THE POETRY OF CECIL DAY LEWIS

by

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Chapter One: "Amongst The Ruins" attempts to survey contemporary society through Lewis' eyes. The main characteristics of the age are these: (1) the extent to which the machine dominates the life of our times, and the economic, social, and psychological maladjustments which result; (2) the tragedy of recurring war; (3) the decay of religious orthodoxy and the quest for spiritual reassurance.

Chapter Two (The Appetite For Wholeness) deals with Lewis' attempt to achieve singleness of mind as related in his spiritual autobiography, Transitional Poem. This poem is especially important for the expression of certain germinal ideas which later develop into fundamental concepts. These germinal ideas are the polarity of flesh and spirit; the duality of physical and spiritual love; a carpe diem conception of pleasure; the acceptance of pain; the worship of hero in his role of decisive action; and the decision to take the side of the proletariat/class struggles of the age.

Chapter Three (The Spendthrift Fire the Holy Fire) examines the poetry of love and sex. From Feathers To Iron relates the thoughts and feelings of the poet during the nine months which precede the birth of his first child. This poem is considered from three different levels; as a
human story, as a pageant of nature, as a political allegory on the birth of a new world. Other lyrics of love and sex deal with sex perversion, and the change which time brings to the marriage relationship, while others are in the mood of cavalier dalliance.

Chapter Four (Inertia and Stimulants) presents Lewis' argument that the key to the sickness of society is a divorce between flesh and spirit. This divorce brings about frustration and inertia, as exemplified by the various "Defendants" of The Magnetic Mountain, and leads to attempts at artificial stimulation, as exemplified by the four "Enemies" of the same book.

Chapter Five (The Shape of Man's Necessity) contends that The Magnetic Mountain offers socialism as a political solution which will heal the divorce of flesh and spirit. The enthusiasm of The Magnetic Mountain and Noah and the Waters gives way in later poems to a disappointment tempered by the faith that the socialist solution, though delayed, will eventually come.

Chapter Six (In The Act of Decision) presents Lewis' ideas of tradition and shows that the hero is one who acts decisively because his knowledge of necessity has united the desires of flesh and the desires of spirit. "A Time To Dance" and "Nabara" are epic stories which may be regarded as examples of men in the act of decision.
Chapter Seven (The Unique Minute) discusses the dual nature of Lewis' philosophy of acceptance. The acceptance of joy becomes a carpe diem philosophy; the acceptance of suffering shows that the poet recognizes the complementary nature of joy and pain.

Chapter Eight (Defend The Bad Against The Worse) examines the war poems which fall into three categories: (1) prophetic poems written before 1939; (2) poems about England at war; (3) poems about the prospect of lasting peace in the future.

Chapter Nine (Emotional Logic) deals with the technique of the poems. Some of the conclusions drawn are these: (1) Both logical and emotional coherence are used, but the former predominates; (2) In matters of rhythm and rhyme, the influence of Anglo-Saxon versification, Hopkins, Owen, Eliot and Auden is present, but as not as great as is commonly supposed; (3) In general Lewis is not an obscure poet; (4) In his latest poems (Short Is The Time) Lewis reveals that technically he is both versatile and accomplished, and that his poetry does not lack the purposeful ambiguity or qualities of "occlusion" which is a mark of great poetry.
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CHAPTER I

AMONGST THE RUINS

PART ONE

Shelley's writings, whether in prose or in verse, do not evoke today amongst readers the enthusiasm they once did, say fifty years ago. His poetry is not as popular as it formerly was, and his critical writings are often said to lack the logical continuity and the consistency of good criticism. Like Shelley, Coleridge uses an apparently haphazard method of development in his Biographia Literaria, and one finds many random notes on aesthetics scattered throughout Keats' letters. The stature of Keats and Coleridge however, has risen rather than fallen. Obviously, the causes of these diverse fortunes must be something else than lack of logical continuity.

Whatever may be the value of Shelley's criticism as a whole, it is a fact that frequently he throws out ideas that are at once striking and original, much as Coleridge and Keats do. For this reason, Shelley's critical prefaces and essays deserve more intensive study than they usually get today. In the "Preface" of Prometheus Unbound, for instance, Shelley writes:

Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are,
in one sense, the creators, and in another, the creations of their age.

By this statement, it would seem that Shelley qualifies his trumpet-blast that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world by saying in the same breath that the world is also the acknowledged legislator of poets. A poet, in other words, is both the created and the creator of his age.

This essay is concerned with a poet who, it will be shown, is peculiarly the creation of his age. The desire to obtain singleness of mind, which was his first concern, is understandable in an age which has no central tradition and no one faith. The satire with which he attacks society, and the political solutions he presents show that Lewis' attitude, like that of the Greeks, is shaped by the conception of man as a "political animal". MacNeice regards the political consciousness of Lewis as perhaps his most important attribute, for, he writes:

-- with the recognition that man is conditioned by economic factors and therefore needs the company of men qua community goes the recognition that man is a creature of strong physical instincts and affections, and therefore needs the company of men qua individuals. (1)

The fact that Lewis is concerned with re-establishing a lost tradition which will create a feeling of solidarity between himself and his fellow-men, and between himself and certain heroes of the past, is also the result of an age which

has neither centrality nor a living tradition, and which is
bogged down in individual apathy. Because this condition
exists, the poet makes the act of decision one of the parts
of his creed.

At times the difficulty of making progress towards his
ideal society tinges his poetry with disillusion, and in time
he develops an attitude of acceptance which acknowledges
disillusion as part of the normal lot of mankind. As is the
case with his conception of the hero, his philosophy of
acceptance has been created by contemporary society, for such
a philosophy is a defence against a hostile environment.

Perhaps even the compression of style one finds in Lewis
and in many contemporary poets is partly due to a society that
turns the poet in upon himself for reassurance. For if the
style is the man, assuming that this generalization is some­
thing more than a platitude, then it would follow that if the
man is the creation of his age, his style too, is the creation
of his age. To be more specific there seems to be a close
relationship between the complexities of contemporary life and
the complexities of contemporary style. The extent to which
this assumption is true, if indeed, it is true at all, will be
examined more fully in Chapter Nine.

This essay must concern itself primarily with Lewis as
the creation of his age. But there is a second idea in the
Shelley quotation with which I opened this chapter. He says that artists are, in one sense, "the creators of their age". Is he speaking literally or figuratively? Do poets actually help to change the political, moral, and economic framework of their age? Or is the effect of poetry reserved for those who read poetry, so that recreation takes place only in the mind of the reader? In short, what exactly does Shelley mean by saying that poets are the creators of their age? This essay is an attempt, not only to show that Lewis is the product of his age, but also to discover in what sense and to what extent he is the creation of his age.

If, indeed, it is true that society shapes our responses, then an examination of that society would seem to be a natural starting point. John Livingstone Lowes would agree to this initial step, I think, for he writes:

Revolt in poetry is not a wind that blows aloof and fitfully along the upper reaches of the air. It is bound up with the general ebb and flow of attractions and repulsions which go to make up life. And it is never amiss to begin by scrutinizing life, when one is questioning the ways of society. (1)

I shall begin the essay, therefore, by scrutinizing society.

PART TWO

I shall attempt, first of all, to survey society with Lewis' eyes, and to pick out from a very complex age certain

sign-posts to guide one through the wasteland. The first of these sign-posts is to be found in all the varied implications of the term, the machine age.

Science has developed machinery to a point of productivity undreamed of fifty years ago. Ours is an age of dynamos, pylons, locomotives, aeroplanes, gears, assembly lines, blast furnaces, wheels within wheels. The technological advance has been so rapid, that man has lagged behind in both the psychological and economic spheres. Economically, the productivity of machines has led to the paradox of over-production, with resulting depressions. Distribution has replaced production as the key problem. Psychologically, the bewildering increase of sense data, and of scientific theory, has led to the atrophy of man's receptive imagination. Lewis writes that:

--wonders crowd so thick and fast
around him that he has almost lost
the sense of wonder; and, if he has
a feeling for the spirit or essence of
things, it is held incommunicado from
his sense of their material utility.
Reason and instinct are kept apart. (1)

Lewis refers to this problem, which is essentially a problem of the divorce between ends and means, in a poem called, "A Warning To Those Who Live On Mountains". Speaking to the men of science, he writes:

Simple the password that disarms suspicion:
Starved are your roots, and still would you strain
The tie between brain and body to breaking-point? (2)

The warning Lewis gives in these lines is that scientists must begin to have a laboratory concern about the effects of their inventions on society. It is a plea to consider ends as well as means, morality as well as mathematics, life as well as knowledge, social as well as laboratory values.

Economic dislocation is a more perceptible, but not a more real, effect of the machine age, than psychological dislocation. The stepped-up productivity of machines, and the spread of the machine technique from where it began in England to the four corners of the earth, has created for the first time on a large scale the problem of overproduction. The great depression of the early 'Thirties resulted from the inability of the economic system to adapt itself to high-speed production. Lewis believes that the capitalist system is a scarcity system; that is to say, it will work effectively only if demand for goods far exceeds their supply. For that reason Lewis believes that capitalism has outlived its usefulness, and that it must be replaced by socialism which is the next stage of economic evolution. By producing goods for use, not for profit, the necessity for shutting down the machines to keep up prices will be removed. All this, of course, is commonplace socialist doctrine, but it is a matter which will receive more attention in later chapters.

Whatever Lewis' political beliefs may be, writers of his generation have manifested an interest in politics and economics.
to an extent unsurpassed among English writers since the French Revolution. In a broadcast in 1935, Lewis pointed out that the crumbling of the social structure is tending to force socially-conscious writers to align themselves with one of the larger world political movements. He made in his talk this prophecy:

If and when the division between the interests of these classes (the working and the owning classes) grows more acute and obvious, we shall find writers standing more and more definitely on one side or the other. And, as this takes place, a new conception of the function of literature is bound to grow up. It will become more concerned with the relations between the masses, and less with the relations between individuals, more of a guide to action and less of a commentary on action; more deliberately a partisan in life's struggles. In fact, it will moralize more. (1)

This publicly delivered manifesto seems clear enough. Yet, as I shall show, the prediction has not been born out in his own poetry at least. Rather than concerning himself increasingly with mass relationships, in his later writings he has veered more and more towards putting the emphasis on the individual. This shift of emphasis leads one to believe that man's opinions, like Proteus, constantly and bewilderingly change shape, and, despite the strength of one's convictions at a given moment, the possibility of an about-face is always present. Sensitive, intelligent men, such as Lewis, constantly change the emphasis they put on their ideas. Perhaps, rather, their ideas are

changed for them. Thus a poet grows, ever alert to new stimuli, ever changing.

The first landmark of our age was the economic, political, and psychological dislocation which was a result of the machine age. The second characteristic is the prevalence of war in contemporary society. To put the problem briefly, it is that in the space of twenty-five years, mankind has fought the two most catastrophic wars in history. The causes of these wars will be discussed in Chapter Eight. The important thing to note here is that these wars did occur, making a shambles of life as it was known, substituting despair and fears of perpetual conflict for rosy dreams of progress and peace. When the first war was over, writes Lewis, "it was left to an American, T. S. Eliot, to pick up some of the fragments of civilization, place them end to end, and on that crazy pavement walk precariously through the wasteland."(1) For those who were to spend their youth in the Nineteen Twenties, the impact of the war was especially shattering. Material destruction and spiritual disollution left a wreckage which buried for most people the idea of the inevitability of progress which had been a characteristic of the Nineteenth Century. The magnitude of the Great War and the intensity of its events served to mark, in men's minds if not in reality, the end of an epoch. And though the world did not die, it became a profoundly different world, "a stange new soil", with new ideas, new modes of life,

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and a new art. Lewis expresses the effect of the Great War in this way:

The Great War tore away our youth from its roots, and when the roots had taken hold again, it was in a strange new soil. Post-War poetry was born amongst the ruins. (1)

The Second World War also had its impact. The nature of this impact and the poetry which resulted from it will be discussed in Chapter Eight. Before going on to the next problem, however, it should be stressed that each characteristic of contemporary society does not exist suigeneris. All the problems fit together like the pieces of a jigsaw, and in the profoundest sense, there is only one problem; the problem of life today.

The third vital problem of our age is tied up with the decline of religious orthodoxy. This decline began to reach considerable proportions among the Eighteenth Century rationalists, but it was not until the growing evolutionary concept (a part of the expansion of science) found its climax with the Origin of Species that human thought about man and his environment was refashioned. Man lost his God in 1859, and he has been trying to rediscover Him ever since. All the attempts to reconcile incontrovertible scientific theory with orthodox religion, the latest being Lecomte Du Nouy's Human Destiny, have failed to fill the gap left in man's mind. Religion must be based on faith, and if that faith is lacking, no amount of logic will

(1) A Hope For Poetry, 166.
10.

bring the conviction that God exists.

It is true that Lewis is a poet who only rarely concerns himself directly with the relation of man to God. Much of his poetry concerns man's relation to his fellow men, but, nevertheless, there seems to be in his most recent writings a growing concern about man's place in the universe. In the broadest sense of the word, then he is becoming more religious. When, however, the church is involved in man's relation to society, Lewis has much to say about it. He frequently satirizes a feckless church and in the Magnetic Mountain he includes the church among these institutions which contribute to the inertia of society.

Lewis has concerned himself with the preaching of a faith not exclusive of, but complementary to, a faith in God. I mean a faith in the essential dignity of man, and a conviction that perfectibility, though itself unattainable, is a practical ideal. He claims love as the greatest gift of God, and the greatest hope for man. As Tennyson lamented for Hallam, so, in "A Time To Dance", Lewis is moved by the untimely death of his young friend, L. P. Hedges. Yet, at a time of bereavement, the memory of Hedges' personality turns the lament into an ode to love. Frequently he uses the word "love" almost as a synonym for God, as in these lines:

But now a word in season, a dance in spite
Of death: love, the affirmative in all living,
Blossom, dew or bird.
For one is dead, but his love has gone before Us, pointing and paving a way into the future.(1) Is there not too in the last lines a feeling about life that Parallels his feeling about pleasure; namely that irrespective of what happens to life or how short its duration, it has achieved a kind of permanence by its very existence.

The quest for reassurance in the world today has led many people to examine their innermost selves. For it is the conviction of many that, if the Kingdom of God is not within us, yet one may find in the unconscious the explanation of desires and actions which will make life more meaningful. Because of this conviction, our age has become increasingly introspective. Just as evolutionary theory found its spokesman in Darwin, so theories of the psyche found a champion in Freud, who called man's attention to his unconscious. Lewis himself, though he rarely uses the clinical vocabulary or the concepts of the psychiatrist, believes that Freud's discoveries may be as important as the results of the Industrial Revolution or the discovery of America. At the time Freud was completing his work in Vienna, writers were beginning to feel the disruption in society, and to fall back upon their last defences, their inner selves. The conflict within a man's mind, rather than that between individuals became for many writers a fertile subject to cultivate. Strange tropical growths, rank vegetation, tangles lianas - growths Victorian

(1) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 49.
writers would have judged impossible to cultivate in our cool northern climate - have been the result. Rilke, Kafka, and Proust on the continent; Joyce, Eliot, and Dylan Thomas, and even Auden in Britain, to name only a few, have absorbed, modified, or extended Freud's beliefs. When Auden, for example, talks about the ills of society, he is not merely using a figure of speech; he is psychoanalyzing the collective mind of society in much the same way that the psychiatrist analyzes the mind of an individual. Lewis sums up the value of Freud's discoveries in this way:

Freud's analysis has altered all the values of the human equation. It has given us a new conception of character. It has thrown a brilliant - and often humiliating - light on our motives. And, above all, it has challenged us to reconstruct our morality on the new foundations it has laid. (1)

Lewis, then regards the continual exploration of man's unconscious mind as a bright hope for a healthier society. A neurotic world needs probably a psychiatric cure, and Lewis would go even so far as to say that possibly Freud has given us the material with which to reconstruct religion. That would be irony if it were achieved - belief reborn from the work of the great unbeliever.

These three problems: the problem of science and the machine age; the problem of recurring war; and the search for spiritual reassurance, are woven with many ramifications into

(1) C. Day Lewis, "The Revolution In Literature", 257.
the overall fabric of life today. These problems are woven also into the very fabric of Lewis' poetry. It remains to see just how the poet moulds and shapes his clay on his potter's wheel.

PART THREE

A thinking man, and a poet is a thinking man, may deal with a given set of problems in a number of ways. An obvious way of dealing with a problem is to shut one's eyes to it, or pretend it does not exist. Much of Victorian poetry was preoccupied with a dream-world, and it is to this fact that T. S. Eliot alludes when he describes the Victorian age as "a period of false stability". (1) Arthur O'Shaughnessy's Ode has always seemed to me to be the locus classicus of "escape-writing". Part of the first stanza of this Ode follows:

We are the music-makers
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams - -

This languid lotus-eater renunciation of the real world was also a characteristic of much of Georgian poetry. Louis MacNeice described the Georgians in this manner:

You in your small corner and I in mine was the principle and the corners were tastefully fitted up.
But they forgot that a corner is by

(1) T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry And The Use of Criticism, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1933, 105.
This is another way of saying that the Georgians had no world-view. It was otherwise with most of the great Romantic poets, though Keats, to be sure, wrote his share of aesthete’s verse. The Romantics believed that the interests motivating their poetry were the motivating forces in the world. Lewis believes this to be true of his own poetry. A poet, he contends, cannot divorce himself from the life and thoughts of humanity.

Another way to solve a set of problems such as confronts the world today is to find the answer in religion. Our literary history is, indeed, rich with examples of poets who sought to discover a religious answer to man’s perplexing problems. Vaughan, Crashaw, Herbert, Blake, Hopkins, Francis Thompson, and, to a certain extent, Tennyson, Browning, and T. S. Eliot come to mind. It is interesting to note at this point what a catholic reviewer writing in the Commonweal has to say about the "New Country" poets. Speaking of Hopkins influence on Auden, Spender, and Lewis, he writes:

So far the influence of the Jesuit poet has been merely technical. But it may come about that all the members of this group will eventually discover the significance of Hopkin's poetic content. If that ever happens they will not find any very deep gulf fixed between communism and Catholicism. (2)

(1) L. MacNeice, Modern Poetry, 8.
To date, there has been no sign of Lewis jumping the gulf.

Some writers seek to find the answer to contemporary problems by seeking a profounder understanding of self. They believe that if one plumbs the depths of the unconscious, one may find means to reconcile himself with a chaotic society.

Still another way to deal with a set of problems is to examine them, elucidate them, and then refrain from offering a solution, or assert that there is no solution. T. S. Eliot in the early 'Twenties comes close to the first; Aldous Huxley in the middle 'Twenties comes close to the second.

Lewis resorts to none of these solutions. Escape he feels is impossible; religion, with its stress on another world, cannot be for him a direct solution to the problems of this world; psychology may help to orient the individual, but he believes that something besides is needed to help society; and the belief that no solution exists defies his sense of historical perspective, which reveals man struggling slowly out of primitive darkness to a higher and higher plane.

As a matter of fact, Lewis gives no one solution. He has something of value to say to the individual which will enable him to live a happier life in an imperfect world. He has a good deal to say, moreover, to society, and in the *Magnetic Mountain* at least, suggests a socialist solution. He is conscious of the fact, like Plato, that society can be no
better than the sum total of the individuals which make it up. But he is equally cognizant of the fact that society by its collective power, owes a debt of a full and rich life to every deserving individual. The interaction must be mutually beneficial; the society gains from the individual, the individual gains from society. Thus Lewis strikes a nice balance between the contribution of the individual, to the mass, and that of the mass to the individual.

Above all, Lewis gives one the impression that he possesses, himself, solid common sense and glowing health. He always has his feet on the ground of the real world. The lines he wrote for the two heroes, Parer and McIntosh, who flew to Australia in an obsolete plane, are equally applicable to himself:

We remember them as the glowing fruit
Sap-flow and sunshine. (1)

Lewis has written that "our world, our minds may be in a state of chaos. But it is the business of the poetic reason to create order out of chaos" (2) The purpose of this essay must be to discover to what extent he succeeds in creating this order, and how he goes about it. His poetry was "born amongst the ruins". What hope for man's regeneration does it offer as, in its turn, it grows and flowers.

(1) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 64.
CHAPTER II

THE APPETITE FOR WHOLENESS

PART ONE

Cecil Day Lewis first came into prominence in 1931, when he published his second book of poetry, *From Feathers to Iron*. His first book of verse, *Transitional Poem*, appeared in 1929, but although it was greeted with warm appreciation by many critics, it failed to achieve any widespread popularity with critics and readers. The second book, however, won for Lewis an immediate and extensive recognition as an original poet of unusual ability. Lewis was a poet, it was seen at once, who had something new and valuable to say to a world in the midst of depression, and who said it in a new and striking way. T. E. Lawrence went so far as to hail the arrival of Lewis as the most important event in the history of English poetry since the death of Tennyson. *From Feathers to Iron* received an enthusiastic reading from both critics and general readers. From the outset, Lewis has been associated with two other English poets, Stephen Spender and W. H. Auden. All three poets resemble one another in many ways, because some of their early work appeared together in the prominent anthologies, *New Country* and *New Signatures*, which Michael Roberts compiled in the early 'Thirties, these poets received the name, "New Country Poets".*
Many comparisons of the three poets have been made.

J. G. Fletcher wrote:

Of the three chief representatives of the most recent revival of poetry in England, we may say this: that if W. H. Auden is the most savagely intellectual, and Stephen Spender the most impenitently evangelical, Cecil Day Lewis is the most lyrically broad-minded. (1)

And Horace Gregory, writing in Books, says:

There is no one writing poetry today who has a better sense of its vocabulary in modern technique; there is no one who has exploited its didactic uses more successfully than Day Lewis. I feel confident that of the three poets, (Auden, Lewis, and Spender) Day Lewis has the greatest potentiality for future development. (2)

Finally, William Rose Benet, who had been at first rather lukewarm in his opinion of Lewis, feels called upon to write:

There was in the beginning something sturdy about C. Day Lewis which has persisted. Insofar as I could see it from over here, he seemed to me the one of the three most in earnest really to get to grips with his time. (3)

I quote the above three critical excerpts, not at this time to appraise them, but merely to suggest that Lewis is an important poet whose stature has been recognized on both sides of the Atlantic.

(1) J. G. Fletcher, Saturday Review of Literature, April 13, 1935.
(2) H. Gregory, Books, April 14, 1935, p. 4.
My own personal view is that Lewis is a very fine poet, if indeed he is not a great one. That his output seems to have fallen off in recent years is disappointing, and one can only hope that he is merely experiencing a lull in his powers while gaining strength for a new outburst of energy. His significance, irrespective of his art, is important because of his treatment of pressing social problems. He has much of value to say to the world. And after three years of intensive reading and study, I find this poet as fresh and as vital as when I first read him.

Lewis was born at Ballintogher, Ireland, April 27, 1904. He was the only child of the Reverend F. G. Day Lewis and Kathleen Blake Squires. His mother, who was a collateral descendant of Oliver Goldsmith, wrote considerable unpublished poetry herself. She died, however, when Cecil was only four years old, and it is therefore very unlikely that she had any influence on her son's poetic talent. The family moved to England in 1907, where Cecil began his schooling at Sherborne. It is reported that he made a conscious attempt to write verse at the age of six. Later, Lewis was an exhibitioner at Wadham College, Oxford, where in 1927 he became co-editor of Oxford Poetry. In 1928 he married Constance Mary Sherborne. They have two sons.

From the first, Lewis wished to devote all his time to writing, but he was financially unable to do so. He therefore
became a teacher. Between 1927 and 1935 he was a master at three different schools; at Summer Fields, Oxford; at Larchfield, Helensburgh; and finally at Cheltenham College.

In 1935, owing partly to an increase in income, derived from an unexpected source, the sale of detective stories, he was able to withdraw from teaching and to devote himself entirely to writing and left-wing politics. The first of his detective yarns, written under the pseudonym of Nicholas Blake (Blake was a family name on his mother's side) was entitled A Question of Proof, and was purportedly written in 1935 to obtain money to repair a leaky roof. Since then, eight more detective yarns have followed, excellent of their kind. (1) It is seldom that Lewis writes bad prose. Lewis regards Nicholas Blake, not merely a financial benefactor, but also as a mechanism for releasing a spring of cruelty, which he finds in all men and for which a country gentleman finds an outlet in hunting.

Following his withdrawal from teaching, Lewis moved to Gloucesteshire, but at present lives at Brimclose, Musbury, Axminster, Devon. There he is referred to by the villagers as "the poet with a gun", for he is fond of shooting rabbits. He is a great observer of wildlife, especially birds, which goes a long way to explain the frequent use of bird imagery and symbolism in his poetry. Among his other recreations he

(1) See Bibliography under "Fiction" for a list of his detective stories.
numbers singing and sailing.

Lewis is a tall athletic-looking man, almost rawboned. Though only forty-three, his face is deeply lined, which fact, sentimentalists to the contrary, has probably not been caused by worry or suffering. He has grey hair, grey eyes, and a soft voice with a lingering Irish intonation. If portraits and photographs are any criterion, he might be called handsome.

Biographical detail is interesting in itself, and, as such, has a place here. The real importance of biography, however, is that it sets the compass, gives one a bearing, and increases one's understanding of the whole man about whom I write.

PART TWO

Lewis was twenty-five years old when, in 1929, the Hogarth Press printed his first major work. It was called simply, Transitional Poem. He had, however, written considerable verse before 1929, and indeed, two collections of his juvenilia were privately printed, though these books are never listed with his published works. Lewis himself never alludes to these early books, Beechen Vigil (1925), and Country Comets (1928), in any of his prose writings, and it is quite possible he would prefer to have his authorship of them forgotten. But the appearance of Transitional Poem showed
that a new poet of considerable promise had arrived. The year 1929 may be regarded as significant for other reasons than the one mentioned. It is interesting to note that Lewis' first major work antedated Auden's *Poems* of 1930. It is noteworthy, too, that 1929 was the year of the stock market crash, and the beginning of eight years of depression.

Despite T. E. Lawrence's over-sanguine opinion, *Transition* Poem remains the most obscure and the least satisfactory of the poet's major works. The key to its importance in the development of Lewis' point of view is to be found in the seventh sonnet of his excellent sonnet sequence, "0 Dreams 0 Destinations", written in the late 'Thirties. This sonnet concludes with these lines:

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We march over our past, we may behold it
Dreaming a slave's dream on our bivouac hearth.
Lost the archaic dawn wherein we started,
The appetite for wholeness: now we prize
Half-loaves, half-truths - enough for the
half-hearted,
The gleam snatched from corruption satisfies.
Dead youth, forgive us if, all but defeated,
We raise a trophy where your honour lies. (1)
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Lewis was older and wiser when he wrote the above lines than he was in 1929, for there is in them an acute awareness that life is a great complexity, and that there are in life many intermediate shades between black and white. Nevertheless, it is the prerogative of youth to be optimistic and to believe that the "appetite for wholeness" can be satisfied.

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(1) *Short Is The Time*, "0 Dreams 0 Destinations", "Sonnet Seven", ll. 7-14.
Transitional Poem is the record of the poet's attempts to achieve integration, expressed with the confidence, sometimes the "cockiness" of youth, before the disillusion of ten years had taught him that perhaps there were no truths, only "half-truths" for the "half-hearted". To use the poet's own explanatory notes, which for the first and only time he appended to a poem, Lewis writes:

The central theme of this poem is the single mind. The poem is divided into four parts, which essentially represent four phases of personal experience in the pursuit of single-mindedness: it will be seen that a transition is intended from one part to the next such as implies a certain spiritual progress and a consequent shifting of aspect. (1)

The poem, then is both a starting-point and a search. It is the result, not of single-mindedness in the poet, but of the lack of it. The poet is frankly lost and the poem is a sort of biographical account of the struggle to find himself. It is precisely owing to the fact that he is not at all sure how to find single-mindedness that he must resort to trial and error. Within each of the four parts of the poem, it is this fact, too, that makes the poem haphazard and obscure.

The poet is lost in a Carlsbad cavern of singular intricacy. He gropes up many fantastically festooned labyrinths only to find them blind; he returns to his starting point, only to find it was not his starting point; he plumbs

great depths, for the caverns have many levels, and he sees
the tantalizing rays of sunlight without ever finding an
aperture large enough to permit his escape. There are moments
of despair and moments of hope; and when the search is over,
we are not sure whether he has at last escaped from the
complexities of the cavern or whether he has resigned himself
to his fate. It might indeed be argued that resignation is
escape. Matthew Arnold's lines from the "Scholar Gipsy"
describe the poet's dilemma very well:

Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
And each half lives a hundred different lives.

In this, his first major work, Lewis reveals that he is
the product of an age that has lost its certainties. In a
sense, the spectacle of a confused man, groping for understand-
ing and order is strikingly symbolic of the age as a whole.
He represents what we see when we look at society through the
big end of the telescope. The problems of the age are his
problems. He sees the dilemma of science whose theories of
relativity have made man doubt that he could achieve any
finality; he is aware of the dilemma of psychology, the
discoveries of which in psychoanalysis have proved that many
actions, apparently instinctive, have been rigidly determined;
he feels the embarrassment of the perfectionist whose beliefs
in the inevitability of progress were roundly shaken by re-
curring war and depression. Yet in spite of all these dis-
appointments and shortcomings, Transitional Poem indicates
that the poet still believes he can find an answer to all the varied problems of his age.

_Transitional Poem_ falls into four parts, containing altogether thirty-four poems of varying form and length. Each part is meant to express a certain phase of the search for single mindedness. Part One is metaphysical in approach; Part Two is ethical; Part Three is psychological; and Part Four is an attempt to link poetry to the other three experiences. It is obvious from a first reading, however, that the poet does not keep too rigidly to these divisions, for ethical considerations are introduced in Part Three and elsewhere, with the result that even the separate parts are a melange of numerous ingredients.

He begins Part One with the assertion that he has grown up into manhood:

Now I have come to reason
And cast my schoolboy clout. (1)

He immediately begins his search, and his first impulse is to find some order in the chaos he sees everywhere. The first tentative solution (and all his solutions in _Transitional Poem_ are tentative) is cerebral. He writes:

It is certain we shall attain
No life till we stamp on all
Life the tetragonal
Pure symmetry of brain. (2)

The hardness of Lewis' language reminds one of J. M. Synge's prophecy made in 1908 that "before verse can be human again"

(1) _Transitional Poem_, "Poem One", ll. 1-2.
(2) _Transitional Poem_, "Poem One", ll. 9-12.
it must learn to be brutal". (1) The impression it makes on one who has been brought up on the velvety-textured stuff of Victorian and Georgian verse is that here indeed is a coarse fabric. Synge was probably criticizing the dreamy escapism of poets like Dawson and O'Shaughnessy, and felt that these poets had lost touch with real people. He no doubt means to criticize as well the artificial poetic diction of some of the "fin de siècle" poets, and yearns for a more "brutal", that is to say a more objectively concrete diction. In the opening verses of Transitional Poem, Lewis attains a "brutality" of diction which would possibly satisfy Synge's desire.

