

# "Writing with dreams and blood": Dylan Thomas, Marxism and 1930s Swansea

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According to his American tour manager, John Malcolm Brinnin, Dylan Thomas indulged in Left-wing noises, but his radical politics were uninformed, reckless and ineffectual:

When he had applied in London for an American visa [for his second visit], he had been subject to questions which had made him angry, but also apprehensive. ... But finally suspicions were allayed and he had received the official approval that designated him as politically harmless. This was certainly applicable.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas had aroused the interest of the authorities by attending an international writers' Peace Congress in Prague in 1949. Being in the company of one of America's most famous Communist writers, the colourful Michael Gold (1893-1967), would have compounded the offence.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Thomas continued to make outspoken political comments during his visits to America in the early 1950s, and while there he met with radical writers, artists and activists:

He was uncomfortable with the New York literati and chose, instead, to be among those who worked at the coalface. Several collaborations that receive no mention whatever in Dylan Thomas in America come from this.<sup>3</sup>

In 1950, for instance, on Thomas's first visit to America, Isaac Rosenfeld of *Partisan Review* "arranged for Thomas to give a private reading at the Cherry Lane Theater especially for local artists and writers, something Brinnin discouraged because Thomas asked for no fee."<sup>4</sup> Brinnin's comments, in the 1950s, are a measure of the shift in his own position:<sup>5</sup>

Dylan's political naïveté, it seemed to me, was a consequence of his promiscuous affection for humanity and of his need for emotional identification with the lowest stratum of society. His socialism was basically Tolstoyan, the attempt of the spiritual aristocrat to hold in one embrace the good heart of mankind, a gesture and a purpose uncontaminated by the *realpolitik* of the twentieth century. While he expressed himself strongly on political matters and tended indiscriminately to support the far left, his attitude was a kind of stance unsupported by knowledge, almost in defiance of knowledge. As long as, anywhere in the world, there existed groups of men pilloried by the forces of propertied power, Dylan wanted to be counted amongst their sympathizers.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas's friend Jack Lindsay (1900-1990) observed that "the passage about spiritual aristocracy there would have made Dylan spew over Brinnin".<sup>7</sup> Lindsay was a sophisticated intellectual who, in *The Crisis of Marxism* (1981), was able to "situate his theoretical perspective among such influential fellow Marxists as Georg Lukács, Ernest Bloch, Theodor Adorno, and Louis Althusser".<sup>8</sup> In the light of his own understanding of Marxism, and of his friendship with Thomas from 1943, Lindsay judged that it was "from his Swansea days", and "presumably to a considerable extent through Bert Trick", that Thomas "gained a secure knowledge of the essentials of dialectical materialism, which played a crucial part in determining his poetic technique".<sup>9</sup> The "dialectical method" that Thomas claimed to use in his poetry has recently been discussed at great care and length, in relation to the theories of Lacan and Kristeva, by Eynel Wardi.<sup>10</sup> The present paper will show that Thomas gained his understanding of the dialectic in the specific cultural and political situation suggested by Lindsay. I will discuss some implications of this for Thomas's work, and for his understanding of the poet's social role.

From 1933, Thomas was schooled in the independent Marxism of his older friend Bert Trick (1889-1973).<sup>11</sup> Trick was a prominent member of the Labour Party in Swansea, serving on its General Management Committee, and "one of Swansea's leading Marxists".<sup>12</sup> Writing in the *Swansea and West Wales Guardian* under the *nom de plume* '20th Century', Trick gave opinions on a wide range of Swansea issues, and this provides documentary evidence of the content of the Marxist education he gave to Thomas. For instance, on 15 July 1935, under the heading 'Plans, and Plots' Trick explains the nature and necessity of socialist planning, with Marx's *Capital* as his authority, and refers scathingly to the official Labour Party paper, the *Daily Herald*. Trick dismisses the ineffectual policies of the Labour Party: "It's a plot. A plot to perpetuate the enrichment of the rich and the impoverishment of the poor", because Labour policy was merely planned capitalism, thereby leaving the economic system still subject to the contradictions identified by Marx. On 26 July 1935, his topic was 'Class War'.

Thomas was not a member of the Labour Party, but, through Trick, he was also involved (from June 1934 to January

1936) with the *Swansea and West Wales Guardian*. This was an independent weekly paper published in Swansea and Haverfordwest from January 1934 to 1940.<sup>13</sup> Thomas was a frequent contributor, and even became, very briefly, the Reviews Editor of the paper.<sup>14</sup> He also figured naturally in its cultural coverage, given his sudden fame as a poet: as one reader observed, Thomas had "achieved the almost impossible task of putting Swansea on the cultural map!"<sup>15</sup> The issue that contained Thomas's first letter to the *Swansea Guardian* also published a poem, 'Twelve', posthumously collected in the *Notebook Poems*.<sup>16</sup> More substantially, 'The hand that signed the paper', published in *New Verse* in 1935, is evidence of Trick's importance to Thomas from their first meeting: the notebook version (17 August 1933) of "Thomas's one acknowledged political poem" was dedicated to "A. E. T." [Albert Edward Trick].<sup>17</sup> 'And death shall have no dominion', first published in 1933, "originated" when Thomas and Trick "had a competition to see who could write the best poem on the subject of 'Immortality'".<sup>18</sup> Two of Thomas's best known, these poems, especially, reflect the intellectual climate represented and nurtured in print by the *Swansea Guardian*:

The hand that signed the paper felled a city;  
Five sovereign fingers taxed the breath,  
Doubled the globe of dead and halved a country;  
These five kings did a king to death.  
( 'The hand that signed the paper' )

And death shall have no dominion.  
Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;  
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,  
They shall have stars at elbow and foot...  
( 'And death shall have no dominion' )<sup>19</sup>

Characterised by a mix of radical socialism, progressive religious feeling and anti-war sentiment and activity, this was Swansea's equivalent of the socialist culture of the mining valleys that formed the Left-wing novelist Gwyn Thomas. The two writers were kindred spirits who admired each other's work, and both had connections with the American Left.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas introduced his circle of friends to Trick, and, according to Paul Ferris "for a year or so, Thomas's intellectual life revolved around Bert Trick's parlour".<sup>21</sup> Trick's account of their first meeting is vivid:

I first knew Dylan when he was seventeen. He brought his poems, written in a number of school exercise books rolled into a cylinder and stuffed into his already over-stuffed coat pocket. ... I was captivated by him at our first meeting. His cathedral voice, his biting wit and his superb poetry gave me the conviction that here was a youthful genius.

