathedral embodying man's faith and mind.... (italics mine) 38

And in "New Year 1965" he writes:

Yet sometimes I have seen it [the sea], after a stormy night, vast, yet immediate, containing all its contradictions, all its opposing forces, in a single harmonious vision. I never doubted the terror, even the malice of the sea's designs; but to see it in a moment of repose is mysterious and supremely satisfying. 39

In the context of the last stanza of the poem, I would suggest that the sea in its temporal aspect of generation and flux is "crying" for eternity, which will in one sense be its destroyer when the things of time are swallowed up in the infinite. The "winds' hound" and the "mussel's sting" in the previous stanza are the negative (painful or destroying) elements of creation which must be raised and transfigured in Taliesin's vision. The poem, then, reveals the darker aspects of Taliesin, the suffering and agony his knowledge brings him, and his need to grapple with the complexities of the created order. Through his identification with the prey--"harried" by hawk and hound, as in the original material where Taliesin as a hare is pursued by Caridwen as greyhound and ultimately swallowed as a grain of wheat--Taliesin is revealed here as a suffering, Christ-like figure. As in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," his endurance of the limitation of birth and temporality can be seen as a kind of spiritual death undertaken in order to renew time.

In "Taliesin and the Mockers," the companion poem to "Taliesin's Voyage" in Affinities, Watkins retains the form of the "I am" utterance of the voice claiming omnipotence as used in the original material.
Before man walked
I was in these places.
I was here
When the mountains were laid.

He makes a deliberate effort to capture the oracular tone and insistent rhythm used by Guest. The assertive claim of the poet to have been present "when the mountains were laid" is reminiscent also of the epic, formulaic pattern of the "boast" evident in the Welsh sagas. David Jones in *In Parenthesis* draws on the same tradition when he has the soldier, "Dai," make his claims to omnipresence more ironically in the context of war:

I was with Abel when his brother found him, under the green tree.
I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes.
I was the spear in Balin's hand
that made waste King Pellam's land.  

Watkins may also have in mind the biblical use of the "boast" as evidenced in *Job* (Chap. 38) where God himself from the whirlwind challenges Job with a series of formulaic questions asserting His divine presence at creation—"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth....?"

The poem goes on to identify the poet both with animate and inanimate nature, "the designing of flowers" and "ringing stones," establishing his presence at the creation of the world and with the vital powers of life and death. The emphasis shifts in stanza six to focus upon the "Lord" of Taliesin, who is at one level Christ the divine Logos present at creation, and the vehicle of creation—the mediating Word. In Guest's translation too we note that Taliesin appeals to such a "Lord" of heaven in the line, "I will supplicate my Lord that I get
refuge in him,/ a regard I may obtain in his grace; / The Son of Mary is my trust...." In the original material he claims to have been in the "Tetragramaton," that is, the hidden and unpronounceable name of God of Jewish mysticism. Taliesin's Lord, though at one level Elphin of the Welsh myth, is revealed in Watkins' poem as the Lord of the heavens, or Christ in his preincarnate identification with the Creator.

My Lord prescribed
The path of the planets.
His fingers scattered
The distant stars.

Taliesin, then, is cast in the role of one who retells or sings creation, beginning and ending, creation and destruction, the calling forth and naming of living forms. He reenacts through the musical evocation of his speaking the making of heaven and earth, birds, mammals, plants, insects and finally man and woman in the "garden," echoing again a passage from Guest's translation. Though the following lines from Guest's poem are comparable in tone, rhythmic structure and content to those of Watkins, we can see that he emphasizes the timeless nature of man's original estate:

Guest: Watkins:

The Almighty made, Last, all labour
Down the Hebron vale, He bent on dust.
With his plastic hands, Out of the red dust
Adam's fair form: Made He Man....

And five hundred years, He built for him
Void of any help, His eternal garden,
There he remained and lay Timeless, moving,
Without a soul. And yet in time.

He again did form, He cast on him
In calm paradise, Dark veils of sleep.
From a left-side rib, Out of his side
Bliss-throbbing Eve. He took the Female.
Watkins' poem becomes a retelling of the creation of man and woman in Genesis and in Milton's Paradise Lost; then it moves through mythic history from the building of Babel's tower and the rise of Solomon to the birth of the creative principle in its most immediate form in Taliesin.

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

What do you seek
In the salmon river,
Caught in the net
What living gold?

What do you seek
In the weir, O Elphin?
You must know
That the sun is mine.

Here Watkins evokes the discovery of Taliesin as recorded in the Romance where Elphin draws the infant forth from a coracle and names him Taliesin, "lord of the radiant brow." Taliesin's name associates him with heavenly light, and establishes him as a divinely marked "star child." The fact that Elphin is seeking fish in the "salmon river" and catches instead a divine child, reminds us of the connection between the story of Gwion Bach and the Irish legend of Finn and the salmon of wisdom which, as we have seen, Watkins used in "The Salmon." It is also a reference to the Hanes Taliesin in the Guest translation where Taliesin asserts, "And it is not known whether my body is flesh or fish." Finally, we cannot forget that the early symbol of Christianity was "the fish," and that Christ chose disciples who were fishermen. The point here is that Elphin has lifted from the weir more than he bargained for—a living
being ("living gold") that will transform his life, and that holds the key to the secrets of creation. For Taliesin is identified not only with "Solomon's lamp," but like Christ with the life-giving sun itself.

In *Defending Ancient Springs*, Kathleen Raine connects Taliesin with what she calls "the other mind" of inspiration, the traditional repositories of wisdom from the regions of the dead. The power of prophetic utterance derived from contact with these interior realms is one aspect of the "gift" that Taliesin brings with him (see stanza 27) and offers to the living. Like the miraculous head of the Mari in "The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" (1941), Taliesin acts as mediator between life and death, time and timelessness, challenging the temporal order. Raine has said, "The knowledge of the Mari is Taliesin's knowledge." By transferring to Taliesin the prophetic, incantatory and sacred powers of the Mari, Watkins carries forward and develops the theme of that early ballad, connecting her powers more closely with those of the poet. In the Taliesin poems, however, he is able to make the point that the greatest gift the poet brings is that of divine love, which must go hand in hand with his knowledge. Taliesin states in the poem under discussion:

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I have a gift
For I have nothing.
I have love
Which exceeds all treasures.
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At this point in the poem the associations of the reborn bard with the infant Jesus and with the later "mocked Christ" of the crucifixion become dominant. The hired court musicians
in the Romance mock Taliesin for his failure to conform to the court system and for his lack of professional training. Here he clearly represents native inspiration over the artificial learning of the schools. We are told in the Romance that

...at that time the bards were in great favor with the exalted of the kingdom; and then none performed the office of those who are now called heralds [bards], unless they were learned men....

Yet in the Romance, Taliesin, who comes from outside the system, is able to turn the court bards' mockery back upon themselves, and reduce them to repeating mindlessly the undignified mumblings of the nonsense phrase, "blerum, blerum." In his poem, Watkins pursues this theme.

Mock me they will,
Those hired musicians,
They at Court
Who command the schools.

Mock though they do,
My music stands
Before and after
Accusing silence.

Watkins' rejection of the artificial learning of the "hired musicians" in this context, does not, however, imply that he rejects the necessity of vast learning and skill in the use of intricate forms associated with the bardic tradition; for he continually argues the importance of "tradition" in both poetry and prose, and practices in intricately structured forms, some of which we shall explore in Chapter III. Here the point is that learning without inspiration is valueless. Obliquely perhaps he is attacking much of the poetry of his day.

Like Christ, then, and like the prophets of the Old Testament, Taliesin is "mocked" and reviled by the world and by
the false poets and prophets; yet like Christ he overcomes. The overcoming in the poem is again through the gift of poetic utterance, his music being a symbol of the wisdom which stands before and after time. It is again the infusion of a higher order of love into the primitive mythos through the allusions to Christ, that gives the poem its final significance and focus. In the last verses, which diverge in the direction of Christian vision from the original material, Watkins alludes to the healing of the blind man by Christ, and the idea that only the blind can recognize Him, playing on the paradox that the physically blind often have spiritual sight.

Certain there were
Who touched, who knew Him.
Blind men knew
On the road their God.

The voice of Taliesin, speaking out of his sense of identification with Christ, merges with that of the poet here and throughout the poem. Thus Watkins, speaking through the mask of Taliesin, establishes his own poetic lineage as one who through poetic utterance would incarnate the highest, most sacred wisdom. By setting himself against the pseudo-poetry of the "schools," Watkins' poet also assumes a relatively isolated position.

In one of the later published poems from *Fidelities* (1968), "Taliesin at Pwlldu," set at a bay near his home on the Gower coast, Watkins moves toward a synthesis of Celtic, Christian and Greek symbolism. Taliesin is gazing upward through the branches of a kind of "Tree of Life" ("the wind-blown tree") toward the "veil of heaven." Nature is like a veil, at once
revealing and concealing the eternal order beyond. Taliesin's speaking in the first person conveys his desire to capture in a visionary moment the instant before Daphne is transformed into Apollo's laurel tree—the moment of metamorphosis where time is conquered. At this point the leaves speak, declaring their intuitive wisdom that freedom comes only in service to an ideal: "In boundless light only the bound are free."

Taliesin, acting in accord with this principle, finds music flowing through him "as through a shell." His entire being has become the vehicle of inspiration. We are reminded here also that Watkins' notion of creative expression demands the submission of the artist to a form, and that his own poetic practice led him in the main to reject the free verse experiments of Pound and the early Eliot for the exploration and renovation of traditional metrical forms.

In the second stanza, he acknowledges the living powers that dance through himself and nature in the line, "Streams dance and glitter and the rocks have veins." Then he turns retrospectively to invoke his own "sea journey" when he floated (like the infant Moses) in a timeless realm and surveyed the uprising of creation:

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.

As we have noted in the earlier poem, "Taliesin and the Mockers," Taliesin's "Master" is not only Elphin from the legend, but Christ, who in Revelation is shown in John's vision standing in a rainbow as the fulfillment of the promise
to Noah and the completion of the old covenant, a kind of universal man.

And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. (Revelation 4:3)

The "Three" who uphold creation are at once the Christian Trinity and the Welsh Triads. For the three who stand about Taliesin in the third stanza in "the secret place within the source of tears," are suggestive of the Welsh "Y Mamau" (or, "the Mothers"), a configuration of three female goddesses. These powers represent Taliesin's Muse—or the "other mind" that inspires his utterance. The "pure stream" which Taliesin touches in the last stanza, like the underground river of "Taliesin in Gower," and the spring of the cave in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," represents his source of inspiration—the waters of life which issue pure from paradise to manifest in the natural world.

Pure stream, by pebbles masked and changing skies,
I touch you; then I know my native land.

Like Taliesin in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision" in the cave, he makes contact with his "native land" by the power of touch. The reference to the "avengers" in the final lines recalls the stories of vengeance associated with Arthur in the Arthurian sagas which Guest refers to in her translation, as well as the theme of vengeance in the original tale of Gwion Bach, where Taliesin achieves revenge on the court bards who have persecuted him and imprisoned Elphin, his master.

Pride cast the pattern from primaeval years,
The avenger's knives in glacier-driven stone
Changed by God's peace, transfixed where morning flies.
The point here, however, is not that Taliesin achieves vengeance, but that "God's peace" (conveyed in part through his own transmission of it) "transfixes" or pierces through the primaev pattern of wrongness cast from "pride." As in the other Taliesin poems, the Christian virtues of love and forgiveness implicit in the new way of seeing, reverse or arrest the "classical falsehood" and the consequences of the Fall.

In summary, by incorporating the Greek mythos into the Celtic and Christian, and by working more inventively with the material from The Mabinogion, Watkins can be seen extending his theme in "Taliesin at Pwlldu." Though he uses a regular iambic pentameter line, his free use of hyphenated words ("whale-backed water-plains") and a strongly alliterated line ("Pride cast the pattern from primaeval years") creates the feeling of an earlier, more alliterative poetic tradition. His use of compound words also suggests the presence of that most considerable Welsh poet in English of the previous generation, G. M. Hopkins, whose influence on Watkins will be considered briefly in Chapter III.

"Sea Chant (Taliesin to Venus)" is the last of the Taliesin poems I shall be taking up here. This poem is particularly important since it reveals a more Dionysian aspect of the Taliesin figure, and shows Watkins using the traditional material in a more inventive and personal way.

The poem is addressed by Taliesin to Venus, who in the poem is associated with the Lorelei ("Venus, Loreley-breasted"), the enchantress of German romanticism and Wagnerian myth who lures sailors to their death on the rocks. Though Taliesin
reveals her in her darker aspects as a "ceaseless mother of change," "hard and hostile to man," he does not reject her as evil, but says that he desires to "preserve" her "Chaste, from shudder and shock." Only Taliesin can preserve her eternal aspects from time, since he alone has realized the truth that darkness must give way to light, corruption to recreation.

Yet that golden-eyed egret
Still as a hawk shall stay,
   While you proclaim to islands
   Nothing dark shall endure.
I have discerned a secret
Hid from the arc of day,
   Locked in the heart of silence,
   Stronger than death, and pure.

The "secret" he has "discerned" that is "Stronger than death, and pure," is the secret of the regenerative power of Christian love common to the other poems. In the last two stanzas, Taliesin reveals himself mythically as both son and lover, heroic rescuer and preserver of Venus in her maternal and feminine aspects. Unlike the lover-son of the ancient mother-goddess cult which Graves elaborates, he is not slain at the end of the year, but comes to free the Venus figure from these cycles of destruction. Comparing her to Semele in the myth of Dionysus' birth in lightning, he identifies himself as the "lightning born" immortal youth who is capable of delivering her.

I, with strength from the giver,
   Kindling coral and horn,
   Taught by the tides of ages,
   Take you, at last subdued.
I am come to deliver
   You of the white spray born.
   Do not all faiths and sages
   End in a child their feud?
The poem, which reveals Taliesin's lineage as a son of divine parents, also connects him with the Christian mythos—for like Christ he is both son and savior of his mother. The birth of the divine child (like the Incarnation which is perhaps the ultimate paradigm for Watkins) ends the "feud" of the warring ages and ultimately will initiate an era of peace. The poem reveals Taliesin in his role of redeemer, not only of nature with which Venus is identified in the poem ("Patterning sunbeams serve you, / Doves, and pinks in the rock"), but of the creative aspects of the feminine. Like Christ in relation to the church as bride, he enacts the role of heavenly bridegroom, bringing about a regenerative union of male and female principles. We note that Venus is described as standing in "bride-veils." The sexual imagery of the poem (the "subduing" of the female), can be seen as a metaphor on the natural level for the creative union of male and female in a higher order of love by which the destructive sexuality of Venus is transformed. At another level, as in the poem "The Lady with the Unicorn" (from the volume by that name), Venus functions as the poet's (here Taliesin's) Muse, for he acts as her singer in the world.

I, the last of your singers,
See how the shells you gave
Shine where the breaker shatters
All that we know of day.

Yet her need for him is as great as his for her, and therefore the relation between poet and Muse is reciprocal. Out of this potentially destructive union issues creative energy and expression. Finally, the poem can be seen on the personal level as a love poem to the poet's wife presenting the conflict
between the poet as artist and the poet in love. It is evident from a survey of the above poems that Watkins saw himself poetically not only within the Christian tradition, but within a particular visionary branch of it. Through the mask of Taliesin he was able to trace the genealogy of his own conversion to a larger, more encompassing Christian vision, and to speak in the prophetic mode of an order of perception that would bridge the gap between the temporal and eternal orders. His essential theme of the conquest of time by art could not be better conveyed than through this mediating figure from his own Welsh heritage where native, Christian and Hebraic themes and images already lay commingled. Though he dropped the mask of Taliesin in later poems and wrote more directly of the relation of man and Muse, it is clear that the bardic figure enabled him to make high claims for the poet, and to reaffirm the sacred nature of the poet's task.
CHAPTER II

TIME AND ETERNITY:

THE "MUSIC OF COLOURS" POEMS
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Time and Eternity:
The "Music of Colours" Poems

We have seen how Watkins drew upon a romanticized tradition of the Welsh bard Taliesin to elaborate his own sense of the sacred calling of the poet as a mediator between time and eternity. Another related sequence of poems entitled "The Music of Colours" enabled him to explore through Neoplatonic sources his sense of what might be called the interdimensionality of experience, the realization that what we know through the senses is but a portion of reality; that hidden within the particularity of this world lie the traces of another.

Like the Taliesin sequence, Watkins' "Music of Colours" poems enabled him to focus on a network of carefully interwoven themes and images over a considerable span of time. This particular sequence began with the publication in 1943 of "Music of Colours: White Blossom" and its appearance in LU in 1948; it continued through to "Music of Colours: The Blossom Scattered" in DB in 1954, and culminated during the poet's lifetime with "Music of Colours--Dragonfoil and the Furnace of Colours" in A in 1962. All three "Music of Colours" poems have been republished in the posthumous US (1978), along with a fragment of a poem entitled "Music of Colours--The Cave." My intention here is to explore the three major "Music of Colours" poems in the order they appeared in the published volumes in light of Watkins' use of Platonic, Neoplatonic and Christian concepts and symbols. I shall explore these poems in
considerable detail to show how Watkins establishes a Platonic
dialectic of time and eternity and fuses it with Christian
imagery of death and resurrection. In the process of examining
the "Music of Colours" poems, I shall provide supporting evi­
dence from other poems that treat the time-eternity motif with­
in a Christian-Platonic context in order to establish the con­
sistency of Watkins' philosophical background and poetic ori­
entation. Because of the great beauty of these poems, and be­
cause the ideas and images contained in them inform so much of
Watkins' work, they deserve a fuller treatment than they have
received up to this time.

Watkins' early interest in Platonic myth was mediated
through two Romantic poets: Shelley, the love of his early
youth, and Blake, whose work he read thoroughly in the 1930's,
and whose ideas and imagery continued to exert an influence on
the mature poet. Among the moderns, the poet Yeats became for
Watkins the greatest twentieth-century exemplar of one who was
able to integrate Platonic concepts within an individualistic
poetic universe. Watkins' treatment of Platonic myth is, how­
ever, traditionally and unambiguously Christian as that of
Yeats and Shelley is not. For this reason, Watkins' Platonism
is perhaps closer to that of Vaughan or Milton than to that of
those nearer him in time. In Chapters IV and V, both Watkins'
relation to Yeats and to several of the seventeenth-century
poets will be considered in greater depth.

Although Watkins was not a theological or systematic
thinker, and avoided categories and "isms" of any kind (except
that of Christian metaphysical poet), he borrowed freely from
Platonic and Neoplatonic sources (such as Plato's *Timaeus* and Plotinus' *Enneads*) and used whatever enhanced his own poetic sense of the mysterious relation between the timeless and the temporal orders. The constant recurrence throughout his work of the theme of the destruction of time by the Imagination argues that the dichotomy between time and eternity is indeed his central poetic concern, the major theme to which his minor themes adhere. We have seen how in the Taliesin poems the pre-Christian bard caught between the worlds of paganism and Christianity attains momentary illumination through the shattering of "time's glass" in time's "timeless moment" (*CA*, p. 20). The problem of how to annihilate time by breaking through to the timeless, whether in a moment of visionary perception or in a lifetime of love, prayer and spiritual discipline, is all-pervasive from the early to the later work. Witness the relatively early "The Broken Sea" in *LV*, for instance, where Watkins speaks in the conclusion of "annihilating time" to gain "love's timeless state" (p. 60), and "A Necklace of Stones" in *LU* where he informs us that his poetic calling is to sing "a placeless and a timeless heaven" (p. 86). In a poem entitled "Dialogue" from the posthumous volume, *Fidelities*, Watkins takes a more positive view of time, but only through the recognition that time itself obeys and is subject to the "fount" of eternity. There the earth speaks to the soul in the following terms:

'....I keep
An exact account.
Time flings wide circles, but still they obey one fount.'

In one sense, the Fall for Watkins is more than anything
else a fall into time and a loss of the primal oneness of eternity. In "The Life Thread" (p. 42), he writes of the soul's reluctant entrance into time as a descent.

With what reluctance,
What misgiving,
Torn from the substance
Of timeless living,
Parted from night,
At last you fall
From the secret waters'
Circling ball.

Finally, we recall that in his Introduction to Dylan Thomas' *Letters to Vernon Watkins* (1957), Watkins reiterates his poetic stance as that of one who after his early twenties could never again write a poem "dominated by time." Time as a condition of limitation and restriction appears again and again as the great opponent to be either annihilated or transfigured.

Watkins' work shares with most forms of Platonism the sense of the presence of an invisible and eternal (timeless) world behind or within the visible and temporal. In poems like "Foal" (LU), "The Mare" and "The Replica" (CA), he uses an obviously Platonic vocabulary to describe the relation of the two worlds, borrowing notions of "original," "pattern," "copy" and "replica" from Platonic sources. "The Replica," for instance, describes a young foal's relation to its archetypal form in the heavenly world in Platonic terms.

Once more the perfect pattern falls asleep
And in the dark of sleep the replica
Springs to awareness.

Like earlier Platonists, Watkins is concerned with the problem of ontology and therefore focuses on where the natural order stands in relation to the Absolute. He assumes an
ordered, hierarchical universe containing multiple levels of being, each one verging on the next. The realization that nature is not an end term or final reality leads him to the affirmation of nature as both reality (at its own level of being) and symbol or hieroglyph in which the higher or archetypal Reality inheres. Depending on man's perspective, nature may stand in relation to that higher Reality either as an obscuring "veil" or a luminous, transparent reflector. In "The Tributary Seasons," for instance, Watkins describes the self-regenerating seeds of nature as

...the year's eternal forms,
An alphabet whose letters all
Mark out a sacred festival. (CA, pp. 72-3)

In its transfigured aspect, nature provides him with analogies to the eternal world in which it participates, and when interpreted rightly he considers that nature may lead man back to that transcendent source known as "the One," "the Good," "the Absolute," in Platonic terms, and "God," the more personalized Father, in Hebraic and Christian. Watkins writes of God in both the abstract and the more personal manner, depending upon the emphasis of the particular poem.

We have seen in the last chapter that Watkins continues in his own unique way the Medieval and Renaissance synthesis or assimilation of classical and pagan to Christian ideas, sometimes subordinating myth to Christianity as in "Song of the Good Samaritan" and "Zacchaeus and the Leaves," and sometimes using myth as metaphor foreshadowing or compatible with Christian revelation as in the Taliesin poems. In the poems to be
discussed here, he continues the process of classical-Platonic-Christian synthesis that is characteristic of his work as a whole.

The "Music of Colours" poems enact a seasonal progression. "White Blossom" describes the end of winter and the beginning of spring; "The Blossom Scattered," spring; and "Dragonfoil and the Furnace of Colours," summer. Certainly, in all three poems the ever-changing, cyclic faces of the seasons present a problematic situation to the speaker who laments man's inability to have absolute or even reliable knowledge in the phenomenal world.

"Music of Colours—White Blossom" opens as a meditation on "whiteness" in nature. The poem develops through nine iambic-based stanzas arranged in intricately patterned verse paragraphs of interlaced rhymes and couplets. The strong rhythmic quality of the lines and the dazzling imagery of light and whiteness intensify the mystical, meditative effect. In the first stanza, Watkins juxtaposes the visible whites of nature in the form of "white blossom" and "white shell" to an invisible, unseen whiteness only suggested by music and by the presence of Jesus, "the Nazarene / Walking in the ear."

White blossom, white, white shell; the Nazarene
Walking in the ear; white touched by souls
Who know the music by which white is seen,
Blinding white, from strings and aureoles,
Until that is not white, seen at the two poles,
Nor white the Scythian hills, nor Marlowe's queen.

The poem moves from a positive invocation of white to a sudden negation based on the realization that the whites of nature barely approximate what Watkins calls later in the poem,
"original white" (9.3). In the opening stanza, the shift to negation occurs in the fifth line—"Until that is not white...."
The white light that flashes from the "strings and aureoles" of artist's representations of angels, the white snow on the ancient Scythian hills, and even the mythic whiteness of "Marlowe's queen," Helen of Troy from Dr. Faustus, only seem white when set against the unimaginable "music by which white is seen." Watkins' reference to the Scythian hills is probably a recollection of Herodotus' description of a miraculous snowfall like white feathers recorded in the section from his Histories on "The Hyperboreans":

....my opinion is, that in the countries above Scythia it always snows--less, of course, in the summer than in the winter-time. Now snow when it falls looks like feathers, as every one is aware who has seen it come down close to him...and the Scythians...call the snowflakes feathers because, I think, of the likeness which they bear to them.4

The reference to Christ as "the Nazarene" who walks within man's inner hearing and within nature establishes early in the poem the possibility at least of contact with the invisible ground of whiteness, the primal purity informing all these mythological and actual whites.

Watkins had referred to Jesus as "the Nazarene" in an earlier poem to Dylan Thomas, "The Room of Pity" (BML, p. 26), in the context of Christ's experience of human grief in the upper room before the crucifixion, and again in "Zacchaeus and the Leaves" (LU, p. 90). In "White Blossom," "the Nazarene" (Christ in his more human aspect) is present as the power capable of transforming darkness (black) into light (white), and grief into joy. He reenters the poem later (stanza 7) as the
healer of the leper from the gospel incident (Matt. 8:2). The allusion to the mythical Helen continues the interplay of classical and Christian imagery that develops throughout the sequence. The association of the unseen white with music, and the assertion that only purified souls can "know the music by which white is seen" draws in the traditional Aristotelian-Platonic and Pythagorean idea (present in Dante, Milton and others) that the world moves to an orderly, harmonious musical pattern.

In stanza two, Watkins recalls the genesis of the poem. In an unpublished lecture-reading dated October 1961, "Poetry and Experience," he wrote that it was suggested,

in winter by a fall of snow on the sea cliff where I live. I walked out on the cliff and found that the foam of the sea, which had been brilliantly white the previous day, now looked grey.

After the dazzling, celestial imagery of "blinding white, from strings and aureoles" presented in the opening, the second stanza is relatively quiet and matter-of-fact, consisting of a series of end-stopped lines. The end-stopping reinforces the sense that the poet's thought has been arrested by the sudden realization that "white is not white":

The spray looked white until this snowfall. Now the foam is grey, the wave is dull. Call nothing white again, we were deceived. The flood of Noah dies, the rainbow is lived. Yet from the deluge of illusions an unknown colour is saved.

The speaker has to acknowledge that "original white" is not to be found in nature. All human knowledge and perception is relative and imperfect if the seemingly pure, white foam of the sea is dull in contrast to the whiter snow. To what, he must
ask, is the snow duller yet? The deceptiveness of the senses is a Platonic idea, and recalls Plato's argument in *The Republic* (Book X) that things in nature are but imperfect copies or counterfeits of the ultimate realities in the world of Forms, as well as the notion in *The Timaeus* that the world is a copy of a unique, perfect, and eternal model. The realm of becoming (time) is in Watkins' terms a "deluge of illusions" (2.5) to man who takes it as ultimate. The biblical reference to Noah's rainbow of the covenant between God and man, and the statement that "an unknown colour is saved" out of the flood, suggests, however, that original white, the "unknown" ground of all colours, is yet accessible to man through grace.

The early, rather Yeatsian poem, "Prime Colours," from *BML* (p. 16) represents Watkins' first effort to relate what he calls "the first five colours" of myth to the senses and to unredeemed nature. The association of the first five colours with the pagan creeds occurs in "Four Sonnets of Resurrection," and also with the creation of time in "The Cave-Drawing." In "Prime Colours" Watkins subordinates classical myth unequivocally to Christian vision, contrasting the pride of Pegasus, "the winged horse of myth" who "Seems now a circus horse paid to be clever" to the humility of Christ in his "ride from Bethphage" on the back of an ass as prophesied by Zechariah. As in the poem under discussion, the image of the rainbow (stanza 5) appears in conjunction with God's promise that the colours of the natural order ultimately will be redeemed. In the last three stanzas, the child who strays into the mountain is the "he" of the final stanza capable of tracing the five
colours to their source in "light's fountain." Christ is identified both as he "who wears the mockers' cap" and "the cornerstone":

For when the garments and tree-branches strawed
The way, a child into the mountain strayed
And on the mountain-path, in heaven's eclipse,
He found a swallows' wings, an ass's steps.

And time stopped still, stopped when an ass went down
Slowly from Bethphage to that still town.
That ass, that swallow, through the window's gap
Meet in his eyes who wears the mockers' cap.

Born of that 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.

The last line suggests that the five colours of nature, myth and time, when seen through "washed eyes" or regenerated vision, can be known to emanate from the transcendent ground of all colours. This poem clearly prepares us for Watkins' sense of the relation between time's colours and the unknown ground of potentiality from which all colours break in the "Music of Colours" sequence.

In stanza three of "White Blossom," Watkins asserts the central paradox of this and the other "Music of Colours" poems: death is the necessary basis of spiritual rebirth.

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.

The Christian sense of the mystery of regeneration through sacrifice and death (the overcoming of time through a submission to time) foreshadowed by the presence of the Nazarene in stanza one is particularly strong here. The dark center of potentiality within the seed which must break in pain from the
"crushed, dark fibre..." contains the form of the completed tree. "Darkness" therefore takes on a positive connotation as the germinative womb from which light manifests, rather than being a mere negation of white.

In the fourth stanza, Watkins again attempts to celebrate the rebirth of nature in spring as a paradigm of the principle of spiritual rebirth proclaimed in stanza three.

The bud of the apple is already forming there.
The cherry-bud, too, is firm, and behind it the pear
Conspires with the racing cloud. I shall not look.
The rainbow is diving through the wide-open book
Past the rustling paper of birch, the sorceries of bark.

But again the poem wavers between affirmation and denial of the beauty of nature. Lines 2-3 echo Keats' ode of seasonal celebration, "To Autumn," where the sun and the season "conspire" together "to load and bless / With fruit the vines...." Here, however, "pear" and "racing cloud" "conspire" to tempt the poet's eye down to nature. The poet's refusal to look at unredeemed nature, however beautiful, at this point (line 3) implies that he is afraid of the wrong kind of attachment to it. He turns his mind instead to the "diving" rainbow of promise and to the consideration of nature as a "wide-open book."

The Medieval concept of nature as "God's book" (found in writers like Augustine, Bonaventure, the Victorines) enables him to elude the "sorceries of bark" (nature's bewitching aspect) and begin to read nature as the tangible script and handiwork of a Divine Mind. He turns his gaze from apple and cherry bud only because natural beauty can deceive when cut off from its transcendent source, but is to be celebrated when viewed as part of the cosmic whole.
The intense, lyrical beauty of stanza five describes April buds "Starrily opening... / Swinging from world to world when starlings sweep." The buds, though "white asleep" (unaware of the transcendent source of their life), swing back and forth between the dimensions of time and eternity. The speaker's recognition that the things of time have true being only as they participate (whether consciously or unconsciously) in the Absolute gives them authenticity for him at their own level. Paradoxically, the denial the poet asks the reader to make (lines 5-6) becomes a kind of reversed affirmation.

They the buds will not break, not break, until you say White is not white again, nor may may.

The idea that one must negate in order to arrive at true knowledge and true speaking is not surprising in this context, since it is a common feature of the Neoplatonic idealism and "negative" strains of Christian mystical theology with which Watkins was familiar.

I wish to pause at this point in discussing the poem to consider how some of the key ideas and images presented thus far are connected to particular passages in The Enneads of Plotinus. This Neoplatonic source was familiar to Watkins, and my reading confirms that it informs the stanzas of the poems which have been so far considered. From the early thirties Watkins owned the six-volume set of Stephen MacKenna's translation of The Enneads (first issued between 1917-30), which he acquired in response to his study of Yeats, who used the same source. The presence of similar concepts and precise verbal echoes of the MacKenna edition argues that Watkins borrowed
freely from it in the composition of his "Music of Colours" poems. The notion just discussed in stanza five, for instance, that one can only speak in negative terms of "original whiteness" parallels Plotinus' idea that nothing can be predicated truly of the Absolute, and that we can have only relative knowledge of things in time. The Absolute cannot be approached except by entering into a state of mystical union with it in which knower and known are one, a state completely transcending time. Time is for Plotinus (as for Watkins) a descent or emanation from Eternity, a state in which man is linked to, yet separated from, his timeless source which is ultimate Reality. In "Sea-Music for My Sister Travelling" from LV, Watkins borrows the Neoplatonic concept of creation as an emanation from and return to the One, here imaged as a primal drop to which all rivers return. The passage can be seen as a Neoplatonic version of the myth of creation.

Swollen rivers run to find their principle in that first drop
That is not theirs but out of nothing fell,
Moving to time from nothing: did they find it time would stop. (p. 31)

Watkins' words find an equivalent in Plotinus' "Third Ennead," "Seventh Tractate" on "Time and Eternity":

If, then, the Soul withdrew, sinking itself again into its primal unity, Time would disappear. 9

He demurs from Plotinus, however, by implying throughout his work that the Absolute, Original White, God himself, has a personal face, and may be known by man (at least in part) while in the mortal state. Where he most resembles Plotinus in these poems is in his firm insistence that only through a kind
of intuitive oneness with the invisible ground of phenomena can phenomena be truly known.

Watkins' clearest borrowings from Plotinus are not his concepts of time and eternity, his assumption that this world is a kind of replica or copy of an Eternal one, or that the universe is musically structured and exists as "one melodic system,"10 since these ideas can be found in a host of other Neoplatonic sources and originate in Plato himself. The poet most resembles the third century philosopher rather in his use of the phrase, "original white." In the "Sixth Ennead" Plotinus writes,

If we do predicate Being, it is only as an accidental attribute; just as when we predicate whiteness of a substance, we are not predicating the Absolute Whiteness.11

In his "Third Tractate" entitled "On the Kinds of Being" from the same Ennead, Plotinus carries on a prolonged discourse on whiteness as a temporal attribute of Being. He concludes,

In sum, whiteness has existence because it is bound up with Being and present in it: Being is thus, the source of its existence....

The Being of the Sensible resembles white in not originating in itself. It must therefore be regarded as dependent for its being upon the Authentic Being, as white for its whiteness upon the Authentic Whiteness which in turn possesses whiteness through participation in that Intellectual Being whose existence is underived. (italics mine)12

Both passages are likely to have been important to Watkins in developing his terminology of "original white," and his sense that the time world is derivative from and dependent on an anterior order.

If the references to "Authentic Whiteness" provided the only parallels to Watkins' poem, the importance of Plotinus
could be minimized. Yet we also find in *The Enneads* a complicated consideration of black or darkness as the ground of being which parallels Watkins' sense that "White must die black, to be born white again." Though this idea can be found in Christian mystical theology, as well as in Hermetic and Jungian thought, it is expressed in Plotinus in terms of the polarity of black and white. Here he writes of the sensible qualities of nature:

> ...the beauty in the germ, and still more, the blackness and whiteness in it, will be included among the Sensible Qualities.\(^{13}\)

He goes on a few pages later to speak of the relativity of all colours in terms that Watkins could have used. Here black and white are posed as the extreme poles of the intermediaries of colours in the world:

> If we regard the intermediates as blendings of the extremes, we must not posit any contrariety other than that between black and white, but must show that all other colours are combinations of these two.... Slight, we may be told, will reveal to us that grey is nearer than black to white.\(^{14}\)

This passage seems to underlie both Watkins' reference to the white foam which now seems grey in contrast to the snow, and his later reference in the poem to the contrarieties of the black and white swans (stanza 9) which we shall examine when we deal with the remaining stanzas.

After establishing Plotinus as a source, we may return to the poem with a renewed sense of its Neoplatonic cast, recognizing at the same time its conscious deviations from traditional Neoplatonism. In stanza six, we are reminded that natural beauty is fragile, since "white flowers die soonest."
In Plato (see Socrates' speech on beauty in *The Symposium*) and in Plotinus, the transitory qualities of physical beauty serve as reminders to man that he must ascend the Platonic ladder to the eternal world where substance does not perish. In Watkins' poem, however, the suggestion that death and decay will soon lay the white blossoms waste, that they will "die into that chaste / Bride-bed of the moon," symbol of the mutable and transitory, leads him on instead to embrace the mortal condition, since it is in death itself that we may discover life. Here he develops the paradox of "death into life" of stanza three, but this time through the use of biblical imagery. The "lilies of Solomon" referred to in the Sermon on the Mount which "toil not, neither do they spin" (Matt. 6:28) "sigh" at the prospect of death, yet "make way" for the flowers that will replace them in the cycles of time. The speaker is able to accept their death because he (with the reader) is heir to the secret of incarnation suggested in the image of Christ's "lowly crib near Solomon's dust." The Christ child, "Rocked to the end of majesty," is the descendent and future deliverer of his ancestor Solomon, and hence his typological "end"—his completion and fulfillment. In spite of the "Dark forest" that haunts his crib, he lies in a state of peaceful repose like that of the untoiling white lilies. Likewise, the "tremendous rest" of the "low beast" nearby suggests a state of unconscious expectancy of rebirth.

In stanza seven, the Christian themes and images become even more predominant. The Neoplatonic realization that "White will not be, apart," that is, cannot have true being except
through participation in "original white" is mediated again through the figure of Christ. For Christ's cleansing or "making white" of the leper represents an act in time through which time is conquered. The leper is already white because of his leprosy, but Christ, paradoxically, cleanses him whiter than white. If "original white" has entered time, says Watkins, it is in the presence of this "Nazarene":

If there is white, or has been white, it must have been
When His eyes looked down and made the leper clean.
White will not be, apart, though the trees try
Spirals of blossom, their green conspiracy.
She who touched His garment saw no white tree.

The poem brings together the gospel incidents of the healing of the leper and that of "the woman with an issue of blood" (Matt. 9:20-21). The line, "She who touched His garment saw no white tree," is probably a conflation of the above-mentioned incident and that of the healing of the blind man who when his eyes were opened saw "men as trees walking" (Mark 9:24). The point of her not seeing a "white tree" is that the woman's eyes were focused upon "original white" and had no need to look on un-transfigured nature.

Watkins' use of the leper figure deserves attention here since it is a recurrent symbol in his work for God's personal love for unredeemed man. Watkins was interested enough in the leper symbol to consider calling his first volume (BML) "Gratitude of a Leper," but was dissuaded from it by Dylan Thomas' friendly derision in a letter (dated May 22, 1941). Nevertheless, Watkins wrote a number of poems which drew on the figure of the leper. The fullest development of the theme occurs in "The Healing of the Leper" in LU (p. 77) and "Hymn (The Leper's
Healing)" in UP (p. 23). An earlier version of the latter appeared in Outposts, 11 (Autumn 1948). "The Healing of the Leper" is significant in the context of this discussion because of its reference to Plotinus. In stanzas three and four of that poem Watkins writes:

Plotinus, preaching on heaven's floor,
Could not give praise like that loud cry
Bursting the bondage of death's door;
For we die once; indeed we die.

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.

The leper's "loud cry" recalls the moment in the gospel (Luke 17:15) when the tenth leper of the ten Christ healed "turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God." Plotinus' "preaching" (abstract philosophy) has its place on "heaven's floor," yet is subsumed by the cry of regenerated man. Stanza four is explained by Watkins' interest in Botticelli's famous fresco in the Sistine Chapel in Rome (which the poet visited) called "The Purification of the Leper." In that painting, various scenes from the story of the Temptation of Christ surround the central figure of the leper (dressed in white) who is presenting himself at the altar to the priest to make his offering of thanksgiving as detailed in Matt. 8:4. Watkins presents the great theme of man's purification in Christian-Renaissance art in contrast to Plotinus' "preaching" in order to suggest here that abstract systems of thought need to be completed by acts of human faith and love. Christ's act of love in time reveals the love of God and enables man to "burst the bondage of
death's door." Furthermore, Watkins' keen interest in the leper figure may have been stimulated by its presence in ancient Welsh poetry. The well-known ninth-century poem, "The Leper of Aber Cuawg,"\textsuperscript{18} dramatizes themes of human illness, isolation and betrayal. For Watkins, of course, the paradox of the "despised and rejected" social outcast being transformed into a symbol of purity gives the image its great Christian significance.\textsuperscript{19}

Watkins moves from a biblical back to a classical motif in the eighth stanza, here taking up the issue of whether "Lovers" in the acts of love approximate "original white." In Plato and Plotinus we recall that human love may lead man up to the Absolute. Watkins describes the whiteness of Venus and her doves, and the mythical union of Zeus and Leda in a passage highly reminiscent of Yeats' "Leda and the Swan." As in Yeats' poem (the language of which Watkins echoes in "web-footed Jupiter" and "mastered by the veins of dawn"), there is a certain ambiguity in the presentation of the ecstatic moment. Are we "imagining" (8.4) Jove's "Lust," a prefigured annunciation scene in which Leda represents mortality uniting with divinity, or both?

Lovers speak of Venus, and the white doves,\nJubilant, the white girl, myth's whiteness, Jove's,\nOf Leda, the swan, whitest of his loves.\nLust imagines him, web-footed Jupiter, great down\nOf thundering light; love's yearning pulls him down\nOn the white swan-breast, the magical lawn,\nInvolved in plumage, mastered by the veins of dawn.

Lines 4-6 play with the double meaning of the word "down" to suggest that Jupiter comes in a light that both descends (falls down) and is like the down of feathers. Line five is also
ambiguous, for the god is either pulled down into the form of
the swan to fulfill his great longing, or Leda's yearning pulls
him as "down" in the swan's breast, and down is a pun. The
ambiguity here helps to reinforce the paradox that both god and
maiden are "mastered" by the greater power of love. In "Music
of Colours--The Blossom Scattered," Watkins will attempt to re­
solve the question of the nature of the union of white swan and
maiden. Here it is posed as an example of "myth's whiteness," an
earthly reflection (or possible distortion) of higher love.

Watkins ends the first poem of the sequence on a quiet
note by shifting to a graveyard scene in which the "yew" of
mourning reminds him of human limitation and mortality. After
the flashes of myth's exuberance in the swan imagery of the
previous stanza, this is a sobering return to a contemplative
attitude. As in so many of Watkins' poems set in graveyards,
the theme of resurrection through death is implicit. For the
first time in the poem an "I" speaker emerges to voice directly
his central realization that he as a man in the mortal condition
lacks "original white."

In the churchyard the yew is neither green nor black.
I know nothing of Earth or colour until I know I lack
Original white, by which the ravishing bird looks wan.
The mound of dust is nearer, white of mute dust that dies
In the soundfall's great light, the music in the eyes,
Utterly secret. I know you, black swan.

It becomes clear that the poem has been a continuing dialectic
between the claims of myth and nature's whiteness, and man's
more humbling realization of his imperfection, mortality and
lack of self-knowledge. Playing with the double meaning of the
word "ravishing," Watkins rejects the image of Zeus the swan,
the "ravishing bird" of the previous stanza in favor of the lessons "dust" and darkness can teach. Like George Herbert in "Church-monuments" from The Temple who writes,

While that my soul repairs to her devotion,  
Here I intombe my flesh, that it betimes  
May take acquaintance of this heap of dust...,

Watkins argues that "The mound of dust is nearer" both to himself in time and place, and to "original white" than the whites of myth and nature. "Dust" (the reminder of man's mortality) speaks truly not only because it gives him a more realistic view of himself in relation to the Absolute (to God), but because a serious contemplation of death leads back to the possibility of the soul's rebirth and regeneration in "the sound-fall's great light." The final enigmatic, "I know you, black swan," like many of the poem's earlier phrases, is deliberately ambivalent. At one level Watkins is admitting that he can only truly identify with the dark and imperfect swan, since he is himself imperfect. At another, the statement ties to his former identification with the "dark ground" of whiteness ("the womb of sounds"). The dark or "black swan" can be seen not merely as the contrary of white, but as its negative counterpart, its "Form" in the Platonic sense. It is dark or black because it is hidden and unknown to man who looks only on the outward face of the world. In identifying with the black swan, then, Watkins identifies with that hidden and inner realm. Finally, in declaring that he has knowledge of the black swan, he proclaims his ability to distinguish between the negation or underside of white and "original white." He no longer confuses the copy with the original.
It is well known that the swan is an important symbol of the soul for both Shelley and Yeats. Watkins too wrote several poems which explore the symbol of the swan in the context of Platonic ideas. In "Swan Narcissus" (F, p. 44), for instance, he describes the narcissus flower's opening as if it were "like a swan," and speaks of it "Printing on time its eternal pattern." The fact that Plotinus too employs the image of the swan in the context of a discussion of "whiteness" argues again that The Enneads are a source for Watkins' poem. Plotinus asks,

If the whiteness of the swan, produced by its Reason-Principle, is given at its birth, are we to affirm Passion of the swan on its passing into being?

In context, the upshot of this rather technical question is whether attributes (like whiteness) are self-generated or proceed from an active, causal agent in a higher sphere. The obvious answer in both Plotinus' discussion and in Watkins' poem is that nothing in time is without relation to its timeless source.

"Music of Colours: The Blossom Scattered" is a reworking within a similar formal structure of the ideas and images of "White Blossom." In this poem, however, Watkins presents the renewal of "the world's colours" (3.5) in spring to achieve a more exalted vision of nature. The whites of the phenomenal world in the form of "clouds," "spray," the white petals of "the marguerite" and the central image of a white blossoming tree reveal themselves here as temporal epiphanies of "original white."

The speaker does not hesitate between denial and affirmation of nature as in the previous poem. It is as if he has
been granted the ability to see the things of time within the clear light of heaven, and the old dichotomy between time and eternity momentarily fades. The first stanza combines the familiar images of "whiteness," "light," and "the leper," explored in the previous poem, with others that suggest redemption through death and regeneration. "White of the risen body" alludes to the Christian resurrection, and the "needle's eye" to the gospel saying that "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Luke 18:25). "The saints" who "teach us" to "adore" the light (1.6) are those in the line of Christian predecessors who have attained glimpses of transfigured nature through a death of self. The mention of them here foreshadows Watkins' use of Saint Francis in stanza six. It is as if the speaker gazes at nature through the "needle's eye" of humility, and beholds the world's glory laid bare. The final lines of the first stanza establish the Christian principle that to relinquish nature's beauty is to have it given back in full; that to lose the self is to regain it. Watkins' statement that "It was the leper's, not the bird's cry / Gave back that glory," suggests that these Christian principles are paradoxical and mysterious, and involve an inversion of our ordinary categories of thought.

In stanza two, Watkins focuses on the "earthy mystery" of death through the image of the great tree with its falling blossoms. Here the particular tree becomes a symbol of the archetypal Tree of Life, "created on the Lord's day."
I cannot sound the nature of that spray
Lifted on wind, the blossoms falling away,
A death, a birth, an earthy mystery,
As though each petal stirring held the whole tree
That grew, created on the Lord's day.
There is no falling now. Yet for time's sake
These blossoms are scattered. They fall. How still they are.
Who touches one dead blossom touches every star.

The speaker approaches the interrelation of death and birth as an unsounded, sacred mystery. The ability of each petal to contain the form of the tree suggests that a divine pattern permeates both the part and the whole; that the part repeats the whole and vice versa. The final line, "Who touches one dead blossom touches every star," affirms that microcosm and macrocosm cohere in one another. This image also links the natural whites of the earth to the cosmic light of the stars, earth to heaven. The problem of whether man can know "original white" while in the world is partially resolved when the poet experiences the things of time as they participate in eternity, and learns that the "kingdom of heaven" can be perceived in the things of earth.

The poet continues to consider the mutability of nature in stanza three. This time, however, the constant changes through which nature passes as it displays its various colours, and the tree's cyclical loss and regaining of its blossoms leave him unperturbed. His confidence rests in the realization that these changes proceed "Not from time's course, but from the living Spring." In his Laws (iv, 719), Plato describes the inspired poet as "a fountain which gives free course to the rush of its waters." In the gospel of John Jesus describes himself as the "waters of everlasting life" (John 4:14), and
in Revelation he promises to "give unto him that is athirst of
the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev. 21:6). Simi-
larly, the "spring" or fountain of waters is a recurrent sym-
bol in Watkins' work for the perennial waters of renewal that
issue from eternity. The knowledge that time flows from an
eternal source or fountainhead gives the repeating cycles new
validity and meaning. Watkins (as poet) attempts to describe
the dazzling brilliance of nature in a series of oxymorons:
"soft thunder," "white as jet," (3.10) and later, "Darkened
with light" (6.2) and "white's bewildering darkness" (6.3).
Again, he turns to the language of mystical experience with its
reliance on paradox, negation and synthesis of opposites to
speak of that which transcends language. Being a poet at the
edge of language rather than the kind of mystic who is forced
to reject words, Watkins undertakes to capture the ineffable,
to incarnate in language the glimpses of eternity available to
man while in time. In such passages as these (as we shall see
in Chapter IV) he reminds us of Milton or Henry Vaughan, ear-
lier religious poets fascinated with white light (cosmological
imagery), Platonism and the Christian paradox of death and re-
birth. Watkins' phrase, "white's bewildering darkness," for
instance, reminds us both of Milton's "darkness visible" in
Paradise Lost (I.63), and Vaughan's "deep but dazzling dark-
ness" found in God described in his poem, "The Night."

There is in God--some say--
A deep but dazzling darkness, as men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they
See not all clear.
Oh for that night, where I in Him
Might live invisible and dim!
Such imagery may be traced back even further to the sixth-century Pseudo-Dionysius (the Areopagite) who writes in *The Mystical Theology* of "the divine darkness," the "dazzling obscurity" of the hidden Deity. The idea that man often perceives divine light (God's brightness) as darkness because his vision is humanly limited (fallen) is one with which Watkins would have agreed, and may help us grasp another sense in which the white swan of the earlier poem is perceived by the speaker as "black."

In stanza four, the poet marvels at the way new life proceeds mysteriously from a dark interior source, again exploring the imagery of light's birth from darkness. Here he adds to his nexus of complicated imagery an allusion to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, speaking of the White born of bride and bridegroom, when they take Love's path through Hades, engendered of dark ground.

Watkins focuses on the love story in the myth when Orpheus attempts to convey his wife back from the underworld. In the act of redeeming his bride Orpheus can be seen as an archetypal figure of the bridegroom, and therefore as a type of Christ. The importance of the Orpheus symbol to Watkins is evident when we recall that he considered Taliesin a kind of Welsh Orpheus. He also may be alluding to the Orpheus myth in "The Betrothal," a love poem from *LU* where he associates love's regenerative power with a "strict music of all sacred things." The poem opens:

I must die first, to look into those eyes,
And yet no lover ever found his bride
But with that look. (*LU*, p. 72)
It is as if the Orpheus myth enables the poet to affirm the value of human love as a means of overcoming time. The fact that Orpheus is a musician whose harp enchanted the dead (indeed, a symbol of the indomitableness of poetry itself) is also apposite in the context of a poem about "the music of colours," "light's unspoken sound" (4.9). In "White Blossom" we recall that classical imagery was set in conflict with Christian, but here Watkins seems to be offering the Orpheus story as an example of redemptive love compatible with (and even prefiguring) Christian "agape."