The search continues. Lewis disavows a temptation to compromise:

For the mind must cope with
All elements or none. (2)

It can be said that Lewis in this book is a temperamental poet. He shifts his mood with confusing abruptness from poem to poem. As early as Poem Three, the optimism of the opening poem has fallen to doubt and depression. Throughout the book, this mood of dejection is symbolized by the sphinx, and the poet's scorn of the traditional does not prevent him, when one of these dark fits is upon him, from going to nature for consolation. It is not generally recognized that Lewis is a nature poet of high rank, but it seems to me that his bold but always sensitive observations of nature make one of his finest


(2) Transitional Poem, "Poem Two", ll. 5-6.
accomplishments. So it is that, early in Transitional Poem, to dispel a fit of gloom, he goes into the woods at night. He describes the woods in the following lines:

Later we lit a fire, and the hedge of darkness - Garnished with not a nightingale nor a glow-worm Sprang up like a beanstalk by which our Jack aspired once.

Then, though each star seemed little as a glow-worm Perched on Leviathan's flank, and equally terrible My tenure of this plateau that sloped on all sides Into annihilation. (1)

Here is a picture in black and white, with only the "patines of bright gold" added to diminish a severity which effectively points up the insignificance of man in the cosmos. And later Lewis writes:

- - - seeing the fall of a burnt-out faggot Make all the night sag down. (2)

How effective a mere park is to cut the darkness, even if for a moment. It is an observation we have all made semi-consciously many times, and the poet with his "make all the night sag down", has, I think, expressed it finely.

It should be noted here that Lewis does not use nature description for its own sake merely, but to point up a mood, to heighten an effect, to intensify the emotional impact for himself and the reader. This functional use of nature description is seen to good advantage in From Feathers to Iron, where, as we shall see, there is a fusion of emotional experience with the weather fluctuations of the seasons.

(1) Transitional Poem, "Poem Three", 11. 11-17.
As Transitional Poem continues, the secret of the relationship between body and soul becomes for Lewis a problem to be solved before any singleness of mind can be won. In Poem Four he presents this problem in a way which reminds one of Emily Dickinson. Here Lewis is terse, austere, and strangely like a mystic:

In that one moment of evening  
When roses are most red  
I can fold back the firmament,  
I can put time to bed. (1)

It would seem that the young poet is experimenting for a congenial technique as well as for something to say. At times his style becomes very ornate; at other times, bald and austere. It would also appear that he finds it easier to suggest what the ideal state or the ideal relationship is to be than to suggest how it is to be attained. Thus, the harmony of body and soul is the ideal. They are:

Twin poles energetic, they  
Stand fast and generate  
This spark that crackles in the void  
As between fate and fate. (2)

He knows the value in operation of the electric generator. But he does not know as yet how to make one. The mechanical imagery in the above lines is bold and effective, though too much of this kind of imagery must have a chilling effect on the reader.

(1) Transitional Poem, "Poem Four", ll. 5-8.  
(2) Transitional Poem, "Poem Four", ll. 33-36.
The relation of flesh and spirit leads directly to the question of whether the power of love can help his search. At times, he thinks it can, but at others, the braggadocio of "Poem Five", for instance, succumbs once more to confusion and contradiction. He is,

Dismayed by the monstrous credibility
Of all antinomies. (1)

This is the note on which he ends Part One - with no solution and no conclusion. The most that can be said is that he has narrowed the problem by a sort of stock-taking. He does suggest, however, that no solution is possible for him which does not include gratification of the senses. This conviction is expressed in lines such as these:

So the antique balloon
Wobbles with no defence
Against the void but a grapnel that hops
and ploughs
Through the landscape of sense. (2)

The two most significant ideas of Part One are these: no solution to the problem of single-mindedness is possible without the harmony of flesh and spirit; and that no solution is possible which rejects the passion for the joys of the moment. Speaking of Methusaleh's longevity, Lewis writes:

Give me an instant realized
And I'll outdo your span. (3)

These lines express an idea which became for Lewis an integral part of his solution, although I believe that he was unaware of

(2) Transitional Poem, "Poem Seven", ll. 17-20.
(3) Transitional Poem, "Poem Four", ll. 3-4.
their significance they would have in the scheme he was to eventually work out when he wrote them in 1929. Just how the idea developed into a *carpe diem* philosophy will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Part Two of the work is prefaced by a famous quotation from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*:

> Do I contradict myself?  
> Very well then, I contradict myself;  
> I am large, I contain multitudes.

Such an attitude offers no concession to clarity. Yet Part Two seeks to clarify the ethical problems of the age. It is the problem of right action, the problem of what ethical system should command his allegiance that Lewis grapples with in Part Two. He commences by stating the purpose of the section:

> It is becoming now to declare my allegiance,  
> To dig some reservoir for my springtime's pain. (1)

He gives praise to these: the woman he loves:

> With you I ran the gauntlet for my prime,  
> Then living in the moment lived for all time(2);

the man who taught him to see all sides of a problem:

> -------Quick  
> Was he to trip the shambling rhetoric  
> Of laws and lions -- (3) ;

those who taught him the value of practical things:

> Alleviating the vain cosmic itch  
> With fact coated in formulae (4).

---

Conversely, he rejects the life of the dreamer, and implies that the entire book, being a search for mental and spiritual order, is a mere preliminary to a plan of action.

There is in Part Two a reference to ideas which, like the value of unique minutes of joy in Part One, became for him important parts of his philosophy of living. I refer to his expressed admiration of heroic and decisive action. The embryo of Lewis' conception of hero is seen forming in these lines:

Since the heroes lie
Entombed with the recipe
Of epic in their heart ---
There's nothing but to recant
Ambition, and be content
Like the poor child at play
To find a holiday
In the sticks and mud
Of a familiar road. (1)

The trial and error exercise goes on. Lewis rejects in turn, "the sticks and mud of a familiar road", orthodox religion, crass materialism, and in a moment of despair, complains that his experience is so discontinuous that he says that if he could but make two pieces fit into place, he would be satisfied. He ends Part Two still undecided about his attitude to life and society, but with an optimistic acceptance of the good that life does contain. There is acceptance and therefore joy in the following passage which concludes Part

Two:

Charabancs shout along the lane
And summer gales bay in the wood
No less superbly because I can't explain
What I've understood (1)

Transitional Poem is an uneven performance. Though the
athletic suppleness of line characteristic of "A Time To
Dance" or the chiselled sculpturesque quality of Short Is The
Time appears now and then, the verse as a whole surrenders
language to casual wanderings of mind with a resulting lack of
that cogency which comes from discipline. Sometimes the verse
suffers from excessive hyperbole, and frequently it is
reminiscent of the tortured conceits of the Seventeenth Century
metaphysical poets, such as Crashaw. The following lines, for
instance, seem to be spoiled by excess. Even hyperbole needs
restraint, and the subject described in these lines is not
weighty enough to bear the exaggerated figure:

When her eyes delay
On men, so deep are they
Tunnelled by love, although
You poured Atlantic
In this one and Pacific
In the other, I know
They would not overflow. (2)

If one compares this hyperbole with a similar image used by
Wilfred Owen, the extent to which Lewis is the loser becomes
clear:

Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified
Now my titanic tears, the seas, be dried. (3)

(3) W. Owen, "The End", Poems of Wilfred Owen, ed. Edmund
Owen "surprises by a fine excess", Lewis somehow fails. Possibly the specific naming of "Atlantic" and "Pacific" in the Lewis lines is too definite, too "local", to use Wordsworth's words, whereas Owen's is "general and operative". A good deal of the poetry in Part Two of Transitional Poem is flat and prosy. These prosy passages do not create a contrast by being purposely juxtaposed with passages pitched in a high key, in the manner of Auden, but seemingly appear without method. Although, for the moment at least, Lewis has depleted his resources.

Part Three of the book deals with the psychological conflict "between self as subject and self as object". (1) Shelley might identify "self as subject" with the poet as the creator of his age, and "self as object" with the poet as its creation. In any case, the question Lewis seeks to answer in Part Three is this: what common denominator can be found to keep both the active and the passive, the creative and the receptive parts of his personality integrated during the search for single-mindedness? The ideal solution is implied in an excerpt from Herman Melville which Lewis prefixes to Part Three. The quotation follows:

But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still centrally disport in mute calm.

During his search for the integrating unit which will bring

him Melville's "mute calm", Lewis compares the brevity of love to the solidarity and age of earth, in a poem which recalls De La Mare's "Very Old are the woods". The use of geological imagery in this poem became characteristic of the poet's later work. An example of this type of imagery occurs in these two lines:

What paroxysm of green can crack those huge Ribs grown from Chaos, stamped by Deluge? (1)

As the poem continues, death inevitably intrudes as a logical solution to all the poet's problems, but he decides that death is negation, and that negation is the opposite of his desideratum. The search for the integrating unit evokes a desire for the spider's equanimity. In a rather fine image which might have been unconsciously suggested by Whitman's noiseless patient spider, Lewis expressed the desire for calm self-mastery:

So the spider gradually, Drawing fine systems from his belly, Includes creation with a thread And squats on the navel of his world. (2)

He ends this section with the incontrovertible thought that if nothing else will solve his problems, death certainly will. So we find the poet rejecting death as a solution, because it is a negation, yet returning to it as if drawn by a magnet.

Part Three is the most adolescent of all the parts. It sometimes recalls the beginner at the piano practicing his

Lewis himself gives us a clue to his state of mind when he wrote Part Three, for he has written:

It was true perhaps for our adolescent selves: in those days we read and sometimes wrote poetry because we had doubts about our emotional potency or because our feelings seemed so confused and un­directed; poetry then seemed to exercise the untried muscles of our emotions, and to be like a relief model of territory that would soon be the battlefield for us. (1)

The "relief model" which Lewis speaks of in the above quotation is an excellent term with which to describe Transitional Poem in its entirety. For the poem contains nearly all the germinal ideas which Lewis later developed. The poem is indeed a map of a territory which would soon be a battlefield for him.

The "relief model" is completed in Part Four. This section, which Lewis intended as "an attempt to relate the poetic impulse with the experience as a whole", (2) is possibly the most difficult part to see as a whole. The subject is centrality, but there seems to be little centrality to the section. For the fifth time, Lewis complains of his difficulties:

Thos Himalayas of the mind
Are not so easily possessed:
There's more than precipice and storm
Between you and your Everest. (3)

The image of Everest to symbolize difficulty is a natural choice of a young man who must have watched with fascination

(2) Notes to Transitional Poem, p. 55.
the vain but heroic attempts of the great Everesters, Arthur Leigh-Mallory in particular, to conquer the peak during the late 'Twenties. Lewis means that the attempt to achieve the single mind is quite as difficult as the attempt to scale Everest. Perhaps he implies, moreover, with the loss of Mallory fresh in his mind, that the attempt is as dangerous too, and that it is sometimes fatal.

The concluding portion of Transitional Poem is important for two reasons in particular. Firstly, Lewis expresses in verse the function of a poet in our society. This expression of aesthetic ideas in verse became a regularly recurring theme in Lewis' later poetry. Of course he has expressed his views of aesthetics in lucid prose also upon a number of occasions; in the concluding pages of A Hope For Poetry for instance, or in Chapters Three and Six of The Poetic Image. In the former book, he compares a successful poem to a light in the window in the last of many houses he has built. He goes on to say:

But one single window so illuminated
Can justify a life's work, while a thousand structures of graceful design
Are vain and void without that fiery occupant. (1)

The use of the lighted-window image in this passage is very apt. In the Transitional Poem appears a versified definition of poetry, in which the poetic spirit is again described in terms of light:

It is a burning-glass
Which interrupts the sun
To make him more intense,
And touch to single flame
The various heap of sense. (1)

The image of the magnifying glass to describe the poet's activity is effective, because the poet, like the glass, must collect and fuse, select and intensify his experiences, to make the concentrated thing we call a poem.

If Lewis does not find single-mindedness in this book, at least he is a lot closer to it at the end than at the beginning of the poem. By the end of Part Four Lewis realizes the weakness of all attempts to solve the riddle by abstract logic alone. The "tetragonal pure symmetry of brain" with which he began his search is now rejected. He has arrived at the point from which all his subsequent books start; namely, at the belief that all judgments of life and humanity must be based on actual observation of living man, and that the poet must concern himself with the pain and suffering, joys and aspirations of man. The following lines express the nature of the poet's discovery:

I stretched a line from pole to pole
To hang my paper lanterns on. Poor soul,
By such a metaphysical conceit
Thinking to make ends meet!
This line, spun from the blind heart -
What could it do but prove the poles apart?
More expert now, I twist the dials, catch
Electric hints, curt omens such
As may be heard by one tapping the air
That belts an ambiguous sphere.
Put down the tripod here. (2)

(1) Transitional Poem, "Poem Thirty-Two" ll. 36-40.
Lewis wishes to emphasize in these lines that attempts to understand life by using the rational faculties alone have proven futile. The products of the intellect are "paper lanterns", and the method is "a line spun from the blind heart". And so he turns to actual contact with man, to his resources of human sympathy, centered in the heart. He "twists the dials" so that he may tune in on the real joy and real suffering of man. He insists on empiricism.

_Transitional Poem_ ends on a quieter note, and with a more chastened tone than it began. The symbol of a hawk which Lewis used to denote himself throughout the poem is replaced in the last poem by that of the lark, as if that were now the more appropriate symbol. The final lines would indicate that Lewis has achieved some measure of peace:

So from a summer's height
I come into my peace;
The sings have earned their night,
And the song may cease. (1)

Whether it is the peace of harmony or the sleep of exhaustion I am not quite sure. The poem does leave one, however, with the feeling that Lewis has progressed towards his goal. If Carlyle's words are true, when he writes, "See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music, if you can only reach it", (2) then Lewis at least has put his hands on the keys.

(1) _Transitional Poem_, "Poem Thirty-four", ll. 21-24.
PART THREE

The poem as a whole reveals a number of defects. In the first place, the poem lacks wholeness, and the irony of that is obvious. There is little cohesion between part and part, or between poem and poem. Edgar Allan Poe argued that long poems are impossible because there is a length, he contended, beyond which "the intense and pure elevation of soul"(1), which he believed to be the decisive characteristic of poetry, cannot be maintained. He went on to point out that successful long poems like *Paradise Lost* are really recurring periods of shorter lyrical passages. Whatever may be the truth about *Paradise Lost*, and I believe Poe's opinion is open to question, Poe's criticism is undoubtedly true of *Transitional Poem*.

The relationship between the thirty-four lyrics which make up the cycle is implied rather than expressed. This fact is probably due to the subject matter. The vagaries of a search for something about which there are so few clues make a subject not conducive to closely-knit form. Perhaps Lewis should have waited, with the poet's patience, until he was sure that he had found centrality, before attempting to describe his travail. It might almost be said, then, that the poem lacks wholeness because, if it has a beginning, it has no middle or end.

It must be admitted in all fairness, that Lewis does make

some attempt to relate the parts. There are certain cross-references, for instance, which are unifying devices. The sphinx in "Poem One", symbol of the poet's doubt, is repeated in "Poem Thirty-One". The electric light globe in "Poem Twenty-Three", symbol of the partial solution which love brings, is alluded to again in "Poem Thirty-One". The hawk of "Poem One" flies back into "Poem Thirty-Four". However, these symbols are neither clear nor important enough to be effective bonds.

The lack of organic unity is intensified by the general obscurity of many of the poems. Transitional Poem is without a doubt the poet's most difficult performance. Obscurity in this work is not so much the result of compression, elision, inversion, or emotional sequence, which are usually the cause of contemporary obscurity, but is the result of confused thought, uncoordinated ideas and slap-dash construction. There are no private or personal references in the poem, so that it cannot be characterized as esoteric. Obscurity is a subject which will be dealt with at some length in Chapter Nine, but it is interesting to note here two types of obscurity not generally found in the poet's other work. In "Poem Twenty-Five" there is an example of what might be called "partial negative". The obscure lines follow:

Where is the true, the central stone
That clay and vapour zone,
That earthquakes budge nor vinegar bites away,
That rivets man against Doomsday? (1)

The negative in these lines applies equally to "earthquakes" (1) Transitional Poem, "Poem Twenty-Five", ll. 1-4.
and to "vinegar", but is syntactically omitted in the case of "earthquakes". This omission puzzles one at first. A second type of obscurity occurs when the omission of commas in the apposition confuses the sense:

One false spark fire the immense
Broadside the confounding thunder. (1)

These lines are doubly confusing, because the word "would" is understood before the verb, "fire"; the whole construction is in the subjunctive mood.

The allusions in Transitional Poem are not recondite, but there is a wealth of Biblical, classical, and historical allusion. In none of his other books does Lewis use many allusions of this type. But in this one there are twenty-five classical allusions (Minos, Artemis, Helen, Patroclus, and others); and some fifteen Biblical references (Methusaleh, Anakim, Abraham, Solomon, and others). Pedantic notes in the Eliot manner are appended to the poem, explaining vague references to Spinoza, Donne, Dante, Henry James, the Bible, and even a song of Sophie Tucker's. These notes add little to the clarity of the poem, since the obscurity does not result from the allusions themselves.

The verse of Transitional Poem is very uneven, and there are times when the verse seems almost slipshod. Such lines as:

----------- 'so the dog
Returns to his vomit', you protest. Well only
The dog can tell what virtue lies in his
vomit. (2);

(1) Transitional Poem, "Poem Twenty-Six",
(2) Transitional Poem, "Poem Six", 11. 5-7.
I've seen your subaltern ambitions rise
Yellow and parallel
As smoke from garden cities that soon fades
In air it cannot even defile -- (1),

are dull and prosy.

On the credit side, a few points should be noted. First of all, it has been shown that some conclusions were reached. Furthermore, Lewis proves himself to be a versatile technician. He uses rhyming stanzas of from four to eight lines, blank verse used with Eliot's variations; decasyllabic couplets; and trimeters, tetrameters, and pentameters in successful association. His rhymes are generally orthodox, but already he has begun to employ consonantal, assonantal, and half-rhymes in the way Wilfred Owen used them. "Hocks - Flux"; "wife - give"; "air - hear"; "Love - live"; "lie - recipe"; "systems - pistons"; and "cattle - metal" is a list which includes examples of the three types of rhyme mentioned above. In his later poetry, Lewis uses these "pararhymes" almost with the effect of muted bells, but in Transitional Poem they occur fitfully, apparently without plan, as though through indolence.

In range of metaphor and originality of imagery, Lewis has more to offer. A child of the machine age, he draws on all the resources of science and industry. The lover travels "a loopline"; soul has its "ektogenesis"; life has its "piston's" pounding into their secret cylinders"; the sky has "golden

seams that cram the night"; and so on. Images are drawn from electricity:

For I had been a modern moth and hurled
Myself on many a flaming world,
To find its globe was glass. (1)

Love has its "terminals", and desire its "charged batteries".

Lewis was the first writer to use such imagery as a natural medium. Francis Scarfe defends his use of it in the following passage:

Lewis, to my mind, is not merely being schoolboyish or trying to be "tough", but this type of imagery is fundamental to his conception of the modern world. And that this was all latent in Transitional Poem is a fact which refutes those critics who have said that Lewis owes all his "modern dress" to Auden. Such signs as there are of Auden in this poem are very slight indeed. His basic imagery is indicative of his own, and no other poet's neurosis. When he developed it later, he gave it a more positive value by using it in a social context. (2)

Scarfe makes two other observations which should be noted. He points out Lewis' urgent desire to be going somewhere. He draws attention to his titles; Starting Point, Transitional Poem, From Feathers to Iron, A Time To Dance. The Magnetic Mountain, too, is the story of a journey. Scarfe further points out the poet's "constant preoccupation with the hardness, the resistance of matter" (3). Some images in this category

(2) F. Scarfe, Auden and After 1930-1941, London, George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1943, 5.
(3) F. Scarfe, op. cit. 4.
are: "strata undiagnosed", "love's geology", "basalt peace", "authority of ice", "jag of sense", "Himalayas of the mind", and "digest an adamant". It is quite true that Lewis uses such images of hardness frequently, but whether such a habit has a psychoanalytical significance is open to question. Scarfe's assertion that Lewis' use of images of flying sparks could be psychoanalyzed as an obsession with the male sperm is meaningless until such time as one knows the incidence in humanity of such obsessions with their causal connections.

This chapter should not be concluded without emphasizing the fact that despite Lewis' frequent use of machine imagery, the very novelty of which is apt to exaggerate its importance, the poet more frequently employs traditional rural imagery, often with beautiful effect. The mystery and immensity of a star is tellingly described, for example, in the following personification:

When I consider each independent star
Wearing its world of darkness like a fur
And rubbing shoulders with infinity — (1)

The comparison of darkness, inexpressibly soft, to a fur is very fine; and the word, "shoulders" somehow steps infinity down to a measurable quantity, as a transformer steps down voltage. There are other superb passages of nature description, this one for instance:

Mine is the heron's flight
Which makes a solitude of any sky. (2)

(1) Transitional Poem, "Poem Fourteen", ll. 5-7.
The heron in this excerpt, large in size but flying alone, increases by its very loneliness the feeling of solitude in the watcher; and the sky too seems vaster because of the bird which mars its wide expanse. Thus the sky enriches the heron, and the heron, the sky. The light is in the window in these lines.

Transitional Poem is the spiritual autobiography of a young man who has set out to achieve the single mind. He tries and rejects abstract logic, as futile and escapism as impossible. He grapples with the relationship of flesh and spirit, and strives to find a way to make them sing together all in tune. As part of the question of the relationship between flesh and spirit, he considers what his attitude towards love should be, and decides that no attitude which rejects the full enjoyment of bodily senses is tenable. He is determined that his social philosophy must be based on the actual observation of and participation in the hurly-burly of life. Lewis concludes the poem optimistically, for he believes that if indeed he has not reached his goal, he has come a long way towards it.

The poem is important, too, for the germinal ideas which it contains, and which later develop into cardinal principles. Despite its faults and obscurities, Transitional Poem leaves one with a sense of vigour and health, of moving forward, of hope for man and for the poet's own poetry.
CHAPTER III

THE SPENDTHRIFT FIRE THE HOLY FIRE

PART ONE

It often happens, when one has expended considerable time and thought on a poem, that new ideas and interpretations explode in one's mind with almost the impact of revelation. Perhaps it is this ever-unfolding quality which makes good art satisfying in all ages. Transitional Poem does not qualify as great art. It is too inchoate; there is in it much seemingly profound verse that proves to be dry and sterile on closer examination; it does not reveal new vistas of meaning as one probes deeper, as the finest poetry does. But even this poem, unsatisfactory as it is, has some protean quality in it.

The very title, Transitional Poem, allows of at least two interpretations. On the surface it means a poem of transition linking the juvenile writing of Beechen Vigil with the mature art yet to be written. In this sense, the poem is a conscious step in the poet's development. There is, however, another possible meaning of the title. Possibly the word "transitional" refers to the movement within the poem from idea to idea, from solution to solution. It is this continual state of flux which leads to the dominant impression of disunity. A third possible
interpretation of the title might make the poem apply to a transition period in history, and concern the poet growing from the accepted ideas of the past to the uncertain ones that will come in the future. It is doubtful, though, that Lewis intended the latter meaning, since at the time of writing his social convictions had apparently not yet fully matured.

It is the first interpretation, however, that I wish to use here. Insofar as Lewis plants various germinal ideas which later develop into major poems, *Transitional Poem* effects a transition in the first sense. The decision to observe men in their daily struggles gave him the social consciousness which produced the *Magnetic Mountain* and *Noah and the Waters*; the idea of hero and ancestor led to *A Time To Dance*, the *Nabara*, and many shorter lyrics; the suggestion that joy is a momentary thing and should be seized and enjoyed to the full, became an abiding conviction in such books as *From Feathers to Iron*, and *Short Is The Time*. Finally, Lewis indicated in *Transitional Poem* that the glorification of sex would become a major preoccupation in his poetry. And it did.

**PART TWO**

The logical development of the germinal ideas in *Transitional Poem* is probably what prompted H. J. C. Grierson to write:

Of these three poets (Auden, Spender, Day Lewis), Mr. Day Lewis has developed most
Grierson uses the word, "consistently", and it is noticeable that critics continually use words like "consistent", "common-sense", "steady", "level-headed", when referring to Lewis.

The poet's handling of the love theme develops as consistently as do all his various themes. It follows the chronological sex pattern characteristic of the experience of most men. Allowing for individual differences of temperament and experience, the love life of most people is similar. It consists of shyness and fascination; later adolescent excitement which sometimes culminates in intercourse; marriage with its complex relationships and responsibilities, which contrive to make love a calmer and cooler thing; and finally, later in marriage, warm friendship which long-shared experience brings, some affection, some boredom, and some nostalgia for the past. This description is obviously an over simplification of a very complex relationship. But all I am trying to say here is that men and women in their experiences in sex and marriage, resemble each other more than they differ. There is, in other words, a general chronological pattern.

Another quality of Lewis' love poetry is discernible in Transitional Poem. It is not only the acceptance of bodily or sexual desires as being in themselves worthy of regard or admiration, but also the belief that the satisfaction of physical

desires is in no sense on a lower plane than the satisfaction of intellectual or spiritual desires. Lewis regards the physical and spiritual sides of love as complementary parts in the overall polarity of sex. Polarity of this kind strives to keep the physical and spiritual aspects of love in perfect equilibrium, so that the balance may not be destroyed either by excess or repression.

In this chapter, I will attempt to trace out the chronological pattern of Lewis' sexual experience, and to show the extent to which the poems reveal the polarity of physical and spiritual love.

The treatment of love in Transitional Poem is typically that of a sensitive but confused adolescent seeking to incorporate it into his scale of values. What has love got to do with single-mindedness is the question he seeks to answer. He tries to reconcile love sexual with love spiritual, and concludes that they form complementary parts of the integral mind:

I have a lover of flesh
And a lover that is asprite:
Today I lie down with finite,
Tomorrow with infinite. (1)

The fact that Lewis separates the gratification of the two types of love by twenty-four hours would indicate that the duality of bodily and spiritual love has not yet become the single force which it became later. It is possible, however. (1) Transitional Poem, "Poem Four", ll. 13-16.
that by the above lines Lewis means that his love experience is a unity compounded of equal portions of spiritual and physical qualities.

Side by side with this somewhat ponderously expressed thought about bodily and spiritual love, Lewis intersperses passages which express the youthful jubilation of love. "Poem Five" is an exuberant declaration of love's power, not yet toned down by the weight of time and married life. He writes:

Time, we allow, destroys
All aërial toys:
But to assail love's heart
He has no strategy.
Unless he suck up the sea
And pull the earth apart. (1)

He has many poems of the same tenor key, so many in fact that Scarfe dryly observes that "sensuality seems to be the subject rather than the single mind". (2)

An important idea which is expressed in Transitional Poem is the self-sufficiency of love. It is an idea that echoes and re-echoes throughout From Feathers to Iron. Love, Lewis writes, needs neither apology, nor explanation, nor even permanence:

For the essential
Philosopher-stone, desire,
Needs no other proof,
Than its own fire. (3)

Despite his use of sexual imagery in the love poems of Transitional Poem, one somehow feels that it is a pale and

(2) F. Scarfe, op. cit. 4.
(3) Transitional Poem, "Poem Fifteen", ll. 39-42.
distant love, bright but metallic, not of this world. This impression is partly the result of discordant qualities not being reconciled in the poem. In *Transitional Poem*, metaphysics, psychology, ethics, and aesthetics all conspire to "assail love's heart". Such is not the case in *From Feathers to Iron*, for in this cycle, love is the predominant, if not the only, subject.

T. S. Eliot makes a significant observation about the raw material of poetry when he writes:

> The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together. (1)

Now, in *Transitional Poem*, the "numberless feelings, phrases, and images" remain largely a mixture; the "disparate experiences" are not amalgamated. In *From Feathers to Iron*, on the contrary, the various "particles" of experience are united by a new and powerful reagent which serves to start the chemical action. This new and powerful experience was the nine month wait for the birth of his first child. This experience pulled the various thoughts and feelings attending his wife's pregnancy into a logical pattern, a pattern which was lacking in *Transitional Poem*.

In the first poem of *From Feathers to Iron*, Lewis expresses his conviction that love may serve to give one a

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much-needed certainty in our divided neurotic civilization.
The fourth quatrains of his widely known first lyric establishes
his love as a bridge over chaos:

Nor fear we now to live who in the valley
Of the shadow of life have found a causeway;
For love restores the nerve and love is under
Our feet resilient. Shall we be weary? (1)

The deliberate twisting of the Biblical phrase, substituting
"life" for "death", in line two, is bold but quite successful.
Eliot does a similar thing in "The Hollow Men", using the
phrase, "For Thine Is The Kingdom", with mordant cynicism.
Eliot's conclusion in "The Hollow Men" is pessimistic, because
he concerns himself in the poem only with the present; Lewis,
as much the product of his age as Eliot, concludes on a note of
optimism and hope. He looks to the future. The concluding
lines of the first poem of From Feathers To Iron are optimistic
with the promise of fertility:

our
Now/research is done, measured the shadow;
The plains mapped out, the hills a natural bound'ry,
Such and such is our country. There remains to
Plough up the meadowland, reclaim the marshes. (2)

Later poems in the cycle reiterate his faith in love.
He can write:

Space-spanned, God-girdled, love will keep
Its form, being planned of bone. (3)

And he is able to express a conviction that out of love and
procreation the will to search out a new life will grow. He
addresses his unborn child in these lines:

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem One", ll. 13-16.
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem One", ll. 29-32.
(3) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Twenty-Three", ll. 15-16.
More than all else might you,
My son, my daughter,
Be metal to bore through
The impermeable clay
And rock that overlay
The living water. (1)

Again the talk of "rock" and "water" probably owes something to T. S. Eliot. But it is Eliot with a difference. There was no artesian well in Eliot's rock.

Although the entire question of technique and form will be treated at length in Chapter Nine, one cannot but notice the considerable advance in directness and cogency that Lewis has made in the above quoted lines over his verse in Transition Al Poem. An increase in comparison with an increase in clauty is no mean achievement in two years.

Considering the poem as a whole (and it is a whole, not merely a loose association of lyrics), From Feathers To Iron has significance when viewed on three separate levels. The cycle is (1) a love story and a marriage story. It consists largely of the reflections, fears, and hopes occasioned by his wife's pregnancy. It is (2) a seasonal pageant of the rites of Nature, with all its infinite variety of shade, color, mood, and motion as it moves in successive stages from autumn to spring. This pageant, completely overlooked by critics as far as I know, parallels with unique symbolism every stage of gestation. Lewis is enough of a craftsman to know that with the nature allegory, the poem stands to gain (1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Sixteen", ll. 1-6.
in emphasis and richness. Finally, the poem may be regarded as (3) a political allegory, the birth of the child being symbolic of the birth of a new society.

It is my purpose to deal with the first two of the three approaches in this chapter, for they are so inextricably intertwined, that to separate the vines would do damage to the plants. The political aspects of the poem, however, will be discussed in Chapter Four and Five.