Moreover, their instant friendship was strong, mutually rewarding, and "close" for much longer than Ferris suggests:

The next ten years of close association confirmed that impression. ... Some time after our friendship had begun we acquired the habit of meeting at his home in Cwmdonkin Drive every Wednesday evening and at my home on Sundays.<sup>22</sup>

Trick had spent his boyhood, like Thomas, in a comfortable middle-class home. But his political outlook grew from his adult experience as a trade unionist, from the socialist literature he read when he was unemployed for a time in the 1920s, from his active involvement in the Labour Party, and from his reading of Marx's three-volume *Capital*.<sup>23</sup> For Thomas, to be a 'communist' was a moral quality rather than a party affiliation, and Caitlin Thomas reveals that Trick offered a personal example of a stern commitment that commands respect:

Dylan used to talk about him a lot. Bert Trick was a Communist who had thought his philosophy right through, who was keen on poetry but put his politics first. Of all the friends that Dylan acquired in his Swansea days, Bert Trick was the one with mettle: he was tough, and it was through him that Dylan developed his hatred of Fascism.<sup>24</sup>

Stan Smith takes Thomas's phrase "a communist grocer" as a straightforward description of Trick, and identifies him as the figure who "lies behind the bar-room brawling vehemence" shown by Thomas in one of his letters to Pamela Hansford Johnson.<sup>25</sup> This is somewhat unjust to Trick, who "as a pacifist (as he then was) he did not believe in a bloody revolution but that socialism could be achieved through the ballot box".<sup>26</sup> The *Swansea Guardian* was generous in its coverage of the local Peace Ballot, but, for Trick, such idealism was not going to be enough without a principled Socialist movement capable of action. Trick's column on 6 September 1935, "War is Hell", was provocative, but not out of place in the paper: "There are suckers in every generation, or how else explain the trust that is reposed in the Labour Party to renounce war, by millions of voters in Britain". If Dylan Thomas, like Gwyn Thomas, later supported Communist-sponsored peace movements it was because the Party had moved sufficiently close to the position held by Trick, Thomas and many others in 1930s Swansea. A joint letter from Trick and Thomas to Ithel Davies is evidence of the strength of Thomas's feelings. Davies was a leading pacifist and spokesperson for the Socialist League, a Left-wing grouping in the Labour Party. It is noteworthy that Thomas was prepared to offer his practical support:

We would like to have details of membership [of the No More War Movement], because we believe the present militarist trend of national politics makes it imperative that those who object to War in any shape or form should actively identify themselves with the Movement ... we wish to enrol ourselves, not merely as nominal members but as active propagandists. ... We would wish to propagate, through the columns of all the journals at our disposal, the urgency of bringing together in a common front those who hold similar views to ourselves.<sup>27</sup>

Lindsay records that after 1945, Thomas:

... signed the Stockholm Peace Petition, the Rosenberg Petition, and actively supported the World Peace Appeal. Doubtless there were many other such expressions of his downright political position; for I never knew him hesitate for a moment before giving his support to such movements.<sup>28</sup>

Stan Smith misses the gentle comedy of Thomas's first mention of Trick to Hansford Johnson, "a communist grocer with a passion for obscurity & the Powys family", and he misses the significance of Trick's passions as well.<sup>29</sup> Thomas's letter shows, after all, that Trick was very far from doctrinaire: no narrowly dogmatic Communist would have encouraged Thomas's interest in *that* family of West Country writers, despite their support for the Left. Admittedly, Trick can be seen in a pro-Soviet mood in his *Swansea Guardian* column in October 1935, after the Comintern had abandoned its ultra-leftism and adopted the strategy of the Popular Front (the Moscow Trials started in 1936):

The greatest realist in European diplomacy is the representative of the USSR, M. Litvinov ... The dominant theme in Russian diplomacy is to keep the borders of the Republic inviolate ... That is good tactics.<sup>30</sup>

Smith draws clear limits to the influence of Trick and his allegedly Stalinist brand of Marxism: "But Thomas's 'Revolution' had little, really, in common with the hardline politics of the Comintern in its intransigent Third Period". Smith's argument is that for his own "credo" of revolution "Thomas has other, more literary mentors", and the "foremost" of these is W. H. Auden, whom he commended to Hansford Johnson as "the Poet of Revolution".<sup>31</sup> Auden's importance to Thomas in the mid-1930s is well argued by Smith, but he mistakes the nature and influence of Trick. When Thomas's 'Plea for Intellectual Revolution' in the *Swansea Guardian* in 1934 dismissed the "official" Marxist Left as intellectually conformist and imaginatively shallow, this was not a criticism of Trick:

Caught between dogmatism and inherent sentiment, clutching to the fag end of a materialist philosophy and the burning end of Marxian dialectics, the official condemnators of capitalism can go little further [than] to remark upon its scientific mishandling and to point out the speculative outlines of a Socialist Erewhon.<sup>32</sup>

The Communist Party is rarely mentioned in the *Swansea Guardian*, but this is not necessarily an accurate reflection of Communist impact on local political life. The paper preferred to give space to some (not all) of the other Left-wing socialist currents then developing in Britain. The *Swansea Guardian* carried articles by Francis Williams, the City Editor of the Labour Party paper, the Daily Herald, on 'The Reconstruction of Finance',<sup>33</sup> and by G. D. H. Cole, of the Socialist League, on 'The Political Situation in France' at the beginning of the Popular Front, although these pieces were not originally written for the *Swansea Guardian*. When Fenner Brockway, the I.L.P. leader, visited Swansea, his speech, given to a "big sands audience", was carefully reported. Brockway (who was characterised at this time by the Communist Party as a "Trotskyist"<sup>35</sup>) explained that Fascism offered nothing to the unemployed: "he attacked the Fascist regime [in Germany], giving examples of how it worked... [in Britain it would mean] oppression, greater unemployment, and brutality". As for Revolution:

Bloodshed was merely the outcome of revolution under certain circumstances, and it was highly desirable, that a revolution to [sic] take place without a drop of blood being spilt. To ensure the success of a revolution, a very necessary step was the education of the workers ... in Italy chaos reigned when the workers took over, because they were not educated sufficiently to carry the situation through. Things should be so arranged that the workers could immediately take charge of industry and commerce without upsetting the balance... The future of the country was in the hands of the workers. They should educate themselves to meet the situation ... [they shouldn't all seek to lead] but they should make themselves into one huge powerful weapon and place themselves in the hands of the leaders who would be able to create the new conditions which would be to their benefit, and depose the capitalists.<sup>36</sup>

The Communist Party appeared in the *Swansea Guardian* through reports of such events as the protest against the civic visit of German ex-servicemen, who, it was claimed, were in reality members of the SS. Above all, the Party was seen in the demonstrations against the Means Test, in which Communist intervention was spectacularly effective in Wales: "Swansea is joining in the storm of protest which has been roused in South Wales over the regulations of the new Unemployment Assistance Board".<sup>37</sup> Arthur Horner, a Communist who was to be elected President of the South Wales Miners Federation in 1936, was a key speaker at demonstrations on these international and economic issues in Swansea, alongside the town's three Labour MP's.<sup>38</sup> Changes in local perception of the Communist Party as it moved out of its sectarian isolation in the mid-1930s are beyond the scope of this paper; Thomas's letters to Hansford Johnson show, all the same, that Thomas was knowledgeable about local Party activities.

Thomas's first biographer, Constantine FitzGibbon, insists on Thomas's distance from the Communist Party, and justifies his "rather rudimentary left-wing politics" as "conventional" rebelliousness for his place and time. Thomas's friend Randall Swingler, "whom he met almost as soon as he arrived in London", was a Party member and "very active ...on the cultural front, acting as a sort of link between party headquarters and bohemia".<sup>39</sup> This is too grudging, given Swingler's leading role with the *Left Review*, which was "one of the best-selling literary magazines of the day, helping to construct a remarkable intellectual and artistic alliance against fascism and the National Government, and drawing towards it many influential non-Communist writers".<sup>40</sup> Swingler assured FitzGibbon that "even if Dylan Thomas had wished to join the party, the Party would never have tolerated so wild and undisciplined a recruit."<sup>41</sup> But Thomas made genuine and lasting friendships with Communist writers in London, and he gained their notice and respect very quickly; the historian A. L. Morton helped Victor Neuberg at the *Sunday Referee* and he "recalled the arrival of Dylan's first poem". Thomas is under-represented in Communist-run literary magazines like *Circus*, even though he would gladly have contributed more: as Lindsay recalled, "we forbore to ask him for poems, since he was hard-up and we did not pay".<sup>42</sup>