Stanzas five and six return to the myth of Leda and Zeus treated in stanza eight of the previous poem. There we recall Watkins offered the union of mortal and immortal as an image of man's approach to "original white" with a certain ambivalence. Here he seems to be answering Yeats' question put at the end of "Leda and the Swan"—"Did she [Leda] put on his knowledge with his power. / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" Watkins' answer, expressed in a "tour de force" of mystical imagery, is unequivocally affirmative:

Leda remembers. The rush of wings cast wide. Sheer lightning, godhead, descending on the flood. Night, the late, hidden waters on the moon's dark side. Her virgin secrecy, doomed against time to run. Morning. The visitation. All colours hurled in one. Struggling with night, with radiance! That smothering Glory cried: 'Heavenborn am I. White-plumaged heart, you beat against the sun!'
All recollection sinking from the dazzled blood.

She woke, and her awakened wings were fire, Darkened with light; 0 blinding white was she With white's bewildering darkness.
Leda not only takes on "godhead" in the act of union, but she "remembers," and wakes to find "her awakened wings" are "fire." By expressing the union of god and mortal in the paradoxical language of mystical theology, and by later associating Leda with the holy figure of Saint Francis (another being "Fledged of pure spirit"), we are left to read the sexual union (as in Yeats' poem) as an annunciation, a heavenly "visitation," and therefore as a symbol for the mystical union of God and the soul. Yet Watkins, more unambiguously than Yeats, has turned the "rape of Leda" into a mystical rebirth of the soul. In this poem, Watkins holds both the Orpheus and Leda-Zeus myths within a Christian perspective, rather than setting them in opposition to Christianity. One might add that Watkins' development of Yeats' imagery is more complicated and less emotionally controlled than that of his predecessor. If the poem has one major weakness, it is in its over-reliance on Yeatsian language in these passages.

The final image of Saint Francis represents man in ultimate harmony with nature. Watkins may have chosen the figure of St. Francis because of his famous "Canticle of the Sun" in which all of nature enters into a hymn of praise to the glory of the Creator. The "secret choir" probably represents the birds to whom the saint was said to have preached sermons in the Fioretti, The Little Flowers of St. Francis. That the humble saint of nature was a favorite of Watkins is evidenced by the use he makes of him in poems like "Birds of Joy and Care" (LU, p. 76) and "Though to Please Man" (BW, p. 31).
The final lines of the poem attempt a return to the human situation by suggesting that the presence of the saint guards the bed of "one living," probably the poet's wife.

I think one living is already there,  
So sound asleep she is, her breath so faint,  
She knows, she welcomes the footsteps of the saint,  
So still, so moving, joy sprung of despair,  
And the two feasts, where light and darkness meet.

To my mind at least, Watkins' attempt to identify his own footsteps with those of the saint, and his rather abrupt descent from the mythic and universal to the personal level of reference end the poem on a weak note. The effort to include the particularity of his own situation here would be commendable had he better prepared the reader for the transition.

The final poem, "Music of Colours--Dragonfoil and the Furnace of Colours," is the most formally coherent and visually detailed of the sequence, moving through a series of elaborate images in which ever-changing nature burgeons with vitality expressive of a transcendent life. Here it is as if the "deus absconditus" or "hidden God" of mystical religion has revealed himself in the world in a blaze of colours. The Platonic Absolutes are suddenly manifest in and through the beauties of nature. The poem moves through three formally unified sections to celebrate summer as the culmination and fulfillment of the seasonal cycle. Paradise is conceived in metaphoric terms as a perpetual summerland.

Watkins employs a regular stanzaic pattern of four heavily-stressed, dactylic lines of four beats per line, each with a strong midline pause. Every stanza ends with a final short line of two strong beats (a dactyl and a trochee).
The poem can be read as Watkins' unique variation on the normally four-line pattern of the traditional Sapphic with its final short "Adonic" line. In its strongly alliterative rhythm, its use of hyphenated words, and its unusual imagery, the poem reminds us of the work of G. M. Hopkins.

As the lecture-notes from his University of Washington teaching reveal, Watkins admired Hopkins throughout and to the end of his poetic career. He would have been drawn to the Victorian Jesuit by their shared Welshness, the energy and originality of Hopkins' language, and his Christian religious orientation. Hopkins' application of Duns Scotus' Medieval notion of "thisness" (or "haecceitas") to his own unique concepts of "instress" and "inscape" may have been in Watkins' mind as he composed "Dragonfoil." The title itself suggests Hopkins' sonnet, "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame," and Watkins even includes references to the "kingfisher" (I.2.2) and the "dragonfly" (III.3.3) in his poem. Hopkins' poem moves from the realization of an "instressed" or actively individuated nature to the incarnational presence of Christ in the world who "plays in ten thousand places, / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his...." "Dragonfoil" can certainly be seen as a similar effort on the part of the twentieth-century poet to view the dynamics of nature as unique embodiments (little incarnations) of a universal creative power.

In the second section he writes,

Here now is summer, this perennial wonder
Of fireborn blossoms, the sudden incarnation
True for this moment, therefore never dying....
Watkins' poem does not progress dialectically, but moves by presenting a rich profusion of images drawn from nature ("hot grass," "poppies," "lizards," "rose-blaze," "stream," "ocean," and so on) in a variety of shifting contexts. The "basking snake" mentioned in Section One (I.1.3-4) reappears in Three (III.2.2); and the "rose-blaze" of One (I.4.3) is repeated as the "burnet-rose" of Two (II.1.3) and Three (III.2.3), and again as a "rose-blaze" in Two (II.3.2). The curious presence of the snake in a healthfully sensual context indicates that Watkins is viewing the world as unfallen, and nature as yet uncontaminated by the presence of evil.

The images of the poem repeat themselves in this circular movement because Watkins is presenting the world seen as eternity which (in Platonic terms) is a stillness and a circle (Being) rather than a motion and a progression (becoming). The central paradox of the poem, then, is that the stillness of eternity can be perceived in the motions of time. In another poem (from The Death Bell) where Watkins deals with Platonic ideas, "The Turning of the Stars," he describes the poised condition of the mind of the artist (in this case that of Raphael, the Renaissance painter) as it perceives the world of time as eternity from a similar conceptual base. There the artist seeks, "Unrest in calm, calm in unrest."

The central concept of "Dragonfoil" which gives unity to the seemingly disparate parade of repeating images is that "original white" light fractures and gives birth (through the death or sacrifice of its unity) to all the natural colours and forms of the world. White divides into the "rainbow / Flying
in spray" (I.7.3), or to anticipate the final image of the poem, breaks "from the furnace," the forge of potentiality in God and out of which he creates. Seen from this perspective, nature is a kind of theophany of God, though not ultimately to be confused with him.

The first and second sections of the poem, then, present a world freshly broken from eternity's forge, one which is surprisingly rich and sensual for Watkins. The many references to heat ("hot grass," "fire," "perpetual summer," "flame wind," "nasturtiums / Burning") suggest summer's fulfillment in intensified energy. Here and throughout the poem, Watkins plays off images of heat, fire and burning against those of their opposite, water, and even "snows" (I.2.3) to suggest that the world is a Blakean or Yeatsian union of opposites. Like Hopkins in the poem, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection," Watkins presents nature as a burning fire, kindled from within or from a hidden source. As entries from his notebooks and occasional references in other poems indicate, Watkins (like both Yeats and Hopkins) was interested in the fragments from the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus. In "Poet and Goldsmith" (CA, p. 36), for instance, he echoes Heraclitus' aphorism that mortals and immortals "live each other's death and die each other's life."

'True characters do not age in each other's eyes. Indeed, we die each moment the life of the other.'

In "Dragonfoil" Watkins consciously calls up the Heraclitean images of the world as a burning fire and of nature as a perpetually moving stream.
Lizards on dry stone; gipsy-bright nasturtiums
Burning through round leaves, twining out in torch-buds;
Even the stream's tongue alters where the rose-blaze
Hangs in forgetfulness.  (I.4)

The references to "poppies" (I.3.5 and II.1.5) in the poem indicate a high state of spiritual intoxication like that which Keats describes of the season in his famous ode "To Autumn" where the figure of Autumn sits "Drows'd with the fume of poppies." In Watkins' poem the presence of poppies does not indicate a psychic condition, but a trancelike state (visionary condition or the Platonic "divine mania" of the Ion and Phaedrus) in which the poet sees the world as a dream of eternity:

All is entranced here, mazed amid the wheatfield
Mustardseed, chicory, sky of the cornflower
Deepening in sunlight, singing of the reapers,
Music of colours swaying in the light breeze,
Flame wind of poppies.  (I.3)

The words "entranced" and "mazed" suggest both a trancelike condition and a state of wonder or amazement as well as the sleepy confusion of nature who is oblivious to the eternal sources of her life. Man who perceives the scene is "mazed" in the sense of being confused (caught in a maze) if he takes these images for their eternal counterparts. In the Platonic sense, life is a dream from which the dreamer must eventually awake. Only if we confuse them with ultimate realities are the flowers that break from time's forge in the final stanza rightfully called "deceptive blossoms" (III.6.4).

Watkins continues to develop the images of swan ("Swan of the lily," (I.5.4) ), "rainbow" (I.7.2), and Orpheus and Eurydice (who are now named explicitly) that we explored in the previous "Music of Colours" poems. Here Shakespeare's Ophelia
joins Eurydice as a female figure claimed by death and resurrected by the power of love's music (poetry). In Section One the speaker asks a series of questions that attempt to penetrate to the generating (causal) ground of phenomena: "Where were these born then, nurtured of the white light?" (I.2.1) and "Where is the young Spring, clustered myosotis?" He continues, addressing first the reader and here the river:

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Speak: what Ophelia lies among your shadows?  
Is it her music, or is it Eurydice  
Gone from your bank, for there a spirit's absence  
Wakens the music that was heard by Orpheus,  
Lost, where the stream glides. (I.5)
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The import of this passage is that the absence rather than the presence of beauty (Eurydice or Ophelia) leads man back to the hidden, eternal world. It is death that wakens "the music ... heard by Orpheus." Even in a poem that celebrates the beauty of the world we are reminded that we praise it not only for its intrinsic value, but because it hides and leads on to another beauty.

In Section Two of the poem where Watkins again alludes to the music "known to Orpheus" (II.2.1), he seems to be either confusing or consciously conflating the story of Orpheus and Eurydice with that of the rape of Persephone by Hades and her descent into the underworld, for he speaks of

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June flowers hiding the footprints of Eurydice  
Seized by the dark king. (II.2.4-5)
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Persephone, whom Watkins in "The Field" (BW, p. 14) refers to as "that white girl, by Pluto's hand delayed," was taken into the underworld while gathering June flowers. Yet Eurydice, clearly named here, was killed by a serpent, and could equally
be said to have been "Seized by the dark king." The point, however, is that only Orpheus ("Leaning above Lethe," i.e., "forgetfulness") can redeem beauty, for he alone has access to its eternal source. The Heraclitean image of the flying stream (II.4.1) is linked here to the stream in the myth that carried the singing head of Orpheus to the sea, an enduring symbol of the power of poetry to overcome death. Watkins returns to the Platonic notion that the stream of time is but the reflection of an eternal, more permanent order:

There the stream flies on to its own beginning,  
Slips through the fresh banks, woods of their escaping,  
Leaving in glory patterns of a lost world,  
Leaves that are shadows of a different order,  
Light, born of white light, broken by the wave's plunge  
Here into colours. (II.4)

The repetition of the phrase, "Ocean, kindler of us, mover and mother" (I.7.4-5 and II.5.1), serves as a kind of refrain, reminding the audience of the "inconstancy of pattern" (II.5.3) in time. Yet at a higher level the ocean as "mover" is a symbol of an ever enduring generative power akin to Aristotle's "Prime Mover," a final cause behind phenomena. As in the Taliesin poems, the ocean is capable of representing either mutability or eternity depending upon the perspective of the beholder.

The Platonic concepts and language reach a crescendo in Section Three where Watkins makes his central point—"All that is made here hides another making...." (III.3.1). As in Plato's doctrine of recollection or "anamnesis" described in the Phaedo, the soul's waking into time entails a forgetfulness of eternity.
Waking entranced, we cannot see that other Order of colours moving in the white light. Time is for us transfigured into colours Known and remembered from an earlier summer, Or into breakers (III.5.1-2)

The "other / Order of colours" is that of the archetypes, the eternal Forms, and the "other making" can be likened to that of Plato's "Artificer" in _The Timaeus_ who modelled the world on the pattern of its eternal counterpart. In a complementary poem, "Bishopston Stream" (A, p. 71), Watkins speaks in similar terms of an underground or "second stream" hidden behind the tangible one.

Always against your sound there is a second river Speaks, by its silence.

If God is an artificer or "maker" in Watkins' thinking, then man made in his image is inherently creative. Hence the importance of Orpheus as the figure of the poet in the sequence.

I wish to point out a final important passage from The "First Ennead" ("Sixth Tractate," "On Beauty") that seems to have informed Watkins' use of the symbolism of fire (light, heat) and colour in "Dragonfoil" especially. Here Plotinus argues by analogy that colours are a refraction of the Supreme Light in the same way that music is a refraction of the "unheard harmonies." This in essence is the analogy underlying Watkins' poem:

The beauty of colour is also the outcome of a unification: it derives from shape, from the conquest of the darkness inherent in Matter by the pouring-in of light, the unembodied, which is a Rational-Principle and an Ideal-Form.
Hence it is that Fire itself is splendid beyond all material bodies, holding the rank of Ideal-Principle to the other elements, making ever upwards, the subtlest and sprightliest of all bodies, as very near to the unembodied; itself alone admitting no other, all the others penetrated by it: for they take warmth but this is never cold; it has colour primally; they receive the Form of colour from it: hence the splendour of its light, the splendour that belongs to the Idea. And all that has resisted and is but uncertainly held by its light remains outside of beauty, as not having absorbed the plenitude of the Form of colour.

And harmonies unheard in sound create the harmonies we hear and wake the Soul to the consciousness of beauty, showing it the one essence in another kind: for the measures of our sensible music are not arbitrary but are determined by the Principle whose labour is to dominate Matter and bring pattern into being.31

In evaluating Watkins' use of Platonic ideas, it is necessary to realize that he was highly critical of certain aspects of Platonism. "Lightning and the City," a posthumously published poem from Uncollected Poems, for example, rejects Plato's ideal city as described in The Republic and the Laws for the Augustinian "City of God" in which forgiveness rather than justice is the supreme principle. The "he" of the following lines is the Christian existential philosopher, Kierkegaard.

He looked at Plato's city and its wall.
He knew the laws which made that city stand,
And saw within them what would make it fall,
Another city, greater than he planned.

Goodness was not enough. Though Socrates
Pulled all to irony's heroic ground
And put the question Kierkegaard would seize,
The perfect answer had not yet been found.

And in an early version of a short poem later published in F, "The Stayers," Watkins attacks Plato for his rejection of the poet in The Republic (Book X) as a mimetic artist three times removed from ultimate reality.32 Watkins writes,
Others migrate to heaven from doubt,  
But earth needs heroes for her own.  
I'd not, like Plato, keep them out,  
But leave them till the rest have flown.  

In this humorous, epigrammatic mood, Watkins defends the artist against the philosopher. Jane McCormick, who knew the poet personally, commented that he

...was fond of remarking that eventually all men, including Plato, would have to become poets before the City was complete.  

One could argue, however, that Watkins recognizes the more mystical Plato (whose reason is fully integrated with his poetic intuitions) as a true poet in his use of myth and in the evocative power of his symbols. Plato's ideas on the divine madness of the poet and the archetypal world of forms as expressed in works like *The Timaeus*, *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo* and *The Republic* would have impressed Watkins both through original sources in Plato and as filtered through the English poetic tradition by writers like Spenser, Milton, Shelley and Wordsworth. It is the more seemingly "rationalistic" Plato who banishes the poet from his ideal state on moral and logical grounds in Book X of *The Republic* that Watkins could not accept. But even in *The Republic* Plato accepts poets who sing sacred odes and hymns. Watkins is in substantial harmony with him on most of his major ideas.

We have seen that Watkins' use of Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas is complex. He is not a Platonist in the sense that recognition of the One entails a rejection or devaluation of the natural order. His is a Platonic cast of mind that looks beyond the physical world, but is tempered by an incarnational sense of the possibility of nature redeemed by vision, and time defeated. William Ralph Inge in *The Platonic*
Tradition in English Religious Thought and Paul Kristeller in The Classics and Renaissance Thought have both pointed out rightly that Platonism has been an integral part of Christianity as a historical religion from its beginnings. Watkins did not have to forge a synthesis in a historical vacuum, but stepped easily into an already existing tradition of Christian-Platonic ideas that can be traced from the early Church fathers, Clement and Origen, on to theologians and philosophers like Boethius and Augustine, up to the Renaissance Platonists of the Florentine school, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, and beyond to the Cambridge Platonists in seventeenth-century England. The Christian-Platonic stream of ideas affected artists as diverse as Dante, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael and Milton. It is notable that the five artists just mentioned are present in various contexts throughout Watkins' work. As I have argued earlier, his juxtapositions of Christian and pagan imagery find their analogues in Medieval and Renaissance poetry and painting. In "The Turning of the Stars," Watkins turns to the world of Renaissance painting for his imagery:

So love descends: the star which blot's out heaven
Moves in the morning of our making hands.
Where Raphael's heavens project
On Mary's dread
The infant Christ, a halo round His head.... (DB, pp. 24-5)

In evaluating Watkins' use of Plotinus, it is worth remembering that the ideas of the pre-Christian and non-Christian Neoplatonists were later integrated into the mainstream of Christian mystical theology. Therefore we are dealing with a tradition in which synthesis and assimilation is the norm.
In Watkins' work, however, it is vain to look for a consistent and coherently articulated system of ideas. One finds instead, a poet's sensitive selection of usable images and ideas out of which he constructs his own rich tapestry. In "White Blossom" Watkins sets up a dichotomy between time and eternity, nature and the ideal forms of nature which he resolves to a certain extent in "The Blossom Scattered" and "Dragonfoil." In these poems and throughout his work, he seems to equivocate between two perspectives—one which sees nature as a mere replica veiling a more authentic order beyond, and another which views it on a continuum with ultimate reality and as a revelation of eternity. To say that the two perspectives are contradictory is to miss the point, however. For Watkins is not aiming at philosophical consistency, but is presenting with a poet's eye various ways in which the mind can view a complex and multi-dimensional reality. At times he stresses the severance between the two worlds, and at times their ultimate unity.

Like Blake, Watkins is concerned with the defeat of time through the raising of consciousness (by means of the Imagination) to awareness of the eternal in and through time. Nature, as we have seen in the poems, is not a final term, but serves as an agent by which man can see beyond it (or from another perspective, within it) to that "other order of colours." His recognition of time's value approximates that of the later Eliot in the *Four Quartets* when he writes in "Burnt Norton," "Only through time time is conquered."36 In Watkins' use of the ecstatic moment, both in these poems and elsewhere, he implies that man is capable of seeing "original white," speaking
of it effectively and grasping the hidden glory behind the appearances of nature.

The "Music of Colours" poems help to answer the question raised in the Introduction—"What kind of religious poet is Watkins?" Philosophically at least, the poems figure forth an eternal order and suggest that the business of the poet or artist who receives glimpses of it in epiphanic moments is to reveal it in his art and so help to build the City of God on earth. By so doing, he is imitating the ultimate Artificer, God. For Watkins, the Christian pattern of death and resurrection is the ultimate and universal paradigm by which man can relate himself to eternity while in time; and the mediation of Christ (the Nazarene of the poems) is the means by which it is possible for man to receive and sustain contact with that which is primal or originally pure in himself and in nature. In the world of Watkins' poems, however, the latter is a matter of direct experience rather than doctrinaire assertion. In the Christian-Platonic poem, "The Replica," Christ (and by implication every infant) becomes the temporal embodiment of the Platonic archetype of heavenly Love:

Yet to man alone,
Moving in time, birth gives a timeless movement....

There shines the one scene worthy of his tears,
For in that dark the greatest light was born
Which, if man sees, then time is overthrown.
And afterwards all acts are qualified
By knowledge of that interval of glory.
Music from heaven, the incomparable gift
Of God to man, in every infant's eyes
That vision which is ichor to the soul
Transmitted there by lightning majesty,
The replica, reborn of Christian love.
The question of how man's relation to God or Christ is worked out in a life of what Eliot in "The Dry Salvages" calls "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action," will be taken up later in Chapter IV where I shall be examining some of the poems in which Watkins most resembles his seventeenth-century predecessors, the Metaphysicals, Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne.
CHAPTER III

THE STRICTER MUSE:

POETIC FORM AND THE METAPHYSICAL VISION
Chapter III
The Stricter Muse:
Poetic Form and the Metaphysical Vision

Part I: Poetic Theory

"For it is the 'form' and not 'content' that is the chief anxiety & responsibility of the artist on the job." (David Jones, from Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 62)

Watkins' poetry has been praised for its technical control and mastery of a wide variety of verse forms. John Heath-Stubbs in a 1950 issue of the Poetry Quarterly notes that Watkins preserves "a traditionally poetic manner, which is, at the same time, never stilted, nor, in the bad sense artificial or conventional. His verse is always formal, and in general, carefully rhymed."¹ James Dickey has written of Watkins' "strict and compressed" music with its "sense of vast forces being held just as powerfully in order."² T. S. Eliot's early recognition probably had to do with his appreciation of the formal, hieratic and traditional nature of Watkins' verse. And even one of Watkins' more severe critics in Wales, Roland Mathias, who has argued that Watkins' considerable facility with language often allows the music of the line to override the meaning, has stated that, "Vernon Watkins is, with the probable exception of T. S. Eliot, the greatest master of form in modern poetry."³ Before turning to address the question of particular literary influences on Watkins' work, I wish to pause in this chapter to consider what ground exists in the technical range of the poems for such high critical assessment, and to argue that Watkins'
ideas of poetry as a religious act and of the poet as a divinely inspired craftsman tie closely to his preference for a formal, hieratic and tightly-crafted verse. The intensely metaphysical basis of his vision (which we have seen expressed in the "Music of Colours" poems) not only gives unity and coherence to his seemingly diffuse prose comments, but explains why he chose an intricate, almost liturgical style closer to that of the seventeenth-century Metaphysicals than to that of most of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors. I wish to demonstrate here that the formal qualities of his verse so admired by Eliot and others are not merely a matter of personal taste, but evolve deductively out of his religious and metaphysical principles and concerns.

In investigating the relation between form and content in Watkins' work, it is my intention in the first part of the chapter to survey some of his statements about the nature and function of poetry as developed in his scattered prose writings, and to relate them to his poetic practice. Briefly, these consist of his sense of a creative tension between pattern and spirit and the way in which the poet writes to a "Muse," the importance of carefully crafted and revised verse, the necessity of musicality and lofty, sometimes artificial diction, and his defense of tradition and the poets of the past. In the second part, I shall be examining Watkins' use of traditional forms in the poems themselves in light of his own statement in "The Joy of Creation" that "The miraculous moment of composition occurs where tradition and innovation meet."
A brief survey of Watkins' work reveals him to be a skilled versifier in the forms of the sonnet (mainly Petrarchan and Shakespearean), the ode, and the traditional ballad. He has written a number of elegies to Dylan Thomas and others, as well as poems in a generally elegiac mode lamenting the loss of childhood or the past. He also tried his hand at classical quantitative measures including Horatian Alcaics (probably derived from his study of Hölderlin), Sapphics, and Greek hexameters, and like his friend Dylan Thomas, has written in French forms like the villanelle (see "Villanelle" in BW, p. 27). He has not only translated long sections of Dante's Divine Comedy in terza rima, but attempted to recreate the form in English in at least six of his own poems. And like his predecessor, Gerard Manley Hopkins, he has also turned to the Welsh tradition to explore the "englynion" (see "Englyn" in F, p. 51), and the possibility of a reflection in English of the complicated assonances and internal rhymes of "cynghanedd," a Welsh term meaning "harmony" used to describe the complex echoing of consonantal and vowel sounds in traditional Welsh poetry. I shall be considering his use of Welsh forms briefly in Part II.

Before proceeding, it is important to look briefly at Watkins' relation to his contemporaries and to some of the poetic movements of his time. From the date of his early appearance in the anthology, The White Horseman (1941), edited by J. F. Hendry and Henry Treece, which associated him fleetingly with the movement known as "the New Apocalypse," Watkins stood apart from the socio-political writing of the poets of
the thirties like Auden, Spender and C. Day Lewis. The tendency of that era was to reject a sense of mystery in poetry, to turn to Freud in psychology, and to advocate a more politically responsive verse. In contrast, Watkins' poetic development was to move him closer to poets like W. B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas, Kathleen Raine, Edwin Muir, Norman MacCaig, George Barker, David Gascoyne and David Jones who, in the face of what they perceived as the increasingly materialistic bias of the age, returned to myth as a source of poetic inspiration, tending to reject an overtly political verse in favor of a poetry of religious or heightened symbolic vision. In Chapter V, I shall be examining more closely the impact of Thomas and Yeats on Watkins' poetry, two possible exceptions to Watkins' maxim that, "A true style cannot be learnt from contemporaries." Yet Watkins' insistent rejection of contemporary influence in his prose, coupled with the kind of poetry he writes, again forces us to look beyond the contemporary scene for his deepest roots. In spite of the ground they share with Watkins, some of the above-mentioned anti-materialistic and mythic poets can be called "religious" only in the broadest sense of the term, that is, in having a generalized sense of poetry as a sacred and sacralizing act. Watkins, I would argue, is a religious poet both in the larger sense and in the more traditional, restrictive sense of one who is dealing overtly with the presence of a superhuman reality (God) and man's moral, psychological, practical and spiritual relation to him.

Watkins' religious-mythological vision stands in clear contrast to the tougher, more ironic poetry that developed in
the fifties, heralded by anthologies like the *New Lines*, edited by Robert Conquest in 1956, and indebted to the criticism of F. R. Leavis. The poets who emerged from this movement, like Philip Larkin and William Empson, brought not only a dryer, more ironic style and sinewy texture to their verse, but a stricter sense of form, challenging what John Press calls in "English Verse Since 1945" "inflated rhetoric" and "loose emotional gestures." They rejected a lofty poetic diction and exalted tone as part of an attenuated Romanticism, and with these qualities, the sense of the poet as an instrument of higher (suprarational) powers.

Only inadvertently is Watkins in line with what Press has called a new "rational conservatism" in verse technique, a focus generated in the fifties and carried on into the sixties by critics like Donald Davie in his *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967) and *Articulate Energy*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976) and Harvey Gross in his *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965). In the latter work, Gross's comment on the fifties poets at first seems applicable to Watkins:

> ....the poets of the late fifties have shown an almost religious devotion to iambic pentameter, intricate stanzas, and close formal arrangements.

Yet I would argue again that the strict stylistic formalism Watkins shares with the fifties poets is no more than coincidental. Not only did he consciously separate himself from the literary activity of his time by living in relative isolation on the Gower, and by speaking out against what he saw as the materialistic trends of much modern criticism (e.g., the "New
Critics"), but the content of his verse is distinct in its specifically Christian religious orientation. William Empson, for instance, a student of I. A. Richards and Watkins' contemporary at Cambridge, also wrought intricate, formal verse, but joined his tighter measures to an intellectual scepticism and rational observation alien to Watkins' sensibility as a Christian poet. We recall that Watkins left Magdalene College at Cambridge in 1925 out of a sense of its hostility (at that time) to the poetic mind, its tendency toward a critical rationalism and an empirical philosophical bias. Watkins' verse, as we have seen in the "Taliesin" and "Music of Colours" sequences, moves toward the very sort of religious exaltation Empson would reject. He retains strong links to the Romantic and post-symbolist traditions, unembarrassedly acknowledging his debt to Blake, Wordsworth, and among the moderns, Yeats.

Watkins stands as an heir of the Romantics not only in the sense of being influenced consciously by the ideas, images and style of particular Romantic poets (Keats, Shelley, Blake, and so on are frequently mentioned or echoed in his work), but because he upholds the Romantic sense of the creative Imagination as the prime faculty by which man perceives and embodies eternal truth, and of the poet as a mediator or legislator of a hidden Power or powers both within and beyond nature. He shares nothing, however, with the darker side of Romanticism which presents the poet as rebel, outlaw or alienated being. As I have suggested already, the traditional Christian basis of his vision with its roots in the mystical side of Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas makes him more at home in the company of
the seventeenth-century Metaphysicals than with many of his contemporaries. His roots reach through Romanticism, both English and continental, back to an earlier religious poetry.

Watkins, then, defies labels. He is a complex mixture of the prophetic and incantatory and the rationalist, conservative poetic strains. He is that rare and difficult-to-categorize combination of a modern poet who unites the prophetic voice with a strict, almost neoclassical sense of restraint and decorum in the use of traditional verse forms. In the occasional poems and poems of religious recognition and statement he is not above being didactic in the best sense of the word. In his best poems he is a happy mixture of prophet ("vates") and craftsman ("poietēs" or maker). As Watkins puts it himself in one of his Blakean aphorisms, "Cold craftsmanship is the best container of fire."

In drawing from Watkins' prose, it is important to be aware that he never collected his random and occasional critical remarks into a coherent body of poetic theory. Yet a unity and coherence do exist in the materials at hand which reveal a consistency in his ideas on the nature of poetry and the poet.

If we set his poetry and prose side by side, it becomes obvious that Watkins is not only developing similar ideas and images in both, but that he echoes himself in the very language. For instance, he later repeats a remark from the 1947 radio broadcast, "Written to An Instrument," "a poem is shaped by belief," in the intricately rhymed "Woodpecker and Lyre-Bird" from *The Death Bell* (1954) where he writes:
This lyre-bird holds to man
The covenant caught in a leaf,
All space, all distance treasured
By the architectural wing.
Lost art's unsearchable span,
The poem is shaped by belief:
If the song is justly measured
The dead may be heard to sing. (DB, p. 49)

The instances of verbal interplay between poetry and prose could be multiplied, and McCormick has noted the significant ones in her unpublished edition of Watkins' prose. 12

A recurrent theme in both poetry and prose is that of the necessity in the creative process of a tension between what is given, the "luck" as he calls it, or those "gifts of instant and unalterable truth which a poet cannot predict, and for whose coming he must wait," 13 and that which is crafted or shaped by the poet. In using the term "luck," Watkins is borrowing a phrase he acquired in his 1938 interview with Yeats which that poet used to signify (in Watkins' terms) "the unpredictable word, the unpredictable correction." 14 In "The Joy of Creation" (1964), Watkins writes that both form and luck are essential:

It is impossible to pay too much attention to form, which is the vehicle of communication; but form must wait upon luck to make it live. 15

When he was young, Watkins had believed for a time (during his early enthusiasm for Shelley) that creativity was a spontaneous and unchecked flow. "In my teens," he writes, "I distrusted in composition what did not come rapidly, and I looked on revision as an impediment to the stream." 16 But in maturity he came more and more to insist on what he called "the second pressure in poetry." In an article by that title, while
insisting upon the unpredictable element of inspiration, he writes of his continued belief in the necessity of careful revision. Watkins himself was a perfectionist in technical matters, and is commonly said to have destroyed or discarded between fifty to one hundred drafts in the process of revising a single poem. Kathleen Raine points out that "he left unpublished as many poems as he ever passed for publication. Like David Jones it was his habit to keep poems and to work them over at long intervals until he was satisfied that they were right." In "The Second Pressure in Poetry" he writes:

I no longer associate art with the natural man. Metaphysically I have taken sides. I am interested only in poetry of the second pressure. True spontaneity, true art, seems to me to come, more often than not, long after the poem's first conception; it is more powerful for being delayed and the purer for having been tried in the furnace of contraries. The poem cannot live until it has been willing to die; it cannot fly like the phoenix until it has been consumed by its own flames. Everything seems to me shallow that is not related to an inner experience which changed the man. There is always, in any serious poet, a moment of change, a pivotal crisis in time that renews him.

I quote this passage at length because here Watkins connects the process of refinement through which a poem passes in the shaping hands of the poet with the spiritual renewal of the man. The aesthetic and the metaphysical or religious principles are presented as inseparable.

In the letter to Michael Hamburger cited below, Watkins clarifies his sense of the relation between the aesthetic and the religious or metaphysical ideals, arguing that the metaphysical sense is primary and inclusive. His critique of the times is that it fails to make this distinction:
I have seen excellent numbers of the New Statesman; it is just that their attitude to poetry often seems false to me....The weakness of that attitude is that aesthetic ideas are applied to metaphysical truth whereas in true poetry metaphysical truth transfigures the aesthetic ideas. (italics mine)^g

The spiritual principle of death leading to rebirth in the earlier passage from "The Second Pressure" applies to the poem, which must die of its first spontaneously generated life to be reborn "like the phoenix" after passing through a Blakean "furnace of contraries." We have seen how Watkins explored the "pivotal crisis in time" in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision" (1959), but here it becomes clear that the moment of renewal of the inner man is also a renewal of his art.

In "Written to An Instrument" Watkins explains why his own sense of aesthetic discipline leads him to prefer stricter forms. Again he couches the argument in terms of a spiritual dialogue between freedom and obedience. Though he does utilize the looser rhythms of "free verse" in his rhapsodic, longer lyric from The Lamp and the Veil, "Sea-Music for My Sister Travelling," and elsewhere in his work, it is true that even in these poems one can discern the presence of a metrical or stress-governed base that provides a norm for the poet's deviations from it. In the main, his poems are carefully rhymed and structured both in the unit of the line and in the stanza. In the above-mentioned talk he writes:

There are certain kinds of poetry in which the spontaneous method of composition...is better than any other. It is a question of intensity, and of freedom. You can, if you are a poet, write in free forms and leave the imagination in chains; or you may, by a pure accident, produce the exhilaration peculiar to great poetry. Where this happens it will be found, on closer examination, that the passage has a strict form: it was a
strict accident in the flow of freedom. This persuades me that the freedom offered to a poet is not offered on easy terms; a lyric poet must refuse rhetoric, and be attentive to the possibility of freedom within the restraint of the poem, a freedom much greater and more rewarding to the imagination than any other. The lyric poet who neglects the instrument has chosen an easier freedom because he could not wait for a freedom more intense, more difficult to obtain. (italics mine)  

In refusing "rhetoric" here, Watkins is not rejecting lofty or dramatic expression, but pointing to the danger of its abuse where the theme does not demand it. In "For the Reading of Poems at Greg-y-nog" he defends the right use of rhetoric in Milton:

Milton is more rhetorical, but that is because his theme usually demands rhetoric. Even he, perhaps the most inverted and Latinized of the great English poets, can produce, at any moment, the unforgettable direct line of living speech, but he is afraid of nothing, being such a complete master of form.  

The traditional sense of the positive tension generated when the poet accepts the restraint offered by a form does not imply for Watkins that the poet impose an arbitrary form on the shape of his experience, but that he forge the appropriate form through which the "given" content and the form can be expressed as an indissoluble unity. For he goes on in "Written to an Instrument" to point out that,

Poetry is a struggle between spirit and pattern. That is why a poem dominated by a pattern is bound to be unsatisfactory. To my ear, at least, the demands of the instrument are shallow in relation to pattern, but profound in relation to cadence.  

The distinction between "pattern" and "cadence" needs to be explored through an investigation of the poems, but I would suggest here that cadence for Watkins is the natural rhythm of the prosody (its musical rise and fall), and the pattern
is the metrical base against which the rhythm of the line plays, creating tensions, resolutions and counterpointings. Watkins' practice also confirms that he is in some poems less concerned with a consistent pattern of syllabic feet per line or syllables per foot, than with a more stress-based rhythm. We shall see how his rhythms operate in some of the poems to be investigated in the second section of this chapter.

Throughout his criticism, Watkins balances against each other the values of inspiration and labour, spirit and pattern, insisting upon their active interplay. In these passages he emphasizes first one and then the other factor:

However laborious the evidence of a poem's making, composition is always a swift, a lightning thing. The vital leap that connects one part of a poem to another is only partly shadowed in the drafts. Research belongs to time, but reperception belongs to the source of the poem, which may be defined as time's timeless moment, the imagination looking forward from that arrested moment.  

Composition is spontaneous, but true spontaneity in poetry is nearly always a delayed thing. It is the check, the correction, the transfigured statement, that makes the poem unforgettable.

It is Watkins' metaphysical assumption that the poet receives from a source beyond himself. Yet poetry is an act in time and involves the clothing or embodiment in the sequentialness of language of that which is timeless. Thought (and wisdom itself) is spiritual, but words and sounds are psychophysical. So if the poet is to bring "time's timeless moment" into expression, he must have one foot in each world. Watkins' aesthetic theory hinges on the ancient paradox that the poet must be both a vessel of spontaneous flow, and an artificer. He must be both actively creative and passively receptive if his
words are to stand in relation to the Word (Logos) of God.

In a short poem dedicated to Kathleen Raine from *Uncollected Poems*, Watkins captures in gnomic statement (using rhymed tetrameter couplets) the above sense of paradox. The Blakean concepts and phrasing pay tribute not only to Raine's work on Blake, but to Blake as a poet of the Imagination. The artist or craftsman hammering at his forge is an allusion to Blake's figure of Los, the divine blacksmith:

The artist's patient hammering
Labours for a sudden thing.

Out of all the massing storms'
Clash of intellectual forms,

Intuition's lightning reads
That confusion in the clouds.

Unity is always more
Than all the different parts it wore:

None so intellectual
As the simplest truth of all.

Labour measures out the gap
From lightning to the thunderclap.

Less than time, too quick for tears,
Equals Blake's six thousand years. (UP, p. 9)

The Blakean cycle of an age (six thousand years) is caught and subsumed in the lightning flash of poetic inspiration; for the instant of poetic creation is timeless. Yet without the labour that precedes and follows it, the poet implies, that instant would be wasted.

In another selection from that same volume, "Excess Luggage," Watkins takes up the idea of the union of "luck and labour" discussed in his prose. I quote only a portion of the poem, noting how the strict iambic pentameter lines arranged
in rhymed quatrains help to reinforce the sense of energy under control. In the opening line, the alliteration and the regularity of the meter reinforce the consciousness of time's "ticking" motion. But in the second line, through a breaking of the rhythm with the caesura after "hindrance," and its resumption in the next line, the sense of inspiration breaking through the artifice of time is conveyed in the management of the prosody. In this poem there are a large proportion of end-stopped lines, unusual for Watkins who is fond of the fluidity of enjambement elsewhere in his verse. This end-stopping technique again creates the effect of the poem regulating the inspired flow:

Luck after labour made the poem tick.
Time was at last no hindrance: it came through.
No other could expound why it was true
And he himself could not explain the trick.

A certain ease beyond the reach of skill,
Taught by the will, yet teaching it, remained.
With less contrivance something more was gained:
The planet circled when the top stood still. (UP, p. 16)

As in the prose statements on luck and labour, the argument turns on a series of paradoxes--here conveyed in images like that of the circling planet which is motionless at its top. Yet the essential paradox lies in the fact that Watkins is writing a poem about shedding the "excess luggage" of rhetorical contrivance in order to reach what Pope in the "Essay on Criticism" called "a grace beyond the reach of art," while using all the resources of his technical skill to do so. The spareness and simplicity of the form, and the preference for monosyllabic words and a plainer diction than Watkins normally
employs, reveal the poet managing a style quite distinct from
the complicated measures and dazzling verbal play of many of
his early poems. The plainness and directness in tone nicely
reinforce the theme of poetry shedding its "excess luggage."

Yet even in the poems where Watkins aims at directness
and simplicity there is often a strong sense of the poem as
artifice through the controlling metrical structure. Though
he writes in the idiom of his time, there is no embarrassment
in using lofty poetic diction or writing in a language that is
consciously poetic if the subject matter calls for it. Unlike
many of his contemporaries who tried to incorporate a more
colloquial diction, Watkins is rarely colloquial except in the
ballads and in some of the later poems. He has no desire to
bring the language of poetry nearer the marketplace. He makes
this point clear in his prose where he writes,

Natural speech is a corrective of artificial poetic
diction, but form is itself artificial, and unless
the artificial demands of form are satisfied in a
poem, its impulsive life will not be held in a last-
ing form. 25

Like Coleridge, he carries on the Romantics' interest in the
dialogue between the "free life and the confining form." 26

In "For the Reading of Poems at Greg-y-nog," he continues to
use the word "artificial" in a positive sense:

Poetry that is divorced from speech, and by speech I
mean the speech-idiom of to-day, runs a great risk of
being artificial, and therefore losing its power to
move. Even so, if his theme demands it, a poet must
take this risk. 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 empha-
sis. 27
Or as he puts it in an aphorism,

Natural speech may be excellent, but who will remember it unless it is allied to something artificial, to a particular order of music? ⁰²

His argument here is similar to that of Eliot in his essay, "The Music of Poetry," where that poet explores the analogies between music and poetry. Eliot writes:

My purpose here is to insist that a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one. ⁰²

Watkins too had a strong sense of the musicality of poetry, one which enabled him to explore in his verse a music of sound as well as a music of imagery and meaning, the repetition and counterpointing of themes in the larger structure of the poem. His strength, however, seems to lie in the perfection of the short lyric, for he made only a few efforts, most of them relatively early in his career, to experiment with larger structures—namely, "The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" and its sequel, (written later in his career) "The Ballad of the Outer Dark," the three long poems from _The Lamp and the Veil_ (1945) and the early Yeatsian verse play, _The Influences_, completed in 1947 and published posthumously in 1976. He writes of lyric poetry as follows:

I believe that lyric poetry is closer to music than to prose, and that it should be read as exactly as a musical score. I also believe that it is always a gift, the reward of tenacity and of the minutest attention, and that unless it comes out of exaltation or moves toward it, it is not worth writing. ⁰³
I am a lyric poet. I also believe that the sound pattern of lyric poetry is more clearly related to music than to prose. Do not misunderstand me. Some of the purest lines in poetry are colloquial speech, that is to say, they would not be at all out of place in prose; but the dominant pattern of any form that is lyrical is totally different, and this is, even mathematically, closer to music than to prose.

In speaking here of sound patterns and mathematical structures, we can be sure that Watkins has in mind an analogy between music and the minutiae of metrical patterns, syllable count and so on; and that to read his poetry as he would have it heard requires a sensitivity to its aural properties, as well as considerable awareness of the rules of traditional English prosody. In his edition of Dylan Thomas' *Letters to Vernon Watkins*, he distinguishes his own aural method of composition from the method of Thomas, which tends toward the tactile and visual:

Dylan worked upon a symmetrical abstract with tactile delicacy; out of a lump of texture or nest of phrases he created music; testing everything by physical feeling, working from the concrete image outwards. I worked from music and cadence toward the density of physical shape. (italics mine)

Like Yeats, with whom he identified in this regard, Watkins composed with emphasis on the sounds of words and clusters of words. In his concern with the rhythms and balance of the musical phrase he sometimes admittedly let his "ear" determine the rightness of the idea or image. Some critics have challenged him for a tendency (at least in the early work) toward obscurity in syntax and a general diffuseness caused by his willingness to sacrifice syntax and meaning to sound. Yet in the best of his poems he rises above this limitation and achieves that clear union of sound and sense which is his
poetic ideal. In excerpts from his lecture notes used at Swansea College, he has written from the standpoint of that union in which "An error of sound in verse will always be an error of meaning, a blurring of vision, or a confusion of thought."34

Watkins averred frequently that prior to or in the act of composition a musical phrase, word, rhythm, or, indeed, the entire conception of the poem would be "given" as if dictated from an "other mind." In a film made by the BBC on Watkins, Under a Bright Heaven (1967), the poet explained to the interviewer that he presupposed inspiration to be God-given, as Milton did, and preferred, also like Milton, to call the experience of "the whole imagination listening," the Muse.35 On that occasion, he spoke somewhat playfully of the Muse as a female having "no tact," sending her vision at "the wrong time" when "the poet is exhausted." Yet Watkins' playfulness conceals a serious sense of the Muse as the most appropriate symbol for the poet's experience of otherness, one he develops both in his prose and in a series of poems about the dialogue between poet and Muse from Affinities. These poems include "Rewards of the Fountain," "Demands of the Poet," "Demands of the Muse," and "Muse, Poet and Fountain." In "Poets on Poetry" (1960), he speaks of the Muse's seeming indifference to the poet's condition in time:

A poet, overhearing a conversation out of time, must be his time's interpreter; but how can the Muse know this, whose eyes are fixed on what is eternally fresh and continually beginning?36
In *Affinities* (1962), he explores his relation to the Muse as a condition of service, one which allows him no compromise with "the world." I reproduce the poem, "Rewards of the Fountain" here in its entirety:

Let the world offer what it will,  
Its bargains I refuse.  
Those it rewards are greedy still,  
I serve a stricter Muse.

She bears no treasure but the sands,  
No bounty but the sea's.  
The fountain falls on empty hands.  
She only gives to these.

The living water sings through her  
Whose eyes are fixed on stone.  
My strength is from the sepulchre  
Where time is overthrown.

If once I labour to possess  
A gift that is not hers,  
The more I gain in time, the less  
I triumph in the verse.

This small, hymn-like poem to a Christian muse telescopes many of Watkins' central preoccupations—his sense of the overthrow of time, the dedication to his craft and the otherness of poetic inspiration. It then unites them with his favorite images of the fountain, the living waters, the stone and the sands. It is a deeply Christian poem in its renunciation of the world and emptying of the self for an ideal of service, and in the allusion to Christ's bursting through the "sepulchre" of death in the third stanza. Yet the primary issue of the poem is that of the artist's dedication to his craft; for it is only through his service to a demanding Muse that he may "triumph in the verse." As in the prose passage discussed earlier, aesthetic dedication is a religious act, and
poetry a form of spiritual discovery. In a ballad stanza of alternating, rhymed, tetrameter lines (i.e. "fourteeners"), a structure often used in hymns, Watkins is able to speak directly and confidently to the reader of the sacred nature of his determined choice. In its uncompromising tone, it bears parallels to some of Herbert's poems of choice between God and the world, poetry as mere artifice and poetry as religious act, particularly the "Jordan" poems (I and II) from The Temple where Herbert addresses the issue of "crossing over" between one way of writing and another.

"Demands of the Poet" and "Demands of the Muse" are companion poems establishing a dialogue between poet and Muse. In the former, the poet speaks to the Muse, and in the latter she responds to him. I shall focus on "Demands of the Muse" as the more interesting of the two because of the intricacy of its form. For here the poet rejects end-rhyme in favor of a repetition of key words at the end of each line which offers the effect, rather than the essence of rhyme. In stanza one, which stands as a kind of proem or introductory stanza, Watkins establishes the theme of the reciprocal relation of man and Muse, the human and the divine. The Muse speaks here and throughout the poem:

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.

In the subsequent stanzas (2-7) the key end words--"another," "me," "words," "him," and "he" are interwoven throughout to create a sestina-like pattern. I quote stanzas two, three and
four to make my point:

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

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.

(italics mine)

The traditional sestina as used by Dante, Sidney ("Ye Goatherd Gods"), Swinburne and others is a complicated troubadour verse form composed of six unrhymed stanzas of six lines each, followed by an envoy of three lines with end words repeating throughout in a regular pattern. T. S. Eliot uses a variation of it in *The Four Quartets* ("The Dry Salvages," II). If we consider the opening stanza as a proem or introductory statement of theme, Watkins' poem contains the requisite six stanzas, but employs only five lines in each and omits the envoy. As in the traditional sestina, a recurrent pattern of end words assumes the function of rhyme. Again, Watkins deviates from the paradigm by developing an irregular rather than a regular pattern in the use of end words. He achieves the effect of unity, however, by constructing a circular structure in which the last word of each stanza is repeated as the last word in the first line of the next, and by having the final word of the last stanza ("another") return the reader to the last word.
of the first line of the second stanza (also "another"). This kind of experimental irregularity within the form creates the effect of unity within variety, order within seeming disorder, which is the subject of the poem. The juxtaposing of "another" and "me," "him" and "me" reinforces the sense of the poem as an interplay of self and other—poet and Muse. The battle between them is presented as a creative tension between spirit and pattern. It is the Muse who brings the apparent disorder of the poet into order, and he who provides her with that which is to be shaped. Like the reciprocal relation of poet and Muse, the order of the poem appears random and jumbled, but is not. This reinforces the sense in which the Muse herself seems capricious, but is working for the poet's good. In his use of end words, Watkins reenacts brilliantly the conflict between spontaneity and form which is the theme of the poem, and a central issue in much of his prose. In the words of the Muse that end the poem,

    ....It is by conflict that he knows me
        And serves me in my way and not another. (A, p. 22)

The final issue to be taken up from Watkins' prose is that of the poet as a defender and conveyer of "tradition," here defined in Watkins' sense of it as the continuous well-spring or repository of timeless poetic truth preserved and transmitted from age to age and mediated through age-old and universal symbols. We may recall that in Hesiod's Theogony the function of the nine Muses was less to create something original, than to preserve what went before, and Watkins' attitude is conservative in that sense. Related to his
concept of the poet as preserver, and his upholding of the supremacy of the poetic masters as a standard of excellence, is his sense of the poet's active relationship with the poets of the past. In "Poets on Poetry" he states, "Write for the dead, if you will not disappoint the living," and further on in that same piece, "A true style cannot be learnt from contemporaries." For Watkins, the works of the great dead poets have entered a realm of timelessness. In "The Joy of Creation" he writes that,

Wherever intuitive truth is manifested, though the work be hundreds or thousands of years old, eternity is present, and the dead artist who made it is revealed as our contemporary.

The implication of the contemporaneity or "eternal presence" of the past is that the poet must write both to the "living and the dead." As Watkins explains of this twofold perspective:

Those who read or hear a poem should remember that a good poem has two audiences; it is addressed to the living and the dead at the same time. If a poet dismisses the living he becomes morbid; if he dismisses the dead he ceases to be a prophet.

This theme is echoed in two small, complementary poems from The Lady with the Unicorn, "Fidelity to the Dead" and "Fidelity to the Living." In these rhymed, hexameter stanzas, Watkins takes up in turn each side of the question, arguing that the poet must wrong neither the "tenuous life" of the living, nor the immortal life of the "unfortunate dead" (LU, p. 40). In the poem, "Affinities" (A, p. 19), the theme of the defense of tradition is conjoined with Watkins' idea of the poet's relation to the dead. The poem stands as a challenge to
the critics. As in "Tradition," which we examined earlier, it employs tightly rhymed couplets to reinforce a slightly satiric tone:

In every smith whose work I come across
Tradition is the ore, fashion the dross....

'His work is new. Why, then, his name encumber
With ancient poets?' He is of their number.

Complain against the dead, but do not sue.
They never read you, much less injured you....