The title, *From Feathers To Iron*, derives from a sentence in one of Keat's letters; namely, "We take but three steps from feathers to iron". The meaning of the phrase when used as a title for the poem is at first not easy to ascertain, but "Poem Five" throws some light on the problem. Lewis writes in this poem:

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Beauty's end is in sight,
Terminus where all feather joys alight.
Wings that flew lightly
Fold and are iron. We see
The thin end of mortality. (1)
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The "feathers", therefore, could symbolize passion without responsibility, without fruit. A bird comes to mind, in air detached from earth, unrooted. In opposition, "iron" would represent resolution - the decision to bring the bird back to earth. In short, the title expresses the decision to have a child. Dilys Powell explains the title as meaning, "a progress from fly-away indecision to metal resolution". (2) There are yet

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(1) *From Feathers To Iron*, "Poem Five", ll. 1-5.
(2) D. Powell, *Descent From Parnassus*; London, Crescent Press 1934, 199.
other connotations which the title, "From Feathers To Iron", brings to mind. One might consider the lazy aimlessness of a falling feather, or being blown about by gusts of wind, as compared with the efficient directedness of iron as it falls. One might consider, furthermore, the resilience and plasticity of a bag of feathers as compared with the resistance and rigidity and the permanence of a block of iron. Such contrasts as these could be applied to the change from youth to maturity, from light love to fixed devotion, or from youthful aesthetic dalliance to a sense of social responsibility. No matter which of the above mentioned connotations is considered, one must infer that by the title, Lewis refers to the hardening and fixing process of maturing. Considering again the quotation on page fifty-four, one might observe that the lines are suggestively ambiguous. "Beauty's end", could mean, for example, the reason for beauty's existence, as the beauty of a flower attracts the bees; or the phrase might possible mean that procreation puts an end to feminine beauty for a time, as the flower fades before the fruit comes. Perhaps Lewis wishes to imply both meanings. In any case, the idea is that the coming of a child brings the parents to grips with new responsibilities, resolutions, mixed with fears of mortality and insecurity - all symbolized by "iron".

The process of making iron from feathers begins immediately in the cycle. After testifying to the self-sufficiency of love
in "Poem One", when he writes:

Love's proved by its creating, not eternity, (1)

the poet moves from the city to the country, presumably because the poet and his wife feel that country life is more conducive to happy and healthful child-bearing. Lewis obtains a functional or aesthetic advantage, purely by accident, from the shift of scenery. By moving to the country, he can incorporate the moods of nature into his theme with more facility. And so both husband and wife will,

Watch not the markets but the stars;
Get shares of gilt-edged space. (2)

"Shares of gilt-edged space" is a fine image, effecting a successful blending of two much opposed pictures as a busy brokerage office and the starry firmament. Shakespeare did a similar thing with:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

In these lines the natural image of the first line is in juxtaposition with the legal image of the second.

The decision to have a child coincides with the season of fruitfulness, autumn, and so the allegory from nature begins to intertwine the human framework, as though it were a trellis. Like the season, husband and wife hear the call to action:

Look how the athletic field
His flowery vest has peeled
To wrestle another fall with rain and sleet. (3)

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem One", 1.6.
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Two", 11. 11-12.
(3) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Three", 11. 7-9.
And they are quite aware of the trying days ahead, to be faced with clamness and resignation. Thus the poet writes:

The swallows are all gone
Into the rising sun.
You leave to-night for the Americas.
Under the dropping days
Alone the labourer stays
And says that winter will be slow to pass. (1)

Three different images; swallows at dawn, an emigrant ship, and a Robert Frost rustic, unite to evoke a mood of nostalgia - a mood which always attends the step from old to new, from feathers to iron.

The naturalness of Lewis' attitude to sex is to be seen in the easy way he writes of the physical aspects of love. There is none of the hot-house atmosphere which one finds, for instance, in the poetry of D. G. Rossetti when he describes the physical aspects of love-making. (2) The reason for Lewis' success in descriptions of this kind is possibly his use of either intellectual imagery, or imagery from nature, to describe what is sensuous. He pictures his wife, for instance, in these lines:

Now she is like the white tree-rose
That takes a blessing from the sun. (3)

In another poem, using a similar depersonalizing technique, he images sexual intercourse in terms of an express engine passing through a station. I do not think he is altogether successful in this image, for the emotional leap which one

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Three", 11. 19-24
(2) cf. Sonnet 6 and Sonnet 7, The House of Life, for Rossetti's over sensuous descriptions.
has to make between ecstasy and the express, between sex and steel, is too great, no matter how cleverly it is done. Here are the lines I refer to:

--- Tightens the darkness, the rails thrum;
For night express is due.
Glory of steam and steel strikes dumb;
Sense sucked away swirls in the vacuum.
So passion passes through. (1)

If this image is a failure, and I am not sure that it is completely so, it is not due to any inability on the part of the "general imagination" to accept the train image, but to a profound emotional disparity between the train and what it seeks to explain.

In the introduction to this chapter, I pointed out that Lewis' treatment of love and marriage was notable for its naturalness and inclusiveness. This fact is apparent in the story of the pregnancy. The entire gamut of emotions and thoughts which attend child-bearing find expression in the poem. The spirit of the cycle is, at times, epithalamic in its exultation and the result is, I believe, something unique in English poetry. This inclusiveness is seen in "Poem Five", which records the necessary change in the love relationship which pregnancy entails:

We must a little part,
And sprouting seed crack our cemented heart.(2)

One might notice the parallel from nature in these lines, for the nature allegory everywhere intertwines the human story.

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Four", 11. 21-25.
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Five", 11. 6-7.
(3) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Six", 11. 5-8.
In "Poem Six", Lewis expresses that increased tenderness which the husband feels for his wife, whom he delicately compares to a poplar:

Or as a poplar, ceaselessly
Gives a soft answer to the wind:
Cool on the light her leaves lie sleeping,
Folding a column of sweet sound. (1)

Once Lewis brings into these lines the comparison with nature, and the effect is very beautiful. I, for one, believe Lewis is more at home in the traditional contryside, using the rural image, using old stimuli in new ways, than with the whir of fly-wheel and dynamo. Often he succeeds admirably with a machine metaphor, but sometimes, as perhaps in the train analogy quoted above, he "misjudges the depth of his own intuition" (2), and the result is either flat or fatally amusing.

As the cycle unfolds, other facets of the poet's experience are brought in. The cathartic function of pain is made clear in "Poem Thirteen". He expresses the inevitable fears for his wife's safety, purging the emotion of any trace of sentimentality by an intellectual tension of image. With Elizabethan intensity he writes:

Powder the stars. Forbid the night
To wear those brilliants for a brooch
So Soon, dark death, you may close down

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Six", 11. 5-8.
(2) "In using such data, the poet runs a two-fold risk. He may misjudge the depth of his own intuition, and the result will be that, instead of an image, we get from him a shallow and accidental conceit." The Poetic Image, 91.
The mines that made this beauty rich. (1)

This fear grows in intensity as the hour of birth approaches, and the concluding octave of the third sonnet-like stanza of "Poem Twenty-Seven" expresses in a manner quite unique in English poetry the harrowing sense of dread:

So I, indoors for long enough remembering
The round house on the cliff, the spring slopes,
The well in the wood, nor doubting to revisit
But if to see new sunlight on old haunts
Swallows and men come back but if come back
From lands but if beyond our view but if
She dies? Why then, here is a space to let,
The owner gone abroad, never returning. (2)

The cross-reference to the swallows and emigrants of "Poem Three" should not be missed; now should the crescendo of "but ifs", and the climactic, "but if she dies". The nostalgic mood is further enhanced by those remembered far-off thing, the round house, springy slopes, and the rustic well.

At other times fear is replaced by a feeling of accept­ance. Such a feeling is evident in these lines:

What life may now decide
Is past the clutch of caution, the range of pride.
Speaking from the snow
The crocus lets me know
That there is life to come, and go. (3)

The first line of this quotation summarizes a feeling which everyone who has had children knows well. Worry, fear for the mother and for the condition of the unborn child, especially

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Six", 11. 9-12.
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Twenty-Seven", 11. 35-42.
(3) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Five", 11. 11-15.
is lessened by the knowledge that the outcome is "past
the clutch of caution". The feeling arises that the respons-
ibility for any possible miscarriage is not his, and the
load is lightened if not removed. The necessity of accepting
what is inevitable is expressed in the following lines:

We may not undo
That or escape this, who
Have birth and death coiled in our bones.
Nothing we can do
Will sweeten the real rue,
That we begin, and end, with groans. (1)

The polarity of pain and joy is a subject which will be
fully treated in Chapter Seven.

Finally all fears are dissipated, for the child is born
without mishap. Joy, and relief from anxiety are the dominant
moods. And the nature allegory ends with the warm spring
sun and the entire world stirring with rebirth. "Rejoice", says the poet, for,

Another day is born now.
Woman, your work is done.
This is the end of labour
Come out into the sun! (2)

I have tried to tie the human story and the symbolic
rites of nature together from the start. Two further
examples will show how cleverly the two ideas are blended.
When the pregnancy is of five months duration and the embryo-
child has quickened, Lewis writes:

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Eleven", 11. 7-12.
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Twenty-Eight" 11. 13-16.
Twenty weeks near past
Since the seed took to earth.
Winter has done his worst.
Let upland snow ignore;
Earth wears a smile betrays
What summer she has in store.
She feels insurgent forces
Gathering at the core,
And a spring rumour courses
Through her ------- (1)

The entire process of conception and early development of the child is here couched in a metaphor of the seasons with consummate ease. And later, when the woman's time is near, how aptly Lewis compares her to the ripening fields:

Draw up the dew. Swell with pacific violence.
Take shape in silence. Grow as the clouds grew.
Beautiful broods the cornlands, and you are heavy;
Leafy the boughs - they also hide big fruit. (2)

Thus the two miracles of regeneration go on side by side in the poem, each enriching the other, each in terms of the other. A third regeneration, that of human society, is implicit. This third aspect of the poem will be discussed in Chapter Five.

A concluding thought about From Feathers To Iron might be that for the first time in English literature, as far as I know, a poet has knitted together with completeness and economy the many feelings and thoughts attending the experience of pregnancy. He has written of this natural miracle with a frankness befitting the subject, and with a reminder that the phenomenon of regeneration is common to

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Ten", ll. 1-10.
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Nineteen", ll. 13-16.
nature as to man.

PART THREE

The love lyrics of Transitional Poem may be described
as the idealization of young love; those in From Feathers
To Iron as the expression of the varied moods of married
life and parenthood. The poems of love or sex written after
1933 may be classified in four categories. Some few of them
deal with the problem of sexual perversion in the contempor­
ary world. Some may be described as being the result of a
middle-age nostalgia for the carefree experiences of youth.
A few are light-hearted poems of dalliance in the manner of
the Cavalier poets. The remaining love lyrics are of
various kinds: some are prolonged metaphysical conceits, the
product of a self-conscious virtuosity; others deal with the
yearnings of a man who has lost his beloved, or the change
in marriage relationship after middle-age, and so on. I shall
examine each division in turn.

Four poems deal with sex perversion in some form.
"Poem Seventeen" of the Magnetic Mountain deals with the
sex-siren of present-day society. The poem is a scathing
attack on a society, which through qualities inherent in it
of malaise and boredom, causes its members to turn for stim­
ulation to a perverted sex-life. Each stanza, representing
a successive stage of a seduction, ends with a trite phrase
of obscure innuendo which cuts like a razor's edge.
A remarkable poem called "Sex-Crime" uses a similar theme, but it plumbs greater depths, and is the product of Lewis' most mature style. It is for me one of his most moving poems, deserving a place in any anthology of contemporary verse. The crime is vividly and tersely described, with a fine restraint and a fierce compression not usually achieved together without obscurity. At times the poem threatens to break out into prolix denunciation, but the poet's sense of proportion keeps a tight hold on the reins. The crime itself is succinctly told as follows:

One step took him through the roaring waterfall
That closed like a bead-curtain, left him alone with the writhing
Of what he loved or hated.
His hands leapt out; they took vengeance for all
Denials and soft answers ---- (1)

These lines perhaps satisfy Coleridge's remark about great poetry; namely,

'In the truly great poets, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word. (2)

The first three lines of the above excerpt are particularly effective. The step that the murderer takes shuts him out implacably from the human fellowship. The waterfall image is good because the roar, the dazzle, the coldness of the water can be associated with the mental state of the murderer, as he makes his decision. The bead-curtain, in effective contrast, muffles the mental uproar, allowing the vengeance "for

(1) Short Is The Time, "Sex-Crime", ll. 11-15.
all denials and soft answers" to work itself out with cool determination. The remainder of the poem, in the same clipped manner, hammers out the theme which the crime serves to introduce; namely, that society deserves the guilt; that we all had a hand in the crime; that we all differ from the murderer only in degree, not kind; that, in short, society has made us all potential sex-friminals. To all society, and to the presiding judge in particular, the poet directs these lines of condemnation:

All of you, now - though now is still too late -
Bring on the missing evidence! Reveal the coiled Venom, the curse that needs
Only a touch to be articulate.
You, Judge, strip off! Show us the abass boiling Beneath your scarlet. (1)

If, as Donne expressed it, "any man's death diminishes me", Lewis would add that, 'any man's crime diminishes me'.

Another poem, "Night Piece", treats obliquely the sex theme, by pointing out that we live in two worlds, not one, the worlds of night and day. Lewis means that the night hides a fringe of illicit human conduct, which emerging from the dark unknown part of the human mind, thrives only in the shades:

All the fears cold-shouldered at noonday
Flock to these shades ------ (2)

Love is one of these, and like certain nocturnal plants, blooms at night.

(2) Short Is The Time, "Night Piece", ll. 22-23.
A final poem dealing with the illicit aspect of love deserves mention. In a poem entitled, "The Fault", Lewis refers to someone who, having had sexual relations before marriage, finds that his attitude to his mistress, owing to the illicit nature of their relations has suffered a sea-change. In the profoundest sense, he is a part of all that he has met, for Lewis writes:

After the light decision
Made by the blood in a moon-blanced lane,
Whatever weariness or contrition
May come, I could never see you plain;
No, never again. (1)

This poem is shot through with an intriguing iridescent light. This iridescence owes something to the poem's key image, which is moonlight. The affair takes place in "a moon-blanced lane", the lane is "like a rift loaded with moon-gold", the lovers sleepwalk "through the moon's white drift". The poem is conceived in chiaroscuro.

A number of poems express nostalgia for lost love. One wistful lyric is simply entitled, "Song". It evokes movingly, but without sentimentality, the mood of a lover who returns to the fields where, ten years earlier, he had courted his sweetheart, now dead. "The Album" varies the treatment in that in it the lovers are separated by the passage of the years, rather than by death. A middle-aged couple, thumbing through an album of photographs, realize with acute regret that the passing time has robbed their love of youthful ardour,

(1) Short Is The Time, "The Fault", ll. 1-5.
their

Noonday of blossom spoilt which promised so fair. (1)

But the couple came to realize as they gaze at each other that they have gained more than they have lost. The experience of living together has enriched them both, and continues to do so, because experience, like a sound wave, goes on eternally, ever widening, bringing as ever-changing significance to marriage, no less real because it is not always consciously understood. They realize that the sunset colours of love are among its most beautiful.

A similar concern about time's effect on love is to be found in "The Rebuke", but with a slightly different twist at the end. The "pandemonium of the heart", has imparted to calm middle-age, like a gift, a kind of truth:

Where are the sparks at random sown
The spendthrift fire, the holy fire?
Who cares a damn for truth that's grown
Exhausted haggling for its own
And speaks without desire. (2)

The rebuke is for those who deprecate the "sensual arrogance" of youth, and perhaps also for those who have allowed, middle-age to dim their enthusiasm for everything.

A third type of love lyric is cast in the form, at once gay and cynical, of the Cavalier poets. "Jig" and "Hornpipe" are two such poems. The latter ends with the admonition to lovers which has been heard before in poetry. Referring to

(1) Short Is The Time, "The Album", l. 28.
(2) Short Is The Time, "The Rebuke", 11. 31-35.
love, Lewis writes:

And the harder we pursue it, the faster it's away

Occasionally, Lewis indulges in wit-writing in a manner reminiscent of the Seventeenth Century metaphysical poets. I use the term "wit" in a sense given by the Oxford Dictionary, as the "power of giving sudden intellectual pleasure by unexpected combining or contrasting of previously unconnected ideas or expressions". In a real way, all imaging in poetry is the result of such an unexpected combination, but in the wit-writing of the sort Lewis uses in the following poems, the gap between experience and image is wider than usual, so that when the realization of similarity does occur, the effect is all the more striking. It is to be noted that the pleasure derived from realization is sudden when it comes, but it comes only after an unusual amount of intellectual concentration has been expended in following the line of thought.

"Poem Eight" of From Feathers To Iron belongs to this type of poem, in which the argument is "based on the interplay between fancy and reason". (2) This poem likens the couple preparing for pregnancy to a pair of castaways on a desert island. They build a raft, and soon will push off into the unknown sea. They may even find a new continent. The idea is cleverly spun out, without the undue contortion which such a technique frequently brings.

(1) Short Is The Time, "Hornpipe", 1. 16.
(2) The Poetic Image, 52.
"Poem Seventeen", of the same cycle is an even more spectacular display of metaphysical fireworks. In this poem, the union of male and female to produce an offspring is compared to a prodigious collision in space between two suns:

Soon from the mother body torn and whirled
By tidal pull
And left in space to cool
That mountain top will be a world
Treading its own orbit,
And look to her for warmth, to me for wit. (1)

The use of the word "wit" in the last line is surely not coincidence. Lewis is quite conscious of what he is doing, and obviously finds the interplay of fancy and reason stimulating.

Still another poem of this type is called "The Hunter's Game". In this poem, love is expressed in terms of an arrow and an huntress. The analogy, however, seems to get out of hand. The wit becomes so wire-drawn that it is sustained intelligibly only with difficulty. If aesthetic pleasure for the reader owes anything to a deep-seated urge to solve acrostics, "The Hunter's Game" succeeds admirably.

The love poetry of the type exemplified by "The Hunter's Game", when it is compared with the body of his love poetry, leaves one with at least two impressions. The first of these is that the role of the amused observer which Lewis plays in "The Hunter's Game" type of poem is a world removed from the intensely serious mood of Transitional Poem, with which this

chapter began. The second impression is that nearly the entire gamut of love experiences which lie between Transition-
ical Poem and "The Hunter's Game" has been inclusively treated. The experience of pregnancy, sex-perversion, sexual promiscuity, the changed relationships of middle-aged married life, all find a place in his poetry. There are poems of a tragic nature, like "Sex-Crime"; of nostalgia, like "Song"; of light-hearted dalliance, like "Jig"; of a feeling of guilt, like "The Rebuke"; and of the sex-siren in society, like "Poem Seventeen" of Magnetic Mountain. Considering the slight bulk of his love poetry, one is surprised to find that Lewis has treated love so exhaustively.

One final observation should be made, in conclusion. Lewis leaves one with a sense of sanity and health. His love poetry, rich in variety though slim in bulk, is prevented by a keen intelligence and an unfailing taste from lapsing into sentimentality. One feels that the sexual side of his life at least has been satisfactorily integrated. And in a complex and confused world, that is not an insignificant accomplishment. A product of his age, he is somehow older than his age, and wiser. One is reminded of what Yeats wrote in his Autobiographies:

- - how small a fragment of our own nature can be brought to perfect expression nor that even but with great toil, in a much divided civilisation. (1)

Lewis expresses it a little differently. Love, he says, brings that rare thing,

    The truth of flesh and spirit, sun and clay
    Singing for once together all in tune. (2)

It is this harmony of flesh and spirit which Lewis believes to be the desideratum in all aspects of life. He does not place spirit above flesh, nor flesh above spirit, for he regards them as natural complements. I have pointed out the harmony of flesh and spirit which love brings. In the next chapters the relation of flesh and spirit as it concerns the illness of society must be examined. It is a step from the society of two to the society of millions.

(1) Short Is The Time, "O Dreams O Destinations", Sonnet Eight 11. 13-14
CHAPTER IV.

INERTIA AND STIMULANTS

PART ONE

Oscar Wilde remarked once that all art was entirely useless. By this remark, Wilde meant to protest against the conception which regards art as the hand-maiden of religion, of philosophy, of morality, or of politics. He meant that art was, or possibly, should be, useless as a means to a didactic end. He denied that art should have any utilitarian value other than that which derives from its function of giving delight or pleasure. As spokesman for the "art for art's sake" theorists, he urged a conscious separation of art from the rest of life. No didactic purpose should intervene in the creative process, which is an end in itself, Wilde believed.

The "pure art" point-of-view is at the opposite pole from another point-of-view which might be termed the "art-from-life" attitude or possibly even better, the "art-for-life" attitude. Writers who adhere to this theory claim that art is rooted in the life and humanity around us, and they would say that to cut the stalk from the roots of life means certain death; perhaps the dry, dead flower between the pages of a book. The "art-from-life" attitude is clearly
expressed by Stephen Spender when he writes:

Writers are the interpreters of life around them. Their genius lies in the life, not in themselves, who are only interpreters of life. They are not self-sufficient gramaphones, which can be hurried off when things get hot in one place, and set up to start playing their records somewhere else. (1)

Notice that Spender places the emphasis squarely on the life around us. He would no doubt contend that isolation from life is impossible even if it were desirable, and that perhaps a natural embracing of life's problems is healthier and "purer" than a retreat from life. It seems to me that art produced under the guidance of the two theories mentioned above does not differ in kind, but only in degree of emphasis, and most poets write both kinds of art. Spender wrote his "Express" as well as his "Vienna", and it is doubtful whether he was guided by any definite theory when he wrote either of them. Art's mansion has many rooms, and perhaps as good a definition of art as any is that art is what the artists have created.

Lewis' idea of art in general, and poetry in particular, is characterized by the clear common sense which we have come to expect from him. His position reconciles the two extreme ideas about art and life. He does not put as much emphasis on life as Spender seems to do in the above quotation; he would not go so far as to say, for instance, that writers' genius

"lies in the life, not in themselves". Lewis gives both life and artist their due. He regards the poet's intention as two-fold, Janus-faced, looking within and without simultaneously. The poet lives, he sees, he acts, he is acted upon, he is raised up, he is hurled down, and he sees others do likewise. In this he is no more and no less than millions of other human beings. But the poet creates, he imagines, he probes, he selects and rejects, he ferrets out unseen connections, he fuses the experiences of life in the emotional furnace within himself. In this he differs from millions of other human beings. Surely the genius lies in the individual artist. Lewis puts the idea this way: poetic images

------- represent what a poet has seen looking outwards at humanity and what he has seen looking into his own heart, focused together to make a whole truth. (1)

The task which must logically be undertaken now is to find out just what Lewis sees when he looks "outwards at humanity". What view does life and society present to the outward-looking face of Janus?

PART TWO

Lewis' attitude towards the society in which we live is succinctly expressed at the beginning of Chapter Eight in A Hope For Poetry. The following paragraph expresses the

(1) C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, 156.
heart of his opinion:

It is a truism that a sound society makes for sound individuals, and sound individuals instance a sound society. For the post-war poet, living in a society undeniably sick, that truism has turned into a dilemma. We have seen him on the one hand rendered more acutely conscious of individuality by the acceptance of current psychological doctrines; and on the other hand, rendered both by poetic intuition and ordinary observation acutely conscious of the present isolation of the individual and the necessity for a social organism which may restore communion. (1)

This quotation is clear enough, but certain phrases perhaps deserve elucidation. The interaction between the individual and society, for example, is deservedly stressed. An individual receives certain rights from and owes certain responsibilities to society, but, like an ionic reaction, the relationship works the other way with equal force. It is a point which Plato has made in his Republic. The phrase, "a society undeniably sick" should be noted, because like Auden, Lewis puts the problem in clinical terms. Finally, the stress which Lewis places on the "isolation of the individual" in present-day society is most important, for it is a theme which finds its way into a number of his poems. He means that in contemporary society, the community of interest and sympathy which in other times has bound human beings to each other and to the state in a pervading comradship has broken down. It would appear, then, that both individuals and

(1) C. Day Lewis, A Hope For Poetry, 217.
society are "undeniably sick". But whether society should
be cured by treating the individuals, or whether the
individuals should be cured by treating society is a problem
which still must be decided. Perhaps the cure of individual
and society must go on simultaneously.

Very early in his work, the poet notes the symptoms of
disease in society. At the start of Transitional Poem, the
poet comments on society's general malaise. He writes, for
instance:

"Disorder I see without,
And the mind must sweat a poison
Keener than Thessaly's brew." (1)

The illness, it would seem is serious, and the fever is high.
Transitional Poem, however, is more concerned with the sickness
of the individual than with the sickness of society, or
more exactly, it is concerned with the poet's own sickness.

From Feathers To Iron is more specific in charting the
symptoms of the illness of society, because the poet's
realization that his child will be born into the unhealthy
world creates an added concern for the condition of the age.
It should be understood, however, that From Feathers To Iron
is not primarily a political allegory. Indeed, it is quite
possible that the political implications in this poem were
not at first intended. Lewis attests to this himself in
these words:

It is my own experience that, when

(1) Transitional Poem, "Poem One", ll. 3-5.
I have expressed some private experience in a poem, I have frequently discovered it to contain a 'political' significance of which I was quite unconscious while writing it. A year or two ago I wrote a sequence called 'From Feathers To Iron' which for me expressed simply my thoughts and feelings during the nine months before the birth of my first child: the critics, almost to a man, took it for a political allegory; the simple, personal meaning evaded them. (1)

Nevertheless, even though From Feathers To Iron may not intentionally be a political allegory, it certainly contains political implications. Lewis himself bears witness to the fact that very often subsidiary meanings that were not at first intended creep into a poem. In The Poetic Image, for instance, he observes that

> Yet it cannot be said too often that a poet does not fully know what is the poem he is writing until he has written it. (2)

Sometimes it seems that a 'super-imagination' works unconsciously in a poet as he creates and by an unintended felicity of phrase or by a secret accumulation of meaning, makes the poem greater than the poet is at first aware. So it is with From Feathers To Iron. The poem is a scalene triangle, and though the shortest side is the political side, it is none the less present.

The first reference to the state of society occurs in Poem Twelve, which in some ways, is the most remarkable poem in the entire cycle. This poem makes use of an iterative

(1) C. Day Lewis, A Hope For Poetry, 206.
(2) C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, 71.
image. A casual explorer is trapped in an old mine by a fall of rockface, and the poet likens his frantic efforts to escape to man's desire to leave behind a world without hope. The implication that the new world must be born out of the old should be noticed in the following lines:

But we seek a new world through old workings,
Whose hope lies like seed in the loins of earth,
Whose dawn draws gold from the roots of darkness.

Now it is quite true, as Lewis insists, that the above lines need not be construed as a figure of speech describing the birth of a new world out of the old. The "new world" he speaks of means the new domestic world of hearth and home which the entrance of a child inevitably brings. And of course, the new life has been produced out of "old workings". Furthermore, the word "seed" and "loins" carry unmistakable connotations of embryo and womb. To conclude the figure, the child is gold, which issues forth from the darkness. That, it seems to me, is the "simple, personal meaning" which Lewis referred to in a previously quoted passage. But surely the political implications are there too. The entire figure with its encrustations of mining imagery and the use of words which might indeed have emanated from the platform of a socialist open-forum, words such as "new world", "hope", "dawn", "roots of darkness" - lead the reader ineluctably into political considerations. This assertion does not qualify the validity of Lewis' statement about no political allegory being intended. Politics was certainly not his
immediate subject in the poem. But as the poem moves forward, the political significance gathers momentum like a rising tide. Perhaps the "super-imagination" was unconsciously at work in him. The political implication was the result, as the depression took its toll, of a growing awareness that there was something radically wrong with society. In any case the political references increase in number and directness as the cycle progresses. "Poem Fifteen", for example, speaks of "an age divided between to-morrow's wink, yesterday's warning"; while Poem Eighteen describes the life which the child will inherit as

"--------born to essential dark, 
To an age that toes the line 
And never o'ersteps the mark." (1)

Surely there is no shadow of doubt about the political meaning in these lines. So the political tide rises. "Poem Twenty-One" speaks of burying the dead and counting the living, and urges that we must "consolidate the soul against proved enemies"; and "Poem Twenty-Two" begins the cataloguing of material dissolution for which the "New Country" poets are noted. Lewis mentions the "rank estate" and "dead follies", and wonders if his child will

"--------thank us for the favour, who 
Inherits a bankrupt firm, 
Worn-out machinery, an exhausted farm?" (2)

He concludes his cycle of twenty-nine poems with an image of life outstretching from the exhausted womb, and it is

(1) From Feather To Iron, "Poem Eighteen", 11. 16-18.
hard not to see in this miracle of birth a mirror of a greater birth, the phoenix-miracle of a new society arising from the ashes of the old.

To sum up the study of *From Feathers To Iron* as a poem of political significance, it may be said that though the political meaning is subsidiary throughout, the progress of the nine months towards the climax of birth carries with it an unmistakable and growing concern about the sorry state of society, so that by the end of the cycle, the step which will take the poet into the political arena seems an obvious one. *The Magnetic Mountain* thus becomes, in a sense, the inevitable sequel of *From Feathers To Iron*, and the progress from the old world to the new could be appropriately termed a step from feathers to iron.

**PART THREE**

The publication of *The Magnetic Mountain* in 1933 saw the poet's breaking away from the autobiographical technique which had served him as a framework in his first two books. In *From Feathers To Iron*, Lewis viewed society only briefly and indirectly, somewhat as the Lady of Shalott had done. But in *The Magnetic Mountain* his view of the world is through an open window, and what he sees is not pleasant. Perhaps a view of this kind is not disadvantageous to a poet. In this connection, T.S. Eliot has written:
"---- the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory." (1)

Eliot's words remind us of a hard fact which the idealist in us is prone to ignore: it is the fact that beauty cannot exist without ugliness, or, to put it differently, that beauty has meaning only in so far as it is bound to its natural opposite and complement, ugliness. If there were no ugliness, there could be no beauty, just as light has no meaning without dark. Consequently, when a poet like Lewis seeks peace of mind as he does in *Transitional Poem*, or when he seeks a perfect society as he does in *The Magnetic Mountain*, it might seem that he is striving for something which, if realized, would destroy his creative urge as an artist and his motivation as a reformer. As beauty needs ugliness, so art needs conflict and the reformer something to reform. Lewis, however, undoubtedly is aware that perfection is an unattainable ideal, a reach exceeding his grasp. It is not so much the perfect society that he seeks, but the next stage in the social evolution of man which would solve certain contemporary problems. He knows that new problems would spring from a new society, which would demand solution in their turn. The nature of these new problems he does not know, nor would he concern himself with them if he did know.

Lewis is concerned with the present, and the solution of

immediate problems.

PART FOUR

In the conclusion of Chapter Three, I quoted two lines which seem to sum up the peculiar triumph of love, a triumph which brings to an imperfect world, love's own kind of perfection. The lines were as follows:

The truth of flesh and spirit, sun and clay
Singing for once together all in tune.

Each of these lines carries a special significance of its own, over and above the single meaning which both lines combine to give. The first line, for instance, demands an explanation of the phrase, "flesh and spirit". By "flesh" I take Lewis to mean directly, the gratification of sexual desire, a need of the flesh. By "spirit" I take Lewis to mean directly the gratification of a desire for family, for a child to love, a need of the spirit. The first need is immediate and transitory; the second is subsequent and permanent. However, the phrase may be given an even wider application. The word "flesh" may be projected to mean all material desires; desires for food, for shelter, for the comforts of home, for education. Similarly, "spirit" may be projected to mean all spiritual desires; desires for recreation; for aesthetic pleasure, for comradship, for religion. Hence, harmony of flesh and spirit would mean the living of the full life and the good life.
The second line of the quotation demands elucidation too. The word "singing" implies vibrant happiness, which is the result of the harmony of flesh and spirit. Moreover, the words "forever", imply that such a harmony is seldom realized, and they perhaps carry an added implication that man must see to it, if he is to attain a greater degree of happiness, that this harmony is realized more often. If these observations are correct, it would seem, then, that Lewis has placed his finger on what he considers to be the root cause of the illness of society; namely, the absence of harmony between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit.

