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Jewels of Blood: An Arab Perspective On R.S. Thomas

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ABSTRACT

This work attempts a study of three themes in the poetry of R.S.Thomas, namely nostalgia for the past, the image of the land, and nationalism, all set in an Arab perspective by examining them in relation to the poetry of three recent or contemporary Arab poets.

Part One deals with the Welsh heritage - history, literature, legends and customs which are then shown being used in the poetry of R.S. Thomas. The Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab offers points of comparison and contrast in his nostalgia for a personal past in the village and his revival of myths and legends of Babylonian, Biblical and Arab origin.

Part Two traces the history of Wales under English domination and examines the advance of industrialization and tourism as seen by R.S. Thomas. The threat which this poses to the Welsh language and the alienation it produces in Welsh people (as projected in R.S. Thomas's verse) are set alongside the image of Palestine as portrayed by Mahmoud Darwish whose work reveals the inseparable bond which exists between the poet and his land despite his condition of exile as a result of Israeli occupation.

Part Three discusses the role of nationalism in Wales and in Arab countries, in particular Egypt. The growth of Welsh Nationalism in the early twentieth century, and the active involvement of the Welsh Nationalist Party, Plaid

Cymru, in defending Wales, and safeguarding its language and culture mark the start of a new era in the modern history of Wales. R.S. Thomas, as is evident from his poetry and articles, not only sympathized with the Welsh Nationalists, but supported them in their campaign to preserve the Welsh cultural heritage. The poetry of the Egyptian Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi, whose nationalism is inspired by the Arab Revolution of 1952 in Egypt, exhibits a strong affinity with the principles of Arab Nationalism, and offers some points of comparison and contrast.

INTRODUCTION

The origin of Anglo-Welsh writing is probably as old as the English language in Wales which could be traced back to the twelfth century.

The passing of the Act of Union in 1536, consolidated the position of English which in certain parts of Wales replaced the Welsh language. For centuries, therefore , Welsh writings in English have developed alongside those in Welsh and in the manner of the English literary tradition.

The emergence of Anglo-Welsh poetry as a separate literary movement with more Welsh flair in the early twentieth century was enhanced first by the publication of Anglo-Welsh magazines like Welsh Outlook, Young Wales , Wales and Welsh Review, and secondly by political events which occurred on the Welsh scene at that time.

The rise of the Welsh Nationalist Party, Plaid Cymru, and its determination to safeguard and preserve the Welsh heritage, not only awakened Welsh-language but also Anglo-Welsh poets. Although the generations who died during and after the Second World War, Huw Menai (1961), Idris Davies (1953), Vernon Watkins (1967), Dylan Thomas (1953), Alun Lewis (1944), showed a distinct devotion to Wales of a personal kind, it was in the next period that a stronger and more active commitment emerged. And one of the main influences in this shift was the work of R.S. Thomas who, although of the same generation as Dylan Thomas, began to publish

later in life, so that his influence follows on Dylan Thomas's death. He helped to bring about a change of direction in Anglo-Welsh poetry from being simply an imitation of English literary tradition to being a platform for writing on Welsh themes.

Not only did he transplant the roots of the Welsh bardic tradition to Anglo-Welsh poetry, and define it within the context of Wales, but he also made the Welsh dilemma an integral theme in his poetry, which is significantly written in one of the most read languages of the world; the English language. R.S. Thomas, therefore, has offered Wales and the Welsh a service which is both valuable and praiseworthy; apart from students in Britain, those in America, Europe and even in the Middle East have come to know Wales and its problems through the poetry of R.S. Thomas.

This study is concerned with the poetry of R.S. Thomas with a two-fold aim. First, to concentrate on and deal with three themes in the poetry of R.S. Thomas which relate to Wales and appeal to Arab readers of R.S. Thomas, namely the glory of the past, the image of the land, and politics in poetry. These themes are set in relation to Welsh history and literature of the early times in Part One, to the period of English domination in Part Two, and to the emergence of Welsh Nationalism in Part Three. Secondly, to present a similar study based on the three aforementioned themes to non-Arab readers, by introducing three contemporary Arab poets; the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab in Part One, the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish in Part Two, and the Egyptian

Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi in Part Three. Information on the background of contemporary Arabic poetry, on the poetry of Palestinian resistance and on Arab Nationalism in contemporary Arabic poetry is included in the Appendices.

From the outset, it should be noted that this is neither a comparative study between the poetry of R.S. Thomas and that of the three Arab poets, nor an attempt to emphasise or establish the excellence or superiority of the one or the other in their portrayal of the themes of our concern; the past, the land and nationalism. However, similarities in views and in treatment of the themes are pinpointed with the aim first to present an Arab response or perspective and secondly to acquaint non-Arab readers with such similarities.

The study is divided into three parts. Part One entitled 'The Glory of the Past', begins with a look at the concept of the past in Anglo-Welsh poetry with reference to David Jones, Alun Lewis, Dylan Thomas, Vernon Watkins, Emyr Humphreys and Keidrych Rhys. Chapter One attempts to establish the fact that a passion for Wales is as much displayed by Anglo-Welsh poets as it is by Welsh poets. Chapter Two traces Welsh history and literary tradition from the Celts to Glyndŵr's uprising in 1400. The heroic deeds of early Welsh princes as portrayed by the Welsh bards, and their struggle against the invaders is also mentioned.

Besides, mythical characters from the Mabinogi and other

Welsh tales including those which treat of King Arthur are referred to in such a way as to prepare readers for their significances in the poetry of R.S. Thomas.

Chapter Three, which is the core of Part One, presents an analysis of the poetry of R.S. Thomas in the light of Welsh history, customs and literary tradition. It also touches on R.S. Thomas's sense of place and his nostalgia for particular places in Wales.

In Chapter Four, the theme of the past is traced in the poetry of the Iraqi Badr Shakir al-Sayyab. In this chapter the theme of the past is studied from an Arab perspective and as seen by an Arab poet.

As mentioned earlier, the aim is not to compare both poets in full, but rather to find out how this theme is dealt with by an Arab poet in relation to political and social factors that governed his situation. Al-Sayyab's longing for the past is displayed more than anything else, in his nostalgia for his village Jaikur, his childhood mates, his lovers and his family. He also depicts scenes and refers to characters from Arab history and myths of Babylonian origin.

Part Two focuses on the image of the land. It starts with Chapter Five which traces the history of Wales from Glyndŵr's unsuccessful attempt to establish an independent Welsh state right to the early twentieth century.

The consequences of the English domination of Wales and its impact on the Welsh are analysed in Chapter Six in relation to the poetry of R.S. Thomas. Chapter Six also examines the role of industrialism and urbanization in Wales, as seen by R.S. Thomas and their effect, on the one hand, on the Welsh countryside and the Welsh language, and on the other hand on the Welshman's sense of alienation and feeling of being an exile in one's own land. Consequently, the image of Wales in the poetry of R.S. Thomas develops from his early notion of a land of romance, to the land of hardship, and finally to the land of eternity as portrayed in Abercuawg.

Part Two ends with a study of the poetry of one of the leading Palestinian poets; Mahmoud Darwish. While there is little similarity in situation between Palestine and Wales, there is evidence to believe that both R.S. Thomas and Mahmoud Darwish are strongly attached to their lands and, in different senses, exiles. Chapter Seven, then, presents Mahmoud Darwish's image of Palestine under the Israeli occupation and his longing for a land that no longer belongs to him.

The poetry of politics is the theme of the third part of this work. It is also a follow-up to the study of the last phase of Welsh history which has been traced in previous parts.

Chapter Eight is concerned with the emergence of Welsh Nationalism in the twentieth century, with the establishing

of the Welsh Nationalist Party, Plaid Cymru, and finally with the role of the Welsh Language Society in the seventies. Attempts are made to analyse the poetry of R.S. Thomas in Chapter Nine in the light of the Welsh Nationalists' views as far as the Welsh language, the depopulation of the Welsh countryside and the role of industrialism in South Wales are concerned.

Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi whose poetry is studied in Chapter Ten, is a strong believer in Arab Nationalism and an ardent follower of the leader of the July Revolution of 1952 in Egypt, Jamal Abdul Nasir.

But, from the outset, it should be mentioned that the difficulty that arises in studying the theme of nationalism in the poetry of both poets lies in the fact that Hijazi's nationalism relates to an actual revolution whereas R.S. Thomas's nationalism looks for change in a still unrealized future. However, as we shall see in Chapter Ten, the theme of nationalism is studied in its broad general sense which does not restrict it to any country or period of time. And finally, it should be emphasized that omissions or errors of translation or facts, quoted in or referred to, in this work, except where references are made, are the responsibility of the writer of this thesis.

PART ONE: THE GLORY OF THE PAST

I am a seeker
in time for that which is
beyond time, that is everywhere
and nowhere; no more before
than after, yet always
about to be ...

R.S. Thomas

Are you buried in my memory?
Or you are its grave?
So resurrect it.
And resurrect me.
But alas! there's no return to boyhood.
My past is my grave and I am the grave of
the past.

Badr Shakir al-Sayyab

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONCEPT OF THE PAST IN ANGLO-WELSH POETRY

A look at the bardic tradition of Welsh poetry reveals that throughout the history of Wales, the Welsh bards endeavoured to keep alive the memory of their kings, at one and the same time preserving the tradition of praise-poetry.

For the medieval Welsh bards, the past had genealogical as well as historical significances. In this manner, the image of Urien, the Welsh king of the north, in the words of Saunders Lewis, 'became through Taliesin's portrayal, the accepted model of the Welsh Christian king, of the Welsh leader of his people'. (1)

Although the tradition of praise-poetry declined after the slaying of Llywelyn the Last, and the role of the Welsh bard was affected as a result of the English domination of Wales, the continuity of the tradition was preserved in the form of elegies and laments. The past for the modern Welsh poet may not be, as it was for the ancient Welsh bard, a series of genealogies but it certainly is a revelation of an ancient heritage and of an ancient land. Hence, there is a sincere attempt on his part to identify himself with this land and its heritage, and take on a traditional celebratory and public role, yet one always tinged with nostalgia and melancholy:

> "The visitor should be aware that there are things in our past and recent history that rankle, things which may seem petty to him but which sometimes hold an agonising significance for many Welshmen today." (2)

Since the traditional role of the Welsh bard will be studied in detail in the next chapter of this part, it is worthwhile contemplating to what extent the Anglo-Welsh poets of the twentieth century pursue this traditional role of the Welsh bard. From the outset, it is important to state that the concept of the past in Anglo-Welsh poetry, as posited by Raymond Garlick "is not necessarily a modern malaise but a recurrent theme over the centuries". (3) However, their attachment to the past has become stronger in recent years as they have begun actively searching for their Welsh identity.

But significantly, the Anglo-Welsh poets' preoccupation with the past is not only a nostalgia for the land of the past, or a commitment to preserve the sanctity of the land, but also an attempt to revive the heritage of the past.

One or more of these elements related to the concept of the past can be traced in the work of many Anglo-Welsh poets, but it is only in the poetry of R.S. Thomas that they are combined in a unity and displayed with full honesty.

Both Edward Thomas and David Jones were born in England of Welsh parents. But while Edward Thomas as noticed by Anthony Conran was "English to the core ..." (4), David Jones, despite his English upbringing, occupied a distinguished position in the ranks of the Anglo-Welsh poets.

Glyn Jones who in The Dragon Has Two Tongues, hardly refers to Edward Thomas, speaks of David Jones as the one who "has returned to his roots, to the springs of Welsh poetry and

legend and culture in a way and to an extent no other Anglo-Welsh poet has ever done". (5)

David Jones is one of those Anglo-Welsh poets whose concern is with depicting the Welsh heritage of the past. In his portrayal of Welsh legends, he shows more interest in tracing the derivations of the words and names than narrating the stories.

In Parenthesis is modelled on Aneirin's Y Gododdin and also includes references to the Mabinogion, and other Celtic sources. It also displays David Jones's response to the atrocities of war · In the story of 'Culwch and Olwen', King Arthur and his companions begin a tiresome journey to fulfil the Giant's demands for the hand of his daughter to Culwch. One of these tasks is the hunting of the boar Twrch Trwyth. Arthur and his companions, not only fail to capture the boar, but also leave behind many casualties.

David Jones, in his reference to the boar, employs military terminology to show the devastating effect left behind by the boar's run:

> "They say that when the Boar Trwyth broke the land, by Esgier Oervel, with a fifth part of Iræland; who in his going by destroyed indifferently, men and animals, and the King's son there, Llaesgeven who was good for no one, got off without a scratch, to come safe home again. The ingenious Menw, despite his craft, was a sick man all his life after because of the poisons loosed. The two auxiliaries who were swift and useful were not seen again after that passage, when the quiet came again with the sudden cessation - in the tensioned silence afterwards you couldn't find a rag of them - only someone complaining under a broken revetting-frame." (6)

Like many poets of the war, David Jones expresses his disgust and hatred of the inhuman atmosphere which prevails in war and surpasses the fierceness of Twrch Trwyth:

> "Properly organised chemists can let make more riving
> power than ever Twrch Trwyth;
> more blistered he is than painted Troy Towers
> and unwholer, limb from limb, than any of them fallen at
> Catraeth ..." (7)

Where In Parenthesis records David Jones's impression of the First World War, The Anathemata is his reaction to the Second World War.

In Part Seven of The Anathemata entitled 'Mabinog's Liturgy', David Jones quotes various stories from different sources, but here the aim is focused on the 'search for order and meaning, for formal goodness, and again the supreme symbol of this order is the sacramental recalling of the events of the Crucifixion with which the work begins and ends'. (8)

Yet the religious implications are undermined by Jones's reference to Celtic gods:

> 'Look to y'r title, Day-star o' the Harbour!
> ... in all her parts
> tota Pulchra
> more lovely than our own Gwenhwyfar
> When to the men of this Island
> She looked at her best
> at midnight.
>
> three nights after the solstice-night, the sun in the
> Goat, in the second moon after Calangaeaf; with the
> carried lights that are ordinary to her before her
> and the many plygain-lights special to this night
> about her; the yntred sung, the synaxis done, ...' (9)

Both 'The Sleeping Lord' and 'The Hunt' are symbolic and circle on the image of King Arthur. The history of Wales from the ninth century to the nineteenth century is traced in the first poem. But it is in his description of the boar Twrch/

Trwyth that the moral significance of the poem lies. Here the boar is more than a fierce beast; it 'also evokes the nineteenth-century depopulation of rural Wales': (10)

> 'It is the Boar Trwyth
> that has pierced through
> the stout-fibred living wood
> that bears the sacral bough of gold.
> It is the hog that has ravaged the fair onnen
> and the hornbeam
> and the Queen of the Woods. It is the hog that has
> tusk-riven the tendoned roots of the trees of the llwyn
> whereby are the tallest with the least levelled low and
> lie up-so-down.' (11)

Another Anglo-Welsh poet who employed Welsh legends and stories in his poetry was Vernon Watkins. Watkins was mainly concerned with the Taliesin legend 'partly because of its powerful time unity'. (12)

The legend relates the story of the boy Gwion Bach who is employed by the witch Ceridwen to assist her in achieving the three drops of Inspiration for her ugly son. But the three drops are swallowed by Gwion Bach who subsequently becomes the wisest man, and the witch's target. To avoid her he changes himself into various forms, and finally becomes a grain, only to be soon found by Ceridwen, who turns herself into a black hen and swallows the grain.

Watkins refers to the legend in a series of poems called Taliesin Poems and entitled, 'Taliesin's Voyage', 'Taliesin at Pwlldu', 'Taliesin and the Mockers', 'Taliesin in Gower' and 'Taliesin and the Spring of Vision'.

In many instances he identifies himself with Taliesin whose voice reverbrates in the present as well:

'I have heard thunder in the heart of the rock.
I felt the unburdening of the clouds, then suddenly
around me
The great drops fell.
Your name, your name on the tongues of children, Taliesin,
Lost in the mist, a bard, I found your abode,
A blind man acclaimed on a blind road
By children learning to spell.' (13)

In the next chapter we shall examine R.S. Thomas's references to Welsh legends and stories of the past, in particular those which have been dealt with by David Jones and Vernon Watkins.

Among other Anglo-Welsh poets who displayed a rather nostalgic view of the land of Wales were Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), and Alun Lewis (1915-1944). According to John Ackerman, the Welsh influence on Dylan Thomas could be seen in three forms:

"First and foremost, there was the fierce and inevitable influence of a particular community with particular traditions. Secondly, there was the influence of other Welshmen writing in English. ... The third influence present in his environment was the tradition of culture existing in and through the Welsh language.' (14)

Dylan Thomas was a non-Welsh speaker, and he was more familiar with the English literary tradition than the Welsh one. 'I have often wished', says Glyn Jones in this connection, 'that Dylan had known more about Welsh Wales and cared more about Welsh literary tradition'. (15)

But despite his lack of Welsh literary knowledge, Dylan Thomas never concealed his yearning for Wales:

'We will ride out alone, and then,
Under the stars of Wales,
Cry, Multitudes of Arks! Across
The water lidded lands,
Manned with their loves they'll move,
Like wooden islands, hill to hill.' (16)

Dylan Thomas is also sometimes thought to display elements of the bardic tradition of Praise Poetry. (17) In his poem entitled 'After the Funeral', and written in memory of Ann Jones, he affirms that position:

> 'But I, Ann's bard on a raised hearth, call all
> The seas to service that her wood-tongued virtue
> Babble like a bell-buoy over the hymning heads,
> Bow down the walls of the ferned and foxy woods
> That her love sing and swing through a brown chapel,
> Bless her bent spirit with four, crossing birds.' (18)

Another Anglo-Welsh poet, who like Dylan Thomas died very young was Alun Lewis. Lewis was a soldier and spent the years of the Second World War until his death in Burma, outside Wales. In some of his poems written in India, he addresses his wife who is associated with Wales where she is:

> 'Last night I did not fight for sleep
> But lay awake from midnight while the world
> Turned its slow features to the moving deep
> Of darkness, till I know that you were furled,
>
> Beloved, in the same dark watch as I.
> And sixty degrees of longitude beside
> Vanished as though a swan in ecstasy
> Had spanned the distance from your sleeping side.
>
> And like to swan or moon the whole of Wales
> Glided within the parish of my care:
> I saw the green tide leap on Cardigan,
> Your red yacht riding like a legend there,' (19)

Alun Lewis was born in Cwmaman near Aberdare. 'The Mountain Over Aberdare', is a poem about his childhood:

> 'From this high quarried ledge I see
> The place for which the Quakers once
> Collected clothes, my father's home,
> Our stubborn bankrupt village sprawled
> In jaded dusk beneath its nameless hills; ...' (20)

Alun Lewis's affection for Wales, is vividly illustrated in his constant reference to Welsh mountains:

> 'This is the street I inhabit.
> Where my bread is earned my body must stay.
> This village sinks drearily deeper

In its sullen hacked-out valley
And my soul flies ever more rarely
To the eyries among these Welsh mountains.' (21)

Mountains are not only geographic features of Wales, but also the remnants of the past; it was there that the Welsh kings fought and defeated their enemies. Alun Lewis's reference to the names of actual mountains in Wales, Carnedd Dafydd and Carnedd Llywelyn carries the memory of those victorious moments in the history of Wales;

'And the great mountains, Dafydd and Llewelyn,
Plynlimmon, Cader Idris and Eryri
Threshing the darkness back from head and fin, ..' (22)

However, Alun Lewis was only embryonically a nationalist. His poetry shows an awareness though not a detailed knowledge of Welsh legends, literature and tradition.