In a more exalted lyric, "Art and the Ravens," Watkins sets up the poet as a defender of tradition. As in the other bird poems in The Death Bell ("The Dead Shag," "The Heron," "Woodpecker and Lyre-bird"), birds enact symbolically the role of the artist. Here the poet's admiration for a pair of ravens protecting their nest ("Love's brood") leads him to explore the analogy between nature and art, the ravens and the true artist who defends a vital tradition:

O dark, interior flame,
O spring Elijah struck:
Obscurity is fame;
Glory and praise are luck.

Nothing can live so wild
As those ambitious wings
Majestic, for love's child
Defending ancient springs.
Drifting in light, they stall.
Wind's conflict keeps them true.
Sunbeam and breaker's fall
Confound them. They cut through. (DB, p. 59)

In many ways, Watkins' sense of the poet's relation to the past ties him closely to T. S. Eliot, who writes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent,"

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for
And we note that Watkins dedicates a poem to Eliot, "Ode to T. S. Eliot," in Affinities (1962). That volume, which pays tribute to some of the dead poets in Watkins' personal pantheon (Charles Williams, T. S. Eliot, Hölderlin, Heine, Keats, Browning and others), was criticized at the time of its publication for what has been called Watkins' "romantic cult of poets," and for what was seen as a self-conscious indebtedness to the past. Harold Bloom has written in his The Anxiety of Influence (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973) of the various defensive postures the aspiring poet in each new generation may take toward his great poetic precursors. With an apparent absence of such anxiety, Watkins boldly opens himself to "the dead," running the risk of being overwhelmed out of a strong sense that relation to the past is integral to a wholeness of vision. Here and throughout his verse he establishes his "affinities" with a poetic line in which he sees himself and his poetry having a place, believing that one does not write in a historical vacuum. Therefore, this sense of the past that some interpret as poetic weakness may be seen from another perspective as poetic strength. The question again is whether he is able to integrate the past effectively into his own poetic outlook. "The Childhood of Hölderlin" (A, p. 57), "Swedenborg's Skull" (CA, p. 60) and "Blake" (LU, p. 88) are only a few examples of poems which (in the opinion of this writer at least) begin as conscious payments of poetic debt, but, through the transforming power of the poet's imagination, end as successful achievements in their own right.
Part II: Poetic Practice

"The miraculous moment of composition occurs where tradition and innovation meet." (Vernon Watkins, from "The Joy of Creation")

Any discussion of the formal qualities of Watkins' craft needs to take account of his skill with the sonnet. Not only are there over sixty sonnets scattered among the published poems, but in them he develops many of his central themes. The two sonnets which I wish to consider here, "Affirmation" in The Breaking of the Wave and "Sonnet (The prose purveyors of doubt)" in Fidelities, explore what Gwen Watkins has called Watkins' sense of the "need for lyric poetry to be exalted against the scepticism of the critics."1 They not only demonstrate Watkins' technical mastery of the form, but show him carrying on in his poetry some of the ideas expressed in his criticism.

"Affirmation," the first of the sonnets in the posthumous edition, The Breaking of the Wave (1979), is a traditional Petrarchan sonnet, rhyming abbaabba cdcddc, with a definite stanza break between the octave and the sestet. Watkins seems to prefer the Petrarchan form by his frequent use of it, but employs the Shakespearean model in a number of poems. Often, however, he creates his own variations on the standard form. "May you love leaves," in the volume under discussion, for instance, uses to advantage the snap of the final Elizabethan couplet, but employs an atypical rhyme scheme in the quatrains (aabb, ccdd, eeff). In that particular poem, Watkins adds anapestic feet to the standard iambic line ("Dancing in the light,
in the shade where light is stilled"), and ends the poem with a line in which the iambic rhythm almost breaks down entirely to enhance the sense of joy arriving in a moment of repose—in the retarding of temporal movement:

Joy will surround you, which you thought had fled,
In safety, in silence, in the steps of the dead.

The ability to work freely in variations on the iambic line is also evident in "Affirmation," where the poet employs inverted feet, spondees, and a free substitution of trisyllabic feet. The rhythm is appropriately rougher in the octave, where he is addressing the sceptical critic and upbraiding him for his loss of faith (vision) and for a consequent loss of style and technical control:

Out sceptic, betrayed by your own style:
No faith and loose measures go hand in hand.
Call grandeur untrue, but truth is grand,
And truth no man can alter, no, nor defile.
Sprung from infinite sorrow breaks the smile
Of grace, altering the path ambition planned,
Whose joy, given, must unforgettably stand,
Relaxed order, charm, for none to revile.

The tensions between rhythm and metrical paradigm are particularly evident in the first two lines where Watkins connects the "loss of faith" to "loose measures." The second line is relatively prosaic, as if to imitate the prosaic style of the sceptic. But in the parts of the octave where he is affirming the sacred nature of truth, the tone becomes exalted and the rhythmic norm is partially restored ("And truth, no man can alter, no, nor defile.").

In the sestet, when the voice turns from challenging the sceptic to a more positive and personal affirmation of the order of "love," the iambic rhythm reasserts itself clearly
("Learn then of love shine from the truth men shun."). The inverted first and third feet (trochees) place the stress on the verbs "learn" and "strive," giving a surging energy to the line. It becomes clear by the second line that the poet is no longer addressing the sceptic, but the "soul," which is encouraged to build its "city" and honour its first estate in which wisdom and innocence are one. The poem has moved mainly up to this point by means of abstract statement, speaking of "faith," "truth," and "grace" without the reinforcement of concrete images. But in the last three lines the poet presents the essential joy of the creative act (an idea which he discusses in "The Joy of Creation") through the image of "weir waters" falling, turning as the earth rotates to make a kind of eternally beginning music:

Learn then of love, shine from the truth men shun.  
Build, soul, your city, honour the state  
Innocence gave to wisdom, there made one.  
Joy singing governs all we create  
As weir waters, feeling the earth rotate,  
Amass, falling, a music always begun.

The falling of the waters is echoed in the falling rhythm (on the words "falling" and "music") of the last lines where the poet recreates the music of creation in the challenging and resolution of the poem's intricate rhythms. The strong underpinning of vowels in "Amass, falling, a music" also helps to reinforce the sense of musicality in the final lines.

In "Sonnet (The prose purveyors of doubt)," Watkins attacks what he sees to be the false poets ("the dismantlers of / Ecstasy") of his day who have rejected "strict numbers" and returned art to "discord" and "chaos" in a "revolution of
anti-love." Like the sceptic in "Affirmation," the "prose purveyors of doubt" represent those who in rejecting a transmutation of meaning through rhythmic and musical structures, betray poetry at its source. He establishes the ground of his attack in the octave:

   The prose purveyors of doubt, the dismantlers of
   Ecstasy, who traffic without a god
   In broken metre, would have their Pegasus shod
   With discord, not strict numbers. At love they scoff,
   And then, in the revolution of anti-love,
   Unsheathe chaos, the death of the period,
   While a new Sibyl, shrieking above her tripod,
   Proclaims transformation, treachery, trough. (F, p. 55)

As in "Affirmation," the vigorous deviation of the lines from the iambic norm, the double caesuras and run over lines, create the sense of a breaking down of form. The complaint against "broken metre" registers in the irregularity of the lines.

The interesting aspect of Watkins' thought in this poem is that in the sestet he ties the obedience to stricter measures to his own sense of ontology. That is, the poem rests on the notion that poetry is meant to repeat the orderly motions of nature and the cosmos. To break with tradition in this sense is to fail to be in harmony with the very nature of things, the orderly progressions and rhythms of creation—the breaking of the waves and the divine proportions of the fixed stars. Both life and art are defined in terms of mathematical and fixed proportions:

   Yet even the disenchanted, disordered fret
   For lost order. Breakers recall rhyme,
   Anchors weighed, and divine proportions set.
   As hawk hovers, as compass needle in time
   Flies unswerving, steadied, where the stars climb,
   Fixed laws hallow what none can forget.
Watkins argues that even those who doubt yearn unconsciously for "lost order." "Fixed laws hallow what none can forget" because the memorable rhythms of earth constantly echo those of an eternal, metaphysical order. Watkins laments the loss of order both in man's relation to the cosmos and in his art, which is out of harmony with cosmic law. Here, the integral relation between Watkins' metaphysical ideals and the kind of poetry he has chosen is explicit.

In some notes made from his lectures by a student in his class at the University of Washington and later published in the *Anglo-Welsh Review*, Watkins makes a similar connection between regular meter and the regularity of the stellar pattern:

We are living in a time when there is a breaking away from regular metre. We have always lived in a time when there was a breaking away from regular metre. I'm a great believer in regularity. Halley's comet is regular. Every seventy-two years it comes around, I think. Some poets are destined to write in strict form. When a thing is irregular, it must be made up for by genius. I don't think anyone does good free verse who has not mastered the strict. Marianne Moore throws over conventional metre and puts in syllabic stress and is absolutely wonderful, but no one else can do it like that.  

One can see from this informal statement that Watkins is not dogmatic about the use of traditional forms for others, but that his sense of the regularity of the rhythms of the cosmos leads him to argue the need of a decided rhythmical base and a knowledge of metrical principles. In "Affirmation," Watkins is building a rationale for his own poetic practice. Like Hardy, Bridges, Yeats, Muir and Ransom, he establishes himself as a modern poet writing predominantly in traditional meters.

Watkins by no means limits the subject of his sonnets to
questions of poetic theory and practice. For his sonnets en-
compass a wide range of themes from that of love (see "The
Dove" and "The Silence of Love" in BW) to treatments of his
central metaphysical and religious preoccupations (see "The
Yew Tree" in LU). "Cwmrhydyceirw Quarry" (F, p. 79) is a
double sonnet for Dylan Thomas in the elegiac mode, while
"Cwmrhydyceirw Elegiacs" (pronounced Coom-rhee-der-kyroo) is an
unrhymed sonnet. "Three Sonnets for Charles Williams" are
fourteen-line poems, but the first and third of the sequence
are written in seven-beat lines and hexameters respectively.
"The Pulse and the Shade" (BOD, p. 38) is a sequence of seven
sonnets addressed to the Savior ("Master of all our styles")
meditating on the nature of life and death, time and eternity.
And "Sonnet (Muscular man)" is a fourteen-line poem in iambic
trimeter on the integrity and dedication of the artist (BOD,
p. 20).

Before moving on to a discussion of Watkins and tradition-
al Welsh poetry, a few words need to be said about his ballads,
odes and elegies. Watkins' own description of his ballads is
quite accurate:

The ballad form is, of course, as old as poetry itself,
and one of the laws attaching to it seems to be that it
must be hammered and beaten and knocked into shape until
it is as hard and anonymous as a pebble on the shore.

My own ballads have a great deal in common with
those of the tradition. They are all rhythmical and
intended to be read aloud; and in some I use a refrain.
They are not in any sense private poems. Yet here the
likeness ends. These ballads are elemental and they
belong to myth, but they do not belong to history. In
these it is not the narrative but the metaphysical sit-
uation that counts, and the symbols surrounding the sit-
uation.
Watkins' long-standing interest in the ballad represents an effort to carry on the Romantic tradition of raising the primitive, public and oral aspects of the form into the realm of literary and mythic retelling, an effort begun by Wordsworth and Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Watkins would have been aware not only of the older, "anonymous" ballad tradition, but of the late eighteenth century and pre-Romantic tradition of the ballad as popularized by the work of James MacPherson the "Ossian" poet, whose partly-fabricated edition of Gaelic poems, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), along with the publication in 1765 of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry*, initiated a new interest in the literary potential of the poetry of the native strain. There is also a strong popular ballad tradition within Welsh poetry that flourished from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century with which Watkins would have been familiar. From the earlier discussion of Watkins' sources for the Taliesin poems in Chapter I, we recall that although Iolo Morganwg's editions of early Welsh poetry (like "The Triads of Britain") were later found to be spurious, they nonetheless exerted an important influence on men's concept of the early poetry and of the figure of the bard. All of these elements would have nourished Watkins' sense of the ballad as both "elemental" and "mythic."

The above remark on his concern with the "metaphysical situation" as opposed to the narrative is certainly true of Watkins' earliest and most well-known ballad, "The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd." There the Mari ("grey or pale mare") is associated both with the terror of the pagan mysteries and with
the sanctity of the Christian sacrament. Symbolically, she represents the "profane thing made holy" whose supernatural presence is capable of uniting the living and the dead in the timeless moment between the old year and the new. Here Watkins raises into the realm of myth the local Welsh custom of peasants bearing a mare's head (or surrogate thereof) from house to house at midnight of the New Year. In *The Death Bell*, Watkins includes eight ballads, many of which demonstrate the formal characteristics of the traditional ballad. For example, he employs insistent repetition in the "Ballad of the Rough Sea" and the traditional four-line alternating tetrameter and trimeter stanzas in "The Ballad of Culver's Hole" to achieve his haunting effects. It is worth noting that many of his ballads take place near or on the sea, and move from a concrete situation or incident to a philosophical perspective on the interwoven powers of life and death and man's relation to the supernatural. In most of them, the poet attains through conscious art that quality of impersonality and objectivity that the ballad tradition demands by speaking through the mask of a dramatic "persona." In the "Ballad of the Trial of Sodom," Watkins shows himself capable of integrating biblical paradigms within the British ballad tradition. The inclusion of biblical themes is also a notable feature of some of the eighteenth-century Welsh ballads.\(^5\)

Watkins' few but memorable odes are not always clearly categorizable as Pindaric or Horatian, but stand as formal, ceremonious poems on a variety of subjects. "Ode" (*CA*, p. 11) proceeds in four-line, controlled stanzas of a loosely iambic
pentameter measure (alternating with tetrameter and trimeter lines) to deal reflectively with the subject of war through the occasion of a royal coronation. The public nature of the event allows Watkins to speak in an objective and self-confident tone. In "Ode to Justice" (BOD, p. 47), he uses the same tight quatrains to reflect on the nature of divine justice. The poem is reminiscent of Wordsworth's Horatian "Ode to Duty" in that it carries on into the twentieth century the classical celebration of a personified abstraction, defining her here as a liberating and forgiving, rather than a restrictive power:

She is more patient, suffers her neglect
Easily, glad to be assigned the lowest
Place in any surroundings,
Lifting her prayer, the fountain none can reject.

"Ode at the Spring Equinox," in contrast, is a more Pindaric poem of longer sixteen-line stanzas, but without the triadic structure of the Pindaric ode. It celebrates the seasonal changes in a heightened, Wordsworthian manner that recalls the "Immortality Ode."

I watch and feel the pulse of turning Earth
Now, in the forespring time,
And mark that power sublime
Which makes the passing moment worth
All unformed years lacking this present form. (CA, p. 98)

Yet like the more Horatian odes, it is a formal and reflective meditation, in this case dwelling on man's potentially destructive-creative relation to nature. "Ode to T. S. Eliot" and "Ode to Nijinski" from Affinities are formal tributes to artists (a poet and a dancer) with whom the poet identifies; and "Ode to Swansea" (A, p. 27) is an apostrophe honouring the
Welsh town near Watkins' home that nourished its artists ("Here is the loitering marvel / Feeding artists with all they know."). In most of his odes, Watkins preserves either the serious and philosophical quality of the traditional Horatian ode, or the occasional and celebratory nature of the Pindaric. More often, he combines the Horatian sense of quiet restraint and reflectiveness with the Pindaric sense of exalted celebration. In general, in his odes Watkins achieves a more public and objective voice than in his more personal lyrics. A final line of inquiry that might prove fruitful would be that of the influence of Hölderlin's odes on Watkins. For his translations of Hölderlin, and the poems dedicated to him prove Watkins responsive to the mysterious, unrhymed odes of the German, Romantic poet. 6

The subject of Watkins' elegies has been treated by Gwen Watkins in her published monograph, Vernon Watkins: Poet of the Elegiac Muse, and in her more recent Portrait of a Friend (Llandysul, Dyfed: Gomer Press, 1983), a study of the complexity of Watkins' personal relation to Thomas. In the former she points out that of the "three hundred poems collected in his books...over one hundred are either formal elegies, or considerations of death as a main or subsidiary theme." 7 She notes that there are eleven elegies on the death of Dylan Thomas in which Watkins attempts to give meaning to the past and to explore his own sense of loss at that poet's death. I shall be exploring some of the elegies for Thomas in Chapter V where I intend to examine their friendship in greater depth. Watkins himself saw his relation to Thomas as a sort of
Coleridgian-Wordsworthian configuration of minds. In a lecture given at Swansea College (1966), though not referring to Thomas directly, he expresses his sense of the mutually enriching friendship possible between poets:

If we look back through the centuries of our poetry we shall find many examples of two poets innately and fundamentally different in idiom and style, but often bound by friendship and a common theme, whose work has been strengthened, not by competition, but by the assurance and expectation of works from a contemporary talent.

Though there are numerous models from the English elegiac tradition upon which Watkins could have drawn, like Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais*, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, it is also evident that there is a strong elegiac tradition within ancient Welsh poetry which he would have known through his early exposure to the Welsh sagas. The laments for Dylan Thomas, Alan Lewis, W. H. Davies and others can be seen to have a place in the bardic tradition of the eulogy for the dead hero or poet. Thomas Parry writes in his *History of Welsh Literature* that the burden of the "gogynfeirdd" (early poets tied to the princely courts) "is praise of the princes and elegies on them when they die."

Gwen Watkins has asserted that Watkins' mourning for Thomas was deep and abiding, and the poems bear her out. She argues in her essay that his elegies are serene, controlled and ultimately affirmative in the sense that in them even the "bereavement of time" cannot "deprive life of meaning." She also suggests that Watkins' elegies tend to dwell upon the past rather than to look forward to a future life, and therefore have much in common with the pagan Welsh elegiac tradition with
its absence of Christian consolation. My own sense is that these poems, though emphasizing bereavement, reside within the context of his poems as a whole where life is viewed as a "divine comedy" rather than a tragedy. As Watkins puts it in "Ode"—"Joy is woven true on a tragic base." In the elegies the sense of Christian consolation is implicit, rather than explicit; for here he is able to contain the early Welsh sense of lament and eulogy within the framework of a Christian vision in which personal immortality is latently, though not always actively, present. In "Birth and Morning" (CA, pp. 50-52), for instance, where Watkins celebrates the birth of his own child and simultaneously laments the death of Thomas, whose name the child will bear, he makes reference to the rigid buds "expecting Easter," and a woodpecker's cry "resurrecting the dark," as if to suggest the possibility of regeneration. And in "The Exacting Ghost" (CA, p. 43), he enacts a confrontation between himself and the ghost of Thomas in a dream to indicate the actuality of the dead man's continued life beyond the grave. We shall examine this poem more closely in the section dealing with the influence of Thomas. In the late poem, "Fidelities," written in terza rima, he speaks with assurance of the ability of man (and the poet) to survive death. This poem stands as one of the many statements of affirmation that qualify the elegiac sense of irredeemable loss:¹¹

A certain cadence underlies the plot;  
However fatally the thread is spun,  
The dying man can rise above his lot. (F, p. 72)

And he is even more explicit in "Great Night's Returning" (CA, p. 102) where he concludes:
Now the soul knows the fire that first composed it
Sinks not with time but is renewed hereafter.
Death cannot steal the light which love has kindled
Nor the years change it.

Poems like the above not only modify his sense of lament in
the elegies, but remind the reader that one of Watkins' recurrent themes is the fruitful interaction between the living and the dead. His Christian-Platonic sense of man's ability to
enter a timeless condition (which was explored in the "Music of Colours" poems) is surely relevant here in approaching his complex attitude toward death and immortality in the poems as a whole.

Let us turn, then, from the elegies to Watkins' use of
traditional Welsh poetry. Watkins explained his own sense of
his Welshness in "Replies to the Wales Questionnaire," when in response to the question, "Do you consider yourself an Anglo-Welsh writer?", he answered,

No. I am a Welshman, and an English poet. Wales is my
native country, and English the native country of my imagination. I would be Anglo-Welsh only if I could write also in Welsh....I wish I could; but even then, English being the first language I learnt would remain my first language as a poet.12

Basically, Watkins saw himself as a Welsh-born poet working
within the English poetic tradition. Though his mythic and cultural affinities and his sense of nature were shaped by his immediate setting, especially the Gower coast where he spent most of his life, he strove for universality in his poetry, and refused to be identified with the Anglo-Welsh movement. His research into the continental European tradition, and his work in the translation of French, German and Italian poets (Heine, Hölderlin, Rilke, Váléry, Dante and so on as mentioned
earlier) made him feel at home in a broader context of continental European poetic forms and ideas. In other words, Watkins is not narrowly nationalistic; yet is decidedly a Welshman in his keen interest in Welsh myth, language and ancient Welsh verse forms. We have seen his knowledge of Welsh myth expressed in his use of a native folk custom in "The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd," and in his choice of the Taliesin figure to present his central poetic concerns. As Jane McCormick points out, he retained enough of his early interest in the Welsh language through his father's interest in it as "a translator of some accomplishment," to "provide a glossary for Welsh words used by David Jones in his "Tutelar of the Place.""

As for Watkins' use of the Welsh tradition, there seem to be basically two lines of critical thought. The first is that of Kathleen Raine, Dora Polk and others who emphasize his Welshness, arguing as Raine does that his perfectionism of verse and his intricate use of rhymes, assonance and alliteration spring both from conscious and unconscious hereditary links to his bardic heritage. Raine writes in "Vernon Watkins: Poet of Tradition," that "the initiatory knowledge of the poet came first...by way of vital memory of the Welsh bardic tradition." The second perspective is that of Leslie Norris, Louis Martz and others who tend to minimize the bardic aspect and see Watkins working primarily within the English poetic tradition. Leslie Norris points out, for instance, that Watkins rarely attempts to imitate Welsh verse forms, and that when he does, as in the short, four-line poem, "Englyn" (F, p. 51), he is relatively unsuccessful, and even "incorrect in
the application of the strict rules of the form."\textsuperscript{15} The englyn is a widely used Welsh verse form which employs cynghanedd as defined earlier in the chapter. Another place where Watkins approximates Welsh forms is in "Triads" (F, p. 102) where he imitates the three-line stanzas of a Welsh form popular in the tenth to the twelfth centuries. There is also evidence of "some rudimentary cynghanedd" in "The Sure Aimer" (F, p. 36),\textsuperscript{16} a poem addressed to Marianne Moore. "Cynghanedd," as we recall, is a strict system of complicated alliteration, internal rhyme, and the echoing of vowel sounds. Though established in the ninth century, it reached its perfection in the fourteenth. It has been defined as "the device whereby words of more than one syllable alliterate when all their consonants except the final ones are the same, and in the same order, the accent falling on corresponding syllables in each word; e.g., búllock and bêllow can be used, but not búllock and belôw."\textsuperscript{17} In Watkins' "Englyn" (F, p. 51), "broken" and "taken," for instance, suggest cynghanedd, though the first consonants in each word differ.

Though Watkins' experimentation with Welsh verse forms and his use of Welsh myth is undeniably important, my own view is closer to that of Martz, Norris and those who see him as well within the English poetic tradition. As noted earlier, not only was he given an English education, being sent to Repton and to Cambridge (to be trained in modern languages), but he grew up at a time in history when the educated Welsh were interested in integrating themselves within the English culture. Later in life, he mostly ignored the Welsh national movement.
His blood is Welsh, and there is probably a true sense in which a Welsh bardic temperament "runs in his veins," yet his great literary models, Dante, Milton, the Metaphysicals and the Romantics, are mostly English and continental. His own definition of himself as "a Welshman, and an English Poet" is probably as close as we can get to the truth of the matter.

Let us examine, however, some of Watkins' links to his Welsh heritage. It is true that he made only a few attempts to apply the Welsh metrical rules to English, but it can be argued that where he employs complex patterns of alliteration, internal rhyme, assonance, and compound words, he is engaged in an attempt to approximate in English the aural quality of the Welsh "cynghanedd." Like his admired predecessor, Hopkins, whose work he was studying and teaching at the time of his death, and whose poetry exerted an influence on him in his use of compound words, dense and fluid verbal play, and looser, stress-based rhythms, Watkins can be said to capture a genuine Welshness in many of his poems. These long, sonorous lines from "Rhossili," for example, utilize some of the above-mentioned techniques:

Coiled sand, gold mountains, grass-tufted dunes, unending, rising, descending,
And the cat-spotted, wind-crafty tide, spitting serpent-white tongues drawn slack.... (LU, p. 45)

It is also arguable that Watkins' technical perfectionism has much in common with that of the bardic schools. As Raine states,

Perfectionism of verse has been the heritage of Welsh-born poets down to Vernon Watkins' generation, perhaps the last inheritors.
The early poets of the learned schools associated with the courts, the Gogynfeirdd ("Rather Early Poets") of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were organized into professional guilds, and were responsible for passing on a body of traditional material. Their poetry was known both for its intricacy and precision, and for its adherence to a strict set of rules. Anthony Conran describes some of the general characteristics of early Welsh poetry as follows:

Welsh poetry is usually highly decorative, full of images strung together, and glittering with phrases which these rules [the strict metrical codes] gather together, as it were into an organized whole.19

Much of Watkins' verse, like the passage from "Rhossili," is certainly highly ornate in this sense, and adheres to strict metrical and other poetic conventions. Watkins shares with the court poets a sense of the poet as a highly trained and expert technician. His love of the past and reliance upon tradition, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, are also characteristic of the Gogynfeirdd.20

Though in the "classical period" (from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries) poets were often members of a learned order, there is also the parallel, more popular tradition of the wandering minstrels and rhymsters (cerddors), who represent a more spontaneous order of bard. The later "township poets" of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries would also have been appreciated by Watkins for their celebration of the natural landscape.21 Finally, as suggested earlier, Watkins would have been exposed to the more Romantic notion of the bard as a kind of priest or "seer" through late eighteenth-century revivers of
the classical tradition like Iolo Morganwg. We recall that in the Taliesin poems, Taliesin was chosen partly because he stood as one who challenged the artificiality of the court system with a more divinely inspired, spontaneous order of music, and that Lady Charlotte Guest as Watkins' primary source for the story drew from these later eighteenth and nineteenth-century sources.

We have noted in dealing with the elegies that the older poets limited themselves to a few basic themes, mainly those of eulogy and praise. It is true that Watkins also works with a restricted number of ideas, themes and poetic images, and that a large proportion of his poems fall within the tradition of eulogy and praise. Yet unlike the early bards who praised or lamented a particular prince or leader, Watkins extends his praise to the whole domain of nature. Certainly his sense of art as painstaking artifice and his recurrence to a few time­less themes do not arise exclusively out of his Welshness, but they can be seen to bear a relationship to the Welsh tradition that is more than coincidental.

In a long letter to Watkins dated April 11, 1962, David Jones addresses this vital issue of what he calls, "the difficulties of one writer of Welsh affinity whose language is Eng­lish."22 Though we do not have Watkins' reply, the intensity of Jones' interest implies that the issue was one he and Watkins shared. In the letter, Jones discusses the complexity of the problem for the Welsh writer who may not speak the Welsh lan­guage himself, but is faced with communicating to an English­speaking audience who has no knowledge of the figures of Welsh
myth "an anterior tradition" which is part of his blood and with which he shares a cultural affinity. He identifies what he sees as the "Welsh strains" in the English genius (present in poets like Vaughan, Herbert, Milton, Smart, Hopkins and so on), and then goes on to compliment Watkins for capturing in the "Mari Lwyd" an "authentic Welshness."

Comparing and contrasting himself and Watkins to Hopkins, who studied Welsh metrics and knew the language, he establishes them as modern poets for whom the land, culture and mythological "deposits" of Wales are important and must be integrated into the work. In the poem, "Pledges to Darkness," Part Two, "Egyptian Burial--Resurrection in Wales" (DB, p. 21), we can see Watkins carrying on in his own terms the effort of consolidating his sense of place within a broader cultural context. In that poem, the Egyptian goddess, Nefertiti, awakes to second birth and a realization of the power of the Christian resurrection in his native Wales.

In his essay, "The Myth of Arthur," from Epoch and Artist, Jones presents a description of the Celtic genius that is relevant to Watkins' poetry:

The folk tradition of the insular Celts seems to present to the mind a half-aquatic world....[I]t introduces a feeling of transparency and interpenetration of one element with another, of transposition and metamorphosis. Kathleen Raine, citing this passage, argues that,

Both Dylan Thomas and Vernon Watkins share this delicate, intricate and dazzling web of intermingled elements. It is in the poems where Watkins most resembles Hopkins (and Dylan Thomas) that this dazzling sense of the intricate and intangible can be identified. We have seen evidence of Watkins'
verbal facility in conveying such a feeling in the "Music of
Colours" poems where his theme is the way the natural world
reflects an anterior metaphysical dimension. The sense of the
world as a union of interpenetrating spheres is also observable
in "Swallows Over the Weser," where Watkins creates a Hopkins-
esque texture in the use of alliteration, consonance, assonance
and in the substitution of adverbs for adjectives:

// // // // //
Watching their wings in the sunlight, || their wings that
// // // // //
transfix the bright aether,
// // // // //
Diamondly flying, is lovely. || Low diving, they skim where
// // //
the branches
// // //
Of sycamore darken the river.... (LU, p. 35)

The use of consonants (note the "l" sound in the third line)
and the complicated assonance approximate the effect of cyn-
ghanedd. Watkins breaks up the long hexameter line by his
placement of the caesura, and creates a stress-based isocronic
pattern in which approximately three strong beats fall on
either side of the medial pause. I have placed double stress
marks where the heavy beats would fall if the poem were read
aloud. Though the poem can be scanned as heavily dactylic, it
can also be read as an example of a poem in which Watkins is
moving toward a looser, stress-based rhythm.

I think it would be vain to search through Watkins' work
for pure examples of cynghanedd and other Welsh metrical de-
vices, but I believe it can be assumed that his sensitivity to
the rhythmic, aural and highly formal qualities of Welsh poetry
(as received in translation) contributed significantly to his
poetic development. In his somewhat diffuse, imagistically
rich and musical poems like "Sea-Music for My Sister Traveling" (LV), he evokes the Welsh feeling of transformation and metamorphosis that Jones so aptly describes in "The Myth of Arthur." And it is obvious that in his choice of themes and mythological motifs he is working consciously with his Welsh heritage.

When we consider that Watkins has explored both the Welsh "triad" and "englyn" as well as classical quantitative meters, we begin to get a sense of his extraordinary technical range. In *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry*, Harvey Gross discusses how prosodists like Gabriel Harvey, Robert Bridges and others (e.g. Arthur Hugh Clough) have attempted to "discover a quantitative base for English meter." Gross has pointed out the difficulties (if not the impossibility) of translating the long and short syllables (i.e. the fixed quantities) of Greek and Latin into the English convention based on accented and unaccented syllables. Watkins avoids the problem by reworking classical meters in terms of a strong-stress or syllabic-stress structure. In scanning one of Watkins' Sapphic stanzas from "Ophelia," for instance, Gross observes that the poet sustains the eleven and five-syllable structure of the traditional Sapphic, but employs a strong-stress pattern. Gross scans the stanza as follows:

```
// // // //
Stunned in the stone light, || laid among the lilies,
```

```
// // // //
Still in the green wave, || graven in the reed-bed,
```

```
// // // //
Lip-read by clouds || in the language of the shallows,
```

```
// // // //
Lie there, reflected.
```

Watkins' epigram to *Uncollected Poems* is also a Sapphic stanza which tends to fall into a trochaic and dactyllic accentual
pattern. Yet it too could be read as heavily stressed, with two to three beats on either side of the caesura:

```
// // // // // //
Evening, father of us, || preternatural starlight,
// // // // // //
Beginning of wonder, || fingers of darkness,
// // // // // //
Hold us, heal us, || and send us praising
// // //
Out on our journey.
```

I would agree with Gross in his conclusion that "the best use of the classical meters has been in adapting them to the stress-based prosody of English, not in trying, as Bridges tried, to write an artificial language which could accommodate the meters." It can be argued that Watkins' success in his Sapphics is tied to his ability to make this kind of adaptation.