One final idea must be presented, before it can be said that the possible meanings of "flesh" and "spirit" are exhausted. If Lewis uses "flesh" in the sense of duty or task or labour, and if he uses "spirit" in the simple sense of zeal, or enthusiasm, so that "flesh" and spirit singing for once together all in tune" should mean the accomplishment of a deed with a feeling of intense participation and joy because the whole body and the whole soul have entered into the task; then a new twist is added to the meaning of the phrase. There is no question, I think, but that such an interpretation is valid. Lewis is continually deploring the lethargy of contemporary man, who has no heart for his tasks. He believes that society should be so constructed that a man might embrace his tasks with his whole heart, so that he might almost, indeed, lose his identity in his task. The
enthusiasm of an amateur sportsman for his game, or that of a hungry man for his food is the kind of enthusiasm he means. This is what he has in mind, I believe, in the following lines:

"As the body that knows through action they are splendid, Feeling head and heart agree"; (1)

or when he urges:

"Let yours be the start and stir Of a flooding indignation That channels the dry heart deeper And sings through the dry bone" (2)

The word "bone" in the fourth line symbolizes the real essence of man and it is used in this sense time and time again. Here as elsewhere the exhortation is for man to identify himself with his activities by a sort of empathy. Indeed, Lewis will go so far as to pardon the Escapist, because he writes,

"Say, if you like, escape was in his blood." (3)

As Lewis looks out at contemporary society, then, he sees everywhere the divorce of "flesh and spirit" in all its various forms. There is no "singing together all in tune"; instead all is discord. Now one of the results of discord is frustration, and the effect of frustration is inertia. When an individual is not able to gratify his material and spiritual needs, or when he is incapable of complete identification with his objectives or activities, the only driving force he has left is

(2) C. Day Lewis, "Self-Criticism and Answer", 11. 29-32.
(3) C. Day Lewis, "The Escapist", 1. 23.
that which is sufficient to preserve his life and the life of his family. Frequently, even the will to live disappears, and he kills himself. It seems to me that many of the symptoms of the illness of society which Lewiscatalogues in The Magnetic Mountain and elsewhere are direct manifestations of the inertia I have mentioned. My first purpose, therefore, in the remainder of this chapter is to show how these symptoms are manifestations of the inertia which in turn is the outcome of the discord between "flesh and spirit".

My second purpose is closely related to the first. Illness in a person, even organic illness, may be defined as the result of a discord between a part of the body and the whole body. The parts of the body are so intricately meshed, that the failure of a part will cause the failure of the entire mechanism. Illness in society has a similar effect. It is possible; however, for the patient, whether individual or society, to be momentarily revived, or at least to have the pain allayed, by the injection of drugs which stimulate or deaden, but do not cure. It is an unfortunate property of such drugs that once used, ever increasing doses are needed to get the desired effect; and that, furthermore, once used, the taking of drugs may become a vicious habit. In the same way, many of the symptoms of illness which Lewis charts are the results of an attempt by society to stimulate the individual to an unnatural show of activity by the administering of various kinds of social
dope. My second purpose in this chapter is to enumerate and study these "gross and violent stimulants", and to show that they, too, are the symptoms of the disharmony which exists between "flesh and spirit",

There is a tendency for didactic verse to become allegorical, possibly because a story framework helps to invest what would otherwise be bald precept with added interest and emphasis, Allegory makes persuasion dramatic. The Magnetic Mountain is such an allegory. Lewis likens the search for a more perfect social order, which he calls the Magnetic Mountain, to a railway trip. The trip into the unknown is guided by a kestrel, which symbolizes the free and daring spirit needed by those who would lead humanity towards its ideal society. The bird is a fitting guide, because it has contact with both earth and sky, and consequently represents the marriage of practical understanding and spiritual vision. In "Poem Two", Lewis warns all men who wish to make the expedition of two enemies who shadow them everywhere; namely, fear; and pain. These two arch-enemies represent the universality of human misery. They are at once a cause and effect of human inertia. Fear and pain are inimical to thought and action; and in turn the inaction which they cause multiplies the amount of fear and pain. Lewis couples the two in many poems, and often he simply calls them, "the Two". In "Poem Two" of Magnetic Mountain he writes of them in this
Such are the temporal princes, fear and pain,
Whose borders march with the ice-fields of death,
And from that servitude escape there's none
Till in the grave we set up house alone
And buy our liberty with our last breath. (1)

The use of an "ice-age" or "glacier" image, as in line two
of the excerpt, is a favourite device of the poet when he
talks of fear and pain. We find the linking of "pain", "fear",
and "ice" in "Poem Twenty-Eight" of From Feathers To Iron,
when he writes:

Pain's long-drawn equator
The farthest ice of fear. (2)

In this excerpt, however, the first line refers to the climax
of child-birth pains, and the second line to the chill of
fear which attends labour. Later in Magnetic Mountain Lewis
focuses the effect of fear and pain on only one aspect of inertia. In "Poem Twenty-Seven" he speaks of the paralysis which
the two enemies bring to men who would otherwise join the
movement of masses towards the Mountain:

Fear and Pain brothers: call them bullies and curs
Who take us into corners and make us squirm,
Finding the weak spot, fumbling at secret doors. (3)

Lewis then exhorts mankind to collect its forces "for a
counter-attack" to repel "the ice-wall of winter at our
back". The "relief train" would be made up of all those who
have cast off the torpor which fear and pain brings. Faith
in a new life of hope and progress would effect such an

(2) C. Day Lewis, From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Twenty-Eight", 11. 7-8.
emancipation, because faith would serve to repair the divorce of "flesh and spirit". Faith would "restore the blood's fullfilment", and man would feel his program in his blood.

By the time we reach the end of Part One of The Magnetic Mountain, the train has reached the frontier station beyond which lies the unexplored land. Here he exhorts the weak-in-heart to get off, for there is no room aboard for them:

Then book your bed-sitter at the station hotel
Or stay at the terminus till you grow verminous,
Eating chocolate creams from the slot-machines;
But don't blame me when you feel unwell. (1)

The "chocolate creams" symbolize the fleeting enticements which the effete civilization still has to offer. But of these pleasures he warns:

Traveller, take care,
Pick no flowers there! (2)

The reference to the evil flowers of our civilization prepares as for the next step, for the poet decides to take

----- a light engine back along the line
For a last excursion, a tour of inspection. (3)

The view which he sees from this "last excursion" is described in Parts Two and Three of the book. It is a close view, because when one looks at something for the last time, one looks closely. The view in Part Two takes the form of a defence of inertia by four social types whom Lewis meets.

(1) C. Day Lewis, Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Four", ll. 19-22.
(2) C. Day Lewis, Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Five", ll. 33-34.
(3) Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Four", ll. 38-39
These types turn, the clinging mother, the English public school master, the conforming minister, and the wife who desires "large cupboards for small responsibilities". He calls these four speakers "defendants", in contrast to the more active "enemies" of Part Three. All four defendants are debaters for inaction, for the hold-tight-keep-what-we-have attitude of mind, and their various arguments are systematically answered by the poet.

The first defendant, the home-rooted mother, fears that any social change will unsettle the habitual round of family life. She is one who believes that known hardships are preferable to unknown perils. She is hard-headed, rooted in practical things, and she expostulates in words such as these:

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let creation's pulse
Keep Greenwich time, guard creature
Against creator, and breed your supermen!
But not for me --------- (1)
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She will "stand by the last ditch of narrowing world and stir not", though she sees "pit-heads encroach or glacier crawl down". Nothing makes her "stir", nothing can break her inertia.

The second defendant is the traditional school master of the English public schools, and he speaks out strongly for convention in lines such as these:

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Here we inoculate with dead ideas
Against blood-epidemics, against
The infection of faith and the excess of life. (2)
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Notice the things this advocate of laissez-faire inoculates against; "blood-epidemics"; "faith", "life". These are the very things which Lewis regards as necessities. "We teach through head and not by heart", the defendant says later. He is against blood, because it signifies spirit and enthusiasm; against faith, because it shakes a man out of his lethargy into action; against an excess of life, because excess of any kind is troublesome, even dangerous. Channels not regulated may overflow and flood. Blind obedience to a code, he says, is the desideratum. He has a vested interest in inertia.

I have described the third defendant as a "conforming minister", and ostensibly he is that. He represents the clergyman who regards his profession as a living and little else; who bends over before affluence; who is proud not humble; and who would compromise his principles for expediency. However, the minister is more than that. He symbolizes organized religion, past and present, playing its role of retrogression or inertia down through the ages. It would seem, therefore, that Lewis regards the church as a tool of the ruling class, especially when he puts such words as these into the defendants mouth:

"I have called down thunders on thw side of authority, Lightnings to galvanize the law; Promising the bread of heaven to the hungry of earth, Shunting the spirit into grassy sidings.
I have served the temporal princes." (1)

(1) Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Eleven", ll. 9-13. Note that in previous quotation Lewis referred to fear and pain as "temporal princes".
The last three lines echo Lenin's assertion that the church serves the ruling classes when it takes the minds of the oppressed or destitute people off their material plight by injecting the question of their spiritual salvation. In such a way does religion become the opiate of the people.

The conclusion we must draw, then, is that Lewis, at this stage of his life at least, regards the church as a definite barrier to progress now and in the past. The church represents a force working for maintenance of ruling class authority; which, in turn, encourages inertia. This does not necessarily imply that Lewis is an atheist or agnostic. His indictment is against church polity, and he believes that a man should manifest a direct and spontaneous relationship to God. Such a spontaneity is preferable to putting the spirit into the hands of,

The petty bourgeois of the soul,
The middleman of God! (1)

The fourth and last defendant of Part Two of the Magnetic Mountain is the possessive wife, who, romanticizing her passion for the husband, desires and will not be satisfied with less than the whole man. She is an apostle for inertia because she regards any aspiration he might have for social or political leadership as inimical to her desire to have all of him. Hence, she complains that,

(1) Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Twelve", 11. 3-4.
Though I persuade him that his stars are mine eyes' refraction, that wisdom's best expressed in the passive mood, - here's no change for the better. (1)

Notice that she attempts to turn all his extra-marital interests towards herself, "his stars are mine eyes' refraction", and further, notice the emphasis she places on "the passive mood". By her insistence on inertia, by her attempts to shackle man's "integral spirit", she places herself with those forces who make for the divorce of flesh and spirit - with fear and pain, with the closely related "clinging" mother, with the teacher of status quo, and with a religion which hangs "on the skirts of progress".

Earlier in this chapter I attempted to make an analogy between an ill society and an ill man. I pointed out that illness in man or society is attended by inertia, and that frequently drugs may be administered to stimulate the patient to an unnatural show of activity or to deaden the pain. We have dealt with the "gross and violent stimulants" of which Lewis speaks. To begin with, Lewis discusses the matter in A Hope For Poetry. He writes:

First, there are a number of 'gross and violent stimulants', in the social sense, which are acting upon the mind to 'reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor'. We have already noticed some: advertisement and cheap publicity of every description, education having a wide extent but little depth, shots of scientific dope. To these we must add the newspaper, the wireless,

(1) Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Thirteen", 11..35-37
the mass-produced novel, the cinema, all the machinery which enables men's minds or bodies to be carried faster and farther than their proper power of imagination or endurance could carry them. (1)

I think the above excerpt is clear enough to stand without comment, but I wish to draw attention to the significance of the last part of the last sentence, beginning with, "all the machinery which enables men's minds -------". Is Lewis not saying that the "harmony of flesh and spirit" is broken by the action of the gross and violent stimulants of which he speaks? What is the "proper power of imagination or endurance" but the force of vibrant self-realization working successfully to weld flesh and spirit into a single entity, a conception which I discussed in the introduction to Part Three of this chapter. The reason why the social stimulants go beyond the "proper power of imagination" is that the need for stimulants does not arise naturally from a body in which flesh and spirit agree; the stimulation does not arise from within; rather, it is imposed upon from without. The stimulation induces a temporary and feverish activity. It gives rise to false notions of well-being, and designed unconsciously by the individual, consciously, perhaps, by society, to obscure the damage which the divorce of flesh and spirit has wrought. In so far as such acceptance of stimulus is a submission of personality to outside forces, it may be described, to use it in Lawrence's sense, as a

(1) A Hope For Poetry, 202.
manifestation of the Death Will. But let us now examine these stimulants specifically as they appear in the Magnetic Mountain.

The first "Enemy" of Part Three of this work is the sexual sensation-seeker; he, who jaded by one excess, seeks another and another. I hesitate to call him a pervert, because "pervert" implies a mental unbalance which would absolve him from responsibility. His excesses are premeditated. He finds in the abuse of sexual appetite a narcotic stimulant which, for the moment, satisfies a craving for sensation, and which, unconsciously perhaps, combats the inertia which grips him. Like a drug, it fails to effect a permanent cure, because it does not get to the root of the problem, and, like a drug, it demands a stronger and stronger dose, with the intervals between the doses making a decreasing progression.

The Enemy tells the story of an illicit affair, each stanza ending with a trite remark of obscene suggestion, which, if strung together, tell the story in themselves. The first stanza, for instance, concludes with, "I do like doing things with you", and the last, "I suppose you hate me, now". But the most significant lines are these:

So, so again. And he that was alive
Is dead. Or sleeps. A stranger to these parts.
Nerve insulated, flesh unfused, this is
No consummation. (1)

(1) Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Seventeen", 11. 31-34.
"So, so again" implies habitual occurrence, and ironically, is uttered with a feeling of boredom. Even sensation bores now. "And he that was alive is dead" may mean either that sexual excess has dulled into habit what was naturally an ever-fresh and meaningful experience; or, more likely, that after, the transient thrill has passed, the addict slipped back into the torpor from which he sought to escape. "Nerve insulated, flesh unfused" brings us once again to our theme. The insulation he speaks of prevents the free and uninterrupted flow of spirit from its sources in the mind to where it can be put to use by the body. There has been a breakdown somewhere in the high tension wires from the power house. The flesh is therefore "unfused" with spirit. The divorce of flesh and spirit is complete.

The second "Enemy" represents the newspaper chains, purveyors of news not truth. Like the first Enemy, the people seek sensation, and the press gives it to them. Lewis lashes out at the irresponsible sensationalism of the newsheets. He makes use of Auden's technique of rapid telegraphese for the purpose, as in the following passage:

Read about rector's girls
Duke's disease synthetic pearls
Latest sinners tasty dinners
Plucky dogs shot Sinn Feiners
Flood in China rape in Wales
Murderers' tears scenes at sales
That's the stuff aren't you thrilled
Sit back and see the world. (1)

(1) Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Nineteen", 11. 5-12
The last line indicates the purpose of the press in contemporary society; namely, to so fill the mind of its readers with hypnotic dope that it paralyzes into a state of inertia; or, to use Lewis' own words:

There's a nasty habit that starts in the head
And creeps through the veins till you go all dead.  

The insidious effect of the newspapers is treated elsewhere than in the The Magnetic Mountain. The poem, "Newsreel", written some five or six years after the Magnetic Mountain was published, is at once more polished, more compressed, and more deadly serious than the former poem. There is in it no hint of the Audenesque buffoonery which Lewis does fairly well, but which is none the less an imitation. Consider the following lines, for instance:

Enter the dream-house, brothers and sisters, leaving
Your debts asleep, your history at the door:
This is the home for heroes, and this loving
Darkness a fur you can afford.  

The cinema is closely related to the newspaper, and the insistence on the effect of hypnotism, of inertia, is stressed once again in the first two lines. Stanza Six of the same poem is noteworthy for the clever use of erotic imagery in a unique way. The use of imagery usually employed when one is talking about life to evoke a mood of impending death is grimly ironic:

(1) Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Twenty", ll. 506.
(2) Short Is The Time, "Newsreel", ll. 1-4.
See the big guns, rising, groping, erected
To plant death in your world's soft womb.
Fire-bud, smoke-blossom, iron seed projected -
Are these exotics? They will grow nearer home. (1)

The question of the newspaper, the cinema, the radio, and
related stimuli such as the jazz lyric, "the spiritual food
of the masses", is treated in various other places as well.
In the concluding sections of A Time To Dance, for example,
we find the radio coming in for its share of attention:

So if you're feeling low ma'am,
If you're ailing sir or failing, tune in. (2)

As always the implication of illness, of the hypodermic
injection, of the prevailing inertia, is there in the lines.

Before we examine what the third "Enemy" of Part Three
stands for, an apt quotation from A Hope For Poetry will
serve as an introduction. Lewis writes as follows:

It is of prime importance for poets to be
warned that all these products of town
civilisation are damnable only in so
far as they imply the outrunning of
man's psychological development by the
complexities of his environment, the
destruction of the creator by the elaboration
of his own creations.
Remember the ringed ammonite, running
Crazy was killed for being too clever --- (3)

There are a number of very important ideas in this excerpt.
First of all, when Lewis writes of "these products of town
life", he is referring not only to the "gross and violent
stimulants" already mentioned, but also to the prodigious

(3) C. Day Lewis, A Hope For Poetry, 203.
spawnings of science which have produced our machine age. Secondly, when he speaks of "the outrunning of man's psychological development", he means that the products of science are so numerous and so staggering to the imagination of the layman, that they leave the layman in a state of bewilderment or stupefaction. These scientific marvels crowd in upon him and he cannot assimilate them. Lewis means, I think, that the creations of science have caused a twofold disruption in society. By complicating our environment; by speeding up the pace of living without giving us a sense of direction; by threatening civilization with material dissolution; by all these ways and by others, science jeopardizes the functioning of society. Depression, war, overpopulation, such material problems as these are the offspring of science. Hence, science endangers the body of society and the body of man. But science threatens the spirit of society as well, by threatening the spirit of the individual. Man has not had the time to apprehend the spiritual meaning of a machine as distinct from its physical meaning. He sees the dynamo, for example, as a whirring engine which generates electricity. He realizes its utilitarian value. But he cannot envisage the dynamo as a living child of his brain, born like a child with the hope that it will prove to be a blessing to him all the days of his life. Lewis puts it this way:

The modern man cannot see things that way: wonders crowd so thick and fast around him that he has almost lost the
sense of wonder; and, if he has a feeling for the spirit or essence of thing, it is held incommunicado from his sense of their material utility. Reason and instinct are kept apart. (1)

And so the effect of science is twofold, material and spiritual, threatening by its very cleverness, but basic indirection, to become its own gravedigger. This is what Lewis means by the lines:

Remember the ringed ammonite, running Crazy was killed for being too clever. (2)

The ammonites were prolific molluscs which swarmed in the Mesozoic seas. Their huge coiling shells were sometimes two feet or more in diameter. They multiplied without number, increasing in diversity and producing exaggerated mutations. They ran crazy, Lewis says. And then, with unparalleled rapidity, they vanished, leaving only a very distant relative, the Pearly Nautilus, to remind us of the extinction of a genus. Lewis wishes to shock us into a realization that man, too, may go the way of the ammonite. Like it, man has become too clever, has multiplied himself and his machines without number, has overcomplicated his environment. And like it, man may vanish with equal rapidity.

The third "Enemy" of The Magnetic Mountain is science, the God. Like some images of Buddha, the god of science has many arms. Lewis makes each stanza of "Poem Twenty-One" represent one arm of the idol of science. Stanza one repres-

(1) The Poetic Image, p. 108.
ents the god as a proposition. Lewis criticizes the smug confidence of a science which goes about explaining God by a "bare hypothesis", or by a mathematical formula. Stanza two, by the same token, begins, "God is an electrician"; Stanza three has, "God is a statistician"; and Stanza four begins, "God is a Good Physician". No matter what branch of science comes to mind, Lewis offers a similar criticism. It is that scientists worship their science as an end in itself, as a god, and that therefore there is little or no attempt on their part to tally the results that their creations have on the individual as part of a society.

One of Lewis' most successful poems dealing with the problem of science appears in *A Time To Dance*, and is entitled, "A Warning To Those Who Live On Mountains*. The mountain dwellers are of course the scientists, working in the rarefied atmosphere, and hatching their diverse plans in a world outside humanity. The poet, in the following lines, warns the scientists that they must assume responsibility for the results of their machines, which means they must renew their kinship with man by concerning themselves with the human consequences of their discoveries:

Labouring aloft you forget plain language,
Simple the password that disarms suspicion:
Starved are your roots, and still would you strain
The tie between brain and body to breaking-point?
Your power's by-products have poisoned their streams
Their vision grows short as your shadow lengthens,
And your will walls them in ---------(1)

---

The passage is clear. Once again Lewis stresses the rupture in the "tie between brain and body". He puts much of the blame for the bewilderment and the inertia in the contemporary world right in the lap of science, the god. He hopes that at the last moment the scientists will have a change of heart by becoming socially conscious, as well as scientifically conscious people.

The fourth and last "Enemy" has yet to speak. He is the dreamer of dreams, the shirker of duty, the man who is afraid to face reality; in short, he is the escapist. There are people among us who are loath to admit the illness that grips them. They will not submit to an x-ray because it may show them to have tuberculosis. So it is when the sickness is in the soul. The fourth "Enemy" of Lewis' poem seeks escape in a dream phantasy of his own creation, which has as its enervating central law the belief that right always wins and that the guilty are always found and punished. The dream world is a place, to quote Lewis, where,

\[
\text{the youngest son wins through,} \\
\text{Wee Willie can thrash the bully,} \\
\text{Living's cheap and dreams come true. (1)}
\]

Escape of this kind is worse than inertia. It is backward motion: it is retreat. Perhaps Lewis' most profound poem on this subject is one simply entitled, "The Escapist". In this poem, as he does in "Sex-Crime", he puts part of the blame for the act on society:

Before you heap quick-lime upon that felon Memory, think how nothing you can do Could touch his self-indictiveness and nothing You did to cure the cowardice it avenged for. Say, if you like, escape was in his blood Escape's as good a word as any other. (1)

"Escape was in his blood", Lewis writes, with the emphasis on the last word. Lewis means probably that "escape" is a soft word for what was really in 'his' blood, and that it was there as the result of the condition of society. The emphasis is always there, within - on the blood, the flesh, or the spirit - for it is the inner discord between these elements which makes for the illness, the inertia, the false stimulation, the escapism rampant in the world. It follows that no cure can be wrought which does not in some way repair the connection between flesh and spirit. It follows, too, that since the individual and society react one upon the other, backwards and forwards, the healing of both must go on simultaneously. Society, too, has a body and a spirit, like an individual's, and the ties that bind them are strained or broken. The illness is critical. Stimulants do not cure; escapism cannot but evade the issue. The surgeon must go deep to the roots of the matter immediately:

It is now or never, the hour of the knife, The break with the past, the major operation. (2)

These are the thoughts with which Lewis concludes his examination of society. In the next chapter I shall attempt

to describe the way Lewis would carry out the operation, to establish once more the truth of flesh and spirit, singing again together all in tune.
Frequently, diagnosis is easier than cure. This is not always the case because sometimes the cause of illness is difficult to ascertain, but when the cause is isolated, the cure is quick and complete. On the other hand, the disease, although quickly diagnosed, may prove to be incurable. The illness of society presents difficulties in both diagnosis and treatment.

In Chapter IV, I examined Lewis' diagnosis of contemporary society. Lewis seems to regard such symptoms as inertia and desire for unnatural stimulation as manifestations of a deep-seated sickness in man. The root-cause of this illness, Lewis suggests, is a divorce between the flesh and the spirit, between bodily desires and spiritual aspirations.

Obviously, if such a divorce between vital human parts is the cause of the trouble, then the healing of the parts will cure the sickness. The problem is to determine just how such a healing operation can be carried out. Who is going to handle the scalpel in the "major operation" which Lewis thinks is needed? What other instruments, ethers, germicides, skills, will be required? To change the metaphor,
when will the "break with the past" take place? What are the chances for success? These are some of the questions one would like to have answered.

The problem of diagnosis and cure may be expressed as a poetical rather than a clinical problem. Michael Roberts expresses the problem in such a way when he writes:

--- a contradiction has been revealed which you must remove either by altering your standards or by altering your environment. If you attempt the latter, your standards are a spur to action; i.e., the basis of a morality. But it is here that there is a necessity for neither pure poetry nor stoical classicism, but a vigorous living poetry, which shall release our inner energy and turn it to new ends. (1)

Lewis, like Roberts, urges the changing of the environment, for he believes that altering one's standards, that is to say, lowering one's standards, is but another manifestation of the inertia against which he inveighs. Escapism is a following of the line of least resistance, a procedure which is characteristic of the fourth "Enemy" of our age in The Magnetic Mountain. Lewis wishes to reintegrate flesh and spirit, and this reintegartion becomes his standard, the basis of his morality. This reintegartion will enable man to release his inner energy and turn it to new ends. Two questions remain to be answered: how is this reintegartion to be brought about? and what is the nature of the "new ends"?

Although *From Feathers To Iron* is not primarily a political allegory, yet there are in it certain political implications which one should not overlook.

"Poem Twelve" of this cycle concerns the efforts of a man to escape from a deserted mine, in which a fall of rock-face has barred his way. In the second stanza of this poem he writes about seeking a new world through old workings, and he concludes with these effective lines:

Train shall spring from tunnel to terminus,
Out on to plain shall the pioneer plunge,
Earth reveal what veins fed, what hill overed.
Lovely the leap, explosion into light. (1)

These lines tell us a number of things. The first two lines contain two distinct images, the train and the plainsman, both carrying an implication of a directed movement which has for a time been frustrated by some barrier. Both the train and the frontiersman have, of course, been impeded by mountains. It would seem, consequently, that if the movement of masses corresponds to the train suddenly looming up out of a tunnel, or to a pioneer breaking out of the mountains, then the social movement towards a more perfect society will be speeded up tremendously, so as almost to resemble an explosion.

"Poem Eighteen" is significant too. It makes the wish that the poet's son may grow up to be a "white hope", to preserve "integrity and nerve" from "flatterers, pimps, and (1) *From Feathers To Iron*, "Poem Twelve", ll. 27-30.
fakes". The words "integrity and nerve" carry unmistakable associations of that link between flesh and spirit, the insulation of which would leave the poet's son open to the influence of "pimps and fakes". "Poem Twenty-One" carries more than a suggestion of the flesh-spirit idea, for it speaks of "the hour of spirit reconciled to flesh". "Poem Twenty-Three" reiterates the conviction that the harmony of flesh and spirit is the requisite for perfect living. The following lines are significant:

Space-spanned, God-girdled, love will keep Its form, being planned of bone, (1)

Love, Lewis means, comes close to perfection in an imperfect world, because it is the result of the complete integration of flesh and spirit. The word "bone" symbolizes the force with which the whole body and the whole soul of man acting as one apprehends love. It is with an identical force of realization that a man should apprehend, not merely love, but everything. Lewis has not as yet indicated, however, just how the major operation upon society will be performed. Since From Feathers To Iron is not primarily a political poem, however, one must look elsewhere to find out how the reintigation of flesh and spirit is to be brought about.

The diagnostic elements in The Magnetic Mountain were discussed in Chapter IV. In this cycle of thirty-six poems, political considerations become the main thematic material.

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Twenty-Three", 11. 15-16
for the first time. The initial quotation prefixed to Part One of this cycle is possibly significant. It is a couplet written by R. E. Warner, a close friend of the poet, and a member of the Communist Party at the time *The Magnetic Mountain* was written. The couplet is as follows:

Come, then, companions, this is the spring of blood, Heart's heyday, movement of masses, beginning of good.2...

Warner, of course, refers to the communist revolution in the lines, but this does not necessarily imply that, because Lewis uses the lines as a prefix, he too urges the formation of a communist state. The lines are sufficiently generalized as they stand to represent any change for the better. The force of such words as "spring of blood", and "heart's" heyday" makes one realize that Lewis could very well have written the lines himself. It must be allowed, nonetheless, that the use of the quotation indicates that Lewis, like Warner, belongs to the left wing of politics, even though he may not be a communist. If the two writers differ in their political objectives, it is a difference of degree, not kind. It is a difference between socialist and communist.

After the invocation to the kestrel in "Poem One", and the admonition to beware of fear and pain in "Poem Two", Lewis makes a general reference to the promised land in "Poem Three". The reference, however, is figurative, with much emphasis on metal and machines. The following lines
illustrate my meaning:

There's iron for the asking
Will keep all winds at bay,
Girders to take the leaden
Strain of a sagging sky.

Oh there's a mine of metal,
Enough to make me rich
And build right over chaos
A cantilever bridge. (1)

It is natural to picture a future civilization in terms of skyscrapers, bridges, rocket-ships and the like, because such things will be there no matter what the economics of a future society. They therefore become a natural symbol of the future. There are undoubtedly other connotations of metal which Lewis means to evoke in the above lines. Iron is strong, durable, resilient, and yet it is easy to mould into every shape. Therefore it may symbolize will, determination, resourcefulness. It may symbolize planning and building.

After the momentary vision which "Poem Three" gives us, Lewis takes a light engine back over the line so that he may have a final glimpse of the society he is leaving. It is then that he presents the various "Defendants" and "Enemies" whom he meets on his tour of inspection, and whose arguments I presented in Chapter IV. The rebuttals which Lewis makes to each of the "Defendants" are close to what one might deduce by implication. For instance, the third "Defendant", the church, which is the tool of the ruling class, he warns that,

the medicine-man
Must take his medicine. (1)

He seems to lump church ritual with mumbo-jumbo. He regards the church as the jailer of man's soul, rather than its saviour, and urges the establishment of a more personal and direct relationship between a man and his God. His objections to the church organization are threefold: political, in that it is reactionary; spiritual, in that it is deadening; and moral, in that it is compromising. Thus, the church "salls down thunders on the side of authority"; it turns "joy into sacraments, the Holy Ghost to a formula"; it raises its hands "to brand a Cain and bless a submarine".

Lewis' rebuttals to each "Defendant" have this in common; they all declare that man must have freedom to act. The mother, the teacher, the minister, the lover - they all restrict freedom and paralyze action. And so Lewis ends Part Two with this exhortation:

But the full man must live
Rooted yet unconfined. (2)

The last word of the quotation is the emphatic one. In the light of this plea for individual freedom, it is doubtful whether Lewis would be willing to submit to the iron discipline of the Communist Party or the equally iron discipline of the Communist Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Lewis' rebuttals to each "Enemy" may similarly be deduced by implication. He deplores the smug attempts of science, the third "Enemy", to find God in a test-tube or to measure Him with a slide-rule. He rejects intellectual attempts to attain to God: faith is the only way, and emotion is the handmaiden of faith. Those who have faith

----- feel the father here,
They have him at heart, they shake hands,
they know he is near. (1)

The key words are "feel", "heart", and "near"

In answering the various "Enemies", Lewis indirectly reveals certain qualities of his ideal society, but there is as yet no concrete evidence that the ideal society represented by The Magnetic Mountain is a socialist society. In Part Four, Lewis frequently builds the reader up to a pitch of expectation, only to disappoint him by failing to give specific detail about his ideal society. "Poem Twenty-Eight", for example, leads one to expect some concrete suggestions, because the poet has reached the interior of The Magnetic Mountain. The suggestions are indeed concrete, but they do not give one an inkling of the political system he has in mind. Skyscrapers and machines will be characteristic of the future irrespective of the nature of its political framework:

Out of that dark a new world flowers
There in the womb, in the rich veins

(1) The Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Twenty-Two", ll. 35-36.
Are tools, dynamos, bridges, towers,
Your tractors and your travelling-crane. (1)

It was the feeling of being let down which led Stanley Kunitz to remark, "The mountain has laboured and brought forth a carload of machinery." (2)

Finally, however, in "Poem Thirty-Four", the thirst for concrete details about the ideal society is adequately quenched, for in this poem, Lewis crams into twenty-four lines enough socialist doctrine to fill a handbook. Stanza two demands a complete quotation:

Publish the vision, broadcast and screen it,
Of a world where the will of all shall be raised to highest power,
Village or factory shall form the unit.
Control shall be from the centres, quick brain warm heart,
And the bearings bathed in a pure Fluid of sympathy. There possessions no more shall be part
Of the man, where riches and sacrifice Are of flesh and blood, sex, muscles, limbs and eyes. Each shall give of his best. It shall seem proper For all to share what all produced. Men shall be glad of company, love shall be more than a guest
And the bond no more of paper. (3)

The specific items of socialist doctrine in these lines appear to me to be these:

(1) in line two: the "will of all raised to highest power" implies the extension of governmental control over the means of supply and production:

(2) in line three: the extension of trade-unionism to become a unit of government:
(3) in line four: government by a central benevolent bureaucracy:
(4) in line four also: government will be efficient because planning will eliminate waste:
(5) in lines five and six: the "long-lost kinship" of man for man will be re-established because a man will feel he is making a specific contribution to society, and because competition between man and man will be eliminated:
(6) in line six: abolition of private enterprise for public enterprise:
(7) in lines seven and eight: production will be for all men's use, not for one man's profit:
(8) in line eight: society will demand work from each according to his ability:
(9) in lines nine and ten: society will give to each according to his needs:
(10) in lines eleven and twelve: every man will have a feeling of comradeship with his fellow men, because each will have his niche to fill, and consequently, each will feel he is a useful and necessary part of society.