FitzGibbon recounts that Thomas was sharply criticised by Trick for a politically naive letter to the *Swansea Guardian*: "He was immediately, and publicly, given a firm rap over the knuckles by his Marxist political mentor for [his] effusion".<sup>43</sup> In fact, as Ralph Maud contends, Trick's response was "part of a concerted effort to create interest" in Thomas: certainly such a letter-writing campaign was being waged in the local press by Trick and others.<sup>44</sup> Lindsay found that Thomas was an effective political worker when he chose to be: in a meeting to work on a Peace Appeal in 1950:

He had by far the most to say, arguing over every sentence ... and insisting that we try as much as humanly possible to get away from committee jargon and make emotionally direct statements. He dominated the discussion and all his amendments were agreed to.<sup>45</sup>

Thomas's genuine knowledge of the various Left-wing formations and strategies of the day, and his confident use of Marxist concepts and vocabulary, are displayed in a letter to Hansford Johnson in 1934:

There is and always must be a stream of revolutionary energy generated when society is composed, at top and bottom, of financial careerists and a proletarian army of dispossessed. Out of the negation of the negation must rise the new synthesis. The new synthesis must be a classless society... what is required is not a bloody revolution but an intellectual one. Alternatively, there is the confiscation of property by force. The revolutionary parties are not in common agreement on that point. The Communist Party, with the faint endorsement of the I.L.P., advocates force to reach power. The Socialist League, the New Socialist Party, the orthodox Labour Party believe in first attaining constitutional power and then putting their policies into practice. If constitutional government cannot, in the space of a year after the next General Election, fulfil their policies, then a united front must be made, the army and the police force must be subdued, and property be taken by force.<sup>46</sup>

Thomas was prepared to countenance force in order to implement a full-blooded Socialist programme, even if his objection to wars between nations was absolute. He appealed in this argument to the Marxist concept, derived from Hegel, of the negation of the negation: Trick would have explained this to Thomas, as he did in his regular *Swansea Guardian* column in October 1935:

Dialectical Materialism is the philosophy of the Marxist. All development is the result of the negation of the negation. History is a living record of the process.... Out of capitalism will derive the new synthesis, the negation of private ownership in the means of production. The restoration of communal property in a new synthesis.<sup>47</sup>

(Trick had first described society's origins in Primitive Communism, where there is no surplus of goods and no inequality.) Yet for all Thomas's defiance of convention and dogmatism, a crudely reductive reading of Marx's dialectical method is indicated when he and Trick write in the 1930s of a "new synthesis":

Neither Marx, nor Engels, nor Hegel endorses a concept of dialectic as a sequence of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Nothing in their works justifies such a simplification, and it contradicts the various interpretations of the term offered by all three. Indeed Marx criticized it as naïve.<sup>48</sup>

All the same, the very idea of the dialectical movement of nature, society and thought was a suggestive and fruitful one for Thomas, and he made spectacular use of it in his poetry for the length of his writing career. As Giles Goodland has pointed out, "Eleven days before his death, in October 1953, Dylan Thomas attended a symposium on 'Poetry and Film' ... in New York".<sup>49</sup> Pressed on the possibility of welding poetry to film, Thomas said:

...just as a poem comes out ... one image makes another in the ordinary dialectic process (somebody left out the word 'dialectic', well I may as well bring it in you know). So, as in a poem one image breeds another, I think, in a film, it's really the visual image that breeds another - breeds and breathes it.<sup>50</sup>

## II

In the course of his remarks on Thomas with which I began, Brinnin slyly implies a comparison between Thomas's politics and his marital infidelity ("his promiscuous affection for humanity"). But there is a principled consistency in the way that Thomas ensured that he could never be seen to be respectable. His scorched-earth version of *épater le bourgeois* was not sensible, and not survivable, but his strategy was to put himself beyond use to any kind of authority, even in a movement of opposition: "[I'm] a Socialist myself, though a very unconventional one".<sup>51</sup> He brought himself, however, to work on film-scripts for the Ministry of Information, in which he wrote powerful anti-fascist and pro-socialist propaganda. This was the most disciplined period of his life and provided "his bread and butter for several years".<sup>52</sup>

Stephen Spender's review of Thomas's *Collected Poems*, alongside those of W. H. Auden, in the TLS (6 August 1954) uses the imperfection of Thomas's life to insinuate a judgement on the work:

Thomas's *Collected Poems*... and his to-be-collected prose have the dimensions of a world becoming poetry within his rhetorical personality. Like Rimbaud (though he is all Celt, writing with dreams and blood, not Greek writing with mineral made of intellect, like Rimbaud) Thomas made himself the *object* of experiences so intensely lived and felt that through him they attained to an objectivity beyond the merely personal. In his isolation he became at times universalized spirit and flesh, all the lives and births and ancestors and descendants and the landscape he had known crammed into his single separate being.

In his use of "Dylan" and "Mr Auden", Spender's condescension is fully integrated as a rhetorical device: one writer is childlike, the other a responsible adult:

The dominating passion of Dylan Thomas was to put as much of his own life as he personally felt it, of Mr Auden, as much of the life of others as he objectively understood it, into his poetry.

This paper is not concerned with the butterfly flight of Spender's politics, but his review, at any rate, situates itself within the great confrontation of the Cold War:

Today there is a vice of thinking that opposed forces are symmetrically balanced (the East and West are as bad as one another - McCarthy in America, slave labour camps in Russia): so perhaps I should explain that because I think Dylan Thomas and W. H. Auden opposites I have not fallen into the contemporary assumption that they must be equal forces. Mr. Auden's seems to me to be the much more considerable achievement: ... he has gone much further in achieving the main task of contemporary poetry, which is to transmute the anti-poetic material of modern life into transparent poetry.<sup>53</sup>

James A. Davies has remarked on the phrase that Spender used to describe Thomas, "writing with dreams and blood", and on how "sensationally and mysteriously" Spender had used it.<sup>54</sup> The sensation and mystery call for wider contextualisation: Spender's disingenuous review is an act of recantation, as an ex-Communist, and a blow for political and cultural amnesia. It is a denial of Thomas's seriousness in an attempt to detach his writing from its political and cultural moment. Auden's "transparent poetry" is responsible objectivity, while Thomas's work is "opaque" self-absorption. All this, coincidentally, makes a neat reversal of Trick's judgement in his own comparison of Thomas with Auden, and Spender himself, made when he reviewed Thomas's *18 Poems* for the *Swansea Guardian* in 1935:

Modern poets fall into two categories, those who are creatures of their age, and those who are its creators. In the latter group we find Auden, Spender and Dylan Thomas. It is a fault of both Auden and Spender, that having perfected their technique as poets, they strain themselves to become perfect media for propaganda. Their poetry suffers in consequence.

Trick argues that Thomas is the responsible artist of the group, the one who refuses to reduce his work to propaganda:

Dylan Thomas is too much the artist to allow politics to bemuse his muse. One knows instinctively his politics are correct, but they hover like a faint perfume above the lines of his poetry; they neither intrude nor obtrude.