The poem, "Thames Forest" (first version dated from 1933), from Watkins' first published volume (_BML_, p. 49), is a good example of his ability to adapt the Sapphic stanza to a strong-stress meter:

```
// // // // //
Years are di\vine rings; || moments are im\mortal.
// // // // //
The months are|saplings, || centuries are|oakenshaws
// // // // //
Lightfoot the | soul goes. || Im|pressive 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....

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

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.
The leaves are numbered.
Gross points out that a falling meter (dactylic-spondaic) governs the rhythm, yet that the meter is "counterpointed against a four-stress alliterative pattern."²⁹ As in his hexameters from "Swallows Over the Weser," the heavy beats fall on either side of the caesura, creating the rhythmic sense of the old alliterative measures. Internal rhyme and slant rhyme (i.e., rings, saplings, lines 1 and 2), alliteration and the compound-ing and coining of words (lightfoot, time-groves, leafmould) are used effectively throughout. Roland Mathias has noticed in this poem that compared to those of the traditional Sapphic stanza (normally arranged, trochee, spondee, dactyl, trochee, trochee), Watkins' predominantly dactylic lines acquire a greater "movement and urgency."³⁰ Both Mathias and Heath-Stubbs have recognized that Watkins is "experimenting" with the Sapphic stanza in this poem. In a poem where the central image is that of the shuttle of eternity weaving the threads of time, such a smooth and deliberate rhythm seems particularly appropriate to the content. The theme of light playing against darkness, spirit with pattern, is again complemented by the choice of form. The poem concludes with the image of the loom:

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.

Watkins' interest in the Sapphic and Alcaic stanzas emerged out of a love of Greek poetry and through his translations and study of Hölderlin. Though he read Greek poetry mostly in translation, he did know some Greek firsthand.³¹ John Heath-Stubbs and Ian Hilton have both pointed out that
Watkins' translations of Hölderlin's Sapphics and Alcaics lead him into a liking for the form. In Michael Hamburger's Preface to his own translation of Hölderlin, which Watkins had read, he writes of the German poet's use of Horatian Alcaics in his odes:

> It is the Alcaic form that invites naturalization in English—by which I do not mean self-conscious exercises in the grand manner like Tennyson's Milton—and more than one contemporary English poet has already shown that it is quite as amenable to English speech rhythms as the long-established only too familiar iambic.

Like the Sapphic, the Horatian Alcaic is a four-line stanza, but it generally consists of two eleven-syllable, one nine-syllable, and a final decasyllabic line. In one of Watkins' Alcaic-like poems, "The Return of Spring" (LU, p. 41), the exact syllabic count of the ideal model is only approximated. In the first stanza, for instance, there are twelve and thirteen syllables respectively in lines one and two, twelve in line three, and eight in the final line:

> The Spring returns. Green valleys, the sparkling meadows Crowd gold, under larks, wry-rooted, the gorse, deep-scented. Lovely it is to live, to turn the eyes seaward, To laugh with waves that outlive us.

In effect, Watkins is translating the Alcaic into an accentual pattern of three lines of five stresses, followed by a final line of three consisting of an iamb and two amphibrachs (To laugh / with waves that / outlive us). The trochaic-dactylic rhythm of the traditional Alcaic is virtually eliminated. In the final stanza, the double pauses in the second and third lines reinforce the sense of the brook faltering. The poem then resumes its flow in the fourth line where the strong,
regular rhythm is restored:

  What first I feared as a rite I love as a sacrament.
  The Spring returns. I look. There is no dissembling.
  The brook falters, runs on. I divine those meanings,
  Listening to tongues that are silent. (LU, p. 42)

This is a particularly beautiful poem in its subtly-changing rhythms and complex patterns of imagery, typical of Watkins' use of the form.

  Harvey Gross has analyzed Watkins' mastery of classical hexameters in "Cantata for the Waking of Lazarus" (DB, p. 63), showing how he uses the caesura to break up the monotony of the line in the early stanzas. Line three, for instance, contains three definite pauses:

    Lazarus, || four days dead, || alone in the shadow || sleeping....

But in the final section, where the poem bursts into a prayer to "the Redeemer," Watkins creates an ecstatic, "trance-like and ceremonious" rhythm by placing the caesura only after the sixth syllable, as in the classical paradigm:35

    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 basin's brim. (DB, p. 64)

In "Foal," however, Watkins uses the hexameter line more loosely, varying the poem with shorter lines, and avoiding the dactylic rhythm of the paradigm:

    See him [the foal] break that circle, stooping to drink,
      to suck
    His mother, vaulted with a beautiful hero's back
    Arched under the singing mane.... (LU, p. 43)

In the following lines from the same poem, Watkins moves almost to a free verse measure; yet we remain conscious of the recur-
rence of the six-beat line. He achieves the effect of parallelism in the repetition of the phrase, "In the darkness":

But perhaps
In the darkness under the tufted thyme and downtrodden winds,
In the darkness under the violet's roots, in the darkness of the pitcher's music,
In the uttermost darkness of a vase
There is still the print of fingers, the shadow of waters.
And under the dry, curled parchment of the soil there is always a little foal Asleep.

A close survey of Watkins' verse forms has shown him to be a more varied poet than is usually assumed. He is capable of ranging from the fluid, rhapsodic style of the early poems, to a simpler, sparer, more epigrammatic style in many of the poems in *Fidelities*, his last volume. It is impossible to date his poems by the order of their appearance in the published volumes because Watkins sometimes withheld early work and published it years later. Yet it has been noted by those who have had access to the dated drafts that he moves toward what McCormick has called a "simpler, more direct, and more assertive" style in the later poems. Leslie Norris, who has conducted a thorough study of the progression of Watkins' work through the published volumes, concludes similarly that in *Fidelities* he achieves a "substantial development in directness of communication, in careful observation, in the relating of single images to the whole of the poem and to each other." It is certain that Watkins can be seen extending his style and range up to the time of his death.

Too often, however, particular poems or volumes of poems have been attacked by critics who have no sense of the shape
and development of his work as a whole. And Watkins' canon, more than that of many modern poets, needs to be read whole because of the interrelationship of its themes and images, an aspect of his work noted in the discussion of the Taliesin and "Music of Colours" poems. Watkins' work has been criticized for what has been seen as a "monotony of rhythm," style and vocabulary, for the presence of strong echoes of other poets, and for a tendency to use weak and commonplace phrases. While such critiques may be entirely valid in specific instances, they miss the point in their main thrust by failing to recognize Watkins' poetic orientation, his self-determined limits. As suggested earlier, what have been seen as his weaknesses may be interpreted as poetic strengths when one recognizes that his uniqueness as a poet lies in his conscious self-restriction to a few basic themes and the development of them through a complex network of cross-references and linked symbols. His seemingly "worn-out metaphors," like that of the fountain, the light, the Muse or the stream, are chosen deliberately for their perennial and archetypal value. What has been seen as a monotony of rhythm issues from a conscious sense of poetry as musical artifice; although a careful look at the complexity of Watkins' rhythms in many of the poems should lead to a quite different conclusion. The strong echoes of earlier poets arise from Watkins' sense of the poet as an inheritor of a received tradition, a contemporary of the "dead." His choice of vocabulary, which some have found commonplace or archaic, stems from his being the sort of poet who is interested in purifying and refining an existing poetic diction, rather than in creating
a new idiom or reforging the language at its base. The exalted tone and impersonal quality of many of the poems, coupled with a relative absence of realistic detail drawn from the temporal sphere, comes out of a conscious exclusion of the mundane from a poetry of timeless vision. In order to explain the recurrence of a few linked symbols in his work he once wrote:

Repetition may be a reinforcement of the individual will, even a statement of faith, and that is sacred. Unless there is a constant and a recurrence, there is no depth in the matrix.

We have seen that Watkins' individuality lies in how he reworks the traditions of English poetry, and that his variations on the received forms are masterful and subtle. We have seen him consciously incorporating Welsh material within his work as an English poet born in Wales. How successful he is in achieving his poetic ideals in his practice and how valid those ideals are poetically are questions for the reader to determine for himself, but Watkins' poetry must be read on its own terms. Michael Hamburger, Watkins' friend and a translator of the German poet Hölderlin, defines those terms well when he states:

The variety of his work lies in its extraordinary range of forms and metres, by no means always traditional, yet always mastered and made his own by an infallible ear. His range of themes and imagery was circumscribed by the constancy of his allegiances, as his musical range was not; and this has to do with anti-realistic, anti-rational premisses hardly reconcilable with many phenomena of the modern world. Yet, until poetry itself becomes obsolete, or this earth uninhabitable, Vernon's natural and human archetypes will be accessible to a few readers at least.
CHAPTER IV

WATKINS AND THE METAPHYSICALS
Chapter IV
Watkins and the Metaphysicals

Part I: Watkins, Donne and Herbert

"Religious poetry is sealed up like the eyes of Lazarus by a refusal to be raised except by the true God." (Watkins, from "Poets and Poetry," 1960)

It becomes apparent from even a brief acquaintance with Watkins' poetry and prose that belief and aesthetics are not in his mind divorced. We have seen that out of an instinct for their inherent unity he creates a lyrical poetry of intense metaphysical concern; that he is "metaphysical" not merely in the restricted, historic sense of writing in the tradition of a defined group of earlier poets, but in the larger more comprehensive one of reflecting a philosophical outlook that assumes the existence of a transcendent order of being. To him, the writer of Job, Shakespeare, Milton and Yeats were "metaphysical poets" in this extended and generic sense because of the presence in their work of a mythic or visionary world view—in short, of the timeless perspective he so consistently sought. Nonetheless, specific poets commonly classified as "seventeenth-century Metaphysicals" seem to have attracted him strongly and to have had a significant impact on his work. In this chapter, I wish to explore in Part I the presences of John Donne and George Herbert, and in Part II those of Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne. I shall be considering the use Watkins makes of their poetry throughout his work in a further effort to address the question: what kind of a metaphysical poet is Watkins?
Kathleen Raine, Louis Martz, Leslie Norris, Roland Mathias and almost all the notable critics who have written on Watkins have perceived a temperamental affinity between him and the English Metaphysicals. In *The Anglo-Welsh Review* Raine speaks of a modern return to a poetry like that of the English Metaphysicals, especially Herbert and Vaughan, whose roots were also Welsh...¹

and lauds him for being like the earlier metaphysical poets who by choice withdrew from the world to seek for wisdom in depth rather than in extent.²

The testimony of Louis Martz (1) and Roland Mathias (2) is consistent with Raine's:

(1) Yet here is one of the first religious poets of our century: religious in a frank, disarming way....

Aside from Hopkins and Eliot we have not seen religious poetry like this since the seventeenth century; and indeed the poetical ancestor of this poetry is Henry Vaughan, whose meditative vision also found these flashings in the landscape of Wales.³

(2) Vernon Watkins was, as he would have wished to be, one of the very few twentieth century representatives of the great metaphysical tradition in English poetry.⁴

In spite of these perceptive remarks, no one has yet conducted a thorough study of the poems to support the argument that Watkins is an heir of these poets, or attempted to explore his efforts to integrate the English metaphysical tradition within the outlook of a twentieth-century man. My attempt to do so will begin with a general description of the ground Watkins and the forenamed Metaphysicals seem to share.

As already suggested in Chapter II, it is with Vaughan and Traherne especially that Watkins shares a mystical, Platonic
cast of mind that looks through this world to another, and an extreme sensitivity to a transcendent and inwardly discovered order of being. Like T. S. Eliot, who wrote in "The Metaphysical Poets" of a "dissociation of sensibility" that he believed to have set in after the seventeenth century, Watkins too would have found admirable in these earlier religious poets a theological ground of certitude that enabled them to relate mind and feeling, sensuality and spirit in a meaningful and coherent manner. I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that Vaughan and Traherne, though not named explicitly, are much stronger presences in Watkins' work as a whole than either Donne or Herbert. They permeate individual poems more through a similarity of poetic themes and symbols than through verbal echoes and direct references. They resemble Watkins in the essentially mystical and individual quality of their Christian vision. The likeness is too fundamental to be a matter of literary influence alone, but of sensibility—a distinct temperamental and spiritual closeness.

Watkins' Christian mysticism (which he can be seen to share with Vaughan and Traherne) expressed itself in a suspicion of systems of any kind, including Neoplatonism when dogmatically ossified. He was disinclined to create an elaborate structure of ideas and poetic symbols like Yeats in A Vision or Blake in the "Prophetic Books." Therefore, he chose instead to rest within the fecundity of a received heritage of Judeo-Christian (biblical) and classical symbolism and myth, illustrated for him in its fulness in poets like Dante and Milton, and to focus upon his own unique expression of the illuminated
moment as it gives meaning to time. As we have seen in his use of Taliesin, his forays into the Celtic world of the native tradition added depth to this rich matrix of traditional material.

When speaking of Watkins' poetic individualism, I do not mean to imply that he rejected institutional or historical Christianity; for like so many of the English Metaphysicals, he was a regular communicant in the Anglican church. His transference from the faith of his Congregationalist parents to Anglicanism occurred when he went to public school at Repton at the age of fourteen (1920), and he continued to attend the small Anglican church near his home on the Pennard cliffs on Gower throughout his life. From early childhood he considered himself a Christian, and after the previously-mentioned "revolution of sensibility" of his early twenties, a "Christian poet." The point is that the institutional side of Christianity—particularly the liturgy and the doctrines of Atonement and Redemption—are not central to his religious vision as expressed in the poetry, and only enter occasionally when fused with his direct and individual experience. The liturgy and church rituals are less important to his poetry than they are to Eliot in "Ash-Wednesday," for example, or David Jones in The Anathemata (1952). In this sense he is less like Herbert, who orders The Temple around the liturgy of the church, and again, more like Vaughan, who, though equally steeped in church tradition, speaks at his most memorable when capturing the individual's inward recognition of "the world of light" in a synthesis of traditional and more esoteric symbolism.
In some of the occasional poems on baptism and christening like "A Christening Remembered" (LU, p. 87) and "For a First Birthday" (BW, p. 22), Watkins does borrow sacramental imagery from the church ritual, and he often incorporates eucharistic themes and symbols indirectly as in "Bread and the Stars" (CA, p. 79). He has several reflective-meditative poems on the Crucifixion including "Good Friday" (CA, p. 100) and "Deposition (for Ceri Richards)" (F, p. 73), as well as numerous poems on the theme of resurrection. Yet even in these poems, he is not doctrinaire in the sense that the poetry exists to expound the doctrine, or that the doctrine intrudes on the experience out of which the poem evolved. I have suggested that in his concern with man's relation to the timeless through the mediation of a Christ who willingly entered time, he is concerned with the implications of the Incarnation and expresses an incarnational view of nature as an embodiment of the spiritual world in many poems. Here again he is close to Vaughan and Traherne who are also interested in nature viewed sacramentally, but always assume that the whole of reality cannot be limited to experience of the natural order.

Because Watkins tends to read back from nature to her eternal forms, he insisted on defining himself as a Christian "metaphysical" poet as opposed to a nature poet, and wrote a few months before his death:

A metaphysical poet, cannot write without being involved in belief, and his belief is tested by every contact with life, and renewed every day.6

Though Watkins never clearly defines "belief" in his prose, his poetry reveals his fidelity to the basic Christian theme of
man's Fall and regeneration, and an assuredness regarding his spiritual origin and end. As the above passage indicates, faith (or "belief") for Watkins was more than an intellectual and emotional acceptance of his Judeo-Christian heritage and an aesthetic utilization of its symbols and mythic paradigms, but involved for him the integration of the entire being—the activation of the moral self and will, as well as the intellect and imagination. The sense of integrity, of spiritual, moral and intellectual wholeness that informs his work as an unspoken ideal, gives it the tone of uncompromising fervor we have noted in "Rewards of the Fountain" (see Chapter III) that links him with these seventeenth-century poets of spiritual vocation and commitment.

The Welshness of the Vaughans (Thomas and Henry) and the part-Welshness of Herbert, as well as Traherne's connection with the borderlands of Wales in Hereford, must have appealed to Watkins with his strong sense of place. Like Henry Vaughan the Silurist, who celebrates the river Usk in his verse, Watkins identified himself intensely with "one place," and remained loyal to that place throughout his life, making poetry out of the dialogue between his inward and spiritual self and the local environment. In the poem "The Death Bell," in a context of religious exploration similar to that of the later Donne, and of Herbert and Vaughan, he writes from this sense of loyalty:

I that was born in Wales
Cherish heaven's dust in scales
Which may at dusk be seen
On every village green
Where Tawe, Taff or Wye
Through fields and woods goes by.... (DB, p. 108)

And in Affinities he states, "Let each whose soul is in one
place / Still to that place be true" (A, p. 32). We have noted
in Chapter III that David Jones, in a letter to Watkins dated
April 11, 1962, indicates their mutual interest in the metaphys-
cical poets of "Welsh affinity":

One thing that I find interesting, but hardly ever re-
ferred to is that the 'English Metaphysicals' of the
17th Cent. were so very largely of the Welsh borderlands.

That Watkins also found these poets engaging is evidenced
by their recurrent presence throughout his work from the early
to the late poems. The poets Donne and Herbert are actually
named, as well as quoted, echoed and imitated in the poems.
Donne appears as early as BML where in "Discoveries" Watkins
invokes him among his pantheon of poetic heroes—Blake, Milton,
Yeats, Heraclitus, Rilke and Keats—as a poet of a celestial
and unified vision:

Donne sees those stars, yet will not let them lie:
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die. (BML, p. 65)

By incorporating a line from Donne's "The Canonization" into
his poem, Watkins alludes to their shared sense of human regen-
eration through love and a death of self, and invokes a vision
of the Ptolemaic system of "stars" (stanza 2) that objectifies
his belief in a divinely ordered universe. Also, in "The
Immortal in Nature" (CA, p. 53) he alludes to Donne's "The Sun
Rising" where the lovers of the poem constitute a spiritual
world unto themselves, a microcosm of the whole:

I tell my soul: Although they be withdrawn
Meditate on those lovers. Think of Donne
Who could contract all ages to one day,
Knowing they were but copies of that one;
The first being true, then none can pass away.

And in "The Breaking of the Wave" (BW, p. 40) he refers to "The exalted vision Donne or Dante drew" which time cannot destroy.

In "A True Picture Restored" (A, p. 29), an elegiac poem about Dylan Thomas, Watkins names Milton and Herbert as two of his and Thomas' shared sources:

Nearer the pulse than other themes
His [Thomas's] deathborn claims are pressed.
Fired first by Milton, then the dreams
Of Herbert's holy breast....

Among the seventeenth-century poets, Milton and Crashaw are also present in Watkins' verse, though I do not propose to make more than passing reference to them here. Milton is invoked often because he, more than any other figure of the seventeenth century, represented to Watkins a complete mastery of poetic form, and because he stood for him as a poet who had realized on a grand scale a valid vision of man's relation to God. Watkins praised him in his prose at a time when it was unpopular to do so. In an "Address to the Poetry Society of Great Britain," May 7, 1966, he states: "It is ludicrous for a poet like Milton to be discountenanced when he is so complete a master of form." Crashaw's influence, on the other hand, is not abiding, though Watkins does echo his phrase, "Eternity shut in a span," from "In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God" in his own "all heaven in a span" from "Revisited Waters":

Yet nothing we knew in that rock of a soul that would climb,
Of a Christ that would save us, contracting all heaven in a span. (A, p. 98)

Aside from an interest in the Magdalene figure, shared by Her-
bert and Vaughan as well, and demonstrated in "The Sinner" (LU, p. 58), "Quem Quaeritis?" and "Five Poems of Magdalenian Darkness" (A, pp. 84 & 86), Watkins has little in common with Crashaw, and certainly displays few of his baroque verbal extravagances, his sensuous continental imagery of divine love, and his penchant for far-fetched metaphors like tears as "Portable and compendious oceans" in "Saint Mary Magdalene; or, the Weeper."

In "The Poet's Voice" (1947) when Watkins wrote, "I would give a great many poems that are found in most anthologies for the two which Donne wrote in his deathbed," he probably had in mind Donne's Divine Poems, "Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness" and "A Hymn to God the Father." Evidence from the poems would suggest that Watkins' emphasis on religious themes led him to admire the later "Dean Donne" of the sermons and the "Holy Sonnets" much more than the early cynical lover of Songs and Sonnets. There is little in Watkins' generally mellifluous voice and evenly lyrical tone to suggest that he derived much from Donne's brand of "wit"--the sinewy style, the ingenious and difficult conceits, or the tough, argumentative structures that characterize this seventeenth-century predecessor in both the early love poems and the later religious verse. What Watkins drew from Donne was not a style, but the confirmation of a vision. It is in the themes and imagery of specific poems that we must look to discover Donne's presence.

"The Return of Spring" from LU is one of the first poems in the published volumes to refer to Donne directly. It names Donne, alludes briefly to Herbert, and recaptures in Watkins'
own style a Vaughanesque attitude toward nature. The poem presents the speaker walking in the woods in the transitional time between winter and spring. He finds himself "resisting that green dominion" of spring in a passionate consideration of "the thing more sacred"—that is, the underlying presence of death in "the death-touching script" that contains the possibility of regeneration. Like Donne of the sermons and meditations, he continually looks on death and sacrifice as the prelude to spiritual life.  

Watkins writes in stanzas six and seven in terms of nature as a "tome," a volume or a book:

Diamonds of light, emeralds of leaves, green jewels:
For me the unnoticed, death-touching script is more passionate.
Cover the tome with dust; there dwells the redeemer,
Deathlessly known by the voice-fall.

O Spring, the box of colours, blue sky, green trees!
Has the brook ears? Donne has delivered his sermon.
Not easily you beguile the pulse, the footprint
Vaulted with intimate music. (LU, pp. 41-42)

Donne's "sermon" (7.2) is linked significantly here with the receiving ears of nature, and in this regard the poem is perhaps Romantic in the Wordsworthian sense by attempting to establish a vital communion between nature and man. Yet in its movement from spring viewed as a repeating "rite" signifying time's domination to spring viewed as a "sacrament" signifying the "redeemer's rebirth" through a submission to time, the poem dramatizes the speaker's change of perception in a manner that is closer to much seventeenth-century religious verse. The poet continues to address spring in stanzas nine and ten:

O returning child, not knowing why you were born,
Not understanding world's beauty the dead sustain,
The sharpness of colour, the clearness of water are yours;
The love there shadowed you know not.
What first I feared as a rite I love as a sacrament.
The Spring returns. I look. There is no dissembling.
The brook falters, runs on. I divine those meanings,
Listening to tongues that are silent. (LU, p. 42)

In its vision of spring as a "sacrament" the poem is reminiscent of some of Vaughan's poems from *Silex Scintillans* (1650 and 1655). One could point to "Regeneration," "I walked the other day," "The Bird," or "The Water-fall." In "Regeneration" the landscape of spring is much more allegorically and symbolically complex; yet Vaughan's poem deals with the same theme that Watkins handles, and in a similar way:

A ward, and still in bonds, one day
I stole abroad,
It was high-spring, and all the way
Primrosed and hung with shade;
Yet, it was frost within,
And surly winds
Blasted my infant buds, and sin
Like clouds eclipsed my mind. 13

Like the speaker in Watkins' poem, Vaughan "resists" the outer dominion of spring because of the winter within his soul, coming to reunite inner and outer landscapes through the shift in spiritual awareness that occurs at the end of the poem when he realizes that the "rushing wind" that speaks within him is the Spirit of God that "blows where it will" of John's gospel, telling him he must be "born again." 14 Likewise, "The Return of Spring" concludes with the speaker turning from nature's visual language to listen to "tongues that are silent"--the invisible voices that speak inwardly to the soul. The movement of both poems is progressively inward. Both speakers come to realize the necessity of a mystical death and rebirth--Watkins' by seeking the "redeemer" in the "death-touching script" of nature and Vaughan's by crying out to Christ in the last couplet, "Let me
die before my death!"

Stanza seven with its reference to spring as a "box of colours" is an obvious allusion to Herbert's little emblematic poem, "Vertue." Watkins' poem is also similar to Herbert's in its dramatic use of line lengths. In both poems the fourth line of each stanza is shorter and more emphatic:

Sweet spring, full of sweet dayes and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie;
My musick shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,
Like season'd timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turns to coal,
Then chiefly lives.15

Like spring in Herbert's poem, Watkins' season is ignorant of its own origin or encroaching death (stanza 9) and of the spiritual principles which sustain it in a larger order of love: "not knowing why you were born, / Not understanding world's beauty the dead sustain...." Yet like Herbert in the last stanza of "Vertue," Watkins' speaker may "divine those meanings" spoken by the tongues of the dead, and rise above the continual deaths of nature. Herbert concentrates on the contrast between mortal nature and the immortal soul of man, however; while Watkins celebrates spring as a sacrament or symbol of eternal regeneration. In both poems the underlying message is that though spring itself dies cyclically, the soul of man that perceives it as part of an eternal order is deathless. The above poem, therefore, though making explicit reference to Donne, can be seen to demonstrate a composite of seventeenth-century influences and parallels.

Other early poems from LU that are indebted to Donne are "Green Names, Green Moss," and "The Burial." The former poem
plays with the image of the richly sounding bell that becomes the central symbol of "The Death Bell," the title poem of the volume by that name. The earliest reference to the bell in the context of death, however, occurs in "Sea-Music" where Watkins writes of "the dying bell" that "Breaks through sound's infinite waves" (LV, p. 31). "Green Names, Green Moss" moves in swinging, alternately rhyming, trimeter lines to sing a paean asserting the immortality of the individual soul. The tolling bell of Donne's "Meditation XVII" that calls each man to death becomes in Watkins' poem, however, a call to a higher quality of life. In the second half of the poem he apostrophizes the bell which he described in the first long stanza:

Swing, life-leaping bell;  
Strike, in the mourning trees.  
No ravisher can tell  
Their secret histories;  
Not one can you reclaim,  
But side-track their loss  
Until the last, loved name  
is covered with moss.  
Yet every moment must,  
Each turn of head or hand,  
Though disfigured by dust,  
Incorruptibly stand;  
If they are nothing now  
Then they were nothing then. (LU, pp. 68-69)

The symbol of the bell, which he is to develop further in _DB_, is drawn from Donne's famous meditation, but the tone of challenging affirmation suggests Donne's sonnet, "Death Be Not Proud." In the elegiac "A Wreath for Alun Lewis," Watkins is even more explicit about the ultimate freeing of the soul from death when he writes, "Death himself must deliver the souls he bound / Unchanged and true, though the winds and the waters mock" (CA, p. 35).

In _CA_ he speaks in the same voice of assurance of the over-
coming of death in "Call It All Names, But Do Not Call It Rest." Here in eight-line, iambic pentameter stanzas reminiscent of Donne's measure in the *Holy Sonnets*, he expresses his own mystical realization that death is a kind of activity rather than a repose, the active counterpart of what we commonly experience as life. Though Watkins' strong sense of the reality of a realm of the dead has pre-Christian undertones, and may suggest the Celtic underworld, there is also in the mystical side of Christianity a belief in the "communion of saints" which is capable of incorporating his sense of the active presence of the dead. The formal and dramatic opening reminds us of Donne's great sonnet to death:

Go, death, give ground, for none of yours is here.  
Weep with no sound, figures around a well.  
Here gales knock down the chestnuts year on year,  
And block with leaves the entry to the temple.  
There the inscription no man's eyes can spell,  
Archaic, in the forgotten character.  
Sleeps near the nymph the font that christened her,  
A shell unfastening to the vanished marvel.  (CA, p. 26)

The appearance of the classical and romantic "nymph" by the Christian baptismal font elaborates Watkins' sense of the essential unity of Greek and Christian mythopoetic imagery. The poem goes on to describe the nymph's tomb as a sacred place where the seasons offer their homage of "fruit and leaves." The final stanza, in language that owes something to Dylan Thomas in phrases such as, "time, being stony, has no tongue to tell" (reminiscent of "And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb" from "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower"), asserts in a more consciously Christian context than any of Thomas' poems the sense that the nymph's sickness unto death is but a "last oracle" of her regeneration:
Here where through trees death's voice, all-severing blows,
Hung with stone tongues, the language of farewell,
Great doors are opened which no hand can close
And wise heaven flies into the bud's cold cell.
So is her sickness her last oracle
Where from its falling we may seed the rose
And her new joy from her remembered sorrows
Which time, being stony, has no tongue to tell.

(CA, pp. 26-27)

It becomes obvious that the poem is an elegy for a girl whom Watkins has transformed into the mythic figure of a nymph. Like Donne in "The Anniversaries," who turns the occasion of the death of Elizabeth Drury into a meditation on the death and regeneration of the world, Watkins' elegy (on a much smaller scale) uses the occasion of a girl's death in an elaborate and figurative manner to explore a similar theme. His is a more personal poem in the sense that it is concerned with the death of the individual rather than "the death of the world," but in both poems the child (Watkins' nymph and Donne's "Shee") takes on a symbolic function as a figure of regeneration.

Watkins' sonnet, "The Burial," in LU is an example of one of a series of sonnets that suggests Donne, Herbert, and even Milton in theme and imagery. Like his seventeenth-century predecessors, he often uses the sonnet as a vehicle for religious or contemplative verse. Again, the opening imperative encourages the reader to look on death as an entrance into spiritual life. Watkins seems to delight in this enormous paradox. As in so many seventeenth-century philosophical-meditative poems, the graveside consideration of death ends in a realization of the archetypal death of Christ, whose presence is suggested here in the imagery:

Go to that place where men can look no more
At what on earth shone brightest. As this wave
Leaps to great light, then, scattering, seeks the shore,
So your fame rose, that sinks into this grave.
Go where dissemblers can no more deprave
The dazzling love, nor knock that hidden door
Closed on the shrouded body the womb gave,
Dark as Christ's hem, as no dark looked before.

(LU, p. 71)

In the sestet the tone shifts again to an affirmation of rebirth through the natural images of the "seed" and the "chrysalis."

Yet must the buried shine, if any shines:
So sleeps the seed; so shrinks in rigid fold
The chrysalis, and hides its patterns old:
We touch, but cannot see its waking lines.
Honour this dust. The presence God refines
Even here is sunk, whose promised flesh is gold.

(LU, p. 71)

The hope for the individual, carried forward in the Hermetic and alchemical image of gold refined by God, lies in the way each soul repeats the pattern set forth in Christ's death and resurrection. I would argue that this sonnet, along with "The Conception" and "The Betrothal" (LU, pp. 70-72), shows Watkins exploring for his own time and in his own voice one of his central themes—the Christian mystery of resurrection out of death. The affirmative, meditative and formal mode exemplified in some of the more serene of Donne's Divine Poems and some of Herbert's sonnets seems to have provided him with a traditional model for this kind of writing.

Another poem in CA, "Good Friday," though very different from Donne's "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward," falls within the mode of the traditional meditation on the cross. As in the threefold Ignatian meditative structure Louis Martz elaborates in his The Poetry of Meditation (Yale Univ. Press, 1954; second edition, 1962), the speaker moves from a visual reconstruction of the scene of the crucifixion, through an analysis of the meaning
of that event, to a personal colloquy in which the soul addresses Christ directly. Unlike Donne's "Goodfriday, 1613," Watkins' poem does not struggle intensely with the sense of the soul's unworthiness before God. Yet it does focus on the implications of Christ's suffering on the cross both for man and for nature in a way similar to that of Donne when he speaks of "Lieutenant Nature" shrinking at the "spectacle of too much weight...." Watkins turns this around, however, by writing of nature benefiting from Christ's sacrifice:

Now let the geography of lands
Learn from these hands,
And from these feet the unresting seas
Take, from unfathomed grief, their ease. (CA, p. 101)

Certainly Watkins' image of Christ's nailed "hands which hold up heaven" (stanza 7) has the same kind of dramatic power as Donne's "Could I behold those hands which span the Poles...." (line 21).

Herbert's "Goodfriday" poem employs a verse form similar in structure to the one Watkins uses in his poem, though in tone and energy of syntax the two poems are quite different. Rather than the impassioned, direct address to Christ of Herbert's "O my chief good," Watkins' poem begins with a subdued description of a winter landscape, only later rising to more fervent expression:

Watkins: After the winter solstice came 4
Ice and low flame, 2
The cockerel step by which the light 4
Shortened the sleep of earth and night. 4

Herbert: O my chief good, 2
How shall I measure out thy bloud? 4
How shall I count what thee befell, 4
And each grief tell? 16

Both poems repeat a consistent pattern of four and two-feet lines throughout, and both dwell on how man's sinfulness requires God's grace. Watkins' poem, however, focuses in a manner characteristic
of him on the overcoming of time through individual perception. Here he fuses the sacramental imagery of "crushed wine" and the "sacred root" or vine, suggesting the sacrifice of Christ, the "Vine of Israel" and "root of Jesse," with the description of the natural landscape as the speaker awaits the "feast" of Easter:

But now light grows where rays decline.
Now the crushed wine
Transfigures all, leaf, blossom, fruit,
By reference to the sacred root.

Day must die here that day may break.
Time must forsake
Time, and this moment be preferred
To any copy, light or word. (CA, p. 100)

He plays like the Metaphysicals with the common paradoxes of light coming out of darkness, sunrise out of sunset, and goes on to suggest that in time's forsaking of itself ("Time must forsake/Time") lies its ultimate regeneration. In the next four stanzas, through the images of "nails of darkness driven / Into these hands which hold up heaven" and the "mountain skull," suggesting Golgotha, where according to esoteric tradition Adam's skull was buried, Watkins argues that the mystery of Christ's death is the essential key to life. By sacrificing himself to time (the present and particular moments) as the necessary arena in which man proves himself by such acts of love as Christ's, the speaker is prepared at the close of the poem to invoke the "Easter star":

Come, Easter, come: I was afraid
Your star had strayed.
It was behind our darkest fears
Which could not see their God for tears. (CA, p. 101)

"Easter" can be seen here as a transfigured epithet for Christ himself, whose star is Venus, the evening and morning luminary. Watkins' final apostrophe, then, has some of the personal and
emotional impact of Donne's "Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace, / That thou may'rst know me, and I'll turne my face ...." Though rather a set piece, the poem shows Watkins working with the traditional imagery of death and resurrection that is central to his vision in both The Death Bell and in Cypress and Acacia, the volume from which this poem derives.

The classical symbols of the cypress of mourning and the acacia of regeneration gave Watkins an organizational theme for the volume by that name. Cirlot's A Dictionary of Symbols informs us that the acacia, sacred to the Egyptians in Hermetic doctrine, symbolizes the testament of Hiram that "one must know how to die in order to live again in eternity." In Hebrew tradition, the acacia constitutes the sacred wood of the tabernacle, and in Mediterranean countries it represents life, immortality and Platonic love. Its red and white flowers denote pairs like life and death, death and rebirth. It occurs especially in Romanesque Christian art as suggestive of the soul and immortality. According to J. C. Cooper, one tradition has it that Christ's crown of thorns was made of the sacred wood of the acacia or thorn tree. By joining the Greek symbol of the cypress with the Hebraic and Hermetic one of the acacia Watkins designates his own sense of the union of opposites so important to his work as a whole. In a poem on his visit to the graves of Keats, Shelley and Trelawny, "In the Protestant Cemetary, Rome," he again writes of those opposites:

The cypress and acacia trees
Take root again where first they grew,
The place where contraries are true. (CA, p. 95)

Yet it was in the tradition of the earlier metaphysical poets of
the seventeenth century that he found a Christian expression of this essential and universal mystery that must have greatly nourished his own poetic vision. Like the Vaughans, he was capable of fusing more esoteric and recondite symbols with his orthodox Christianity.

The volume *The Death Bell* (1954) is both in its title and thematic concern (centering on the above-mentioned sense of the mystery of death and life) a kind of tribute to Donne. Like Dylan Thomas' "Do not go gentle into that good night," it was occasioned by the death of the poet's father. The elegiac title poem opens with an epigram from "Meditation XVII," "It tolls for thee," which reveals that Watkins will be exploring his own sense of the essential interdependency of mankind. It is interesting to note that Traherne also used the symbol of the soul as a bell in the poem, "Bells," which Watkins could have known. Watkins' volume opens with a Donne-like poem of spiritual conflict and tension. "The Strangled Prayer" is one of the few poems of intense self-contradiction and struggle in Watkins' canon. Though I can detect no direct verbal echoes of Donne in this poem, the sense of the speaker being overwhelmed by his own capacity for sin, that is, "lust," and his urgent need for a powerful Deity to rescue him from himself reminds us of Donne in poems like "Holy Sonnets Nos. 1, 2 and 5." In the sonnet beginning, "As due by many titles I resign...," Donne asks God to wrestle with the devil for his soul:

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Except Thou rise and for thine owne work fight,
Oh I shall soone despaire, when I doe see
That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not chuse me.
And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee. 21
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Compare the general tone to the conclusion of Watkins' poem where the poet is kneeling on the floor of his room:

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, p. 15)

The contest here is partly with sin (the poet's "lust"), but ultimately with his mortal condition—the fact that nature makes him "mortal in her bed." The "travelling beasts" of the zodiac "cross" in the sense of confounding and contradicting the higher intentions of the time-bound speaker who has longings for a timeless condition. Watkins puns on the word "cross" (crucifix) to suggest also that the zodiacal powers make the sign of the cross over him as he prays. The poem develops the conflict between man and the cosmos by juxtaposing celestial imagery—"the stars," the zodiac, "the Pleiades and the Plough"—against the more sensual images of vegetation ("strange creepers"), "insects," and animals ("beasts" or beast-like men). The "shades of ancestors," ghosts of primitive, "desirous" men who "dance...leap," and "gratify the moon" (symbol of generation), haunt the memory of the child of the poem, an earlier and more innocent form of the speaker himself (stanza 1), who asks God to free him from time, mortality and the human condition. The dramatic presentation of the soul in dialogue with God is characteristic not only of Donne, but also of Herbert in The Temple who has a number of poems of spiritual conflict like "The Collar" and "Aaron." In "Affliction (I)" he speaks in punning terms similar to those of Watkins of God "cross-biasing" him; and in "Affliction (IV)" he pleads with God to "dissolve the knot" that ties him to sin. In "Love (II)" he speaks like
Watkins of the "usurping lust" that keeps him from the true spiritual life. In Herbert, however, the struggle is often with his calling as a priest and is quickly resolved by the poet's deeper and more fundamental response to God's overwhelming love. In Watkins' poem the conflict of the private individual (as opposed to the priest) with God remains unresolved.

In "Time's Deathbed" the problem of mortality as conveyed in "The Strangled Prayer" is partly mitigated through the poet's realization that a surrender to time through love can reverse and transform time. The mysterious presence or "shade" that speaks in the seventh stanza, "Possess new time, possess / New time, or nothingness," leads the poet to the paradoxical realization that in surrender lies a kind of victory. Herbert develops a similar paradox in his poem, "Time," where he argues that time serves eternity's purpose as "an usher to convey our souls / Beyond the utmost starres and poles."22 In a way it is a restatement of the old Renaissance theme of Spenser's "Mutability Cantos" where the goddess "Mutability" and "Nature" herself are seen to work to the furtherance of God's decrees.

Watkins writes in stanzas ten and eleven of how a surrender to God can nullify the ill-effects of time:

Then, when all thoughts were summed
And the small flies had hummed
Around the passive bone,
I gave so great a groan
That time was dumbed.

Deeper and far more tender
That groan to my life-lender
Floated, than songs of praise,
For the firm pulse of days
Was locked in my surrender. (DB, p. 17)

The almost grotesque image of flies humming around the "passive
bone" of the corpse suggests Donne's death imagery in poems like "The Funeral" or "The Relique" where he writes of men finding in his grave, "a bracelet of bright haire about the bone." In theme, Watkins has returned to the traditional sense of Christian resignation that Milton expresses at the end of the sonnet, "When I Consider How My Light is Spent," or Donne in "Hymn to God, My God, in my Sickness," or Herbert in "Sion" and "Love (III)." The poet's "groan" in stanza ten may, in fact, be an echo of Herbert's "Sion" where he argues that human "groans" of self-resignation are spiritually efficacious: "But groans are quick, and full of wings, / And all their motions upward be...." It becomes obvious by the end of the poem that the mysterious "Near One" who speaks is Christ (or a human being representing Christ's love) who asks the soul to lie down in the grave and await the opening of an eternal dimension, a "fourth wall" of time:

Once more the Near One spoke:
'Lie still. Your fist then broke
The hour-glass that has cursed
Man from the first
With superstition's cloak.

Time built your room three-walled
Where Fear, a nursling, crawled,
But at the fourth wall I
Bring the starred sky
And the scented world.' (DB, p. 18)

We recall also that the symbol of the hourglass as a reminder of man's short lifespan was used frequently in the seventeenth century, and in a particularly memorable fashion in several of Donne's sermons (see Sermon V, folio of 1660). It was said that "Dean Donne" preached with an hourglass beside him on the pulpit. In Watkins' poem the hourglass breaks to symbolize the
shattering of time.

Before turning to the title poem of The Death Bell, it should be noted that Watkins' "Epithalamion" for Michael Ham­burger in the same volume is partly indebted to Donne's "Epith­alamion on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine Being Married on St. Valentine's Day." Like Donne's marriage song, Watkins' poem not only invokes St. Valentine, but is arranged in Donne­like, rhymed, open couplets. Watkins writes,

Tonight is glory, when Saint Valentine
Shall tread out thoughts and crush his grapes to wine. (DB, p. 52)

In the fifth stanza, he borrows Donne's favored image of the "phoenix" (see "The Canonization" on the lovers as "The Phoenix Riddle") as a symbol for the self-regenerative love of the married couple. In every way this is a traditional epithalami­on setting forth the union of the marriage partners as a pattern of universal concord. The sacred union is expressed in terms of a reconstruction of Eden:

Far back, the sacred pattern still is found,
Two lovers walking on the verdant ground
Through avenues of suffering.... (DB, p. 53)

The union of lover and beloved, by reenacting the "sacred pat­tern," makes possible in Watkins' mind at least, a temporary defeat of time. Like Perseus who loosed Andromeda from the rock (invoked in stanza 12), the lover by uniting with his bride overcomes the "dragon," time:

Now plunges his heroic spear
Through the subdued, devouring year,
And time the dragon falls to his control. (DB, p. 54)

This rather formal and hieratic poem on the theme of the sacred marriage surely belongs with Watkins' other important poem on
this theme, "The Lady with the Unicorn" (see Chapter V), the
title piece from his earlier collection where he meditates on
the Medieval tapestries from the Musée de Cluny in Paris.

In a note to the title poem of The Death Bell, Watkins re-
interprets Donne's symbol of the tolling bell in his own meta-
phorically complex and original terms. Though the poem is
marred by the presence of some private symbolism (that of "the
nightingale" and the "bull" in "Part II") which is clear only
by virtue of the note, the note itself does help to enrich and
inform the poem. Like Donne's prose in "Meditation XVII," Wat-
kins' language is rhythmical and metaphorically powerful. I
cite the final paragraph to illustrate the complexity of his
symbols:

The bell itself is more than an instrument. It is in-
volved with all for whom it has tolled, and its reso-
nance has the power to beckon everyone whom its sound
has touched. Before it rises, it must sink to its
full weight at the end of the rope, and lie there, as
the dead body must, under a single thread, expecting
resurrection. The harmony within the bell, and within
the dead body, is musically controlled, and depends
upon the mercy and judgment of heavenly scales for its
peace. These scales are discernible everywhere in na-
ture, but they may be discerned only by the intuition,
ot by the reason. They reveal that unredeemed man,
through acquisitiveness, wills his own perdition, but
that redeemed man, falling through time deliberately,
is raised by loss. Whether in Eden or on the banks of
the four Welsh rivers named in the poem, the resurrec-
tion of the body is assured, not by the instinct of
self-preservation, but by the moment of loss, of the
whole man's recurrent willingness to lose himself to an
act of love. (DB, pp. 111-12) (italics mine)

The poem itself moves through a series of short, open, trimeter
couplets with a slightly Yeatsian swing (which imitates the
swinging of the bell) to develop the theme that was so essential
to Watkins' Christian vision—the sense that Christianity as
exemplified in the life of the Christ of the gospels was rooted in an absolutely selfless love. The resolution of the spiritual dilemma embodied in "The Strangled Prayer" lay in what he saw as the "completeness" of Christian love:

The pathos of pre-Christian love lies in its incompleteness, the prophetic nature of pre-Christian death in its reticence. (DB, p. 111)

In the poem he expresses his sense of the resolution of the problem of human mortality as follows:

Man in his mortal state
Can bear the heavy weight
Of earth and heaven and hell
Compounded in a bell
If he discern the glory
Of John's deep-thundered story
By which a thorn-crowned head
Sinking, to raise the dead,
Has pulled unbounded space
Down, by the weight of grace.... (DB, p. 106)

Expressed in conventional theological terms of a redemption through grace, and an "imitation of Christ," Watkins' poem transforms the bell into a symbol of man swinging back and forth between the polarities of mortality and resurrection, earth and heaven, despair and hope. As Kathleen Raine points out, in one sense the poem is a "return to the theme of the Mari Lwyd of the two worlds of the dead and the living"; but this time I would suggest that Watkins develops that theme in more explicitly Christian terms. Not only does he echo Donne's "Hymn to God, My God" in lines such as these—

Yet now the bell falls dumb.
Already he is come
Into that other room
So near his first home..., (DB, p. 109)

but he takes on the full implications of Donne's paradox that,
As West and East
In all flat Maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the Resurrection.

For Watkins believed that each man could reenact in himself spiritually the death and resurrection of Christ. Though certainly in theme and governing symbolism the poem reminds us of Donne, in its detailed use of biblical incidents, its comprehension of classical myth, and its mystical imagery of dark, light and fire it is perhaps closer to some of the more cosmological poems of Vaughan, as the imagery of light in the following passage demonstrates:

The hour when such men die
Translates the galaxy
And keeps, where stars abound,
The selfsame holy ground
Reclaimed from ancient rocks,
Preserved by paradox
Through time and whirling space,
Lost Eden's latter place. (DB, p. 107)

Herbert's influence has already been considered in several of the Donne-like poems that demonstrate a composite influence from the seventeenth century. Watkins first read Herbert in his youth at Repton, and then reread him, probably in the thirties, encouraged by Thomas' appreciation of that poet. Thomas himself experimented with Herbert's use of the "shape poem" in "Vision and Prayer" and followed Herbert in the development of intricate stanzaic patterns and an integration of biblical imagery. Watkins may also have been impressed by Eliot's references to the "little Gidding" community to which Herbert belonged in the fourth section of The Four Quartets (1944). Though not generally liturgical or dogmatic like Herbert, as suggested earlier, Watkins does share with the Parson of Bemerton some important
characteristics, especially in his more devotional and hymn-like poems. These include: similar thematic concerns, the use of intricate poetic structures and a wide variety of forms and treatments, the sense of poetry as prayer or colloquy with a personal God, the frequent parabolic use of biblical material, and an often quiet, even-tempered disposition that results, after a brief struggle, in a tone of joyous acceptance. I would say that Watkins' main debt to Herbert derives from the lyrics of *The Temple* (1633) rather than from Herbert's prose, *A Priest to the Temple* (1652), or the didactic "The Church-Porch" which serves as an introduction to and preparation for the lyrics.

In the early "A Prayer Against Time" from *BML*, Watkins opens with a direct apostrophe to God characteristic of Herbert in so many poems from *The Temple*. Yet Watkins seldom achieves (or aims for) Herbert's relaxed, conversational tone as demonstrated in "Man" where he begins, "My God, I heard this day...." Watkins' tone is just as direct, but definitely vatic, prophetic and incantatory:

God, let me not know grief
Where time is uppermost,
Not though it handle me
More wretchedly than all.... (BML, p. 38)

The issue of Watkins' poem is that of his dedication to his poetic craft. Yet where Herbert sometimes expresses a conflict between his art and his vocation as a priest, or deals with the choice between secular and sacred verse, or the problem of writing from the wrong motives, as in the "Jordan" poems (I and II), for Watkins the dedication to God and to his art are inseparable, and there can be no conflict. He concludes the poem, therefore,
in lines of Yeatsian tone, but Christian content that celebrate his craft as a means of overcoming both time and death. Like Herbert, Watkins can be seen to restrict himself wholeheartedly to variations on a single theme—the religious one of eternity's continual penetration of time: 32

I have been luckier than
All others in one thing,
Devoted secret time
To one love, one alone;
Found then that dying man
Exulting in new rhyme:
The river standing,
All but miracle gone. (BML, p. 38)

Other poems that approach the condition of prayer as Herbert defines it in "Prayer (I)" when he calls it "the soul in paraphrase," are "Dust in the Balance" (CA), "The Interval" (A) and "Sonnet: The Expectation" (BOD). As the title suggests, "The Interval" presents the time of aesthetic and spiritual drought between the completion of one poem and the beginning of the next. Watkins justifies this pause in the phrase, "Nature needs waste," as a necessary time of lying fallow in preparation for a new seeding of inspiration. Here he defines poetry clearly as an act of prayer—a creative act in time that joins man to God. The soul must await the word of inspiration passively, but the moment of receiving is active:

This new being finished and the next unknown,
I must wait long to find the words I need.
Verse tests the very marrow in the bone,
Yet man, being once engaged by song, is freed:
The act itself is prayer, deliberate in its speed. (A, p. 14)

By joining the apparent opposites of deliberation and speed, Watkins suggests the nature of the timeless moment in which both prayer and creation occur.
"Dust in the Balance" and "Sonnet: The Expectation" are both religious sonnets suggesting Herbert's use of the form, except that Watkins prefers the Petrarchan, and Herbert the Shakespearean paradigm. The title of the former was probably drawn from Traherne's use of the phrase in _Centuries of Meditations_ (I.19) where he writes:

> Your Understanding comprehends the World like the Dust of a Ballance, measures Heaven with a Span and esteems a thousand Yeers but one Day.  

"Dust in the Balance" begins with the traditional complaint of the spirit against the flesh which is but "dust":

> Why should pure spirit in ribs of bone be trussed,
> Why should clear vision pine in jails of eyes,
> Why mortal ears divine immortal skies
> And heaven interpret to the listening dust?...,

but resolves itself in the sestet with the image of the soul as a "lute" played on by the fingers of God:

> Come down, sweet cadence, come; I grieve alone.
> By this closed world all distances fulfil.
> Hearing those abstract senses mock the bone,
> My soul is like a lute when it is still,
> That played when mockers tore His cloak apart
> Who gave them all, but not His beating heart.  

We know that Herbert played the lute, and that several of his poems, including "Easter" and "The Temper (I)," present this symbol in a similar context to suggest that man's soul may be offered up as an instrument on which God plays. "The Temper," for example, reads,

> Yet take thy way; for sure thy way is best:
> Stretch or contract me, thy poore debter:
> This is but tuning of my breast,
> To make the musick better.  

"Sonnet: The Expectation" is one of Watkins' most explicitly devotional sonnets in which the soul utters its plea in
conventional terms of grace and salvation, playing with the mys-
tical image of the "wounds of love." It is one of Watkins' few
doctrinal expressions of the theme of Redemption:

Here, Lord, I lie: have mercy on my soul.
My wounds from time were more than time could heal.
Grace had I none, nor health, till I could feel
Those old wounds die, and your wounds mine control.
Then I was fresh and washed, as in a bowl.
I closed my eyes, that you might break the seal,
Then clearly saw the ransom you reveal,
Richer than all the treasures which I stole. (BOD, p. 46)

Like so many of Herbert's reflections on redemption in which
man's reluctant acceptance of God is set against God's active
courtship of man, the poem expresses the soul's overwhelming
sense of gratitude, accompanied by a desire to return God's
gift through a complete resignation of self. Like Herbert, he
places himself in a dramatic situation where he enters into an
intimate colloquy with Christ. Watkins builds on the image of
the soul as a "treasure-vault." We are reminded of the kind of
symbolism Herbert uses in "Man" when he describes the soul as a
"cabinet" of riches, and a "Palace" or "stately habitation"
built by God, and intended for God's use. Watkins continues,

Take from this vault whatever wealth is more
Than just suffices to be blest and bless.
Like the grown child the ungrateful city bore,
Rebuked for faults and clothed in his distress,
If I give all, that gift you can restore,
And I must always grieve if I give less. (BOD, p. 46)

In tone and theme this poem resembles Herbert's "The Reprisall"
where he enlarges on the question of how man can ever repay God
for his incommensurable gift of sacrificial love: "I have con-
sider'd it and finde / There is no dealing with thy mighty pas-
sion...." Even in its use of the image of the wounds of love
the two poems are similar, for Herbert writes, "And yet thy
wounds still my attempts defie...." Watkins' posthumously pub-
lished, "The Debt," also presents the theme of how God's love
outgoes man's in the style of some of Herbert's simpler songs
of praise. Here the poet's gaze fixes on the sacred river as a
symbol of the permanent within the transient. The symbols of
cup and thorn suggest the Passion:

There though my gaze is set
I yet can never know
Why, of so great a debt
So much is left to owe.

Tell me, cup and thorn
Who can provide enough
To lighten what was borne
In that foresuffered love?

Though all day I toiled
I never could supply
This that no fault has spoiled
Where naked it flows by. (UP, p. 28)

In his integration of biblical paradigms, Watkins resem-
bles Herbert, as well as Vaughan, who followed Herbert in the
tradition of the typological and allegorical use of scripture.
Watkins' figure of Adam, for instance, in "Ironics of the Self"
(A, p. 16), "A Bell Unrung" (A, p. 36), "Angelo's Adam" (A, p.
65) and "Adam" (BOD, p. 23) can be read as a "type" of shadowy
prefiguration of Christ, of redeemed man, or of the artist. In
"Adam" he is at one level a figure of the uncompromising artist
who is determined to build a "paradise within" in spite of the
corrupt and fallen world around him:

When Adam found a leaf, and God called out:
'Who told thee thou wast naked?' he began
To build that heaven from which God cast him out
With all the effort of a conscious man. (BOD, p. 23)

Watkins' treatment of the Magdalene as a figure of redeemed
humanity is also similar to that of Herbert and Vaughan. His
earliest reference to her occurs in "The Room of Pity," a poem to Thomas in which he imagines her response to the event of the crucifixion:

But Mary, Mary Magdalen, and they
Whom sorrow chose, who never shall be old,
Marvelled the world could shake so, and still stay....
(BML, p. 26)

His sonnet, "The Sinner," stands in the same line as Donne's "To the Lady Magdalen Herbert: Or St. Mary Magdalen," Herbert's "Marie Magdalene" and Vaughan's "St. Mary Magdalene" as a meditation on a gospel event. It is noteworthy that Herbert also has a poem entitled "The Sinner" on the theme of the soul's need for divine forgiveness. Watkins' Magdalene poem is like Herbert's "Marie Magdalene" in several respects. It employs the third person to describe the incident of Mary wiping Christ's feet with her tears and anointing his head with oil as a symbolic preparation for his burial as recounted in the gospels.

Both poems identify the unknown woman with the box of ointment with the woman taken in adultery in the gospel of John and dwell on the paradox drawn from Jesus' parable on the Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43) that the greatest "sinner" (in men's eyes) is the greatest saint because of her capacity to love in response to God's forgiveness. Herbert concludes with the paradox of how her act simultaneously cleanses both Christ's feet and her own soul, and plays with the notion of Atonement: "Dear soul, she knew who did vouchsafe and deigne / To bear her filth...." Watkins' less doctrinal poem centers on the pharisaical attitude of her "accuser" who in the gospel is repelled by her spilling of the "costly ointment." The somewhat ambiguous syntax of the sestet raises the question of what led Simon the Pharisee (or
Judas in some versions) to judge her act of love an impropriety
and a waste. Through the images of the locked tomb of Christ
and the closed creative womb, Watkins challenges the power of
evil that would deny love:

O, seeing her spikenard, to whom much was forgiven,
Spilt from love's box, anointing the limbs for heaven,
What horror repels her accuser? Who rears that stone
Shaped in the fountain of her magnanimous womb,
To disfigure her love-name and shut the mouth of the tomb,
For whom the unnumbered candles cannot atone? (LU, p. 58)

Like his predecessors, Watkins conflates the incident of the
raising of stones against the woman taken in adultery with the
story of the woman with the box of spikenard.

Though arranged in tetrameter couplets rather than the
form of the sonnet like Watkins' poem, Vaughan's "St. Mary Mag­
dalene," addressed to the saint, is similar to Watkins' "The
Sinner" in the way it develops the symbols of both her tears
and "love's box." Vaughan's and Watkins' treatment of the bro­
ken box of spikenard is more mystical than that of Herbert by
using it as a symbol of the continual breaking open or sacrifice
of self. Vaughan writes:

Why is this rich, this pistic nard
Spilt, and the box quite broke and marred? 40

As in Watkins' "The Sinner," the issue of Vaughan's Magdalene
poem is that Mary, the seeming "sinner," is more pure than the
accusing Pharisee. Vaughan here compares the Pharisee to a
leper in need of cleansing:

This woman (say'st thou) is a sinner:
And sate there none such at thy dinner?
Go leper, go; wash till thy flesh
Comes like a child's, spotless and fresh;
He is leprous, that still paints:
Who saint themselves, they are no saints. 41

The conclusion of Vaughan's poem, though not important to
"The Sinner," may have had an impression on Watkins because of its inclusion of the leper symbol which was so central to him in other poems (see Chapter II). We are told in the gospel of Luke (Chap. 7:36-39) that a woman who was "a sinner" anointed Jesus at the home of a certain pharisee. But Matthew and Mark state that the man with whom Jesus dined on this occasion was "Simon the leper" (Matt. 26:6 & Mark 14:3). Vaughan is obviously working from the latter version here.

In a later grouping by Watkins on the Magdalene, "Five Poems of Magdalenean Darkness," where the variety of forms from section to section suggests Herbert's mastery of technique, the leper is mentioned in conjunction with the Magdalene as in Vaughan's poem. Throughout the poem the Magdalene speaks in the first person. It is as if the mask of the lamenting woman allowed Watkins to explore in his own terms the psychology of human suffering. Watkins' other great poem on this theme is "Niobe" (DB, p. 31), which draws on the classical Niobe figure from Dante's Purgatorio (XII, 37). The following hymn-like excerpt from section two of "Five Poems," entitled "The Stair," shows Watkins juxtaposing the figure of the cleansed leper against that of the Magdalene, whose praises are greater because of her greater grief:

Bitter my life has been, not sweet,  
Yet grief has made me strong.  
Was ever vision more complete  
Or hope more plainly hung  
Than when with tears I washed his feet  
Whose body paid for wrong?  

Darkness, compel that hour to stay  
Whose pledge is in the tomb.  
The leper's praises die away.  
How silent is the room.  
All is remembered from the day,  
And still death will not come.  (A, p. 86)
His choice of the dramatic monologue to explore the questioning mind of the aged and dying Mary gives the poem its great intensity. Herbert also uses a similar technique in "The Sacrifice" where Christ speaks directly to the reader of his great "grief"--"Was ever grief like mine?" Louis Martz in his The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962), has described how Robert Southwell's prose work, Marie Magdalens Funeral Tears (seeing eight editions between 1591-1636) introduced into England the continental "literature of tears." Laments of the Magdalene and meditations on her life presenting her as the "pattern of the perfect lover" were later utilized richly by poets like Herbert and Vaughan.

Here Watkins is developing in his own way the traditional seventeenth-century lament of the Magdalene.

Watkins' Magdalene poems, then, are closer in spirit to the Magdalene poem of Vaughan than to Herbert's more verbally compact exploration of divine grace in "Marie Magdalene." Not only does Watkins include the figure of the leper like Vaughan, but like him he focuses intense dramatic interest on Mary herself as a figure of heroic love. Like so many of the short, evocative, richly-layered titles of Herbert and Vaughan, the title of "The Sinner" is chosen deliberately for its double-edge, being both a description of Mary in the world's eyes and a denunciation of her accuser as the actual "sinner."

A final thought to conclude this section is that Watkins' delicate imagery and evenly fluid, exalted and frequently vatic style do not allow him the kind of controlled emotional
effects Herbert achieves through the mixture of a plain diction and a concrete, homely vocabulary with more abstract and sublime concepts and language. Though often lacking Herbert's concreteness, Watkins is concerned with the mysteries of sin and love within a unifying vision of God's relation to man. Like him, he is a relatively learned poet whose short, lyrical utterances demonstrate only an apparent simplicity, and whose learning, though deep, is not self-consciously displayed at the surface level of the poems. It remains to consider Watkins' relation to Vaughan and Traherne who followed Donne and Herbert in time, and in the chain of literary influence.
Part II: Watkins, Vaughan and Traherne

"So piecing this Life with the life of Heaven, and seeing it as one with all Eternity, a Part of it, a Life within it. Strangely and Stupendously Blessed in its Place and Season." (Traherne, "The Fourth Century," 93)

One could point to many ways in which Vaughan and Watkins demonstrate the same kind of religious and poetic sensibility, sharing as they do a Welsh regionalism, as well as a comparable ground of philosophic and theological ideas. We have noted that this ground consists largely of a synthesis of Platonism, Neoplatonism and the Bible with more recondite, mystical (or Hermetic) symbols. The most striking parallel of all, however, lies in the way both poets are fascinated by what the Welsh have called "the world of white light." We have explored Watkins' symbolism of whiteness in the "Music of Colours" poems, but it is important to realize that such references to whiteness and light as we find there are almost ubiquitous in his work. The word "gwyn" in Welsh means "white," "holy," or "light," and "gwynfyd" has been used to describe paradise, or "the white world."1 Both poets reach after this "white world" through a brilliantly luminous, poetic imagery in an effort to capture moments of direct mystical revelation given (however briefly) to the individual. In Watkins as in Vaughan, this passionate striving after eternity may reflect itself in a certain unevenness of style which suggests the difficulty for the poet of sustaining the intensity of the illuminated moment.

In the section that follows, I wish to pursue the all-pervasive, Vaughanesque imagery of celestial light and whiteness
through a number of Watkins' poems, as well as the related theme of the two worlds of time and eternity. I shall be touching also on several poems that parallel Vaughan's use of nature and his concept of childhood as a state of paradisal innocence—a notion also centrally important to Traherne. I believe it can be argued that just as Vaughan and Traherne turned inward to seek individual illumination at a time when ancient institutions were in a state of collapse, so Watkins as a twentieth-century poet responded similarly (in however indirect a manner) to the decay of credible religious structures and the dominance of a materialistic outlook. In The Paradise Within, Louis Martz comments on the impact of the seventeenth-century Platonic revival (led by the Cambridge Platonists) on the minds of the poets Vaughan and Traherne, who revitalized Platonic and Augustinian notions of direct, individual illumination—the presence of the "inner light." His description of these poets' Augustinian concern with the mind's relation to time could apply equally well to Watkins:

Augustine shows how the mind can transcend the oppressive 'transience of time and act as an image of God's timeless mind, in which all things have their simultaneous existence.

Vaughan, Traherne and Watkins all share the theme of the two worlds of time and eternity, the "white" or "light" realm, separated as it were by a thin veil, wall, or "film." Traherne writes, for instance, of this "twofoldness" in "Shadows in the Water," where all that keeps the speaker from that parallel universe is a "thin skin":

I plainly saw...
A new Antipodes,
Whom, tho they were so plainly seen,
A Film kept off that stood between....

.........................

....below the purling Stream
Som unknown Joys there be
Laid up in Store for me;
To which I shall, when that thin Skin
Is broken, be admitted in.

In Watkins, the thinness of the partition is evident in "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" where the dead stand just outside the door of the living, and in the Taliesin poems and The Death Bell where eternity breaks through from the other side of "time's glass."

In his Centuries of Meditation Traherne suggests that God reveals himself in time at three levels of knowing: directly and intuitively within the soul, in the divine Word of scripture or "The Book," and in the world or Book of Nature. Like him, Watkins also relies partly on intuition and grace, that is, God speaking within the self, "The Nazarene / Walking in the ear"; partly on biblical and ecclesiastical tradition, the Word, biblical parable and paradigm; and partly on the word of God revealed in the Book of Nature, the sacred script of divine hieroglyphics of which he speaks in "Digging the Past" (F, p. 84) where he writes of coming, "To read such hieroglyphs as give the void a name." In his use of the latter, as suggested earlier, he is close to the Platonism of Vaughan and Traherne who so often utilize nature as a shadowy type, allegory or symbol of the eternal. Vaughan, for instance, speaks of nature in "The Retreat" in a way similar to that of Watkins in the last two poems of the "Music of Colours" sequence already discussed:

When on some gilded cloud, or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity.
And in "I walked the other day" he writes:

Grant I may so  
Thy steps track here below,  
That in these masques and shadows I may see  
Thy sacred way....

Both Vaughan and Watkins believed that though nature speaks only in what Vaughan calls "broken hieroglyphics" (see "Vanity of Spirit"), she speaks intelligibly to man of God.

Like the "Private Ejaculations" (see the subtitles to The Temple and Silex Scintillans, 1655) of Herbert and Vaughan, many of Watkins' poems are personal, prayer-like utterances to God or Christ, and many are traditional meditations or explorations of biblical incidents. We have noted earlier (in Chapter I) that he develops the Zacchaeus figure in a number of poems, but it is important to realize the frequency and originality of his use of biblical paradigms. The good thief, the leper, Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, Simeon, the Roman centurian of the gospels, the Good Samaritan, Paul, Stephen, and of course, the figure of Christ himself appear prominently in numerous and shifting contexts. Old Testament figures include Ruth and Naomi in "Ruth's Lament for Naomi," Elijah in "Testimony," Abraham in "Ballad of the Trial of Sodom," Adam in "Adam," Zechariah in "Prime Colours," and Samson in "The Measure Moves," "Samson" and others.

The concentrated otherworldly preoccupation of Vaughan, Traherne and Watkins seems to have corresponded with lives of relative isolation and obscurity. After a time at Oxford, a brief study in law and mild participation in the English Civil War, for instance, Vaughan (a Royalist) returned to Breconshire
to take up the quieter occupation of a country doctor. His reading of Herbert's *The Temple* led to a Christian conversion and a wholehearted dedication to religious verse. Traherne, whose works were not discovered until the late nineteenth century (1896; published, 1903) spent most of his life after leaving Oxford as an obscure Anglican rector at Credenhill in Herefordshire, and later as a private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, lord keeper of the great seal. Likewise, we recall that Watkins left Cambridge in 1926 (after less than a year), because he found it aesthetically and spiritually disappointing, took up the relatively mundane job of cashier at Lloyd's Bank, and underwent a significant spiritual regeneration that transformed his poetry.

Though not a direct response to war, Vaughan's and Watkins' retreat into rural seclusion and exclusive focus on timeless themes can be seen in the context of a war-torn society. Vaughan retired to Breconshire after the English Civil War, while Watkins' long career in the bank was interrupted by a five-year interlude (1940-1945) in the R.A.F. Intelligence. Though not by any means a "war poet" in the sense that Wilfred Owen was, Watkins greatly admired Owen and wrote a long essay on him (circa 1936) originally entitled "The Poetry of Wilfred Owen."\(^7\) Watkins too abhorred the violence and waste of war and rejected as mistaken the idea of "art for art's sake," speaking in his prose of the danger of "the betrayal of Life by Art."\(^8\) He himself addressed the issue of war directly in several poems, "Sea-Music," "The Broken Sea" (IV) and "Unveiling the Statue" (LU, p. 53). Yet ultimately, Watkins avoided topical
references and direct political comment out of a belief that the best way to respond to chaos is by affirming the religious value of true art and its essential relationship to life lived in time.

Vaughan's "Thalia Rediviva," a Virgilian sequence of pastoral poems named after the Muse of comedy, reflects his choice of the country over the city. Similarly, Watkins' decision to remain on Gower enabled him to direct his attention to the vision of a natural landscape fraught with higher significance. Like Vaughan (as opposed to Herbert), his landscapes, though symbolic, are distinctive and realistically conceived. Watkins' greatest debt to Vaughan did not come through "Olar Iscanus" or the Virgilian pastorals, however, but from his reading of Silex Scintillans (the "fiery flint" or stone struck by God from man's stony heart). It can be established with certainty that he owned a personal copy of Vaughan's well-known religious lyrics. Yet there are further parallels to be drawn between the two poets when considering the lesser-known Vaughan of the elegies, Latin translations and meditative prose. Like Vaughan, Watkins gave his continued attention to translations of the classical poets, and like him he also wrote a number of poems in the elegiac mode, as noted in Chapter III. Watkins' philosophical prose pieces, though fragmentary, share with Vaughan's devotional prose, "The Mount of Olives, or Solitary Devotions" (1652), a strong sense of the need to withdraw from the world in order to develop the inward and spiritual self. This kind of deliberate withdrawal to achieve intensity is reflected in both poetry, prose and life-style.
Many critics have noted that Vaughan's poems often begin strongly, but trail off into the less intense or the prosaic as the original impetus dissipates. This is also a characteristic of some of Watkins' more visionary efforts. The long lyrics from *LV*, "Yeats in Dublin," "Sea-Music for My Sister Travelling" and "The Broken Sea" are full of passages of vigorous lyrical beauty within the context of some less successful writing. "Sea-Music," for instance, has been criticised for syntactical obscurity and a tendency to ramble. Like Vaughan, Watkins has been seen as a poet of intense beginnings, brilliant passages and memorable phrases. For he quite consciously pursues what he calls in "Bread and the Stars," "Wisdom...hid in crumbs," rather than coherent architectural structures. Yet I would qualify the above critique by suggesting that he overcomes the tendency toward diffuseness and verbal obscurity in the later poems, which are generally tighter, more condensed and refined efforts. I hope to be able to illustrate this point through example in the next chapter. I would add here that just as Vaughan was spiritually and stylistically influenced in a dramatic way by his predecessor Herbert, but managed to alter all of Herbert's he borrowed through his unique individuality, so Watkins was deeply influenced by Yeats' style and themes, but emerges with a distinctly individual vision and voice.

Some of the earliest passages from Watkins' poetry describing the celestial world of whiteness occur in "Sea-Music" and "The Broken Sea" from *LV*. Earlier examples can be found in the "Mari Lwyd" where the Mari is associated both with the

In some ways it represents Watkins' effort to explore a moment of spiritual crisis at sea like that of the Franciscan nuns in Hopkins' "Wreck of the Deutchland," one of Watkins' favorite poems. Breathlessly long sentences and complex internal and end-rhymes mark this as a virtuoso technical achievement among the early poems. Lines like, "But the crust breaks in Christ's original radium" (p. 30), are both startlingly fresh and traditionally eucharistic. The poem culminates in a grand invocation to light:

```
Signs of the heavens, the Zodiac,
Flood of the crystalline, white, unending Way
Ascending through colossal night
From breath abandoned which believes
The last blown seashell cast up on the bay:
Come down, I say,
Deluge of light, and drown the words' inflection,
Rush through the luminous coiled, vermilion chambers,
And ruin all the mind remembers;
Come down, great Resurrection,
Swing up the clarion,
Wake all the dead. (LU, pp. 33-34)
```

As in Vaughan's well-known poem, "The World," mortality comes face to face with eternity imagined in the Dantesque vision of a Ptolemaic universe of crystalline spheres or rings. Watkins' "crystalline, white, unending Way" is much like Vaughan's "Ring of pure and endless light." And Watkins' poem, like "The World," is Platonic in its desire to transcend mortal
memory in the pure light of eternity, or to "ruin all the mind remembers." The primary difference in the movement of the two poems is that Vaughan, after considering the various "estates" or conditions of spiritual darkness represented by the emblematic Petrarchan "lover," the "darksome states-man," and the "fearful miser," longs to be rapt as Christ's "Bride" into the "Ring" or spheres of eternity that drive time; whereas in Watkins' poem the speaker asks to be inundated with light from above in an apocalyptic deluge. In other words, Vaughan presents the soul's longing to ascend or be taken up into heaven, while Watkins asks heaven ("the great Resurrection") to descend into time like the New Jerusalem or bride of Revelation 21. In both poems, the Platonic-Christian imagery of light and whiteness is central. Perhaps the ascent into light and the descent of light can be seen ultimately as reciprocal and complementary motions viewed from different perspectives, and amounting equally to a changed awareness.

In "The Broken Sea," a poem about the birth of Watkins' godchild to his friend Francis Dafau-Labeyrie in Paris during the war, Watkins writes of white light in the context of the belief that every birth is a divine birth. Here, heavenly light streams from the Christlike infant born in time:

A cradle in darkness, white.  
It must be heavenly.  Light  
Must stream from it, that white sheet  
A pavilion of wonder....

The nocturnal flight of the breath, and the ear as still  
As a listening shell  
Lost in the crystalline heaven....  (LV, pp. 37-38)
Watkins, Vaughan and Traherne all share the Platonic sense that the soul retains a shadowy recollection of eternity when it first descends into time, conjoined with the Christian notion derived from the gospels that the child is particularly close to God. As Vaughan expresses it in "The Retreat," "Happy those early days! when I / Shined in my Angel-infancy ...," and Traherne in "The Third Century" (1): "Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and Curious Apprehensions of the World, than I when I was a child." At the close of "The Broken Sea" the child wakes to time to find that she has lost the whole and intuitive memory of eternity: "You wake, and great recollection trembles away" (LV, p. 61). Yet her loss is tempered by the poet's realization that time is a dimension in which that knowledge can be "recollected" in the Platonic sense.

The Death Bell and Cypress and Acacia contain several poems which develop the light and star imagery of the previously-noted passages from LV. In "The Turning of the Stars" (DB, p. 23), Watkins views the great galactic "disc of light" (stanza 5) from the perspectives of Ptolemy, Copernicus and modern astronomers, incorporating Dante and Raphael as representatives of artists who achieved a unified vision from their time and place. He concludes with a description of the modern "mathematic" heavens that suggests the old sense of the numinous and holy yet survives. Again, we are reminded of Vaughan's "Ring" of eternity by Watkins' "wheel of air":
I see the wide world sink, and rise again,  
Hung in pure night, ablaze  
With million worlds united in a look  
Where boundless glory astounds the eye of the brain.

Verse is a part of silence. I have known  
Always that declamation is impure.  
This language best fits prayer,  
The crystal night  
Teeming with worlds in mathematic height.  
Prodigious darkness guards its undertone,  
And though the wheel of air,  
Seems to leave nothing earthly to endure,  
The likeness, not the original, is gone. (DB, p. 25)

The modern fear of a vast and possibly indifferent cosmos, and the vision of the world as only one of a "million worlds," no longer the center of the universe as in the old Ptolemaic view, leaves the poet relatively undismayed. For he suggests in the closing lines, through the Platonic concept of original and copy, that the "earthly" world, however dwarfed by infinitude, endures in a timeless dimension. The corollary of this is that a prayer-like poetry capable of expressing awe and reverence is the best counterpart to the silences of such a cosmos.

Watkins' brief reference to "the fountain" earlier (stanza 8) is important as one of many such allusions throughout his work. As I have noted elsewhere, the fountain represents both the continuous wellspring of art and the interior sources of man's (and nature's) psychic and spiritual life:

Leaves cover up the well.  
And buds begin  
To break, and hide the fountain's origin.  
Spring behind Spring, star behind star, unseen,  
Revolve in seed and shell. (DB, p. 25)

The Platonic symbol of the poet as a living fountain of inspiration, ultimately derived from Plato's Laws IV, 719, was used by both Vaughan and Traherne in similar contexts. Vaughan's
"Regeneration" presents a fountain in a symbolic spice garden like the enclosed garden of the Song of Songs. It is the "earthly paradise" of man's lost innocence to which the poet arrives in his allegorical pilgrimage. There he finds a "little fountain" full of bright and dark stones, representing the souls of men in their various conditions of enlightenment and ignorance, wakefulness and sleep:

Only a little fountain lent
Some use for ears,
And on the dumb shades language spent
The music of her tears...

At the end of "The Timber," Vaughan speaks of the "chaste fountains" of eternal life that "flow not till we die"; and in "The Dwelling Place" of the "happy, secret fountain," that might have lodged Christ in his sojourn on earth:

What happy, secret fountain,
Fair shade, or mountain,
Whose undiscovered virgin glory
Boasts it this day, though not in story,
Was then thy dwelling?

The upshot of "The Dwelling-Place" is that Christ himself, that living fountain, now dwells interiorly in the heart of man.

Traherne speaks of "Lov" as the "fountain...not Known," a "fountain of Delights" which is "plainly shewn" to the child. And in "The Second Century" (41), he states that, "Lov in the Fountain, and Lov in the Stream are both the same," developing an Augustinian Trinitarian concept of the three aspects of God as "Lov begetting, a Lov begotten, and a Lov Proceeding." The implication is that God is present both as interior wellspring or source, as outer manifestation or stream, and as mediating and sustaining agent—a vital power
at all levels of life and consciousness.

Though not as theologically complex, Watkins' "Child of the Fountain" combines the symbolism of the "stars" with that of "the fountain," and identifies the child clearly with the infant Christ:

Child of the fountain falling late  
From spent October through the gust  
And frosty spears of Herod's hate,  
Protected by the turtle's wing.... (BW, p. 23)

The poem concludes:

O, how sweet upon our lips  
Fall these drops, in time's eclipse,  
Child of the fountain falling late  
And image of the moving stars. (BW, p. 23)

His phrase "time's eclipse" here may be an indirect echo of Traherne, who writes in "The Third Century" (7) of the child's loss of timelessness as an eclipse of light:

The first Light which shined in my Infancy in its Primitive and Innocent Clarity was totally eclipsed....

It is notable that Watkins often focuses on the man-made fountain within a cultivated garden or city as in the early "The Fountain" or in "Peace in the Welsh Hills." The use of the fountain in this context indicates a concern with the world of art and artifact as a symbol for the holy city or "New Jerusalem" which must be begun to be built in time. The imaginative power of "Peace in the Welsh Hills" lies in its ability to shift back and forth between a pastoral landscape in Wales and the poet's remembrance of an Italian fountain in an Umbrian town:

To live entwined in pastoral loveliness  
May rest the eyes, throw pictures on the mind,  
But most we need a metaphor of stone  
Such as those painters had whose mountain-cities
Cast long, low shadows on the Umbrian hills.
There, in some courtyard on the cobbled stone,
A fountain plays, and through a cherub's mouth
Ages are linked by water in the sunlight.

All of good faith that fountain may recall,
Woman, musician, boy, or else a scholar
Reading a Latin book. They seem distinct,
And yet are one, because tranquility
Affirms the Judgment. So, in these Welsh hills,
I marvel, waking from a dream of stone,
That such a peace surrounds me, while the city
For which all long has never yet been built. (CA, p. 31)

Just as for Vaughan and Traherne, the image of the fountain,
both as natural spring and man-made artifact, appears again and
again in a theological or mystical context in Watkins' poetry,
carrying with it all of its associated information.

"Before a Birth" (CA, p. 48) is a more personal lyric to
the poet's wife. Yet like "The Turning of the Stars" it ad­
dresses the question of how human events can have any signifi­
cance when set in the context of the vast astronomical spaces.
For Watkins, hope lies in the recognition that both earthly and
heavenly motions obey a single law:

Hear the finger of God, that has fixed the pole of the
heavens.
There the Pleiades spin, and Orion, that great hunter.
Stars silver the night, where Hercules moves with Arc­
turus.
Spawning systems amaze: they respond to an ordered
music.
Ultimate distance vibrates, close to that intimate string.
(CA, p. 48)

In "The Constellation," Vaughan writes in terms similar to those
of Watkins of the ordered motions of the stars. Both poets
employ astrological symbolism:

Fair, ordered lights (whose motion without noise
Resembles those true joys
Whose spring is on that hill where you do grow
And we here taste sometimes below,)
With what exact obedience do you move
Now beneath, and now above,
And in your vast progressions overlook
The darkest night, and closest nook.  

In stanza three of Watkins' poem, the poet reminds his pregnant wife that "the stars of infinite distance" have need of earth; that man and cosmos are linked indissolubly because of what Thomas and Henry Vaughan would have called in more Hermetic language, the "doctrine of mystical correspondences" between the world "above" and the world "below." Here Watkins speaks of the correspondence of "time to the timeless":

Love, your measure is full: the stars of infinite distance,
Needing the shade of a bird to knit our time to the timeless,
Fell to-night through the dusk.

The poet has witnessed the falling of the stars, and thus can speak to his wife of the mystery of eternity's entrance into time—which is also the mystery of birth. For every birth is a descent of a timeless soul into time. His wife's fruitfulness, then, becomes a smaller repetition of the fruitfulness of the "spawning systems," both stars and mortals moving in response to "an ordered music." Her carrying and nourishing of new life is sacred, even sacramental; for her body is compared in the final lines to the "earthenware jug" which bears the water that Jesus transformed into wine at the wedding at Cana in the gospel of John:

Late I can hear one walk, a step, and a fruitful silence.
Touch, finger of Wine, this well of crystalline water
And this earthenware jug, that knows the language of silence;
Touch, for darkness is near, that brings your glory to bed. (CA, pp. 48-49)

In "A Christening Remembered" (LU, p. 87), Watkins speaks
similarly of his wife's pregnant body as "a pitcher doomed to wine." Here in "Before a Birth," he is relatively successful in descending from the cosmological imagery with which the poem opens to the human situation of its close.

"The Forge of the Solstice" (CA, p. 68) alludes to three artists and personal friends of Watkins, David Jones (stanza 1), Ceri Richards, painter and musician (stanza 2), and the painter and friend of Dylan Thomas, Alfred Janes (stanza 3) as representatives of "the artificer" or artist who is a mediator of eternal wisdom. The final stanza combines the astral event of the changing of the equinoxes with the Blakean notion of the artist as a smith working at a fiery forge at the ground of creation. The idea of "bend[ing] the solstice like a bow" suggests the defeat (or from another point of view the regeneration) of time by art:

Love gives their art a body in which thought  
Draws, not from time but wisdom, till it bend  
The solstice like a bow, and bring time round  
White with young stars, quick from the forge they have found. (CA, p. 69)

Watkins uses the word "quick" in its older sense of "living" as Vaughan does in "Quickness": But life is, what none can express, / A quickness, which my God hath kissed. The reference to "white...young stars" again reminds us of Vaughan's imagery in poems like "The World," "The Constellation" and "They are all gone into the world of light!"

"Bread and the Stars" is one of Watkins' most serenely moving and evocative poems. It is Vaughanesque for its incorporation of Christian religious symbolism in the context of a
celestial starscape, in its quietly ecstatic opening and in its presentation in theological terms of the dialectic of time and eternity. The poem begins with a view of the stars in a wintry landscape:

How clear the stars to-night,  
All the bright heaven how still!  
Under dense groves of white  
This glistening sheet displays  
A frost of spellbound streams.  
All is at rest. I gaze  
Out of the paths and beams  
Of night's unresting mill. (CA, p. 79)

Watkins takes up the mythic Icelandic, Norse and Medieval symbol of time as the gigantic starry millwheel of the heavens, grinding out the seasons, days and hours of the creation. In *Hamlet's Mill*, Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend point out that Amlodhi, a figure from Icelandic and Norse myth, was the original owner of the "fabled mill" which "ground out peace and plenty" in good times and salt in bad. They argue in the above work on the transmission of human knowledge through myth that the mill imagery stands for "an astronomical process, the secular shifting of the sun through the signs of the zodiac which determines world-ages."27 The precise imagery of the poem suggests that Watkins also may have been aware of the esoteric Medieval tradition of Christ as the cosmic mill of heaven grinding out the sacramental bread and wine. An iconographic representation of the "Mystical Mill" is on display at Vézelay (Basilique de Madeleine) in Burgundy. St. Ambrose, basing himself on John 12:24 and 6:33, and describing Christ as a grain figure, may be the ultimate source for this icon.28 It is obvious that Watkins here combines the ancient
and universal symbol of the cosmic mill with the pre-Christian
and Christian symbols of the sacred bread and wine of the com-
munal meal, and places them in the context of a cosmic
starscape.

Celestial "white" takes on a sinister aspect in the next
stanza, connoting frost, winter and death as in the "Ballad of
the Mari Lwyd" where the pale Mari is associated both with
death and life, horror and sanctity. As Watkins writes in
stanza two:

So deadly white this frost
It kills both bird and mouse
Hid where the swedes are tossed
Into an iron barn.
Owls upon vermin feast.

Here the destructive aspects of white frost are brought to-
gether with the predatory side of nature. Watkins proceeds in
the next stanza to speak of those who died as souls who have
reunited with "the inane" in the sense of the "infinite spaces"
of the heavens. These "dead" are now part of the "white mill-
stream" of the milky way:

Nothing now comes between
The inane and this hard crust
Close to the roots of men
As shrouds are to their dead.
How precious now the loss
Of souls whose printless tread
Where many footprints cross
Takes the whole night on trust.

How full the clustered sky!
Beyond the uncounted crop
Of stars I still descry
Where the white millstream runs
Glittering in ghostly race
New multitudes of suns,
While here galactic space
Hangs, like a frozen drop. (CA, pp. 78-80)
Faced with the overwhelming endlessness of the frozen heavens, Watkins states that the human faculties are numbed at man's apparent insignificance.

The same unerring will
That called conception forth
Now bids the bloodstream freeze.

In his direct confrontation of the possibility of the meaninglessness of human endeavor, Watkins is particularly a man of his time here. Yet the poem's approach to resolution lies in a traditional vision of man placed within the confines of time under the guidance and control of a beneficent power. The turning point of the poem comes in stanza six when the poet begins to accept man's earthbound limitation as necessary to his sustenance and growth:

Yet men to Earth are bound,
To heats from which they grew.
They sift the stars who pound
The corn with leavening yeast
Till the whole bread is made;
And plenty crowns their feast,
Wine from a cellar's shade
Preserving all that's true.

The imagery is sacramental, having both pre-Christian and Christian eucharistic overtones. We discover that the cosmic mill grinds out the staples of man's spiritual need--his "daily bread" and "wine." The biblical symbols of corn, leavening yeast and bread are drawn principally from Christ's parables of the kingdom, and the bread and wine from the event of the "last supper." Watkins unites the metaphor of the mill with his Christian symbolism by arguing that those who accept their place on earth by participating in the pounding out of corn and making of bread find that they also "sift the stars,"

that is, have relationship to and comprehension of the larger order, since microcosm and macrocosm are ultimately related. In the BBC film, Under a Bright Heaven, Watkins commented that in "Bread and the Stars" he wished to convey the way in which the "words of the Christian gospel outweigh all that is speculative," and to suggest that those words give man assurance when looking out into the vast spaces that he is "not insignificant."29 I have hinted earlier that Watkins views time from two, noncontradictory perspectives: as an enemy to be defeated, a condition of restriction leading to death; and as a chastener, refiner and processor of souls. From the latter viewpoint time is the necessary condition by which eternity can be mediated and known. In this poem the second view prevails.

The reference to "the elect" in stanza seven reminds me of Vaughan's chosen "bride" who is wed to Christ in the "Ring" of eternity in "The World," which concludes: "This ring the
bride-groom did for none provide / But for his bride."30 Watkins writes:

None need look far for proof
That passion bears the sky.
The elect, beneath time's roof
Dropping from steadfast eyes
The plummet of their peace,
Hold to each man that dies
A measure of increase,
A cup to judge life by. (CA, p. 80)

I do not believe that Vaughan's language, any more than Watkins' is meant to imply a predeterministic view of salvation in the cruder sense. Just as the bride in Vaughan's poem rises into the "ring" because of her active choice of "true light" over "dark night" (stanza 4), so Watkins' speaker defines the
"elect, beneath time's roof" as those who have actively chosen to receive the freely given bread and cup, which they now give just as freely to "each man that dies." He draws forth the universal meaning of the communion feast as God's spiritual provision for man's immediate need in time and place:

Bread of dear life, and cup
Or glass made dull by breath,
Those spinning worlds far up
Whose fiery swarms recede,
All cannot match the weight
Of your immediate need,
Brought on a man-fired plate
To break his fast to death. (CA, p. 81)

With a play of words on "crust" similar to that of Vaughan on the word "Ring" in "The World" (indicating both the ring of light and the marriage ring of the bride), Watkins reveals in the last stanza that the wintry "hard crust" of frost is metaphorically identical with the "crust" of sacramental bread. The speaker turns finally from the vast and solitary heavens which his finitude cannot ingest to the more immediate reality of the "crust" of frost (representing the sacramental bread) placed before him:

Clear night, great distances,
Faith, like a pestle, drums
Your baffling silences.
Hard though the wintry crust,
What truth has man but loaves?
Bread will compel man's trust,
And not the starry groves:
Wisdom is hid in crumbs. (CA, p. 81)

By turning back to time, Watkins is not rejecting the idea that man has a place in the cosmic order, but arguing that he must direct his attention to earth and his situation in the immediate environment before he can ascend to the "baffling silences" of the stars. For Watkins, the symbols of the Christian
eucharistic feast provided a means of reaffirming the value of time.

Some of Watkins' poems of grief for the dead (including Thomas) are strikingly like Vaughan's elegiac lyrics mourning the death of his brother William, "Joy of my life! while left me here," "Silence, and stealth of days!" and "I walked the other day to spend my hour." Watkins' "Gravestones" (LU, p. 73), for instance, identifies a flower (the sunflower of the last stanza) with the life of "the dead" in the same way Vaughan does in "I walked." Vaughan's speaker digs around the roots in the soil where a "gallant flower" (identified with his late brother) once flourished, seeking in nature for an appropriate emblem of the departed. Ultimately, he turns away from the "masques and shadows" of nature to seek his brother's living soul "above" in God. The poem concludes:

> And from this care, where dreams and sorrows reign  
> Lead me above  
> Where light, joy, leisure, and true comforts move  
> Without all pain,  
> There, hid in thee, show me his life again  
> At whose dumb urn  
> Thus all the year I mourn.  

Watkins' poem not only employs a similar verse form of iambic pentameter lines alternating with shorter iambic lines of two and three feet, and similar imagery of rooted plants and light, but traces the ascent of the dead from nature to their transcendent home. At the end of the poem he speaks of the souls of the "meek" who are "blest" as follows:

> Yet they have lover's ends,  
> Lose to hold fast, as violets root in frost.  
> With stronger hands  
> I see them rise through all that they have lost.
I take a sunflower down,
With light's first faith persuaded and entwined.
Break, buried dawn,
For the dead live, and I am of their kind. (LU, pp. 73-74)

Both poems reveal an intense identification with the dead, and dwell on the close relationship between the two realms of life and death.

I wish to look finally at some ways in which Watkins' use of nature lends itself to comparison with that of Vaughan. In "Birds of Joy and Care," one of his many bird poems, he uses the way larks, ptarmigans, and plovers will sacrifice themselves to guard their young as a metaphor for Christian love. He also develops this theme in "Art and the Ravens" (DB, p. 57) and "Means of Protection" (F, p. 60). The title of the poem may be an echo of a line from Vaughan's "The Timber" where that poet speaks approvingly of the man who has abandoned "vain joys and vain cares" (stanza 8). Watkins' poem, like another by Vaughan, "The Bird," exploits some of the possible analogies between the spiritual, human and natural orders. In both "Birds of Joy and Care" and "The Bird," for instance, the "birds of joy" represent that part of the created order which freely celebrates God. Watkins contrasts the birds to men whose songs all too often "Follow the fashion's guise." We may recall that in Vaughan's "And do they so?", the seventeenth-century poet also laments man's failure to match the creatures and sentient natural things in praise:

I would I were a stone, or tree,
Or flower by pedigree,
Or some poor high-way herb, or spring
To flow, or bird to sing!
In "Man," he compares the "birds like watchful clocks" which are in innate and instinctual harmony with the Creator to "restless and irregular" man, who is so made that he can find no rest in the world until he returns to his "Maker." The figure of St. Francis in Watkins' poem serves to draw forth this same sense that man's essential business is to realign himself with God. St. Francis speaks at the poem's close:

....'O Christ, hear me:
Your angels in the cloud
Take from this tree
The harp they play that gives these wings their symmetry.

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, p. 76)

The saint prays to Christ that the birds may continue to be living symbols of that which man's art and life should be—a spontaneous and freely given act of praise. He asks that they may continue to make what the Medievals called the "naturalis musica mundi."

"The Tributary Seasons" (CA, p. 70) is one of Watkins' many seasonal celebrations, moving from autumn to winter and summer, and then back again to autumn to make a complete circle. The section on summer as "That Eden state of lasting time...." when men heap their "tributes, bread and wine...." concludes with a passage reminiscent of some of Vaughan's more Hermetic statements. "Time's keys" here (as we may recall through association with the Zacchaeus poems) are the floating seeds of the sycamore tree—the "keys" or seeds that unlock the "year's eternal forms." Like Vaughan, Watkins is a mystical
poet in his endless fascination with the hidden and inner life of things:

At last late leaves bright-coloured bring,
Turning time's keys,
Those fruits foreshadowed by the Spring.
Acorns and nuts restore their trees.
As certain jewels have the power
To magnetize and guide the hour,
So seeds before our eyes are strewn
Fast hidden in the pod's cocoon. (CA, p. 72)  (italics mine)

And like his predecessor, he approaches the mystery of growth from within the seed through the Hermetic image of magnetic stones or jewels that "magnetize and guide the hour" from within. We may recall that Vaughan uses the symbol of the lodestone or magnet similarly in "Cock-Crowing" to suggest that the bird, a Christian emblem of resurrection, carries within itself a "seed" or alchemical "grain" of light that draws its being to the "Father of lights" (see James 1:17) like a magnet to dense metal:

Father of lights! what sunny seed,
What glance of day hast thou confined
Into this bird? To all the breed
This busy ray thou hast assigned;
Their magnetism works all night,
And dreams of Paradise and light.34

And Traherne too takes up the symbol of the magnet in "The First Century" (2) where love is that power which draws man to God like iron to a lodestone.

A final symbol from nature used both by Vaughan and Watkins is that of the waterfall, illustrated here by Vaughan's "The Water-fall" and Watkins' "Waterfalls" (A, p. 11). Both poets are intrigued with the mystical element of water, whether in the form of natural spring, fountain, fall or sea. Watkins' poem
is about a return to a scene of early childhood, and concentrates on an exact presentation of remembered detail:

Always in that valley in Wales I hear the noise
   Of waters falling.
   There is a clump of trees
   We climbed for nuts; and high in the trees the boys
   Lost in the rookery's cries
   Would cross, and branches cracking under their knees

Would break, and make in the winter wood new gaps.

(A, p. 11)

Vaughan's poem, on the other hand, develops a consciously theological distinction between water viewed as a symbol of human transience, and water signifying the "Fountains of Life," the eternal wellsprings in Christ. He writes:

As this loud brook's incessant fall
   In streaming rings restagnates all,
   Which reach by course the bank, and then
   Are no more seen, just so pass men.
   O my invisible estate,
   My glorious liberty, still late!
   Thou art the channel my soul seeks,
   Not this with cataracts and creeks.35

Vaughan ends by choosing the spiritual over the natural waterfall, while Watkins sets up no such dichotomy. Yet he does associate the memory of "waters falling" with the inevitable passing of time in a way similar to that of Vaughan. The poem succeeds in creating an intense nostalgia for what seems irrecoverably lost.

In "The Replica," however, Watkins establishes the waterfall clearly as a symbol not only of transience and loss, but of that in nature which is self-sacrificing and self-renewing, and hence emblematic of the Christian life. In stanza two, he uses the waterfall to develop his by now familiar argument that things in time are "replicas" or patterns of the eternal world.
He uses the foal, as in the other "mare and foal" poems, as "the perfect pattern" of foalness in stanza one, and reborn man as the replica of Christ in stanza three. The waterfall becomes, paradoxically, a replica of both man's transience and his timelessness, a symbol of change within an abiding unity:

Such is the waterfall; and though we watch it
Falling from rock to rock and always changing,
Cast to a whirlpool, pent by rock, pursuing
A reckless path, headlong in radiant mist
Leaping within the roar of its own chains,
We know it lives by being consumed, we know
Its voice is new and ancient, and its force
Flies from a single impulse that believes,
Nothing is vain, though all is cast for sorrow.
There hangs the image of our life, there flies
The image of our transience. (CA, pp. 87-88)

Vaughan too uses his "water-fall" in a similarly complex way when he suggests that water runs not merely to its death, but back to its source in God. From this perspective water becomes a "useful element and clear" (line 23) like the "Fountains of Life" that go with the Lamb of John's Revelation. He writes:

Dear stream! dear bank, where often I
Have sat, and pleased my pensive eye,
Why, since each drop of thy quick store
Runs thither, whence it flowed before,
Should poor souls fear a shade or night,
Who came (sure) from a sea of light? 36

For both poets, waterfalls are what Vaughan calls, "mystical deep streams! / Such as dull man can never find / Unless the spirit lead his mind...." 37

Traherne, a poet also obsessed with the whiteness of innocence, springing fountains of everlasting life, and white light, is perhaps closest to Watkins among the seventeenth-century religious poets in the essential clarity and simplicity of his vision. Watkins would have identified with him as a
spokesman of the nonpriestly, personal mystical tradition, as the son of a Hereford shoemaker who remained uninfluential during his lifetime, and as a theocentric poet in search of the infinite, the absolute within the soul of man. Watkins also shares with Traherne many of the Platonic and Neoplatonic sources mentioned earlier. Traherne's sources include Plato, Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus, Augustine, Ficino, Pico and the Cambridge Platonists. Both textual and external evidence indicate not only that Traherne was familiar with the works of contemporary Platonists like Whichcote, Smith, Culverwel, Cudworth and More, but that he kept notebooks on Ficino and incorporated ideas from Pico's Oratio de Dignitate Hominis into "The Fourth Century" of his Centuries of Meditations. I would argue that Watkins most clearly approaches Traherne in his use of an abstract, intangible vocabulary with many references to eternity, light, the mind, the soul and so on, and in his sense of childhood as a state of original wholeness and purity. In the pages that remain, I shall be demonstrating these likenesses by looking at some of Watkins' poems on childhood and on his version of what Traherne calls the "kingly" or "royal estate" of man.

One of Watkins' poems from LU, "First Joy," takes up the theme of the essential joy of childhood in a way similar to that of Traherne in the Centuries and poems. Watkins' use of the child as a symbol of innocence and perfection can be traced throughout his work. He refers specifically to Traherne being with Wordsworth one of the great spokesmen for the sanctity of childhood in his Foreword to The Golden Age

The title of Watkins' poem, "First Joy," suggests an important passage in Traherne from "The Third Century" (2) where he describes the "first light" of infancy as follows:

All appeared New, and Strange at the first, inexpressibly rare, and Delightfull, and Beautifull. I was a little Stranger which at my Entrance into the World was Saluted and Surrounded with innumerable Joys. My knowledge was Divine. I knew by Intuition those things which since my Apostasie, I Collected again, by the Highest Reason. He goes on in that meditation (which so much resembles Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode") to emphasize how the "Estate of Innocence," man's lost Eden, is a condition of spontaneous praise:

I saw all in the Peace of Eden; Heaven and Earth did sing my Creators Praises and could not make more Melody to Adam, then to me. All Time was Eternity, and a Perpetual Sabbath. Is it not Strange, that an Infant should be Heir of the World, and see those Mysteries which the Books of the Learned never unfold? The above passages contain most of Traherne's central ideas on
childhood: the intuitiveness of original perception, the Pla­
tonic notion of the soul's recollection of eternity, and the
sense of man's eventual loss of Eden through an "apostasie" or
falling away of the soul in adulthood. In 3.7 we recall that
he describes this apostasy as an eclipse of the light. Though
Watkins would have found many of these ideas expressed with
equal power in the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Blake, it is
certain that he appreciated them here especially in their ear­
lier, more consciously theological context. In Watkins' poem,
"First Joy," the poet "recollects" childhood as a state where
time is eternity and a state of perpetual praise, a condition
where death is inconceivable:

First joy through eye and limb
Shoots upward. Groundroots drive
Through shadow and crust a sheath.
I praise God with my breath
As hares leap, fishes swim,
And bees bring honey to the hive.

On the sands, children pick
Bright shells, who stopping, know
Nothing of Earth's white dead;
They run with graceful thread
Of light, and are made quick
By earlier streams that sweetlier flow. (LU, p. 13)

Watkins follows those "earlier streams" back to his grand­
father's house in Carmarthen in "Returning to Goleufryn," one
of his few directly autobiographical poems. The poem (pub­
lished in 1948) bears thematic and imagistic similarities to
Thomas' "Fern Hill" (published in 1946 in Deaths and Entrances)
in its dreamlike recollection of childhood on an idyllic farm
associated with Eden, though it is uncertain which poem was
written first:
Returning to my grandfather's house, after this exile
From the coracle-river, long left with a coin to be good,
Returning with husks of those venturing ears for food
To lovely Carmarthen, I touch and remember the turnstile
Of this death-bound river....

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, p. 15)

"Goleufryn" is Welsh for "Hill of Light." The word "prodigal"
is a transferred epithet, suggesting the prodigality of the
speaker himself, who like the prodigal son of the parable (Luke
15), sat among the "husks" with swine (line 3) before returning
to his father's house. Watkins has returned "after this exile
/ From the coracle-river" to view again the paradisal world of
his youth. Biblical references to the house "shut, like a book
of the Psalms" and a "salmon" which "has swallowed the tribut-
money" (2.7) given to Peter in the gospel, reinforce the poet's
sense of the holy associated with the place, and also remind us
of Thomas' use of biblical imagery in "Fern Hill." The substi-
tution of verbal forms for adjectives as in "venturing ears"
also suggests Thomas' kind of word play, though both poets were
capable of this sort of verbal inventiveness. In Watkins' poem,
more than in Thomas', however, the poet appears as a wistful
outsider, shut out from bliss through what Traherne would call
his "apostasie." In all three poets, Watkins, Thomas and Tra-
erne, this defection is brought about not so much by "original
sin" as by the inevitability of growing up, that is, by time,
and the corrupting influence of the adult world, Traherne's
"outward Bondage of Opinion and Custom" (3.8). Watkins as the
returning prodigal realizes that Goleufryn itself, though still
retaining its childhood associations, is subject to corruption
and decay:

Yet now I am lost, lost in the water-wound looms
Where brief, square windows break on a garden's decay.
Gold butter is shining, the tablecloth speckled with crumbs.
The kettle throbs. In the calender harvest is shown,
Standing in sheaves.

The reference to the harvest "Standing in sheaves," like Traherne's remark on his childhood vision of the corn as "Orient and Immortal Wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown" (3.3), recalls the biblical metaphor of the harvest of souls in the gospels and suggests a timeless fulfillment. The clarity of Watkins' paradisal vision here is similar to that of Traherne, along with his sense of the difficulty of sustaining it into adulthood. In the last lines he states that he would not renounce the experiences and people ("souls") he has known in time, to regain his earlier innocence. The implication is clearly the Blakean one that a person cannot regain "Innocence" without passing through "Experience." He asks,

Which way would I do you wrong?
Low, crumbling doorway of the infirm to the mansions of evening,
And poor, shrunken furrow where the potatoes are sown,
I shall not unnumber one soul I have stood with and known
To regain your stars struck by horses, your sons of God breaking in song. (LU, p. 16)

The poem "Serena," celebrating the birth of Watkins' son Tristan, presents infancy as a state of spiritual wholeness. Like Traherne, he associates childhood with light—the primal light of the Logos that "shines in darkness" of the opening of John's gospel:

The cradle stirs.
There life, there innocence, there the miracle shines.
Old, he is old:
Life's earliest word, the first. Light has created him
Out of inscrutable deeps. (CA, p. 45)

The infant, ensconced safely in "calm," sails across the myth-
ical waters of chaos into time like a miniature Noah:

The source of time
Still binds the flying galaxies to rock.
Nothing shall change
The diamond fixed between vine-masted Noah
And the first deluge drop.

He will be calm
In the first calm that glittered before knowledge.
Nothing shall change
The Primum Mobile's effectual music
Planted within the breast.

He will be calm,
Not through a reason known to man, nor favour,
But through that gift
The first Cause left, printing upon his forehead
The word "Serena". (CA, pp. 46-47)

The reference to "vine-masted Noah" is traditionally typologi-
cal, being both an allusion to Noah, keeper of vines in the Old
Testament, and Christ, the true vine of Israel, hung from a
mast-like vine or tree--the cross. The imprint of the "First
Cause" in the forehead of the child indicates that each soul
is a primordial being whose mind and soul mirror the eternal.
Watkins, like Traherne, develops his Platonic ideas in a Chris-
tian context. He suggests here that the Aristotelian
and Medieval "Primum Mobile" or "first moved" that generates
the music of the spheres dwells inwardly in the "breast" of the
child. This sense that each soul is a world, a sphere or a
replication of eternity is one of Traherne's most powerful and
all-pervasive themes. He writes in "The Second Century" (23),
for instance, that,
Man is made in the Image of God, and therefore is a Mirror and Representativ of Him. 47

And he speaks in the poem "Innocence" of how the soul is "A little Adam in a Sphere." 48 Similarly, Watkins' notion in "Serena" that the pure image of God planted within the soul is paradise is central to his religious vision. It determines his belief that the image of God in man's consciousness is his most innate and fundamental "Idea" in both the Jungian and Platonic sense. In "For a Christening" (CA, p. 84), Watkins uses Traherne's image of the soul as sphere as expressed in "The Second Century" (80) where he writes:

....my Soul is an Infinite Sphere in a Centre...
God hath made your Spirit a Centre in Eternity Comprehending all.... 49

The idea of the soul as sphere can be traced to Platonic and Neoplatonic sources (see Keith Critchlow's The Soul as Sphere and Androgyne, Golgonooza Press, 1980) and has been a part of Christian mysticism throughout the centuries. Setting the above passage against the fifth stanza of Watkins' poem where he describes the christening of a child, the parallel is obvious in both concept and symbol chosen:

Worshippers here,
We are come to see that prism [the sun's]
Take fire, where Christ's own tear
In your baptism
Consecrates, first each drop, then all the sphere.

(CA, p. 84)

In "Earth-Dress" (BML, p. 45) and "The Immortal in Nature" (CA, p. 53), Watkins develops his sense of what Traherne calls "the Royal Estate" of man—the idea (derived in part from the book of Revelation) that man at his innermost centre is enthroned with God in divine majesty. In "The Fourth Century"
(71-72) Traherne writes, "To sit in the Throne of God is to inhabit Eternity." This lost image of man as king or prince at the centre of creation, Traherne argues, has been hidden from man by his "apostasie"; yet it is possible for him to recover it. In "Thanksgivings for the Body," for example, he describes the soul's "Regent Life....That makes our centre equal to the Heavens," and in "The First Century" he promises to unfold the sense in which man can discover himself as "heir of the world." In "The Second Century" (92), he develops the theme that man's interior being opens out into timelessness, marveling at "the unsearchable Extent and illimited Greatness of each soul." And he writes in "The Third Century" (46) that his "Study of Felicity" has enabled him to regain the "kingly life" of eternity while still in time:

So that through His [God's] blessing I liv a free and a Kingly Life, as if the World were turned again into Eden, or much more, as it is this Day.

Watkins uses a similar notion in "Earth-Dress," relating it to Blake's concept of spiritual or "fourfold man" (1.10). Here, like Traherne, he associates regenerated man with symbols of royalty and kingship:

But the spirit is loyal
To what, before time stood,
Was single and royal,
Alone in multitude. (BML, p. 45)

Traherne also emphasizes the singleness of the soul in its pristine state, and the solitariness it must endure in quest of perfection when he writes in "The Fourth Century" (13):

A man that studies Happiness must sit alone like a Sparrow upon the house Top, and like a Pelican in the Wilderness.
Again in "The Immortal in Nature" Watkins speaks like Traherne of nature's royal estate; for with his predecessor he believes that nature, like man, has a timeless core encompassed by eternity:

Where time is not, all nature is undone,
For nature grows in grandeur of decay.
These royal colours that the leaves put on
Mark the year living in his kingly way;
Yet, when he dies, not he but time is gone. (CA, p. 53)

I would argue, in fact, that it is in Watkins' constant recurrence to the idea of a timeless paradise--partly attainable in and through time--that he most resembles this most mystical of the seventeenth-century poets discussed.

In summary, I wish to suggest that Watkins is not only a metaphysical poet, but a theological one in the sense that his imagination expresses itself within the symbols and paradigms of a traditionally theistic, Christological view of the world. By his own definition in his prose, he sets up "theological" poetry (like that found in the book of Job) as his ideal:

Poetry is really closer to theology [than to philosophy]. The Book of Job is full of theology, and it is full of contradictions, the clash of imagination with greater imagination, the journey of integrity through the dark night of the soul, the equating of arrogance and humility, the reconciliation of opposites through the unknown dimensions of forgiveness and love. This is poetry.

He is arguing here that poetry (which is akin to theology in its use of myth and symbol) is distinct from philosophy in its full-bodied expression of the complexities of life, the Yeatsian "clash of opposites," and in its full inclusion of the human condition with all its contradictions and paradoxes. He is speaking of a theology of universal poetic symbols within a
meaningful context of belief, rather than a theology based on purely rational structures.

Though poems like "The Strangled Prayer" and "Dust in the Balance" address the issue explored in Job of man's spiritual dilemma, and though Watkins was deeply moved by the struggles of the Christian existentialist, Kierkegaard, more often his poems move toward the moment of release from tension and conflict when the soul, almost unexpectedly, enters on the borders of paradise. In terms of the above-cited statement on poetic theology, Watkins' deepest concern is with what he calls "the unknown dimensions of forgiveness and love." He stands as one of the few modern poets concerned with "conversing with Paradise" in any authentic sense. When speaking of religious authenticity here I mean that Watkins' Christian symbols are not merely arbitrary counters of his imagination, but reflect his deepest grasp of the very structure of the world. Rosemond Tuve, in her study of Herbert distinguishes Herbert's use of religious symbols from that of many of the moderns:

Not only acceptance of universal meaningfulness but systematic correspondences between meanings--these are basic assumptions regarding the nature of reality which underlie all writing or other arts in the symbolical mode....

Nevertheless, although there are many such patterns of symbols, it is necessary to believe whatever set belongs to us. One desperate modern substitute for belief--investigating and comparing the various sets of meaningful symbols, and then dressing ourselves up with a set we find "interesting"--is just another form of the descriptive, critical, rationalistic approach to what is real.57

Watkins "believes in" his symbols, that is, in the realities to which they refer, in the manner of a Herbert or a Vaughan or Traherne, and is unlike those among the modern writers who
do not. His relation to the older writers, then, is not merely a matter of literary influence, but a sharing of a similar religious outlook which attracted him naturally to the kind of meditative structures, biblical symbols and theological insights with which they felt at home.

"Christ and Charon" is a fine example of a religious sonnet on the theme of the soul's release and entry into paradise that shows Watkins handling Christian, Dantesque symbolism and Greek myth in his own unique way. Through the Christ figure or Christian soul who is the speaker of the poem, Watkins captures the moment of transfiguration in which terror opens out into sanctity. The phrase "mutual forgiveness" (line 7) is one used frequently by Blake in the "Prophetic Books" to indicate a condition of human freedom and spiritual attainment.58 The landscape is Dantesque (see Inferno, Canto III) and ultimately Virgilian (Aeneid, Book VI), but the tone is that of a seventeenth-century meditation on the overwhelming and unexpected gift of divine grace. I cite the poem in its entirety to illustrate Watkins working with traditional material in a fresh manner:

After more terrors than the sea has waves
Where vultures black beyond redemption stood
Circling the 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, p. 57)

Leslie Norris detects verbal echoes of F. T. Prince's poem,
"Campanella," in "Christ and Charon." Yet he is forced to point out that, though similar in theme, the two poems differ radically in their conclusions. Watkins' speaker turns to the "cradle" of Bethlehem (an image of man's spiritual rebirth) for resolution, while Prince's hero retreats into self-irony and doubt concerning his momentary hope for "abject government re-born in brotherhood."

It is clear that Watkins' theological ground lends his work a spirit of achieved serenity and "calm." Yet unlike Herbert, who spoke out of the role of priest to a well-defined Christian flock in a Christian age (see the poems "Aaron" and "The Collar" from *The Temple* as well as *A Priest to the Temple, or the Country Parson*), Watkins as a twentieth-century poet, faced the problem shared by Eliot, Jones and others of the absence of a cohesive Christian community and the lack of a shared basis of belief in his audience. In spite of this limitation, we have seen that he writes purely devotional poems in relative isolation.

I would argue also that he succeeds in producing religious poetry in the broader sense Eliot uses in "Religion and Literature" when he distinguishes between religious verse of a restricted subject matter that is self-consciously devotional, and poetry that is unconsciously religious because it treats "the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit." He writes:

What I want is a literature which should be unconsciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly Christian.

In many of Watkins' best religious poems, traditionally
Christian symbols are so infused with his experience that one is not immediately conscious of a "religious" or sacramental outlook. This is evident in an early poem, "The Mother and Child" (BML, p. 64) where the "Madonna and child" theme remains implicit in the imagery of the natural relation between the poet's wife and his infant. An implicitly religious outlook is present in a later elegiac poem for Thomas, "The Snow Curlew" (F, p. 59), where a sacramental attitude toward nature is conveyed indirectly through the presentation and juxtaposition of images—the white "manuscript of snow," the curlew's cry, and the poet's effort to light a fire on the beach. The poem is about times of spiritual and artistic aridity, but resonates with the potentiality of renewal through its subtle handling of imagery and tone. "The Mare," from CA, ostensibly a poem describing a pregnant mare asleep on the grass, conveys a sense of the fragility and holiness of unborn life, the beauty of created things. The horse image carries with it here its ancient Celtic, mythical undertones to become a symbol of the feminine, creative principle:

Her body [the mare's] is utterly given to the light,
   surrendered in perfect abandon
To the heaven above her shadow, still as her first-born day.
Softly the wind runs over her....

Do not pass her too close. It is easy to break the circle
And lose that indolent fullness rounded under the ray
Falling on light-eared grasses your footstep must not yet wake.
It is easy to darken the sun of her unborn foal at play. (CA, p. 24)

The imagery of light and circularity (in the full horizon, the mare's full belly, and the imaginary circle drawn around her
by the speaker) conveys a sense of the condition of perfect, but precariously maintained wholeness in which the mare resides. Without straining for symbolic effect, the poem creates a sense of an unfallen, paradisal condition.

Though basically a poet of affirmative vision, Watkins' sense of spiritual alienation from the majority of his contemporaries may explain why he was so concerned to construct out of tradition and the poetry of the past a sense of a timeless community of poets. In turning to the more religious and mystical of the seventeenth-century poets for support, affirmation and inspiration, I would argue that he is not merely backward-looking, or "traditional" in the pejorative sense. Eliot pinpoints the way in which the desire for tradition can be poetically damaging in *After Strange Gods* when he writes that one of the dangers is, to associate tradition with the immovable; to think of it as something hostile to all change; to aim to return to some previous condition which we imagine as having been capable of preservation in perpetuity, instead of aiming to stimulate the life which produced that condition in its time.63

That Watkins seizes the vital aspects of the past to remake them in terms of the present in many of his prayer-like and meditative poems has been partially demonstrated in this chapter. Like Vaughan and Traherne especially, he restricts the range, but not the depth of poetry, integrating his poetic influences into his own unique vision. As in "Christ and Charon," he utilizes the Christian tradition in an individual manner and speaks in a poetic idiom that is decidedly of his own time. A passage from Part Two of "Orbits," ("The Revolution of the
Heart") should suffice to demonstrate his ability to unite the past (Rome at the time of the third-century Christian persecutions described in Part One, "The Colosseum and the Outer Spaces") and the present, the ancient and the modern:

Is there a heart in space? Is heaven's wide span Kindly disposed to man, Massing new satellites on the dynamic slope Of his far-travelling hope, Who sees their return, like planets, vouchsafed by Orbits in the star-sown sky? (F, p. 94)

The resolution of this question, which occurs in the recognition that "in Christ is the orbit of love," is reached only after a serious consideration of the "outer darkness" of physical space, and of man (like his satellites) as an "outcast prodigal son" lost in a seemingly meaningless void. Through a modern reclamation of the old symbolism of microcosm and macrocosm, Watkins is able to affirm that the outer and inner revolutions, the outer and inner spaces are part of one vast motion. Like Donne, who struggled with the challenge of the "new science" in "The Anniversaries" (particularly in "An Anatomie of the World"), Watkins attempts to come to terms with the new technology of his age in a religious context. As Raine argues in "Intuition's Lightning":

In mood, often even (as in The Death Bell) in his 'metaphysical' imagery, Vernon Watkins calls to mind Vaughan or Herbert or Traherne; but the scope of his vision belongs peculiarly to his own time, with the cosmology of Teilard de Chardin and the poetry of St. John Perse. 64

Raine's comment is particularly apt in relation to "Orbits" where Watkins incorporates the technology of his day, the imagery of modern satellites, into an older cosmology of a meaningful and purposeful universe. He concludes:

What may the wandering mind Of true substance in outer darkness find? In Christ is the orbit of love. Where a candle throws Light on woman or man, or a babe's repose,
True man re-enters his path, where monuments quiver, 
Back through his ancient bonds, for bonds to deliver.

Orbits: the secret marking of shell or urn 
Speaks of the heart's return. (F, p. 95)

That his themes and symbols are timeless and exclude much of the conflict and uncertainty characteristic of the modern age can be seen as a monitor of Watkins' spiritual maturity. Without making a saint of the man (as Walton attempted to do in his Life of Herbert), one can argue it is to his credit in an age that revelled in full exposure of the subliminal self, the fractured ego, that Watkins upheld a poetry and a poetics of spiritual idealism. As Thomas expressed it in a letter to Watkins dated April 20, 1936, Watkins' simplicity is not that of naivety, but of a hard-won innocence:

But you are—even if only momentarily—the one happy person I know, the one who, contrary to facts and, in a certain way, to circumstances, seems to be almost entirely uncomplicated: not, either, the uncomplication of a beginning person, but that of a person who has worked through all beginnings and finds himself a new beginning in the middle...

I would suggest, finally, that the relative absence of deep-rooted conflict in his work is less an indication of a flight from reality, than the result of a conscious choice to produce a modern poetry of praise that mirrors the highest levels of the self. No more than Traherne with his "Pelagian" sense of man's inherent purity and the original sinlessness of the soul, can Watkins justly be indicted for a failure to plumb the darker reaches of the psyche. In the poem, "Belief and Praise," he makes his choice of an affirmative vision clear. I cite only the first two stanzas, though the poem goes on to develop his theme of praise through the biblical story of the
journey of the wise men to the scene of the nativity. In its treatment of this theme, the poem stands in clear contrast to Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi" with its emphasis on the ambivalence and uncertainty of the speaker (the Magus) and his failure to interpret the significance of the event of the Incarnation. Watkins writes:

Who but a fool believes
Despair gives strength?
Look at that wall:
The hanging light of leaves
Knows better than they all
Who cry against the length
Of life, or mock its fall.

A tree will testify
Whose ripeness gives
The fruit life raised
Through storm-disfigured sky.
Belief is not erased.
The man who praises lives,
Although he dies unpraised. (F, p. 75)
CHAPTER V

WATKINS AS TWENTIETH-CENTURY METAPHYSICAL POET
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Part I: The Example of Yeats

Watkins' love of the great classical, romantic and religious poetic traditions of the past, and his intense identification with earlier poets lead him on several occasions to deny the influence of living contemporaries. In "Context," a response to a questionnaire put out by London Magazine (February 1962), for instance, he writes:

I suppose every writer, in applauding another's work, undergoes a modulation of sensibility, but I cannot see how any poet whose roots are deep can be fundamentally influenced by a living contemporary. I never think a true style can be learnt from contemporaries.  

He was to restate this theme in poetry, prose and conversation, insisting upon the need of the true artist to ignore "fashion" and pursue his own timeless vision in relation to that of the great poets of the past. We have seen how his search for a unified Christian outlook ties him more directly to the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets than to those among his contemporaries who rejected either a Christian or a traditional metaphysical perspective. While it is true that Watkins was little affected by modern movements and critical schools, and pursued in relative isolation the themes that were to obsess him from the "other Mind," or his timeless "Muse," surely he exaggerates when he denies unequivocally the influence of contemporary minds.

W. B. Yeats among the moderns of the previous generation, whom Watkins first read in 1931, had a profound effect on the
style and many of the thematic patterns of the younger poet's work. I shall be arguing that it took him years to break free of obvious Yeatsian mannerisms. Next to Yeats, I would suggest that Dylan Thomas is the second most important example of a living contemporary whose personality and poetic idiom had a powerful impact on Watkins from his first encounter with him in 1935. These two poetic presences, coming approximately at the same time in Watkins' life four to eight years after his departure from Cambridge and his establishment at the bank in Swansea, were to remain with him throughout his life. I intend in this chapter to focus on the presences of Yeats (Part I) and Thomas (Part II) in Watkins' work in an effort to demonstrate that the influence of Yeats was the more abiding of the two on Watkins' style. I shall be arguing that though Thomas and Yeats helped him forge a style, he emerges (roughly from the publication of *The Death Bell*, 1954) with a voice and a vision that are decidedly individual, earning himself a unique place among the moderns.

Though I shall be narrowing my discussion to the influence of Thomas and Yeats, Watkins also felt repercussions from the work of T. S. Eliot, identifying especially with the Eliot of the later *Four Quartets* whose theme, like Watkins', was that of the timeless moment in time within a context of orthodox Christian belief. It is also significant that Watkins' seven volumes of verse were published by Faber and Faber at Eliot's instigation. Eliot must have recognized in this younger Welsh contemporary a voice of substantial poetic promise—both technically and in depth of content. The literary path of the
early Eliot as a displaced American seeking roots in British and European tradition is clearly distinct from that of Watkins, who more resembles Yeats in his interest in the mythological and Celtic traditions of his native land and in fidelity to the place of his birth. I can detect few direct verbal echoes of Eliot or textual evidence of a stylistic influence on Watkins, whose more fluid, lyrical voice separates him from the new, less formal way of writing initiated by the more satiric Eliot of "Prufrock" and The Waste Land. Watkins himself writes of Eliot's influence on the age in a short elegiac commentary (Jan. 10, 1965) as "liberating and constricting at the same time":

Eliot had broken up the formal rhythm and rhyme of regular stanzas for the sake of a new music corresponding more closely to the movement of life. He substituted an often irregular line of his own, its cadence depending on speech rhythms and the demands of his subject. He accepted everyday life as material for poetry; he banished artificial poetic diction, and tested a poem by one thing only: "Is it genuine?"

Though Watkins could admire Eliot's use of freer verse forms and the genuineness of his voice, this less artificial style was not amenable to his own particular genius—which (more like that of the early Yeats) expressed itself in a strict and intricate rhythmical (often incantatory) cadence. Like the Yeats of the Byzantium poems, he believed that art should create a world of artifice in contrast to the reality of "everyday life." Yet Eliot's sense of eternity's penetration of time (past, present and future) through the Incarnation in The Four Quartets, and his idea of the poet's need for a continuous historical and literary tradition as described in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" appealed strongly to Watkins who wrote of Eliot in that
same commentary:
I think his [Eliot's] influence will always be immediate and not retrospective, and that is the mark of a great poet. Critics think in terms of decades, poets in terms of centuries. I believe that in whatever century Eliot's work will be accessible, his influence will be immediate, and its effect profound.4

Watkins' "Ode to T. S. Eliot" in Affinities respectfully acknowledges his literary debt and the debt of the age:

> Who can better teach how little is visible
> Save in the eye of God?
> Tentatively you struggled,
> Mapping out slowly the land we know. (A, p. 39)

Though the scope of this chapter does not permit an investigation of other twentieth-century figures who may have been important to Watkins, it should be noted that he shares with another contemporary, the Scottish poet Edwin Muir (1887-1959), a concern with the relation of time and eternity, a love of mythic themes, an interest in Platonism and a respect for the German poet Hölderlin. Just as Watkins was actively engaged in his translations of continental poetry, so Muir translated Kafka's The Castle and The Trial. Though Watkins refers to Ezra Pound's remark that poets are "the antennae of the race,"5 he is not close to Pound in subject matter or style. He remained unaffected alike by the "vers libre" and imagist movements and by Pound's use of larger "open-forms" as in The Cantos. Yet he was quick to acknowledge the genius of those who wrote in a style and idiom different from his own. Watkins' prose comments indicate that he admired the work of Auden and the American poets, Marianne Moore, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke.6 In spite of his sense of his own isolation,
his work was well received both in Britain and in America, particularly at the end of his life, being praised in the States by Marianne Moore, Robert Lowell and others. Therefore the illusion Watkins helped to create of his complete detachment from the contemporary scene is erroneous and needs to be amended by the proposed investigation of the centrally important influences of Yeats and Thomas—poets who affected so many writing between the "forties" and the "sixties."

Though Watkins limited his reading to the Romantics (particularly Blake and Shelley) and earlier poets in his early twenties, he began reading Yeats in 1931 when he picked up a copy of The Tower (1928) in a local shop. In a lecture on modern poetry at University College, Swansea, 1966, he indicates his high estimation of Yeats dating from that time:

"When I met Dylan Thomas [i.e. 1935] I had for nine or ten years been so deeply absorbed in certain poets who were dead that I did not pay much attention to the living ones. There was, however, one living exception. This was W. B. Yeats, whom I regarded then and still regard as the greatest lyric poet of our age."

After his initial discovery of Yeats, Watkins bought all of his books and read him intensively, appreciating especially the poems written after Yeats' fiftieth year. The whole of Yeats' canon was extant before Watkins published his first volume of verse in 1941; therefore we can expect to find evidence of Yeats' influence in many of the poems from the published volumes.

Watkins saw in the older poet the epitome of the "self-renewing" artist, and found Yeats' later more austere and intensely chiselled style to have a dramatic impact on his own
sense of what great poetry should be like. In an address to the Poetry Society of Great Britain, May 7, 1966, he writes that Yeats' poetry became purer and fresher as he renewed himself to the very week of his death, "moving" as he said, "Like Swedenborg's angels, toward the dayspring of their youth." He is here, in fact, echoing Yeats' own words from "The Bounty of Sweden" in *Autobiographies*:

I am old and rheumatic, and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young. I am even persuaded that she is like those Angels in Swedenborg's vision, and moves perpetually "towards the day-spring of her youth." Watkins spoke with authority on the subject of Yeats in several articles and two longer essays. The major essay, "W. B. Yeats—The Religious Poet," read publically in 1948 and first printed in French in 1953, moves out of a deep identification with his Irish hero. Watkins had, in fact, visited Yeats in the spring of 1938 in his Riverside home near Dublin with his friend Francis Dufau-Labeyrie, and was received graciously by the seventy-three year old poet and his wife. He made a transcript of the interview which has been published in the Spring 1977 issue of *Poetry Wales*. Out of these notes came Watkins' long poem, "Yeats in Dublin," published later in *LV* (1945). It is, like Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," an elegiac tribute to Yeats and attempts to capture in stately Yeatsian sonorities (interspersed with taut colloquialisms) the dignity and wisdom of the aged poet. Watkins' use of Yeats' six-line ballad stanza with its short, three and four-beat lines is deliberately imitative of poems like "Sixteen Dead Men" or "The Rose Tree." The poem tends to be merely descriptive of the actual
encounter, and is weakened by its too literal reconstruction of the conversation. Watkins here puts in Yeats' mouth a statement on "luck" that, as we noted in Chapter III, was to become his own catch-phrase for the essential element of the unexpected that arrives as a "reward of tenacity":

There must always be a quality
Of nonchalance in the work.
The intellect is impotent
Labouring in the dark,
For a poem is always
A piece of luck. (LU, p. 8)

This quality of apparent nonchalance was the element of Yeats' later style that Watkins particularly admired and attempted to emulate.

In the pages that follow, I propose to examine some important parallels between Watkins and Yeats, focusing on their fascination with Celtic myth, their shared literary sources, their development as complex "symbolist" poets, their similarities of style, and their sense of the consolation of great art. I shall be looking at some of Watkins' poems that stand as self-conscious tributes to Yeats, as well as poems where Watkins merely borrows Yeatsian rhetoric, rhythms or vocabulary, or takes up a Yeatsian stance, theme or point of view. Finally, I shall be attempting to examine some of Watkins' poems which, though indebted to Yeats in style, content or both, reveal him disagreeing with or even challenging his position. In many of these poems, I believe Watkins succeeds in successfully incorporating Yeats' influence into his own individual style and vision.

Like the early Yeats of The Celtic Twilight (1893) or the
Yeats who contributed so vigorously to Ireland's Celtic revival, Watkins too, though apolitical, was concerned with finding in his native land a mythology and a landscape for his poetry. This need is most evident in the early dramatic poem, "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd," where we recall that he revives an ancient Welsh folk custom in order to bring together the Yeatsian antinomies of the worlds of the dead and the living. We have seen that the Celtic interest is obvious also in the Taliesin poems where he revitalizes the heroic figure of the sixth-century bard. In his prose, he speaks of the Mari Lwyd custom as a "reconciliation of contraries," exploring in his own terms the search for what Yeats called "Unity of Being," the complete integration of "history, religion, aesthetic and practical life":

...it seemed to me that the old custom assumed terrifying proportions, for not only drunken and holy people, but the dead themselves, seemed to have come to the house. This, too, was a kind of reconciliation of contraries, an eternal moment of contradictions, and my "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" began to take shape.

Like Yeats also, he maintained an interest in the folk ballad and ballad techniques throughout his career.

Watkins' sense of "the Muse" as an otherness, evident in poems like the previously-discussed "Demands of the Muse" (see Chapter III), is close to Yeats' notion of the "Daimon" or antithetical self who spurs the poet to song and strengthens him through opposition. Watkins describes this opposition in the voice of his Muse:

Yet, though a school invoke me, it is he I choose, for opposition gives those words Their strength.... (A, p. 22)
For Watkins, however, the Muse is more unambiguously "other," more Miltonic, and not merely a hidden aspect of the self as Yeats suggests in *Autobiographies* when he writes: "I believed that this enigmatic sentence came from my own Daimon, my own buried self...," or further from that same volume,

I know now that revelation is from the self...that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind.\(^{20}\)

As Kathleen Raine has pointed out, Watkins' approach to tradition is less historical and intellectual than that of Eliot, who sometimes seems to suggest that it can be acquired through learning, and closer to Yeats' idea of tradition as a few intensely conceived heroic themes and vital symbols contained within a "Great Memory" or repository of consciousness transcending the mind of a single individual.\(^{21}\) Yeats defines traditional art in *Autobiographies* as follows:

Supreme art is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths, passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius, but never abandoned.\(^{22}\)