The next stanza adds more points of doctrine to the list:
(11) in lines one to three: money will revert to its functional use; i.e., will become a medium of exchange, not wealth in itself:
(12) in lines four and five: human welfare will replace private profit as the motive force in government.

(13) in lines six and seven: reason and intuition will make a harmony in place of a discord, "feeling head and heart agree":

(14) in lines eight and nine: production will increase, because the workers will share its utility value:

(15) in lines nine and ten: there will be freedom from worry about security because the government will insure each man's security as general policy:

(16) in lines eleven and twelve: those who will not work will not eat:

The final stanza concludes with these items:

(17) in lines four: there will be a planned use of leisure time for cultural purposes:

(18) in lines five to seven: there will be planned use of leisure time for sports and recreation:

(19) in lines ten and eleven: respect will be paid to the memory of proletarian martyrs like Rosa Luxemburg:

(20) in line twelve: the illness of society will be cured because the "major operation" will have corrected the malady by removing its cause. The inertia of society will be replaced by a forward motion, and the inertia of the individual corrected by a reintegration of flesh and spirit.

Although Lewis never once mentions the word "socialism"
in *The Magnetic Mountain*, there is no doubt in my mind that in "Poem Thirty-Four" he is presenting socialism as his ideal society. Specific phrases such as one hears in working class open forums show through the more generalized poetic diction in which the stanzas of the poem are couched. Such phrases as "all to share what all produced", "possessions no more shall be part of the man", "only the exploiter receive no quarter", are unmistakably socialistic in flavour. Furthermore, the deification of such proletarian heroes and martyrs as Harris, Wainwright, and Rosa Luxemburg clinch the matter. Many labour temples have these names tacked up along their bare walls, in company with portraits of other heroes like Mateotti, Sacco, and Vangetti. Such Heroes as these, Lewis writes, will be remembered by the workers as "ancestors that gave them ease". (1)

The concluding poem in *The Magnetic Mountain* cycle re-emphasizes the conception of socialism as a benevolent bureaucracy built by and for the working classes:

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Drink to the ordered nerves, the sight restored;  
A day when power for all shall radiate  
From the sovereign centres, and the blood is stirred  
To flow in its ancient courses of love and hate. (2)
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The reference to "blood" is most important. Lewis means that socialism will be able to satisfy what the spirit wills that the flesh should enjoy. Socialism will give man the feeling that the government is truly his government, and he will,

(1) *The Magnetic Mountain*, "Poem Thirty-Four", ll. 45.
(2) *The Magnetic Mountain*, "Poem Thirty-Six", ll. 9-12.
therefore, feel that his activities are socially meaningful. The aim of government, Lewis believes, is to minister to the needs of all men, and to this end socialism directs both the economic and political machinery of the state. By planning for production, for distribution, for health, for welfare, for recreation, for culture, and for education; by giving everyone an opportunity to find his niche; by removing fears of rivalry and insecurity which make a man "stale with deferred crisis", in short, by giving society direction as well as speed - by all these means and others - the divorce of flesh and spirit will be mended. Of people living in such a restored state of bodily and spiritual health he writes:

They sing their own songs, they are active, they play not watch. (1)

Such people are happy because they are creating. They are active: they have thrown off the hobbles of inertia.

One might effectively argue that the items of political doctrine which I enumerated from "Poem Thirty-Four" are just as representative of communism as of socialism. Theoretically, communism is but one step beyond socialism in the scale of social evolution. Theoretically socialism is not a class less society, but communism is. Socialism remunerates the workers on a varying scale depending on the value of their work; communism remunerates all workers equally, the only stipulation being that every worker give

(1) The Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Thirty-Four", l. 28.
himself to the best of his ability. Theoretically, no country in the world has yet achieved a socialist economy, while the communist ideal is even further away in the future. The orthodox Marxist terms the Russian experiment the "dictatorship of the proletariat", which is explained as a preparatory and necessary stage in social evolution preceding the advent of socialism, which in turn will eventually give way to communism. It follows from this that, in Marxist theory, a communist must *ipsos facto* be a socialist.

In actual practice, however, a significant difference has emerged to separate the socialist and the communist, or more correctly, to separate the socialist party member from the communist party member. The difference is twofold. The socialist advocates the use of the ballot-box to bring about the change to socialism; the communist advocates the violence of the class struggle. That is the first difference. Secondly, the socialist believes the step known as the "dictatorship of the proletariat", with its restriction of individual liberties, is an unnecessary, even a retrograde step; the communist, with Russia as his living example, insists such an interim step is necessary and, indeed, inevitable. There are undoubtedly other differences, but these two, it seems to me, are the fundamental ones. The question now arises, since most of the ultimate aims of the socialist and communist are identical, and since differences are
largely a matter of method, what precisely is Lewis? Is he a communist or a socialist?

It is certain, to begin with, that Lewis has never belonged to the Communist Party. In his "Letter To a Young Revolutionary" he has this to say:

I was old enough to feel the latter war atmosphere and at my most sensitive during the early post-war years. The one gave me a perhaps exaggerated horror of bloodshed and destruction, which rather queers my pitch as a practical revolutionary; the other has left in my system germs of "acedia and mental sauvé qui peut", equally pitch-queering from the revolutionary point of view. (1)

This seems clear enough; he dislikes violence, and the "acedia" he talks about prevents the fanatical devotion to party which the communist demands. Before a final and valid answer can be reached, however, it is necessary to examine Lewis' most radical work, the play, *Noah and the Waters*. In no other work does he directly advocate the use of force to achieve political ends. He seems, therefore, to contradict the opinion he expressed in the "Letter To A Young Revolutionary".

*Noah and the Waters* was published in 1936, three years after *The Magnetic Mountain*, and at a time when the clouds of war were already beginning to gather. A significant quotation appears on the flyleaf of *Noah and the Waters*; it is a (1) Day Lewis, Cecil, *New Country*, 25.
quotation from the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels, and it concerns the final stages of capitalist disintegration:

A small part of the ruling class breaks away to make common cause with the revolutionary class, the class which holds the future in its hands." (1) *Noah and the Waters* is a play which deals with the time "when the class-struggle nears the decisive hour." (2) The play's conflict revolves in two orbits around the central figure of Noah, who represents Everyman. The first conflict exists in the mind of Noah himself. Its spokesmen are the First Voice representing the future, the urge for change, and the Second Voice representing the past, the enemy of change. The second conflict is external and has for its protagonists three Burgessesses who symbolize the vested interests, and the Chorus which represents the working class. Throughout the play, the Chorus and the Burgessesses, the former in verse, the latter in prose, do their best to persuade Noah to throw in his lot with them. The Burgessesses argue very persuasively. Flattery, promises, threats, all the guns of capitalist propaganda, are unlimbered and fired with consummate cleverness. The chorus replies, attempting to counteract the subtle poisons of the Burgessesses. Speaking to Noah, the chorus says:

You have come far
To the brink of this tableland where the next step treads air,
Your thoughts like antennae feeling doubtfully

(2) Ibid, 26.
towards the future,
Your will swerving all ways to evade that unstable word;
High stakes, hard falls, comfortless contacts lie before,
But to sidestep these is to die upon a waterless plateau;
You must uncase and fly, for ahead is your thoroughfare. (1)

Note that the above quotation successfully blends two distinct images; a man approaching the brink of a precipice and an insect about to emerge from its pupa and fly away.

Meanwhile, the Flood, symbolizing the inevitable march of history, steadily rises. Finally, Noah gives his decision. He likens the propaganda of the Burgesses to

The clever hands all gloved to sterilize
And the slick knife that leered above my manhood. (2)

He blames the Burgesses for the plight the world is in, and justifies the rising of the Flood. In a passage of fine blank verse which deserves to be remembered, Noah rejects the Burgesses and makes common cause with the Flood. I do not know where the dilemma of choice has been more powerfully and beautifully expressed than in the following lines:

I was always the man who saw both sides,
The cork dancing where wave and backwash meet,
From the inveterate clash of contraries gaining
A spurious animation. Say, if you like,
A top whom its self-passions lashed to sleep
Pirouetting upon central indifference,
The bored and perfect ballet-dancer engrossed
By mere reiteration; but lately
The one that cuts a figure on thin ice.
-Who saw both sides and therefore could take neither:
A needle midway between two fields of force,
Swinging at last I point and prove the stronger Attraction. Gentlemen, you have lost. (3)

(1) Noah and the Waters, 39.
(2) Noah and the Waters, 48.
(3) Noah and the Waters, 50.
In these lines Lewis describes the endless succession of
dilemma and indecision which is the result of a burning and
fatal intelligence - fatal, that is, to action. Noah, however,
has made up his mind. The Burgesses have lost. The play
ends in open fight, with the Burgesses at last showing their
true colors. Their defeat is certain.

I have said that Noah symbolizes Everyman. He is
Lewis as well, the sometime indifferent, sometime undecided
intellectual who has remained outside political movements,
though sympathizing with left-wing parties, but who at last
has been converted and has taken his place with the Flood.
I believe that in 1936 Lewis came very close to becoming an
active revolutionary. The Magnetic Mountain reveals that
socialism is his ideal society; Noah and the Waters concerns
itself with the revolution which must bring the ideal into
being. The latter work, taking its cue from the Communist
Manifesto, envisions the time when the class struggle will
have broken out into open warfare. At such a time, the
working class and the ruling class will contend in a life-
and-death struggle, the former class to achieve mastery, the
latter class to maintain it. The inevitability of such a
struggle is Communist doctrine. Noah and the Waters
expresses a supreme confidence in the ultimate victory of the
Flood. This confidence is also a characteristic of communists,
for communists believe with the strength of a faith, that all
the forces of social evolution are with them, and that the
ultimate triumph of their ideals is only a matter of time. In 1936, it would seem that Lewis was an intellectual communist, whose lack of emotional urge or whose peculiar reflective temperament prevented him from becoming an active member of the Communist Party. Since then, as I shall try to show, Lewis has moved somewhat to the right of that extreme position.

PART THREE

A statement of W. B. Yeats which finds its way into many books of literary criticism is that, "Out of your quarrel with others we make rhetoric; but out of our quarrel with ourselves, poetry." This statement belongs with those which tantalize the reader by sometimes seeming quite clear, and at others defying precise explanation. It is a statement which prompts one to say, "Yes, I feel that it expresses a fundamental truth, yet I cannot explain it or paraphrase it without destroying a part of its meaning." The point I wish to make here is that Lewis, since 1936, has become increasingly expressive of the "quarrel with himself". He concerns himself more and more with his own conflicts, his own problems, less and less with the problems of society. This does not mean that there are no more poems on direct political themes. But even the poems which do concern themselves with political themes are more restrained than Noah and the Waters, less obviously political, possibly less
confidently socialistic.

Two poems which are sensitive indicators of this change of emphasis are "The Conflict" and "In Me Two Worlds". Both these contemplative lyrics appeared among the ten poems which precede the little poem in A Time To Dance. "The Conflict" expresses the conflict within a man's mind, possibly the poet's, between a desire not to be concerned with social or political problems, and the necessity of choosing a side, of making a decision. As the following lines indicate, there is no such thing as neutrality in life:

Yet living here,
As one between two massing powers I live
Whom neutrality cannot save
Nor occupation cheer. (1)

To those who say they are "detached" or "unconcerned", Lewis replies that they live in a no-man's land, "and only ghosts can live between two fires". The poem, "In Me Two Worlds" is a twin poem in many respects. The conflict in this poem is between all the forces within the poet which hold him to the past and all the forces within him which pull him towards the future. Both these poems are indirectly concerned with the political question, of course, but only indirectly; both poems are primarily concerned with the emotional conflict within the poet's mind. Lewis is "quarreling with himself" in a way he does not do in Noah. This inner quarreling is a healthy sign I think.

Another trend seems to be developing in his later poems. Lewis begins to put emphasis on a semi-mystical conception of love and comradeship as a basis of progressive social change. He has moved slowly from the political basis of socialism to the ethical basis of love. It is a change of emphasis which Auden similarly made in *The Double Man*. The ideas of love and comradeship begin to appear in such early writings as *A Hope For Poetry*. In this essay, speaking about a crying need of contemporary man, he writes:

That is why, speaking from the living unit of himself and his friends, he appeals for the contraction of the social group to a size at which human contact may again be established and demands the destruction of all impediments to love. (1)

Just how the social group is to be contracted to the desirable size is a problem. Possibly Lewis believes socialism will supply an answer, for in *The Magnetic Mountain* he wrote that, "Village or factory shall form the unit" (2) and that, "Men shall be glad of company, love shall be more than a guest." (3) A poem called "The Assertion" probably contains the most profound application of his conception of social love, a conception which,

"apprehends love as a kind of necessity by which all things are bound together and in which, could the whole pattern be seen, their contradictions would appear reconciled". (4)

The idea expressed in the last quotation is not a new one.

(1)*A Hope For Poetry*, 206.
(2)*The Magnetic Mountain*, "Poem Thirty-Four", 1. 15.
(3)*The Magnetic Mountain*, "Poem Thirty-Four", 1. 23.
(4)*The Poetic Image*, 37.
The conception of an overall plan which, if understood, would explain the paradoxes of life, appears in some shape in nearly all modern religions. Indeed, such a belief is inevitable concomitant of the idea of an omnipotent and benevolent deity. Pain, suffering, even war - if the overall plan could be perceived - would be seen as necessary pieces in an harmonious picture. Lewis expresses the idea in the following lines:

Love's the big boss at whose side for ever slouches
The shadow of the gunman: he's mortar and dynamite;
Antelope, drinking pool, but the tiger too that crouches. (1)

These lines express the conviction that joy and pain, or good and evil are opposites neither of which can exist without the other. The mood of the lines is one of acceptance.

There is acceptance, too, in many of the political poems in Short Is The Time. A lot of water has flowed into the sea since the depression days of the early 'Thirties. The lack of markets which slowed the assembly lines of capitalism to a stop had been more than remedied by the insatiable demands of war. Scarcity is the life-blood of industry. The economic crisis for the moment had been averted. The worker's revolution receded further into the future. The socialists marked time.

The revolutionary ardour which keyed up books like The Magnetic Mountain and Noah and the Waters is noticeably

lacking in the lyrics of Short Is The Time. There is an increased awareness of the shades that exist between black and white. "Not so sure", and "Iwonder" replace the confidence of "I know". Consequently, he can say:

Boredom, the dull repetitive delay,
Opponents tricky call, the discontent
Of friends, seem to deny what history meant
Then first she showed her hand for you to play. (1)

These lines sum up the disappointment with which left-wing thinkers realized that the socialism they had expected to establish during their lives was still far away in the future. Sometimes the mood is close to exasperation at the slowness of change and the deferment of hopes, as in "Questions":

How long will you keep this pose of self-confessed
And aspen hesitation
Dithering on the brink, obsessed
Immobilized by the feminine fascination
Of an image all your own,
Or doubting which is shadow, which is bone? (2)

The question which the above quotation frames might be addressed to himself, or to the undecided intellectual, or to the working class in general. The poet complains that reflection is paralyzing to action, and he wonders what huge catastrophe will be necessary to shock mankind into creating a better social system for itself.

In his later poems, Lewis often looks with a wry smile at the enthusiastic dreams which had seemed so close

(1) Short Is The Time, "Questions", ll. 1-6.
to realization:

Waking, how false in outline and in hue
We find the dreams that flickered on our cave. (1)

Possibly Lewis feels that there has been too much dreaming, not enough facing of reality. Lines like these would seem to indicate this possibility:

Ah, not in dreams, but when our souls engage
With the common mesh and moil, we come of age. (2)

I have referred to the growing political disillusion which characterizes much of Lewis' more recent poetry. Disillusion may be the wrong word. It is not so much disillusion as a natural ebbing of the enthusiasm of youth. Lewis' changed attitude is partly the result of changed world conditions, to be sure, but it is even more the result of the poet's growing older, and of the growing burden of wisdom.

A cycle of seven poems entitled, Overtures To Death, is probably the finest expression of this new and firmly realistic view of life. In this cycle, Lewis chats with death as an intimate friend or a near relative, addressing him as "Sir" or "Mister".

"Poem One" talks about the immanence of death in a society which is itself dying. The second poem likens death to a bailiff who is foreclosing a mortgage. In "Poem Three", a dramatic monologue in blank verse, the poet speaks (1) Short Is The Time, "O Dreams O Destinations, Sonnet, Four", 11. 12-13.
familiarly to death, and without rancour. On the contrary, he can compliment death with such words as these:

Happiest in our nervous time, who name you Peace. You are the peace that millions die for. (1)

Lewis' argument is with death's "damned auxiliaries" who represent the reactionary forces in society, and who cause

---stunted hearts that droop by our olive-green Canals, the blossom of children untimely shattered By their crazed, random fire, and the fear like a black frost Foreshortening our prospect, metallic on our tongues. (2)

Lewis' quarrel with these "damned auxiliaries" is that they deprive our short life of that well-being which is our due. In "Poem Four", the poet asks death to teach men the value of their stay, lest they "insult the living clay". "Poem Five" expresses the knowledge that the thread of life is indeed flimsy, and liable to break at any moment. The sixth poem exhorts man to live his life to the full. It is Lewis' zest for life which makes him fear the dimming of the senses that comes with age, "the downward graph of natural joys". He asserts that the best way to live a full life is to achieve that balance of "radiant flesh" and "receptive spirit" which makes living vibrant and harmonious. This harmony of flesh and spirit remains his central theme: he has not changed his mind. The final poem is Overtures To Death concerns itself with the worm in the rose of society.

(2) Short Is The Time, "Overtures To Death", Poem Three", 11. 42-45.
Death lurks everywhere in the contemporary world - among the "tornado wheels" of vehicles and machines, in war, in the fabric of society itself.

Lewis concludes the cycle by assuring death that men of vision will help him to end a social system which no longer is fit to live.

It may seem paradoxical that a chapter which began with thoughts of a new life should end with thoughts of death. The Magnetic Mountain revealed a faith in a socialist society which would reunite flesh and spirit, establish long-lost kinship and restore the blood's fulfilment. Noah and the Waters ended with the triumph of the Flood. In comparison, Overtures to Death seems to be a retreat. But actually, nothing could be farther from the truth. In the latter poem Lewis talks with death because he is all the more anxious to come to grips with life. The poem is inspired by the knowledge that the shortness of life makes it that much more urgent to perfect society so that life may be enjoyed to its full measure, and so that "life's green standards" may be advanced to the limit of death's "salt unyielding zone".

Day Lewis has not lost his faith in socialism. But times have changed and he has grown wiser. The evolution of man's society is a slow process, and nature will not be hurried. But his faith remains, faith in a time when,
the mounting stages of oppression
Like mazed and makeshift scaffolding torn down
Reveal his unexampled, best creation -
The shape of man's necessity full-grown.
Built from their bone, I see a power-house stand
To warn men's hearts again and light the land. (1)

Note that the lighthouse is "built from their bone". It is
built by happy men whose flesh and spirit sing in unison.
CHAPTER VI

IN THE ACT OF DECISION

PART ONE

Life has been compared to many things. I recall particularly the passage in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* in which he likens life to a sparrow that flies out of the stormy darkness into a great hall where thegn are feasting at the board, and a great fire is blazing at the hearth. The sparrow feels the warmth and knows the light for a few moments, then flies out the other end of the hall into the cold and the night. So Bede emphasizes the brevity and inconsequence of individual life. Robert Burns's couplet from *Tam O'Shanter* is equally applicable to life:

Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white - then melts for ever.

Burns emphasizes, like Bede, the transience of life.

Though individual life is all too short for most of us, yet there is much about life that gives the impression of an eternal progression. A man dies, but some part of him remains in his children or in his works. A man dies, but the race lives on, and possibly moves forward. There has been much written about the transience of life; but not so much about its continuity.

Lewis is aware of the brevity and inconsequence of life,
but he is also conscious of its continual progression. Lewis, I think, might compare life to a circular staircase whose base and top are lost in the swirling mists of the unknown. Life is never static, Lewis contends, for man must go ever upwards; the present is always trembling between the past and the future. Time is a single spiral, like the staircase; past, present, and future are one. Lewis might add that past, present, and future are likewise inseparable in his concepts of history. Present and future are rooted in the past, and can be understood only in so far as the past is understood. A similar idea about time and tradition is expressed by Joseph Conrad in the Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus. In this Preface, Conrad gives us his aesthetic creed. It is a creed which Lewis might be satisfied to call his own, for Conrad, like Lewis, is conscious of the intricate locking which binds past, present, and future into unity. Conrad writes as follows: the artist, he says,

--- speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation - and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity - the dead to the living and the living to the unborn. (1)

(italics mine)

When Conrad speaks of the "sense of mystery surrounding our

lives", we are reminded that the evocation of that mystery is one of his finest accomplishments in writing. He even invests the idea of tradition with mystery, partly because, in place of abstractions such as past, present, and future, he uses "the dead", "the living", and "the unborn".

Chapters IV and V of this essay attempted to show how Lewis emphasized the necessity of living man repairing the divorce between his flesh and his spirit, and between himself and his fellow men. He spoke of the "integral spirit", and the "communal sense", and of "restoring long-lost kinship, the blood's fulfilment". It follows from this that since past, present, and future are one, the "long-lost kinship" must be restored between the living and the dead ancestors of the race, and must reach far up the spiral staircase into the future, to the heirs. By "living" ancestors I mean that the ideas of the future being built on the present, and the present of the past is so vital, that one must consider living man the potential ancestor of those yet unborn. The living are just as much ancestors of future generations, as the dead are ancestors of the living. The entire conception of tradition takes on added meaning when living man realizes he will in large measure determine the fate of the unborn, and when this realization is of such force that it moulds and directs his present actions. Hence social consciousness and social responsibility is projected to include future
generations as well as the present. Man generally, and the artist, specifically, because of his more sensitive antennae, must seek to bind "the dead to the living and the living to the unborn". Lewis says much the same thing when he writes:

Standing at the end of an epoch, the poet's arms are stretched out to opposite poles, the old life and the new; that is his power and his crucifixion. (1)

It is the poet's "power" because, standing in the present, his outstretched arms make electrical contact with both the past and future, and the electrical current of an understanding greater than his fellows are capable of, surges through his body. This experience is the poet's "crucifixion" because he knows more than his fellows, and he suffers for that knowledge. The poet's fate is similar to the fate of Tiresias, whom Pallas Athene cursed with the words:

----- thou hast seen too much,
And speak the truth that no man may believe. (2)

The poet's fate also brings to mind Christ's fate, for He too suffered for what He was, at the hands of unbelieving man.

There is a fine poem in the volume, A Time To Dance, which bears directly on the matter I am discussing. "Johnny Head - In - Air" is a vision expressed in ballad form. It

(1) A Hope For Poetry, 218.
(2) Tennyson, Alfred, Tiresias, 11. 48-49.
is a vision of the human race struggling "over an endless wold", on a never-ending road that "reels back a million miles". The poet sees mankind come to a halt before "sheer, un fissured walls",

They have come to the crisis of the road,
They have come without maps or guides:
To left and right along the night
The cryptic way divides. (1)

And there in front of that endless company is a signpost, a man whose arms are pointing to east and west, like the arms of the poet, like the arms of a Christ. The man is Johnny - Head - In - Air, whose

--- face was pure as the winnowed light
When the wild geese fly high,
And gentle as on October evenings
The heron-feathered sky. (2)

The company of travellers ask Johnny the correct path to take, and he replies that the path to the left is the one. As the travellers move on, they ask Johnny to come with them, and he replies.

That cannot be till two agree
Who long have lain apart:
Traveller, know, I am here to show
Your own divided heart. (3)

Once again the poet reaffirms his conviction that division, divorce, is the great enemy of mankind. It is a divorce which separates flesh from spirit, man from man, the future from the present, and the present from the past. Johnny,

(1) A Time To Dance, "Johnny - Head - In - Air", 11. 61-64.
(2) A Time To Dance, "Johnny - Head - In - Air", 11. 69-72.
(3) A Time To Dance, "Johnny - Head - In - Air", 11. 141-144.
too, suffers, like the poet because he has superior knowledge; he sees the division in men's hearts. That is his power and his crucifixion, for his arms stretch to the past and the future like the poet's, like Christ's.

How can the past be used by man in a conscious way? Lewis emphasized repeatedly the necessity of using in any future society all that is best in the past and the present society. The term "revolutionary conservation" (1) was used by John Strachey to describe a similar idea. Lewis refers to the idea in a number of poems. In *The Magnetic Mountain*, he writes:

> The tree grips soil, the bird knows how to use the wind; but the full man must live Rooted yet unconfined. (2)

A plant must have its roots in the soil, but if it is to thrive, it must have sun, and air, and moisture from the skies. It is not surprising that Scandinavian mythology symbolizes life as the great tree, Igrasil, which is watered by three Nornas or Fates - the Past, Present, and Future. Later in *The Magnetic Mountain*, Lewis varies the metaphor by describing the new world in terms of a boat being built on the stays:

Many months have gone to her making, wood well-seasoned for watertight doors, The old world's best in her ribs and ballast, White-heat, high pressure --- (3)

Tradition is the earth from which the plant of society grows. And the new leaves themselves die in time and fall into the earth of tradition, ever enriching it. Tradition involves the historical sense, which sees not only, to use a quotation by T. S. Eliot, "the pastness of the past", but its presence, and "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer, and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." (1) Lewis and Eliot are alike in this, that they both have a profound grasp of the way tradition makes a oneness of time. Lewis might possible express himself differently; he might say that tradition is change, and that change is tradition.

PART TWO

In his prose and in his poetry, Lewis frequently uses the word "ancestor". The term needs to be defined. Lewis has described "ancestors" in this way:

We claim for these "real ancestors" only this: that great men, heroes, men who have seemed to live, at a higher pressure than the rest, can brim over into posterity. Their immortality is not through lip-service and stone monuments, nor in any act of memory; it is not external to us, but works in our minds, our blood and our bones. (2)

(2) A Hope For Poetry, 164.
This description implies a number of things. It implies that great men are the servants of tradition; they are the active agents that vitalize the working of the past in the present. Their work "brims over" into the present, to use Lewis' term, and becomes a part of those who wish to work in the same tradition. Choosing an ancestor compels a man, therefore, to make also a choice of ends. The work of many great men "brim over" into posterity, but if one disagrees with the aims of a great man, one will certainly not choose him as an ancestor. Therefore, in choosing his "ancestors", a man must choose an ideology which he undertakes to project into the future. In the same way, a poet must choose the type of poetry he wishes to project into the future.(1) T. S. Eliot makes this point clear when speaking of the poet in an essay entitled, "Music of Poetry", he writes:

---- he is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write. --------- he sees the poetry of the past in relation to his own: and his gratitude to those dead poets from whom he has learned, as well as his indifference to those whose aims have been alien to his own, may be exaggerated. He is not so much a judge as an advocate. (2)

Lewis' idea of an "ancestor" is a type of hero-worship, but his type of hero-worship goes deeper than Carlyle's.

The heroes in Heroes And Hero-Worship are revered "in an act of memory", and that is precisely what Lewis does not mean.

Carlyle admires his heroes, whether Oden, Mahomet, Dante, Luther, or Napoleon, for the manner in which they create ideas. He is not so much concerned with the matter of their ideas. Carlyle believes that man makes history. He says:

--- Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. (1)

Lewis on the other hand, believes that history makes man. The ideas are already here, he believes, and a man must choose the ideas he wishes to project, so that he himself may become an ancestor to those as yet unborn. To sum up then, when a man chooses his ancestors he tells us his point of view. A man would not choose Adolf Hitler as an ancestor, though he is an historical figure who will "brim over" into posterity, if the Nazi ideology were not also his own. A man must take sides, as his "ancestors" did in their time.

Lewis first mentions the ancestor idea in the epilogue to From Feathers To Iron. This epilogue takes the form of three sonnet-letters to W. H. Auden. He likens Auden to a mole, "the anonymous miner", "Noising among Saxon skulls, roots of our genealogies". Lewis frequently uses the symbolism of a mole to describe the revolutionary. (2)

Reference is also made to "ancestors" in The Magnetic Mountain. In describing the "Enemies" collectively, he writes:

(2) cf. "Letter To A Young Revolutionary" in New Country, p. 30; and Noah and the Waters, p. 51.
Leaders to no sure land, guides their hearings lost
Or in league with robbers have reversed the signposts,
Disrespectful to ancestors, irresponsible to heirs.  

One should notice how Lewis links the past and the future
in the last line.

The fullest expression of ancestor-worship, however, is
to be found in "A Time To Dance", which is the story of two
heroes, told in memory of another dead hero, for the enlight-
enment of a world almost without heroes. Lewis describes
his airmen as those,

        ---- whose passion
        Brimmed over the deep grave
        and dazzled epitaphs:
        For all that have won us wings
        to clear the tops of grief.  (2)

And later in the same prefaceatory stanzas to great men, he
wrote:

        Their spirits float serene
        above time's roughest reaches,
        But their seed is in us and over
        our lives they are evergreen.  (3)

The immortality of the ancestor does not reside "in any act
of memory" Lewis wrote. This idea finds a poetic re-iteration
in the last two lines of the above quotation. The heroes' influence works "in our minds, our blood and our bones".  (4)
Lewis never tires of repeating this theme in "A Time To Dance".
The poem is dedicated to L. P. Hedges, a young friend of the

(2) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", 11. 6-10, p. 31.
(3) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 31.
(4) A Hope For Poetry, 164.
poet, who died suddenly. The impact of his death upon Lewis is quite reminiscent of that of Hallam's death on Tennyson. Hedges was a hero in the poet's definition, and Lewis continually asserts that Hedges' personality has not died, but lives within the poet himself. He does so in lines such as these:

For I knew, at last wholly accepting death,
Though earth had taken his body and air his breath,
He was not in heaven or earth: he was in me. (1)

The same idea finds expression in the lines which follow:

----- Each stopping-place
Wears his look of welcome. May even find,
When I come to the snow-line, the bitter end,
His hand-holds cut on death's terrific face. (2)

In such verse as this, Lewis uses sharp and concrete imagery to point up an emotional state of mind. He does it very well, I think, satisfying Milton's dictum that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, passionate".