Trick goes on to say that:

The influence of surrealism is unmistakable on ... [Thomas's] poems, yet it is surrealism with a difference. Mr Thomas is doing with poetry much the same as James Joyce did with prose. He is making a new language, not as Joyce did by making numerous languages to produce an illegitimate literary offspring, but hammering new meaning into old words and phrases; crowning hacks [sic] with the alchemy of his essentially poetic imagination.<sup>55</sup>

Thomas's development as a poet, in Trick's narrative, is away from the "transparent", from direct reactions to experience, from naïve representation and the too easily political. He moved, that is to say, in the direction - with Trick's guarded blessing - of the "revolution of the word" as a contributor to and supporter of Eugene Jolas's *transition*. Thomas "had

read *transition* at least as early as December 1933" and "according to his friend, J. H. Martin, he 'turned to the extreme avant-garde, to Joyce and the Paris[ian] magazine'" as an inspiration and influence on his work "sometime in 1934".<sup>56</sup>

Spender had always been a rough, tough reviewer. In 1934, while reviewing Michael Roberts's *Critique of Poetry*, Spender seized on an argument about poetry and belief, and compared it to "the attitude of mind which is considered desirable in a judge of the Aryan State".<sup>57</sup> In 1954, Spender was on the other side, but his militant status on the cultural front, as co-editor of *Encounter* magazine (from June 1953), is beyond doubt. Irving Kristol, his American colleague, was paid with funds covertly provided by the CIA's Farfield Foundation, while Spender was paid "with money from the British Treasury's secret vote". In addition to their salaries, "printing bills and other expenses for its first twelve months were met by a grant of \$40,000", again from the Farfield Foundation, "a figure Kristol and Spender were advised ... to 'keep to yourselves'".<sup>58</sup>

In Spender's *TLS* review of Auden and Thomas there is no reference to past Left-wing positions. Twenty years before, though, in August 1934, Thomas had published his own recollection of Spender in the *Swansea Guardian*. His piece, 'A Plea for Intellectual Revolution. Clean thinking - clean living - a clean world', concludes:

Once I walked with Spender along a desolate London Street, late one rainy afternoon. "The streets of London after the revolution", he said, and pointed to the empty shops, the bare stones, and the grey mist over them. And London, to us, was like a city of the dead. We imagined the silence and the distant noise of guns. There would be stillness and greyness, and blood in the streets. On a hill of bones we imagined the last financier counting his pennies, before they shot him down. And Cllr Hughes would be floating gently down the gutter.<sup>59</sup>

Councillor Mainwaring Hughes had been elected to the Town Council as an Independent (and sat as part of the Conservative group) in 1930. He changed his allegiance to the British Union of Fascists in 1934 as a sitting councillor; he returned to the Conservatives sometime later in the 1930s, and continued a successful career in local politics that was to span forty years.<sup>60</sup> Earlier in the essay, Thomas had attacked Mainwaring Hughes in a torrential one-sentence paragraph:

This system of society - exorcised each week to a wordy gehenna by my friend 'Twentieth Century,' who contrives to be even duller than Gibbon, with no pretence to his style, by Mr. Trick, that nagging little man with an airy grievance and a very solid bogey in the form of our chameleon Councillor who has divested his true blue skin and is temporarily hidden under a skin of black kicked, by this time into a nice shade of black and blue; and by the Rev. Atkin who, despite his political stand [as a prominent Labour Councillor and anti-fascist], is a paid minister of a church that has clothed its Christ in khaki and will clothe Him so again whenever the Government or powers decide to transform the starving belly of Europe into a womb of dynamite is so fundamentally evil that, in castigating it, one must avoid all the Queensberry rules, strike as often as one can beneath the belt, and bring to one's aid the muscles of a generation that Mosley, dangerous only because of his disease, the disease of elephantiasis of the self, and the rest of the careerists and the paunched exploiters of youth, must not be allowed to drive into a militaristic ignorance or to spoon-feed with a propaganda that reeks of the death of culture and drips with the milk and honey of a curdled patriotism.

The figure of the fascist, "Cllr Hughes", floating down the gutter was transmuted a few days later into the short story 'Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar', unpublished until 1971, but dated in the *Red Notebook* as 8 August 1934:

The workers in the south and north of the island, where death had fallen thinly, were provided with guns and shafts of steel [and little pinned grenades]. They cocked the guns and laughed up at the shadow above them[, pointing the barrels at the high men of the island. They slew the givers of arms. They looted the shops, and raped the widows, and burgled the hearts of the dead, finding the keys of hate in the opened pulses...]. Street rose against street, and city against city...<sup>61</sup>

This is "writing with dreams and blood" indeed. As the energy of his insurrectionary fantasy suggests, there is more to the matter than Thomas's distaste for a local town councillor. Trick's review of *18 Poems* was placed in the bottom right hand corner of the left-hand page, directly beneath Mainwaring Hughes's column, "Mirror of Swansea Municipal Events", two columns wide and half a page deep. The *Swansea Guardian* was a broadsheet paper, not a tabloid, and the column and the review together make a powerfully suggestive montage. The *Swansea Guardian* began publication the year after Hitler's accession to power, and this gave a poignant urgency to the polemics the paper fostered. An editorial looking back over the first twelve months of publication expressed pride in its success as:

Swansea's truly independent weekly newspaper ... [which set out] to give the people of Swansea an open vehicle of opinion unfettered by outside influences, political or industrial. In adopting an independent attitude we have tried to avoid a tepid and fearful neutrality which would have resulted in giving the public nothing but cold slop.

The paper was as dialogically daring as legally possible:

We have accordingly opened our columns for the expression of various and conflicting viewpoints to an extent which has

seldom been equalled in local, or even national, journalism. Our regular contributions include Clr. Mainwaring Hughes, whose political opinions are the extreme "right" of fascism, and Evan Abertawe, who as an extreme socialist, represents the "left".

Thomas and Trick were part of a wide spectrum of cultural and political debate:

In between we have Conservative and Liberal contributors; Mr Ithel Davies, B.A., and other members of the Labour Party; "20th Century", Dylan Thomas, and occasional contributors who write, not from any particular political angle, but purely on local matters, such as that well-known Swansea docksman, Mr. Fred A. Rees. Others have written for us including the Rev. Leon Atkin.<sup>62</sup>

The public arena of the *Swansea Guardian* was the natural place to express the mutual loathing of Thomas and Mainwaring Hughes.<sup>63</sup> Mainwaring Hughes dismissed democracy and human rights with jaunty, mocking cynicism: he prided himself on a gift for taunts and provocation. As Peter Stead has observed,

Mainwaring Hughes fired his barbs in all directions, most noticeably at the local rabbi Mr. Weintrobe (who had openly criticised him). "If I thought for a moment that the Rev. Weintrobe represented the views of Jewry, I could almost understand the anti-semitism of Hitler."<sup>64</sup>

Bert Trick's friend John Jennings argued in his weekly column for socialism, and against fascism, sometimes on the same page as Mainwaring Hughes, and sometimes on the opposite:

Unless Socialists keep on emphasising that planned and co-operative industry is merely a stepping-stone and no more, the move may only prove to be the selling of the pass to capitalism - perhaps in its most virulent form, Fascism. The future course of events does not appear to me as a sweetly ascending gradual staircase into higher regions: I can see the black hand of private power ready to throttle the rise: a classless society will not be wished into being. But here is a prophecy of events, for what it is worth. It may perish in the fire of unexpected fortune, perhaps even in that war which draws so inexorably nearer.<sup>65</sup>

Jennings expressed simply and powerfully his horror of fascism, and articulated the widely felt sense of terrible foreboding:

A Socialist state, which means you and me and our neighbours, would ... be well worth dying for ...How long this freedom [to write the truth in this country without being suppressed] will exist is impossible to tell.<sup>66</sup>

Jennings was not a lone voice. A Swansea Democratic League was established, "in which Socialists, Pacifists and anti-Fascists combined to point out the international and local dangers of Fascism." The organisation was effective and highly articulate: "Swansea was set alight by a slanging match between the outspoken and provocative fascist-sympathisers and a talented group of anti-fascist writers." The main spokespersons were Ithel Davies and Trick.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, Mainwaring Hughes and his group "brought Mosley to Swansea to address a crowd of almost 3,000 at the Plaza Cinema" in July 1934.<sup>68</sup> Thomas and Trick were present and witnessed the disturbances that followed, including the assault on the British Union of Fascists' Swansea headquarters. Mosley brought to British politics a new and extreme violence, and Mainwaring Hughes eventually disowned him on these grounds.