Two Anglo-Welsh writers who were deeply involved with the Welsh past were Keidrych Rhys and Emyr Humphreys. Both reacted strongly to the bombing school incident in Llŷn in 1936.

The British government's plan to build a bombing-school in the most Welsh area of Wales provoked three Welsh nationalists to burn the school and give themselves up to the police.

In 1936 Keidrych Rhys published a poem in response to the incident entitled 'Bombing School', and dedicated to Saunders Lewis:

'Where once the seas lashed up their fury,
and circling gulls gleamed in such
sovereign joy,
Now, our air concerned by angry planes
that bury
General Purpose Bombs sighted by
doomed boys

This senseless target-practice of days and
night
Ugly floats a mile from the littered
breach,
The diving Hawkers and Bristols of each
flight
Cut me to the quick, my Culture out of
reach.' (23)

In another poem entitled 'The Fire Sermon or Bureaucracy Burned' Rhys focuses on the consequences of the incident and the trial of the three nationalists with reference to the cultural and traditional significances of Llŷn:

'Llŷn was focus and native pinpoint. Doom.
Prize for patriotic verse. A super bandstand
For the coronation marching songs.
The half-goose built on, despised our heirloom;
Our paper jazzed up some toughs - refused our wrongs.
I want the world to know and understand
All, how the Fire was forced on the Three like royalty.
Taliesin, Their language they shall keep.
Literature was withheld in this nutty dam.
They burnt the Aerodrome and wrote why.
We wanted a hero with a drastic programme,
So they transferred the Trial to the Old Bailey,
So they could clap him in jail for so few days.
Time. At Llŷn a scarecrow smokes a gassy pipe.' (24)

Emyr Humphreys also wrote poems on the incident. In 'Patriotism', he praises Saunders Lewis for his devotion to Wales:

'He was a very old man, not in years but pain,
And as we walked in the moonlight
I sang to him in vain,
He was a very old man,
Not in years, but pain ...' (25)

Emyr Humphreys' anger and rage are clearly manifest in his untitled poem '1536-1936'. The poem exhibits a strong passion for the Wales which is past with reference to the years of independence.

'Will you come back ?
The sky is burning
And the hills are angry,
In the ferns there are
Wrathful whisperings -

Spirits grow tired of waiting -
Four hundred years upon a rack
Of disappearing Hope -
Freedom, will you not come back?
Our souls are Hungry!' (26)

The burning of the Bombing School in 1936 also had a more long-term effect prompting a younger generation of poets in the sixties and seventies to concern themselves with Wales and her problems. Among these one can mention Meic Stephens, Peter Gruffydd and John Tripp.

Although of the same generation as Dylan Thomas, R.S. Thomas's published work falls into this post-war period. He is in the words of Glyn Jones 'the most Welsh of the Anglo-Welsh', (27) and has shown his concern for Wales and its past heritage in various poems ranging from those on Welsh history and legends, to those on the depopulation of Welsh rural areas and the threat to the Welsh language.

In the next chapter a survey of early Welsh history and literature is made: the historical events and stories most relevant to the poetry of R.S. Thomas are dealt with fully in the chapter which follows that.

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CHAPTER TWO: THE WELSH HERITAGE: A BRIEF STUDY

As mentioned earlier, the past for the Welsh poet implies a sense of adherence to tradition, and it is through unravelling this tradition that the historical and literary values of Wales emerge. The Celts whom the present day Welsh are derived from, came to Wales sometime around 600 B.C., pouring into the country in the form of tribes, and dividing it into various territories. Signs of these early divisions can be found even today in Wales. According to Gwyn Williams, 'It is to the Celts that we owe the feeling of difference that still exists between the people of the north and the south'. (1)

Yet there was a unity of language between those areas. The language, despite hazards and mishaps throughout history has remained on the scene, the major element in the Celtic heritage that is still alive in Wales.

The early Celts had their own religion whose priests were the druids, but they were more than priests and philosophers; they were the defenders of the land, not with arms, but with their teachings, which roused the population against the invaders.

It is not surprising, therefore, to see the druids leading the struggle during the Roman invasion, but they 'were overwhelmed by the disciplined Roman forces. The sacred groves were cut down, and the druids slaughtered'. (2)

Besides the Welsh language which the early Celts have left us, the greatest literary achievement of the early period is a collection of tales known as the Four Branches of the Mabinogi; a mythological portrayal of their princely heroes and heroines.

These ancient tales do more than present scenes of heroic values; they exhibit the Celts' sense of originality and creativity.

The growing awareness of the early Celtic world has, in modern times, according to Prys Morgan:

> 'helped to extend backwards by a thousand years the Welsh historical tradition, giving it an origin which was independent of Christianity and independent of the Anglo-Saxons'. (3)

The tales of the Mabinogi in the form they have come to us are believed to be 'the work of a monk writing somewhere in Dyfed'(4). Because these tales had been passed from one generation to another, expanded or otherwise changed by each storyteller before being written down, it is probable that we shall never know their original forms.

However, the real artistic strength of these tales, in the words of Jeffrey Gantz lies:

> "in the vibrant and imaginative nature of the Celtic tradition; in the deft and sensitive handling through which this tradition is rationalized and presented; and in the degree to which characteristic (courage, generosity, hospitality) and uncharacteristic (patience, moderation, a sense of fair play) Celtic virtues inform the action.' (5)

The tales focus on the continuity of a line of heroes from one generation to another. This emphasis on the genealogical aspects is illustrated in the recurring theme of birth

and rebirth of three families: the Pwyll family appear in the First and Third Branches, the Llŷr family in the Second and the Don family in the Fourth.

The first episode of the First Branch traces the confrontation and consequently the reconciliation of Pwyll, Lord of Dyfed and Arawn, King of Annwfyn.

We are also introduced to Rhiannon, who eventually becomes Pwyll's bride, and whose destiny in Pwyll's court is continued in the second episode.

In the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, new characters who belong to the Llyr family are presented. The head of the Llŷr family is Brân, the King of the Island of the Mighty. Then follow Manawyddan his brother and Branwen his sister. He has also two half-brothers: Efnisien the quarreller and Nisien the peacemaker.

The tale begins with the arrival of Matholwch, King of Ireland in Harlech to ask for Branwen's hand. The plot is complecated by Efnisien's evil deeds which subsequently drive the two countries into war with each other. The tale ends in the death of both Brân and his sister Branwen.

In the Third Branch we are dealing with two of the seven survivors of the previous tale; Pryderi, son of Pwyll, Lord of Dyfed and Manawyddan, son of Llŷr.

The tale relates the adventure of Pryderi with his wife Kigva, and his mother Rhiannon who is now married to Mana-

wyddan and their confrontation with various mishaps which lead first to the disappearance of Pryderi and Rhiannon and their return when their captor is caught by Manawyddan.

In the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi we are introduced to the family of Don. There are three main characters in this tale: Math, son of Mathonwy and Lord of Gwynedd; Gwydion, son of Don and Math's nephew; and Llew who is probably Gwydion's son.

This is the tale of tricks played by Gwydion first against Math and then against Arianrhod who is reluctant to name Llew and equip him with arms.

Gwydion also with the help of Math, conjures up a woman of flowers named Blodeuedd for Llew.

But the happy marriage of Llew and Blodeuedd comes to an end when she falls in love with Gronw, and together they plan the death of Llew.

The tale ends with Gwydion's intervention, rescuing Llew and punishing both Gronw and Blodeuedd.

R.S. Thomas in 'Song for Gwydion', which was written in celebration of the birth of his son (who is named after Gwydion, son of Don) elevates the image of this mischevious mythical character to the position of God.

Apart from these Four Branches, there are other materials, tales and romances, in which King Arthur makes a brief appearance. Of these tales and romances, 'How Culhwch Won Olwen', and 'The Dream of Rhonabwy', display a rather Celtic atmosphere though coming from a later twelfth century period of Welsh history.

As far as other tales are concerned, both 'The Dream of Maxen', and 'Lludd and Llevelys', 'relate pseudo-historical accounts of British courage and intelligence in Roman and pre-Roman days'.(6) 'Owein', 'Peredur son of Efrawg', and 'Gereint and Enid', on the other hand, are similar in themes to the tales of Crestien de Troyes and Thomas Malory.

The significance of the tale of 'Culhwch and Olwen', lies in the fact that it portrays the Welsh image of King Arthur. Here as in other tales, King Arthur is not the protagonist, but the king who has already achieved heroism in the past.

The story of 'Culhwch and Olwen', will be studied later on in relation to R.S. Thomas's reference to it and to the role of King Arthur. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that another tale which is very close in feeling to 'Culhwch and Olwen' is 'The Dream of Rhonabwy', which circles round a genuine historical figure, Madawg, son of Maredudd who died in 1159. But according to Jeffrey Gantz, this reality is 'merely a frame for the heart of the story: the dream'. (7)

The tales of the Mabinogi which interweave the two qualities

of dream and reality manifest the imaginative strength of the Celtic heritage, and its persistence even after the introduction of Christianity in Wales.

The Celtic saints were often men of meditation rather than preaching. 'The early Welsh hermits', as stated by Gwyn Williams, 'retired to wild, desolate places in the mountains, on the sea-shore or on the islands around the coasts, there to meditate and mortify the flesh'. (8)

One wonders if R.S. thomas in his wanderings in the Welsh countryside, intends to display the same Celtic quality of meditation. His description of himself as a 'nature mystic' supports this view. Furthermore, his visits from one chapel to another, and from village to village, which are recorded in those poems which show a sense of place, are reminiscent of the early Welsh saints' travels spreading and establishing sites for the new faith. Today, these places have become parish churches which bear the saints' names. But some significantly, were dedicated to Celtic pagan gods, like the old parish of Llansantffraid, which is according to Gwyn Williams, 'a dedication to Ffraid, the Welsh form of the Irish Brigit, Celtic goddess of healing, learning, poetry and the crafts'. (9)

The old Celtic tribal division of Wales into four main kingdoms of Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth and Morgannwg was kept unchanged even after the Roman invasion and the coming of Christianity to Wales.

The security and integrity of these Welsh kingdoms came under direct threat when the Saxon conquest of England occurred, causing destruction of towns and forcing their inhabitants to flee to other lands.

Although the Welsh, along with their Celtic cousins in the north, resisted the Saxons' further penetration in a series of successful battle s, the Saxon invasion of England, eventually divided the Celts; the Welsh were cut off from cousins in the north.

The Celtic kingdoms of the north under the leadership of Urien of Rheged, and Mynyddog Mwynfawr of the Gododdin stood firmly against the new invaders.

The courage and prowess of their leaders have become part of Celtic literary tradition, recorded in the songs of the great bards of the period, Aneirin and Taliesin.

These two great Celtic bards laid down the tradition that has remained alive for centuries in Welsh poetry, and through this tradition a whole world of past glory is revealed.

It is interesting, indeed, to observe how a sense of Celtic brotherhood could drive a bard like Taliesin from his native place in Powys to south Scotland to sing for a Celtic king whose kingdom was under threat of invasion. Of the same kind is the sense of affinity with Celtic writers expressed in the present time by R.S. Thomas, W.B. Yeats and Hugh MacDiarmid in particular, which brings him closer to this notion

of Celtic brotherhood. The songs of Taliesin were eulogy, with definite political implications. The poets of this tradition were, in the words of Emyr Humphreys, 'The voice of resistance, the tireless mouthpiece of the endless process of defending a realm under siege'. (10)

Yet, the poet achieved this by being, more than anything, a preserver of the tradition; a man who kept the memory of the past alive, almost like a chronicler who records the succession to the throne of a dynasty through its genealogy. It is in this manner that Taliesin's contemporary the bard Aneirin forged King Arthur's spirit in his epic poem Y Gododdin. Mynyddog the King of Gododdin is portrayed as a warrior of great likeness to Arthur whose heroic virtues were obviously Celtic.

The tradition of heroic poetry continued even after the fall of the Celtic kingdoms in the north, one by one, to the Saxons, due to the fact that the Welsh survived to form an isolated Celtic nation, and 'this isolation of the Welsh people was confirmed when Offa, King of Mercia, built the great dyke which bears his name between 757 and 796'. (11)

But the great dyke which was built to keep the Welsh out did not stop raids which eventually led to a bitter conflict between the sides.

The agonies of the Welsh at this period of their history are again preserved by the Welsh poets, and reflected in

a series of laments. The most notable ones are those by Llywarch Hen, the chieftain who lost his twenty-four sons in war against the English.

Such laments, though full of melancholy, do not depart from the main function of the heroic poetry tradition which is the portrayal of the heroic virtues of the Celtic leaders.

In his praise to his last son Gwen, Llywarch Hen associates him with Urien Rheged the Celtic leader:

> 'My son was a man, a stubborn defender of his right,
> And he was nephew to Urien,
> At Rhyd Forlas Gwen was slain.' (12)

In other poems attributed to a princely girl, Heledd, daughter of Cyndrawn whose brother Cynddylan was slain by the English, there is an emphasis on the nobility of Cynddylan:

> 'No royal prince trod on Cynddylan's domain,
> He never retreated a foot,
> His mother reared no feeble son.' (13)

These are the qualities of the Celtic Prince preserved in the songs of the Welsh poets and in the image of Welsh leaders.

Three Welsh leaders of this period of Welsh history who kept alive the memory of past kings and revived their heroic spirit were Rhodri Mawr, Hywel Dda, and Gruffydd ap Llywelyn.

Of these three leaders, only Gruffydd ap Llywelyn had a tragic end to his life. He was attacked unexpectedly by Harold of Wessex, but he managed to escape to Ireland. However, 'in the latter years he became a hunted fugitive and was betrayed and slain by some of his followers.' (14) His head was sent to Harold, who to his misfortune never

enjoyed his triumph, for he himself was defeated and slain by William the Conqueror at Hastings in 1066.

After the tragic fall of Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, Wales once more was divided between rival princes. To bring Wales under his domination, William the Conqueror created small earldoms along the Welsh borders and gave the barons a free hand to seize lands and build as many castles as they could.

Throughout the resistance to the Normans, the royal house of Gwynedd produced great national leaders such as Owain Gwynedd, Llywelyn the Great, and Llywelyn ap Gruffydd better known as Llywelyn the Last.

Llywelyn the Great married King John's daughter Joan, and swore allegiance to the English King, thus securing the independence of Wales. Llywelyn the Last, on the other hand, was slain by King Edward I.

The struggle of Llywelyn the Last against the English and his tragic death (his head was cut off and sent to London for display, while his body was saved and buried in the Abbey of Cwm Hir) is recorded in the elegy of the bard Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch. Gwyn Williams comments on this elegy that:.

> 'It is passionate and personal and it moves forward from the collapse of the poet's own world, through the general deprivation and suffering of the people of Wales, to the involvement of the whole of nature and the very order of the universe.' (15)

If we look at the role of the Welsh poets during the period of resistance against the Normans, we can easily detect

a continuity with the heroic songs of Taliesin, and with Aneirin's Y Gododdin, a continuity that amounts almost to imitation. Reference to past heroes is often made to invoke heroism and prophesy victory.

In Gruffuydd ab yr Ynad Coch's elegy on the death of Llywelyn the Last, the shadow of the Welsh Arthur is dominant and there is a hint of his last battle Camlan. 'Llywelyn wore Arthur's crown. Now it was lost. It seemed the end of the old order, the end of an old song.' (16)

With Llywelyn's death, there came to an end a line of princely succession from Rhodri Mawr, and there started an era of English domination, which also witnessed the demise of the heroic-poetry tradition. The link between the Welsh bards and their past tradition was broken, and instead they 'sang of the beauty of girls and of the solitude and safety of woodland' (17)

The chief figure in this new literary period was undoubtedly, Dafydd ap Gwilym. By his time, with every national uprising subdued by the English, the princely courts of Wales superseded by aristocratic families, and Welshmen enlisted in the English army, there were no grounds for singing of the past.

Yet it seems unjust to suggest that at this particular time, Welsh history and Welsh poetry were totally devoid of any heroic themes.

Owain Lawgoch, a Welshman in the French army and would-be

redeemer of the Welsh nation, made a courageous move towards liberating Wales from the English by allying himself with the French against the English. Gwyn Williams recalls a poet by the name of Gruffydd ap Maredudd of Anglesey who 'wrote a resounding awdl calling on Owain to take up arms against England to return to Wales to take up his rightful inheritance'. (18) But Owain Lawgoch did not live long enough to lead any uprising in Wales - he was stabbed to death by an English spy John Lamb. Thus in the general absence of a great Welsh leader strong enough to fight the English at this period of Welsh history, the Welsh poets turned to other subjects; some worked on new techniques of poetry, and others associated themselves with the exploits of the Welsh officers in the English army or simply wrote eulogies to Welsh landowners. The bard Iolo Goch wandered from one corner of Wales to another, singing to Welshmen like Hywel ap Gruffydd (later to become Sir Hywel of the Axe, when his role in the English army had pleased the Black Prince) and celebrating the ancient Welsh tradition in the house of a prominent Welsh landowner like the Bishop of St. Asaph.