Yet Yeats, Watkins and the later Eliot of the *Four Quartets* are all concerned with the illuminated moment which gives man access to the universal consciousness as Watkins describes it in the Taliesin poems when Taliesin receives the three drops of inspiration, and which Yeats portrays in "Vacillation" as a sudden blazing of the body like that of the mythical tree of the *Mabinogion* alluded to in part II of the same poem:

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessèd and could bless.\(^{23}\)
This recurrent longing in Yeats for moments of transcendence as they emerge out of the violent oppositions between self and soul leads Watkins to designate him a "religious poet." He argues in "W. B. Yeats—The Religious Poet" that Yeats was religious because he never resigned the struggle for "Unity of Being," and because "religious conflict" lay at the heart of all his late work. In "The Poetry of W. B. Yeats," Watkins suggests that Yeats never fully renounces the way of the "saint," nor fully resolves the early conflict between St. Patrick and the heroic Oisin of *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1888) which emerges metamorphosed in Ribh of *Supernatural Songs*. He implies in the former essay on Yeats, "the religious poet," that the Christian option was never ultimately rejected in spite of Yeats' respectful dismissal of Von Hügel, the representative of the Christian mystic, at the conclusion of "Vacillation."

Watkins writes:

> Paradoxically Yeats brings a pagan strength to the poems which deal directly with Christianity, and he brings Christianity to his poems of pagan theme. "Wisdom," "The Mother of God," "A Prayer for My Son," and "Veronica's Napkin" are not only devotional poems but also dialogues between Self and Soul. For Yeats is a poet of religious conflict in all the late work.

Watkins had a tendency to make Christian heroes of all the poets he most deeply admired, and it is unlikely that Yeats would have described his later poems as "devotional" in the Christian sense. Yet it is obvious that Watkins identified strongly with Yeats in his religious struggle and admired his lifelong effort to resolve the antinomies of self and soul, saint and swordsman. Yeats often explored the conflict or dialogue of self and soul by uniting the worlds of Homeric Greek myth with Celtic
myth and legend—Usna and Troy—and juxtaposing these against images of Christian sanctity. Watkins' union of Celtic and Christian motifs in the Taliesin poems follows the Yeatsian precedent. In Watkins' poems, however, the heroic values are usually superseded by Christian "caritas" and a new synthesis of hero and saint emerges. In poems like "Niobe," "Pledges to Darkness" (DB) and "The Muse of Homer" (BW) we can see Watkins uniting Celtic with classical and European (in the former case Egyptian) myth in a way similar to that of Yeats who, as Watkins points out in his essay on his later poems, cherished "a vision of the union of all myths...."27 "The Muse of Homer" is a typically Yeatsian sonnet on the heroic suffering of the Greeks. In the poem "Niobe," Watkins identifies a rock on the Welsh seacoast with the sorrows of the weeping mother figure of classical tradition. The poem's twin epigraphs invoke both Dante's Niobe in The Divine Comedy (Purg. XII, 37) and the biblical "Rachel weeping for her children" (Matt. 2:18) to draw attention to the universality of the motif. In his choice of Niobe, Watkins may be recalling Yeats' comparison of her in A Vision to a civilization in decline:

A civilization is a struggle to keep self-control, and in this it is like some great tragic person, some Niobe who must display an almost superhuman will or the cry will not touch our sympathy.28

"Pledges to Darkness" (including "Nefertiti" and "Egyptian Burial—Resurrection in Wales") represents Watkins' effort to unite Egyptian and Welsh myth. The use of "mummy" imagery in this poem, "The Mummy" (BML), and "Time's Deathbed" (DB) may owe something to Yeats' references to the Egyptian dead in poems
like "Byzantium" or "All Soul's Night." In the latter he writes:

    Such thought—such thought have I that hold it tight
    Till meditation master all its parts,
    .................................................................
    I need no other thing,
    Wound in mind's wandering
    As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound.\(^{29}\)

"The Mummy," written in 1940, is, in fact, a disguised elegy to Yeats.\(^{30}\) In this early poem, the Yeatsian rhetoric overpowers Watkins' characteristically more delicate rhythms and phrasing. His overuse of a familiar Yeatsian construction ("what...what") at its close, to my mind at least, weakens the poem in spite of the superb last line:\(^{31}\)

    What shudder of music unfulfilled vibrates?
    What draws to a dust-grain's fall most distant stars?
    In the last taper's light what shadow meditates?
    What single, athletic shape never cast on wall or vase?

    What shudder of birth and death? What shakes me most?
    Job his Maker answering, the stricken exclaiming 'Rejoice!'
    Gripping late in the shifting moment giant Earth, making
    Earth a ghost,
    Who heard a great friends' death without a change of voice.\(^{\text{BML, pp. 41-2}}\)

Though "Pledges to Darkness" includes some slightly Yeatsian magniloquence in lines like, "In death she knows, fine things are finely made," the style and treatment by this time (1954) are Watkins' own. Here he transforms the image of the mummified body of Nefertiti into a pre-Christian symbol of sacrifice:

    Yet now she whispers close: 'Dispense
    No precious ointment here; my body has cast all.
    Here, if the taper burn intense,
    It may instruct your eyes
    To seek that holiest treasure laid
    A Syrian widow once let fall.
    This contrite darkness never has betrayed
    Love's perfect secret whose disguise
    Sleeps in my lettered pall.' \(^{\text{DB, p. 22}}\)
Watkins imagines the buried dead of the pagan world waking in a Christian Wales. Nefertiti's death points to the archetypal death and resurrection of Christ which is potentially that of each individual. Her whispered prayer is that her death may direct others to "that holiest treasure"--the coin dropped by the "Syrian widow" of the gospels who gave all her living for love (Mark 12:42-43). Like Yeats, Watkins is concerned to unite heterogeneous mythologies with those of his native land, but in his poems heroic values are more clearly subordinated to the theme of Christian sacrifice.

Although Watkins uses his mythological backgrounds in a manner different from Yeats, it is clear that he derived a number of his important philosophical and literary sources from him. We have noted already that Watkins read Plotinus in the MacKenna translation because it was one of Yeats' major entrances into Neoplatonic thought; and it is probable that Watkins' references to Heraclitus in "Poet and Goldsmith" (CA) and Von Hügel of The Mystical Element in Religion in "Discoveries" (BML) are due to Yeats. In "Discoveries," for instance, a poem which echoes Yeats' title for a book of criticism (Discoveries, 1907) and uses a two-line stanza similar to that of Yeats in "A Nativity" or "The Four Ages of Man," Watkins writes:

'Solice, in flight,' old Heraclitus cries,
Light changing to Von Hügel's butterflies. (BML, p. 65)

In that same poem (cited below), Watkins includes Blake among his heroes. We may recall that he borrows Blakean symbols in the Taliesin poems to present his concept of the ideal poet-prophet:
Blake, on the world alighting, holds the skies,
And all the stars shine down through human eyes.

(BML, p. 65)

Blake, Shelley and Dante were important to Watkins long before he read Yeats; yet it is certain he was delighted to have his personal literary tastes confirmed by the older poet he so much admired. During the time Watkins experienced the mental collapse of his early twenties (1927) referred to in the biographical sketch, and was confined briefly in a nursing home in Derby, he is said to have been so deeply immersed in Blake that he kept "the other patients awake at night by his endless recitation" of him. Blakean ideas, symbols and direct references to the English visionary poet continued to appear in the work of his maturity, and his widow has confirmed in conversation that he was still reading and studying Blake's "Prophetic Books" toward the end of his life. We recall that Yeats did an immense study of Blake's prophetic symbols with Edwin Ellis in his early years, and that the Blakean idea of contending opposites within the self, the Blakean notion of the Imagination as divine, and the Blakean use of symbols helped him to develop his own concepts of a symbolical poetry.

What Watkins particularly sought in Blake that was less central to Yeats was a concept of the ideal Christian mystical poet and a more mystical and experiential image of Christ than that of the Church; for Watkins often focused on Blakean ideas of forgiveness, innocence and the eternalness or "fourfoldness" of man in his redeemed state, attempting to place them in the context of his own religious ideas and experiences. In "Revisited Waters," for instance, an occasional poem written for
the Quartercentenary of Repton School, the public school he attended in his youth in Derbyshire, Watkins writes at the conclusion of the poem of the moment in which man confronts the Satanic powers within himself. The reference to "friend dying for friend" is an allusion to Blake's *Jerusalem* where Jesus (a form of Los) gives himself to redeem Albion:

> Then at last man encountered himself, his Accuser and end. He saw his own Hell and the labouring lusts that destroy, And Jerusalem showed him the pastures where friend dies for friend, And the end of all labours is joy. (A, p. 98)

Watkins' fine sonnet, "Blake," also reveals him exploring in his own terms Blake's visionary conception of "Jesus the Imagination":

> Blake was immortal. When his eyes were bent On mortal forms he knew that Earth was heaven. The stones of law were love's negations graven, And Christ was each forgiving lineament. (LU, p. 88)

In the sestet he uses the image of the two thieves at the crucifixion as a dramatization of the imaginative choice between good and evil, time informed by eternity or negating it:

> 'Now is undying' was Blake's eternal theme. He knew that thief who mocked Christ, and despaired, And that good thief who looked for Paradise; He knew the evil and the noble dream, The eternal heaven that breaks on love declared. (LU, p. 88)

Watkins was not only attracted to Blake because of his idea of the putting off of self in mutual forgiveness, but, like Yeats, because of his notion that spiritual growth occurs through challenge and opposition, or in Blake's words: "opposition is true friendship"; "Without contraries is no progress." Yeats writes of the value of such opposition in the form of the "unknown communicators" in *A Vision*:...
It was part of their [the spirits'] purpose to affirm that all the gains of man come from conflict with the opposite of true being. From this observation he was to develop his doctrine of the "mask," which involves the dramatic projection of all the everyday self is not; or as he puts it in Autobiographies:

I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self....

In Watkins' "Buried Light," a much more Yeatsian poem in style than "Revisited Waters," the Blakean-Yeatsian contraries are present in the form of falcon and dove:

All hunting opposites I praise.
I praise the falcon and the dove.
Night's intense darkness gives to days
True pictures of regenerate love....

Sons of true sacrifice are there.
Rivers and hills are in their hands.
The highest petal the winds bear
Has mocked the Serpent's swaddling-bands. (CA, p. 82)

Though this is an elegy for Dylan Thomas, the four-line tetrameter stanza form and the phrasing of the last line quoted suggest Blake's "Infant Sorrow" in Songs of Experience; yet we are also reminded of Yeats in the rhythm of the tetrameters, the syntax and diction ("mocked") and the bold rhetorical stance ("I praise"). Here Watkins takes up Yeats' Blakean idea as developed in "The Dialogue of Self and Soul," "Ego Dominus Tuus," "Vacillation," and "The Man and the Echo" that Unity of Being emerges out of the clash of contending contraries--primary and antithetical man, self and soul, swan and dove. As Yeats puts it in A Vision:

I had never read Hegel, but my mind had been full of Blake from boyhood up and I saw the world as a conflict--Spectre and Emanation--and could distinguish between a contrary and a negation.
The main difference between Watkins and Yeats with regard to their fascination with the clash of opposites is that Watkins sought a union of the contraries in religious synthesis, while Yeats tended to sustain a scepticism that enabled him to waver continually between the poles of pagan defiance and Christian resignation. The "tragic joy" of the Last Poems represents Yeats' final approach toward a resolution of the tensions within the self through an acceptance of conflict as the basis of life. Yet his position there is still a great distance from Watkins' more traditionally Christian sense of religious affirmation and commitment, in spite of Watkins' protestations to the contrary.

Watkins like Yeats invokes Blake frequently, not merely for his ideas and symbols, but because he represents to both the prophetic poet mediating his visions of Eternity to man. In the opening of the early long poem, "The Broken Sea," Watkins makes the fundamental ground of his affinity with Blake clear. Again he uses a Yeatsian three-beat rhymed measure such as we find in Yeats' "The Cat and the Moon." It is characteristic of him to borrow a Yeatsian cadence in his poems about Blake:

And calm above disasters
In the confused wake
Of pitiless history
I see the visions of Blake
In their self-bridled power.
Upon the regenerate sea
Among the great Masters
He measured the passing hour. (LV, p. 35)

Blake, like Yeats and all Watkins' great models, was heroic in his eyes because of his ability to conquer time through the visionary powers of imaginative art. In Ideas of Good and Evil,
Yeats makes clear—in terms that Watkins would have accepted—his sense that Blake, with his complex symbolic imagination, was an appropriate model for the twentieth-century poet. Yeats, in fact, saw him as an early "symbolist" poet,\(^43\) evocative and suggestive in his tightly-woven universe of interconnected symbols relating to a hidden order of reality. Though Watkins would not have wanted to make a religion of art or to deny the relevance of the historical Jesus to Blake's "Jesus the Imagination" as Yeats seemed to do in the early writings when he was most under the pre-Raphaelite sway,\(^44\) he would have agreed with him that for Blake and for the true poet,

the imaginative arts were...the greatest of Divine revelations, and that the sympathy with all living things, sinful and righteous alike, which the imaginative arts awaken, is that forgiveness of sins commanded by Christ.\(^45\)

We can see, then, that Watkins was not only drawn to many of the same figures named by Yeats in *Autobiographies*, *A Vision* and the poems and essays, but that he is like him in his need to invoke such a pantheon of literary and artistic heroes, and to build his art out of response and opposition to those who stirred his imagination.

Three of Watkins' poems, "Lover and Girl" (LU), "Angel and Man" (CA), and "Dialogue" (F), for instance, reveal him handling his Blakean contraries in a manner both similar to and distinct from that of Yeats. His dialogues often express two poles of consciousness in order to arrive at a synthesis in which the claims of soul are seen as more comprehensive than those of self. In Yeats' "Dialogue of Self and Soul" and "Vacillation," on the other hand, Self holds the ascendancy. Here in the "Dialogue"
Self has the final word:

When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.46

Watkins' "Angel and Man," though written in a decidedly Yeatsian conversational style, is closer in content to some seventeenth-century dialogues like Herbert's "Dialogue" or Vaughan's "Death: A Dialogue" where God or eternity confronts the finite soul. In the following passage from Watkins' poem, though the Man's doubts are viable, and though he too speaks the final word, the Angel speaks from a higher level, having a greater knowledge of the reality of life beyond the grave. Here, the Man responds to the Angel's insistence that his Yeatsian moment of "annunciation" has come:

Man: Do not look at me, for I am ill,
I would believe you, but I cannot.
Too much is hidden.
I hear your speech, but when your speech has faded
It is the earth that counts, where these men lived.
All these the eyelid buried,
These the rough earth hides,
Where are they, then?

Angel: They are gone to the root of the tree.
Just as the red sun went behind the hill,
They pierced the shadows of imagined rest.

Man: If sighs are ended they should wake now, too.

Angel: They do wake, though your ears are not attuned to those sunk voices which the ground transfigures.
They are like lightning, or the time in sleep circling the earth from which the slow leaf breaks.
They do wake, in the murmur of the leaves.

(CA, pp. 58-59)

The Man's acceptance of his human limitation before spiritual forces more powerful than he can grasp, and his desire to abide
within the confines of a known earthly reality parallels
Taliesin's statement in "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision"
from this same volume:

....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.  (CA, p. 21)

The Man's final statement, however, is not a rejection of the wisdom of the Angel, which he recognizes as transcending his own, but an acceptance of man's relative condition in time--his appropriate and justified fear or awe before the Absolute to which he is but a spark or embryo in "solitary dark":

I accept this for my portion. Grief was theirs,
And grief, their lot, is likely to be mine.
Yet in the last, most solitary dark
There lives an equilibrium in the soul
Depending on forgiveness. Grant me this,
And I shall hold truth fast without remorse
Under the turning stars. (CA, p. 59)

Like Yeats' Self of "The Dialogue of Self and Soul," Watkins' Man casts out "remorse." The Yeatsian selfhood, however, conquers by actively celebrating the upheavals and impurities of the temporal cycles even in "the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch," while Watkins' humanity or Man finds a quieter "equilibrium of the soul" in "forgiveness." He is asking, in effect, to be held within time in a state of grace as in the related poem "Bread and the Stars" (see Chapter IV) which also explores man's condition "under the turning stars."

Watkins wrote an early masque over the period 1935-1947 entitled The Influences which reveals him exploring the Yeatsian form of the short, symbolic, lyrical drama. A yet unpublished
version of the play was produced in 1939 by Thomas Taig at the Swansea Little Theatre, and a final version, a script for radio completed in 1947, has been published by Bran's Head Press (1977). Again, the theme of this early play is the Yeatsian-Blakean one of the union of contraries—this time enacted through the symbolic figures of a girl (a dancer) and an old man, representing respectively the poles of youth and age, joy (action) and reflection, folly and wisdom, or as Watkins writes in the Prologue, "the life beyond time" and "the moment of time." Its simplicity of staging suggesting the Japanese Noh drama, its use of (two) musicians, and the opening stage business of the folding and unfolding of a black cloth are pure pastiche of Yeats. Watkins borrows devices used in plays like At the Hawk's Well, Calvary and Purgatory. Even his figures of the dance and dancer, which he uses elsewhere in "Touch with Your Fingers" (CA) and "The Dancer in the Leaves" (BOD), suggest Yeats' symbolic use of the dance in both the plays, and in poems like "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" and "Sweet Dancer." Though the play is too strongly imitative of Yeats to display Watkins at his best, it does reveal again his close concern with the problem of uniting antithetical poles of being, a problem he was to address more clearly in his own voice in "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd." There the contraries are represented by the inmates of the house, or the living, and the party of singers bearing the Mari, or the dead. In The Influences as in the "Ballad," Watkins is concerned with what he calls in a note to the ballad, "the profane and sacred moment impossible to
realize while the clock-hands divide the Living from the Dead" (BML, p. 55). In both the play and the poem the moment of potential union and transformation is fleeting. The old man achieves it only at the moment of death, and the "living" of the ballad fail to achieve it at all by refusing to admit the "holy Mari" to their feast. Therefore, Watkins' concern with man's relation to the timeless moment is vital to him consistently whether or not he clothes his antinomies in Yeatsian form. Except for this brief excursion into the theatre, his use of the longer dramatic poem in the "Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" and its sequel the "Ballad of the Outer Dark," and his experiments with the three long lyrics from LV, Watkins remained almost exclusively a master of the short lyric poem. To my mind, his experiments with longer forms are interesting, and help reveal the complexity of his vision, but are ultimately less successful than the condensed lyrics where his naturally lighter and more fluent patterns find their most mature expression. The fact that he did experiment with other forms, however, demonstrates that he was a more varied poet than is usually assumed.

Watkins' concentration on a few intense images, like that of dancer and aged man in The Influences, has shown him to be, like Yeats, a poet in search of what Brian Keeble has called, "a lyrical expression of symbolical content." Because of Yeats' early identification with Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites, his love of symbolist drama and his appreciation of the French poets Mallarmé, Verlaine and Valéry, he has been classified as a post-symbolist poet. I believe the use of that label can be a
valid way of approaching his early work in particular. Yet it is important to realize that Yeats developed as a poet by steeping himself in Celtic, Neoplatonic, Christian, occult and Indian sources, thus working from a deeper philosophical base than that of the symbolists who were concerned primarily with the evocation of symbols in a more private or subjective context. In his mature work dating from the time of Responsibilities (1914), and in late poems like "News for the Delphic Oracle" and "The Circus Animal's Desertion," he was capable of a severely ambivalent attitude toward his own earlier symbols and mythic apparatus. After such questioning, he would often return to them with renewed vigour and insight as in "Cuchulain Comforted." I wish to designate him a symbolist poet, however, in the sense that in the whole of his canon he works and re­works his metaphors with such intensity and precision that they become heightened symbols. He distinguishes such symbols from metaphors in the early essay, "The Symbolism of Poetry":

...metaphors are not profound enough to be moving, when they are not symbols, and when they are symbols they are the most perfect, because the most subtle, outside of pure sound....

Such universal symbols used to invoke complex intermixtures of ideas and emotions are mysterious, and their use corresponds to a view of the world that assumes mystery at its very heart.

I wish to argue that in the above sense alone Watkins is, like Yeats, a symbolical poet, though he shared with him a knowledge of the French symbolist movement. In his case, a related nexus of key images concerned with the overthrow of time is used symbolically. Like the work of Yeats, Watkins'
poems must be read whole if one is to appreciate the full meaning of each one individually. In Yeats, the symbols of swan, Helen of Troy, the dome and tower, and so on, recur in ever-new contexts, and one must assume the presence of cross-referencing from poem to poem. In Watkins, where this is also the case, we have already seen how the sycamore (representing longevity, fertility, immortality) and Zacchaeus, images of white flowers and white light, the fountain, the stream and the sea reappear in poem after poem, gaining richness when read in the context of the whole of his work. Though he does not invent his symbols like Blake, Watkins assumes that they are in Blake's words, "a Representation of what Eternally Exists Really and Unchangeably." As Yeats expresses it in his essay on Blake's illustrations to Dante when distinguishing between allegory and vision,

A symbol is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame; while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to fancy and not to imagination: the one is a revelation, the other an amusement. Again, the inherent religiosity of Watkins' vision led him to choose symbols that were revelatory in this sense; and it was this use of symbol in Yeats that caused him to declare Yeats a religious poet.

The impact of Yeats' later style was revolutionary on Watkins' own in helping him to move like Yeats from a highly Romantic, image-laden verse to a more austere, tight and refined mode of expression. When he speaks in the essay, "The Poetry of W. B. Yeats," of how Yeats' Muse freed the Irish poet from
"that early affectation, that artificiality of poetic dic-
tion,"\footnote{54} one feels that Watkins is speaking simultaneously of his own struggle to achieve a more contemporary idiom. As Gwen Watkins has stated in a note,

\ldots the fact that music could be made out of bare and ordinary language—'the tongue of the common people'—was a revolution in style for him as great as the 'dolce stil nova' of Dante, and this was necessary to complete the 'revolution of sensibility' which VW refers to as taking place in his 21st year. Until his style caught up with his feelings the real poet couldn't begin to develop, and this was what Yeats did for him.\footnote{55}

Watkins' initial identification with Yeats was increased when he found that they both believed in the value of a strong formal structure and a strict musicality. Leslie Norris has noticed that the incantatory style common to both is based on a similar sensitivity to sound and rhythm. He points out that in his early verse Watkins handles some of Yeats' personal rhythms awkwardly, as in "Portrait of a Friend" (BML) where he borrows the short Yeatsian line of three accented syllables and three or four unaccented as used in "Easter 1916" and "The Fisher-
man."\footnote{56} Watkins must have been pleased to discover not only that Yeats composed aurally (with emphasis on sound) as he did, but that their habits of revision were almost identical. In "New Year 1965," Watkins describes Yeats' method of composition:

First of all he would make a prose draft, and then move it into a lyrical shape, until slowly, sometimes chanting the lines all through the night, he had arrived at the purest form of his thought, its most direct and muscular expression. At last the whole poem would come together in a moment, like a click of a box, as he once described it.\footnote{57}

Watkins was to speak frequently of the problem of "resolving a poem," that is, of how to discover through such a process as
Yeats calls "sedentary toil" (see "Ego Dominus Tuus") its final form. 58

Many of Watkins' tributes to Yeats, like the earlier-mentioned "Yeats in Dublin," seem to suffer from a too obvious emulation of his master. "Yeats' Tower," "In Memory of Elizabeth Corbet Yeats" (BML) and "The Last Poems of Yeats" (BML) are notable examples of Watkins in a self-consciously Yeatsian mood. In "Yeats' Tower," Watkins borrows a Yeatsian ballad refrain, "O under grass, O under grass, the secret"; in "In Memory of Elizabeth Corbet Yeats" he uses a typically Yeatsian epitaph such as the Irish poet employs in "Swift's Epitaph"; and in "The Last Poems of Yeats," he uses stanzas of two-line epigrammatic couplets to rehearse some of Yeats' major themes and symbols, concluding with the symbol of the swan to represent the union of contraries:

Even as I read those letters there
Two white swans are meeting in air;

Two white swans are beating their wings
Terrified, lost in flight, he [Yeats] sings. (BW, p. 37)

Though it is a legitimate practice to honour a poet by writing in his style, many of these poems fail to be more than set pieces. The early "Yeats' Tower" is exceptional, however, in that in spite of its Yeatsian diction and phrasing, the content is Watkins' own. The image of the "marguerite" whose "doom that never comes, comes soon," foreshadows his use of ephemeral blossoms in the "Music of Colours" sequence. Blossoms are also conjoined here, as in the later poems, with the "Dead saints" who have crossed from life to death. Here the "snow-white blood" has blown from the wind stirred beneath the touch of the "finger
of God" of the first two stanzas. Nowhere in Yeats do we find such an explicit statement of God's direct intervention in the natural world:

Surely from this [the wind] 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:

0 under grass, 0 under grass, the secret. (BML, p. 27)

Like many of Watkins' early poems written during the time he was in close association with Thomas, this one suffers from a certain obscurity or deliberate ambiguity of syntax (unclear or multiple referents, obscure appositive phrases), yet it shows Watkins beginning to explore the unique imaginative landscape which was to haunt him in later poems.

A much later Yeatsian poem from Fidelities, "Earth and Fire" (F, p. 12), reveals Watkins working in the more condensed, tighter style of his own later lyrics where the presence of Yeats has become well-integrated. The rhythm is Watkins' own variation of Yeats' short four and three-beat lines. The symbol of fire (stanza 1), the idea of the blessedness of "the moment" (see Yeats' "Vacillation IV"), and the notion of an exaltation "uniting death and birth" (stanza 3) could be traced to some of Yeats' poems where he expresses his ideal of a "cold and passionate" verse (see "The Fisherman"). I quote the poem in its entirety to illustrate the point that Watkins has here adapted elements of Yeats' later style, particularly the heroic attitude, to express his own unique vision of the soul fixed on God:
All do not seek the exalted fire;  
All do not let the moment bless.  
And yet, what so rewards desire,  
So nourishes? Confess:  
He's wrong who toils for less.

Measure the ground and weigh its yield,  
Changing the crops while seasons turn.  
Yet who can say a barren field  
Where the dry brambles burn  
Brings not the best return?

Then the fine breath of wintry air  
Answers the crisp and stubborn earth.  
Without the exaltation there  
Uniting death and birth,  
What is a man's song worth?

Earth's natural order brings a wealth  
Of promise, bounty, and regret.  
Through changes he alone has health  
And writes off all the debt  
Whose heart on heaven is set. (F, p. 12)

The poem concerns the poet's decision to strive for the highest level of poetic expression—that which embodies religious ecstacy. In its celebration of "Earth's natural order" and use of the metaphor of the barren field Watkins' poem is distinct from anything Yeats wrote. There is in the whole of Watkins, in fact, what seems to me a less violent opposition than we find in Yeats between the ideal and the natural orders, the dome and tower and the "fury and the mire of human veins" of "Byzantium." Though Watkins distinguishes clearly between the "exalted fire" of heaven and the claims of "the crisp and stubborn earth," he does not shift back and forth between a choice of first one and then the other as Yeats tends to do in the dialogue poems. Nor does he set up a dichotomy between perfection of the life and perfection of the work as Yeats does in "The Choice." In the final stanza, in fact, the implication is clear that by simultaneously setting his heart on heaven and
adjusting himself to the "wealth / Of promise, bounty, and regret" provided by "Earth's natural order" he is best equipped to recover what Yeats called Unity of Being, or at least a state of spiritual and aesthetic health. At a second level, the poem establishes the necessary union of inspiration ("the exalted fire") and toil (the preparing and planting of the "stubborn earth") in the production of the poem. Like many of Yeats' later poems (i.e. "High Talk," "The Circus Animal's Desertion" and "Under Ben Bulben") it stands as a self-conscious exploration of the poet's craft. Unlike Yeats, Watkins does not constantly revive and satirize his own earlier interpretation of myth, dramatizing the various aspects of himself, but he is concerned to analyse the human versus divine elements involved in the creative process. The central question both he and Yeats raise is this: "What is the nature of the creative act?"

"Earth and Fire" is a particularly fine example of the later Watkins at his best and an excellent summation of his exalted ideal of poetry. The theme that the poet should strive uncompromisingly for the "exalted fire" of divine inspiration is reinforced nicely by the heightened but sometimes natural or colloquial diction (i.e. What is a man's song worth?), the use of rhetorical question and vatic reply to suggest an interior dialogue. The opposing elements of fire and earth are played off and reunited by the "fine breath of wintry air" in stanza three, representing man's breathing or "aspiration" (in the etymological sense) toward God. The paradoxes that the burned and "barren field" of the heart tested by adversity yields to heaven "the best return," and that by setting the heart on
heaven one gains earth as well, proceed from the basic Christian principle articulated elsewhere in Watkins' verse that to lose the self is to gain it.

Another central theme Watkins shares with Yeats is that of the consolation offered by great art. Like Yeats, he was interested in what he recognized in "The Joy of Creation" as "the links between poetry, music, and the visual arts." In the following excerpts from that essay, he writes mainly of the visual arts:

A picture, like any work of art, is an interpretation of life. Life is a miracle, and art becomes a miracle when it is a perfect refraction of life....

What happened when, after Michelangelo's labours, the doors of the Sistine Chapel were opened? Was anyone among those who entered able to seize more than a fraction of the imaginative power displayed?

....A supreme work of art is able to persuade us that it has existed forever, and that it is we, who believed in the fugitive nature of time, who were deceived.

The reference to immortal works of art as "miracle" providing man with an escape from time recalls the use Yeats makes of the Ravenna and Sicilian mosaics in "Sailing to Byzantium," the lapis carving by Callimachus in "Lapis Lazuli" and the marble sculptures and ivory carvings of Phidias in "Meditations in Time of Civil War" and "The Statues," to cite only a few examples. In a letter to The Listener (Jan. 22, 1948), Watkins speaks of how Byzantium is for Yeats "a recurrent symbol of vision." There he argues that Yeats' symbols of art serve a purgative function in the poem "Byzantium":

In this poem ["Byzantium"] Yeats again examines the soul's relation to works of art; he finds that architect and goldsmith have set up miracles of workmanship
to stand in mockery of "all that man is"....

....[F]or the works of art, the cathedral dome, the mosaic pavement and the golden bird, continue to have a power of purgation over all "blood-begotten spirits" who come near them. 63

And he adds that in "Lapis Lazuli," one of his favorite poems, Yeats, with a subtlety he never excelled, recalls that ancient miracle, the joy underlying suffering, the inviolable joy of creation, artists as world-builders triumphing over suffering and death. 64

The recurrent statement that art is "miracle" capable of defeating time may be an echo of Yeats' comment in *A Vision* that the "round bird-like eyes of Byzantine sculpture" seemed to be "staring at miracle." 65 The Yeatsian image of the golden bird gazing into past, present and future (viewing prophetically "what is past, or passing, or to come" as in Blake's "Hear the Voice of the Bard! / Who Present, Past, & Future, sees" from *Songs of Experience*) became for Watkins a powerful symbol of the artist as "world-builder triumphing over suffering and death."

In his own work, Watkins was to utilize the "ut pictura poesis" tradition in a like manner. Michelangelo's Adam, or "the Sistine wonder," as Watkins calls it in "Epithalamion" (DB), is referred to in "The Immortal in Nature" (CA), "Angelo's Adam" (A) and "Resting Places" (F). We recall that Yeats pictures Michelangelo's hand moving "to and fro" across the Sistine roof at the end of "Long-legged Fly." In Watkins' sonnet, "Angelo's Adam," the figure of Adam appears as a Yeatsian sculptured image of masculine energy:

Design upon this image holds the vast
Will of the sculptor no desire could speak.
There the strict outline overcame the weak
Before the face could hold the radiance cast
And let that finger gather all the Past,
Revealing at a stroke in light oblique
In muscular strength of neck and curve of cheek
The harmony of line for which all fast. (A, p. 65)

In the sestet, the Michelangelo sculpture is compared to the
closest image of the kestrel in flight. Even in the use
of the kestrel hawk, Watkins' poem suggests Yeats' use of birds
of prey in "The Second Coming" (i.e. the falcon) or At the

**Hawk's Well:**

Exuberantly the kestrel rides the storm
Motionless, carved in air. It is the form
Speaking against the false forms it cast out
Whose fixed proportions still return with grace.
Athletic genius has no room for doubt
And laughs at all designs to take its place. (A, p. 65)

A later poem, "Resting Places," hails in a single breath the
artist and the scientist—Michelangelo and Galileo:

Adam lies fast in Rome:
The moment's magnitude brought near to man.

He drew that body's praise,
Gazing on God. What centuries have since

Turned from those eyes to wage
Ageless, destructive war, all worth made cheap.

Hushed in a single nave,
Grave Angelo and Galileo sleep. (F, p. 68)

For Watkins, art which draws "body's praise" is an inherently
religious act made possible by "gazing on God," and is abso-
lutely opposed to the insanity of "ageless, destructive war."
Here Watkins makes one of his few, but potent, directly politi-
cal comments. The Renaissance painter and sculptor, "Grave
Angelo" (with a pun on "grave"), is joined to his antithesis,
the scientist and philosopher, Galileo, whose confirmation that
the earth circled the sun was to issue in a new view of the cos-
mos. Watkins is suggesting here Blake's idea that "Beneath the
bottom of the Graves...Contrarieties are equally true." 66
Other poems by Watkins based on works of art are the previously analysed "The Healing of the Leper" (LU) inspired by Botticelli's painting by that name, "The Cave-Drawing" (LU) by the caves of Lascaux, "The Lady with the Unicorn" (LU) by the French unicorn tapestries, and "Deposition" (F) by Ceri Richards' painting of the crucifixion. Perhaps the most memorable of these is "The Lady with the Unicorn," an almost Medieval meditation on the famous sixteenth-century tapestries from the Musée de Cluny in Paris. In a letter to The Listener (Jan. 20, 1949), Watkins notes that the tapestries were ordered by Jean Chabannes-Vandenesse in honour of his fiancée for their marriage. He writes:

In my poem I have tried to interpret the sense of harmony, valid for all ages, which these tapestries gave me when I saw them for the first time at the Paris Exhibition of Tapestry in 1946.

Yeats' use of the unicorn in association with an eternity of vital energies in The Unicorn from the Stars and as a symbol of strength, chastity and creative power in The Player Queen may have also contributed to Watkins' fascination with this mythological beast. In "The Lady with the Unicorn" he explores the abovementioned "sense of harmony valid for all ages" through the marriage metaphor, playing on the idea that the six tapestries represent the marriage of the five senses with a sixth or spiritual sense through divine love. Each of the first five stanzas describes one of the tapestries as it relates to one of the five senses. Working very exactly with the rich, heraldic iconography of the tapestries, he explores the senses of sight (stanza 1), sound or music (stanza 2), smell (stanza 3), touch
(stanza 4), taste (stanza 5) and a higher sense unifying the five (stanzas 6, 7 and 8). The opposition of the heraldic lion and "chaste unicorn" (representing the two aspects of Christ) culminates in the synthesis or marriage union of the opposites of lover and beloved in a higher love in the last two stanzas. The "sovereign balm" referred to is spiritual love. As the lover's gaze unites him with the beloved, so, Watkins suggests, life unites with art for the observer in the contemplation of the tapestries. In this poem, Watkins is at his most deliberately "artificial" in style and structure in order to create a courtly, Medieval atmosphere. To enhance this atmosphere he borrows a stanzaic form used by Milton in his proem to the "Nativity Ode." Here he varies the rhyme scheme of the rhyme royal of Chaucer (ababbcc) and finishes it with a final Alexandrine:

O sovereign balm to heal all mortal illness:  
Long let him look, and still he will find stillness,  
Her one betrothed, who sees her museful face.  
This lady, with her flowers and hounds,  
Woven in light, in air, in wooded grounds,  
Transmits a glory wrought about her face,  
Caught in a sacred bond within the encircling space.

Let him look softly, with some seventh sense  
Breaking that circle's hushed magnificence,  
And see what universe her love controls,  
Moving with hushed, divine intent  
Through the five senses to their sacrament  
Whose Eden turns between two silent poles,  
Creating with pure speed that harmony of souls. (LU, p. 103)

Though comparable to Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" in its theme that "the artifice of eternity" can draw man out of time, the poem's emblematic imagery, elevated diction, high seriousness of tone, and Miltonic form suggest Milton rather than Yeats, and
the Miltonic conception of art as that which translates between
time and eternity—man and God—that which refers beyond itself
to a transcendent source.

In Yeats, the timelessness of art sometimes seems to be
offered as a substitute for religion—aesthetic replacing reli-
gious feeling. He writes in Ideas of Good and Evil, for in-
stance, that,

The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoul-
ders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of
priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling
our thoughts with the essences of things, and not with
things.69

In Autobiographies, he describes how for him and his generation
"historical Christianity had dwindled to a box of toys."70
Responding to what he saw as the failure of traditional reli-
gious institutions he wrote, again in Autobiographies, of how
he channelled his own intense religious feeling into a world of
art or "poetic tradition":

I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall,
whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my
childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infal-
lible Church of poetic tradition.71

For Watkins, as for Eliot who challenged Yeats on this matter
in After Strange Gods,72 the substitution of historical reli-
gion by a religion of art was never really possible. Though
Yeats repudiated his early aestheticism in his later work, and
even describes in Autobiographies some fleeting moments when he
experienced a feeling of Christian surrender,73 it is fair to
say that he was, though a supernaturalist, not a Christian in
any real sense. In his own prose, Watkins clearly refuses to
make an idol of art, and, though ranking it as man's "most
exhilarating" and "searching, activity," subordinates it to the
principle of charity:

I am not saying that the need or ability to create art is the highest and most indispensable gift of man: charity is clearly that. But I do say that art is man's most exhilarating, as well as his most searching, activity. 74

Yeats would not necessarily set art above acts of charity (love), but there does run through his work a strong sense of a dichotomy between what he calls "Hodos Chameliontos" or the "winding path of the serpent" which the artist, "sanctity's scapegrace brother," treads, 75 and the "straight-shooting path of the saint." 76 In many of his later poems he chooses the former path out of a sense that a search for perfection of the life destroys the wellsprings of art by denying the complexities of lived experience; that to become a Christian in either the orthodox or mystical sense is to deny the senses and emotions, that is, the passionate, virile, full-bodied humanity in which art is grounded. For him, to take the Christian path of surrender to a personal Deity would be clearly to renounce experience and commit a kind of aesthetic suicide. In "Anima Hominis" from Per Amica Silentia Lunae he writes,

the saint has turned away, and because he renounced Experience itself, he will wear his mask as he finds it. 77

The way of the Christian saint and the way of the Platonic mystical philosopher who seeks union with the One are equally dangerous to the artist for the later Yeats, who writes in A Vision:

Yet even the truth into which Plato dies is a form of death, for when he separates the Eternal Ideas from Nature and shows them self-sustained he prepares the Christian desert and the Stoic suicide. 78
These sorts of observations led him to satirize Plato, Plotinus and Pythagoras in some of his middle and later work, writing vehemently in "The Tower":

I mock Plotinus' thought
And cry in Plato's teeth,
Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul....

Watkins challenges Yeats on the point that acceptance of Christ or Christianity entails a rejection of experience in "The Parthenon," a poem that exalts the friezes on the Parthenon in the Yeatsian sense that art proclaims the heroic nature of man:

The Parthenon, the pride of man,
The Muse of Homer and the Fates,
The marbles of Athenian dawn,
Reject them: they return in Yeats.

The impassive heroes match the force
And calm of his daemonic verse.
Into the stone he drives his horse
That time nor death deters.

He swears, the Muses most exult
In the hard clash of steel on steel.
When conflict ends the words are dulled,
No pleasure in the song they feel. (F, p. 14)

In his celebration of Yeats' heroic attitude, Watkins may be recalling the Irish poet's remark in A Vision on the "primary phases" of Greek art:

Those riders upon the Parthenon had all the world's power in their moving bodies, and in a movement that seemed, so were the hearts of man and beast set upon it, that of a dance.

In the fourth stanza (lines 3 and 4), however, Watkins breaks with Yeats on the issue of the necessary separation of martyr (saint) and hero (artist):

And rightly from the grave he [Yeats] draws
The athletic pulse of deathless art.
Why, then, must passion break those laws,
The martyr and the hero part? (F, p. 14)

Watkins' poem gathers together the heroic images of "strong men" of "bronze" and "iron," and shows them to be awaiting their completion in Christ, the ultimate "prince" or hero whose "love controls" original sin, that is, "Time's error, and the primal fault":

Forever, when those horsemen move,
In souls of Earth's divided sons
The cadence of enduring love
Is destined to subdue the bronze.

Though strong men laugh at human kind,
Though bronze endure and iron ring,
The metaphysics of the mind
Are secret, and a harder thing.

And bones of unregenerate souls
Laid by the sword in their cold vault
Fast for a prince whose love controls
Time's error, and the primal fault.

Still, where those ancient heroes fought,
Proud horses rear their heads in stone;
And still the briddles horsemen caught
Move in the marble, and are gone. (F, pp. 14-15)

The poem rests finally on the paradox that self-sacrifice is the highest form of heroism. By implying that art can be based on self-resignation as well as self-conflict, it is a clear response to Yeats' stance in "Vacillation" where "Heart," in contrast to "Soul," embraces "original sin" (asking, "What theme had Homer but original sin?") as a more favorable creative ground than Christian sanctity. There Yeats writes:

I--though heart
might find relief
Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief
What seems most welcome in the tomb--play a predestined part.
Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.
The lion and the honeycomb, what has Scripture said?
So get you gone, Von Hügel, though with blessings on your head.81
In the earlier "Song of the Good Samaritan" (LU), we observed in Chapter I that Watkins rejected Greek heroism (the "heroic Pegasus") in favor of Christian charity (the Samaritan's deed). In this later poem, however, he seems more capable of integrating the heroic attitude into his Christian position by arguing that love itself is heroic. It is as if by this time he has found a more satisfactory reconciliation of what he calls in "To Hölderlin," "the Christian and the Greek" (A, p. 48). The last stanza of "The Parthenon" is a tribute to the unknown artist who was able to capture in stone the magnificence of the "Proud horses," and a partial concession to Yeats' notion that "the Muses most exult / In the hard clash of steel on steel," that is, in the realm of human conflict. The effort of the poem, however, is to raise that conflict into the realm of the hard and secret "metaphysics of the mind." It would seem to me that Yeats' opposition enabled Watkins to develop a tougher-minded, more comprehensive Christianity, one which would incorporate heroic values within a Christian context.

In the poem "Semele" (F) also, we can see Watkins reinterpreting, modifying and challenging Yeats' position in "Leda and the Swan" by using Semele (a Leda figure) as a symbol of feminine (maternal), self-sacrificing love comparable to the Christian "agape" love Paul describes in Phil. 2:8 when he speaks of Christ's "humbling" of himself (his self-emptying or kenosis). In Yeats' poem dealing with the visitation of a mortal woman (Leda) by a god (Zeus) the encounter represents the union of opposites at the beginning of an age that initiates a new historical cycle. Leda is passive, "mastered by the brute blood
of the air." In contrast, Watkins' Semele, though doomed to the god's fiery embrace for asking to see him in his glory, stands heroic in her disinterested love for Dionysus, the son who will survive her when reborn from Zeus' thigh. Watkins ignores the element of passionate union and concentrates on Semele's other-centered love for her son—a love similar to that of Mary for Christ. Like Yeats in his play, _The Resurrection_ (1931), Watkins associates Christ and Dionysus; for the vine imagery is implicitly sacramental, suggesting the wine cult of Dionysus, but foreshadowing the "half divine" child, Christ, who was also called "the Vine." Whereas Yeats narrates the encounter objectively from outside, Watkins focuses on the woman's maternal feelings, having her speak directly in the first person:

I, killed by lightning, loved the vine,
My unborn child, being half divine,
Mingling a twofold fire shall make
The crushed wine glitter for my sake
Who never saw him. May he know
The soil of Greece where vine-leaves grow,
And may my shade in this true place
Protect him from his father's face.
Infant of one he cannot see,
May he be saved from following me. (F, p. 20)

In spite of Watkins' disagreements with Yeats on the issue of a conflict between Christian self-abnegation and creative expression, what he does share clearly with him is the sense that artists are what Shelley in his _Defense of Poetry_ called "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." In "The Forge of the Solstice," he invokes three Welsh painters, David Jones, Ceri Richards and Alfred Janes as "artificers" who redeem time. In "The Turning of the Stars" (DB), he names Raphael and
Perugino just as Yeats does Michelangelo in "An Acre of Grass" or "Her Vision in a Wood." Like Yeats, who wrote of the "Quattrocento finger" that "fashioned" the image of Leda in "Among School Children," or who alludes to Poussin's "Marriage of Peleus and Thetis" in "News for the Delphic Oracle," Watkins was particularly drawn to the great master painters of the Renaissance. He admired them for their ability to transform creative acts into acts of joyous self-surrender.

As noted earlier, many of Watkins' poems using birds to represent the visionary artist owe much to Yeats for whom the symbols of dove and hawk, swan and heron were emblems of creative contraries—dove and hawk representing primary states; swan and heron antithetical. "The Coots" and "The Peacocks" (LU), "The Dead Shag," "Art and the Ravens" and "The Heron" (DB), "The Crane" (A), "Eyes of an Eagle" (F), "Dusk Tide" and "Night and the Swan" (BOD) are only a few examples. While Watkins' bird poems on the whole reveal more exact powers of natural observation than those of Yeats, they often enact the Yeatsian battle of contraries. In "The Crane," the male bird "stares into miracle" as he performs the ecstatic dance which his natural or earthly counterpart, the female crane, cannot comprehend:

Drawn by the opposite
Of solitude at her side,
She eludes the startled fit
Delusion has deified,
The exalted, staring eyes
Fixed on remotest space.
Against their abstraction she supplies
A movement in time and place. (A, p. 26)

A similar dialectic of opposites between male and female birds
is played out earlier in "The Peacocks" (LU) where the masculine power displayed in the male bird becomes a symbol of the artist possessed by the Muse or spiritual power. With his considerable sensitivity to the Christian iconographic tradition, Watkins is likely to have known that the peacock was a symbol of the incorruptible soul in Christian art.\(^{84}\) In this poem, the female peacock's "lack of interest" or seeming indifference to the male's fan-tailed display of beauty and power represents the fear of the earthbound, materialistic mind before divinity—the uncomprehending response of the everyday world to the divinely possessed artist:

Her lord [the male peacock], 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 unearth's a pod,  
His hurricane of light consumes  
All but the terror of her god. (LU, p. 28)

The obvious use of sexual imagery to express spiritual ecstasy, and the sense that the contraries of abstract thought and sense need each other for completion makes this an expression in Watkins' own style of some very Yeatsian themes.

In "The Heron," probably the most Yeatsian of Watkins' bird poems, he takes up a symbol Yeats uses in Calvary, The Herne's Egg and several of his poems. In "Yeats in Dublin," Watkins, in fact, compares Yeats himself to a great heron:

Then as the heron  
Rises from the stream,  
He raised from the haunted chair  
His tall, proud frame  
In that dazzling background  
Of heroic dream. (LV, p. 17)

"The Heron" takes up the same image and applies it to the
"time-killing" artist in general. Watkins also may be remembering Thomas' use of the heron in "Poem in October" when he speaks of the "heron / Priested-shore," or in "Over Sir John's Hill" when he describes the "holy stalking heron / In the river Towy."

For in "A True Picture Restored" (A, p. 29) and the uncollected "Elegy for the Latest Dead" (Botteghe Oscure, X, 1954), two elegies for Thomas, Watkins clearly associates the heron, "Transfixed...with holiest eye," with his friend. Here in "The Heron" the mind of the bird, like that of Yeats' "Long-legged Fly," "moves upon silence." Its undistracted, motionless fixity on eternity makes it oblivious to changes induced by time:

The cloud-backed heron will not move:
He stares into the stream.
He stands unaltering with the gulls
And oyster-catchers scream.
He does not hear, he cannot see
The great white horses of the sea,
But fixes eyes on stillness
Below their flying team. (DB, p. 46)

Finally, increasingly exact powers of observation characterize the work of Watkins' maturity. The following passages from "Poet and Goldsmith" and "The Guest" demonstrate his ability to present nature objectively by describing the behavior of birds with great accuracy:

He [Taliesin] was now alone. The lovers had wandered across
The field. About him the air fell sweet with singing.
Very close to his eyes a bird was carrying moss.
It gathered a wisp of straw, pecked, and looked up,
And flew to a secret nest. He watched the bough Tremble. Now it was still. There was dew on the field.
Petals began to close. The roots of the elms
Held his wonder: 'Be warned: about you are symbols.'
(CA, p. 36)

The cliff's crossed paths lay silvered with slug tracks
Where webs of hanging raindrops caught the sun.
A thrush with snail cocked sideways like an axe
Knocked with quick beak to crack it on a stone....

There, halfway down the cliff, in fallen flight
I came on plumage, tufted claws, wide wings,
A white owl dead, feeding fritillary light
Into those roots from which the heather springs.

(F, p. 26)

Less often in Yeats do we find the same kind of faithfulness to a natural landscape or focusing of insight through consideration of animal behavior as demonstrated here when Watkins describes the activity of a bird "carrying moss," the exact turn of a thrush's head as it cracks a snail on a stone. Masterfully the repetition of the hard "c" and "k" sounds ("Knocked with quick beak to crack it on a stone") creates an almost onomatopoeic effect. In Yeats, natural images abound, but they are less detailed and individualized, more fused with his mythological symbolism. Concerned more intensely with the dramatic projection of the self upon the world, he was never in danger of being called a mere "nature poet" as Watkins was by critics who failed to perceive the symbolic quality of his descriptions of nature.

A final area where Watkins seems to be following a precedent set by Yeats is in his series of poems dealing with children. Poems like "A Prayer" and "The Caryatids (for Rhiannon asleep)" (DB), "Precision of the Wheel (to my son)" (A), and "For a First Birthday" (BW) are obviously indebted to Yeats' "A Prayer for My Daughter," "A Prayer for My Son" and "Among School Children." As might be expected, however, Watkins' prayer-like addresses to Christ and his prayerful words spoken to sleeping children are much more specifically in the Christian devotional mode, and read more like seventeenth-century
religious meditations. In "A Prayer," for instance, Watkins asks like Yeats in "A Prayer for My Daughter" for certain blessings or gifts that will equip the child to face the "coming age." Yeats' desire is that his daughter shall be "learned" in "courtesy," and enter at last as a bride into "a house / Where all's accustomed, ceremonious"--that she achieve equanimity of soul and inner balance. The ideal he establishes is that of the country manor houses (like his friend Lady Gregory's at Coole) where a continuity of traditional humanistic values survives. Watkins' hope, in contrast, is that his sleeping son might in adulthood avoid desire for the praise of the world by seeking uncompromisingly the "uncounted praise" that belongs to the courageous Christian. Both poets wish that their offspring might rise above what Yeats calls "intellectual hatred" and Watkins, contentious "argument," but Watkins' poem alone points toward resolution in Christ, the "bridegroom" of the following lines:

I pray that he may have
Recourse in argument
After the falling wave
To what remains unspent,
That he may stoop and dare
To gather for his own
In that loud, hostile air
One word's deliberate throne,
I mean uncounted praise,
The bridegroom's calm return
For which all nights and days
In speculation burn. (DB, p. 40)

Watkins asks further that his son may meet the tests of time with unwavering faith and enter at last his "Christ-appointed house." In "The Precision of the Wheel," Watkins' references to the "wheel of prayer" of the turning year, and his own
wheeling mind which twelve years ago at his son's birth "Had run upon a coil," suggest Yeats' symbol of winding gyres. Like Yeats' mind in "Among School Children," Watkins' moves back and forth between memories of art (the unicorn tapestries and his earlier poem on them) and the present situation, that is, his son's twelfth birthday:

Your birthday; and, that night,  
I stopped, to bind  
What I had come to write.  
That month my mind  
Had run upon a coil  
Where light newborn  
Revealed in weaver's toil  
Lady and unicorn. (A, p. 12)

Finally, Watkins' "For a First Birthday" is like Yeats' "A Prayer for My Son" in its request for Christ's protection for a young child. Yet it is the least Yeatsian of Watkins' poems on children in language and tone, being written for a baptism and containing notions of personal redemption and eternal life:

Lay, gentle Christ, Your hands upon this child,  
And let her stature, this first year fulfilled,  
Spring from the font made pure by darkest tears,  
Since the deep love the woman bears  
Quickens her life already, gives her grace  
As if all light were born again  
And the first love the Virgin bore to men  
Entered her eyes and streamed forth from her face....

Clouded indeed are eyes that dream  
Our souls have not been purchased by His love.  
(BW, p. 22)

We have seen that Watkins' affinities with Yeats are both stylistic and thematic. Though overpowered by him in the early BML, he later comes to handle Yeats' characteristic themes and symbols with his own uniquely Christian emphasis. I would suggest further that Watkins' mind is not as intellectual and systematizing as that of Yeats; that his vision is less worldly and
full-bodied—more strictly delimited or concentrated on his Christian themes. In essence, his work lacks the strong vein of scepticism that runs throughout that of Yeats, and with it the dramatic quality of imagination that enacts first one side and then the other of an ongoing debate between self and soul. Many of Yeats' quarrels with Christianity were quarrels with the historical Church—particularly the late Victorian church which he believed to have put too much emphasis on belief and morality, rather than on the essential experiences of the soul.

Since Watkins, though orthodox in his religious practice, saw himself as a more mystical, Blakean Christian in the sense that Blake's Jesus represents Imaginative power at its height, he did not feel that he and Yeats differed radically on the essential metaphysical questions. Where he does depart from Yeats is not in Yeats' struggles with the historical church, but, as I suggested earlier, in his notion that the Christian mystical way involves a dichotomization of flesh and spirit, self and soul, and ends in a negation of the passions on which art is based. Watkins believed, in contrast, that to affirm Christ is to affirm both body and soul, flesh and spirit, and to move toward the very "Unity of Being" Yeats sought. In "Though to Please Man" Watkins makes a summary statement of the inadequacy of the heroic or tragic attitude without a sense of "grace" or a receptivity to the love of God to complement it. Perhaps Watkins' use of a Yeatsian rhetorical style and tone of defiance here in a poem refuting Yeats is a quiet irony on his part. Whether or not intended as a response to Yeats, the poem establishes clearly the distinctness of his position and of his poetic
sensibility:

Though to please man I might
Affect a scornful air
Setting against the night
Strong emblems of despair,
I am too much in debt
To that strong love which cried:
Lay your life down, and set
No store by scorn or pride.
For what were all men's praise
Or worldly recompense
If in the coming days
A dropped voice, more intense
Than any other said:
I too had solitude
And felt, being clothed and fed,
Nothing but gratitude?
How can I fail to see
That living fountain spill
In equal harmony
Over Assissi's hill
And here, wherever feet
Walk with considerate pace,
No intellect complete
Lacking the hand of grace? (BW, p. 31)
Part II: The Friendship with Thomas

No two poets could have been greater temperamental opposites than Vernon Watkins and Dylan Thomas from their first mutual encounter on Pennard in 1935. Watkins was introverted, self-effacing, Cambridge-educated, proficient at three languages, and tenaciously Christian; Thomas was extroverted, dramatic, less well-educated and basically agnostic. Watkins was living in relative isolation on Gower working steadily at Lloyd's bank in Swansea, while Thomas was already catapulting between Wales and his frantic pub life in London. Yet they became close friends immediately and developed a personal and literary relationship that was to last until the time of Thomas' death in 1953. These two essentially different sorts of poets were drawn together by their shared Welsh backgrounds, their mutual opposition to the sociological and political writing of the thirties, and by a common sensitivity to language and concern for meticulous craftsmanship in their verse. The purpose of this section is to explore some aspects of this unique literary configuration in an effort to demonstrate that though the friendship was important to both poets, and especially to Watkins who carefully nurtured Thomas' memory in his elegies after his death, the resemblance between them as poets in both technique and content is only superficial.

Watkins first met Thomas early in 1935 shortly after the publication of *Eighteen Poems* (1934) when he was twenty-nine and Thomas twenty-one. In his Introduction to Thomas' *Letters to Vernon Watkins* (1957), Watkins describes their first meeting:
He was slight, shorter than I had expected, shy, rather flushed and eager in manner, deep-voiced, restless, humorous, with large, wondering, yet acutely intelligent eyes, gold curls, snub nose, and the face of a cherub. I quickly realized when we went for a walk on the cliffs that this cherub took nothing for granted. In thought and words he was anarchic, challenging, with the certainty of that instinct which knows its own freshly discovered truth.

Soon after this initial encounter the two young poets began to meet together regularly to discuss details of composition and revision of their work. They quickly discovered that they shared a similar dedication to the technicalities of the craft, but that their methods of composition were distinct:

We had immediately a very deep affinity, though his style and method of composition were completely different from mine, he working outward from a colloquial core of texture, I working towards the concrete from a musical or articulated source.

Both poets, coincidentally, had attended first the Mirador School in Swansea, and then the Swansea Grammar School where Dylan's father had taught, and both came from middle-class backgrounds; Watkins' father was a banker and Thomas' a schoolmaster. Unlike most of their parent's generation, neither of the young Welsh poets spoke Welsh, and both considered themselves to be working well within the English poetic tradition—"English poets in Wales." Besides similar early educational and social environments, they soon discovered they shared like tastes in poetry—each having developed individually an appreciation of Donne, Herbert, Blake, Keats, Hopkins and Yeats. Thomas was less learned than Watkins, more haphazard in his reading, and less apt to use his sources imitatively. Through subsequent contact they encouraged and broadened each other's literary interests. Thomas, for instance, kindled in Watkins
a deeper respect for Herbert, and Watkins introduced Thomas to the German poet, Rilke (1875-1926), as well as many of the French symbolists. Both poets possessed a strong sense of external form in poetry and were fastidious in technical matters. Techniques like cynghanedd or approximations thereof, syllable counting, use of compound words, alliterative forms, biblical allusions and paradoxical constructions are common to both. In addition, they shared a number of important thematic concerns. Thomas, as much as Watkins, is obsessed with the problem of time, posing it in terms of a descent or fall out of timeless perception into a corrupt or decaying world where life and death are inextricably united. Both have a strong sense of nostalgia for childhood and an interest in how the child views the world. Their equally important differences in methods of approach to the "Fall," and the close interrelation of life and death were to emerge more clearly as their work matured.

Watkins' edition of the *Letters to Vernon Watkins* (1957), the main source of information about this unusual friendship, reveals that theirs was a mutually beneficial exchange. The letters extend from 1936 to 1952, though many have been lost, along with Watkins' side of the correspondence. The period of Watkins' and Thomas' most intense personal contact occurred between 1935 and 1936 when they were meeting at least two or three times a week at each other's residences either in Swansea or in nearby Pennard. In March of 1936, however, Dylan returned to London and married Caitlan Thomas in July of 1937. From this time (April 1936), the literary correspondence evidenced by Thomas' published *Letters* began and continued, becoming somewhat
sporadic during the time of Watkins' stint in the R.A.F. from 1941-44, and diminishing greatly after the war. Yet it unfolds a developing personal and literary relationship that was to have a significant impact on both poets, and a profound one on Watkins.

The correspondence reveals that Watkins and Thomas were equally committed to perfectionism in verse or what Thomas called the "subtle craft"; for the letters center primarily on issues of compositional detail, the minutiae of stanza, line, phrase and word. There is much evidence from the letters to argue that Thomas admired Watkins' considerable technical facility, and it has even been suggested on the basis of changes in Thomas' work after Eighteen Poems that Watkins may have influenced him in the direction of greater formal precision, the use of more complex rhythms, longer sentences and more intricate stanza forms. Since we lack Watkins' side of the correspondence, and because Thomas was so individual a writer, it is difficult to estimate the extent of Watkins' influence beyond actual changes he suggested that were ultimately used in the final versions of some of the poems. The phrase "cloud-sopped hands" in "After the Funeral," for instance, is due to Watkins. Watkins also eventually convinced Thomas to use titles and inspired him to experiment with ballads, working closely with him on the revisions of "The Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait." He helped with the revisions of Twenty-Five Poems (1936), culled from Thomas' early Swansea notebooks, and typed the poems for The Map of Love (1939) as they were ready.
Before he met Thomas, Watkins had himself shunned publication as too self-seeking an endeavor, and had published only a single poem, "True Lovers," in *The London Mercury* (May 1929). Thomas broke down this rather stubborn resistance by encouraging him to publish "Old Triton Time" and "Griefs of the Sea" in the first number of *Wales* (1937). Subsequently, more of Watkins' poems appeared in *The Welsh Review, Life and Letters, Today, Horizon* and *The Listener*, and his public career was firmly established.\(^9\)