The *Swansea Guardian* related the startling arrival of Fascism to developments in Europe and beyond. The paper was particularly concerned with Mussolini's Italy and its war in Abyssinia, the new regime in Germany and in particular the Social Democrats' insurrection in Vienna on 12 February 1934, which was provoked by the pro-Italian *Heimwehr*. The bravery shown by the workers in their rising against the fascist dictator Dolfuss, the ferocity with which the rising was put down, and the repression which followed, made it a moral touchstone and cause for the Socialist, as distinct from Communist, Left.

Gollancz's Left Book Club published (in 1939) a powerful and still-celebrated eyewitness account of the Vienna events:

All the Social-Democratic city councillors the Heimwehr and police could catch, [were] dragged off to prison. Still not a shot had fallen. But all around the Ringstrasse troops were constructing barbed-wire entanglements, putting out knife-rests and bringing machine-guns to bear on all the arterial and minor roads leading into the Inner City from the outer suburbs. Police and Heimwehr tried to force their way into the great blocks of municipal dwelling-houses, which the Socialists had built right around the city in the outer suburbs, firing wherever admission was refused. Frantically the Republican Defence Corps were searching for their hidden arms, and, where they found them, using them to defend their homes. In Ottakring, Floridsdorf, Favoriten and other workers' districts the great gates of the dwelling-houses were barred and barricaded and here and there uniformed Defence Corps men posted machine-guns, while others constructed hasty street barricades from the galvanised rubbish bins. In many cases the arms could not be discovered, as the key men had been arrested before they could pass on the secret to some deputy. In one great dwelling-block, the Engel-Hof, the tenants dug frantically in the courtyards and hammered walls all night, the women tearing up the gardens with their nails while the men dug with the few spades available, searching for their arms. But they found nothing, and the building was occupied without the tenants being

able to fire a shot in self-defence. In other buildings - the Karl Marx-Hof, the *Arbeiterheim* in Ottakring, the beautiful sun-bathed workers' garden-city block of Sandeiten - someone knew where the arms were bricked up, and they were hurriedly issued. I heard sporadic shooting already at about 4 o'clock, and by 6 p.m. the deadly tattoo of rapid machine-gun fire came from all parts of the outer suburbs. Not only the trams but also all taxis had ceased to run. In conveying someone to safety past some of the districts where fighting had started at about seven, I had to go on foot, and found it almost impossible to get back to my office in the Inner City. Excitable Heimwehr irregulars and even police officers refused at one point after another to recognise my police press ... It must have been about 10 o'clock that the intermittent sound of dulled explosions came from the outer suburbs. Walking along the Ringstrasse with a colleague, an Austro-Hungarian, and a distinguished American visiting journalist. "Good God!" I said, "that sounds like howitzers or trench mortars. But they can't do that - Dollfuss couldn't - not even Fey - turn the guns onto those houses packed with women and children as well as the workers. However determined the armed resistance, the Government and the Heimwehr have it in their hands to starve them into submission in a couple of days, by cutting off light, gas and water and letting no food through." ... But within an hour there was no longer any question of it. Howitzers, machine-guns and trench mortars were raining death to the buildings of which Karl Seitz had said in opening one the finest a year or so before: "Long after we are gone, these stones will speak for us and for Socialism". To-day, even, they speak still for something more - for the meaning of Fascism.<sup>69</sup>

Gedye, one of the most distinguished foreign correspondents of the 1920s and 30s, describes a mass Social Democratic party, with a militant Marxist membership fighting to the death for the overthrow of fascism and for a new socialist order. (The Austrian Communist Party was small, and played no part in the rising.)

In Britain, two of the many literary responses to the defeated rising were published by John Lehmann, and by Stephen Spender. Lehmann was living in Vienna, and he recorded his first-hand experiences of the *Reichstag* fire and the Vienna events in his second verse collection *The Noise of History* (1934). Spender's long poem *Vienna* (1934) grew from his visit to the city in the aftermath of the massacre; both of these books are discussed at length by Samuel Hynes.<sup>70</sup> Thomas's published response to the events in Vienna was more modest in scope; this stanza of 'My world is pyramid' appeared in *New Verse* in December 1934:

My world is cypress, and an English valley.  
I piece my flesh that rattled on the yards  
Red in an Austrian volley.  
I hear, through dead men's drums, the riddled lads,  
Strewing their bowels from a hill of bones,  
Cry Eloi to the guns.<sup>71</sup>

With an angry intensity that pre-figures Picasso's *Guernica*, Thomas writes of the crucifixion of the Viennese proletariat (in this Passion, pieces of their/his flesh are offered by Christ, in an image of sacrament), and the death of all the hopes embodied in the municipal socialism of 'Red Vienna'. As Spender recalled in 1953, it was "perhaps... in the great working-class tenements - Goethehaus and Karl Marx Hof, built by the Socialists - [that] one glimpsed a new Vienna, a people's city".<sup>72</sup> Thomas had tried to write a politically-engaged poem in direct response to a particular event, and "a remnant of the poem's six stanzas remains, according to A. E. Trick ... in this reference to 'an Austrian volley'".<sup>73</sup> The condensed and difficult poetry of 'My world is pyramid' shows Thomas at work as a revolutionary artist, and any immediate and reductive political purpose is pushed aside by an insurgent lyricism. The poem's phrase "a hill of bones" was used, of course, in the memoir of Spender quoted above. Thomas was disturbed and shaken by the reality of extreme political violence. He drew on it ambiguously in his story 'Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar', which revels in an imagined uprising of the Left, but also dwells on the pain and murder of Vienna.

Thomas reviewed Spender's *Vienna* in the same issue of *New Verse* as that which carried 'My world is pyramid':

In a poem ... the poetry must come first; what negates or acts against the poem must be subjugated to the poetry which is essentially indifferent to whatever philosophy, political passion or gang-belief it embraces. ... in his previous work, Mr. Spender, sensitively working from words, has arranged a well-chosen, if limited vocabulary, and expressed a sincere emotional reaction to a world that, even if it has not had its day, has at least a palpable weak end...

After the painful pun, Thomas is almost chillingly tough-minded:

Dollfuss and Fey are nice words. Does it really matter if they are, or are not, nice men? This would appear ridiculous if it were not for the fact that Mr. Spender, working now away from words, regarded only the historic significance of these two men as being important, and not the verbal context in which he placed the letters that make up their names.

Thomas had already established his Left credentials in *New Verse* (which will be discussed below), and this allowed him his angle of bitter attack:

As a poem, *Vienna* leaves much to be desired; in the first place it leaves poetry to be desired, in the second, any real intensity of propagandist mission. The propaganda is bad, to be condemned, and even despised, by the real communist, whether he

be intellectual or not.<sup>74</sup>

Thomas may have been deliberately echoing the *Daily Worker* review of John Lehman's *The Noise of History* (the only poetry the *Worker* noticed in 1934). The reviewer praised Lehman for joining the battle against fascism, but judged that "As poetry, much of this poetry suffers from the uncertainty of its origin".<sup>75</sup> Spender eventually accepted that *Vienna* was a bad poem, confused in its intentions, and disowned it.