He also sang in praise of a Welshman who was to become one of the great national leaders in Wales; Owain Glyndŵr. But it was by another bard Gruffydd Llwyd, that the prophecy of Glyndŵr's 'rising star' was made. Whatever the factors which contributed to Glyndŵr's rebellion were, and personal grievance was said to be a main one, one cannot overlook the fact that the strength of the movement was seeded in

the extent of discontent among the Welsh. He would not have succeeded had not the Welsh stood beside him and followed him.

For this particular reason, when on 16 September 1400, he was proclaimed Prince of Wales, his friends and relatives, government officials, farmers and clergymen, and even Welsh students at Oxford and Cambridge joined him in his house at Glyndyfrdwy. 'What in the north of England was a drive for regional autonomy was in Wales a national movement for liberation, castles and towns, the hated symbols of foreign domination, were taken and destroyed.' (19)

His first confrontation was with Lord Grey who had already occupied parts of his lands. Glyndŵr attacked Grey's territories and went on to other English towns. His rebellion was consolidated by the rising of the Tudors in Anglesey and had the backing and support of the Franciscan friars of Llanfaes.

His first victory was on the banks of Hyddgen on Plynlimmon over an English army which had been sent to capture him. Then followed his success against his enemy Lord Grey and his victory over Edmund Mortimer at Bryn Glas. The first setback, however, came when his eldest son was taken prisoner, and his friend the Welsh Prior of Llantarnam fell in the battle.

In 1407 Prince Henry (who was to become Henry V) took control of Aberystwyth and two years later entered Harlech.

The rise and fall of Owain Glyndŵr has become a chapter of the past, and he himself as stated by Emyr Humphreys 'quietly took his place in the cave, which is the Cymric equivalent of Pantheon, and has been sleeping there alongside Arthur, Cadwallon, Cadwaladr, Owain Lawgoch, and all the other heroes, ever since'. (20)

Over the centuries, the struggle of Owain Glyndwr has become a legend well preserved in the songs of the Welsh bards.

Unlike Llywelyn the Last whose death aroused sympathy among the Welsh poets, no elegies were made on Glyndŵr. Perhaps the Welsh bards thought he was not dead, but only vanished to reappear at the right time.

In the next chapter we shall examine the image of Glyndŵr as portrayed by R.S. Thomas and illustrate to what extent R.S. Thomas can be labelled with the ancient bards, a preserver of the past.

Notes and References

1. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.31.

2. Howell T. Evans, Mediaeval Wales, p.18.

3. Prys T.J. Morgan, 'The Clouds of Witness' in Anatomy of Wales, p.20.

4. Jeffrey Gantz, The Mabinogion, p.10.

5. Ibid, p.28.

6. Ibid, p.11.

7. Ibid, p.19.

8. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.43.

9. Ibid, p.44.

10. Emyr Humphreys, The Taliesin Tradition, p.6.

11. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.50.

12. A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (eds.) A Guide to Welsh Literature, vol. 1, p.88.

13. Ibid. p.95.

14. Famous Welshmen, p.11.

15. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, pp.79-80.

16. Emyr Humphreys, The Taliesin Tradition, p.16.

17. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.86.

18. Ibid. p.92.

19. Ibid. p.96.

20. Emyr Humphreys, The Taliesin Tradition, p.36.

CHAPTER THREE: R.S. THOMAS'S ROLE IN PRESERVING THE PAST

As mentioned earlier, the traditional role of the Welsh poet was to establish a link with the past by celebrating those glorious moments and praising the rulers whose true Welshness was traced through genealogical evidence. He had also a duty towards his community.

Over centuries the Welsh have preserved their heritage and independence by adhering to their own tradition which has been kept alive in the songs of the bards and in the popular life of the community. The Welsh heritage has hitherto been safe in the hands of the community, the ultimate protector of the Welsh language and culture. Therefore, any decline in this community constitutes a threat to the heritage.

Today, there are serious threats endangering the existence and the continuance of the Welsh community. The destruction of the countryside, sometimes by urbanization and the influence of the mass-media sometimes by depopulation and the emigration of the peasants to towns; these things have undermined the structure of the Welsh community. The heritage of the past is in danger either of disappearing, or of being preserved in museums for the gaze of tourists.

Such harsh realities are, as stated by John Osmond 'given political focus because of the sense of community identity, and with it, community responsibility that exists in Wales'. (1)

Just as the decline of the Welsh community has forced Welsh politicians to act, it has also provoked Welsh poets to respond, and this sense of duty towards the community has not been confined to those poets writing in Welsh. Indeed, it can be argued that in the post Second World War period the Anglo-Welsh poets have added a special sense of desolation and loss to a poetry of profound commitment to Wales. (2)

Among twentieth century poets writing in English, R.S. Thomas comes very close to the Welsh bardic tradition, expressing a strong feeling for the past while adhering, at the same time, to the literary norms of twentieth century English literature. In his poetry we find the Celtic spirit of Taliesin, the devotion of Iolo Goch and of the laments of Llywarch Hen. There is also a sense of frustration at the present, coupled with fear; man has become so mechanized that he is hardly aware of his actions. R.S. Thomas' inability to come to terms with modern man thus merges with his longing for the past.

But R.S. Thomas's concern with the past is not romantic escapism, in that it includes concern with the Welsh community, which is for him, in so far as it still survives, a living embodiment of the past. It is in the Welsh countryside, he says, that 'beats the old heart of Wales'. (3)

'R.S. Thomas', in the words of Glyn Jones, 'is much nearer a tradition in Wales which sees the poet as part of, and concerned with the community in which he lives'. (4)

His commitment to the Welsh community is profound and sincere. It brings a:

> 'Constant realization that he lives in or belongs to a country of great age, that by geography and tradition has developed an individual way of life.' (5)

To give this community a sense of reality and continuity with the past, R.S. Thomas has created the enduring figure of Iago Prytherch. For R.S. Thomas Prytherch is a symbol of endurance:

> 'Yet this is your prototype, who, season by season
> Against siege of rain and the wind's attrition,
> Preserves his stock, an impregnable fortress
> Not to be stormed even in death's confusion.' (6)
> (A Peasant)

And though he might not be real, he is certainly a true descendant of the past.

> 'And Prytherch - was he a real man,
> Rolling his pain day after day
> Up life's hill? Was he a survival
> Of a lost past, wearing the times'
> Shabbier cast-offs, refusing to change
> His lean horse for the quick tractor?' (7)
> (Which?)

Iago Prytherch is, therefore, the quintessence of the past and the remnant of the Welsh community. 'His lean horse' has been, in fact, long ago changed for a 'quick tractor' as the Welsh community gradually went into decline.

Speaking about Manavon, R.S. Thomas admits that:

> 'When I went there in 1942 there was not a single tractor in the area. The men worked with their hands, hoeing, sheep-shearing, collecting hay, and cutting hedges.' (8)

Thus Iago Prytherch and the Welsh community in Manavon, which is apparently a microcosm of Wales, became things of the past. For this reason R.S. Thomas cannot rely on them. There are realities that tear him apart; the mere fact that the Welsh community is disappearing is enough

to make him turn Iago Prythrch into a metaphor , a facet of his own mind:

> You served me well, Prytherch,
> From all my questionings and doubts;
> From brief acceptance of the times'
> Deities; from ache of the mind
> Or body's tyranny, I turned,
> Often after a whole year,
> Often twice in the same day,
> To where you read in the slow book
> Of the farm.' (9)
>
> (Servant)

Consequently, the Wales of his imagination which is full of 'jewels to gather', becomes a graveyard:

> 'Come to Wales
> To be buried; the undertaker
> Will arrange it for you.' (10)
>
> (Welcome to Wales)

And as he comes to accept the fact that the Welsh community is not as flourishing as it was, he creates nightmare scenes; the community is dead, its ghosts disturb the peace of the fields:

> 'Dewi is out paddling in the grass
> Ianto, he is doing the same.
> Llywelyn John? He was here just now.
>
> Don't go out on the hill's brow
> To look for them. Let them lie
> Safe and sane in their names' cradle.
>
> Let the round mind fill their place
> At the scrubbed table with tall farms,
> Beautiful in the halflight.
>
> Let the old mother rambling on
> Interminably as the wind keep them
> For you, as for herself, young.
>
> It is best so. What have those shadows,
> Torturing the field's peace
> Like dead trees, to do with a man?' (11)
>
> (Brothers)

There is another image of death in 'Gospel Truth'; the Puw family are involved in a series of accusations and confrontations: they might be shadows of a real family now dead:

> 'There is an empty
> Place at the table; instead
> Of a respite from that tune

> In the skull, I must endure
> The accusation of dead eyes
> From a portrait. It is not my fault.' (12)

Such a gloomy picture indicates that like the Welsh community, R.S. Thomas's view underwent a shift. It took him several years to realise that the image of Wales he always had in mind, did not exist in reality.

In both Manavon and Eglwys fach he was struck by the discovery that there was no true Welsh community there. However, most of the critics thought that in Aberdaron at last he had found the Wales of his imagination, but soon came his response:

> 'No, I haven't found the Wales of my imagination, but I've found the community that was Welsh-speaking, and you can't go on writing about the same thing all the time - I mean what's happened to me is that I'm much more active now. When I was away from it, I was writing about it, but I wasn't very active, but now that I moved into the Welsh community I don't write about it I act more ...! (13)

The Welsh-speaking community in Aberdaron, obviously satisfied R.S. Thomas so far as the linguistic factor was concerned: it lacked, however, a sense of commitment to past traditions and a firm adherence to family roots.

The Welsh community have for a long time despite hardship retained their tradition by their 'recognition to the value of society'. (14) Such a tradition has been passed from generation to generation:

> 'Here, in the soil and the dirt and the peat do we find life and heaven and hell, and it is in these surroundings that a Welshman should forge his soul.' (15)

The Welsh community which is in R.S. Thomas's perception mainly a farming community, has, in recent years, been diverted from the old principles. Their traditional skills are no

longer passed on to the younger generation, and the tradition is not as strong as it was before.

Furthermore, they do not seem to show enough enthusiasm for their family roots, and thus the names of great Welsh leaders like Arthur, Llywelyn the Great, Llywelyn the Last, Owain Glyndŵr and many others fall into oblivion.

So it can easily be argued that the Welsh community's real existence lies in its past history where once there was a sense of genealogical affinities.

In 'Genealogy', R.S. Thomas traces the history of a Welshman, probably himself, through a genealogical order with reference to great Welsh leaders who fought to preserve such tradition but:

> 'I stand now
> In the hard light of the brief day
> Without roots, but with many branches. (16)

There is agony as well as anger in realizing that the roots have been eradicated, and only the branches have been retained.

A rootless tree obviously means that the national identity is in jeopardy. R.S. Thomas's anger arises from the fact that once he was Welsh:

> 'All right, I was Welsh. Does it matter?
> I spoke the tongue that was passed on
> To me in the place I happened to be,
> A place huddled between grey walls
> Of cloud for at least half the year.' (17)
> (A Welsh Testament)

Consequently, and as a direct result of the lack of identity, the glory of the past gradually fades away. After all,

what is the significance of a glorious past for people who dissociate themselves from it? Therefore, the sense of despair which has coloured his poems, one can assume, stems from his frustration at his fellow countrymen who cannot appreciate such a great past. It is this lack of appreciation on the part of the Welsh of their past that drives R.S. Thomas into a quandary; if this glorious past belongs to this graceless peasant in the field, or to these irresponsible townspeople, who are both unaware of its greatness, then it must be a derelict past.

'There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics,
Wind-bitten towers and castles
With sham ghosts;
Mouldering quarries and mines;
And an impotent people,
Sick with inbreeding
Worrying the carcase of an old song.' (18)
(Welsh Landscape)

R.S. Thomas is not at ease when he utters such words, and yet he is fully conscious that the people who have abandoned their heritage, by fleeing to towns and cities, have sentenced their language and culture to death, and do not deserve a better past.

There is a note of distress in the final lines of 'A Welsh Testament', which is derived from R.S. Thomas's own dilemma:

'Am I the keeper
Of the heart's relics, blowing the dust
In my own eyes? I am a man;
I never wanted the drab rôle
Life assigned me, an actor playing
To the past's audience upon a stage
Of earth and stone; the absurd label
Of birth, of race hanging askew
About my shoulders.' (19)

Melancholic as well as pitiful, is the voice of the only man who bears 'the absurd label of birth, of race'. R.S. Thomas's endeavour to illustrate the past with its manifold dimensions seems to have ended in total failure. It neither awakened the conscience of the Welsh in the fields, nor provoked the Welsh in towns and cities. On the contrary it enraged them and left them with no choice but to retaliate. 'This nostaligic glancing backward', says Peter Gruffydd, 'seems to me sentimental indulgence, especially if it involves some myth-making about a 'free people''. (20)

Dafydd Elis Thomas presents a different critical response:

> 'I am being critical of a despair-laden view of Wales generated by a historically-motivated nationalism, which because of its very motivation of necessity had to despair of present and future.' [21]

And a more recent criticism comes from Dai Smith who not only accuses R.S. Thomas of 'fundamentalism', but also argues that 'R.S. Thomas has turned 'Wales' into ... 'an analogy for most people's experience of living in the twentieth century ... a special, spare grammar and vocabulary in which certain statements can be made as in no other language'. He then continues to state that 'the actual history of Wales is then ejected by R.S. Thomas from the reservation where bleak stoicism is a sunny virtue ...' Subsequently, 'the past would have to be pulled into the present until it blotted out the false dawn.' (22)

One wonders if it is because of this criticism that he is forced to abandon that 'drab rôle' he refers to in 'A Welsh Testament', as 'an actor playing to the past's audience

...' or is it because he cannot stick to his 'drab rôle' of singing to the past while Wales in the present is faced with crucial problems, economic rather than cultural ones?

But then who assigned him this 'drab rôle'? Who made him the mouthpiece of the past Wales? First his own race who are not exempt from his hatred:

> ....'I find
> This hate's for my own kind,
> For men of the Welsh race
> Who brood with dark face
> Over their thin navel
> To learn what to sell;' (23)
> (Those Others)

This is not all; he refers to other Welshmen but this time with a tribute:

> 'There are still those other
> Castaways on a sea
> Of grass, who call to me,
> Clinging to their doomed farms;
> Their hearts though rough are warm
> And firm, and their slow wake
> Through time breeds for our sake.' (24)
> (Those Others)

But despite his scolding, one can always detect a humane tendency, and an affectionate approach towards his people as shown in the above lines. His temporary fulmination will not under any circumstances, undermine the fact that R.S. Thomas in the first place, is the poet of community. The traditional role of the Welsh folk poet has been passed to him, and thus he has to adjust himself according to the community's ups and downs. In spite of his criticisms, R.S. Thomas has always remained fundamentally sympathetic towards the Welsh community.

In 'They', there is a note of utmost sincerity, which is

full of love towards these people:

> 'I take their hands,
> Hard hands. There is no love
> For such, only a willed
> Gentleness.' (25)

Here is a man who presents himself as the guardian of these people, who owns the cure to their suffering and hardship:

> ...'Daily I take their side
> In their quarrel, calling their faults
> Mine. How do I serve so
> This being they have shut out
> Of their houses, their thoughts, their lives?' (26)
> (They)

This scene of close encounter with the farmers is a rare occurrence in R.S. Thomas's poetry. One can feel that these farmers are real people, derived from his daily observations and regular visits to their houses.

In his portrayal of the peasant s' life, R.S. Thomas even touches on their personal and private affairs with a reference to Welsh tradition. Earlier on, the role of the Welsh farmer, in particular, the emblematic significance of Iago Prytherch as the symbol of the Welsh community has been mentioned. The duty of the Welsh woman in fulfilling their daily needs while their husbands work on their farms, has also been analysed by R.S. Thomas. In 'Farm Wives', R.S. Thomas illustrates the work of these women which is not of less hardship than their husbands:

> 'I have seen them smirking, as I passed,
> Toothless, busy with their brood
> Of cats and chickens, heard their harsh
> Voices calling in cow language
> The heifers down from their thin diet
> Of rush and bracken and coarse moss.
>
> Sallow of cheek, a crow's wing
> Of hair over the brow's smudged
> Vellum, their legs all red and scarred
> With brambles and the bites of flies,
> They patch and mend and milk and bake,

Enduring the long ache
Of loneliness, till you return
At twilight, and enduring then
Your sullenness.' (27)

Inside the house the family gather to hear from the elderly members the tales of the land. R.S. Thomas in his depiction of the Welsh family focuses on an important element of the Welsh tradition which has been honoured since the reign of Hywel Dda: the hearth. 'The social centre of farmhouse and cottage life', in the words of Iorwerth C. Peate, 'has always been the hearth and the focus of the hearth is the fire'. (28) And according to the tradition, the fire should not be extinguished for 'it stood as a perpetual sign that the site where it stood was the site of an occupied homestead' (29).

The hearth has also a social function; it gathers people round itself which is in fact, a symbol of unity in the Welsh community.