So the eternal spirit of our ancestors lives on in us, as Hedges' spirit lives on in the poet:

Their spirit shall be blowing out of the sunrise,
Their veins our rivers, their bones our bread. (3)

PART THREE

Lewis prizes highly the will in men which leads to action. Such a will is a characteristic of those whom he considers his ancestors. The carrying through of a course of action,

(1) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 47.
(2) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 49.
(3) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 64.
deemed necessary at the moment, to the best of one's ability, constitutes heroic action. Heroism is understanding first, and then the will to act in the light of that understanding. Heroism makes for that exhilaration of spirit one experiences in every moment of decision. It is the negation of dilemma. It is the razor-edge determination which is the antithesis of the confused groping found in Transitional Poem. It is the negation of inertia, because the flesh and the spirit and the mind are unanimous in crying out for action.

Heroism is,

--- the will to prove
Your case, though that word
And clinching argument should be your death. (1)

It will be remembered that in The Magnetic Mountain Lewis spent much time listing and examining the "Defendants" of the old system and the "Enemies" of the new. "Defendants" and "Enemies" alike either embodied the divorce of flesh and spirit which paralyzed action, or ministered to such a divorce in others. In a sense, then, what Lewis was criticizing was the absence of heroes; that is to say, the absence of heroic action in a society which needs it more than ever before in history. No birth is possible without struggle, without fist-clenching, and the "élan vital" of will is especially needed for the birth of a new society.

Lewis himself knows the pangs of indecision. He needs

(1) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 57.
the conscious goad of a strong will to keep him moving, to counter the sluggishness which a "fatal intelligence" puts into his system. To act decisively, one needs almost a fanaticism for the moment, and Lewis is too "inclusive" a man to find it easy to be even an enlightened fanatic. Lewis bears witness to this state of inertia in a number of poems in Short Is The Time. He says, for instance, that the contemplative state of mind is peculiarly enervating. Thinking, musing, throw a shadow over will, but,

In the act of decision only,
In the hearts cleared for action like lovers naked
For love, this shadow vanishes: there alone
There is nothing between our lives for it to thrive on. (1)

The poem, "Questions", attests to a similar experience and ends with this question: how long will it be before,

You'll risk your javelin dive
And pierce reflection's heart, and come alive? (2)

In another poem, (3) Lewis looks with favor upon a placidly swimming swan, "complacent, a water-lily upon the ornamental water", which suddenly comes to life and flies off. Lewis sees in the action of the swan, I believe, a prophecy that England will shake herself out of the indecision of the Chamberlain era, and end an appeasement policy which could only lead to war.

If Lewis can write about the pangs of indecision in himself and in others, he can also write about the act of

(1) Short Is The Time, "In The Heart of Contemplation", 11.17-20.
(3) Short Is The Time, "Behold The Swan", p. 44.
decision. He has written two, long narrative poems which may be regarded as exempla of heroic action. They are, the narrative portion of "A Time To Dance", and "The Nabara".

The former poem tells the story of two lieutenants, Parer and McIntosh, who, at the end of the first world war, acquired an obsolete "D.H. 9", and flew it, by hazardous stages, to their homes in Australia. Lewis begins with the take-off on January 8, 1920, and follows their fortunes to France where they were beset by dense fog, engine-trouble, and a defective petrol pump. They ran out of gas over Italy, barely escaped the "ice-tipped spears" of the Appenines, extinguished the fire which nearly ended their saga prematurely, and finally, after forty-four days reached Cairo. They were forced down in Arabia and attacked by Arabs, whom McIntosh held off with a pistol, while Parer tinkered with the engine. Somehow, they reached Burma, where they crashed. After six weeks of repair work, the "heap of scrap" took to the air again. Storms and lost bearings to the contrary, the two heroes finally crashed near Culcairn in Victoria Province. Then they,

Dazed as the dead awoken from death, stepped out of the broken Body and went away. (1)

The poem is written in virile "sprung rhythm", which is nicely fitted to the speed of a story that never lags, that never is weighted down with otiose detail. The moments of

(1) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 43.
lull are contracted effectively with hectic activity. The poetic texture is muscular and sineway. The following lines are typical of the entire narrative:

Air was all ambushes round them, was avalanche earthquake
Quicksand, a funnel deep as doom, till climbing steep
They crawled like a fly up the face of perpendicular night
And levelled, finding a break
At fourteen thousand feet. ---- (1)

The rhythm of these lines recalls the rhythm of Birney's "David", and there are other points of similarity between the two poems. "David", too, concerns the exploits of a hero.

The only other long narrative poem which Lewis has written also concerns heroic action. "The Nabara" resembles the airmen poem in that it is based on an actual incident. It differs from the former poem in that its protagonists are many, not two; in that its setting is the Bay of Biscay; in that the heroes are sailors, not airmen; in that it has a tragic ending; and in that political motives enter into the poem. If "The Nabara" is a better exemplum of heroic action than "A Time To Dance", it is because the "knowledge of necessity" is carried out to the death, and because the Basque fishermen who struggle against overwhelming odds are fighting the good fight against Fascism.

The incident related occurred during the Spanish Civil War. The government trawlers, Nabara, Guipuzkoa, Bizkaya, and Donostia, were escorting the freighter, Galdames, from Bayonne to Bilboa. The freighter carried much-needed nickel and other supplies for the loyalist forces. There were also important political refugees aboard. A dense fog settled down, and the freighter lost position. When the fog cleared, the Basque sailors saw,

Blocking the sea and sky a mountain they might not pass,
An isle thrown up volcanic and smoking, a giant in metal
Astride their path - the rebel cruiser, Canarias. (1)

The poem goes on to describe the one-sided battle which ends with the Nabara, a glowing coal, hissing into the sea. Of her crew of fifty-two, only fourteen survive, and all are wounded. The fourteen survivors pull away from their burning ship in a leaky rowboat, and as a last gesture of defiance,

---- they strung their nerve
For one last fling of defiance, they shipped their oars and threw
Hand-grenades at the launch as it circled about to board them. (2)

The grenades fell short, and the men were overpowered, but their epic struggle had borne fruit. The freighter escaped during the fight with its precious cargo. The poem concludes with a blast at those politicians, who, by their negative obstinacy, refused to allow shipments of materials to aid the loyalist cause.

(1) Short Is The Time, "The Nabara", ll. 58-60.
(2) Short Is The Time, "The Nabara", ll. 245-247.
The poem leaves no doubt in our minds as to what Lewis means by heroism. As a poem, "Nabara", has its ancestors too. It carries on the tradition of British sea-poems of which Tennyson's "Revenge" is a classical example. The prosody is more dignified than that of "A Time To Dance". The hexameters move on inevitably, but without rush, almost grimly. A ship moves more certainly, with less eccentricity, than an obsolete "D.H. 9". But like the air poem, "Nabara" ia a gripping story, well paced, revealing considerable dramatic power.

This chapter has been concerned with Lewis' conception of tradition, and with his idea of ancestor and hero. Lewis regards his ancestors as servants of the kind of tradition he himself favours. Tradition, Lewis believes, is dynamic, not static, and it works in the present as it has worked in the past and will continue to work in the future. Understand the past, diagnose the present, plan for the future - that is the sequence. Finally, Lewis has revealed in his two narrative poems living examples of what he understands by decisive action. Heroic action results from a "knowledge of necessity" which, with the body's courage and the spirit's will, works itself out in an act of decision. Once again flesh and spirit sing together all in tune.
CHAPTER VII
THE UNIQUE MINUTE

PART ONE

Few ages, I believe, have been less conducive to the development of a simple philosophy of life than the present one. Probably no period of history has been more complex and confusing than ours. The Middle Ages had as a typical man the religious ascetic like St. Francis; the Renascence had its universal man, like Leonardo; the "Age of Reason" its Descartes; the Nineteenth Century its devotees of practical morality. What characteristic has the typical man of our own age? Would he be the man of science? the benevolent president? the man of steel? the business executive? the general-stateman? We have our Einstein, our Roosevelt, our Stalin, our Henry Ford, our Marshalls and Mac Arthurs. I suppose, ideally, the modern man would have to be one who combined qualities from all five. But that is impossible. The overwhelming diversity of modern life and knowledge is inimical to a new da Vinci. Ours is an era of mixed feelings, the "nightmare conflict of opposites". And of all people, our intellectuals, "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought", are most a prey to tangled feelings and contradictory experiences. This condition is not altogether
peculiar to our age, of course. John Donne compounded sensuality and religious fervour. And I suppose Hamlet is the most complex, confused character in drama. But the universality of dilemma is unique in our contemporary world. William Empson bears witness to this fact in the following sentence:

But, indeed, human life is so much a matter of juggling with contradictory impulses (Christian-worldly, sociable-independent) that one is accustomed to thinking people are probably sensible if they follow first one, then the other, of two such courses. (1)

Though Empson does not specifically say so, I think he is referring to contemporary human life in the above quotation.

The poetry of W. H. Auden offers a striking example of the "juggling with contradictory impulses" to which Empson refers. Auden is an example of the "inclusive" man. "The Devil, indeed", writes Auden, "is the father of Poetry, for poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed feelings."(2)

Unfortunately, many people are unable to perceive the mixed feelings which they experience with any such clarity.

It is well known that I. A. Richards claims that such a mental state as is implied by Auden's definition is the best condition for the creation of poetry. (3) I would only add that, although a state of mixed feelings may produce the most profound poetry, it likewise may produce the most unsuccessful poetry, because the poetic fire needed to fuse

disparate views must be more intense than is necessary for the creation of the "exclusive" type of poetry, and therefore more frequently fails to bring its materials to the required melting point. The result is a poem that falls apart at the touch. Synthesis has been incomplete.

Lewis, no less than Auden, is a product of the age of mixed feelings. His poetry, however, does not contain the number of diverse elements to be found in Auden's. On the other hand, one feels that Lewis has worked out his ideas and maintained them more consistently than has Auden. This makes his poetry more consistent in development, easier to classify into trends, but not necessarily better poetry.

Though Lewis' poetry is not so inclusive of contradictory impulses as Auden's, yet there are a number of apparent contradictions which must be considered. Chapter Six, for instance, revealed Lewis' admiration of decisive action; yet, as I shall try to prove in this chapter, there is in his later work, a strong feeling of resignation, of the acceptance of disillusion as the inevitable fate of mankind. This is a philosophical contradiction, it seems. Are resignation and decisive action mutually exclusive? Or can they be explained as the systole and diastole of a single point of view?

There is yet another quality displayed in Lewis' poetry
which seems to conflict with his feelings of resignation. It is the expression of a carpe__diem philosophy which is the subject of much of his poetry. How can a belief in the value of immediate pleasure and immediate beauty be reconciled with Lewis' concern for the illness of society and for the birth of a new society? And how can it be reconciled with his acceptance of disillusion as the inevitable state of mankind? These are some of the apparent contradictory impulses which make Lewis, too, an inclusive poet. These are contradictions which demand elucidation in this chapter.

PART TWO

It is probably not far from the truth to say that what Lewis wants above everything else from this life is peace of mind. Indeed, peace of mind is the goal of most men. The poet's first three cycles were concerned with the search for this peace. Transitional Poem related biographically the poet's struggle to attain singleness of mind, without which peace of mind is impossible; From Feathers To Iron is a delicately balanced conflict between fear and hope, but ends with the expressed faith that the child will help the poet come to grips with life and thus bring him peace of mind; The Magnetic Mountain presents a political solution, without which peace of mind would be an unattainable ideal. If his three latest poems are any criterion, however, it can be said
that he has not achieved the peace for which he craves. These three poems appeared in an anthology of contemporary prose and poetry entitled, Orion, which came out in the autumn of 1946. The last of them, called "Statuette: Late Minoan", is a lyrical reflection on an archaic statue. The final stanza shows that he has not yet found the tranquil state of mind:

Goddess or girl, you are earth
The smile, the offered breast -
Thirsting as I for rest,
As I, unblest.

Though he is still "unblest", Lewis would admit, I think, that he comes closest to satisfying his thirst for rest when the mood of repose, of resignation is upon him. He has found it is easier to hit a target from a stationary position than from a moving one. "Rilke", Lewis observes, "put patience first among the poetic virtues".(1) And although Rilke is talking about the act of poetic creation, Lewis would also regard patience as high up among the virtues of living.

The state of repose, no matter how brief, serves another purpose. It is, to quote Lewis,

----- the process by which the spirit withdraws into a state of accidie or one of impotent frustration, a doldrum state, as an initiation into new life, going through a period of introversion before turning outward again with new vigour,

(1) The Poetic Image, 100.
descending into hell that it may rise to 
heaven. (1)

In the light of this, his moments of resignation cease to 
contradict his moments of action. Periods of repose must be 
looked upon as lulls of power during which he is resting, 
rebuilding, his spent powers preliminary to another outburst 
of energy. No one is able to live continually at the pitch 
of high pressure which decisive action demands. The value 
of a state of calm in the creative life of a poet has been 
described in verse by Lewis:

Oh, on this striding edge, 
This hare-bell height of calm 
Where intuitions swarm 
Like nesting gulls and knowledge 
Is free as the winds that blow. (2)

The state of fruitful repose described in these lines must 
be similar to Wordsworth's state of mind when emotion was 
recollected in tranquility.

I have been referring, be way of introduction, to one 
aspect of the subject of resignation; namely, the need of 
repose, whether in life or poetry, to build up depleted 
powers prior to a new burst of activity. There are more 
important aspects of the subject, however, because states 
of repose of the kind referred to above have little to do with 
a philosophy of life. Repose is a universal necessity in life.

Lewis' poems of resignation may be conveniently divided

(1) The Poetic Image, 100.
(2) Short Is The Time, "The Poet", 11. 31-35.
into two categories: poems which deal with the imperfection or inconsequence of individual life; and poems which deal with the acceptance of such imperfection, and the suffering that results, as a fate to be endured with patience.

The tone of Short Is The Time is much less optimistic than Lewis' previous books. For one thing, he has come to realize that in his younger days, his reach far exceeded his grasp. Perfection is not for this life:

We who in younger days,
Hoping too much, tried on
The habit of perfection,
Have learnt how it betrays
Our shrinking flesh. (1)

Certainly the lines quoted express a disillusion, but possibly it is a healthy disillusion, because it expresses a fundamental truth. The lines contain the germ of resignation, too, because the poet accepts the limit placed on his aspirations as necessary. The feeling of limitation is so strong that the poet uses words like "betray" and "shrinking flesh" to describe the disparity between what one desires and what one achieves.

Falling, as it does, far short of perfection, a man's individual life sometimes leaves Lewis with a sense of inconsequence and futility. The ninth sonnet of the "O Dreams, O Destinations" sequence compares a man's life to the flight of a bird. The sestet follows:

(1) Short Is The Time, "Regency Houses", ll. 19-23.
--- Alask the bird flies blind,
Hooded by a dark sense of destination:
Her weight on the glass calm leaves no impression,
Her home is soon a basketful of wind.
Travellers, we're fabric of the road we go;
We settle, but like feathers on time's flow. (1)

In these lines Lewis is saying, I believe, that a man's individual life is inconsequential, leaving no impression, vanishing like the wind. A man travels the road of time, becoming a part of all he meets, but when life ceases, he has made no more impression than a feather makes when it falls to earth. The first two lines are difficult. Does Lewis mean by "a dark sense of destination" that man does not know his destination? that he is in the dark as to what it is? or does he mean that man is driven by a feeling that he must strive forward to some unknown goal or end. Whatever may be the precise meaning Lewis intended, the poem is a statement of the inconsequence of individual life, and Lewis seems to accept the fact with perfect serenity.

There are a number of poems in Short Is The Time which express the desirability of patience and the need of submission in the face of adversity. "Sonnet For A Political Worker" is such a poem. It is a poem about political disillusion. Few people realize with what force of conviction many people believed in the imminence of their socialist system in the early "Thirties. To many of them, even in this country, the establishment of socialism was thought to be inevitable.

(1) Short Is The Time, "O Dreams, O Destinations", "Sonnet Nine", ll. 9-14.
and a matter of months. When the war clouds gathered, and the economic crisis was solved by a military crisis, the disillusion of these socialists was profound. Lewis expresses their disillusion, and his own disillusion, in "Sonnet For A Political Worker". He speaks of "boredom, the dull repetitive delay", and "opponent's tricky call" and "discontent of friends". But in the sestet he has an answer to this seeming denial of what history meant. It is an answer involving acceptance of reality. It is a plea for patience:

Do you not see that history's high tension
Must so be broken down to each man's need
And his frail filaments, that it may feed
Not blast all patience, love and warm invention?
On lines beyond your single comprehension
The circuit and full day of power proceed. (1)

In these lines Lewis compares the maddening slowness of political evolution to an electrical transformer which is necessary to step down the voltage to a force which can be conveniently and safely used. He might also have compared it to the atomic pile which prevents the chain reaction from getting out of hand. The last two lines of the sestet are especially significant. He means by them that the sweep of current and future history is beyond a man's comprehension, but that it moves on in its inevitable and ponderous course oblivious of man or his understanding. There remains a single but all-important implication. It is that the sweep of history is in the direction desired by the political worker of the poem; that is to say, it is towards socialism.

(1) Short Is The Time, "Sonnet For A Political Worker", 11 9-14.
Its realization is merely a matter of time - and patience.

Another poem which expresses the poet's disillusion is "Word From All". Rather, the poem expresses a disillusion for the present, but a calm faith for the future. Lewis describes with despair the crash of bombs and the thump of the "ack-ack" guns. He speaks of "our time's ghost-guise of impermanence", of being "caged with the devouring present", and of "millions fated to flock down weeping roads to mere oblivion". He resigns himself to these grim facts, but it is not a resignation to hopelessness. The following lines express a faith, patient but strong, that humanity will emerge from its ordeal cleaner and stronger:

Whether our good, amy tarnish, our grief to far
Centuries glow not.
The Cause sheals off, the Humankind stands forth
A mightier presence,
Flooded by down's pale courage, rapt in eve's
Rich acquiesence. (1)

These lines suggest that if indeed the life of individual man is inconsequential, the life of collective man, of mankind, is the important thing. Man dies, but the race lives on.

The poem entitled "Ode To Fear" is yet another plea for patience and for submission to the inscrutable ways of history. It is not the first time Lewis has written about fear. In The Magnetic Mountain, Lewis speaks about the Two, fear and pain, brothers, from whose servitude there is no escape this side

(1) Short Is The Time, "Word Over All", ll. 51-56.
of the grave. In this earlier poem he speaks of fear resentfully, as if it were an Enemy. In the Ode, however, the attitude of a lover:

    Come to my heart then, Fear,
    With all your linked humiliations,
    As wild geese flight and settle on an submissive mere. (1)

The whole spirit of the "Ode" is one of acceptance, of resignation. The words "submissive mere" are most significant. The humiliations of fear are likened to a flock of geese, and the poet to a quiet lake which received the geese into itself.

The poem which follows "Ode To Fear" in Short Is The Time bears the title, "The Dead". The experience which fires the poem is the observation of the dead victims of an air-raid lying "like effigies thrown down after a fete" among the "fag-ends of fires", and the "litter of rubble". He is moved to write about the life of these victims, in these lines:

    And if they chose the dearer consolations
    Of living - the bar, the dog race, the discreet Establishment - and let Karl Marx and Freud go hang,
    Now they are dead, who can dispute their choice? Not I, nor even Fate. (2)

These lines evince a passionate love for man and his simple pleasures which makes Marxian criticism of them and Freudian analysis of them seem quite irrelevant. Lewis feels this love for them in spite of their ill-advised lives in which they have chosen valueless activities. If they were still

(1) Short Is The Time, "Ode To Fear", li. 40-42.
alive he would dispute with them regarding their choice (as he has always done). But they are dead and he is realistic about it.

There is, over all the poems which deal with the subject of resignation, a blanket of calm. I think it is unquestionable that Lewis writes best when this mood of tranquillity is upon him. Speaking of the resignation poems, Rolfe Humphries writes:

The nearer these draw to quiet and separation, the better they are apt to be, as if in stillness, not in keeping up, not in rushing off in several directions, lay the best talent of this writer as a poet. (1)

I believe Lewis too thinks so, for of his own poetry he has written:

It never was possessed
By divine incontinence. (2)

Lewis produces his best poetry, I believe, when it is possessed by continence, when a period of "wise passiveness" allows the intuitions and thoughts which swarm in his mind to be carefully selected or rejected. Too much of his early poetry is spoiled by a facility directed by youthful political ardor. There is something of the soap-box orator in parts of The Magnetic Mountain. Possibly he talks too much and thinks and means too little. In his later poems, however, there is the "fundamental brainwork" which Rossetti asked for in a poem.

Lewis takes care in selecting and rejecting his imagery. In doing so he follows Keat's advice as well as Rossetti's for he loads every rift with ore.

The poems from which I have quoted in this section were concerned with the acceptance of suffering. Lewis' reasons for this submission are two. He believes that suffering has a place in the overall plan of life. It is one of the pieces in the jig-saw which makes an inclusive unity of life. Another of the pieces is joy, and he regards joy and suffering as complementary to each other. Therefore he can say:

Dark over all, absolving all, is hung
Death's vaulted patience:
Words are to set man's joy and suffering there in constellations.

Writing, he means, should set down the great joy and the great suffering of mankind. But Lewis urges the acceptance of pain for another reason; mankind, he believes, can progress only through travail; the pain shales off, "the Humankind stands forth a mightier presence".

PART THREE

Resignation implies submission to suffering. But it also implies submission to joy. Lewis sees with profound clarity the relationship between joy and suffering. He knows that each one cannot exist without the other. Consequently, when the unique minutes of pleasure, or joy, or beauty do come,
he urges that they be seized and enjoyed to the full. Soon enough, the unique minutes of pain and suffering must come like a cloud to block the sunshine.

The Dryden translation of the Twenty-Ninth Ode of the First Book of Horace contains a passage which seems to me to be a fine expression of the carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero attitude to life which characterizes much of Lewis' poetry:

Happy the man, and he alone, 
He, who can call to-day his own; 
He who, secure within, can say, 
To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived today: 
Be fair, or foul, or rain, or shine, 
The joys I have possessed, in spite of fate, are mine; 
Not heaven itself upon the past has power, 
But what has been, has been, and I have had my hour. (1)

This excerpt needs no interpretation; it is perfectly clear. In applying it to Lewis' attitude, however, there is one modification I would make. Lewis gives one the impression, that even when he is most enjoying today, he can never quite forget the tomorrow which will bring new pain, new responsibilities. Lewis is able to live for the unique minutes, because the unique minutes provide a hope for the future. They vanish, like the dew, but they come again.

The following stanzas provide a good example of the attitude I have been discussing:

Suppose that we, to-morrow or the next day, 
Came to an end - in storm the shafting broken, 
Or a mistaken signal, the flange lifting -
Would that be premature, a text for sorrow? 
Say what endurance gives or death denies us. 
Love's proved in its creation, not eternity: 
Like leaf or linnet the true heart's affection
Is born, dies later, asks no reassurance. (1)

Lewis asks that we enjoy beauty or love for their own sake, 
here and now. Why worry about their impermanence, when it is their immediate being which gives them value. He goes on to say that, 

Here - now we know, what death cannot diminish
Needs no replenishing; yet certain are, though Dying were well enough, to live is better. (2)

This is *carpe diem*, though it has not quite the carefree abandon of Horace or of Herrick.

The eighth sonnet of "O Dreams, O Destinations" is perhaps a better example of the "unique minute" philosophy than the previous quotation because it is inlaid with concern for the morrow. The sestet of the sonnet is this:

Love, we have caught perfection for a day
As succory holds a gem of halcyon ray:
Summer burns out, its flower will tarnish soon -
Deathless illusion, that could so relay
The truth of flesh and spirit, sun and clay
Singing for once together all in tune! (3)

The last two lines should now be familiar, for I have quoted them many times. They provide here an explanation of why "unique minutes" brings such happiness. For it is the harmony of bodily and spiritual aspirations at any one moment

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem One", ll. 1-8. 
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem One", ll. 22-24. 
(3) Short Is The Time, "O Dreams, O Destinations", "Sonnet Eight".
which brings the flood of happiness characteristic of the "unique minutes". It is this harmony which brings in its train, "perfection for a day".

The phrase, "unique minute", itself is taken from "O Dreams, O Destinations". The context is as follows:

Looking beyond, or backward, more and more
We grow unfaithful to the unique minute
Till from neglect, its features stale and blur. (1)

In these lines Lewis expresses, perhaps with unintended irony, the very reason why he himself is unable to surrender himself completely to the joys of the moment. Lewis is often guilty of the very breach of faith he criticizes; that is to say, by permitting past regret or future concern to intrude, he lowers the maximum of enjoyment at any given moment.

Sometimes it is not the past or the future, but a philosophical generalization which intrudes and blunts the joy of the unique minutes in the poem. An example of intrusion of this kind is provided by the poem, "A Happy View". As the title would indicate, it is a happy poem, but it is not as happy as one would suppose. The poem merits a complete quotation:

--- So take a happy view -
This lawn graced with the candle-flames of crocus,
Frail-handed girls under the flowering chestnut,
Or anything will do
That time takes back before it seem untrue:

(1) Short Is The Time, "O Dreams, O Destinations", Sonnet Three".
And, if the truth were told,
You'd count it luck, perceiving in what shallow
Crevices and few crumbling grains of comfort
Man's joy will seed, his cold
And hardy fingers find an eagle's hold. (1)

Before leaving the poem, "A Happy View", I would draw
attention to the description of the crocuses. Of course the
crocus is a candle flame, but it needs the close observation
of a poet to point out the resemblance. The stroke of original-
ality which makes the old seem new, and the new seem old was
called "repristination" by Robert Browning. Lowess describes
"repristination" in these words:

And the supreme test of originality is
its power to give us the sense of a
footing on trodden and familiar ground,
which all at once is recognised as
unexplored. (2)

The exploration of the infinite would of thought and sense is
at once the poet's triumph and his failure: triumph, in that
he discovers hidden resemblences between apparently unlike
things; failure, in that for every resemblance he finds, a
thousand remain hidden. The world of poetry knows no frontier.

A final observation about "A Happy View" would note
the sound pattern of the lyric. The rich vowels might be
compared to a string base, giving body to the sound, and to
the intricate consonantal harmony as a whole. It would notice,
 furthermore, the predominance of the "k" sound in words such
as "take", "candle", "crocus", "takes", "back", "count", "luck", (1)
(2) John Livingstone Lowes, Convention and Revolt In Poetry,
"crevices", "crumbling", "comfort", and "cold". A sound attracts others of its kind in poetry, sometimes for alliterative effect, sometimes for imitative harmony, sometimes just for company.

The poem, "A Happy View", is not alone in revealing the potency of Lewis' power of "repristination". Lewis is a great observer of physical beauty, of the "brief act of beauty" which he praises in the following lines.

--- For they, whose virtue lies
In a brief act of beauty, summarize
Earth's annual passion and leave the naked earth
Still dearer by their death than by their birth. (1)

Because he looks at beauty as though he is looking at it for the last time, he observes with singular intensity, and it is not surprising, therefore, that "repristination" frequently results. At times his enthusiasm for natural beauty approaches close to the ecstasy of the mystic's vision. Thus he is able to write:

In that one moment of evening
When roses are most red
I can fold back the firmament,
I can put time to bed. (2)

or, in the same poem, referring to Methuselah:

Give me an instant realized
And I'll outdo your span.

These excerpts from his early poetry actually show more genuine carpe diem sentiment than do some of his later poems.

(2) Transitional Poem, "Poem Four", ll. 5-8.
In moments of unalloyed pleasure derived from natural observation, repristination comes frequently. It is present in:

Daffodils now, the pretty debutantes,
Are curtsying at the first court of the year; (2)

Dawn like a greyhound leapt the hill-tops
A million leaves held up the noonday. (2)

or in:

Over the hill three buzzards are wheeling
On the glass sky their skaters' curves (3)

It comes with the shock of surprise to read that Edith Sitwell criticizes Lewis for his "aversion of physical beauty". "It is to be hoped that in the future", she writes, the "when/spiritual life is assured to him in such a way that he does not fear that it will fade, this young poet will become on terms of friendship with this other world which lies around us, whose radiance, whose fleeting colours, gleams and sounds, all bear their message from another life". (4) I do not think Miss Sitwell is being fair to Lewis, any more than those who pick out her "Emily-coloured primulas" and her "Martha-coloured scabious" for criticism are fair to her. It is true that The Magnetic Mountain, which prompted her criticism, probably "avoids physical beauty" more than his

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Epilogue", ll. 15-16.
(3) Orion, "Buzzards Over Castle Hill".
other cycles, but even in this metallic poem there is no lack of softer rural beauty.

Two further poems dedicated to "a brief act of beauty" might be mentioned to conclude this aspect of the poet's work. "The Ecstatic" is a short ode to the beauty of the skylark. "Spring Song" comes close to the genuine gather-ye-rosebuds-while-ye-may attitude to life. Referring to the spring season, he writes:

Now the bee finds the pollen,
The pole boy a cure:
Who cares if in the sequel
Cocky shall be crestfallen?

Who cares whether beauty lasts? We can delight in it while it lasts, and "not heaven itself upon the past has power".

This chapter has been concerned with the philosophy of living in the immediate present. Lewis' attitude is one of acceptance; acceptance of suffering, and acceptance of joy. The poet has a profound understanding of the polarity of joy and pain. They form the convex and concave surfaces of the single curved mirror. Each creates the other, and each destroys the other. Lewis, therefore, can submit to the one with resignation; and embrace the other with passion. Both pain and joy must have their due. Shadows are dissipated by the sun, but the sun seldom shines from a clear sky. The clouds are nearly always there. And there is one cloud larger and darker than the rest:
There's a kind of release
And a kind of torment in every goodbye for every man -
And will be, even to the last of his dark departures. (1)

Death, surely, is the most "unique minute" of all. It is the one "unique minute" to which we cannot grow unfaithful.

(1) Short Is The Time, "Departure In The Dark", ll. 38-40.
CHAPTER VIII

DEFEND THE BAD AGAINST THE WORST

PART ONE

The Hundred Years War was an intermittent struggle fostered by the growing national consciousness of England and France in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries. There were many subsidiary causes, such as Edward's strong claim to the French throne, and the sporadic assistance France gave to Scotland in her border strife with England. The fundamental causes lay deeper, however. The Hundred Years War was essentially a struggle between the growing mercantilism of England, one aspect of which was the lucrative wool trade with Flanders, and the more solidly entrenched feudalism of France. It was, therefore, a conflict between two worlds, one dying and the other struggling to be born.

Left-wing intellectuals see our last two wars in a similar light. They argue that the First and Second World Wars were not two wars, but merely successive stages in the same war, as Henry V's wars were a continuation of Edward III's wars. Continuing the analogy, these intellectuals point out that the two world wars represent the death throes of the world order called capitalism. Only by war can capitalism spuriously stimulate a demand for goods without which it must perish. Capitalism, they emphasize, is a "scarcity..."
system"; that is, it can flourish only when general demand exceeds general supply. The great depression of the 'Thirties resulted when the stepped-up productivity of machinery flooded the world with consumer goods, the very abundance of which prevented the factory owners from realizing an adequate price or profit for them. The left-wing intellectuals conclude that modern war is an artificial but infernally effective way of stimulating demand for, and maintaining a profit in, the production of consumer goods. War does this by creating an insatiable demand for armaments, and by creating a back-log of commodity orders which requires many years to fill.