In spite of obvious differences in temperament, Thomas seemed to respect Watkins not only as the older poet by eight years, but for his broader English and Cambridge education, his more international cultural exposure, and his precise knowledge of modern European languages (French, German, Italian). Though Watkins left Cambridge after only a year, and of his own volition, he had been academically successful both there and at Repton, and retained throughout his life a scholarly, well-stocked, well-disciplined mind. As noted earlier, his translations of Hölderlin, Heine and others were competent and well-received by critics and reviewers.\(^10\) Thomas, on the other hand, though brilliantly precocious, left school early to pursue his career as a poet, and (some say) lived to regret his lack of more formal education.\(^11\)

Thomas, the "anarchic cherub," however, challenged Watkins' more literary mind with his startlingly fresh and original poetic idiom. Watkins wrote later of Thomas that, "he showed me what was fresh in my work and what was stale and derived from other poets."\(^12\) Always it was the vigour and energy of Thomas'
style that Watkins remarked on in his prose about him. In Thomas' obituary he wrote:

It was at once realized by discerning readers, among whom Edith Sitwell was one of the first, that this poet had created an idiom; that he had disturbed the roots of our language in an organic way and given it a new vitality.13

Though there are poems where Watkins seems to have absorbed features of Thomas' highly individual idiom, it is not in these poems, I would argue, that Watkins is at his best. Thomas' astute editing, however, encouraged him to move away from vagueness and abstraction, and to avoid the weakly adjectival line, the commonplace phrase or expression. In his critique of Watkins' early poem, "Mana," in a letter of October 25, 1937, for instance, Thomas writes:

And one other line I think is bad: "Laid in the long grey shadow of our weeping thought." This, to me, has far too many weak words. They are weak alone, & weaker when added together....14

And in a letter of March 21, 1938, he speaks similarly of an early draft of "Call It All Names":

There is something very unsatisfactory, though, about "All mists, all thoughts" which seems--using the vaguest words--to lack a central strength. All the words are lovely, but they seem so chosen, not struck out. I can see the sensitive picking of words, but none of the strong, inevitable pulling that makes a poem an event, a happening, an action perhaps, not a still-life or an experience put down, placed, regulated; the introduction of mist, legend, time's weir, grief's bell, & such things as "which held, but knew not her," the whole of the 13th line, "all griefs that we suppose", seem to me "literary," not living. They seem, as indeed the whole poem seems, to come out of nostalgia of literature....15

Though Watkins often proved more resistant to criticism than Thomas,16 the alterations in the final drafts of some of the poems discussed with him indicate that he heeded Thomas' advice,
and gradually began to free his language of what was dead or unnaturally derivative. He never repudiated what critics have called his "cult of dead poets," but he did attempt to forge a more individual and contemporary idiom.

Even though it is clear from the letters that the two poets were approaching poetry from different perspectives, and that the criticism of one is not necessarily applicable to the work of the other, it is certain that Watkins derived needed support from a fellow poet at a critical time in his life. The friendship brought him in contact with a group of Thomas' friends, the composer Tom Warner, the painter Alfred Janes, and the writers John Prichard and Richard Hughes. It gave the isolated and previously unpublished Watkins confidence and the sense of belonging to an intellectual community which he lacked since his days at Repton.

The letters also reveal several areas of contention between the two young poets. Though he forgave him later, Watkins was offended when Thomas took the liberty of changing several lines of "Griefs of the Sea" before its publication without his permission. Watkins informs us in his Introduction to the Letters that afterwards he entered the shop in Swansea where the issues were stocked and changed back every copy by hand. Thomas, who was freer with his unfinished drafts, resented Watkins' reluctance to share his work until he considered it finished. Thomas complains in the letters also that Watkins' criticisms of his work were sometimes misdirected. In a letter dated May or June 1939 he writes:

I think you are liable, in your criticisms of me, to underrate the value—or, rather, the integrity, the
wholeness—of what I am saying or trying to make clear that I am saying, and often to suggest alterations or amendments for purely musical motives.19

In spite of these sources of near conflict, Thomas continued to commend Watkins publicly and to read his work in radio broadcasts. And in spite of Thomas' constant dunning of Watkins for small sums of money and (the final blow) his failure to turn up at Watkins' wedding, Watkins continued to defend Thomas as one of the truly "religious" poets of the age, reading many of his poems as religious statements.

In the Introduction to the Letters, he argued that Thomas was religious in the broadest sense by refusing (like himself) to write a poem "dominated by time":

My own themes were really closer to his...we were both religious poets, and neither of us had any aptitude for political reform.20

Recalling how (when Thomas was still living) he was once challenged on the contradiction between his sense of debt to Thomas and his contention that "a poet cannot learn a true style from a contemporary," Watkins responded by saying that "Dylan Thomas is an ancient poet. He happens to be alive."21 I shall be examining Watkins' view of Thomas as a religious poet at a later point in the chapter. At this stage I wish to suggest that the mutual influence of the two poets fades after Watkins' LU and Thomas' Map of Love, that is after the period of their most intense communication. Thomas' presence in Watkins' work in style and content is most evident in BML (1941), LV (1945), and LU (1948). Though Watkins' influence on Thomas is less obvious, and less important, we are most likely to find it in Twenty-Five Poems (1936) and The Map of Love (1949). I shall proceed by
examining several of the Dylanesque poems from Watkins' first three volumes, and then move on to show how Thomas appears as a symbolic figure of the poet in the later elegies.

Many of the poems from BML (1941) show Watkins under the sway of Thomas' personal style and idiom. The sonnet, "The Dead Words," with phrases like, "So flies love's meteor from her shroud of winds," is a clear example of Watkins' indebtedness to Thomas' "Alter-wise by owl-light" sequence of sonnets. Watkins seems to affect in the early work (sometimes unsuccessfully) the verbal density, the accumulation of meaning through word play, and the joining of disparate images in contexts of paradox characteristic of the early Thomas. Leslie Norris has shown, in fact, through internal evidence and on the basis of the dates of the drafts, that most of the poems in BML were written after Watkins had met Thomas in 1935. Even T. S. Eliot was quick to note in his comments on the dust jacket of Watkins' first book "a racial quality which gives it [Watkins' style] something in common with that of Dylan Thomas." It is probable that some of the early similarities between the two poets can be accounted for not merely by influence, but by their common Welsh backgrounds and cultural experience.

"Portrait of a Friend" is a set piece written in response to Thomas' suggestion in a letter of February 7, 1938 that Watkins write a poem on the back of a photo Thomas sent him in the mail. Thomas was pleased by the resulting effort and read it on several occasions to friends. The poem opens,

He has sent me this
Late and early page
Caught in the emphasis
Of last night's cartonnage,
Crumpled in the post,
Bringing to lamplight
Breath's abatement,
Over-and under-statement,
Mute as a mummy's pamphlet
Long cherished by a ghost.  (BML, p. 36)

The reference to Thomas as "this cracked prophet" suggests the
notion that genius is allied to madness, but is also a play on
words, since the photo arrived with a literal crack down the
middle. In the third stanza, Watkins describes Dylan's Blash-
ford residence:

T rusting a creaking house,
His roof is ruinous,
So mortal. A real wind
Beats on this house of sand
Two tides like ages buffet.
The superhuman, crowned
Saints must enter this drowned
Tide-race of the mind
To guess or understand
The face of this cracked prophet,
Which from its patient pall
I slowly take,
Drop the envelope,
Compel his disturbing shape,
And write these words on a wall
Maybe for a third man's sake.  (BML, pp. 36-37)

This is an early example of a poem (Feb. 1938) where Thomas as
central subject allows Watkins to expostulate on the flawed and
mortal yet divine role of the poet or artist. There are pos-
sible traces of Thomas' imagery in phrases like "tide-race of
the mind," and verbal echoes from The Map of Love. Watkins'
phrase,

....a worldly brothel
That a sinner's tongue may toll
And call the place Bethel...  (BML, p. 36)

is certainly an allusion to Thomas' "It is the sinner's dust-
tongued bell." 27 Thomas is present in BML, then, not merely as
a stylistic influence, but as a symbolical figure of the artist in time.

Watkins' "Elegy on the Heroine of Childhood (in Memory of Pearl White)" (BML, p. 14) takes up Thomas' famous passion for films and employs his frequently used six-line stanza as in "I see the boys of summer" and "Before I knocked." In this early poem, Watkins, who shows little later interest in the cinema, attempts to recreate the flurry and excitement of children transfixed by Hollywood's imaginary world of heroes and heroines. It is uncharacteristic of him also to draw upon realistic scenes of contemporary life:

From penny rows, when we began to spell,
We watched you [Pearl White], at the time when Arras fell,
Saw you, as in a death-ray seen,
Ride the real fear on a propped screen,
Where, through revolting brass, and darkness' bands,
Gaping, we groped with unawakened hands. (BML, p. 14)

The heavily alliterated lines, hyphenated words, rush of concrete images and use of original adjectives like "thumbscrewed" are again characteristic of Thomas:

From school's spiked railings, glass-topped, cat-walked walls,
From albums strewn, the street's strange funerals,
We run to join the queue's coiled peel
Tapering, storming the Bastille,
Tumbling, with collars torn and scattered ties,
To thumbscrewed terror and the sea of eyes. (BML, p. 15)

In spite of the persistence of such devices, Watkins' language seldom displays the same kind of verbal obscurity found in Thomas' early work. In his Introduction to the Letters, in fact, Watkins speaks of how he tried to discourage Thomas from publishing some poems he considered impenetrable:
I tried to persuade Dylan to leave two of the poems out of the new book of Twenty-five....The other poems all seemed packed with meaning, but for me these two poems presented a face of unwarrantable obscurity.29

The two poems, "Now, Say Nay" and "How Soon the Servant Sun," were, of course, retained by Dylan, who responded to the possible severity of critics by saying, "Give them a bone"; but at least Watkins had registered his complaint against the kind of verbal compression demonstrated in those poems. The imagistic movement of Watkins' "Elegy of Childhood," in contrast, is logical, and the narrative sequence clear. Most of Watkins' poems are accessible to the general reader; whereas many of Thomas' early poems unfold through a juxtaposition and union of disparate images related by verbal association that makes comprehension difficult. Ralph Maud notes in his critical study, *Entrances to Dylan Thomas' Poetry*, that,

This breeding and contradicting process is essentially fanciful and undisciplined; its only logic is that of association of ideas.30

He is referring to Thomas' own description of his method in a letter to Henry Treece recorded in Treece's *Dylan Thomas: "Dog Among the Fairies"*:

I let, perhaps, an image be "made" emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess--let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict. Each image holds within it the seed of its own destruction, and my dialectical method, as I understand it, is a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time.31

Maud argues that many of Thomas' most seemingly opaque early poems are comprehensible when read in light of his dialectic of
association. He argues perceptively that Thomas' word play, dislocations of meaning, and disruption of normal narrative structure are related directly to his view of the world as a "war of conflicting forces"—that the disparate images reinforce the theme of a basic polarity in the self and in the world.  

In spite of occasional obscurities of syntax, the relative absence of this kind of difficulty in Watkins through the maintenance of logical narrative and imagistic structures argues that he takes a more traditionally mimetic view of poetry. He is not concerned to destroy in order to rebuild meaning like Thomas, but to mirror the timeless unity and elegance of a world built on unshakeable, universal principles. I would argue, then, that in these early poems, he is merely utilizing verbal skills and poetic devices sharpened by association with Thomas to reflect his own more traditionally Christian view of the world. He is concerned with the way the inner self relates to an objective metaphysical order, and less focused on the subjective (visceral and psychic) processes within the self.

In Watkins' second collection, _LV_ (1945), Thomas again appears as a figure of the modern artist--this time, the "anarchic" poet with his "iconoclastic frown." Though his use of this image indicates that Watkins must have recognized the differences between his traditionally religious and Thomas' more radically questioning orientation, he believed that Thomas was a true poet, and that the function of the true poet is to challenge the narrowness of social convention. Watkins assumed that the timeless vision of the artist, like that of Blake, was inevitably disturbing to ordinary sensibility. In the long lyric,
"The Broken Sea," a poem in honour of the birth of a friend's (Francis Dufau-Labeyrie's) child in wartime Paris, he recalls his own childhood in Swansea. He again invokes the cinema actress Pearl White (who was a kind of Venus to the adolescent poet), several of his artist friends including Alfred Janes, "the painter of limbo," and finally Thomas himself, "the extravagant hero of night":

I mourn that moment alive  
Near the glow-lamped Eumenides' house, overlooking the ships in flight,  
Where Pearl White focussed our childhood, near the foot of Cwmdonkin Drive,  
To a figment of crime stampeding in the posters' wind-blown blight.

I regret the broken Past, its prompt and punctilious cares,  
All the villainies of the fire-and-brimstone town.  
I miss the painter of limbo at the top of the fragrant stairs,  
The extravagant hero of night, his iconoclastic frown.  

Using what John Heath-Stubbs has called an "elemental, obsessive, subliminal imagery characteristic of his friend and fellow Welshman Mr. Dylan Thomas...."\textsuperscript{33} Watkins' "The Broken Sea" from LV is as close in style to a Thomas poem as anything Watkins wrote. We have seen in Chapter IV that certain passages from this poem approach a Vaughanesque sense of eternity by using a traditional mystical symbolism of light. I would argue that the poem thus departs from Thomas' early work by the greater metaphysical depth of its symbols. As already suggested, Thomas' early poems, in contrast, often focus on the biological (even prenatal) and psychological processes within the self--the sexual awakening ("Before I knocked"), the battle
between the sexes ("I make this in a warring absence"), and the painful realization of death's interrelation with life ("The force that through the green fuse drives the flower"). Though both poets see life as a flux of forces, in Watkins' early work it is clear that those forces issue ultimately from a transcendent and unified ground.

Both poets may use religious symbols and biblical allusions freely, but only Watkins places them in their traditional religious context. As Kathleen Raine points out,

...if Dylan Thomas surpassed his friend in dazzling richness and the fulness of the flow of life in his work, Vernon Watkins has the greater metaphysical sense. 34

...all along Vernon Watkins has adhered to his symbols with a more conscious dedication to their sacred and traditional content. 35

These assertions can be illustrated by a passage from "Sea-Music" where the dazzling flow of images may suggest Thomas, but the symbols are held in a context of Christian belief in the efficacy of the eucharist. The "ark of the covenant" and the "grail" symbols both retain their traditional associations with Christian death and resurrection, and the bell imagery foreshadows the use Watkins is to make of it in The Death Bell. The effort is to universalize the primal death and resurrection experience of the self:

Who knows so well as I
There are deep sea-bells. Zig-zag swordfish daggering
Rip the plumed exultation of the whale
Whose thousand years are drowned in that blood-spring
Falling through darkness, falling from a wing
To the sea-troughs, ark of the covenant, lowering of
the grail
To the mad navel of the million-fated sky. (LV, p. 25)
Elements of Thomas' style and many of his persistent themes continue to appear in LU (1948), Watkins' third Faber volume. By this time, however, Watkins has begun to develop the complexity of his own vision in poems like "Music of Colours--White Blossom," "Foal" and "Zaccheus in the Leaves." In "Returning to Goleufryn" from this volume, as already noted in Chapter IV, Watkins explores the nostalgia for childhood he feels on returning to his maternal grandfather's farm in Carmarthenshire in a manner similar to that of Thomas in "Fern Hill" (published in Deaths and Entrances, 1946). Yet his view of childhood here is distinct in that the adult speaker is more clearly outside Eden, more decidedly in exile from original innocence:

Yet now I am lost, lost in the water-wound looms
Where brief, square windows break on a garden's decay. 
(LU, p. 16)

Though a less successful poem than "Fern Hill" in verbal energy and in creating the freshness and spontaneity of childhood, it is again more implicitly theological, more concerned with personal guilt and adult moral responsibility:

....Yet I alone
By the light in the sunflower deepening, here stand, my eyes cast down
To the footprint of accusations.... (LU, p. 15)

Norris points out that Thomas may have had Watkins' "Returning to Goleufryn" in his mind when he composed "Over Sir John's Hill" years later, since he takes up Watkins' image of the river Towy and echoes his phrase "in a turn of the Towy" in his own "in the tear of the Towy."\(^{36}\) This as well as other verbal parallels argues that Watkins continued to influence Thomas,
as well as the other way around, though not to the same extent. The fact that both poets wrote a number of important poems for or about children may indicate not only the presence of mutual influence, but argue that as fathers of young children they both shared a common area of experience.37

"Llewelyn's Chariot" (LU, p. 21) along with several poems Watkins omitted from the published volumes, "Poems for Llewelyn" (Life and Letters, March 24, 1940) and "Llewelyn's Spoon" (Wales 3, No. 3, October 1943), are written consciously and explicitly with Thomas in mind. "Llewelyn's Chariot" concerns the infancy of Dylan's first son. Thomas too wrote several poems about Llewelyn (when he was yet in the womb) including "A saint about to fall" and "If my head hurt a hair's foot." "This Side of the Truth (for Llewelyn)" (published July 1, 1945) is another poem by Thomas about Llewelyn at the age of six. "Llewelyn's Chariot" shows Watkins in an unusually whimsical mood that returns in the later poem to his own son, "Poem for Conrad" in Fidelities. In the later poem he adopts the child's-eye view by speaking through the persona of the child. Here he speaks to him as a sympathetic, adult observer. The poem begins with an image of the child as solar hero (compared to Jason and Ramses) within his own small cosmos of toys. The original Llewelyn the Great was a Welsh chieftain who died in 1240, and his grandson, Prince Llewelyn the Last, was the final of the great Welsh princes to suffer defeat by the English (under Edward I) in 1282.38 As hero or literally "man of deeds" in his own sphere, the child's microcosm takes on mock epic proportions:
Sun of all suns, seed of dandelion seeds,
Sprung from the stem of delight and the starry course,
High at the helm of night, in the van of deeds,
A one-wheeled carriage you drive and a headless horse.

(WU, p. 21)

Watkins' poem, in contrast to Thomas' later "This Side of the Truth," for instance, conveys a more assured sense that because the child is made in the image of his "Maker," God protects him in his innocence:

Your Maker makes you his glory, you grasp and push
Through bars the bugle, the mirror, the string of beads,
The doll and the wooden men; with a mighty wish
You ride the brunt of creation's galloping beds.

(WU, p. 21)

In the final stanza, however, as in so many of Thomas' poems, Watkins dwells on the way in which the timeless state of youth is threatened by death, the "hearse" that lurks in the shadows:

Ramses, trumpet and chariot, all you outrun
Grasping your cage where grief is banished for good,
Created nothing, timeless, perpetual one
Dropped from light-years to crawl under legs of wood,
Star-seed, breath-downed, dropped from the topmost sun
To the toppling house near the shed that shadows a hearse,
From whirling, luminous night, to sleep here alone
In the darkness a great light leaves, where a feather stirs.

(WU, p. 21)

The poem is reminiscent of Thomas in its use of Hopkins-style compound words as much as in its sense that death is interwoven with life from the moment the child is "dropped from the topmost sun." As in "Fern Hill," only the introspective adult looking back on childhood recognizes that the "great light" retreats as the child matures. The Platonic ramifications of birth as a descent and a forgetting of eternity are more strongly and consciously present in Watkins' poem.

Another theme used by both Thomas and Watkins with some
success is that of the ravages of war, the despoiling of innocence through human violence. Watkins' "The Spoils of War," also from LU, is similar in subject matter to Thomas' "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" and "Ceremony After a Fire Raid." It is an account of a woman's death during a wartime air raid in Swansea. Thomas' "Refusal to Mourn" is more rhetorically effective in the way it convinces the reader of the paradox that a refusal to mourn can itself become a great elegiac statement. Though its tone is less heroic, Watkins' poem focuses on the moment of the young woman's death, and the repercussions to her motherless infant:

She sprang, luminous on a wish, to the trivial
Tread of her gallows-drop, reaching for a cushion for her child in the shelter to sleep on,
Crossed her own tombstone, then all the stars ran in
And the world shot back like a ball.... (LU, p. 51)

Again, though Watkins uses his own profusion of images less innovatively than Thomas, the narrative movement is clear and the religious implications less ambiguous. The woman's dying becomes not only a symbol of man's injustice to man, but of her capacity for a Christlike forgiveness:

Wounded to the death of Earth, she forgives those restless ones.
Divorced from her darling, O at last no ropes are rung.
Look on her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young.

(LU, p. 52)

By the time of DB (1954), published the year after Thomas' death, the obvious technical impact of Thomas has vanished, and Watkins seems to be working toward a new, more austere and reflective style. Here, after allowing a six-year interval from the publication of LU, he succeeds in pulling away from the verbal density and obscurity of some of the early work. Like
the style of the later Yeats, Watkins' new bareness and simplicity has been seen by some as a restriction of his native powers, but I believe it to be a limitation that allowed ultimately for greater intensity and freedom. Like the Thomas of "Do not go gentle into that good night" and the unfinished "Elegy" (completed from manuscript notes by VW), Watkins was deeply affected by his father's death, and dedicates The Death Bell to him. In his allusions to passages from Donne's sermons and meditations, Watkins can be compared to Thomas, who also made frequent references to Donne, especially to his last sermon, "Death's Duell." Yet here, as argued in Chapter IV, Watkins emerges more clearly as a traditional Christian metaphysical poet in the line of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne.

It remains to consider the complex question of Thomas' position on the issue of religion. The frequent biblical allusions, his own sense of the holiness of life, especially in the later poems, and Watkins' assumption that Thomas was moving toward a more traditional Christian position in the later work, force us to consider whether he can be classified meaningfully as a religious poet, and if so, in what sense of the word? William Empson has spoken of Thomas' "pessimistic pantheism," and Constantine Fitzgibbon, his major biographer, of his "reluctant agnosticism." Other critics like Charles Williams and Thomas Merton have argued with Watkins that he is essentially a religious poet. In his essay, "The Religious Poet," Merwin, for instance, argues that Thomas is a religious artist in the sense of

a celebrator in the ritual sense: a maker and performer of a rite. And also a celebrator in the sense of one
who participates in a rite, and whom the rite makes joyful. That which he celebrates is Creation, and more particularly the human condition.

If we define the religious sense thus loosely, we can say at the very least that Thomas has written several noteworthy poems of religious celebration, and many poems of intense religious conflict. Among the poems of celebration I would include "And death shall have no dominion," "Poem in October," "Fern Hill," "In Country Sleep," "Over Sir John's Hill" and "Poem on His Birthday." Many of these are among the later poems where a new clarity and concern with people and issues beyond the self begin to appear more strongly. The assumption in these later poems that affirmation can be made even in the face of ultimate annihilation provides a context for Thomas' own preface to Collected Poems (1952):

These poems, with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of Man, and in praise of God, and I'd be a damn' fool if they weren't.

This statement, along with earlier prose comments on his poetic intention, asks the reader to grant that at one level at least the poems come from religious sincerity.

The following answer to questions submitted by the editor of New Verse, October 1934, reveals that from the time of the early work Thomas considered himself to be involved in some kind of religious quest:

My poetry is, or should be, useful to me for one reason: it is the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light....

Thomas' own particular method of moving from darkness to light, however, involves a psychological, even Freudian "stripping of
the individual darkness." For in that same questionnaire he has written revealingly of his attitude toward Freud:

Whatever is hidden should be made naked. To be stripped of darkness is to be clean, to strip of darkness is to make clean. Freud cast light on a little of the darkness he had exposed. Benefiting by the sight of the light and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag forth into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realise.  

One can never take the poet's interpretative comments on his work as the absolute word. Yet many of the poems, both early and late, confirm that Thomas was interested in the conscious shaping of unconscious material. He is arguing here that bringing to the surface as much as possible of the unconscious, subliminal self is a way of enacting the movement from darkness to light. Certainly, many of his poems are successful shapings of the flow of images from a subliminal source.

Most traditional religious symbolism of light and dark, however, implies the existence of a transcendent plane and the possibility of translation from a lower to an upper world, from an individual to a universal consciousness. In his essay, "Second Thoughts About Humanism" (1929), T. S. Eliot makes a distinction that is applicable here:

Either everything in man can be traced as a development from below, or something must come from above. There is no avoiding that dilemma: you must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist.

In Watkins, whatever the limitations of his vision, the assumption is clear that God, an eternal world, a second dimension (or dimensions) beyond the physical one exists, and that this dimension is more than an aspect of the individual unconscious mind—that in Eliot's terms it proceeds from "above," from the
world of Spirit. Not only does he believe such a realm exists, but that its existence demands from man a response in terms of obedience and commitment. I have called Thomas an "agnostic" in the etymological sense of one who reckons that nothing certain can be known about God, because he sustains an attitude of ambiguity toward the existence of such an eternal world, a life-beyond-death, a higher dimension, as well as toward the concept of a beneficent Deity involved actively with his creation. Watkins is not naive in granting Thomas a strong religious impulse in the broader sense defined by Merwin; but in the sense defined by Eliot Thomas remains essentially sceptical, and certainly not Christian. At the most we can say that Thomas is a poet of religious conflict for whom the naive, Nonconformist faith of his cultural background was intellectually and emotionally inadequate, but who retained into adulthood its sense of reprobation and guilt, of individual "fallenness," and on the positive side, the Nonconformist's attitude of religious celebration, his immersion in the language of the Bible, and sensitivity to the devices of Welsh preaching rhetoric. More than one critic of Thomas has noted the way the rolling rhythms and sonorous oral patterns of his verse recapture powerfully the feeling of the traditional Welsh sermon. Though Dylan's father, D. J. Thomas, was what John Ackerman calls "a bible-reading atheist," the brother of Dylan's paternal grandfather had been a Unitarian minister, and the Nonconformist strain is strong on both sides of the family. 

Thomas' desire to shock is at one level at least a response to the restrictive influence
of Welsh Puritanism and betrays an element of guilt, a sense of moral tension that runs throughout his work.

Thomas' uneasy relation to the Nonconformist religious tradition in which he found himself only partly accounts for the presence of the many scriptural allusions in his work. What are we to make of them, then, in terms of his interior religious quest? I have suggested earlier that such allusions do not cohere in a context of traditional belief and commitment. My further conclusion is that Thomas uses his Christian symbols playfully, idiosyncratically, tearing them from their traditional context of Christian consolation and assurance. As Ralph Maud expresses it in *Entrances to Dylan Thomas' Poetry*, "It is hard to tell whether Christ is being praised or defamed." Maud argues convincingly that Thomas exploits Christian concepts of life coming out of death for aesthetic purposes. "Vision and Prayer" is a late Herbert-style 'shape' poem that Watkins admired and believed to have been influenced by Rilke. In spite of allusions to the nativity of Christ, the poem focuses on the poet's subjective reactions to his child's birth. Even at the end of the poem when the speaker turns "the corner of prayer," and asks to be drowned or overwhelmed in the light of the sun, symbol of Christ, his position is far from a traditional belief in personal immortality. He conveys instead the notion that the poet's office is to affirm in the face of probable annihilation, and dwells on the impossibility of returning to "the hidden land" of prenatal security. The poem is ultimately about the agony of birth, with none of the usual consolations.
Emotionally it wavers between fear of and desire for annihilation:

I turn the corner of prayer and burn
In a blessing of the sudden
Sun. In the name of the damned
I would turn back and run
To the hidden land
But the loud sun
Christens down
The sky.
I
Am found.
O let him
Scald me and drown
Me in his world's wound.
His lightning answers my
Cry. My voice burns in his hand.
Now I am lost in the blinding
One. The sun roars at the prayer's end.

The religious vocabulary of "Over Sir John's Hill" with phrases like "holy stalking heron," "psalms and shadows among the pincered sandcrabs," and "Led-astray birds whom God, for their breast of whistles, / Have mercy on...," never implies real religious certainty, for the poem centers on natural destruction, and leaves the reader with the sense that God distances himself from the slaughter of creatures:

In the pebbly dab-filled
Shallow and sedge, and "dilly dilly," calls the loft hawk,
"Come and be killed..." At best one can say Thomas comes face to face with the possibility of death as absolute finality without flinching, writing heroically in "Poem on His Birthday,"

....the closer I move
To death, one man through his sundered hulks,
The louder the sun blooms
And the tusked, ramshackling sea exults....

As John Ackerman argues in Welsh Dylan, Thomas is "wrestling with belief and unbelief, yet finally settled in neither."
In both poetry and prose, we can observe this tendency to hover between the poles of belief and doubt. Thomas says publicly that he writes his *Collected Poems* (1952) "for the love of Man and in praise of God," but qualifies himself by saying privately to John Malcolm Brinnin (July 1951) that the poems were written "in praise of God's world by a man who doesn't believe in God." One of Thomas' early notebook entries next to the poem "Before I knocked" tells the story of an unsettledness on the issue of religion that was to persist throughout his life:

If God is praised in poem one
Show no surprise when in the next
I worship wood or sun or none:
I'm hundred-headed and countless sexed.

When Watkins writes, then, in a footnote comment to Fitzgibbon's biography (1965) that Thomas was "religious and Christian," a "Blakean Christian," he is exercising (rather blindly I would argue) his old tendency to make Christian heroes of all the poets he most loved. Part of his readiness to assume in Thomas a religious impulse similar to his own, to overlook all differences and focus on essential unities, was his nature. But his later tendency to defend Thomas against all critical opposition was a reaction to the uproar surrounding Thomas, "the legend," at his death. Watkins was deeply shocked when the news of Thomas' death in New York reached him in Swansea in 1953. After a long silence, when the papers and magazines stressed the lurid details of Thomas' last days, Watkins proceeded to write a series of obituaries, articles and reviews that stand as an apologetic for Thomas the man and fellow Welsh poet. Out of a phenomenal loyalty, many of Watkins' prose
statements seem to fly in the face of facts. He writes in "Mr. Dylan Thomas—Innovation and Tradition" (The Times, November 10, 1953), for instance, that Thomas "live[d] Christianity in a public way." Along with Fitzgibbon, who defends Thomas the poet in his biography, Watkins believed that Thomas had been the victim of his own mask, that the drinker and actor had overwhelmed the true poet. In a May 1956 issue of Encounter, Watkins takes issue with John Malcolm Brinnin's book, Dylan Thomas in America (1956), which he considered sensationalistic, by arguing that "he [Thomas] was killed by his own mask, by the grimace which his entertainment produced, by a kind of disgust at the popularity of what he was not." Watkins believed Thomas to have been the victim of his heartless American audiences who encouraged him in the false role he was forced to assume because they expected it of him. Only in later articles and private conversations was Watkins able to admit a self-destructive element in Thomas' personality. In his Afterword to Adventures in the Skin Trade, he speaks of a "heckler" in Thomas, "a dissenter who will not keep step with his fame, a spur which contradicts progress." And in a remark to Jane McCormick shortly before his death Watkins was to admit:

Yes, I still believe Dylan to be a religious poet, but he was not a religious man, and certainly not a Christian. I mean, if you're a Christian it changes your life, doesn't it? Dylan certainly never changed. If he had had half the respect for his life that he had for his poetry, he would have been a good man—and alive today.

Nevertheless, Watkins never ceased to mourn Thomas in his poems or to lose the strong sense of identification with him as fellow poet, opposites though they were on the religious path.
In her searching analysis of what she sees as Watkins' rather one-sided relationship with Thomas in *Portrait of a Friend*, Gwen Watkins sets their friendship in a completely new light by suggesting that Watkins was able to sustain such an intense identification because Thomas stood for him as an "alter ego," the self he might have been had his life taken another path:

Dylan was his *alter ego*; when he supported, protected, admired Dylan it was because of the life he had never lived himself.  

She argues from her personal knowledge of the poet that the external differences between the two men conceal a deeper root of identity—that Watkins' stable exterior hides a deeper immaturity of character:

Biographers have commented on the differences between the two, but this was merely that they were wearing different masks. It was the same man underneath—or rather the same immature, confused, unresolved being, who had turned from life, which he could not control, to words, which he could.

Her study reveals a more complex image of Watkins than that of the quietly responsible "bank clerk"; it reveals him as a more passionate, exacting and recalcitrant personality than has been imparted by Thomas' biographers, who tend to see him as the great stabilizer in Thomas' life. In her discussion of Watkins' religious sensibility she argues, in fact, that

Watkins faith in God was as nebulous and as certain as Dylan's. In my opinion he is right to call Dylan a religious poet, since, he no less than Vernon, expressed in his poems a strong feeling of, and belief in, the numinous.

She focuses on the social and psychological elements of the poet's life to present a more complete portrayal of Watkins as
a man; yet when dealing with the difficult question of the similarities and differences between Watkins and Thomas in religious belief, we are again forced back on the poems. The dualities and ambiguities in the poet's life are interesting as biography, but the poems must be given the priority in evaluation since it is there that he expresses his highest aspiration. To my mind at least, they reveal Watkins as the more serenely committed of the two in terms of religious conviction. Whatever the conflicts and insecurities of his interior self, the poems record both the process and the end product of his human struggle; they reflect or refract as art the life he created through conscious choice rather than what he might have been had he enacted a hidden or repressed self.

In the later poems from *Cypress and Acacia*, *Affinities* and *Fidelities*, long after Thomas' stylistic influence has vanished, he continues to appear in Watkins' work as a symbol of the artist. He is no longer simply the anarchic hero with the "iconoclastic frown," but the true poet who died young, the incompletely understood man of genius. Death has immortalized him. As mentioned in Chapter III, Watkins' many elegies for Thomas carry on the Welsh tradition of the lament for the fallen bard.

Though *The Death Bell* (1954) was the next volume to come out, only a year after Thomas' death, the symbol of the bell of the title tolls the death of Watkins' father, not that of Thomas. The elegies for Thomas do not appear in the Faber volumes until the publication of *Cypress and Acacia* (1959). By that time the full impact of Thomas' death has had a chance to
register at the deeper levels of Watkins' consciousness, and he expresses his grief in a series of veiled elegies. By "veiled" I mean that Thomas is not named or the details of his life alluded to directly, but that we may discover through internal evidence or the testimony of his widow that Watkins had Thomas in mind. "The Sloe," "The Curlew," and "Buried Light" are three examples of such elegies in CA: "To a Shell" and "The Snow Curlew" follow in the same mode in F.

In "The Sloe," Watkins refers to a dream about Thomas that made a deep impression on him, and which he explores further in "The Exacting Ghost" and "The Return" from the same volume. Here Thomas is identified with the plumlike, astringent fruit of the blackthorn plant. Since "sloe" is also a type of gin, the title invokes with quiet irony Thomas' alcoholic's death. I cite the poem in its entirety to demonstrate how completely Thomas (the dead poet) is hidden in the natural imagery. Only the mention of the tomb and the "lineaments" (a Yeatsian-Blakean term) revealed in the "dream" indicate that this is an elegy for Thomas:

Too like those lineaments
For waking eyes to see,
Yet those the dream presents
Clearly to me.

How much more vivid now
Than when across your tomb
Sunlight projects a bough
In gradual gloom!

Even such a curious taste
I found, seeing Winter blow
Above a leafless waste
The bitter sloe.
It will not yet begin
To act upon the tongue
Till tooth has pierced the skin
And juice has sprung:

A flavour tart and late
Which, when the rest had gone,
Could hide in mist and wait,
Its root in stone. (CA, p. 38)

Watkins deals movingly with the delayed aftereffect of Thomas' death by comparing it to the sharp taste of "the sloe," through the simplicity of the short three and two-foot lines, and by universalizing the poet through the symbol of the stubbornly-enduring plant rooted "in stone."

Likewise in "The Curlew," Watkins refuses to name Thomas, but connects him implicitly with the mysterious "one" of the first line who, being dead, is no longer able to hear the curlew's cry. In a tone similar to that of Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" Watkins writes:

 Sweet-throated cry, by one no longer heard
 Who, more than many, loved the wandering bird,
 Unchanged through generations and renewed,
 Perpetual child of its own solitude.... (CA, p. 54)

As the poem concludes, Watkins identifies the cry of the bird more clearly with the voice of the dead poet. As in Keats' poem, the invisible bird becomes a symbol for the entire realm of the dead—-that side of nature which is "unheard," unseen:

 The quick light of that cry disturbs the gloom.
 It passes now, and rising from its tomb,
 Carries remorse across the sea where I
 Wait on the shore, still listening to that cry
 Which bears a ghostly listening to my own;
 Such life is hidden in the ringing stone
 That rests, unmatched by any natural thing,
 And joins, unheard, the wave-crest and the wing. (CA, p. 54)

Here again, Watkins succeeds not only in identifying Thomas with
the natural world, the Welsh landscape he most loved, but in conveying powerfully a sense of his own bereavement and utter desolation as a lone figure "on the shore," the solitary place of meeting between the worlds of the living and the dead. As in "The Sloe," the life of the dead one (i.e. Thomas) is hidden in "ringing stone," that is, rooted in the most primitive element of nature's substratum.

"Buried Light" achieves a similar effect with its ballad-like four-line stanzas and veiled allusions to Thomas:

What are the light and wind to me?  
The lamp I love is gone to ground.  
There all the thunder of the sea  
Becomes by contrast idle sound. (CA, p. 82)

The dead poet becomes the "buried light" (associated ultimately with Christ) in a stanza reminiscent of Hopkins' "The Habit of Perfection" in both form and imagery:

Come, buried light, and honour time  
With your dear gift, your constancy,  
That the known world be made sublime  
Through visions that closed eyelids see. (CA, p. 82)

Like Hopkins, Watkins is concerned with the inner vision that expands only as the outer senses close. Hopkins writes:

Be shellèd eyes, with double dark  
And find the uncreated light:  
This ruck and reel which you remark  
Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight. 64

Perhaps Watkins' echoes Hopkins consciously here as a tribute to Thomas, who also admired the Victorian Jesuit and employed techniques similar to his.

Three of the elegies in CA explore the previously-mentioned "dream" of "The Sloe," a dream that assumed in Watkins' mind the authority of a visionary contact with the soul.
of Thomas from beyond death. Though Watkins was not interested in organized spiritualism like Yeats, there is evidence throughout his work to suggest he believed literally in the communication between the dead and the living, and did not find it incompatible with his Christian belief and practice. "The Exacting Ghost" actively reshapes a dream that seems to have had all the authenticity of an actual encounter. Watkins is in control of his language, which is compressed, concrete and quick-moving. Again he exploits the simplicity of the four-line, rhymed tetrameter stanza. As suggested in the first section of this chapter, Watkins often uses a slightly Yeatsian cadence and tone when writing about Thomas, but here the handling and subject matter are his own:

I speak of an exacting ghost,  
And if the world distrust my theme  
I answer: This that moved me most  
Was first a vision, then a dream.

In the second stanza, he addresses Thomas, the "exacting ghost," directly:

By the new year you set great store.  
The leaves have turned, and some are shed.  
A sacred, moving metaphor  
Is living in my mind, though dead.

I would have counted good years more,  
But all is changed; your life has set.  
I praise that living metaphor  
And when I sleep I see it yet.

In the next stanzas (the first of which becomes a refrain by its repetition at the end of the poem), the poet raises the question of why the conscious mind cannot recreate the image of the dead as accurately as the unconscious, dreaming mind; then he goes on to describe the actual encounter with the "ghost"
Why is it, though the conscious mind
Toils, the identity to keep
Forgetful ages leave behind,
No likeness matches that of sleep?

Last night, when sleep gave back the power
To see what nature had withdrawn,
I saw, corrected by that hour,
All likenesses the mind had drawn.

In crowded tavern you I found
Conversing there, yet knew you dead.
This was no ghost. When you turned round,
It was indeed your living head.

Time had returned, and pregnant wit
Lodged in your eyes. What health is this?
Never had context been so fit
To give old words new emphasis.

Watkins, a poet obsessed by timelessness, plays on the paradox
that the dream out of ordinary time and place seems to give
back "time," and the known particularity of Thomas in a charac-
teristic tavern setting. The irony of the poem is that even in
the afterlife Thomas does not suddenly become angelic or other-
worldly, but retains his unique individuality, his "pregnant
wit," even his sarcasm. Watkins goes on to study his own com-
plex emotional reaction to this sudden reunion on the border-
lands of time:

If hope was then restrained by doubt
Or joy by fear, I cannot tell.
All the disturbances of thought
Hung on my words; yet all seemed well.

You smiled. Your reassurance gave
My doubt its death, my hope its due.
I had always known beyond the grave,
I said, all would be well with you.

The speaker's naive assumption that Thomas' smile is one of
unqualified reassurance is quickly broken in the next stanza,
which marks the turning point of the poem:
You fixed contracted, narrowing eyes
To challenge my instinctive sense.
The uncertainty of my surmise
Their penetration made intense.

The ghost of Thomas, retaining all the anarchic characteristics of the living man, proceeds to challenge Watkins' (the dreamer's) "instinctive sense." The "gift" he accuses him of " arrogating" is the assumption that "all will be well" on the other side of the grave:

'What right had you to know, what right
To arrogate so great a gift?'
I woke, and memory with the light
Brought back a weight I could not lift.

In sleep the dead and living year
Had stood one moment reconciled,
But in the next the accuser's spear
Had sacked the city of the child.

Why is it, though the conscious mind
Toils, the identity to keep
Forgetful years will leave behind,
No likeness matches that of sleep? (CA, p. 44)

Watkins' old hope of the reconciliation of the "dead and living year" present in the early "Mari Lwyd" is shattered by the ghost's bold cynicism. The dream turns to nightmare; the unbeliever confronts the believer. The unrelenting scepticism of the "accuser" (a biblical designation for Satan) is expressed metaphorically as the sacking of "the city of the child." Not only does the image invoke the biblical "massacre of the innocents" by Herod, but allows Watkins to allude to a passage from one of Thomas' own early poems, "Do you not father me," where Thomas writes of his mother and the mothering figures in his life. The sacking of the child's city here, as in Watkins' poem, is a symbol for the destruction of innocence and hope. Thomas writes:
You are all these [i.e. the father, the lover, the sister, brother etc.], said she who gave me the long suck,
All these; he said who sacked the children's town....

I have cited Watkins' "Exacting Ghost" at length because it reveals his continuing dialogue with Thomas after the poet's death, and because it shows the extent to which he was conscious of his differences from Thomas, his ability to envision him (even beyond the grave) in a realistic context. At a second level, Watkins may be using the conflict between himself and "the exacting ghost" to work out his own more personal and inward conflict between faith and doubt, since the ghost of Thomas is capable of shaking his native optimism. The poem shows Watkins at his best and most original, dealing with a real struggle within the self. The language is fresh, the imagery concentrated around a single action, and the tone (of hope about to be undercut by doubt) right throughout.

In Affinities and Fidelities, the elegies to Thomas continue to appear. Some like "A True Picture Restored" (A) attempt to strip off the public mask and revive the true image of the man and poet as Watkins knew him. Poems like "At Cwmrhydyceirw Quarry" and "Cwmrhydyceirw Elegiacs" (F) are public tributes having to do with the choosing of the stone for the Dylan Thomas memorial in Cwmdonkin Park, Swansea. These elegies are no longer veiled, but explicit and full of topical references to Swansea, Cwmdonkin Park and other places with which Thomas was associated. Watkins writes in "A True Picture Restored" out of his old loyalty to place:

Let each whose soul is in one place
Still to that place be true.
The man I mourn could honour such  
With every breath he drew.  
I never heard him wish to take  
A life from where it grew.  (A, pp. 32-33)

Though wholly affirmative, these poems are, I believe, less successful than "The Exacting Ghost" in capturing the complexities of Watkins' relationship with Thomas. They are on the whole more public and commemorative expressions of grief.

The short poem "Exegesis," cited in a review of E. W. Tedlock's Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet (London: William Heinemann, 1960), later appeared in Fidelities (1968), the last of the Faber volumes. It too is an elegy for Thomas, but also a defense against critics who, as Watkins expressed it, lacked "the complete equipment to analyse" him.66

So many voices  
Instead of one.  
Light, that is the driving force  
Of song alone:  
Give me this or darkness,  
The man or his bone.

None shall replace him,  
Only falsify  
Light broken into colours,  
The altered sky.  
Hold back the bridle,  
Or the truth will lie.  (F, p. 51)

Watkins was vehement to the end in registering his complaint against premature generalities on the value of Thomas' work, and the tendency to judge the man by the mask.

We can see that by the time of the later poems, Thomas is not an active poetic presence in terms of style and content, but remains a permanent symbol of the poet. Though Watkins focused on transcendence, and Thomas on immanence, Watkins on God and Thomas on the self, the friendship was surely the most important
in Watkins' life. For purposes of critical evaluation, it is mistaken, however, to see Watkins as the same kind of poet as Thomas, whose personality has overshadowed that of his less well-known contemporary. As suggested in Chapter IV, a different kind of critical apparatus is needed to come to terms with Watkins, one which would set him among the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, and earlier representatives of the Christian mystical or visionary tradition. His ancient sense of the Muse demands that he be seen not merely as a post-Romantic, but as part of a prophetic line stretching from Homer and Dante, down to Milton, Blake and Wordsworth.

Unlike the just-named major poets who were also masters of the long poem, Watkins chose to concentrate on the shorter lyric. Yet as a predominantly lyric poet he did experiment in interesting ways with long forms in the ballads ("Ballad of the Mari Lwyd" and "Ballad of the Outer Dark") and the "long lyrics" from *The Lamp and the Veil* ("Sea-Music" and "The Broken Sea"). To the extent that his collections of verse are not merely groupings of disconnected poems but tightly unified progressions in terms of theme and symbol, one can argue that they take on the textual and structural coherence of larger works. In this way they more resemble Yeats' carefully ordered volumes of poetry or George Herbert's *The Temple* than many modern collections of lyrics. Though his vision is less comprehensive (inclusive of the full range of human passions and experience) than that of Yeats and Eliot, and sometimes lacks their intellectual rigour and incisiveness, his poetry is surely distinctive as a modern expression of that aspect of the Christian
tradition which looks at nature as both a mirror of eternity and a ladder which leads beyond itself to a more perfect reality. In his best poems he manages to bring together considerable technical mastery with a pristine sense of nature's dazzle and glory. His recurrent symbols achieve that "depth in the matrix" he believed indispensable to great metaphysical art. Though some of his work is uneven, the best poems of Vernon Watkins, poems like "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision," "Bread and the Stars," "Rewards of the Fountain" and "Earth and Fire," stand among the finest lyrics written in the twentieth century. As a metaphysical and religious poet he is, like his predecessors Vaughan and Traherne, a distinguished poet of indisputable excellence in his time. Because of its qualities of significant vision united with outstanding technical assuredness, I believe his work will continue to be valued and studied for its uncompromising otherworldliness and its original reworking of Platonic and Christian symbols in a contemporary context of religious belief.
NOTES

Introduction


2 Personal interview with Gwen Watkins, the poet's widow, Pennard, Wales, 28 June 1982.


5 David Jones, Epoch and Artist, ed. Harmon Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 159. Jones' non-standard etymology is a variation on Augustine's "striving after one God and binding our souls to him."

Biographical Sketch


2 Watkins also wrote an essay called "Swansea" which was published in The Texas Quarterly, 4, No. 4 (Winter 1961), 59-64.


4 Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 5.

5 Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 22.


7 Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 27.

8 Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 28.

9 Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 27.

11 Vernon Watkins, "Prose," Poetry Wales, 12, No. 4 (Spring 1977), 56.


14 All subsequent references to the published volumes of Watkins' poetry will appear abbreviated in the text as follows here. Citations are from the first edition unless otherwise indicated:

Ballad of the Mari Lwyd and Other Poems (2nd edition) = BML
The Lamp and the Veil = LV
The Lady with the Unicorn = LU
The Death Bell: Poems and Ballads = DB
Cypress and Acacia = CA
Affinities = A
Fidelities = F
Uncollected Poems = UP
Unity of the Stream = US
The Ballad of the Outer Dark and Other Poems = BOD
The Breaking of the Wave = BW

15 After the Hungarian revolution of 1956 at the request of Hungarian refugees, Watkins translated the poetry of Gyula Ilyes and József Atilla. He worked from prose versions since he knew no Hungarian. Ian Hilton in his essay, "Vernon Watkins as Translator," in Vernon Watkins 1906-1967 (Faber and Faber, 1970), gives an account of how the poems were transliterated.

16 Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 117.
Chapter I


2 "Taliesin in Gower" was first published in *The Listener* in 1950. A list of the Taliesin poems and poems that allude briefly to Taliesin in the published volumes follow in order of dates of publication. Some of these have been republished in the posthumous volumes. Dates of first publication are listed below also.

Taliesin poems in the published volumes:


Poems that mention or allude to Taliesin:


3 Ruth Pryor, "Vernon Watkins and the Taliesin Legend," *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 26, No. 59 (Autumn 1977), 52-53. Dr. Pryor points out that, "At a fairly early stage of their genesis, four of the Taliesin poems, later published separately and collected in separate volumes at different dates, were linked in series
under the common title 'Taliesin on the Beach.' The four poems of the sequence are 1. 'Taliesin's Voyage'; 2. 'Taliesin at Pwlldu'; 3. 'Taliesin and the Mockers'; 4. 'Taliesin and the Spring of Vision.'"'


5 Pryor, "Vernon Watkins and the Taliesin Legend," p. 51. The draft was entitled "Taliesin," and was written after the poet returned from a cycling tour made in the Spring of 1938 to explore the area of Tai near Lake Geironydd where Taliesin was said to have lived and died. Dr. Pryor informs us that in these early drafts, Watkins distinguishes himself from the bard, and speaks as one who wishes to tread in his footsteps, unlike the speaker of the published poems whose voice is wholly identified with that of Taliesin.

6 "The Salmon" was first published in The Poetry Review (1949); revised version from a signed typescript dated 1960; republished in BOD (1979).


10 Gwen Watkins, the poet's widow, informed me in an interview (June 1982) that Watkins' primary source for the Taliesin poems was the Guest translation of The Mabinogion. Her statement is based on a firsthand knowledge of the poet's reading.


13 McCormick, "'I Sing a Placeless and a Timeless Heaven,'" p. 33. We note also in support of this argument that Taliesin appears in the context of references to Aneirin and Llywarch Hen, heroic figures from the Welsh historical poetry in the
poem, "Swallows" (F, pp. 62-63).

Still Taliesin stays,
Touching more than all we know,
The pulse of praise,
Deeper, more strong, than string of harp or bow.

14 Guest, p. 264. Dora Polk in her dissertation points out that in the Iolo Manuscript from which Guest drew her notes, Taliesin is already associated with Gower. (Polk, "An Ambience for Reading," p. 290.)


17 Ford, The Mabinogi, pp. 185-86. Watkins could have known this poem in translation both through H. I. Bell and through Graves.

18 Jones, Epoch and Artist, p. 155. In "Art and Sacrament" Jones writes,

We have ample archaeological evidence to show us that palaeolithic man, whatever else he was, and whatever his ancestors were, was a sacramental animal.

19 Jones, Epoch and Artist, p. 150.


22 Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, p. 33.

23 William Blake, Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 611, 657, 687. It is interesting to note here that Thomas Traherne, another of Watkins' sources, employed the image of the grain in a similar context when he wrote, "You never enjoy the world aright till you see how a sand exhibiteth the wisdom and power of God." (from Traherne's Centuries of Meditation, "The First Century," no. 27)


25 Blake, Complete Writings, p. 418.

26 Blake, "Jerusalem," in Complete Writings, p. 687.

27 I am referring here to two primary works of Christian mysticism: The Ascent of Mount Carmel, including "The Dark

28 Norris, "The Poetry of Vernon Watkins," p. 28. Many of Watkins' sources, such as Blake, Plotinus and Von Hügel "were suggested by his study of Yeats' poems," writes Norris. I shall be exploring Yeats' influence in Chapter V.


30 Watkins' use of Dante has been investigated by Ruth Pryor in her article, "Vernon Watkins and Dante," Anglo-Welsh Review, 23, No. 52 (Summer 1974), 94-101. Watkins translated sections of the Divine Comedy and was influenced by Eliot's use of Dante in The Four Quartets. Leslie Norris has traced Watkins' use of Blake in an appendix to his dissertation.


32 For references to Zacchaeus or to the image of the sycamore and its keys see:

"Sycamore," BML
"Thames Forest," BML
"Autumn Song," BML
"Four Sonnets of Resurrection," LU
"A Man with a Field," CA
"The Scythe," CA
"Poet and Goldsmith," CA
"Movement of Autumn," F


35 Watkins translated a number of Hölderlin's poems and wrote several eulogies on the German Romantic, "To Hölderlin," and "The Childhood of Hölderlin" in Affinities. In the former poem he speaks of Hölderlin as one in whom "the Christian and the Greek were reconciled." (A, p. 48)


37 See Watkins' use of these birds as symbols of the artist in "The Kestrel" (CA, p. 55) and "Art and the Ravens" (DB, p. 57).


41 Guest, p. 267.

42 Guest, pp. 281-82.

43 Guest, p. 274.

44 Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, p. 20.


46 Guest, p. 268.

47 Other Celtic trios of supernatural shape-changing women include Morrigan or Morrigina of Irish myth and a triad called the "Matrone" or "Matres" (Mothers) of Latin origin. Polk argues (along with Graves and others) that these female goddesses were originally associated with horse worship. See Polk's "An Ambience for Reading," p. 102. "Y Mamau" can also be compared fruitfully to the Irish three Brigids and in Christian theology to the three Marys.

48 Guest, p. 271. In Taliesin's song the bard refers to Badon's fight, mentioning both knife blades and the idea of vengeance in conjunction:

> As erst in Badon's fight,—
> With Arthur of liberal ones
> The head, with long red blades:
> Through feats of testy men,
> And a chief with his foes.
> Woe be to them, the fools,
> When revenge comes upon them.

Chapter II


I am a Christian poet and believe that a poet should not offer mankind less than the whole truth of his integrity.


Mathias, "Grief and the Circus Horse," p. 124.

B. Jowett, trans., The Dialogues of Plato (New York: Random House, 1937), II, 12. There Timaeus argues:

The work of the creator, whenever he looks to the unchangeable and fashions the form and nature of his work after an unchangeable pattern, must necessarily be made fair and perfect.

3 In "Four Sonnets" he writes, "The pagan creeds fly back, staining white stones...." (LU, p. 99). In "The Cave-Drawing" he describes the "Five colours a mist-formed rainbow spun / From the dawn of time...." (LU, p. 100).


He [Watkins] was deeply devoted to the English mystics such as Rolle and Julian of Norwich, and read extensively and intensively in the poets of the religious and hermetic tradition. Like Yeats, whom he admired tremendously... Watkins was familiar with the Neo-Platonists, as citations and quotations from Plotinus' Enneads in his notebook suggest. (p. 14)

A letter from Gwen Watkins to the present writer dated March 28, 1983 confirms that Watkins, "did use the large MacKenna translation of The Enneads, six volumes. He must have bought it in... any of the years from 1931 to 1935." Yeats himself cites the MacKenna translation in A Vision (Collier, 1966), p. 20.

Plotinus, p. 324.

Plotinus, p. 473. The concept of "pure whiteness" can also be traced back to Plato's *Philebus*, a source well-known to the Neoplatonists and later translated by Marsilio Ficino. (Jowett, Vol. II, p. 388)

Plotinus, p. 497.

Plotinus, p. 506.

Plotinus, p. 510.

Plotinus, p. 429.

Thomas, *Letters to Vernon Watkins*, p. 102. Thomas wrote:

Any more about your leprous collection? Perhaps the volume should be surgically bound. I do hope it comes out this summer, just before the gas.

The following poems make reference to the figure of the leper:

"Ballad of the Mari Lwyd," BML, p. 38.
"The Collier," BML
"The Broken Sea," LV
"Money for the Market," LU
"Song of the Good Samaritan," LU
"Quem Quaertis," A
"Five Poems of Magdalenian Darkness," A


Watkins may also have been aware of Father Damien's (1840-1889) work with lepers. A book on the Belgian priest's life, *Damien the Leper* by John Farrow, was published in 1937, and the BBC took up the story of his mission to a colony of lepers in the Sandwich Islands, Hawaii, in its School Broadcasts of the 1940's. Since Watkins read occasionally for the BBC and followed its programs during those years, it is highly likely he knew the story.

For other examples of Watkins' use of the graveyard setting see "The Burial," "Gravestones" and "The Yew-Tree" in _LU_.


Watkins' "swan poems" include: "Swan Narcissus" (F, p. 44) and "Night and the Swan" (BOD, p. 43).
23 Plotinus, p. 461.
26 Lecture-notes 1-22, TS, University of Washington, Seattle, 6pp.
27 During the period from 1874-76 when Hopkins was reading theology in North Wales he took a keen interest in Welsh poetry. Passages from his letters not only reveal that he was beginning to learn Welsh, but that he was adapting Welsh verse techniques like "cynghanedd" to his own poetry.
28 Notebooks on Hopkins and Yeats, University of Washington, Seattle. The notebooks indicate that Watkins was reading John Burnet's Early Greek Philosophy (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899) at the time of his first appointment at the University of Washington. This work contains a long section on Heraclitus. Watkins' reference to Heraclitus in the early poem, "Discoveries" (BML, p. 65), argues a longstanding interest in the Pre-Socratics.
29 I have in mind here Heraclitus' fragments: "This order...is now, and ever shall be an everliving Fire, fixed measures of it kindling and fixed measures going out," and "You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you." (Burnet, pp. 135-36)
30 In this poem Watkins has in mind an actual underground stream near his home on Gower. At one level he associates the stream's disappearance underground with his father who had recently died at the time of the poem's composition.
32 Jowett, The Dialogues of Plato, I, 855.
33 Watkins, "Replies to the Wales Questionnaire," in "The Prose of Vernon Watkins," p. 16. The revised version from Fidelities reads:

      When the trees drop their leaves in frost,
      Old Earth, deep-rooted, knows her own;
      Poets, who loved her, are the last
      To leave her, when the rest have flown.
34 McCormick, "'I Sing a Placeless and a Timeless Heaven,'" p. 134.


37 Eliot, The Four Quartets, p. 44.
Chapter III

Part I


5 Of the approximately three hundred poems in the published volumes, sixty-seven of them are sonnets. Watkins has written six formal odes and at least twelve long ballads in addition to the poems which use a ballad-like refrain as in "Expectation of Life" from Affinities.

6 Heath-Stubbs, "Pity and the Fixed Stars," p. 18. He writes of Watkins' association with this group in the following terms:

Into this framework were fitted the rhetoric of Mr. Hendry, the naive romanticism of Mr. Treece, and the marginal comments of Mr. Fraser and Mr. Moore (two somewhat tender-minded intellectuals with a taste for the easier forms of English versification); and apparently, the finely-wrought, hieratic, and formal verse of the poet who forms the subject of this essay [i.e. Watkins].

See also Philip Larkin's, "Vernon Watkins: An Encounter and a Re-encounter," in Vernon Watkins: 1906-1967, p. 29. Larkin argues that though Watkins' name had been associated with the Apocalyptics, "in fact his poetry was much more controlled than theirs and reached further back to the symbolist poets of Europe."


10 Gross, p. 248.

McCormick, "The Prose of Vernon Watkins," pp. 3 & 6. She notes that, "In addition to the Taliesin example...he echoed 'The Poet's Voice' in the poem 'Woodpecker and Lyre-Bird'; 'Poets on Poetry' is echoed in 'Affinities' and in several poems in Fidelities; and the articles on Dylan Thomas are prophetic of the poems on Thomas." (p. 6)


How much patience must have gone to the making of these poems, how much patience in waiting for the 'luck,' as he called it, for the unpredictable word, the unpredictable correction that is so personal to the poet, so much a part of his soul.


33 Robert Gorham Davis, "Eucharist and Roasting Pheasant," Poetry (Chicago), 73 (December 1948), 173. Davis writes of Watkins' work that, "where the difficulties are not intrinsic, they are largely a matter of syntax, which is sacrificed to the poetry."

34 Vernon Watkins, "Prose," in Poetry Wales, 12, No. 4 (Spring 1977), 54.

35 Under a Bright Heaven, BBC, University of Washington, 1967.


41 Hamburger, "Vernon Watkins, a Memoir," p. 51. Roland Mathias has also written in "A Note on Some Recent Poems," I am not persuaded that...this reverence of his for the witnessing saints is anything but crippling to his own development....Can undue reverence be creative? (p. 43)

Part II


2 "The Joy of Creation," p. 179. He writes,
I am convinced that the foundation of art is joy. In the visual arts, in poetry and in music, the act of creation is joy.

3 La Belle, p. 101. Actually, the comet appears every seventy-six years on the average.


8 Watkins, "Prose," in Poetry Wales, p. 53.

9 Parry, A History of Welsh Literature, p. 51.


11 See, for instance:

"Four Sonnets of Resurrection," LU, p. 58.
"Gravestones," LU, p. 73.
"Testimony," DB, p. 29.
"Rhadamanthus and the New Soul," BOD, p. 50.


Norris, "The Poetry of Vernon Watkins," p. 175. The englyn is technically a three or four-line stanza of 10, 7, 10 syllables and one main rhyme.


Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, p. 25.

Gross, p. 32.

Gross, p. 34. It should be noted that the traditional Sapphic stanza (developed by Horace) is composed of three lesser lines of eleven syllables, followed by an Adonic line of five. In English the stress normally falls on the long third and fifth syllables or on the fourth and sixth. The Sapphic line was arranged as trochee, spondee, dactyl, trochee, trochee. The Adonic consisted of a dactyl and either a spondee or a trochee. According to the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), the stress patterns are as follows:

Lesser Sapphic Line: — — < — — — — — — — —
Adonic: — — —< — — — — — —

Gross, p. 34.

Gross, p. 273.
30 Mathias, "Grief and the Circus Horse," p. 104.
34 The scheme for the Alcaic is:

```plaintext
\( \sim - \sim - \sim - \sim - \sim - \sim \) (twice) \|
\( \sim - \sim - \sim - \sim - \sim \) ||
\( \sim - \sim - \sim - \sim - \sim \)
```
35 Gross, p. 274.
39 Davie, *Purity of Diction*, p. 16. Davie distinguishes between poets like Shakespeare, who enlarge and recreate the language and those who undertake "to preserve or refine a poetic diction."
41 Hamburger, "Vernon Watkins, a Memoir," p. 56.
Chapter IV

Part I


0 who will set me down in the cool valleys of the Usk, and protect me with the ample shadow of his branches! (p. 65)
9. Watkins, "Prose," in Poetry Wales, p. 59. He also wrote, So Milton, when he was overtaken by blindness, spoke of "that one talent which is death to hide." ("The Joy of Creation," p. 178.)

Significant references to Milton occur in the following poems:

"Discoveries," BML
"The Broken Sea," LV
"The Immortal in Nature," CA
"A True Picture Restored," A

It can also be argued that Watkins' Samson poems, "The Measure Moves" (F) and "Samson" (BW), are indebted to Milton's Samson Agonistes.

12 George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, eds., The Sermons of John Donne, 10 vols. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953-62). See, for instance, Sermon XV, Folio of 1640 preached at Whitehall, March 8, 1622, where he writes:

Doth not man die even in his birth? The breaking of prison is death, and what is our birth but a breaking of prison? (Vol. IV, p. 52)

See also Sermon XXXVI, Folio of 1640 on "the decay of the world" and his last sermon, "Death's Duell" or Sermon XXVII, Folio of 1649 preached at Whitehall, Friday, February 25, 1630.

13 Vaughan, p. 147.

14 Vaughan, p. 149. The poem concludes: "Lord, then said I, On me one breath, And let me die before my death!"


16 Herbert, p. 33.


From Clay, and Mire, and Dirt, my Soul,
From vile and common Ore,
Thou must ascend; taught by the Toll
In what fit place thou mayst adore;
Refin'd by fire, thou shalt a Bell
Of Prais becom, in Mettal pure.... (p. 114)

All subsequent references to Traherne are drawn from this two-volume edition.


22 Herbert, p. 113.


24 Herbert, p. 97.

25 Sermons of John Donne, Vol. IX, pp. 173-88. Herbert also uses the hourglass figure in "Church-monuments":
flesh is but the glass, which holds the dust
That measures all our time; which also shall
Be crumbled into dust.... (Herbert, p. 57)

26 John Donne, The Epithalamions, Anniversaries, and
pp. 6-10.

27 We have seen his development of this theme earlier in
"Song of the Good Samaritan" discussed in Chapter I. In "The
Death Bell" he again makes reference to the Samaritan's deed
and other incidents from the gospels including the story of
Simeon, and the day of Pentecost from Acts:

O who can match the speed
Of whirling nebulae
To the Samaritan's deed
Performed in sympathy? (DB, p. 104)


29 Donne, The Complete Poetry, p. 390. Donne's lines are
as follows:

Since I am coming to that Holy roome,
   Where, with Thy Quire of Saints for evermore
I shall be made Thy Musique....


31 Letter from Gwen Watkins, the poet's widow, 28 March
1983. Mrs. Watkins writes:

Herbert he [Watkins] knew at Repton, and read him again
a great deal because Dylan Thomas especially loved him.

32 See also Watkins' poem, "One Theme":

Why should you wander in the clouds
If art has but one theme:
Did not those transfigured shrouds
Shake you from your dream? (BW, p. 38)

33 Traherne, I, p. 10.

34 The reference to "His [Christ's] beating heart" strongly
echoes the words of the amazed Greek in Yeats' play, The Resur-
rection, "the heart of a phantom is beating!" Like Yeats, whose
influence will be considered in Chapter V, Watkins emphasizes
the great paradox of a spirit becoming flesh and blood.

35 Herbert, p. 48.

36 Herbert, p. 31. See also Watkins' "The Restitution"
(UP, p. 25) for another statement of the theme of "reprisal."
Herbert, p. 32.


Herbert, p. 164.

Vaughan, p. 273.

Vaughan, p. 275.


The dates of these writers are:

Donne: 1571-1631
Herbert: 1593-1633
Vaughan: 1622-1795
Traherne: 1637?-1674

Part II

1 Being a native speaker of Welsh, Vaughan would have known that "gwyn" was the word used in the Welsh Bible for "white," "holy" and "blessed." Though modern scholarship cannot delineate his exact Welsh literary sources, it is highly likely that he had read much of the older poetry where "gwynfyd" imagery abounds. Thomas Parry in his *A History of Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), points out that there was a vigorous antiquarian revival in Wales throughout the seventeenth century (pp. 222-24). "White light" is also an important symbol of transfiguration or transmutation in the documentable Hermetic sources which he shared with his twin brother, Thomas, sources like Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus and Boehme. See F. D. Hutchinson's, *Henry Vaughan, A Life and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), pp. 155-62, for a discussion of Vaughan's use of Welsh concepts and literary devices like cynghanedd and "dyfal" or a piling up of comparisons. Watkins would have acquired his sense of "gwynfyd" both from ancient Welsh and more esoteric sources like Hermeticism and Neoplatonism as discussed in Chapter II.


4 Traherne, I, pp. 111-31. In "The Third Century," Traherne treats the revelation of God in the Creation (No. 3), the self or soul (No. 18) and in "The Book" or biblical tradition (Nos. 27-35) as he explores his own search for what he calls "Felicity," a word that comprehends the notions of happiness, blessedness and
joy. The idea of the world as "God's Book" is Medieval and can be traced to Augustine and Bonaventure, two of Traherne's probable sources. Louis Martz has examined the presence of Augustinian concepts in Vaughan, Traherne and Milton in his *The Paradise Within*. For a fine synopsis of the Medieval metaphor of the book see E. R. Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Bollingen Series, No. 36 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 315-26.

5 Vaughan, p. 173.

6 Vaughan, pp. 241-42.

7 This essay was published in *Labrys* 1 (Feb. 1978), and re-published as "War and Poetry: The Reactions of Owen and Yeats" in *Yeats and Owen: Two Essays* (Frome, Somerset: The Hunting Raven Press, 1981.

8 Watkins, "War and Poetry: The Reactions of Owen and Yeats," p. 27.

9 Letter received from Gwen Watkins, 28 March 1983.

10 The only area in which Watkins' canon does not parallel that of Vaughan in range is in the presence of satiric pieces like Vaughan's early translations of Juvenal. Yet one can argue that in the satires and poems to "Amoret" Vaughan is less himself and more imitative of Donne. It should be noted that some of Watkins' later poems in *Fidelities* are more socially and politically concerned, like "Trees in a Town" and "Postscript (for J.F.K.)," but his work is generally free of topical and polemical references.


Some of the properties we noted in his first book begin to show themselves here, the inversions, a certain obscurity, and some very commonplace writing.

12 Watkins' lecture-notes from the University of Washington reveal that he was studying and teaching this poem at the time of his death. See lecture-notes on Hopkins' "Wreck of the Deutschland," TS, 27 Sept. 1967, University of Washington, Seattle, 3 pp.

13 Dafau-Labeyrie was the friend who accompanied Watkins on his visit to Yeats in 1938, and who also translated Thomas' *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* into French.

14 I have in mind here Jesus saying of children that "their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10), as well as his treatment of "little ones" in the gospels in general. *Plato's Republic*, Book VII, on the allegory of the cave deals with the loss and recovery of the memory of eternity in terms of darkness and light.
The following are only a few of the many references to the symbol of the fountain in Watkins' work:

"The Fountain," BML
"Peace in the Welsh Hills," CA
"Candle Constant," UP
"Child of the Fountain," BW

Vaughan, p. 148.
Vaughan, p. 263.
Vaughan, p. 282.
Traherne, II, p. 64.
Traherne, I, p. 79.
Traherne, I, p. 78.
Traherne, I, p. 114.
Vaughan, p. 230.
Vaughan, p. 308.

Under a Bright Heaven, BBC, University of Washington, 1967.

In his thesis, "The Poetry of Vernon Watkins," Leslie Norris points out that passages from this poem echo the tenth-century anonymous Welsh lyric, "Winter," as well as the Llywarch Hen poems. (pp. 129-30)

Vaughan, p. 251.
Vaughan, p. 307.
36 Vaughan, pp. 306-07.
37 Vaughan, p. 307.
40 Some of Watkins' poems on or to children are listed below:

"Sonnet (Infant Noah)," BML  
"First Joy," LU  
"Llewelyn's Chariot," LU  
"A Child's Birthday," LU  
"A Christening Remembered," LU  
"A Prayer," DB  
"The Caryatids," DB  
"Serena," CA  
"Birth and Morning," CA  
"For a Christening," CA  
"Poem for Conrad," F  
"Fragment from Poems for a Child," BOD  
"For a First Birthday," BW  
"Child of the fountain," BW  

41 Reprinted in "The Prose of Vernon Watkins," p. 196. There Watkins writes of "the truth of Wordsworth's reperception of childhood, or of Traherne's...."

42 Letter received from Gwen Watkins, 28 March 1983. Mrs. Watkins confirms from her firsthand knowledge of Watkins' reading that he did know Traherne's prose.
43 Traherne, I, p. 110.
44 Traherne, I, pp. 110-11.
45 Traherne, I, p. 111.
46 Watkins developed the figure of Noah in a similar context as a type of the holy infant earlier in "Sonnet (Infant Noah)" (BML, p. 57).
47 Traherne, I, p. 68.
48 Traherne, I, p. 18.
49 Traherne, I, pp. 96-97.
50 Traherne, I, p. 206.
Traherne, I, p. 3.
Traherne, I, p. 103.
Traherne, I, p. 137.
Traherne, I, p. 176.


Blake, "Jerusalem," in Complete Writings, p. 684. Blake writes, for instance, "This is Jerusalem in every Man / A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness...."


Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 345.
Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 346.


Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 25.

Traherne has been called Pelagian after a Welsh monk (Pelagius) of the fourth and fifth centuries who denied the doctrine of original sin. I would submit that neither Traherne nor Watkins avoids the "problem of evil" in their shared sense that the soul has a timeless centre in Spirit, since they both present the soul as a moral agent capable of freewill choice with the ability to regain or deny that original unity.
Chapter V

Part I


9 Vernon Watkins, "Prose," in Poetry Wales, 4, p. 64.


13 The major essays by Watkins on Yeats are:


14 All citations from this essay are derived from the 1962 version published in TSLL (see note 13).

15 Vernon Watkins, "Visit to Yeats in Dublin, Spring, 1938," Poetry Wales, 12, No. 4 (Spring 1977), 66-77.
20 Yeats, Autobiographies, pp. 371 & 272.
22 Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 490.
25 Watkins, Yeats and Owen, p. 4. See also his "W. B. Yeats--The Religious Poet," p. 488.
26 Watkins, "W. B. Yeats--The Religious Poet," p. 484. See also his Yeats and Owen, p. 4.
27 Watkins, Yeats and Owen, p. 3.
28 Yeats, A Vision, p. 268.
29 Yeats, A Vision, p. 305. Watkins may also be remembering Thomas' poem on Egyptian burial in the sonnet sequence, "Altar-wise by owl-light in the half-way-house" (IX) from the early Twenty-Five Poems (1936).
30 McCormick, "'I Sing a Placeless and a Timeless Heaven,'" p. 176.
31 For Yeats' use of this construction see "What Magic Drum" and "The Statues" in his Collected Poems.
32 Yeats, A Vision, p. 20.
33 Desiree Hirst, "Vernon Watkins and the Influence of W. B. Yeats," Poetry Wales, 12, No. 4 (Spring 1977), 95.
34 Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 28.
36 The following passage from DB shows Watkins using Blake's notion of "fourfold" or integrated man:
In death the fourfold man
Still rules time's bell and can
Teach the competitive
The loss by which we live. (DB, p. 107)

37 Blake, Complete Writings, p. 743.
38 Blake, Complete Writings, p. 149.
40 Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 503.

41 See Blake's "Infant Sorrow" and "The Mental Traveller." In the former Blake deals with the infant "striving against [his] swaddling bands." Watkins has combined Blake's symbol of the serpent of generation with Blake's idea of the constriction imposed upon the child by an adult society. "Regenerative love" alone can break those bonds.
42 Yeats, A Vision, p. 72.
43 Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 120.
44 Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 148. There he writes: "The historical Christ was indeed no more than the supreme symbol of the artistic imagination...." He also speaks of making the soul out of art rather than of orthodox morality:

In our time we are agreed that we "make our souls" out of some one of the great poets of ancient times, or out of Shelley or Wordsworth, or Goethe.... (pp. 117-18)
50 Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 168.
52 Blake, Complete Writings, p. 604.
53 Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 23.
54 Watkins, Yeats and Owen, p. 6.


59 John Heath-Stubbs also makes this point in "Pity and the Fixed Stars," p. 20.


70 Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 333.

71 Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 115-16.


73 Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 378. Yeats writes:

I was crossing a little stream near Inchy Wood and actually in the middle of a stride from bank to bank, when an emotion never experienced before swept down upon me. I said, "That is what the devout Christian feels, that is how he surrenders his will to the will of God."


Yeats, Per Amica, p. 33.

Yeats, A Vision, p. 271.

Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 223.

Yeats, A Vision, p. 276.

Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 286.


Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 239. Cirlot points out that the peacock's tail in the Ars Symbolica of Bosch represents the blending together of all colours and the ideal of totality. This concept of mystical unity would have appealed strongly to the author of the "Music of Colours" sequence.

Part II


4 Ralph Maud, Entrances to Dylan Thomas' Poetry (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), p. 7. Maud argues that figures like Donne, Hopkins or Rimbaud are of little use in illuminating any particular poem by Thomas.


Maud, Entrances, pp. 122-23. Critics who assume Thomas was working toward greater clarity on the basis of chronology alone are mistaken, since the supposedly later (less obscure) Twenty-Five Poems were actually written before many of 18 Poems. Watkins was completely unaware that Thomas' poems for the former volume were being quarried from the early notebooks.


For essays on Watkins' translations see Chapter III, Part II, note 6.


Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 29.

Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 38.

Thomas complained in a letter written in January 1939 that Watkins was impervious to criticism:

Since you've apparently been taking lessons from John Pritchard [sic] in refusing to accept adverse criticism, I shall make my grumbles about your good Yeats poem [i.e. "Yeats in Dublin"] illegible to invisibility. Here come the grumbles, hot, strong, and logical, but you can't see them. (Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 53)

Thomas, on the other hand, was quite free with drafts and unfinished poems, but could be equally stubborn about criticism.

Mathias, Vernon Watkins, p. 60.


Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 66.


Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 36.
26 Fitzgibbon, Life of Dylan Thomas, p. 28.
30 Maud, Entrances, p. 28.
32 Maud, Entrances, pp. 39-40.
39 Fitzgibbon, Life of Dylan Thomas, p. 262. Empson's remark is quoted in Mathias' Vernon Watkins, p. 79.
42 Dylan Thomas, "Replies to an Enquiry," in A Casebook on Dylan Thomas, p. 102.
43 Thomas, "Replies to an Enquiry," p. 103.
44 T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 433.
45 John Ackerman, Dylan Thomas, His Life and Work (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 12. Ackerman writes of the Nonconformist Welsh conscience as follows:

There was a racial Puritanism that had been ingrained in the Welsh character over many centuries. Even when the
orthodox Nonconformist way of life had been rejected, the Nonconformist conscience remained. (p. 34)

46 Maud, Entrances, p. 95.

47 Maud, Entrances, p. 94.

48 Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 165.

49 Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 188.


51 John Ackerman, Welsh Dylan: Dylan Thomas' Life, Writing and his Wales (Cardiff: John Jones, 1979), p. 92.


53 Maud, The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas, p. 29.

54 Fitzgibbon, Life of Dylan Thomas, p. 262. Thomas once informed Pamela Hansford Johnson in an early letter that he was "in the path of Blake." (See Maud's The Notebooks, p. 28) It is probable that in the early days of their regular meetings he introduced himself to Watkins similarly, though he and Watkins derived very different things from Blake (as noted in Part I of this chapter).

55 Many of these prose pieces have been published in McCormick's "The Prose of Vernon Watkins." They include:

"Mr. Dylan Thomas--Innovation and Tradition," The Times, 10 Nov. 1953.


"Dylan Thomas in America," Encounter, 4, No. 6 (June 1956), 77-79.


59 McCormick, "'Sorry, Old Christian,'" p. 82.


63 Watkins, I That Was Born in Wales, p. 72. See editorial notes for the genesis of many of the poems on Thomas.


65 Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 54.

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APPENDIX


In Penllyn near Lake Tegid there once lived a man named Tegid Voel and his wife Caridwen. Her son Avagddu was the ugliest man in the world, and she feared that because of this disadvantage he might not be admitted among the ranks of the nobility. Therefore she decided to compensate him for his deficiency by making him learned in the mysteries of "the future state of the world." Caridwen proceeded to boil a magical cauldron of herbs for a year and a day in order to obtain "three blessed drops of inspiration." She told Gwion Bach, the son of a neighbor, to stir the cauldron, and left a blind man to kindle the fire. One day when she was away gathering herbs for the cauldron, three drops of the fluid flew from it and fell upon Gwion Bach's finger. He put his finger to his mouth; and as soon as the drops touched his lips, he gained prophetic knowledge of past, present and future.

Realizing immediately that he must protect himself from Caridwen, he fled away. When Caridwen arrived and saw her plan spoiled, she wrongfully struck the blind man, who defended himself by informing her it was Gwion Bach who had robbed her. Caridwen then set out in pursuit of Gwion. On seeing her coming, he changed into a hare. She changed herself into a greyhound. He became a fish; she an otter-bitch. He turned himself into a bird; she pursued him as a hawk. Finally, he spied a heap of wheat on the floor of a barn and turned himself into one of the grains. She transformed herself into a hen and swallowed him. Nine months later she bore him as a child. Because of his beauty she could not kill him, so she wrapped him in a leather bag and cast him into the sea.

The "unlucky" son of Gwyddno, Prince Elphin, was fishing in the salmon weir on the beach between Dyvi and Aberystwyth when he spotted the bag. On opening it he saw the forehead of a boy and exclaimed, "Behold a radiant brow! Taliesin be he called." Then Elphin placed Taliesin behind him on his horse and carried him home, while Taliesin recited his first poem, a song of consolation to his new master for losing his catch of fish. Next, Taliesin sang a song to Gwyddno Garanhir telling of his various transformations through many times and places. At the court of Gwyddno, Elphin's father, Taliesin continued the song of his transformations, speaking of his relation to "his Lord," the "Son of Mary." The child was then reared till he was thirteen years old, when he was taken by Elphin to the court of Maelgwn Gwynedd. There he figured in a series of incidents where he displayed his great knowledge and skill before the court. In one of these, he embarrassed twenty-four of Maelgwn's best bards by reducing them to playing the nonsense phrase, "Blerwm, blerwm," on their lips before the king. When asked by the king to give an account of
himself, he continued to sing of his transformations:

    I was with my Lord in the highest sphere,  
    On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell  
    I have borne a banner before Alexander;  
    I know the names of the stars from north to south;  
    I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the Distributor;  
    I was in Canaan when Absolom was slain;  
    I conveyed the Divine Spirit to the level of the vale of Hebron;  
    I was in the court of Don before the birth of Gwdion.  
    I was instructor to Eli and Enoc;  
    I have been winged by the genius of the splendid crosier;  
    I have been loquacious prior to being gifted with speech;  
    I was at the place of the crucifixion of the merciful Son of God;  
    I have been three periods in the prison of Arianrod;  
    I have been the chief director of the work of the tower of Nimrod;  
    I am a wonder whose origin is not known....

In the last series of riddling fragments, Taliesin goes on to prophecy the destruction of the court.

    A most strange creature will come from the sea marsh of Rhiannedd  
    As a punishment of iniquity on Maelgwn Gwynedd.

Finally, after freeing his master Elphin, who had been imprisoned by the king for making extravagant claims about Taliesin, the bard ends with a song of creation.