Furthermore, the oral tradition of folk tales originated around the hearth. So 'the talk by the hearth of a winter night', is an inseparable aspect of Welsh tradition, and to the exhausted farmer in a wintry night it is, as illustrated by R.S. Thomas, a source of relief:

'The rain and wind are hard masters;
I have known you wince under their lash.
But there was comfort for you at the day's end
Dreaming over the warm ash

Of a turf fire on a hill farm,
Contented with your accustomed ration
Of bread and bacon, ... ' (30)
(Too Late)

In 'A Peasant', it also serves the same purpose:

'And then at night see him fixed in his chair
Motionless, except when he leans to gob in the fire.' (31)

But there are instances in which the hearth does not fulfil its function; it adds to the farmer's misery a sense of despair:

'You may look in vain
Through the eyes' window; on his meagre hearth
The thin, shy soul has not begun its reign
Over the darkness.' (32)
(Autumn on the Land)

Again the same dismal picture is illustrated in 'Gideon Pugh':

'Gideon Pugh has a house of his own, but no wife
To ease the loneliness of his wide bed,
And the crickets, invisible under the cauldron
Of simmering broth, are a poor exchange for children
With their wearisome prattle on the bare hearth.' (33)

In 'Evans', the misery of the sick man is aggravated by a little life on the hearth:

'Evans? Yes, many a time
I came down his bare flight
Of stairs into the gaunt kitchen
With its wood fire, where crickets sang
Accompaniment to the black kettle's
Whine ...' (34)

Relevant to the role of the hearth in the Welsh community is the seasons' celebration which is a prominent feature of the Welsh countryside and undoubtedly Celtic in spirit. The gatherings round the hearth which occur only in winter are replaced by various festivals in spring and summer. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that the Celtic year was divided into two seasons: 'Winter Kalend', and 'Summer Kalend'. Both Kalends were deeply rooted in the Welsh countryside and were always accompanied by festivals. The introduction of Christianity in Wales apparently did not abolish the pagan customs often associated with the

seasons' festivals, but 'adopted those customs which it did not see fit to destroy, sublimating them to its own purposes and when necessary investing them with an added ceremonial.' (35)

The Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter were celebrated in between the two Kalends. But it was the first of January that fell in the Winter Kalend and was the New Year's Day which became 'far more significant than Christmas Day'. (36)

It is interesting to note that these festivals which were held during the Winter and Summer Kalends had symbolical implications as well. The portrayal of the Winter and Summer Kalends as two kings, each trying to be victorious is in fact, Celtic in essence. Besides, there is a reference to the symbolic acts of Winter and Summer in the old Celtic tales.

In the story of Trystan and Esyllt, King Arthur faces a hard decision whether to hand Esyllt to her lawful husband and his cousin March or to her lover Trystan. He decides at last to award 'Esyllt to the one of them for as long as the leaves should be on the trees, and to the other for as long as the leaves should not be on the trees', (37) and then March is asked to choose first. He goes for Winter, and thus Arthur's judgement is to leave Esyllt with Trystan who stands for Summer.

Such festivals have been modified to represent a Christian

society - though T. Gwynn Jones quoting Sike (1880) states that 'the custom of carrying the King of Summer and the King of Winter was observed at Defynnog in Breconshire'. (38) By the time R.S. Thomas moved to Manavon in 1942 such customs had already vanished. However, in The Minister which is a tale about a community, R.S. Thomas plunges deep into the roots of the Welsh peasantry. Taken in its entirety it is, undoubtedly a satirical piece, and yet in this portrayal of Welsh Non-conformist community, there are many scenes which are derived from the tradition.

From the outset, one may assume that the scenes in this long poem change with the changing seasons. Death and birth, decay and renewal are the outcome of each season. The people in this community are tied to the outcome of the seasons, and here lies the tragedy of Morgan the minister ; he cannot adjust himself within the frame of this community:

> 'In spite of all
> His courage Morgan could not avert
> His failure,'(39)

for he was wrong:

> 'Wrong from the start, for nature's truth
> Is primary and her changing seasons
> Correct out of a vaster reason
> The vague errors of the flesh.' (40)

Like most of Thomas's personae, Morgan cannot appreciate the beauty of nature yet unconsciously finds it rather tempting. In one instance he is troubled by a singing thrush:

> 'Its singing troubled my young mind
> With strange theories, pagan but sweet,
> That made the Book's black letters dance
> To a tune John Calvin never heard.' (41)

The sunlight is another temptation:

'The evening sunlight on the wall
Of my room was a new temptation.' (42)

But Morgan's dilemma lies in the fact that he cannot accept what was practised in the past:

'A few flowers bloomed beneath the window,
Set there once by a kind hand
In the old days, a woman's gesture
Of love against the childless years.
Morgan pulled them up; they were untidy.
He sprinkled cinders there instead.' (43)

During the two kalends of Winter and Summer, various activities took place in the community. The Winter Kalend was overlapped by Christmas and New Year's festivals, as well as traditional games of hunting and story telling. The Summer Kalend coincided with the harvest season.

One of the customs related to the harvesting is the plaiting of the last tuft of corn. It is then withdrawn to a distance, and the reapers throw sickles at it. After being cut, it is taken to the farmhouse by the reaper, who hides it in his clothes.

It is worth mentioning at this point that although The Minister represents a very Welsh tradition, Non-conformity , it seems that by depicting such old customs, R.S. Thomas prefers an older, more pagan, definition of Welsh tradition.

This old custom of plaiting the last tuft of corn is referred to very lightly:

'Harvest, harvest! The oats that were too weak
To hold their heads up had been cut down
And placed in stocks. There was no nonsense
Plaiting the last sheaf and wasting time
Throwing sickles.' (44)

After the harvest time, comes the trip to towns to sell their produce or work in a farm to earn some money. This activity is well preserved by the community in The Minister where the farmers take their cattle to towns for sale:

> 'Drive on, farmer to market
> With your pigs and your lean cows
> To the town, where the dealers are waiting.' (45)

This was an occasion not to be missed for it was considered part of his merry-making myth:

> 'And the girl in the green blouse,
> Fresh as a celandine from the spring meadows,
> Builds like a fabulous tale
> Tower upon tower on the counter
> The brown and the golden ale.' (46)

But in addition to this, there was also another old custom which was practised for a long time. Speaking about his poem 'Border Blues', R.S. Thomas mentions that at the time of writing the poem he 'was conscious of certain old customs and behaviour that people living up on the hill round Manavon a century back had followed; when they wanted employment they'd have gone down into England to work in the hay harvest because the hay harvest was earlier down in the lowland, and they walked down and gained a little money and then they came back to their own farms just in time to mow the hay.' (47) Thus, this old Welsh custom is one of many features of Welsh tradition illustrated in 'Border Blues'. Here, the Welsh drove to Shrewsbury not only to see the pantomime, 'The Babes', or 'meet in the inn', but also to seek employment:

> 'And to think that my grand-dad walked it each year,
> Scythe on shoulder to mow the hay,
> And his own waiting when he got back.' (48)

Besides this visit to towns, there was in the past another date of importance in the traditional farming year when farmers drove their cattle from the lowland homestead (hendre) to

the summer pastures (hafod). R.S. Thomas explains its significance:

> 'As the first of May comes round, we Welsh still remember the importance of this day in old Welsh society, for it was the day on which the pastoral community moved up from the lowlands to the summer grasslands. This practice, already well defined in the laws of Hywel Dda in the tenth century, continued well into the nineteenth ...' (49)

And it is illustrated in 'Border Blues':

> ' ...it's the first of May
> And I must go the way of my fathers
> Despite the loneli- you might say rudeness.' (50)

In 'A Welshman in St. James' Park' R.S. Thomas's longing for the Welsh countryside triggers to his mind the picture of this old custom; in his lonely situation the hafod becomes a metaphor:

> ' ...I think of a Welsh hill
> That is without fencing, and the men,
> Bosworth blind, who left the heather
> And the high pastures of the heart.' (51)

Fox-hunting which was apparently a very old kind of sport, and was very much resented by R.S. Thomas - occurred in Winter. 'It was a strange kind of hunting', (52) he says referring to it when he was in Manavon. The sport is also practised by the community in <u>The Minister</u> :

> 'Snow in the fields, snow on the heather;
> The fox was abroad in the new moon
> Barking.' (53)

And a very realistic picture of the fox being wounded is drawn in 'January':

> 'The fox drags its wounded belly
> Over the snow, the crimson seeds
> Of blood burst with a mild explosion,
> Soft as excrement, bold as roses.' (54)

The whole activities of the Winter kalend are summarized in <u>The Minister</u> :

'Winter was like that; a meeting, a foxhunt,
And the weekly journey to market ...' (55)

The customs related to marriage were also practised during the festivals. The boys and girls of the community often chose each other in social gatherings and meetings. 'At some of these meetings, youths gave tokens to girls. A twig of birch meant constancy, a sprig of hazel signified a change of attitude.' (56)

Among the numerous customs of marriage in Wales, the one which involves making three furrows in the ashes is worth mentioning. The girls choose their future husbands by observing the young man who touches the one before the last furrow. The young men on the other hand, had their own way of choosing their brides; they would walk backward to a bush where they could find the hair of their future wives.

There was also a strange marriage custom which occurred sometime before midnight, and took place somewhere near the church. The person concerned (male or female) was supposed to sow hemp seed while repeating 'hemp I sow, let him (or her) that comes after me mow', 'looking back on the stroke of twelve, the sower would see either a coffin or the future partner ...' (57)

For some odd reasons R.S. Thomas's young men do not seem to be involved in marriage; their fate is to remain untouched until their death.

In 'The Airy Tomb', Twm takes the family farm and stays

without a wife till his death, though he can easily join the village boys in their social activities, or responds to the village girls who try to trap him, but he is too busy and shows hardly any interest:

> 'Of course there was talk in the parish, girls stood at their doors
> In November evenings, their glances busy as moths
> Round that far window; and some, whom passion made bolder
> As the buds opened, lagged in the bottom meadow
> And coughed and called.' (58)

In The Minister it is the community that shows strength and will in deciding whether young Morgan, the minister should or should not marry:

> 'A young 'un we want, someone young
> Without a wife. Let him learn
> His calling first, and choose after
> Among our girls, if he must marry.' (59)

'Gideon Pugh' is also lonely and without a wife:

> 'Gideon Pugh has a house of his own, but no wife
> To ease the loneliness of his wide bed, ...' (60)

Conspicuous from these lines is the fact that to some extent celibacy was common in the Welsh countryside. T. Gwynn Jones recalls a story of four bachelor brothers who lived together for almost eighty years (61).

In 'On the Farm' the Puw family live with three male bachelors and a girl.

In 'Meet the Family' we are introduced to John's family. The head of the family John All is apparently dead, leaving only his portrait to 'stare from the wall'. But his staring indicates his regret and a sense of guilt for having fathered the three Johns. His wife shares that feeling:

'John All and his lean wife,
Whose forced complicity gave life
To each loathed foetus, stare from the wall,
Dead not absent. The night falls.' (62)

The Puw family in 'Gospel Truth', also comprises three males and a girl. Like John All, Mark Puw also shows his uneasiness about something:

'Who put me here?
I must get on with this job;
The rain is coming. I must get on
With this job. Who put me
Here? The bugger; I'd like
To see him now in my place.' (63)

The man who put him there is obviously his father who is now dead, and therefore, cannot be blamed by other Puws. It is Mark Puw, now the head of the family, who takes the blame:

'I shall get all the blame
For this. Who put the seed down
In such places?' (64)

But, as in 'Meet the Family' the portrait of a dead man reveals the source of agony:

'There is an empty
Place at the table; instead
Of a respite from that tune
In the skull, I must endure
The accusation of dead eyes
From a portrait. It is not my fault.' (65)

Significantly enough, the customs related to marriage and celibacy always imply belief in the supernatural. On each occasion held, there was a common belief among the people that fairies or ghosts were present. The fairies were expected to visit the betrothed couples, and the ghosts of the dead were to be seen on Winter's Eve, Summer's Eve and St. John's Eve.

There was also a widespread superstition that the names

of those who would die soon, would be announced by the spirits on Halloween in the church. The appearance of a ghost was thought to be for a particular reason - 'either to avenge a wrong, to fulfil a neglected duty, or to do a kindness to a relative or a friend.' (66)

The impression that one may have from R.S. Thomas's poems about the Welsh farmers is that like ghosts, they vanish whenever he approaches them, and are always mute when he speaks to them. In 'Brothers', these apparitions act like real peasants:

> 'Dewi is out paddling in the grass.
> Ianto, he is doing the same
> Llywelyn John? He was here just now.
> Don't go out on the hill's brow
> To look for them. Let them lie
> Safe and sane in their names' cradle.' (67)

Like real people these brothers are active in their work, and yet they don't want to be disturbed. The narrator advises us to keep away from them so that they remain young in the mind of their mother. And if still we doubt their existence, there is a direct answer:

> 'What have these shadows,
> Torturing the fields' peace
> Like dead trees, to do with a man?' (68)

In other instances the peasant seems to be dominated by supernaturals:

> 'I think there is some dark well
> You drink from, your eyes mirror
> Its chill waters; when I am in
> Your warm kitchen and rain beats
> On a slow drum, under the talk
> I hear you answering the cry
> Of wild voices, and through your veins'
> Sluices the night desolately pours.' (69)

Furthermore, there is another duty assigned to the farmer (Brother) besides his working on the farm:

'In new woods
There are the old ghosts to appease.' (70)

But the fear of 'the old ghosts' was felt among the Welsh farmers. This was due to the fact that the farmers strongly believed that the ghosts did exist.

In 'Phobia' such a fear of the shadows at night plants in the woman a chronic disease which brings about her death:

'This poor woman who was afraid,
Afraid of the gestures the trees made
In the wood at night or on the blind
At home; afraid of the heart's sound,
The intestinal rumour, the ripe swell
Of muscles under the taut skin;
Through long brooding conceived at last
Peculiar sickness, nurtured it
And reared it, till it was of age
To practise incest with its mother.
From such foul intercourse death came
Bloodily forth.' (71)

And in a unique situation illustrated in his poem 'Midnight on the Farm', R.S. Thomas himself becomes phobic. In a dialogue which occurs between two men, there is a sense of fear as the first man talks of the ghosts:

'Morgan, stop your silly talk
Of ghosts and ghouls, don't be a fool, man;
You'll have me quaking in a minute,
Going on like that.' (72)

While Morgan tries to comfort the speaker by saying that 'there's nothing in it', he is not feeling relieved at all:

'I know, but still the nights are lonely
In a hill farm, and on such a diet
Of old tales men's shadows grow
Unruly in the fickle light
Of a wood fire, so shut up, or -
Shut up, I said. I can't stand
A word more.' (72)

And suddenly Morgan disappears, apparently to play a trick on him and the speaker is left alone:

'I can see
You crouched there, Morgan ... Morgan bach ...
O God, too long!' (74)

R.S. Thomas seems to have had such an experience of a lonely walk at night. In his prose-work 'Y Llwybrau Gynt' (The Paths Gone By) he relates such an experience:

'Without moon or stars, it would be as black as pitch sometimes, and if one passed somebody, or heard people talking quietly at the side of the road, there was no point in saying 'Goodnight'; there would be no answer.' (75)

But as mentioned earlier, the ghost was thought to be harmless unless there was a duty to fulfil. Connected with the ghosts, there were other creatures of the same supernatural kind, namely demons, devils and magicians.

Demons and devils were invisible, while the magicians practised their skills openly.

The magicians were the wise men or the witch doctors of the community. They would not only cure people but also advise the farmers on how to rid their cattle of enchantment. In the words of R.S. Thomas himself - these magicians were, 'like the African witch doctors, wise men; there were people living up the hills who had the reputation of being wise men, magicians in a way that if you have a problem you went up and consulted them,' (76)

In 'Border Blues', the woman who comes back from the wise man has got the answer to her problem:

'Going by the long way round the hedges;
Speaking to no one, looking north
At every corner, she comes from the wise man.
Five lengths of yarn from palm to elbow

Wound round the throat, then measured again
Till the yarn shrinks, a cure for jaundice.' (77)

The instructions are quite simple; after measuring a piece of yarn from the elbow to the index finger, it is wound around the wrist of the patient. The yarn should be measured in a week's time, and its 'lengthening being a sign of improvement and contraction a sign of the contrary.' (78)

The farmer would also consult the wise man in cases where a mishap occurs to his animals. A reference to a bewitched mare is also made in 'Border Blues':

'Hush, not a word. When we've finished milking
And the stars are quiet, we'll get out the car
And go to Llangurig; the mare's bewitched
Down in the pasture, letting feg
Tarnish the mirror of bright grass.' (79)

And it was thought that a formula written in English 'with a trace of Welsh idiom in the meaning given to the term creatures', and read like ABRACADABRA could remove the spell. R.S. Thomas's formula in 'Border Blues', comes close to the original one:

'Six drops in a bottle,
And an old rhyme
Scratched on a slate
With stone pencil:
Abracadabra
Count three, count nine;
Bury it in your neighbour's field
At bed-time.' (80)

This type of magician was considered to be 'beneficial to society, and their art seems to be divination or the practice of white magic'. (81) However, this practice was so wide - spread in Wales that it could hardly be called magic in the sense that it is referred to in old Welsh Tales. In The Mabinogi, magic is an instrument of 'shape-shifting and transformation'. (82) In the Fourth Branch, Math son

of Mathonwy transforms his two nephews Gwydion and Gilfaethwy into various animal forms, and Lleu who has already been changed into an eagle regains his original shape with Gwydion's magical wand. Relevant to this point is the Celtic view that death was merely a stage of transformation or 'getting into some other form'. (83)

There was a belief in Wales that 'the soul was hunted in the air by the Dogs of Death'. (84) Such a belief had been replaced by a more subtle and refined view of death put forward by Christianity. The attributions to the dead by the relatives and friends now take place in the church. Furthermore, Christianity gave the dead body a sense of respect by introducing the coffin.

The quality of coffin depended on the dead man's financial position. There were occasions when the poor 'were buried in a linen shroud; without a coffin'. (85)

R.S. Thomas's peasants are buried in coffins according to the Christian tradition; but cheap coffins:

> 'And there in the cheap coffin Llywarch was lying,
> Taller than you thought and women were trying
> To read through their tears the brass plate.' (86)
> (The Minister)

Twm's father in 'The Airy Tomb' is also unfortunately being buried in a cheap coffin:

> 'At his mother's side
> He stood in the graveyard, where the undertaker
> Sprinkled earth rubble with a loud tattoo
> On the cheap coffin.' (87)

And in 'Funeral', the dead man is observed by curious spectators:

> 'On the cheap coffin
> The earth falls more clearly than tears.