Of course other factors enter into the cause of modern wars, just as subsidiary causes entered into the Hundred Years War. Incompatible nationalisms, and the conflict between totalitarianism and political democracy are involved, but the men whose concept of history is based on economic determinism regard all causes but the economic as secondary.

Lewis is a left-wing intellectual. His attitude to war is based on the conviction that the theories of economic determination are correct. Consequently, Francis Scarfe is able to write that Auden, Spender, and Lewis had

------ a great mythological conception of themselves as martyrs, born into one war and fattened for another. (1)

These poets regarded themselves and all men as the victims of modern wars, which were themselves the gigantic death struggles of capitalist society.

The Spanish Civil War, and the destruction by the Dolfuss catholics of the worker's quarters in Vienna in the middle 'Thirties, were similarly phases of the same struggle. Lewis would explain Fascism as the desperate last defence of a system that has been brought to bay. Fascism is but a capitalism which has removed the velvet glove that covered the mailed fist. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Spender writing his "Vienna", and Lewis writing his "Nabara" in the middle 'Thirties.

In 1936, moreover, Lewis was writing poetry warning of the impending outbreak of a new world war, and, indeed, one feels that Lewis was, even at that date, writing as though the war had already stated. The poem, "February 1936", for instance, is filled with a dark sense of premonition. The following lines imply that war has already begun:

We cannot meet
Our children's mirth, at night
Who dream their blood upon a darkening street.

Stay away, Spring!
Since death is on the wing
To blast our seed and poison everything. (1)

In these lines, the terrible fears of war are imaged in terms of a nightmare, by a poet who knew the imminence of war at a (1) Short Is The Time, "February 1936", 11. 19-24.
time when the western world was burying its head in the sands of appeasement and isolationism.

There are other poems of the same period expressing not so much the imminence as the immanence of war. By this I mean that though the physical war was in the future, the germs of war were growing within the world's body, like the bacilli of a fatal disease. Three years before the outbreak of war, Lewis described an air-raid with singular realism:

Black as vermin, crawling in echelon
Beneath the cloud-floor, the bombers come:
The heavy angels, carrying harm in
Their wombs that ache to be rid of death.

This is the seed that grows for ruin,
The iron embryo conceived in fear.
Soon or late its need must be answered
In fear delivered and screeching fire. (1)

It is noticeable that in the above lines Lewis employs imagery which is associated with conception, gestation, and birth to picture death and war. A similar ironical inversion of traditional imagery is to be found in "Newsreel" (2), where the rising of the big guns is compared to the erection of the penis, "to plant death in your world's soft womb".

Such imagery carries with it the conviction that war is in the very blood and bones of capitalist society, that war is immanent. This is merely another way of saying that a society which breeds death instead of life is critically sick.

(1) Short Is The Time, "Bombers", II. 13-20.
Poems like "Bombers", "February 1936", and "Newsreel" are poems of warning. But perhaps the most effective, because it is the most beautiful, poem of warning is the first poem of *Short Is The Time*, entitled, "Maple and Sumach". In the octave of this sonnet, Lewis speaks of the scarlet leaves of the trees in autumn:

> You leaves drenched with the lifeblood of the year -
> What flamingo dawns have wavered from the east,
> What eves have crimsoned to their toppling crest
> To give the fame and transience that you wear. (1)

He goes on to contrast the "russet and rejoicing" decline of the trees with the "ashen, harsh decline" of man:

> His fall is short of pride, he bleeds within
> And paler creeps to the dead end of his days.
> O light's abandon and the fire-crest sky
> Speak in me now for all who are to die! (2)

It is possible to interpret this sonnet in two ways. The first of these two interpretations would make no reference to war at all. The death Lewis refers to in the last line would then mean the natural decline and demise which is the fate of all men. The theme of the poem would thus not be dissimilar to the theme of Eliot's "Hollow Men", for Lewis would be lamenting the feckless petering out of a life which was itself characterized by blind striving and no achievement. The mood of the words, "creeps to the dead end of his days", is similar to Eliot's.

> This is the way the world ends
> Not with a bang but a whimper.

(1) *Short Is The Time*, "Maple and Sumach, ll. 5-8, ll. 11-14.
Lewis cannot but note the difference between the death of the leaves and the death of man. Theirs is a crimson flourish; man's is a grey decline.

The second interpretation of the sonnet varies from the first only by giving a different twist to the last line. The words, "fire-crest sky" imply that the death Lewis refers to in the last line is the impending death-in-war of millions of people. It is a grey death because it is an unnecessary death and possibly an inglorious death. The image of sheep being led to the slaughter is hackneyed but aptly expresses the idea which Lewis wished to convey. This second interpretation possibly gains authority from the fact that "Maple and Sumash" is the first of a group of five poems in Short Is The Time, the remaining four of which are definitely war poems.

Two other poems which prophesy impending war are "Landscapes" and "A Parting Shot". The former poem criticizes the ugliness, both physical and spiritual, of factory towns. It contains the lines:

Iron and man they mould for war,
But in their death that war will end. (1)

By these lines it would appear that Lewis believes that in the long run war will be seen to have speeded up the dissolution of capitalist society, and that war will end only with the death of the profiteers.

(1) Short Is The Time, "Landscapes", ll. 27-28.
"A Parting Shot" is a whimsical fragment which embodies a warning. It is a warning that armaments are made to be used, and that the armament race of the late "Thirties must end in war. In the poem, an inexperienced or irresponsible gunman is warned not to point the gun at the dove in the judas tree. The warning is ignored, the gun goes off, and the only thing one can think of to say is, "I told you so".

These first war poems were written in the middle of the Nineteen Thirties. They are poems which embody both prophecies and warnings. By 1939 the war which Lewis had so realistically and grimly predicted had become a fact. Thus he found himself in the position of the speaker of "A Parting Shot", and was free to say with him, if he wished, "I told you so".

PART TWO

During the last war Lewis served with the Home-Guard, and spent much time watching the coastline and the sky in company with the neighbours whom he commanded, country rustics for the most part. Two poems describe these experiences: "Watching Post", written in July, 1940, and "The Stand-To", of September, 1940. The dates are more than usually significant, for the air-battering that England was experiencing on each of them was thought at the time to be a prelude to invasion. In the former poem, the poet and the
farmer keep watch, "for whatever may come to injure our
countryside - light signals, parachutes, bombs, or sea-
invaders". The various elements of the subject - the moon,
watchers, searchlights, fires, Devon countryside, talk about
crops - are ingredients, pinheads if you like, out of which
a shining theme emerges. It is that war has healed in England
the break between man and man which in The Magnetic Mountain
the poet had deplored. A common foe, a common need, and a
common hope make poet and farmer feel as one. Lewis is able,
therefore, to write, that,

Image or fact, we both in the countryside
Have found our natural law, and until invaders
Come will answer its need: for both of us, hope
Means a harvest from small beginnings --- (1)

The tragedy of the situation is that it has taken a war to
make Englishmen feel their program with their whole selves.
It is a situation which makes one wonder what prodigious
achievements in peace would result if the heroism, devotion,
self-sacrifice, enthusiasm, and genius that is wasted in
war could be conjured up and channelled into constructive
works. Lewis, himself, expresses in prose the effect which
war had in restoring "long-lost kinship" to the people of
England:

That common experience created an
impulse towards community - an
impulse which for the ordinary man
meant an enlargement of imaginative
sympathy, so that he became, quite
simply, more cooperative, more friendly,
more serious. (2)

(2) C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, 110.
The verse in "Watching Post" is simple without being shallow. The mood is quiet, hopeful, subdued but happy.

The "Stand-To" tells of an experience two months later, when Hitler massed his invasion barges "on the other side". Lewis is in command of thirty nondescript men ordered out to guard a village. At dawn the men stand down and go home. The poem is written in praise of the heroic spirit of these "ragtag fighters of lane and shadow", and of the

--- love that has grown
Familiar as working-clothes, faithful as bone to bone. (1)

The insistence with which Lewis srites of the love between man and man, and the frequency with which he uses the imagery of "bone" or "blood" to describe its fundamental importance almost becomes monotonous. The real value of the experiences related in "Watching Post" and "Stand-To" is the knowledge that the stress and strain of England's national emergency has created "that human reaching out of hands towards the warmth in all things" which Lewis calls love. War has cancelled out a multiplicity of conflicting motives; it has made life simpler, and linked all men to a single goal which breathes and burns within them. Unfortunately the bond of fellowship will die when the crisis of war which created it is gone. The temporary character of the fellowship does not invalidate it, however.

(1) Short Is The Time, "The Stand-To", ll. 31-32.
Every reader of Lewis' war poems must feel how different in tone they are from the war poems of the last war. There is in them no fanaticism of any kind, either for or against the war. Since Lewis was not an actual combatant there is little to be found in his verse of the physical horrors of war, such as were typical of Sassoon, Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg. This isolation from actual battle is possibly an advantage, for it makes the perspective better. Francis Scarfe has said that "a good war poem must also be a good peace poem" (1), and I feel that many of Sassoon's poems are better war poems than peace poems. The experience has not been sufficiently de-personalized; the poem is too close to the experience. Lewis always uses the physical details of the war as a trellis upon which to train some green thoughts. Scarfe goes on to say that "the best war poetry is necessarily written, not by those who see war, but by those who feel it intensely". (2) Lewis does feel the war intensely. But what specifically is the poet's attitude to the war?

PART THREE

The strong note of resignation which characterized some of the poems discussed in Chapter VII is shown equally by the war poems. The poet's attitude is succinctly expressed in the poem, "Where Are The War Poets?" The poem answers the

(1) F. Scarfe, op. cit., 170.
(2) F. Scarfe, op. cit., 170.
question about the apparent lack of songs and poems of this war. The query was based on a popular misconception; namely, that the state of mind existing between 1914 and 1918 was the same state of mind as that existing during the last war. Such, obviously, was not the case. A changed state of mind is exemplified in "Where Are The War Poets?" The poem follows in its entirety:

They who in folly or mere greed
enslaved religion, markets, laws,
Borrow our language now and bid
Us to speak up in freedom's cause.

It is the logic of our times,
No subject for immortal verse -
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse. (1)

The strength of this poem lies in the fact that its subject concerns two wars, not one. Obviously, the poem is concerned with the war against Germany and Italy, the idea being that though capitalist democracy is not perfect, it is better than, and must be defended against, Fascism. The other war with which the poem is concerned is implied, not stated. It is the war at home between the forces of capitalist authority, and the working classes; the war between reaction and progress. Lewis is a participant of both wars. While defending the bad on one level, Lewis was attacking it on another. Thousands of others were doing likewise.

Other poems reveal more of the poet's attitude to the recently concluded war. "Word Over All" satisfies Wilfrid

(1) Short Is The Time, "Where Are The War Poets?", 76.
Owen's definition that the poetry is in the pity. The poem is the expression of the poet's profound sense of pity for the "millions fated to flock down weeping roads to mere oblivion". The poem contains the opposite emotion too, anger at the

---- preachers, the politicians weaving
Voluble charms around
This ordeal, conjuring a harvest that shall spring from
Our hearts' all-harrowed ground. (1)

Once again the twin wars - against foreign foes and civil reactionaries - are implicit in the poem. The poem ends with the expression of a faith that mankind, in spite of setbacks, will march ever onward.

About the "Ode To Fear", in relation to the other war poems, William Rose Benet has written:

Considering his more sombre poems, I have read nothing as good about the mood of England under intensive bombing. (2)

"Ode To Fear" ends on a note of submission to the present and faith in the future, as "Word Over All" does. It is significant to observe that in this poem Lewis places the guilt for the war squarely on the head of every individual in society. As for the sex-crime of an earlier poem, all men share the guilt for the war; fecit per alium fecit per se. This sense of communal guilt is passionately expressed in the following lines:

But wh, what drug, what knife
Can wither up our guilt at the root,
Cure our discoloured days and cleanse the
blood of life? (1)

It is the anguished cry of a super-sensitive man who feels the
guilt of the whole world within himself. The feeling is so
intense, it takes on the force of personal shame. Voluntary
inaction, soft option, dream retreat - these he is guilty of
himself. It is not a mere rhetorical flourish which he makes
in "The Dead", when he writes:

Each man dies for the sins of a whole world. (2)

One final poem must have a passing mention here. The
four quatrains of a poem called "Reconciliation" express the
feelings of a tank-man dying on the desert beside his burnt-
out machine. The first quatrain contains a striking image
which is one of Lewis' most original:

All day beside the shattered tank he'd lain
Like a limp creature hacked out of its shell,
Now shrivelling on the desert's grid. (3)

The remaining three stanzas are bits of impressionism. The
eyes blur, visions and noises accompany death's delirium,
and then he dies:

Then, in a heavenly calm,
The lock-gates open, and beyond
Appear the argent, swan-assembled reaches. (4)

There is a suggestion of ineffable peace in these lines, and
on this note the poem ends.

(1) Short Is The Time, "Ode To Fear", 11. 33-35.
(2) Short Is The Time, "The Dead", 1. 16.
(3) Short Is The Time, "Reconciliation", 11. 1-3.
(4) Short Is The Time, "Reconciliation", 11. 14-16.
To summarize, I have divided Lewis' war poems into three classes: the pre-war poems which warn of impending conflict; the poems which are the result of the poet's own experiences during the air-raids; and finally the poems which explain the poet's attitude to the war. His attitude is one of acceptance of the inevitable, but it is an acceptance made meaningful by the fact that he has never ceased to attack the evils in the very society which he is defending. He feels personal shame for the guilt of society, but he is proud of man's heroism and dignity, and is hopeful that the new-found sense of communal intimacy which war has inspired among Englishmen will eventually be a reality in a peaceful world as well. The spirit of England at war should animate England at peace, and one day it will do so.

One question remains. Does he express anywhere a faith that war will be abolished? The poem, "Will It Be So Again?" supplies an answer of sorts; but the answer appears to be a begging of the question that is shallow and sentimental. Perhaps, however, it is the only answer. Lewis simply says that it is the responsibility of all men, by an act of will, to prevent a third war:

Shall it be so again?
Call not upon the glorious dead
To be your witnesses then.
The living alone can sail to their promise
the ones who said
It shall not be so again. (1)

(1) Short Is The Time, "Will It So Again", ll. 21-25.
And we are reminded of what Arnold said in "The Scholar Gipsy":

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade.
CHAPTER IX

EMOTIONAL LOGIC

PART ONE

Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair. (1)

Not only are these two images tied together by
what I should venture to call "emotional
logic": their component parts - the ideas, for
example of brightness, of falling, and of air -
have been brought into an association from
which each of them profits and to which (the
complete image) each contributes, just as each
complete image contributes to and profits from
the poem as a whole. (2)

It is with these words that Lewis explains the nice congruity
which various images in a poem have for one another, a
congruity making for consistency of impression and making one
see, with almost the force of revelation, the similar in the
dissimilar. The process by which the poet selects his
images to create a desired emotional response he calls
"emotional logic". The term, I think, is a good one, in
spite of the paradox which the words "emotional" and "logic"
seem to imply. The term, "emotional coherence", might be
substituted for "emotional logic", without distorting in
any way the meaning which Lewis intended, and such a term
would avoid the seemingly irrelevant complications which
his term brings in. The very paradox of Lewis' term, however,

(1) Thomas Nashe, "A Lament in Time of Plague", II. A Pageant
of Elizabethan Poetry, ed. A. Symons, London,
Blackie and Son, p. 356, ll. 17-18.
(2) The Poetic Image, 35.
is stimulating, and I propose to use it and extend its meaning to serve as a heading for the discussion of the entire subject of form and technique including the use of imagery and symbolism.

The use of the term, "emotional Logic", demands, however, rather meticulous explanation. A successful poem ordinarily employs both intellectual (or logical, or rational) coherence, and emotional coherence, though one of these may be strongly predominant in the poem. If intellectual coherence predominates, the images or parts are held together mainly by their logical connections. The connection, for instance, may be by the result of a cause and effect relationship, or of a movement from the general to the particular, or of the chronological sequence of events. If emotional coherence predominates the images or parts are held together by connections that are non-rational or non-logical. The connection may be the result of the feeling that two images or ideas are suitable to be presented together, either because they are capable of evolving identical, or similar, or even related emotional responses; or because they are capable of producing different or even contradictory responses which serve the purpose of contract, as a black ornament on a white dress heightens the whiteness of the dress. A non-rational sequence of images involving a contrast of this kind creates the kind of emotional unity that Lawrence called polarity. Polarity is a word derived from physics, and it
means that a magnet is a magnet because the opposite north and south poles are present. They are the opposites which are necessary to make a unity. When I. A. Richards wrote about the idea of "inclusion" or "inclusive unity" in the Principles of Literary Criticism (1), he too was referring to the polarity of opposite or contradictory ideas which is to be found in some poems.

When the relation between the parts of a poem depends on emotional sequence, the coherence is often more difficult to discover, but it is none the less there, and frequently the discovery of the connection results in a greater thrill of pleasure than would be the case if a logical connection had been used. It follows that emotional coherence can be explained; that is to say, it is "emotional logic". Therefore, a poem depending predominately on emotional coherence can have a logical coherence superimposed upon it. Professor Hunter Lewis has pointed out to me that the lines from Nashe which Lewis uses to exemplify emotional logic, and which were quoted in the introductory excerpt, might be rephrased so as to use rational rather than emotional coherence. If this were done, the quotation might be transcribed as follows:

The thieving night slays beauty
As brightness falls from the air -
Strips from the sun's world glory,
As queens have died young and fair.


(2) I am indebted for much of the material in the introductory part of this chapter to Mr. Hunter Lewis, who has guided the writing of this essay with patience and forbearance.
By making this change, the effect which Nashe contrived is diluted of course, because the introduction of a "story" and of a forthright comparison decreases the immediacy of the effect and hence lowers its intensity. The significant thing to note, however, is that even when a poem has intellectual coherence, it really depends upon the emotional coherence (which it must also have) for the qualities which make it a poem. Hence, the emotional and intellectual connections in a poem, themselves make a polarity without which the poem, like the magnet, cannot exist.

Whether the poem depends on emotional coherence or rational coherence, there are numerous non-rational devices or techniques that are necessary to the creation of a poem. Such things as the length and quality of lines, the very fact that there are lines, sound texture, rhythm, metre, and the ordering of words are non-rational devices. Although these devices have emotional consequences, they have no specific thought or feeling content, and are therefore different from the elements which enter into the creation of emotional coherence.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the form of Lewis' poetry from two points of view: from the point of view of the coherence (emotional or logical or both) of a poem, which will necessarily involve the whole poem; and secondly, from the point of view of the non-rational devices
such as rhyme or rhythm or stanza form, which will involve the parts of a poem. Because I prefer to begin with the parts and end with the whole, I propose to deal with the latter of the two aspects first.

Many critics have warned of the dangers involved in the examination of the parts of a poem. One of these dangers lies in the fact that in the concern for a particular part of a poem, one is prone to forget that the poem is an organic whole, and that the effect of any particular part has meaning only in so far as it contributes to the effect of the whole poem. Lewis himself warns of this danger, when he writes that "if the subject is not a cadaver before you start dissecting, it soon becomes one".

Lewis himself warns of this danger, when he writes that "if the subject is not a cadaver before you start dissecting, it soon becomes one". I. A. Richards adds his voice in warning:

This trick of judging the whole by the detail, instead of the other way about, of mistaking the means for the end, the technique for the value, is in fact much the most successful of the snares which waylay the critic.

Nevertheless, analysis is inevitable in any form of criticism. Criticism cannot possibly work without it. However, one must be careful not to view the parts in isolation. If criticism dissects in order to view the parts in isolation, it is faulty; if it dissects so as to view the nice relationship between the parts, it is valuable. And so, like so many other questions in literary criticism, the problem of analysis.

(1) The Poetic Image, 40.
(2) Richards, op. cit., p. 24.
comes down to a matter of balance, of emphasis. After the clock has been taken apart, and something has been learned about its mechanism, it must be put together again, for, after all, a clock has no meaning outside its functional one. This, then, is the order of procedure that I shall follow in this chapter: first, the parts of the whole, and secondly, the whole of the parts.

PART TWO

All art is characterized by a quality called rhythm. In painting, rhythm may be created by the motion of a line or by the pleasing disposition of related masses of color, or configurations, or areas, so that the eye moves in an orderly way from part to part. Rhythm in painting is necessarily visual. Rhythm in poetry is auditory, for even when the poem is read silently, one notices the rhythm in the mind as though it were being read aloud. The mind has an ear as well as an eye. The basic quality of rhythm, no matter in which art it may occur, is a motion governed by some particular law imposed by the artist. Rhythm in poetry may be defined as a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables recurring regularly within the line.

Rhythm is pleasant for its own sake, for the discovery, and often the iteration, of the law by which a piece of music, or a painting, or a poem moves, appeals to some deep-
seated desire in a man for order. Now though rhythm is pleasant for its own sake, it is not in art an end in itself. In poetry, for instance, it is a device which contributes to the effect of the entire poem. It may poise the crest of the sound on certain key words, giving them emphasis by stress or position; it may reflect, by changing its quality, the various moods of poetry; or it may heighten the meaning of a line by helping to create an onomatopoetic effect.

The rhythm of a particular poem could conceivably be selected by a poet on rational grounds. More generally, however, the rhythm unconsciously imposes itself on the thoughts or feelings because it suits them, or it is worked out by trial and error by the poet, who finally selects one because he feels it is right.

In matters of rhythm, Lewis is a versatile technician, for he employs a great many varieties. A good deal has been written about his use of so-called "sprung rhythm". This term was used by Hopkins to describe his own prosody in which the stress rather than the syllabic foot is the constant. The term may be new, but the idea was not new even in Hopkin's day. Coleridge explained in the "Christabel" preface his use of this kind of metre in the poem. Going even further back in history, Anglo-Saxon versification linked the stressed syllables in different half-lines by alliteration of the same initial consonant or vowel sounds. Alliteration always
occurred in a stressed syllable, and there were two of these stressed syllables in each half-line. The first one in the second half-line always contained the alliterative letter, while in the first half-line the alliteration sometimes occurred in both stressed syllables, sometimes only in the first, and occasionally only in the second.

These details of Old English versification are necessary in order to determine how closely Lewis' "sprung rhythm" approximates the Anglo-Saxon. "Poem Twelve" of From Feathers To Iron offers the closest parallel to Anglo-Saxon versification I can find. Five of the lines follow:

As one Who wanders into old workings
Dazed by the noonday desiring coolness,
Has found retreat barred by fall of rockface
Gropes through galleries where granite bruises
Taut palm and panic patter close at heel.

I took the liberty of dividing the hemistichs, but no such aid is necessary to observe the similarity which exists between Lewis' verse and Old English verse. On the other hand, there are obvious points of difference. In the first line, for instance, the second, not the first, stressed syllable in the second half-line, contains the alliterative letter, which is "w". On the whole, Lewis is not trying to reproduce the versification of Anglo-Saxon alliterative poetry, but is trying to use some of its effects.
In *The Magnetic Mountain* Lewis uses this versification frequently. An example follows:

Getters not begetters; gainers not beginners;  
Whiners, no winners; no triers, betrayers;  
Who steer by no star, whose moon means nothing. (1)

With the exception of the first line, this excerpt departs from the strict rules of Anglo-Saxon versification, though it has qualities which are unmistakably derived from it. The use of the negative in all three lines, for instance, approximates the "litotes" of Anglo-Saxon poetry, which was a figure of speech in which "an affirmative was expressed by the negative of its opposite". Another characteristic of Old English poetry was the use of "kennings", which were metaphors by which an object was mentioned not directly but by its attributes. Thus the sea is described as "the whale-path", and the devil as the "soul-slayer". Sometimes many "kennings" for the same object were piled up one after the other creating a ponderous effect quite unique in poetry, I believe. Occasionally Lewis imitates the Old English use of such "kennings", as in the following lines:

A beater to windward, obedient to rudder,  
A steamer into storm, a hurricane-rider,  
Foam-stepper, star-steerer, freighter and fighter -  
(2)

Sometimes the temptation to create a novel effect results in lines such as:

Is it your hope, hope's hearth, hearth's home,  
here at the lane's end? (3)

(3) *A Time To Dance*, "Moving In", 1.1.
This line, however, owes more to Hopkins than to Old English poetry. In general, Lewis' alliterative metres give the suggestion of Old English versification without conforming strictly to the rules of Anglo-Saxon prosody. It should be noted, furthermore, that in the total collection of Lewis' poems, those which approximate Anglo-Saxon versification form a very small minority. Lewis' indebtedness to Old English poetry has been exaggerated. Nor can I find any direct influence of John Skelton's metres. The succession of short "breathless" lines, rhyming in no set order, which Skelton generally used, and which has been imitated by some contemporary poets, Auden for one, does not find a place in Lewis' poetry. Sometimes, it is true, Lewis does use the short line, as in "Poem Twelve" of The Magnetic Mountain or in "Spring Song", but his rhymes in these poems are regular, and his rhythms lack the choppy abandon of the "Skeltoniads".

The influence of Hopkin's style, on the contrary, is apparent in many of his poems. The line quoted previously from "Moving In" owes much to lines such as:

Oh why are we so haggard at the heart,
So dare-coiled, care-killed, so fagged,
So fashed, so cogged, so cumbered. (1)

One might notice the resemblance between Hopkin's line and the following quotation:

If anywhere love-lips, flower-flaunt,
crimson of cloud-crest

(1) Hopkins, "The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo", 1.44.
With flames impassioned hold off the pacing shadows -
You can rest indulgent ---- (1)

Such lines as these have the verbal music, the alliteration and the assonance, the hyperbaton, the constant caesura which are so consistently employed by the Jesuit poet.

Possibly the most successful use of "sprung rhythm" is to be found in the narrative portion of "A Time To Dance". The rhythm of this poem is peculiarly fitting to the subject. The speedy virility, the constant caesura which suggests resembling changes in a plane's direction, the freedom given by the use of accentual units; all combine to suggest the precarious and uneven flight of an obsolete plane:

Air was all ambushes round them, was avalanche earthquake
Quicksand, a funnel deep as doom, till climbing steep
They crawled like a fly up the face of perpendicular night
And levelled, finding a break
At fourteen thousand feet. (2)

The movement of these lines is topsy-turvy in the first two; smooth and graceful in the third, like the steady climb of a plane; regular and quiet in the fourth and fifth, each change of rhythm imitating the various stages of the plane's flight. And when the plane levels off, the verse levels off.

If Lewis frequently makes spectacular use of unusual rhythms, the great bulk of his poetry conforms to the

(1) Short Is The Time, "Overtures To Death", "Poem Three", 11. 32-34.
(2) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 35-36.
traditional types of prosody. He uses every type of line; dimeters, trimeters, tetrameters, and pentameters; and he uses every type of metre except, if my search has been thorough, the amphibrach foot. The success of any metre depends largely on the variations which the poet is able to play on it, using the normal pattern as the theme. Lewis is adept in this manipulation of rhythm, creating pleasing auditory effects, and fitting the speed and quality of the rhythms to the sense.

The variations which Lewis makes in his blank verse creates a flexible, even a sinuous medium. His blank verse loses some of the majesty usually associated with "the mighty line", but it gains by coming closer than traditional blank verse to the rhythms of every-day speech. These qualities are discernible in the following lines:

It is they, your damned auxiliaries, must answer
For the self-slain in the foodless, fireless room,
For stunted hearts that droop by our olive-green Canals, the blossom of children untimely shattered
By their crazed, random fire, and the fear like a black frost
Foreshortening our prospect, metallic on our tongues. (1)

The conversational tone of this blank verse is singularly fitting to the poem, which is a rather intimate chit-chat with death, about his regal dispensations and his not so regal henchmen, "his damned auxiliaries".

As he does with rhythm, so with rhyme Lewis finds new

(1) Short Is The Time, "Overtures To Death, Poem Three", 11.40-45.
uses for old techniques. Rhyme is a very old technique. Like rhythm it is auditory and pleasing for its own sake. Rhyme, like rhythm, is based on the desire in man for regular repetition dictated by a definable law. If rhyme is valuable for its own sake, it is valuable too in that it may serve other ends. It may give emphasis, for instance, to words; or mark off the physical limits within which an idea is to be expressed, as it does in the classical couplet; or, by linking lines in a stanza, act as a valuable integrating device. When these uses are ignored and rhyme is used as an end in itself, it frequently degenerates into a state and unprofitable fetish. Rhymes may become stale, too, from overuse, for the human ear craves variety. "As soon as rhyme is worn threadbare," writes Robert Graves, "the ear anticipates the echo and is contemptuous of the clumsy trick." (1)

It was to satisfy his own insistent craving for variety that Lewis sought fresh and stimulating rhymes. In his departure from tradition in this regard, Lewis followed his literary ancestors, especially Wilfrid Owen. Just as a versifier may play a variation on a certain metrical pattern by approximating but not identically following the norm, so he may play a variation on rhyme by approximating but not repeating exactly the initial sound. He may (1) repeat only the consonant sound and thus create a consonantal rhyme, such as "affair-fire"; (2) repeat only the vowel sound and

create an assonantal rhyme, such as "sonnet - porridge";
(3) repeat a vowel which itself only approximates the initial vowel, and create a half or partial rhyme, such as "terrible - parable". Lewis makes use of consonantal, assonantal, and partial rhymes continually, and he has done so from the start. The first poem of Transitional Poem has rhymes like "reason - poison", "hooks - Flux", "wive - give", and "mind - stand". Examples of consonantal rhymes selected as random from his poems are: "safe - surf", "home - him", "sparse - spires", and "coinage - earnage". Examples of assonantal rhymes are: "squander - comrades" and "grief - ear"; while the partial rhymes are exemplified by "flown - dawn", "eye - multiplicity", and "turns - fawns". Consonantal and half-rhymes are to be found in profusion, but assonantal rhymes are rarer than one might suppose.

Sometimes Lewis gives one the impression that his slant-rhymes, as all of the three types previously defined are called, result from an impatience which will not allow him time to find a purer rhyme. Slant-rhymes, however, have their place. Frequently such rhymes give a striking effect of muted bells. But there is a limit beyond which the laws of rhyme cannot be relaxed without destroying altogether the effect of rhyme. Possibly such rhyme as "home - warm", "bay - sky", and "rich - budge" exceed this limit. In any case the use of slant-rhymes served to enlarge the stock of rhyme words and revivify a device which badly needed a transfusion.
The purest kind of rhyme, I suppose, is made by the repetition of identical words. Lewis uses identical rhyme words occasionally, though the reader is not likely to notice the fact unless he is actually plotting rhyme schemes. "Poem Three" of Transitional Poem uses each of the following words twice to make the rhymes: "sunlight", Sphinx", Surrender", "Worm", and "of". The only exception is the rhyming of "terrible" with "parable" which may be regarded as a partial rhyme, consonantal in its last half. "Departure In The Dark" uses a similar rhyming system, for the second, and seventh lines in each eight-line stanza employ identical rhyme words.