A letter from Thomas to Glyn Jones (April 1934) shows Thomas to be opposed to the Communist Party leadership's policy of "proletarian art":

And as for the workers! People have been trying to write to them for years. And they still don't care a damn. The trouble is that in attempting to write for the workers one generally writes *down*. The thing to do is to bring the workers up to what one is writing.<sup>76</sup>

Thomas's grafting of the Modernist privileging of suggestion over direct statement onto classical Marxism is ultimately problematic. But prior to the Popular Front, intellectually demanding contemporary work in the arts, and all the culture of the past, were officially written off by the Communist Party as "one reactionary mass", merely the culture of the exploiting classes. As Andy Croft puts it, the Party's sectarian isolation in the early 1930s led to "a disastrous anti-intellectualism".<sup>77</sup> A merit of Trick's brand of Marxism is that it validated the literary Modernism that Thomas learned from Dan Jones, and turned him to dissident Left-wing writers, whether in the Communist Party like Randall Swingler and Jack Lindsay, or outside it, like the Powyses. Such writers are often difficult to read and to categorise, and – like Thomas – difficult to discipline or silence. Thomas is already, in 1934, concerned with the relationship of the radical lyric poet to the reader. It was a question which was also to exercise Brinnin: his 1943 essay on the pro-Communist poet Muriel Rukeyser drew on his own experiences to explore the dilemmas of committed poets who wished to keep their eyes on "the immediate issues of their time" whilst neither reducing their verse to journalism or retreating "toward obscurantism".<sup>78</sup>

Thomas's point, so boisterously made to Glyn Jones, about raising the workers to the level of the artist, is in part the classical Marxist one: his work will be understood by workers transformed by new social conditions after they have made and sustained their revolution. For the meantime, Thomas works as a revolutionary writer, not in fashioning propoganda, but in his method, and he described this in a letter to Henry Treece in 1938:

A poem by myself needs a host of images, because its centre is a host of images. I make one image, – though 'make' is not the word, I let, perhaps, an image be 'made' emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual & critical forces I possess – let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict. Each image holds within it the seed of its own destruction, and my dialectical method, as I understand it, is a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time.<sup>79</sup>

The value of this as a description of Thomas's working methods is illustrated in the poem 'In my craft or sullen art', written late in 1945. This poem foregrounds the process of logical argument, placing its "nots" and "buts" as turns in the poem like the Boolean operators ("if", "then", "else") used in high-level programming languages ("if condition *a* is met then understand and execute instruction *x*, else do *y*"). The poem is plainly "dialectical" in the Hegelian and Marxist conception, and the playful advance of its terms of argument redeems it from the vulgar Marxism of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. There is a rocking forward movement of assertions ("In my craft", "When only the moon", "I labour") and negatives ("Not for ambition or bread", "Not for the proud man apart", "Nor for the towering dead"), theses and antitheses moving to unstable resolutions ("But for the common wages", "But for the lovers"). The poet undergoes his "labour" as a writer "Not for ambition or bread ... But for the common wages" of the "most secret heart" of ordinary lovers lying in bed. The lovers are a symbol of common humanity, vulnerable and tender, and if Thomas risks falling into sentimentality at this point, in this poem at least he writes for them, and not for a cultural elite:

Not for the proud man apart  
From the raging moon I write  
On these spindrift pages  
Nor for the towering dead ...  
But for the lovers...

The poem ends on the negation of the negation, in a climax where a logical double negative becomes a positive: the lovers "pay **no** praise or wages / **Nor** heed my craft or art". This achieves a formal resolution, and the rhythm ensures a satisfying sense of the poem shutting down, even though there is no closure to its argument, and the writhing syntax is not brought to rest. How the poet, who lives to write, is to make a living, remains – as it had to – a poignant paradox. This negative resolution is not a weakness in the poem; it supplies the strength of its bittersweet taste. But Thomas is no longer "shut, too, in a tower of words".<sup>80</sup>

'In my craft...' does not make overt political statements, but various literary and political textual references are

evident. This paper will not provide an exhaustive account of these, but one sense of the "towering dead" is the threatening stature of the poet's predecessors. In another, related sense, this is a rejoinder to *The Tower* (1928), Yeats's first Modernist book. Yeats's tower stands metonymically for a whole literary tradition and its allegiance to a class hegemony:

Blessed be this place,  
More blessed still this tower;  
A bloody, arrogant power  
Rose out of the race  
Uttering, mastering it...  
In mockery I have set  
A powerful emblem up...  
(‘Blood and the Moon’)<sup>81</sup>

‘In my craft...’ has another textual relationship that it is most relevant to this paper. The line "I labour by singing light" asks to be read in the light of *Capital*. Marx's thinking on the concept of "labour" is most explicit in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, an early work that was still unpublished in the mid 1930s. The same assumption is made in the later work *Capital*, though, that "labour" is the highest human activity because it is the work of changing the world, in free association, to deliberately designed plans. Art is obviously a form of labour in this conception. As Victor N. Paananen has shown, brilliant and independently-minded British Communists like Alick West (1895-1972) and Christopher Caudwell (1907-1937) were already arguing how "such is the unity of Marx's thought that, from the commodity, one can derive a full account of alienation, the division of labor, and even an aesthetics".<sup>82</sup>

And then, light *sings*. For Thomas the natural world and the world of art are linked, and his most famous declaration of this insight was written in the months after Thomas met Trick. This conviction comes from Engels, and his insistence that Marx's "dialectical method" can be seen as a process at work in nature and human thought and life alike:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
Drives my green age.<sup>83</sup>

Engels held that the "negation of the negation" was:

... an extremely general - and for this reason far-reaching and important - law of development of nature, history and thought; a law which ... holds good in the animal and plant kingdoms, in geology, in mathematics, in history and in philosophy.<sup>84</sup>

The compatibility of Engels's dialectic of nature with Marx's own philosophical method, now controversial, is unlikely to have been an issue for Thomas.<sup>85</sup> However, the validity of the application of the dialectic to the universe was debated "in the light of modern science and philosophy" in the issue of *Partisan Review* which first included Thomas, in 1938.<sup>86</sup>

Thomas's political statement in *New Verse* in October 1934 can now be read in a number of inter-related contexts that make clear the consistency of Thomas's position as a political artist:

I take my stand with any revolutionary body that asserts it to be the right of all men to share, equally and impartially, every production of man from man and from the sources of production at man's disposal, for only through such an essentially revolutionary body can there be the possibility of a communal art.<sup>86</sup>

Thomas anticipates the libertarian aspect, at least, of the 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art' by Trotsky, the French surrealist André Breton and the Mexican artist Diego Rivera that appeared in *Partisan Review* four years later:

True art is unable not to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society.... We believe that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution.<sup>88</sup>

The basis of the Manifesto, signed by Breton and Rivera, is the new perspective on Left-wing Modernism that Trotsky was developing in exile.<sup>89</sup> It is possible that Thomas saw the manifesto, as his poem 'It is the sinners' dust-tongued bell' appeared in the same issue of *Partisan Review*. Thomas pleaded ignorance of both Surrealism and contemporary French poetry but his example of "proper" Surrealism was that done by "the Breton boys", as opposed to the "worthless" work of David Gascoyne.<sup>90</sup> Thomas is not named on the Contents page, but subsumed under the heading "A little anthology of British poets" - a surprisingly twee title for a magazine that then called itself "A Quarterly of Literature and Marxism".<sup>91</sup>