What are these red faces for?
This incident of pious catarrh
At the grave's edge?' (88)

The funeral scene in The Minister shows that the dead body does receive proper Christian burial rituals, and the role of the minister in conducting such services is essential:

'It was my biggest funeral of all; the hills crawled
With black figures, drawn from remote farms
By death's magnet.' (89)

The gathering of people is surely an indication of community responsibility towards each other. In many parts of Wales on the eve of a funeral a 'vigil' was observed. According to T. Gwynn Jones, 'in some places, this custom was called padereua, 'prayer-saying'. The parish clerk would read, and psalms and hymns were sung'. (90)

In The Minister , R.S. Thomas describes a funeral scene:

'My voice deepened; the people were impressed.
Out in the cold graveyard we sang a hymn,
O fryniau Caersalem; and the Welsh hills looked on
Implacably.' (91)

In 'Two Versions of a Theme', R.S. Thomas depicts another funeral scene with a touch of satire:

'You couldn't, I thought, ask for
A seedier crowd than these Welsh
People, men and women, in their
Cheap shoes and expensive
Hats, blowing their noses, shuffling
Their cold feet, listening between lulls
In the gossip to the minister
Praying, while the stiff corpse lay
In its coffin beyond the reach of
Such cant.' (92)

These Welsh people who have gathered in the church to pay their respects to the dead man, obviously perceive death as due to some natural causes, disease or accident. For

this reason they mourn the dead especially if his death is premature. But they have also been taught by tradition that 'however 'sudden' the death, there will have been omens'. (93)

For the Welsh farmers, the main source of such omens was the weather. It was seen as a radar which signalled the birth and the death of something. The farmer's beliefs in weather were so strong that they 'have persisted in the form of customs, observed with what seems often to be tinged with an unconscious fear of mishap'. (94) It is also worth mentioning the significance of weather in the songs of Welsh bards. The elegies are usually imbued with wind and rain images, like Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch's elegy on the death of Llywelyn the Last:

> 'The heart is chilled under a breast of fear,
> Lust shrivels like dry branches.
> Don't you see the way of the wind and the rain?
> Don't you see the oaks beat together?
> Don't you see the sea stinging the land.' (95)

The praise-songs, on the other hand are coloured by mild weather imageries like the one by Gwalchmai boasting of his own ability as a warrior:

> 'Early rising is the sun of the approaching summer,
> Gentle is the singing of the bards, fine and pleasant
> the weather,
> Splendid in manner am I, fearless in battle,
> A lion I am before the host ...' (96)

Weather imagery had also been very common among the English Romantic poets, Shelley in particular, whom R.S. Thomas much admired.

In R.S. Thomas's poetry, however, such weather-images often become striking metaphors or in the words of Calvin Bedient

'little miracles of implosion' (97) These may be Celtic characteristics which are deeply rooted in the Welsh bardic tradition. Such imageries underline more than symbolical implications; they render a sense of ambience - they are Welsh in essence and belong to the Welsh landscape. For R.S. Thomas these weather-images signal the flow of time, and its effects on the Welsh farmer.

In 'Out of the Hill' Thomas relieves the farmer from 'the weight of the sky, and the lash of the wind's sharpness', and offers him instead, sweet dreams of 'the legendary town'.And as he walks in his dreams, 'the medicinal sun', the blue river and 'the officious light' move with him in the same circle, until they are diminished in darkness. (98)

These are the imageries of a dream and not of a reality. The farmer is given a chance of life, a dream-like journey which should *not* be interrupted. And the weather-images adopted are as pleasant and soothing as the dream itself.

In 'Country-Child', however, the situation is more or less akin to the harsh reality of the peasant's life, and the images used, tend to reflect such a reality.

The whole process of birth, growth and death, with its complications is revealed in an accumulation of striking images.

From the start, the reader is made aware of the fact that the child is doomed :

'Dropped without joy from the gaunt womb he lies'

What accompanied his birth seems also to add more misfortune to his fate:

'The slow scene unfolds before his luckless eyes
To the puckered window, where the cold storm's raging
Curtains the world, and the grey curlew cries
Uttering a grief too sharp for the breast's assuaging.'
(99)

The same gloomy picture is drawn in 'The Airy Tomb', where Twm's life is traced from an early time:

"Yet his grass-green eye
Missed neither swoop nor swerve of the hawk's wing
Past the high window, and the breeze could bring,
Above the babble of the room's uproar,
Songs to his ear from the sun-dusted moor,
The grey curlew's whistle and the shrill, far cry
Of circling buzzard ...' (100)

And again like 'Country Child' the end here is predictable; there is no suspense or possible reverse in Twm's fate.

With 'the wind's quickness' both Twm and his father move to their predestined fate. And when the father dies - which is obviously a natural process of 'taking and giving', his vacancy is filled with the arrival of Twm on the scene.

The death of Twm's father has been forecast from the start by Thomas's reference to the frightening image of snow:

'where snow is laid
Deadly as leprosy till the first of May,' (101)

When the mother's death occurs, the snow has already disappeared, and though the mild weather of Spring, might be expected to bring happiness to Twm's life, yet it does not:

'and December shadows
Dwindled to nothingness in the spring meadows,
That were blowsy with orchis and the loose bog-cotton.'
(102)

And we are soon struck by another deadly image of the frost:

'but the first frost came
To prove how ungarnished was the truth she told.' (103)

With the death of the mother, Twm becomes lonely, and eventually 'aware of something for which he had no name'. (104)

Before Twm's tragic death R.S. Thomas again employs weather imageries to prepare us for the final fall:

'No, no you must face the fact
Of his long life alone in that crumbling house
With winds rending the joints, and the grey rain's claws
Sharp in the thatch;' (105)

In 'Depopulation of the Hills', the effect of the wind is again severe:

'Leave it, leave it, - the hole under the door
Was a mouth through which the rough wind spoke
Ever more sharply ...' (106)

And it becomes a destructive element of nature in 'Death of a Peasant':

'the trapped wind
Tearing the curtains, and the wild light's
Frequent hysteria upon the floor.' (107)

In adopting the wind imagery R.S. Thomas is showing his affinity with the bardic tradition and at the same time associating himself with the Welsh farmer. He speaks of the wind as though he himself is the sufferer:

'The wind goes over the hill pastures
Year after year, and the ewes starve
Milkless, for want of the new grass.' (108)
(The Hill Farmer Speaks)

Apart from his depiction of Welsh folklore and customs, and the weather imagery which, as has already been said,

are characteristics of the Welsh bardic tradition, R.S. Thomas also attempts to revive certain scenes from the past history of Wales.

The revival of the literary achievements and historic events of the past may convey, in general, a sense of 'continuity and identification with mankind', and yet for R.S. Thomas and probably for every Welshman, they convey joy as well as pride.

For a Welshman every corner of Wales is a reminder of past history; the mountains, the trees and the rivers:

> 'Always the outlines of the scenery are deep in the Welsh consciousness as if scored in thick paint on canvas. But one only knows this quality of depth through reading, in history and literature, about the past, feeling it as it has been felt by those who have lived Welsh history within that landscape.' (109)

It is in the names of great heroes and heroines that the glory of Wales lies, and R.S. Thomas confirms this view:

> 'Yes, there was sunshine and summer in the land
> when Branwen walked by the river Alaw in Anglesey.
> Glyndŵr too saw the shadow of the clouds fleeing
> before the east wind; ...' (110)

In portraying the names of the Welsh figures of the past, R.S. Thomas again allies himself with the Welsh bards who sang and celebrated the heroes of the past: 'these were early patriotic poets', he says, referring to the role of the Welsh bards, 'like Iolo Goch, and Gruffydd Gryg, Gruffydd Llwyd ; they were able to inspire people like Owain Glyndŵr, and at the same time write pretty good poetry as well, because the tradition was strong, the language was vital.' (111) And the continuity of this tradition required an important element; patronage. 'Once patronage

is withdrawn, it becomes more difficult.' (112) Yet despite the lack of patronage, R.S. Thomas for the most part of his career, remained loyal to the bardic tradition. Even in his gloomy pictures of past Wales, he is echoing the laments of the Welsh bards.

In his mood of despair, his voice reverbrates with the past as well as the present. The past reveals those glorious moments in which the Welsh were on the march to victory. It also unravels the scenes of betrayal and treachery. The present has no glory but shame. His poetry exhibits both joy and despair. There is shame as his eyes detect the people's indifference to their cause.

> 'Our people have failed all through history
> Because of their inability to stand together.' (113)

And yet not all his illustrations of Wales in the past are dull and gloomy. In his portrayal of great Welsh heroes like King Arthur and Owain Glyndŵr there is a sense of pride.

The image of King Arthur is still as enigmatic as it was centuries ago. Was he an historical reality or just a creation of an imaginative mind? Historians today believe that it was Geoffrey of Monmouth who elevated and polished King Arthur's image.

Prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth's work, History of the kings of Britain , another Welshman, Nennius, who was apparently living in a more 'cultured circle' - the court of Merfyn Vrych, the most successful Welsh dynasty - had already

established the image of King Arthur as a Celtic hero. In his description, there is a link with the old 'tradition'. In other words,'much of it must have been handed down by word of mouth, and the style of the account of Arthur's career is closer to that of Welsh poetry'. (114)

What makes King Arthur's historical reality shadowy is that fact that there are no reliable sources which can tell us 'where he came from, who he was, and, apart from being a warrior, what he did'. (115)

What is certain is that Arthur was a Welsh hero, though for some unknown reason he was omitted from Gildas's On the Destruction of Britain . His role as a legendary figure comes also under scrutiny. In the Four Branches of Mabinogi, he appears as a king rather than a hero, and in one of the poems in The Book of Taliesin 'he is portrayed as leader of an expedition to a Celtic Otherworld ; an earthly realm occupied by supernatural beings full of strange and magical treasures'. (116) Significantly enough, his name is also mentioned in two stories about Welsh saints written in Latin. In the Life of St. Cadoc , Arthur and companions are characterized as 'valiant heroes', and he himself as a 'petty tyrant'. (117) In the Life of St. Carannog , on the other hand, he goes to 'the saints' aid in order to overcome a serpent'. (118)

By the twelfth century King Arthur had become a European figure. In Wales, however, there emerged a strong belief that one day he would return. Such a belief became so

well established that it assumed 'a political force, invoked in Welsh rebellions against the English'. (119)

R.S. Thomas in his reference to the Welsh Arthur, avoids the question of his historical validity and focuses on his mythical significance, in particular his role in old Welsh tales and the cave story connected with him.

In the tale of Culhwch and Olwen, Arthur seems to be implementing the whole plan of bringing Olwen to Culhwch, but he is hardly, except for the last task, involved in fulfilling the demands. As related earlier, the tale of Culhwch and Olwen is about Culhwch's search for the woman whom he has never seen before. To obtain her, he is to accomplish various tasks. One of these tasks is the finding of Mabon son of Modron who has been kidnapped since he was three nights old. But before Culhwch and the warriors could save Mabon, they have to find his kinsman Eidoel 'who lies in Glini's prison'.(120) Having freed Eidoel from Glini's dungeon, the warriors proceed to seek the Old Animals to find out the place where Mabon is held. The first bird Arthur asks his companions to consult is the Ouzel of Cilgwri which leads them to another of the oldest animals on earth. Although the Ouzel of Cilgwri admits that when she came to this place she was the 'youngest of young birds',(121) yet there was another creature God created before her, namely the Stag of Rhydynfre. The Stag shows no knowledge of Mabon, though he adds that when he came to this place 'there were no trees ... except for a single oak-sapling, and that sapling grew into an oak tree with a hundred branches', (122)

yet he is ready for Arthur's sake to guide them to another creature that existed before him; the Owl of Cwm COwlyd .

Like the previous creatures, the Owl fails to lead them to Mabon's place of imprisonment and yet for Authur's sake she directs them to the Eagle of Gwernabwy.

The Eagle, while showing ignorance of Mabon's hidden place, relates to Arthur's companions his onetime war with the Salmon of Llyn Llyw. While looking for food the Eagle came to the Lake of Llyn Llyw, where he sank his claws into a salmon, thinking of it as food; but the salmon, being stronger, dragged the Eagle down into the lake. At last, however, a truce was made between the two. So the Eagle tells the warriors that if there is anyone who knows about Mabon it is the Salmon of Llyn Llyw.

The Salmon , for his part, relates to the warriors that whenever he goes along the River Severn, he hears ' distress-ful cry', and immediately he takes both Cei and Cwrhyr on his two shoulders to the river.

As they reach the bend of the wall of Caer Loyw, they hear 'a great wailing and lamentation', and they realize that Mabon son of Modron is imprisoned there. The two warriors come back to King Arthur and inform him of the place, and with the help of the Salmon, they release Mabon from his prison.

Reference to these ancient animals is made by R.S. Thomas in two of his early poems, 'Wales', and 'The Ancients of the World'. But it seems that along with this story of Mabon son of Modron, there is another fable which has been adapted by R.S. Thomas, perhaps to reinforce his argument about Wales being one of the most ancient lands on earth. R.S. Thomas in his reference to these ancient animals, adds another creature to them; the Toad of Cors Fochno. So Arthur's warriors in their search for Mabon seek advice from six ancient animals, starting with the Ouzel of Cilgwri, the Stag of Rhydynfre , the Owl of Cwm Cowlyd , the Eagle of Gwernabwy, the Salmon of Llyn Llyw and finally - and this appears to be R.S. Thomas's addition - the Toad of Cors Fochno.

Now there is a tale in Wales which combines the six animals and apparently is the source of R.S. Thomas's story, but surprisingly enough it lacks Arthurian reference. This tale, which is full of humour, ralates how a lonely eagle who has lost his wife is now in search of someone to take her place. He spots an owl in the woods and falls in love with her, but to be sure of her antiquity, he proceeds to consult his friends about her. In the land of Gwent he meets the Stag of Rhydynfre, and asks him about the owl. The stag replies that, 'the owl has been old since I first remember her', (123) but to be certain he directs the eagle to another friend, the Salmon of Llyn Llifon. The salmon does not satisfy the eagle either, and he leads him to the Ouzel of Cilgwri, who although he relates to the eagle his old age, says very little about the owl.

As a last resort he turns to the Toad of Cors Fochno, who being unaware of the eagle's intention to marry the owl, says that the owl is much older than him, and never had a pleasant appearance, but that of 'an old grey hag crying Ty hwt, ty hw in the woods in the long winter nights, frightening the children and disturbing everybody'. (124)

It is therefore, from this courtship of the eagle and the owl that there emerges the notion of the Ancient Animals.

In 'The Ancients of the World' there is an echo of the past penetrating through this ancient land with a heartbreaking message: the sorrow of the Salmon of Llyn Llifon, the singing of the Ouzel of Cilgwri, the shivering of the Toad of Cors Fochno - all mourn the demise of a glorious era.

The poem ends on an apparently cheerful note that of the unity between the old eagle and the owl:

> 'The toad and the ousel and the stag of Rhedynfre,
> That has cropped each leaf from the tree of life,
> Are not so old as the owl of Cwm Cowlyd,
> That the proud eagle would have to wife.' (125)

Unlike the original tale of the Old Eagle and the Owl, which is more or less a child's story, R.S. Thomas's tale in 'The Ancients of the World', is totally void of any sense of humour. By marrying the owl, the old eagle preserves 'the old laws', of the land - which do not exist today but are R.S. Thomas's proof that Wales is the most ancient land on earth.

In 'Wales', another poem about the ancient animals, one detects a change in tone; R.S. Thomas suddenly realizes that 'the old laws' practised by these ancient animals do not exist. Instead, there is 'the mournful story of the long dead' sung by the Ousel of Cilgwri. The song travels through 'the bare boughs', and awakens 'the brown owl'.

The ancient animals, the owl, the ousel, and the toad can be heard without the presence of the Eagle of Gwernabwy. What has kept the eagle away from his fellow animals? There is no answer except a note of wonder:

> 'The owl, the ousel, and the toad's carousal
> In Cors Fochno of the old laws -
> I hear them yet, but in what thicket cowers
> Gwernabwy's eagle with the sharp claws ?' (126)

The tale of 'Culhwch and Olwen', in which the ancient animals appear and King Arthur plays a modest role, is again adapted by R.S. Thomas in 'Border Blues' for another reason.

'Border Blues', as Thomas himself states 'is not intellectually difficult, but it is difficult from the background point of view'. (127)

It is a combination of legends, history and customs of Wales. The Welsh in 'Border Blues' are not so concerned about their land; everything here moves eastward to England:

> 'All along the border the winds blow
> Eastward from Wales, and the rivers flow
> Eastward from Wales with the roads and the railways,
> Reversing the path of the old migrations.'(128)

And there is no one to stop the rivers in Wales from flowing eastward; the Welsh themselves are moving eastward:

> 'But the rivers are surly with brown water

Running amok, and the men to tame them
Are walking the streets of a far town.' (129)

The Welsh are 'reversing the path of the old migrations' by walking to the English towns. They are unaware of the fact that once Wales was a most powerful and prosperous land - and it was from England that men walked westward. But now Wales is deserted; there is no one to care for her.

In such a pitiful condition Wales becomes Olwen waiting for someone to save her from the tyranny of her father Ysbaddaden the Giant.

In the original tale of 'Culhwch and Olwen', King Arthur shows no knowledge of Olwen, and has obviously never heard of her, and throughout the mission he never meets her. It is Culhwch who once he hears her name from his step-mother, blushes and immediately falls in love with her.

Later he meets her in Custennin's house, and tells her about his decision to marry her. But she declines his offer by saying that she has already given her father a pledge that she will not marry without his consent since according to the tale, the Giant lives only until Olwen is married. But to marry Olwen the suitor has to accomplish numerous demands, and thus all those who have asked for her have fallen victims to the Giant. Olwen's release depends on the Giant's death, and his death is an impossible task.

In his first confrontation with Culhwch, the would-be son in law, the Giant reveals his cunning nature by throwing a poisoned spear at him, but it is caught by Bedwyr and thrown back at him. On the second day, the Giant again throws a poisoned spear at Culhwch and this time it is caught by Menw and thrown back. Yet again on the third day the Giant attempts another throw which is, this time, caught by Culhwch himself and thrown back at the Giant.