The repetition of identical or similar sounds may occur within a line as well as at the end of the line. The exploitation of this melopoeic device reached a high point of intensity in the verse of Hopkins, and it is not surprising, therefore, to see his heirs; Lewis among them make the most of alliteration, assonance, and internal rhyme to create verbal music. This quality is noticeable in the following lines:

This was your world and this I owe you,
Room for growing, a site for building,
The braced sinew, the hands agreeing,
Mind for foreseeing and nerve for facing. (1)

Hopkins uses verbal harmony of this kind continually, as a natural idiom. The effect of such a poem as "Spelt From Sibyl's Leaves" is similar to that of a violin concerto which is all cadenza. Hopkins never lets up. There is continual (1) The Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Eight", 11 1-4.
virtuosity, and it puts something of a strain on the reader. Sometimes I am heretical enough to feel that Hopkins' virtuoso poetry would be even more effective if contrasted with periods of lull, of suspended animation. Now, if Lewis never attains to the fever-pitch of Hopkins' virtuosity, (possibly because, having a cooler temperament, he never tries), yet he reveals competence in alternating sound passages pitched in a high key with passages pitched in a low key. The effect is one of a refreshing shower after a hot spell, or, of the smith plunging the fused glowing metal into the cold water. That is the way metal is tempered. A good example of variety in tonal pitch is seen in Poems Eleven and Twelve of The Magnetic Mountain. In "Poem Eleven", the smugness of the hypocrite preacher is pitched in a low sound key, while the succeeding poem, containing the poet's angry denunciation, is definitely a coloratura performance. The contrast is sharp and effective. In the Nabara, too, there are moments of stasis in the midst of the fierce battle, during which the poet makes a generalization and the reader can find his bearings. It is altogether appropriate that the rise and fall of sound intensity should parallel a similar fluctuation in poetic intensity.

Lewis' ingenuity in making something new out of something old is evident in the uses he find for old stanza forms. The twenty sonnets he has written to date have twelve different rhyme schemes. In the second, sixth, and ninth sonnets of
"O Dreams, O Destinations", the rhyme scheme resembles the Petrarchan sonnet in the octave, but ends with the Shakesperian couplet. The rhyme scheme is abba, cddc, effe, gg. The same scheme is repeated in "Maple and Sumach". A variation of this pattern is to be found in two other sonnets of the "O Dreams", sequence, and in "When They Have Lost", in which the rhyme scheme is typically Shakesperian; namely, abab, cddc, efef, gg. Sometimes he turns the Shakespearian sonnet upside down, beginning instead of ending with the couplet, and following with the quatrains. "Sonnet Four" of "O Dreams" is of this type, beginning with:

Our youthtime passes down a colonnade
Shafted with alternating light and shade.

In the quatrains which follow, Lewis goes on to expand the generalization expressed in the opening couplet. This procedure seems justified because it follows the sound logical sequence from general to particular.

Not all of Lewis' sonnets use a couplet. Sonnets Seven and Eight of "O Dreams", "The Image", "Sonnet For A Political Worker", and "The Lighted House", each employs a modified Petrarchan form, the latter rhyming abba, abba, cdd, cdd. "The Lighted House" is unusual in employing partial rhymes in the sestet. Usually in his sonnets, Lewis makes only pure rhymes. "Poem Twenty-Four" of From Feathers To Iron is singular too, in that the rhyme scheme of this sonnet is composed of four tercets and a concluding couplet. There are a number
of poems which look like sonnets, in that they consist of fourteen iambic pentameter lines divided into thought units which resemble couplets and quatrains. They are not couplets or quatrains, however, nor are these poems true sonnets, because there is no rhyme at all. The compression of word and thought which is one of the necessary features of the sonnet, is achieved in these poems, without the added difficulty of a complex rhyme scheme. "Poem Twenty-Seven" and the "Epilogue" of From Feathers To Iron each consists of three of these poems.

Lewis writes at his best when he pours his poetry into firm moulds. The sonnet compels him to be concise, and sometimes, by its very compression, generates the heat necessary for great poetry. So, in the sonnet sequence, "0 Dreams, O Destinations", Lewis wrote probably the best contemplative verse he has written to date. I will examine one of these sonnets later in this chapter, when I discuss occlusion.

Lewis is very fond of the four-line stanza, used in every possible combination of rhyme and line-length. "Overtures To Death" uses the quatrain in six out of the seven poems in the cycle. A typical quatrain follows:

Now Death he is the bailiff
And he sits in our best room
Appraising chintz and ornaments
And the child in the womb. (1)

This stanza rhymes abcb, but he also uses 'aa bb, or abab, or abca, and sometimes, as in "Poem One" of From Feathers To Iron.

(1) Short Is The Time, "Overtures To Death", "Poem Two", 11. 13-16.
no rhyme at all. It is not surprising to find Lewis using this simple four-line stanza as a ballad metre. This he does in the superb imitation ballad, entitled, "Johnny-Head-In-Air", which was discussed in an earlier chapter.

Speaking of imitation, it should be noted that Lewis has a flair for burlesque satire. The concluding sections of A Time To Dance include burlesques of jazz-songs, radio commercials, famous Elizabethan lyrics, and nursery rhymes, all directed towards a didactic end. The parody on the "Passionate Shepherd To His Love" begins in this manner:

Come, live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
Of peace and plenty, bed and board,
That chance employment may afford. (1)

The use of an idyllic pastoral, with all its pleasant rural connotations, as the basis of a bitter satire on the evils of town life in a capitalist depression is a masterful stroke which would have pleased the fancy of Jonathan Swift. The burlesque on the nursery rhyme near the end of "A Time To Dance" is especially mordant, because children suffer the results of malnutrition and poverty even more than others in a depressed society. The poem follows in its entirety:

Oh hush thee, my baby,
Thy cradle's in pawn:
No blankets to cover thee
Cold and forlorn.
The stars in the bright sky
Look down and are dumb
At the heir of the ages
Asleep in a slum.

(1) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", p. 54.
The hooters are blowing
No heed let him take;
When baby is hungry
'Tis best not to wake.
Thy mother is crying,
Thy dad's on the dole:
Two shillings a week is
The price of a soul. (1)

This burlesque compounds the emotions of pity and indignation into a devastating indictment of a society which permits children to suffer from malnutrition. The poem is for me a poignant experience, for the poverty described in the poem was just as real in Vancouver East during the depression as it was in Manchester. The effect of the poem is enhanced by the bare simplicity of the material, and the gentle trisyllabic metre is in sharp contrast to the fierce indignation which smoulders beneath the placid surface.

By ironically turning the pastorals, and nursery rhymes to a didactic end, Lewis was finding a new use for an old bottle. In the fashioning of a new type of imagery, however, Lewis was finding an old use for a new bottle. It is always dangerous to claim that a poet invented or discovered this or that, because it is nearly always possible to go back in literature and find prior examples. In a very real sense, there is nothing new under the sun. Therefore it is not wise to assert that Lewis, or Spender, or Auden was the first to use the machine image. Even the old English scops derived imagery from their primitive machines: wheels, weapons, horns, sailing tackle, and similar things. The English metaphysical poets consistently used the imagery of the mariner's compass,

(1) A Time To Dance, "A Time To Dance", pp. 54-55.
the geographer's compasses, pulleys, telescopes, globes, planispheres, epicycles, and the like. These are technical images, machine images of a sort. Of course the machines of today have developed in variety and extent to an importance not dreamed of by the Elizabethans. But the fact remains, that when Lewis uses a machine image, he is not doing something different in kind, but only in degree. Lewis was the first poet (Transitional Poem ante dates Auden's first volume) to use machine imagery consistently is a natural expression in modern times. He was the first to draw people's attention to the nearly untapped resources of imagery which the machine-world provided. Lewis thinks naturally in terms of machinery, and it is nearly always metaphor rather than simile which he uses. The human body may be expressed in terms of an aeroplane, as in the following excerpt:

Bodies we have, fabric and frame designed
To take the stress of love,
Buoyant on gust, multi-engined. (1)

A machine-age metaphor is used again to describe the womb:

There is a dark room,
The locked and shuttered womb
Where negative's made positive. (2)

The womb is here described as the generator room of an electrical power house, and there is, I think, nothing strained or unnatural in the comparison.

Of course there is always the danger that the rapid progress of science may date machine imagery. Aeroplanes and

(1) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Four", ll. 11-13.
(2) From Feathers To Iron, "Poem Eleven", ll. 1-3.
dynamos may be obsolete in a hundred years or less. "So long as a scientific textbook is obsolete in a decade or less", wrote John Livingston Lowes, "to poetize science is to court mortality." (1) Certainly in The Magnetic Mountain, some of the machine imagery appears as undigested gobbets, which have "not turned to blood" within the poet. One does get a little tired of the metallic clang which one hears at every turning. In his later poetry, he does not flaunt the machine images; it appears naturally and quietly as a spontaneous mode of expression. Furthermore the imagery is more generalized, and is therefore less liable to become dated. A dynamo of a particular type, for instance, may become obsolete, but there is more chance of electricity remaining a force in the physical world for centuries to come, perhaps forever. I have previously referred to the effective way Lewis uses electricity in the sonnet, "For a Political Worker":

On lines beyond your single comprehension
The circuit and full day of power proceed.

The reader is scarcely aware he is looking at a machine image, and that is a sign that the imagery has been digested by the poet and by the reader. When the reader notes, with a shock or surprise, the dynamo, or the grinding gears, and he stands watching and listening to them instead of the poem, then the imagery is faulty. Images should be self-effacing, for then, in Coleridge's words, "they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant" (2)

(1) J. L. Lowes, op.cit., 298.
(2)S.T.Coleridge, op. cit., 169.
Lewis' use of machine imagery has been exaggerated by the critics. The Magnetic Mountain, to which poem these critics point, is in many ways the least typical of Lewis' poems. But even in this poem, traditional imagery is used more frequently than machine imagery. If I were to list the images Lewis most frequently uses, I would include in the list the following types: (1) the geology image, as in "Poem For An Anniversary"; (2) the frontier image, as in "Poem Thirteen" of From Feathers To Iron; (3) the ice-age image, as in "Poem Seven" of The Magnetic Mountain; (4) the sun or light image, as in "Poem Thirty-Six" of The Magnetic Mountain; the bird image, as in "Sonnet Nine" of "O Dreams"; and the sport or athletic image, as in "Poem Thirty-Four" of The Magnetic Mountain. Space will not permit a quotation for each type of imagery; possibly two examples will suffice. Examples of the geological image and the athletic image follow:

A molten rage shook earth from head to toe,
Seas leapt from their beds
World's bedrock boiling up, the terrible lava
Now it is not so. (1)

Happy at might talking
Of the demon bowler cracked over the elm-trees,
The reverse pass that won the match. (2)

The sports which Lewis most often refers to are cricket and English rugby, and both sports find their way into the above excerpt.

The question now arises as to the manner in which Lewis uses his images. First of all, his juxtaposed images (1) A Time To Dance, "Poem For An Anniversary", ll. 3-6. (2) The Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Thirty-Four", ll. 41-43.
generally are characterized by a high degree of congruity. Whether the link between two successive images is an intellectual coherence, or an emotional coherence, these images are congruous if the similarity between them which is being revealed is a true similarity. The similarity may be a physical likeness, or the two objects may create either similar or opposite emotional responses. Usually Lewis employs logical coherence, and the mental leap needed to pass from image to image is not very great. Lewis is not one of those whose entire meaning lies within the images or symbols of the poem. He uses statement to conduct the passage from image to image. There is a definite cause-effect relationship, in most of his poems, and for that reason, he is not an obscure poet. And yet a large number of people who have heard of Lewis, but who are not really familiar with his work, have the idea that he is an obscure and difficult poet. Of the three poets, Auden, Spender, and Lewis, I find Auden the most difficult, and Lewis the least.

Occasionally, it is true, Lewis does write in the way that John Donne wrote "A Valediction of Weeping". In this poem, Donne describes the thoughts which come to him as he experiences the tearful parting with his wife prior to a sea-voyage. The tears, being round, suggest a ball, which in its turn, being a sphere, suggests the earth. The same ball later suggests the moon, which brings with it images and ideas of the tides, of storms, and of death by drowning. This
method of progression is an important one, and I suppose all poets must use it to a greater or lesser degree. The process is called "free association" or sometimes, "telescoping". The latter term is good, because it suggests the pulling out of the ideas, which always maintain a necessary relation, one to the other, like the segments of a telescope.

An example of "free association" is to be found in "Departure In The Dark". Departure implies distance, distance in space brings the idea of distance in time. Thus he conjures up an image of the ice-age:

And memories sleep
Like mammoths in lost caves.

"The Passover" being a departure, and being distant in time, and representing in itself a lineal distance, comes to mind in the third stanza. The bridge leading to a discussion of the Israelites is crossed in stanza four. Finally, departure means death, the last of man's dark departures. So the poem ends. Speaking of the great Elizabethans, T. S. Eliot referred to the technique of "free association" when he wrote:

They had a quality of sensuous thought,
of thinking through the senses, or of the senses thinking

The technique of "free association" is an intriguing one, and it lends itself admirably to the world of myriad and conflicting sensations in which we live. Lewis revealed in "Departure In The Dark" a consummate mastery of this technique, and it is a pity he does not use it more often. I have searched the poems through for other examples, but so far as I know,

"Departure In The Dark" is the only poem which uses the technique extensively.

Lewis frequently uses imagery from nature to intensify or elaborate a theme. Imagery is used in this way, for instance, in "Regency Houses" and in "Landscapes". In the latter poem, the autumn evening falling about the dissolution of an old mansion keys the mood and gives one a perfect idea of how the poet regards the dissolution of society. Sometimes Lewis uses a key image, or sensuous key word which he repeats throughout the poem. By its very repetition, it repeatedly evokes the emotional response connected with it, and achieves a cumulative emphasis. The key image of "Poem Sixteen" of From Feathers To Iron is an artesian well, which symbolizes the new hope a child will bring into the desert of the poet's life. In "Bombers", the sensuous key word is "embryo", which creates the desired effect by contrast. The juxtaposition of "embryo", "womb", and other words associated with life, and of guns and bombs, which are associated with death, makes life seem more dear and death more terrible than they would be without the contrast. The sensuous key word resembles the drone-pipe of a bagpipe, for it sets the key and harmonizes simultaneously. "Maple and Sumach" has "scarlet" as a key word, "February, 1936" has "grey", "The Fault" has "moonlight", and so on.

Lewis prefers to frame his imagery in an metaphor rather
than in a simile. Indeed, he uses metaphor almost to the exclusion of simile. Metaphor is a more compact figure than a simile, at once more emphatic and more conducive to the compression modern poets prize so highly. He can use simile effectively though, when he desires a more elastic relationship between his images, In"Sex-Crime", for example, he writes:

    While news-sheets are yet falling all over the town
    Like a white ash. (1)

The comparison is a good one, from the point of view of both the physical and emotional similitude involved. "Ash" carries with it ideas of fire which destroys what it burns. But it also carries with it connotations of sterility and drabness, like much of the news and the society it speaks for. Both ideas are applicable to the sex-criminal, who "can never be whole again". Another fine simile occurs in "The Nabara":

    Nervous the sea crawled and twitched like the skin
    That dreams of the chase, the kill, the blood-
    beslayered feast. (2)

Even the sea, the simile implies, feels that the offer of new victims is imminent.

In The Magnetic Mountain, Lewis fell for a while under the spell of Auden, and the Audenesque paraphernalia is everywhere evident in that poem. There is the alternate lyricism

(1) Short Is The Time, "Sex-Crime", ll. 34-35.
(2) Short Is The Time, "The Nabara", ll. 42-43.
and flatness, the emotional theme expressed in an unemotional phrase, apostrophes in the vernacular, appeal to the coterie for unanimity, and a flippant, cocky tone at times not very far from the mood of Ogden Nashe. "Poem Ten" of The Magnetic Mountain contains most of these peculiarities. The opening lines set the mood:

You'll be leaving soon, and it's up to you, boys,
Which shall it be? You must make your choice.
There's a war on, you know. Will you take your stand 
In obsolete forts or in no-man's land? (1)

At times, as in the above excerpt, the feeling of solidarity which Lewis has with Auden, Spender, Warner, and others of the group becomes so warm as to be schoolboyish. I cannot but think that lines such as the above must be a source of embarrassment to Lewis today. Take this line for instance:

Look west, Wystan, lone flyer, birdman, my bully boy! (2)

This kind of personalization of the poet's thought does not seem to be in very good taste. It is a little reminiscent of the actor who makes asides to the audience. The point must not be laboured, however, since only in The Magnetic Mountain does Lewis do this sort of thing. Furthermore, Lewis' solidarity with the coterie does not cause him to write coterie poetry. There are no private jokes or secret experiences in his poetry.

As Lewis' style has matured, he has found an increasing use for verbal paradox. Sometimes the paradox consists of the expression of beliefs contrary to those generally accepted,

(2) The Magnetic Mountain, "Poem Sixteen", 1. 1
and sometimes consists of ideas which include parts of apparently contradictory natures. He can speak, for example, of love being a cripple, faith being a bedtime story, and peace walking on knives. More and more, he compares ideas or objects with what one would least expect; he likes to discover hidden likeness, nor merely in different things, but in diametrically opposed things. He can compare love to a gang-leader, for instance, as he does in "The Assertion":

> Love's the big boss at whose side for ever slouches
> The shadow of the gunman. (1)

In finding such likenesses, he is going about the poet's old business of bringing emotional order out of material and intellectual confusion. The poet works by a kind of centripetal force, which makes a little bit of cosmos out of chaos.

**PART THREE**

The second part of this chapter has been concerned with what might be called the parts of the whole. It has been concerned with the examination and evaluation of various non-rational devices used by Lewis in the creation of whole poems. It is now time to examine and appraise the whole of the parts. It is time to look at whole poems.

I discussed Lewis' first long poem the *Transitional Poem*, rather fully in Chapter II. This poem fails to achieve wholeness, because the experience which the poem attempts to

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(1) Short Is The Time, "The Assertion", ll. 16-17.
recreate was not itself a completed experience. The desire for singleness of mind is never satisfied, and every state of reconciliation is a springboard for new leaps, new struggles. The successive lyrics of the cycle may be whole poems themselves but the sequence fails to achieve organic unity. The clear declaration of purpose which Lewis makes in the appended notes for each of the four divisions of the poem is not realized in fact. There is much confusion and overlapping, and the intended progression from part to part falls short of realization.

From *Feathers To Iron*, on the contrary, does achieve wholeness, partly because the experience is complete when the poet begins to write, and partly because the experience of impending parenthood is strong enough to draw the lyrics into a well-knit pattern. This cycle remains Lewis' most complete and most satisfactory long poem.

*A Time To Dance* has a unity of sorts. I do not refer to the ten poems which preceded the title poem. The requirements of his publishers probably demanded that all the material which Lewis then had at hand be included in the volume. I refer to the title poem itself, the unity of which is implicit rather than stated. The poem may be divided into three parts: first, the epic story of Parer and McIntosh which itself achieves wholeness; then the elegiac lines to the dead friend, L.P. Hedges; and finally the bitter satire
of contemporary society. Lewis is, of course, concerned here with opposites. The air epic is designed as a joyous hymn to the spirit that produced the airmen and Hedges, and the satire is against a society which is antithetical to that spirit. The design is clear, and yet Lewis omits bridge passages between the parts which would have made the transitions easier.

Noah and the Waters, a play not intended for the stage, achieves complete wholeness. The characters are mere puppets, but the poet cannot be criticized on that score because he never intended them to be anything else.

The Nabara is superior as drama and as poetry to Noah. It is, I believe, one of the very finest narratives of its kind in the language, and deserves to be known better than it is. The Nabara is "literatesque" in Bagehot's sense of the word, having "that perfect combination of the subject-matter of literature, which suits the art of literature". (1)

The Nabara is a whole poem.

As far as the individual lyrics are concerned, they nearly always have the kind of completeness which is the result of a fertile but orderly imagination insisting that every word and every image contribute to the total effect of the whole poem. It is a completeness which can only be illustrated by intensive examination of a whole poem. The first sonnet of "O Dreams O Destinations" exemplifies the sort of completeness I mean. The sonnet is quoted in its

entirety:

For infants time is like a humming shell
Heard between sleep and sleep, wherein the shores
Foam-fringed, wind-fluted of the strange earth dwell
And the sea's cavernous hunger faintly roars.
It is the humming pole of summer lanes
Whose sound quivers like heat-haze endlessly
Over the corn, over the poppied plains -
An emanation from the earth or sky.
Faintly they hear, through the womb's lingering haze,
A rumour of that sea to which they are born:
They hear the ringing pole of summer days,
But need not know what hungers for the corn.
They are the lisping rushes in a stream -
Grace-notes of a profound, legato dream.

The subject is infancy. The theme is that infants are as
much a part of the womb-world from which they come as of the
world into which they are born. How does the poet evoke the
mood of infancy? Does he succeed? Does he bring any serious
alien notes in, and if so how, and of what kind? Is it a
whole poem?

The sonnet begins with a superlatively evocative image
of the noise one imagines he hears in a sea-shell. This
image is especially congruous because children in particular
are fascinated by the hollow welling of sound, like sea-surf,
which one hears in the shell. The vague murmurings which
the infant must be conscious of "between sleep and sleep" is
compared to the murmurings of the shell. The sea of life is
as yet unknown to the infant, but he is conscious of its
heave and swell around him. The verbal music of words like
"humming", and "the sea's cavernous hunger faintly roars"
is onomatopoetic in the best sense of the word. The very
movement of the first quatrain is slow and indolent, like
infancy, like the hypnotic swell in the sea-shell. There is something of Keats' magic casements in faery lands forlorn in these lines. But the poem moves on.

Every child is fascinated by the humming of electrical wires. It is fitting them that the poet use this image in the second quatrain to develop the mood. Once again the movement is indolent, the sound hypnotic, again it is a "humming" sound. It is a summer's lane; the heat quivers. An infant must be kept warm, sometimes he is bundled up by the over-anxious mother so that he must endure a continual heat-haze. In line seven the first alien note creeps in. The poet mentions fields of corn and of poppies. Now both corn and poppies like heat, but the significant thing is that corn is often used to symbolize life, and the poppy to symbolize death. It is not an accident that the poet uses both in the same line. In the new world to which the baby is born, life and death are at once the forces and the mysteries which impel all things to action.

The sestet begins with a phrase, "the womb's lingering haze", which seems to me an excellent description of the state of semi-consciousness and utter helplessness which is the lot of new-born infants. One should notice the repetition of the key-word "haze". Even in a poem about in fancy, the socially-conscious poet brings in a political note. It is beautifully muted however, in perfect taste, very different from the blatant and bitter denunciations of The Magnetic
Mountain. The line, "But need not know what hungers for the corn", serves a dual role. With faint irony it hints that the world to which the infant is born is not a perfect world, and it also tells us that an infant is entirely unconscious of such matters. Thus it tells us something of the world and something of the infant. Meanwhile the imitative harmony continues. We hear the murmur in phrases like "a rumour of that sea", "the ringing pole of summer days".

The concluding couplet brings in another image, equally indolent, "the lisping rushes in a stream". The picture of the gently rhythmic movement of rushes in a meandering stream is peculiarly apt. The impression is everywhere consistent. The word "lisping" is once again associated with childhood, and there are connotations of bullrushes, the baby Moses, bullfrogs, elves and other beings which inhabit a child's fairyland. The last line ends the poem as it began - with sound and sleep.

"Grace-notes of a profound, legato dream."

I feel that this is a superb sonnet. I know of no other poem which so successfully evokes the mood of childhood. And like most good poetry, it gains from being read aloud. Day Lewis has a fine auditory imagination. The poem satisfies Day Lewis' own definition of a whole poem:

"Wholeness lies, surely, in imaginative statement which creates a pure imaginative response reaching out beyond the limits of a theme towards human experience on all sides, yet at the same time perfectly
218.

satisfied with those limits." (1)

The sonnet quoted above illustrates another quality of
good poetry which I have called the quality of **occlusion**.
By occlusion I mean the impregnating of simple verbal state-
ment with many layers of meaning. It is an enriching process
well known in chemistry, where the term occlusion is used to
define the absorption of gases by certain elements. (2) In
poetry, certain images have this same absorptive quality, en-
riching, encrusting the poetry with a meaning and significance
sometimes not clearly perceived by the poet himself. Good
poetry expresses as much by what is left unsaid as by **what** it
actually says. It is the mystery, the hidden depth which
is perhaps the most valuable quality of poetry.

T. S. Eliot refers to this quality when he writes:

> The recreation of word and image which
> happens fitfully in the poetry of such
> poets as Coleridge happens almost in-
> cessantly with Shakespeare. Again and
> again, in his use of a word, he will give
> a new meaning or extract a latent one. (3)

It is this latent quality which makes a good poem eternally
satisfying. The ore of a good poem is never depleted; new
veins of meaning are being continually brought to light. I
would venture to predict that many of Lewis' poems will be
producing new ore from newly exposed veins many years hence.

(1) *The Poetic Image*, 75.
(2) Finely-divided charcoal absorbs deleterious gases, and
palladium absorbs eight hundred to nine hundred times
its own volume of hydrogen when heated as a cathode
for decomposing water.
(3) T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*. 166.
Each of the sonnets of "0 Dreams", for instance, shows a highly developed power of occlusion, and every new reading brings a new stratum of meaning to light.

It might be argued that occlusion makes for obscurity. If it does, it is a valuable obscurity from which thought will draw new and richer meanings. The sort of purposeful obscurity which occlusion often brings should not be confused with the technical obscurity which is characteristic of much contemporary verse. Technical obscurity results from a desire which is praiseworthy in itself; the desire for compression which seeks a way to say more and more in fewer and fewer words. If such a desire results in the omission of articles, conjunctions, pronouns, noun subjects and other sentence parts, then the result is a sort of poetic telegraphese, which is certainly more brief than if these words had been used, but does not necessarily mean more. Successful compression results when the poet impregnates the words he does use with deep layers of meaning. Whether he does or does not omit connective words is beside the point.

Lewis is not, on the whole, an obscure poet. His coherence is a poem is nearly always of the logical type, and when he does progress by emotional sequence, the congruity of the images is so clear, and the emotional responses which the images evoke are so similar, that the meaning, or at least, a meaning is apparent. He does omit conjunctions, but his
ellipses are not extreme enough to turn his poems into tele­
graphese. Perhaps this is the wrong time to write about
obscurity in Lewis, however. Two years ago, when I first
read From Feathers To Iron in its entirety, I had, I re­
member, a good deal of difficulty with some of the poems.
I recall, furthermore, that it was not until after many
readings of "The Conflict" that I understood the meaning of
the first three stanzas. At first I could not find the
common denominator of a man singing on a sinking ship, a
storm-cock, and an ocean flyer running out of gas. It final­
ly occurred to me, not in a flash of revelation, but as a
gradual accretion, that all three are making the most of a
bad job, but that they really have no hope of improving
their unfortunate position.

There is a passage in Of Human Bondage which might be
used to describe how understanding gradually emerges from
obscurity. Philip, speaking to Hayward, says:

You see, it seems to me, one's like a
closed bud, and most of what one
reads and does has no effect at all,
but there are certain things that
have a peculiar significance for one,
and they open a petal; and the petals
open one by one; and at last the
flower is there. (1)

That is the way understanding usually comes, not with the speed
of revelation, but slowly, like petals opening one by one.

I am still not sure that I have grasped the meaning of

(1) S. Maugham, Of Human Bondage, New York, Sun Dial Press,
1943, 357.
a tantalizing poem called, "A Passage From Childhood", but I feel that eventually it will come, welling out of the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind. And when that time does come, I shall not know for sure when the poem stopped being a riddle and when it became clear.

PART FOUR

I began this essay with a quotation from Prometheus Unbound. Shelley, it will be remembered wrote:

Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and in another, the creations of their age.

I have tried to show how Lewis' poetry is the product of this age of uncertainties and conflicts. Chapter III showed that Transitional Poem was an attempt to achieve single-mindedness in an age which puts a premium on synthesis of any kind. Chapter III examined the poetry of erotic love, the great value of which is that it, almost alone among human activities, achieves that harmony of flesh and spirit which is the desideratum of all human activity. It is this harmony which enables love to create "perfection for a day". Chapter IV revealed Lewis' analysis of contemporary society, a society which, through its characteristics of inertia and false stimulation, prevented the harmony of flesh and spirit necessary for an integrated and happy life. Chapter V showed that the poet has suggested a political solution in socialism.
Socialism would end much of the frustration of the individual, and the stagnation of society, by repairing the divorce of body and spirit in the individual, and by creating a planned, purposeful social economy, the only purpose of which would be to minister to the material and spiritual welfare of every citizen. Chapter VI discussed the poet's idea of hero and ancestor, and the inference that heroic conduct was needed to bring society up out of the morass into which it had fallen. Chapter VII dealt with one of the many kinds of polarity which must enter into any discussion of Lewis' poetry. It is the polarity formed by the complementary nature of joy and suffering. This polarity is exemplified in Lewis' poetry by the apparently contradictory acceptance of both suffering and joy. The one accepts disillusion as the inevitable state of mankind; the other urges a passionate seizing of present joy and present beauty. Chapter VIII attempted to define Lewis' attitude to war, and to evaluate his war poems. Finally, Chapter IX has been concerned with matters of style and technique.

I think it is clear how each aspect of Lewis' poetry discussed in the above chapters shows that the poet is the creation of his age. Lewis is a poet of contemporaneity. But possibly the most interesting part of Shelley's quotation is that which claims for the poet the role of creator of the age. It is more interesting because its meaning is not so
obvious. All artists, all men, are the products of their environments. But in what sense are artists the creators of their age?

To begin with, I think that the idea of the poet being a behind-the-scenes legislator, an idea which Shelley himself broached, can be discounted. If there are examples of poems which have moved governments to pass legislation, they are a rare occurrence. Such a legislative role is more likely to be played by a novel, or an essay, or a journalistic report, or even a drama, than by a poem. Shelley undoubtedly had a more subtle meaning in mind than direct legislation when he said that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind.

Poetry works in indirect ways as a socially creative force. A poem does not legislate directly, but it does create in men higher ideals of conduct and social consciousness, and may show them new roads to truth and beauty and hope. The appreciation of a good poem somehow makes one a finer and bigger person than he was before he read it, not because the poem necessarily teaches a lesson, but because it transplants in us a fragment of a great truth, and a portion of a great beauty. Lewis describes the peculiar value of poetic appreciation in these words:

Through our experience of the poem, we are reborn - not indeed complete, for perfection is the
prerogative of art alone in this world & but, because poetry's illusion is a fertile one, a degree or two nearer the wholeness for which our selfhood strives. (1)

A poet is a sort of creator in another way too. A poet by his very nature is a superior receiving-set. He catches secret vibrations the presence of which most men are not even aware, and from these vibrations he can piece together superior information about the affairs of men. Consequently he is often aware of vast movements, whereas other men see only local and transitory trends. The poet has a superior perspective. He sees the mighty river from source to sea, while ordinary men are preoccupied with back-waters and eddies. Because of his whole view, the poet can be of inestimable service to mankind. By showing that order comes out of chaos, he helps to create his age. He makes the age more understandable to itself.

Lewis has painted a large canvas of contemporary society. Out of the tangle of confusion and aimlessness which he saw everywhere, Lewis has created for himself a pattern of the age. He has given a form to something which at first seemed utterly formless. But in so far as he created a pattern to satisfy his own craving for order, he has created a pattern for all men. The discovery of a pattern of contemporaneity is, moreover, a primary stage in the recreation of society, and the maker of such a pattern, in a very real way, is

(1) The Poetic Image, 145.
helping to create his age.

Lewis has helped to create his age by discovering it, for himself, and for all mankind.


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