Thomas first contributed to *Partisan Review* when the editors were trying strenuously to associate the magazine directly, albeit on a non-party basis, with Trotsky:

Our program is the program of Marxism, which in general terms means being for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society, for a workers' government and international socialism. In contemporary terms it implies the struggle against capitalism in all its modern guises and disguises, including bourgeois democracy, fascism, and reformism (social democracy,

Stalinism).<sup>92</sup>

Thomas is unlikely to have read this editorial statement. He paid no heed to the *Partisan Review's* movement away from Trotskyism, either. By his reckoning, the revolutionary party did not exist: "I... belong to no political party. I am a Socialist, and, so far as I know, there is no Socialist Party".<sup>93</sup> His business was the poetry, exploring the potential of the dialectic for wit and irony, and for a writing of polyvalent excess that allowed him to be, in the work as well as the life, "a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie".<sup>94</sup>

## NOTES

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1. John Malcolm Brinnin, *Dylan Thomas in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955; London: Dent, 1956; references to Dent edition), pp. 25-26.
2. Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 61.
3. James Nashold and George Tremlett, *The Death of Dylan Thomas* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1997), pp. 87-88.
4. Nashold and Tremlett, p. 88. Isaac Rosenfeld's novel *Passage from Home* (1946) arose from the author's previous convictions and activity as a Trotskyist, and Thomas's first appearance in *Partisan Review* coincided with a contribution from Leon Trotsky, in 1938. Rosenfeld had been a member of the Worker's Party. Trotskyism was known to Thomas as a term of abuse, and not as an alternative to Stalinist or reformist socialism. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had been so weak in the late 1920s that (uniquely) it had no resistance to Stalinism - even the CP-USA had its factions, internal debate and a Left opposition. The case of the British Trotskyists was also unique, for they coalesced outside the CPGB, rather than as a reform movement within it, like the mass Trotskyist movements in China, Argentina, Sri Lanka, Japan and elsewhere. The small and determined group of British Trotskyists included the composer Michael Tippett, and the West Indian writer C. L. R. James. The situation - and the context for the reception of Thomas - was different in New York, where leading literary figures were drawn to Trotsky, whose movement there was not overshadowed by a large Communist Party until the pro-Soviet mood of the 1940s. The ranks of literary Trotskyists included James T. Farrell, Saul Bellow, Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe and Dwight MacDonald.
5. Brinnin was, for instance, "a veteran of the Detroit John Reed Club" and of the Young Communist League, and, under the name Isaac Gerneth, a history as a committed and thoughtful Communist poet. Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time*, p. 307; see pp. 306-09 for a biographical sketch of Brinnin.
6. *Dylan Thomas in America*, p. 26.
7. Jack Lindsay, *Meetings With Poets* (London: Frederick Muller, 1968), p. 35.
8. Victor N. Paananen, *British Marxist Criticism* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000), p. 51.
9. Jack Lindsay, p. 31.
10. Eynel Wardi, *Once Below a Time: Dylan Thomas, Julia Kristeva, and Other Speaking Subjects* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).
11. For a biographical sketch of Trick see Constantine FitzGibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas* (London: Dent, 1965), pp. 84-85.
12. Peter Stead, 'The Swansea of Dylan Thomas', in *Dylan Thomas Remembered* (Swansea: Dylan Thomas Society Wales Branch, 1978), p. 10.
13. Further references in the text will follow the usage of its contributors and be shortened to *Swansea Guardian*.
14. See Ralph Maud, *Dylan Thomas in Print: a Bibliographical History* (London: Dent, 1971), p. 68.
15. Letter to *Swansea Guardian*, 22 March 1935.
16. 'Twelve' ("That the sum sanity might add to nought"), *Swansea Guardian*, 8 June 1934, 10; Ralph Maud, ed., *Dylan Thomas: The Notebook Poems 1930-1934* (London: Dent, 1989; paperback 1990), p. 227-28.
17. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud, eds., *Dylan Thomas: Collected Poems, 1934-53* (London: Dent, 1988), p. 205.
18. *Dylan Thomas: Collected Poems, 1934-53*, p. 209. Thomas's poem (*New English Weekly*, 18 May 1933) was substantially revised, with Vernon Watkins, for *Twenty-five Poems* (1936). Trick's poem (*Swansea Guardian*, 15 June 1934), is given in the notes to *Collected Poems*.
19. *Collected Poems*, p. 51, p. 56. Both poems were collected in Thomas's second volume, *Twenty-five Poems* (1936).
20. Gwyn Thomas corresponded with American Communists, notably the novelist Howard Fast, and the poet Norman Rosten. The latter was a literary and political associate of Brinnin's in the late 1930s. See Victor Golightly, "'We, who speak for the workers': The correspondence of Gwyn Thomas and Howard Fast", *Welsh Writing in English*, 6, 2000, 67-88; Dai Smith, *Wales: A Question for History* (Bridgend: Seren, 1999), p. 11, p. 181; Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time*, p. 307-08.
21. Paul Ferris, ed., *Dylan Thomas: Collected Letters* (London: Dent, 1985; New Edition, 2000), n. 41.
22. Bert Trick, 'Dylan - The eternal Swansea boy', *Country Quest* (Autumn 1960), Vol. 1, No. 2, 26.
23. See Kerith Trick, 'The Original Marx Brother', *New Welsh Review* 54 (Winter 2001-2), 43-51.