R.S. Thomas in 'Border Blues', as in the previous tale of the ancient animals seems to have departed from the original story. Here there is no reference to Culhwch, the hero of the quest. The question which immediately comes to the reader's mind is why Culhwch has been separated from Olwen? Is it because Culhwch has not reached the stage of maturity to look after Olwen? Or is it because Arthur is more deserving of Olwen than Culhwch?

Whatever R.S. Thomas's motive is, it seems that it is Arthur, the Celtic hero and the saviour of the Celtic nations, who should rush to free Olwen. But Arthur in R.S. Thomas's poem, shows no interest in Olwen:

> 'Are there none to marry?
> There is still an Olwen teasing a smile
> Of bright flowers out of the grass,
> Olwen in nylons. Quick, quick
> Marry her someone. But Arthur leers
> And turns again to the cramped kitchen
> Where the old mother sits with her sons and daughters
> At the round table. Ysbaddaden Penkawr's
> Cunning was childish measured with hers.' (130)

Although the reference to 'the old mother' and her sons and daughters 'at the round table' does not seem to fit into the original story, it has Welsh connotations; it is because of the influence of Welsh Nonconformity represent-

ed in the image of 'the old mother' that Arthur and the sons and daughters show no interest in Olwen.

But to trace the source of R.S. Thomas's story referred to in 'Border Blues', one may state that it has no origin in old Welsh tales, and seems to be his own fabrication. Therefore, these scattered references to the tale of 'Culhwch and Olwen' with characters and events disorderly arranged aim not at tracing the original tale, but at dragging the reader into the legendary Wales of the past, to become simultaneously acquainted with the Welsh setting of the poem and ironically distanced from it.

R.S. Thomas's reference to 'the round table' is significant, since the whole idea of the round table is related to Arthur's career, and it is Celtic in origin.

There is a story behind its link with Arthur's name. It was said that during every feast King Arthur held 'a quarrel over precedence arose', (131) which eventually led to the death of many of the attendant knights and barons. To ease the tension, King Arthur sought a carpenter who agreed to make 'a table which could be carried anywhere, and at which sixteen hundred men could sit without one being higher than the next'. (132)

But in R.S. Thomas's story the round table does not serve the original purpose. Here it is a place for the old mother and her children rather than the knights and barons. Its

significance, however, lies in the fact that it is a symbol of Celtic glory, or to be precise Arthurian glory, but now enclosed in a 'cramped kitchen.'

Another story which is closely related to King Arthur's role in Welsh tradition is his disappearance and his possible return to Wales.

Geoffrey of Monmouth relates an impressive account of Arthur's death. After defeating the Saxons, he marries Gwenhwyfar, the daughter of a Cornish nobleman, and then plans to expand his kingdom to include other areas of Europe. Consequently, he is involved in a war with Lucius Hiberus, the Roman Emperor, which ends in Lucius's death and Arthur's victory. But soon he is informed that Mordred, whom he appointed to look after his wife and the kingdom 's affairs, has betrayed him. In a battle between the two, Mordred is killed and Arthur is gravely injured. Thus, he is taken to the mysterious Avalon for his wounds to be healed. (133) But the belief in his return was so strong that it became part of a tale, of a sleeping warrior in a cave waiting for his countrymen's call to wake up and fight for his people.

One of the tales about Arthur and his warriors sleeping in a cave, narrates the story of a Welshman with a hazel stick in his hand, who, on London Bridge, meets a stranger.

The stranger tells him that under the tree which he has cut his stick from lies a treasure. They both return to Wales, and find the cave. As they enter it, they see a bell and thousands of warriors including Arthur himself lying asleep.

The bell should not be touched, because otherwise the warriors will awake and ask 'Is it day?, and the answer should be, 'no sleep thou on'. On his first visit to the cave, the Welshman touches the bell while leaving with his treasure, but though the warriors immediately wake up he gives the right answer.

The second time, however, when he touches the bell, the warriors leap up, so terrifying the intruder that he forgets the answer, and is beaten and thrown outside the cave. The underlying implication is that these warriors along with their leader Arthur have 'their arms ready at hand, for the dawn of the day when the Black Eagle and the Golden Eagle should go to war, the loud clamour of which would make the earth tremble so much, that the bell would ring loudly, and the warriors awake, take up their arms and destroy all the enemies of the Cymry, who afterwards should repossess the island of Britain, re-establish their own working and government at Caerlleon, and be governed with justice, and blessed with peace as long as the world endures.' (134)

It is perhaps significant that in some of these cave stories the hero is not King Arthur but either Owain Lawgoch, the would-be redeemer of the Welsh nation who was stabbed to death by an English spy, or Owain Glyndŵr the leader of the Welsh uprising in the fifteenth century whose disappearance was a reality.

R.S. Thomas in 'A Welshman to any Tourist', addresses the holiday makers bluntly by saying:

'We've nothing vast to offer you, no deserts

> Except the waste of thought
> Forming from mind erosion;
> No canyons where the pterodactyl's wing
> Falls like a shadow.' (135)

The scenery in Wales is attractive; the mountains and hills reveal pages of an old history. But then, there is no empty space for the tourists to occupy. And if, despite the warnings, the tourists are still tempted to enter Wales, there is Arthur in the cave who will soon wake up to defend the land against the intruders:

> 'The hills are fine, of course,
> Bearded with water to suggest age
> And pocked with caverns,
> One being Arthur's dormitory;
> He and his knights are the bright ore
> That seams our history,
> But shame has kept them late in bed.' (136)

Arthur and his men who are 'the bright ore' of this nation have been abandoned by the Welsh. The Welsh are powerless to stand in defence of their land, so that Arthur and his men could rise from their sleep and hurry to their aid.

The present is frustrating for King Arthur and his men; there is no glory in it but 'shame'. King Arthur cannot live in the present. He belongs to the glorious past where his name is as bright as ever.

Another Welsh leader, who like King Arthur is expected to come to lead the Welsh to victory is Owain Glyndŵr.

If the historical reality of King Arthur is in doubt, and his resurrection is a dream rather than a possibility, the role of Owain Glyndŵr as an indomitable warrior who fought the English is beyond doubt.

As has been mentioned in Chapter Two of this study, Owain Glyndŵr's image as a great Welshman and a competent leader had already been established - sometime before he took arms against the English.

He was a learned man who 'may have spent some of his time at the University of Oxford', (137) and a valiant soldier who fought in the English army against the Scots.

It is because of these characteristics that one cannot simply label him as 'a barbaric Welsh chieftain'. (138)

Glyndŵr's princely life at his mansion in Sycharth became the subject of several songs. 'It was a magnificent place in many ways', says Gwilym Arthur Jones, 'built on a green mound surrounded by a moat crossed by a bridge. It was situated not far from Llansilin in the commote of Cynllaith. A great wooden hall had been constructed with four strong pillars for support. In the loft were bedrooms for the bards - in addition to the family apartments.((139)

From Sycharth the bards inspired him with the songs of patriotism. The poor as well as the rich gathered round him to fight the English. Their rage and his own anger, in the beginning, were directed against a single enemy, Lord Grey, but later the English Crown was involved too. His uprising is a memorable phase in Welsh history and there are many tales which relate to it.

It has been said that like King Arthur, he had power to disturb

nature causing storms and rain, and disperse birds and beasts. There were cries from the Welsh men and women as he prepared himself for the crucial moment.

R.S. Thomas in 'The Rising of Glyndŵr' illustrates such a scene:

> 'Thunder-browed and shaggy-throated
> All the men were there,
> And the women with the hair
> That is the raven's and the rook's despair.' (140)

There is no doubt about the Welshman's anger against the English in the above scene; what is, in fact, worth noting is the role of Welsh women in the uprising.

The reference to the Welsh women is often made after the battle of Bryn Glas where the English were badly defeated. J.D. Griffith Davies, quoting an English chronicler, says that, 'the horror of the slaughter was heightened by the sport which the women of Wales made with the corpses'.(141)

The gathering of the Welsh men and women in defiance of English law is an indication of their uneasiness and anger.

In one of those gatherings, and before Glyndŵr spoke, a man by the name of Crach Ffinnant shouted 'we have suffered too much under the yoke of these English, and it is time we showed that we will have no more of this tyranny.' (142) The Welsh hailed him and:

> 'Then he spoke, and anger kindled
> In each brooding eye;
> Swords and spears accused the sky,
> The woods resounded with a bitter cry.' (143)

His supporters were so vast and overwhelming in number that they scared the beasts and birds in the forests:

'Beasts gave tongue and brown-owls hooted,
Every branch grew loud
With the menace of that crowd,
That thronged the dark, huge as a thundercloud.' (144)

And if these Welshmen gave him strength and hope of victory, the bards injected into him the songs of glory.

Among his faithful bards who glorified his image and praised his courage at Sycharth, one can name Iolo Goch and Gruffudd Llwyd. While Iolo Goch did not live to see Glyndŵr's hope become a reality, Gruffudd Llwyd followed him to the end.

Iolo Goch's song about Sycharth seems detailed and reliable in understanding this magnificant mansion:

'This water girdled wide about
It shows a wide and stately door
Reached by a bridge the water o'er
'Tis formed of buildings coupled fair,
Coupled is every couple there;
Within a quadrate structure tall,
Master the merry pleasures all.' (145)

Gruffudd Llwyd, on the other hand, was a patriotic bard. His song on the disappearance of Glyndŵr is full of grief:

'How could'st thou, cruel Owen, go
And leave the bitter tears to flow
Down Gruffydd's furrowed cheek?' (146)

R.S. Thomas in 'The Tree' allows Owen Glyndŵr to speak about these two bards:

'Gruffudd Llwyd put into my head
The strange thought, singing of the dead
In awdl and cywydd to the harp,
As though he plucked with each string
The taut fibres of my being.
Accustomed to Iolo and his praise
Of Sycharth with its brown beer,

> Meat from the chase, fish from the weir
> Its proud women sipping wine,
> I had equated the glib bards
> With flattery and the expected phrase,
> Tedious concomitants of power.' (147)

And then he speaks of motive behind his rage.

> I heard
> Above the tuneful consonants
> The sharp anguish, the despair
> Of men beyond my smooth domain
> Fretting under the barbed sting
> Of English law, starving among
> The sleek woods no longer theirs.' (148)

And according to the 'English law' the Welsh were prohibited from entering the towns except on Market Day.

This agitation was reinforced by the tale of the comet which appeared in the spring of 1402 and was seen all over Europe:

> 'In Wales the comet was seized upon as a portent with a very plain message. Hedging dangerously on blasphemy, the bards likened the comet to the star which had heralded the birth of Christ. They recalled, too, the comet which had appeared at the brith of the great Welsh hero King Arthur. Certainly it was a lucky star for Owain; scarcely had its fiery tail died before he achieved a victory which must have given him tremendous personal satisfaction.' (149)

Glyndŵr himself is aware of the tale:

> 'And I remembered that old nurse
> Prating of omens in the sky
> When I was born, the heavens inflamed
> With meteors and the stars awry.' (150)
> (The Tree)

It is worth mentioning at this stage, R.S. Thomas's use of weather imagery to indicate victory or defeat. In fact, weather was considered to be a cause of Glyndwr's success. It was because of the weather that the march by Henry IV to Wales in order to crush the rebels failed. The English were defeated and the King was 'sent bootless home'. (151)

The English soldiers were terrified, and as a result 'tales of wizardry began to circulate in the ranks. Every soldier was convinced now that Owain could call up storms at will.' (152)

Glyndwr's reference to the change of seasons in 'The Tree', is undoubtedly associated with his success or failure. When, for instance, he refers to the summer, his tone is quiet and full of confidence, reminding the reader of the past.

'For one brief hour the summer came
To the tree's branches and we heard
In the green shade Rhiannon's birds
Singing tirelessly as the streams
That pluck glad tunes from the grey stones
Of Powys of the broken hills.' (153)

Such lively scenes of birds and trees are immediately transformed into dismal pictures as autumn and winter arrive:

'The music ceased, the obnoxious wind
And frost of autumn picked the leaves
One by one from the green boughs;
They fell, some in a gold shower
about its roots, but some were hurled
Out of my sight, out of my power,
Over the face of the grim world.'(154)

And the dry picture continues:

'It is winter still in the bare tree
That sprang from the seed which Gruffudd sowed
In my hot brain in the long nights
Of wine and music on the hearth
Of Sycharth of the open gates.' (155)

And despite these changes in weather, the 'great tree' which holds in its bosom the history of the race survives. This 'great tree' does not need tears to be shed for its sake. The only thing and the one thing which could bring another spring to it is the blood of his nation. Glyndŵr is aware of this fact:

'But here at its roots I watch and wait
For the new spring so long delayed;
And he who stands in the light above
And sets his ear to the scarred bole,
Shall hear me tell from the deep tomb
How sorrow may bud the tree with tears,
But only his blood can make it bloom.' (156)

But the Welsh are not prepared to shed blood in order to make the 'great tree' bloom and thus, the aura of glory diminishes. The battles in which Glyndŵr fought and won became 'fruitless'. In 'Hyddgen', R.S. Thomas shows how vain was the victory in which Glyndŵr defeated the English army at Hyddgen.

Today the historians realize how fortunate Glyndŵr was in this battle. Ian Skidmore describes the situation:

"Owain was trapped. Tactically he could not have been in a worse position. The Fleming army ringed the rim of the glen and their downhill charge gave them a formidable advantage over the Welsh, forced to fight uphill. Surrounded and surprised Owain's soldiers prepared for a battle which could logically end only in death or capture.' (157)

But the Welsh won the battle, and thus Glyndwr's competence as the only leader of the Welsh nation was firmly established. 'Here at last', says J.D. Griffith Davies describing Glyndŵr's role in the battle, 'was a man upon whose shoulders had fallen the mantle of the great warriors of ancient times'. (158)

R.S. Thomas, however, is less moved by the victory. He watches his countrymen with his keen eyes, realizing with agony the difference between the victory in the past and the slavery in the present:

'The place, Hyddgen;
The time, the fifth
Century since Glyn Dŵr

Was here with his men.
He beat the English
Does it matter now
In the rain? The English
Don't want to come:
Summer country.
The Welsh, too:
A barren victory.
Look at those sheep
On such small bones
The best mutton,
But not for him.
The hireling shepherd.' (159)

Here we have an overlapping picture of the past and the present; the victory at Hyddgen cannot be perceived in the present and thus loses its significance. The present also distorts the glory of the past, and makes it a phase of a futile process:

'We fought, and were always in retreat,
Like snow thawing upon the slopes
Of Mynydd Mawr ...' (160)
(A Welsh History)

It even blurs the image of the Welsh kings:

'Our kings died, or they were slain
By the old treachery at the ford.' (161)
(A Welsh History)

Welsh history reveals quite a number of Welsh princes who had been betrayed and then killed. Before Llywelyn the Last who was driven by one of his followers to Builth and later treacherously slain, Gruffydd ap Llywelyn was betrayed after becoming a hunted fugitive and was murdered. Owain Lawgoch, the Welsh leader in the French army was also stabbed to death by a trusted friend, and it has been said that Owain Glyndŵr himself narrowly escaped a plot by his cousin Hywel Sel.

In 'Genealogy' R.S. Thomas traces the development of Welsh history from King Arthur to the present time. Again

there is a reference to Llywelyn the Last:

'I was the man
Watching later at the grim ford,
Armed with resentment, the quick stream
Remembers at sunset the raw crime.' (162)

And even those powerful kings like Maelgwn Gwynedd (who was known as the 'island dragon') could not escape death:

'The deed pursued me; I was the king
At the church keyhole, who saw death
Loping towards me. (163)

Maelgwn Gwynedd according to tradition was a 'strenuous wilful ruler, wielding great power over his subjects.' (164). He overthrew his uncle and destroyed his rivals, and was also known to have killed his nephew and his first wife. One of the legends about him relates how he made himself 'a white chair of waxed wings on which to ride the rising flood tide when the men of Wales met to choose an overlord on the sands of Dyfi'. (165)

There is an echo of this tale in 'Traeth Maelgwn':

'Blue sea; clouds coming up
For convention only; the marks
On the sand , that mean nothing
And don't have to to the fat ,
Monoglot stranger. Maelgwn
Was here once, juggling
With the sea ;..' (166)

R.S. Thomas further touches upon Maelgwn's firmness and intelligence which surprisingly the Welsh now lack:

'He puts down
Rivals, made himself king
Of the waves, too; his throne
Buoyant - that rocking beacon
Its image. He kept his power
By intelligence; we lose
Ours for lack of it,' (167)

But because of his numerous crimes, it is recorded that he fell 'a victim to the avenging wrath that of the

Fad Felen or Yellow Monster' which he saw approaching him 'through the keyhole of the church at Eglwys Rhos'. (168) This incident has already been referred to by R.S. Thomas in 'Genealogy' and quoted on the previous page.

The development of Welsh history does not come to a halt after the death of Maelgwn Gwynedd; it continues till it reaches its zenith in 1485 when Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at Bosworth and proclaimed himself King of Britain. Again, R.S. Thomas refers to this victory in 'Genealogy'.

> 'I marched to Bosworth with the Welsh lords
> To victory, but regretted after
> The white house at the wood's heart.' (169)

But much earlier than R.S. Thomas, another bard Guto'r Glyn saw the victory happen, and yet realized with bitterness it would 'make his Wales less Welsh'. (170)

The victory at Bosworth by a Welsh leader, paved a new path for the Welsh to join the army and fight for the Crown. Those eminent Welshmen who aided Henry in his fight, settled in England and were rewarded. For those who lived in Wales, on the other hand, it exposed them to a new language and a new culture.

For R.S. Thomas such an exposure meant the annihilation of the Welsh language and tradition. Furthermore, it was also perceived to be the direct cause of this pathetic situation where the sense of alienation dominates the mind of every Welshman:

> 'I was the stranger in the new town,
> Whose purse of tears was soon spent;

I filled it with a soldier coin
At the dark sources ..(171)
(Genealogy)

Welsh history, despite such mishaps continues to record the deeds of the Welsh in the present as it did in the past, and proceeds to the future. The Welshman, in the present, seems to be trapped in the middle, since his achievements now are minimal compared to those heroic acts of his own ancestors.