24. Caitlin Thomas with George Tremlett, *Caitlin* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986, Pan books, 1987), p. 44.
25. Stan Smith, 'The Little Arisen Original Monster: Dylan Thomas's Sour Grapes', in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton, eds., *Dylan Thomas: Contemporary Critical Essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001; New Casebooks series), p. 25. Dylan Thomas, Letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, early 1934, *Collected Letters*, p. 103.
26. Kerith Trick, 44.
27. Letter to Ithel Davies, 8 August 1934, signed by Thomas and Trick, *Collected Letters*, p. 192.
28. Jack Lindsay, p. 35.
29. Letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, week of Nov 11 1933, *Collected Letters*, p. 68.
30. "20th Century" (A. E. Trick), *Swansea Guardian*, 4 Oct 1935.
31. Stan Smith, 'Dylan Thomas's Sour Grapes', p. 25. Dylan Thomas, letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, early December 1933, *Collected Letters*, p. 81.
32. Dylan Thomas, 'A Plea for Intellectual Revolution. Clean thinking - clean living - a clean world', *Swansea Guardian*, 3 August 1934, 11.
33. *Swansea Guardian*, 8 January 1935, 15.
34. *Swansea Guardian*, 25 January 1935, 10.
35. "Much of my criticism of Russia's policy was similar to Trotsky's but my conclusions were reached quite independently", Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left* (London: 1941), p. 263, quoted in Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Against the Stream: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1924-38* (London: Socialist Platform, 1986), p.162.
36. *Swansea Guardian*, 28 June 1935.
37. 'Storm against the New Dole Board', *Swansea Guardian*, 13 Jan 1935, 9.
38. See Hywel Frances, *Miners Against Fascism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984).
39. FitzGibbon, pp.85, 90.
40. Andy Croft, 'Writers Take Sides: Writers and the Communist Party 1920-56', in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan, eds., *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party* (London and Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press, 1995), p. 93. Croft's introduction to Randall Swingler, *Selected Poems* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2000; Nottingham Trent University), is informative and richly suggestive; he is currently preparing a biography of Swingler.
41. FitzGibbon, p. 90.
42. Jack Lindsay, p. 29, p. 35.
43. FitzGibbon, p. 90; A. E. Trick, Letter to the Editor, 'Mr. Dylan Thomas. "Aiming at the Wrong Aunt Sally". Spiritual Need of Today', *Swansea Guardian*, 15 June 1934, 6.
44. Ralph Maud, *Dylan Thomas in Print*, n. 30.
45. Jack Lindsay, p. 38.
46. Letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, 20 July 1934, *Collected Letters*, p. 185.
47. "20th Century", 'Philosophy of the working man', *Swansea Guardian*, 11 Oct 1935.
48. Terrell Carver, *A Marx Dictionary* (Cambridge: Polity Press/Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 73-74.
49. Giles Goodland, 'Dylan Thomas and Film', *New Welsh Review*, 9 (Summer 1990), 17.
50. Transcribed discussion, 'Poetry and the Film: A Symposium' in John Ackerman, ed., *Dylan Thomas: The Filmscripts* (London: Dent, 1995, pp. 406-08), p. 407.
51. Letter to Glyn Jones, about 14 March 1934, *Collected Letters*, p. 121.
52. *Collected Letters*, n. 530.
53. Stephen Spender, 'Greatness of Aim', *TLS*, 6 August 1954, vi.
54. James A. Davies, *A Reference Companion to Dylan Thomas* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 249.
55. *Swansea Guardian*, 11 January 1935, 6.
56. Dougald McMillan, *transition: The History of a Literary Era* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1975), p. 159.
57. Stephen Spender, 'A New Defence of Poetry', *Now and Then*, no. 47 (Spring 1934), 25. Quoted in Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 153.
58. Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999), pp. 176-77.
59. *Swansea Guardian*, 3 August 1934, 11.
60. See W. T. Mainwaring Hughes, *Kicks and Kudos: Candid Recollections of Forty Years as a Councillor* (Swansea: published by the author, n.d., circa 1971).
61. Walford Davies, ed., *Dylan Thomas: Collected Stories* (London: Dent, 1983), p. 365. In the Davies edition of the text, square brackets denote deletions by Thomas.
62. Editorial statement, *Swansea Guardian*, 4 January 1935, 6.
63. Mainwaring Hughes wrote of Thomas as a "bird that fouls its own nest", and that "It is indeed too bad that Mr. Dylan Thomas should have to stay in such a town, or for that matter, in such a country. What's the matter with Russia as the spiritual home of one who wants to 'Teach to hate and then to believe in the antithesis of what is hated', or Cefn Coed?" (*Swansea Guardian*, 15 June 1934). Cefn Coed was Swansea's new mental hospital.
64. Peter Stead, *Dylan Thomas Remembered* (Swansea: Dylan Thomas Society Wales Branch, 1978), p. 10; Mainwaring Hughes, *Swansea Guardian*, 3 August 1934.

65. "Evan Abertawe", *Swansea Guardian*, 18 January 1935, 8. "'Evan Abertawe' is the pen-name used by John Jennings, Swansea, who regularly contributes to the 'Swansea Guardian' each week under the heading 'The Swansea Review'. Views expressed here and in the Review are those of the writer and must not be taken as an editorial statement. From next week the Review will be published under the writer's own name - an arrangement which will prevent his frequently unorthodox opinions from being attributed to the wrong persons", *Swansea Guardian*, 11 June 1935, 7.
66. "Evan Abertawe", *Swansea Guardian*, 25 January 1935, 8.
67. Peter Stead, 'The Swansea of Dylan Thomas', p. 10. 'Socialism v. Fascism. Large Audience hear Able Debate at Swansea. Way out of World Chaos'. This event was held at St Paul's Schoolroom, i.e. of the Congregational Church of which Leon Atkin was Minister. Ithel Davies debated with Mainwaring Hughes, who cited Germany as a country where the government has "a Fascist aspect" and Italy as "Fascism in operation". *Swansea Guardian*, 8 March 1935.
68. Peter Stead, 'The Swansea of Dylan Thomas', p. 10. The following May, Hughes found appreciative listeners who thanked him for a talk on the Corporate State, whose principles, he said, were embodied in the Milk Marketing Board. According to Hughes, concentration camps were a feature of German life that were not essential to fascism ('Fascist ideas explained to Swansea Rotary Club', *Swansea Guardian*, 2 May 1935).
69. G. E. R. Gedye, *Fallen Bastions* (London: Gollancz, Left Book Club, 1939), pp. 104-05). *Fallen Bastions* is cited in Martin Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century Vol. Two: 1933-1951* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 34-5, 173-74.
70. Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976).
71. *Collected Poems*, p. 28.
72. Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p.171.
73. *Collected Poems*, p. 194.
74. Dylan Thomas, 'Fey, Dollfuss, Vienna', *New Verse*, no. 12 (December 1934), 19-20.
75. A.L.M., 'A poet writes of real things', *Daily Worker*, 24 October 1934, 4. Quoted in Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 144.
76. Mid April 1934 (*Collected Letters*, pp. 141-42).
77. Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 45.
78. John Brinnin, 'Muriel Rukeyser: The Social Poet and the Problem of Communication', *Poetry* 61 (January 1943), 554-75, quoted in Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a future Time*, p, 308.
79. Letter to Henry Treece, 23 March 1938 (*Collected Letters*, p. 328).
80. 'Especially when the October wind' (*Collected Poems*, p. 18).
81. *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933); W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1950) p. 267
82. Victor N. Paananen, *British Marxist Criticism* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000), p. 34.
83. *Collected Poems*, p.13.
84. Frederick Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)*, trans. Emile Burns, ed. C. P. Dutt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1934; published in the Marxist-Leninist Library, 1936), p. 157.
85. "Engels interpreted the dialectic rather differently, but attributed his own interpretation to Marx. In Engels's view the dialectic was the essential feature of a scientific method, universal in scope and first formulated by Marx. It was based on a crudely materialist inversion of Hegel's idealism, a view that contradictions are inherent in all reality, and a conviction that universal laws, of which he formulated three, represent valid results derived from applying the dialectical method to nature, history and logic. The unitary methodology and the encyclopaedic pretensions of such a grandiose system of interpretation were never explicitly endorsed by Marx. Whether or not they are reflected in his work is a matter of controversy." (Terrell Carver, *A Marx Dictionary* (Cambridge: Polity Press/Oxford: Basil Blackwell, (1987), pp. 73-74.)
86. William Phillips, 'The Devil Theory of the Dialectic (A Reply to Edmund Wilson)', *Partisan Review* (Fall 1938), Vol. VI, No. 1, 82. I am grateful to Dr Nathalie Wourm for drawing my attention to this debate.
87. Dylan Thomas, *New Verse*, no. 11 (October 1934), 9.
88. André Breton and Diego Rivera, 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art', *Partisan Review*, Fall 1938. Collected in Paul N. Siegel, ed., *Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970). Breton revealed in 1953 that the manifesto was written in collaboration with Trotsky.
89. See Alan M. Wald, 'Leon Trotsky's Contributions to Marxist Cultural Theory and Literary Criticism', *Writing from the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 125-43.
90. Letter to Henry Treece, 23 March 1938, *Collected Letters*, p. 329.
91. The other British poets were Roy Fuller, Julian Symons, Keidrych Rhys, David Gascoyne and George Barker.
92. 'Politics and Partisan Review', *Partisan Review* 4, no. 3 (February 1938), 62.
93. 27 May 1951 (*Collected Letters*, p. 889).
94. Marx's description of the dialectic in *Capital*, Vol. 1, quoted in Terrell Carver, *A Marx Dictionary*, p. 73.