Nonetheless, he is not totally obliterated from the scene of history:

'I stand now
In the hard light of the brief day
Without roots, but with many branches.' (172)

His existence, though 'without roots' is obviously an indication of his involvement in history. For R.S. Thomas, then, the history of past Wales was glorious, despite those instances of failure; the defeat at Catraeth, the crime at the 'grim ford' and the fall of Harlech which ended the hope of an independent Wales.

In 'History of a Race', R.S. Thomas refers to a moment in Welsh history where the Welsh were on the verge of defeat:

It was not a retreat
The historians say,
This movement halted
At the rough edge
Of a salt bay.

We were here already
On the thin soil,
Seeing our failure
In the slow tide's
Endless recoil.' (173)

Whether the movement was a retreat or a tactic, it undoubtedly marked the beginning of a continuing process. In

contrast to the previous scenes, the following lines exhibit a hope of success:

> With the high mountains
> Turning our backs
> On the sun's rising
> What could we ever know
> But its gold track
>
> Vanishing westwards?
> The noon went by
> To the sweet music
> Of Rhiannon's birds
> That crossed our sky.' (174)

The significance of 'the sweet music of Rhiannon's birds' is that it 'would give sleep to the living and awaken the dead'. (175)

Rhiannon, who in the First Branch of the Mabinogi, is related to have been mistreated by her husband Pwyll, is only comforted by her birds. The songs not only relieve her suffering but like a cauldron generate a new life in her.

Rhiannon's birds again appear in another poem entitled 'Lines for Taliesin' where the Taliesinic technique of transformation - shape-shifting - is adopted.

First he was at Catraeth the mysterious battle in which Mynyddog Mwynfawr and his men were severely defeated:

> 'I was at Catraeth dazed with the grey mead
> Like my lean countrymen. I saw them bleed
> On the broad English plain, and heard their prayers
> Falling unanswered on the indifferent air.' (176)

A contrast to the massacre at Catraeth is presented in the scene where Taliesin watches the Welshmen at Bryn Glas inflicting great casualties on the English:

> I was with Owain at Bryn Glas and knew
> The frenzy of the victor. Swift winds blew
> The storm clouds eastward, and my country lay
> Chaste as a maid, asleep in the moon's ray.' (177)

The poem ends on a cheerful note. There is a reference both to Caer Arianrhod, which literally means the fort of Arianrhod, and to Rhiannon's birds. Arianrhod who is Gwydion's sister in the Fourth Branch of The Mabinogi is also known to be the goddess of dawn and thus her name is associated with glory:

> 'The years have passed and she lies dreaming still,
> Where Caer Arianrhod gleams above the hill.
> But dawn approaches, and Rhiannon's birds
> Are busy in the woods. Hush! She has heard.' (178)

Discernible in each stanza is the repetition of the word 'I' in the first line. Like Vernon Watkins, R.S. Thomas adopts the Taliesinic style to express his own view.

But unlike Watkins who aimed at portraying Taliesin 'as a Christian poet'. (179) R.S. Thomas's Taliesin is the sixth-century bard who sang for Urien and was contemporary to Aneirin. Furthermore, Watkins's concern with Taliesin seemed to be mainly based on the Story of Taliesin - a folk tale about a witch named Ceridwen. The confusion arises from the fact that these folk tales which were attributed to Taliesin, were composed sometime in the ninth century - while the songs of Taliesin for Urien were recorded in the sixth century.

A.O.H. Jarman unravels the mystery of the two by stating that:

> 'there are strong reasons for accepting Taliesin as the authentic court poet of Urien and Owain in the sixth century. After this period, however, there emerged another Taliesin, the Taliesin of legend who was credited, like Myrddin, with possessing the gift of prophecy.' (180)

What is interesting in R.S. Thomas's adoption of Taliesin, is that while the content echoes the songs of the sixth century Taliesin, his style, in particular the use of 'I', belongs to the ninth century Taliesin, but there are no references to the legend of Ceridwen.

The 'I' therefore, in R.S. Thomas's poem, does not only indicate the fact that R.S. Thomas has been metamorphosed into the form of Taliesin, but also reveals the extent of affinity which R.S. Thomas claims with this great bard.

In 'Taliesin 1952' R.S. Thomas again allows the bard to reveal the names of certain Welsh figures of the past:

> 'I have been Merlin wandering in the woods
> Of a far country, where the winds waken
> Unnatural voices, my mind broken
> By sudden acquaintance with man's rage.' (181)

The reference to Merlin is worth noting since this bard was known to have the gifts of prophecy. But before he became a prophetic bard, his misfortune had led him to the forests where he spent a wild life among the beasts. It was, as related by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the poetry of Merlin that prophesied the birth of King Arthur.

The rising star of Glyndŵr was also prophesied by the bards:

> 'I have been Glyn Dŵr set in the vast night,
> Scanning the stars for the propitious omen,
> A leader of men, yet cursed by the crazed women
> Mourning their dead under the same stars.' (182)

But more than Merlin and Glyndŵr who both suffered each in his own way, R.S. Thomas, under the mask of Taliesin, experiences the life of Goronwy Owen the eighteenth century Welshman in exile.

'I have been Goronwy, forced from my own land
To taste the bitterness of the salt ocean;
I have known exile and a wild passion
Of longing changing to a cold ache.' (183)

Goronwy Owen's ambition, according to Emyr Humphreys 'was no less than to compose a Welsh epic poem worthy to stand comparison with Homer and Virgil and above all with the great John Milton whose massive shadow seems to have dominated the literary imagination of the eighteenth century, leaving the Welsh even more mesmerised than the English'. (184)

Goronwy's financial difficulties forced him at last to settle in America in hope that he could fulfil his ambition there.

R.S. Thomas makes another quick reference to Goronwy Owen in 'On Hearing a Welshman Speak' where scenes of the past are recalled along with Welsh figures:

And as he speaks time turns,
The swift years revolve
Backwards. There Goronwy comes
Again to his own shore.
Now in a mountain parish
The words leave the Book
To swarm in the honeyed mind
Of Morgan. Glyn Dŵr stands
And sees the flames fall back
Like waves from the charred timbers
Before taking his place
Behind the harp's slack bars
From which the singer called him.' (185)

Three great Welshmen are portrayed by R.S. Thomas in the above lines to show that each one on his own possessed a talent; Goronwy Owen as a literary figure whose 'devotion to the ancient forms of the Welsh literary tradition' (186) was undisputable: William Morgan the Welshman who bore

on his shoulders the task of translating the bible into Welsh, and Owain Glyndŵr, the military leader who led the Welsh half-way to victory.

The qualities of William Morgan are developed and elaborated in 'Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant'. William Morgan became the vicar of Llanrhaeadr in 1578, and during his stay there, it is said that 'life was made very difficult for him ... by the hostility of some of his parishoners'. (187)

Ironically enough it was in Llanrhaeadr that he completed his translation of the bible into Welsh. For R.S. Thomas this was a great achievement:

> 'The smooth words
> Over which his mind flowed
> Have become an heirloom. Beauty
> Is how you say it, and the truth,
> Like this mountain-born torrent,
> Is content to hurry
> Not too furiously by.' (188)

Another Welshman towards whom R.S. Thomas has shown reverence is Thomas Edwards (Twm o'r Nant). In 'A Welsh Ballad Singer' his life and career are traced and revealed by R.S. Thomas. It is significant to note that the Welshmen referred to by R.S. Thomas - those in the past like the Welsh kings and leaders; King Arthur, Maelgwn Gwynedd, Owain Glyndŵr; those in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries; William Morgan (1545-1604), Goronwy Owen (1723-69), Thomas Edwards (1739-1810); and those in the present century, Gwenallt and Saunders Lewis, - all display and share the uncompromising quality of courage and determination to resist hardship.

Thomas Edwards who was a poet and writer of interludes and was known as Twm o'r Nant, was like Goronwy Owen 'involved in heavy debts'. (189) He had to write and act his interludes in order to overcome his financial difficulties.

In his search for work he becomes a wanderer:

> 'Out of the night and the night's cold
> I came knocking at your door;
> But not begging, my wares are verse
> To costly for you to set
> Your purse against. Yet if you've bread
> And cheese and beer and fresh cake,
> I'll match them with as good a song
> As you've an ear for.' (190)

But it was not only the above-mentioned Welshmen whose deeds he recalls; it often happens that he touches on the career of those Welshmen like Sir Gelli Meurig, who left Wales in order to have a more luxurious life in England. In England Sir Gelli Meurig became extremely rich as a result of his service to the Earl of Essex. Later on, however, he was caught in a conspiracy against the Crown and was hanged.

For R.S. Thomas he is not the only Welshman who betrayed his land:

> 'Gelli Meurig,
> Squire of a few
> Acres, but swollen-headed
> With dreaming of a return
> To incense, to the confections
> Of worship; a Welsh fly
> Caught in a web spun
> For a hornet
> Don't blame him
> Others have turned their backs,
> As he did, and do so still,
> On our land.' (191)

His feeling towards Gelli Meurig, in fact, does not differ from his reaction against the Welshmen today, who desert

their villages in pursuit of a better career in English towns and cities.

In his depiction of past events or even characters, as has been mentioned earlier, R.S. Thomas endeavours to illustrate both those depressing and glorious moments, devoted as well as irresponsible Welshmen. In his poems about the past, one can detect both resentment and acclamation.

But there are also instances in his poetry where memory generates and creates rather static scenes to be contemplated. Such scenes do not reveal moments of victory or defeat, but a constant awareness of the past. They appeal to us not to forget but to remember. 'Whenever you look', says Ned Thomas, 'in modern Welsh culture you find the word 'remember'. It is there in Gwenallt and Saunders Lewis and in the songs of Dafydd Iwan ...' (192)

R.S. Thomas's memory of the past is often enhanced by longing and yearning for a particular place, and this place cannot be outside Wales. Ned Thomas again:

> 'Even the landscape takes on a different quality if you are one of those who remembers. The scenery is then never separate from the history of the place, from the feeling for the lives that have been lived there.' (193)

R.S. Thomas's sense of place is strongly related to his personal experience in different localities within Wales - and is coloured by his political views. In other words, his sense of place is less picturesque and is evoked more

or less by his awareness that the place, be it a village or a chapel, is deserted by its people or occupied by the outsiders.

'From his earliest volumes, The Stones of the Field (1946) and An Acre of Land', states Moelwyn Merchant, 'he sets down the facts of his 'place', the Wales he sees, with irony, compassion and with moments of rejection; the facts may repel or attract him but the contraries and ambiguities are chronicled with clarity; he does not argue, adjust or synthesise but declares his 'sense of place' without patronage, censure or pity.' (194)

The opening lines of The Minister, establish R.S. Thomas's sense of place:

> 'In the hill country at the moor's edge
> There is a chapel, religion's outpost
> In the untamed land west of the valleys,
> The marginal land where flesh meets spirit
> Only on Sundays and the days between
> Are mortgaged to the grasping soil.
>
> This is the land of green hay
> And greener corn, because of the long
> Tarrying of winter and the late spring.
> This is the land where they burn peat
> If there is time for cutting it,
> And the weather improves for drying it,
> And the cart is not too old for carrying it
> And doesn't get stuck in the wet bog.
>
> This is the land where men labour
> In silence, and the rusted harrow
> Breaks its teeth on the grey stones.
> Below, the valleys are an open book,
> Bound in sunlight; but the green tale
> Told in its pages is not true.' (195)

R.S. Thomas's arrival in Manavon in 1942 did not at all confirm his Romantic leanings. On the contrary, it turned him away from what he had already picked up in Shelley

and the Georgians.

In a poem entitled 'Evensong' published in his first collection The Stones of the Field , and probably written before his coming to Manavon, one can easily detect the strong influence of the Georgians on him:

'That was a good rain falling,
When I awoke from sleep,
Stinging the apple orchard,
Where the branches keep
A silver harvest
For the wind to reap.' (196)

But the life and attitudes of the farm-folk in Manavon, as he himself put it 'administered an inward shock to my Georgian sensibility'. (197) In Manavon R.S. Thomas's sense of place was transformed from the landscape of vision to the scene of reality. There is no 'stoic regret', in his portrayal, no joy or comfort either.

In his prose-work 'Y Llwybrau Gynt' (The Paths Gone By) R.S. Thomas mentions that 'Manavon lay in a hollow. There was no proper village there, just a church, a school, a shop, and a public house, and the hills rose around it to something over a thousand feet'.(198)

In his poem 'The Village', he describes Manavon as he saw it in 1942:

'Scarcely a street, too few houses
To merit the title; just a way between
The one tavern and the one shop
That leads nowhere and fails at the top
Of the short hill, eaten away
By long erosion of the green tide
Of grass creeping perpetually nearer
This last outpost of time past.' (199)

The picture of the church in Manavon of which he thought it 'gave a Welshness to the area', (200) also remained unadulterated in his mind:

> 'The church stands, built from the river stone,
> Brittle with light, as though a breath could shatter
> Its slender frame, or spill the limpid water,
> Quiet as sunlight, cupped within the bone.' (201)

Besides Manavon, R.S. Thomas's mind is also preoccupied with the memory of other places in Wales. 'Maes-yr-Onnen' is a poem about a chapel in Radnorshire which he visited while in Manavon. The chapel has already been described in his article 'Two Chapels':

> 'I went there on a sunny morning in August with the east wind chasing the clouds across the blue sky. When I had walked around the building and stared in through the windows (there was no one there to unlock the door for me), I stretched myself out on the grass and let my mind wander back into the past.' (202)

In the poem 'Maes-yr-Onnen', which was published in his second collection An Acre of Land, he relates the experience he had while visiting the chapel:

> 'You cannot share with me that rarer air,
> Blue as a flower and heady with the scent
> Of the years past and others yet to be,
> That brushed each window and outsoared the clouds,
> Far foliage with its own high canopy.' (203)

This unique experience coupled with the heavenly atmosphere of the chapel are enough to produce the legendary tale of the past; though empty, the chapel echoes the songs of Rhiannon's birds:

> 'You cannot hear as I, incredulous, heard
> Up in the rafters, where the bell should ring
> The wind, sweet singing of Rhiannon's birds.' (204)

But not all Thomas's recollections of a particular place are personal or descriptive. There are places he visited that remind him of the dead. These are the fields which

have been deserted and have become tourist picnic spots.

In 'Welsh Border', there is Thomas's own response to the horror and darkness of the night on an empty field where the bare trees stand like dead bodies, reminiscent of the violent past history:

> 'In the fields are the trees,
> Brushed by a few stars
> The owls are restless.
> People have died here,
> Good men for bad reasons,
> Better forgotten.
> Trees grow no arrows
> For the dead, enlistment
> Of memories is over.' (205)

There are also places that for him imply political significance s.The poem 'Reservoirs' is a politically motivated poem based on a 1957 Act of Parliament which permitted the Corporation of Liverpool to drown the Tryweryn Valley to provide water for the nearby English cities. In 1963 and despite the people's protest in Wales, the Tryweryn reservoir was opened.

The drowning of Tryweryn Valley has become an indelible scene of injustice in the consciousness of the Welsh. R.S. Thomas's memory of the incident is as bitter as the incident itself:

> 'There are places in Wales I don't go:
> Reservoirs that are the subconscious
> Of a people, troubled far down
> With gravestones, chapels, villages even;
> The serenity of their expression
> Revolts me, it is a pose
> For strangers, a watercolour's appeal
> To the mass, instead of the poem's
> Harsher conditions.' (206)

The memory of Tryweryn, though void of joy and pride,

cannot be effaced from the Welshman's mind, since it has become part of his subconscious. For this reason, the memory of such places for R.S. Thomas takes the form of a lament. R.S. Thomas is simply looking back at a particular time in the history of Wales, and as he contemplates, the memory of Tryweryn flashes into his mind.

Relevant to these memories of the past which are displayed in the form of recollection, one can also trace in R.S. Thomas's poetry a sense of nostalgia or what is known in Welsh as hiraeth.

In 'Hiraeth', R.S. Thomas establishes three phases or steps that could generate the sense of hiraeth. In the first scene, the setting is arranged:

> 'My dark thought upon that day
> That brought me from Arfon's bay,
> From the low shores of Malldraeth and its sand,
> Far inland, far inland.' (207)

A corollary of that is the smooth flow of memory:

> 'For I remember now to the growth of night
> The great hills and the yellow light
> Stroking to softness the harsh sweep
> Of limb and shoulder above the quiet deep.
> And in the glitter of stars, shoal upon shoal,
> Thicker than bubbles in Ceridwen's bowl,
> The running of the sea under the wind,
> Rough with silver, comes before my mind.' (208)

Like Rhiannon's birds whose songs are believed to have soothed Rhiannon's pain during the period of her misfortune, 'Ceridwen's bowl' stands for ecstasy as it preserves memory and spreads joy. But as memory gradually fades away, R.S. Thomas's own rising spirit suddenly diminishes. The journey to the world of fantasy has come to

its final phase, and R.S. Thomas, once again, is restored to reality:

> 'Autumn shakes out the thistle's curse
> On the grey air, and my leafless house,
> Picked clean by the frost and rain,
> Cowers naked upon the pain;
> But there Caergybi, Aberffraw
> And holy Llanddwyn are wearing now,
> Like the rich cloak of old royalty,
> The wild purple of the sea.'
> (209)

We have seen that the concept of the past in R.S. Thomas's poetry is a dominating theme, and goes beyond simply a recollection of past memories. In his depiction of the past he makes references to Welsh tradition and customs, to the Welsh literary heritage, and to events and characters derived from Welsh history; likewise his sense of place is an indication of his longing for the past. The underlying tone (in each reference) varies from one instance to another; for there is pride in the heroic deeds of Welsh leaders of the past, shame in the apathy of the Welsh in the present, anger and resentment against those Welsh who abandon their past tradition and heritage, and personal consolation at the realization that the Welsh heritage of the past is still recorded in history.

However, I have tried to show that R.S. Thomas not only takes the past as his subject matter, but that he adopts some of the stances and attitudes towards it of the Welsh bardic tradition.

Notes and References

1. John Osmond, Creative Conflict, p.14.

2. The poems of Morgan Llwyd, a seventeenth-century Welsh and Anglo-Welsh poet, are full of passion for Wales. According to Raymond Garlick, 'Morgan Llwyd's poetry strikes a note in Anglo-Welsh literature which is not to be heard again until our century ...'

3. R.S. Thomas, 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country'. Selected Prose, p.24.

4. Glyn Jones, in Contemporary Poets, p.1541.

5. R.S. Thomas, 'Replies to 'Wales' Questionnaire' Wales VI:3 (1946) p.23

6. R.S. Thomas, The Stones of the Field, p.14.

7. R.S. Thomas, Tares, p.42.

8. R.S. Thomas, Selected Prose, p.138.

9. R.S. Thomas, The Bread of Truth, p.41.

10. R.S. Thomas, Not That He Brought Flowers, p. 30.

11. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.40.

12. Ibid., p.32.

13. See Appendix C

14. R.S. Thomas, 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country', Selected Prose p. 22

15. R.S. Thomas, 'Two Chapels', Selected Prose p. 47

16. R.S. Thomas, Tares, p.16.

17. Ibid., p.39.

18. R.S. Thomas, An Acre of Land, p.26.

19. R.S. Thomas, Tares, p.40.

20. Peter Gruffydd, 'The Poetry of R.S. Thomas', Poetry Wales II:I (I966) p.I7

21. Dafydd Elis Thomas, 'The Image of Wales in R.S. Thomas's Poetry', Poetry Wales VII:4 (I972) p. 66

22. Dai Smith, Wales! Wales? p.160.

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26. Ibid.

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28. Iorwerth C. Peate, Tradition and Folk Life, p.38.

29. Ibid.

30. R.S. Thomas, Tares, p.25.

31. R.S. Thomas, The Stones of the Field, p.14.

32. R.S. Thomas, Song at the Year's Turning, p.106.

33. Uncollected poem listed in bibliography.

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38. T. Gwynn Jones, Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom, p.153.

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40. Ibid., p.32.

41. Ibid., p.19.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., p.25

45. Ibid., p.28.

46. Ibid.

47. See Appendix C

48. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, p.10.

49. R.S. Thomas 'A Welsh View of the Scottish Renaissance', Wales VII:30 (1948) p. 600

50. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, p.10

51. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.23.

52. R.S. Thomas, 'The Paths Gone By', Selected Prose p. 142

53. R.S. Thomas, Selected Poems 1946-1968, p.27.

54. R.S. Thomas, Song at the Year's Turning, p.107.

55. R.S. Thomas, Selected Poems 1946-1968, p.27.

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60. Uncollected poem listed in bibliography.

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62. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, p.39.

63. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.32.

64. Ibid., p.33.

65. Ibid., p.34.

66. T. Gwynn Jones, Welsh Folklore and Folk -Custom, p.33.

67. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.40.

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69. R.S. Thomas, The Bread of Truth, p.37.

70. Ibid.

71. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, p.43.

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76. See Appendix C

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78. T. Gwynn Jones, Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom, p.132.

79. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, p.10

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88. R.S. Thomas, The Bread of Truth, p.10.

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110. R.S. Thomas, 'Two Chapels', Selected Prose, p. 44

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128. R.S. Thomas Poetry for Supper, p.9.

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CHAPTER FOUR

BADR SHAKIR AL-SAYYAB AND THE VOYAGE TO THE PAST

If the past to R.S. Thomas is a revelation of an ancient history and thus a source of personal comfort, for the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab it was the realm of resurrection and rebirth. Al-Sayyab's poetic career was short, and yet rich enough to inspire the younger poets of this century. In the words of M . Badawi, al-Sayyab 'led a life marked by failure, suffering and exile on account of his political beliefs, and of disease and slow death towards the end.' (1)

Al-Sayyab was not only one of the greatest Arab poets of the twentieth century, but probably the first Arab poet to write in Free Verse.

His knowledge of Western literature, in particular English literature was outstanding. He was well-acquainted with the English Romantics and later with the work of T.S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell.

Eliot's disillusion with twentieth century life, which is reflected in 'The Waste Land', was exploited by al-Sayyab to represent his own responses to current issues in the Arab world, and his own inner conflict. According to Issa J. Boullata, 'the conflict between good and evil, between love and hatred, between freedom and oppression, between fertility and barrenness, between life and death in which he was personally engaged and in which he conceived of himself

as an embodiment of his country, the Arab world and humanity at large - found expression in his imagery as well as his themes.'(2)

Like most of the Arab poets, al-Sayyab began his poetic career by writing poetry under the influence of the two Arab Romantic poets, Ali Mahmud Taha and Ilyas Abu Shabaka. When he joined the Iraqi Communist Party in 1945 he attempted writing poetry on social problems, but the reading of Eliot's 'the Waste Land' led al-Sayyab to adopt two new techniques in his poetry; imagery and myth. These two techniques became so prevailing and dominant in his poems that often they lose their significance. In many cases he 'burdens his reader with intrusive and often unnecessary footnotes that kill the spontineity of symbolism and intuition by explicitness and logic.' (3)

There was also something of an excess of emotion in his poetry. His thirst for love was unquenchable, and his sorrow was pitifully melodramatic. One explanation of that attitude might be his deprivation of personal affection, for his mother died very young and his father remarried leaving the child of nine in the hands of his grandfather; also his own unpresentable appearance (for he suffered from a slight facial distortion) created in him a personality of a complex nature. One outcome of such a personality was a tendency to introversion.

For him, there was only himself and a vast world and his tragedy was that he found his existence in this world, in the present, superfluous.

In two of his early poems, 'In the Old Market', and 'The Ancient song', the absurdity of life in the present, and the passive ineffective role that an individual is assigned to play, are portrayed in a very subjective manner and doleful tone. What is significant about his early poems is al-Sayyab's obsession and fear of death at this stage of his life. The irony is that this fear of death became a reality in his later life when he realized that he was soon to die. But his obsession with death can also be analysed in the light of his humanitarian view of mankind, the atrocities of war and its tragic consequences on human beings.

It is interesting at this point to note the similarities which exist in themes and forms between Al-Sayyab and R.S. Thomas. Both came under the influence of the English Romantics; R.S. Thomas's early poems, either published in The Dublin Magazine or collected in his first volume The Stones of the Field manifest without any doubt, the Romantic principle of man and nature in unity.

Al-Sayyab's early poems are marked by a deep sense of sorrow and loneliness. And yet his joy though minimal, is derived from his own self-contemplation. R.S. Thomas also exhibits the same feeling; how often we see him wandering alone on the farms in hope of meeting a passer-by. Even among the farmers, he seems to be totally detached or isolated. What is interesting in al-Sayyab is that he is undergoing the same experience;his loneliness is only felt in crowded places like a market or a cafe. Nevertheless, one should not be tempted to conclude that because both R.S. Thomas and al-

Sayyab were influenced by the English Romantics, they lacked originality. R.S. Thomas's indigenous characteristics are conspicuous in his use of imagery which is impregnated with striking metaphors and are indubitably Welsh. Al-Sayyab's amorous tendency, on the other hand, and his search for his forgotten beloved are traditionally based on the attitudes of the pre-Islamic Arab poets. And like R.S. Thomas, who after having encountered the harsh life of the Welsh farmers, turned to portraying the agonies of the farmer, and thus avoiding his own personal solace in nature, al-Sayyab also became inextricably involved in social and political campaigns.

His social poems, which are based on his past memories became less didactic in tone as he got more involved in politics. Harassed by the secret police, he was forced to flee his country, first to Iran and then to Kuwait. Ironically it was in his exile that his most memorable collections were written. These poems which are mainly about his recollections of his childhood and his nostalgia for his little village of Jaikur, were gathered under the title of Hymn to Rain.

In these poems, states M.M. Badawi, 'we find an emotional complex of elements related to the man who since early childhood has been yearning for a mother's love and who has therefore been nostalgically looking back to the happy days of his early childhood in his native village with its river, its shells and its palm trees ...' (4)

In Hymn to Rain, al-Sayyab is at his peak of artistic creativity. Here the spasmodic scenes from his early encounter

with women are transformed into a concatenation of transposed images of the past. Nevertheless, the reader cannot be entirely happy about the sentiment and emotional outbursts which mark the poems of this collection.

For al-Sayyab, however, Hymn to Rain, becomes like Sinbad's ship on its voyage to the land of the past, an instrument to drive him back to his childhood.

In the poem which gives the title to the collection 'Hymn to Rain', al-Sayyab as a political exile in Kuwait, contemplates his misfortune, while watching the rain falling on the Gulf, reminding him of his childhood in his village Jaikur. The poem opens with the traditional address to a beautiful woman:

> 'Your eyes are two palm groves at the hour of dawn
> Or two balconies from which the moon recedes.
> When your eyes smile, vineyards leaf
> And lights dance like moon in a river
> Which an oar shakes at the hour of dawn
> As if, in their depths, stars are throbbing.' (5)

Al-Sayyab's use of metaphors in the above lines is significant and conducive to his aim of imparting a nostalgic setting.

At first glance they appear to be implying love or to be at least related to love, but as we proceed with the poem, we realise that the reference here is to his village Jaikur which is a microcosm of his country Iraq. But for al-Sayyab there are two lands by the same name; there is an Iraq of the past, of beauty and love, and there is an Iraq of the present, ruled by despots, who drove him into exile.

In such a pathetic condition, he remembers his childhood, as an orphan who was deprived of the love of his mother at the age of six:

'Evening yawns, and the clouds
Pour down their heavy tears
Like a child who before sleeping raves
That his mother -whom he did not find
on waking up a year ago and was told
After persisting questions
That she would return day after tomorrow -
Must by all means return
Although his comrades whisper that she is there
On the hillside mortally sleeping in her grave
Eating earth and drinking rain.' (6)

The child here is al-Sayyab himself who used to ask about his mother, and the answer was that she would come tomorrow.

As the title of the poem indicates, rain is a symbol of fertility, but in today's Iraq instead of prosperity it brings hunger:

'And there is hunger in Iraq!
The harvest season scatters the crops in it
So that ravens and locusts have their fill
While a millstone in the fields surrounded by human beings
Grinds the granaries and the stones.'(7)

However, the picture might change tomorrow when the children grow up; they are hopes of the nation to rid the country from the despots:

'In every drop of rain
There is a red or a yellow bud of a flower.
And every tear of the hungry and the naked,
And every drop shed from the blood of slaves
Is a smile waiting for new lips
Or a roseate nipple in the mouth of a babe
In the young world of tomorrow, giver of life.
Rain ...

Rain ...
Rain ...
Iraq will bloom with rain.' (8)

Al-Sayyab like the Romantics was a staunch anti-urbanite. When he left his village Jaikur to go to Al-Basra and then to Baghdad, he carried with him the rich memories of his childhood in the village.

In Baghdad, however, he came to realize how complex the life of the city was. It lacked the simplicity and the beatific atmosphere of life in the village. In Jaikur, there was the memory of his mother, and his adventures with the village children. There was also the memory of his love for his cousin Wafiqa who to his surprise, married another man. Furthermore, there was his courtship with the Bedouin girl Hala while grazing his grandfather's flock on the pastures. So the materialistic life in Baghdad distanced him from those joyful memories. Instead, he came into contact with prostitutes and the night-life of the city.

Again the analogy between him and R.S. Thomas is patent. Both were appalled by the superficiality of life in the city, and thus could not adjust themselves to its norms.

But unlike R.S. Thomas who was in constant search for his ideal place, from Manavon to Eglwysfach and then to Aberdaron, al-Sayyab's Jaikur was, and remained, his first and last resort.

Perhaps one should remember that R.S. Thomas was originally

an urban-born poet who became attracted to the Welsh countryside as an adult, while al-Sayyab was born and brought up in the rural area of South Iraq.

Among his numerous poems about Jaikur of which some were published in Hymn to Rain, and others in The Sunken Temple, the following are the most subtle and least emotional: 'A Return to Jaikur', 'The River and Death', 'Christ after the Crucifixion', 'The Shades of Jaikur', 'The Ageing Jaikur' and 'Jaikur My Mother'.

It is worth noting here that such an accumulation of poems addressed to Jaikur is not simply an expression of devotion or a nostalgic whim; it is also an indication of the fact that he had been rejected by the city. In other words he was no longer needed in Baghdad. What happened was that by 1955 he had changed his attitude towards the Communists and begun to show a nationalistic tendency. The friends in Baghdad with whom he lived and with whose Marxist ideology he associated himself, were stunned. To them he became simply a renegade. He had to turn to his village for consolation and solace. His nostalgia for Jaikur, became in later years so strong that only there could he find a cure for his suffering.

'A Return to Jaikur', is devoid of any socialist outlook and does not depict the gloomy scenes of his previous poems. It also marks his happy return to Romanticism.

Having been rejected by the Communists and by the city of

Baghdad as a whole, he begins to envisage Jaikur as the paradise where he can restore his happiness. But as we continue reading the poem, it appears that his return to Jaikur is only a dream which cannot be fulfilled. In other words Jaikur cannot be his refuge, nor can he embrace it as he did in his childhood, for it only exists in his dream:

'And my soul was snatched as the train hooted
My eyes brimmed over with tears
A cloud carrying me as the train moved on
Oh the sun of days, isn't there a return?
.....
Jaikur, sleep in the darkness of years.' (9)
(A Return to Jaikur)

In the above poem there is a reference to Biblical as well as to Koranic stories. Al-Sayyab's aim in employing such stories is to elevate the image of Jaikur and to reveal his own suffering.

In 'Christ after the Crucifixion', al-Sayyab depicts the story of Christ and applies it to himself. The whole idea of the poem is based on the theme of resurrection and final union with Jaikur. What is significant here is the fact that the story of Jesus Christ adopted by al-Sayyab in this poem is derived from the Holy Koran which relates that Christ was not crucified but united with His God in Heaven. This version of the story of Christ apparently suits al-Sayyab who is only concerned with his own rebirth, or reawakening which had been subdued while he was a Communist. The poem begins with Jesus Christ, who is obviously al-Sayyab himself, relating His story after the Crucifixion:

'When they brought me down I heard the winds
In long lamentation weaving the leaves of palm-trees,
And footsteps receding far, far away. So the wounds
And the Cross to which I have been nailed all through
the afternoon
Have not killed me. I listened: the wail
Traversed the plain between me and the city
Like a hawser tied to a ship
That is sinking into the depths.' (10)

And although he is alive, the prevailing atmosphere is that of grief. He could not relish living in a city where everyone is asleep. So it is only by leaving this city where he has been crucified and by taking shelter in Jaikur, that he is resurrected:

'When orange trees and the mulberry are in blossom
When Jaikur spreads out to the limits of fantasy
When it grows green with vegetation whose fragrance
sings
Together with the suns that have suckled it with their
brilliance
When even its darkness grows green,
Warmth touches my heart and my blood flows into its earth
My heart is the sun when the sun throbs with light
My heart is the earth throbbing with wheat, blossoms and
sweet water
My heart is the water; it is the ear of corn
Whose death is resurrection.' (11)

Jaikur, then, becomes the source of life. His resurrection makes his enemies fear him. Even those who have betrayed him as Judas did Jesus Christ, would be amazed to see him alive:

'Thus I returned and as soon as he saw me Judas turned
pale
For I had been his secret
He was a shadow of mine, grown dark, the frozen image
of an idea
From which the spirit had been drawn out
He feared that it might betray death in the tears of
his eyes
(His eyes were a rock
In which he tried to hide his tomb from the people)
He feared its warmth, its impossibility for him, so
he informed
against it.

'Is it you? Or is it my own shadow, grown while melting
into light?
You struggling back from the land of the dead?
Men only die once, so our fathers said, so they taught
us, was
it a lie then?
That is what he thought when he saw me, what his glance
spoke.' (12)

Along with the biblical story of Jesus Christ, there is also a reference to Tammuz, the Babylonian god of fertility. Christ's resurrection which is al-Sayyab's rebirth eventually awakens the conscience of the people, and as they wake up to oppose the tyranny, he simply dies like Tammuz:

'The rifles' eyes devour my road
Pointed they are and the fire in them dreams of my
crucifixion
Iron and fire they are made of, while the eyes of my
people
are fashioned
Of the light of the skies, of memories and love.
They relieve me of my burden, and my cross then grows
moist.
O how small
Is that death, my death and yet how great.' (13)

The image of Christ, as the symbol of rebirth, has, in fact, fulfilled al-Sayyab's aim of establishing the theme of resurrection, but it is doubtful whether his reference to the pagan god of fertility has reinforced that aim.

In another poem about his childhood in Jaikur, entitled 'The River and Death', he yearns for the River Buwayb where he spent his childhood.

According to the Babylonian legends, the river is the source of life, so it is through the river Buwayb that Jaikur flourishes. But for al-Sayyab Buwayb is also the spring of his own rejuvenation:

'Buwayb ...
Buwayb ...
Bells in a tower lost on the seabed,
Water in jars, sunset in trees,
Jars brimming over with bells fashioned of rain,
Their crystal melting in the lament:
"Buwayb ... O Buwayb!"
And in my blood a sombre yearning
For you, O Buwayb,
O river mine, as sad as rain.
I long to run through the darkness
With fists clenched, bearing in each finger
A whole year's hopes, as if bringing you
Pledges of wheat and flowers.
I long to look down from the hills' high throne
To glimpse the moon
Sink between your banks
Planting shadows
And filling its basket
With water, fish and flowers.' (14)

One wonders why al-Sayyab appears to be so attached to this river, or to his village in general. There is no doubt at all that his feeling is sincere and genuine. What bores the reader is in fact, the constant repetition of these pitiful utterings. the poem ends with a wish to die so that he could revitalize the others:

'Buwayb ... O Buwayb,
Twenty years are past, each like eternity,
And today as darkness falls,
I come to rest in bed, but not to sleep
My senses taut like a lofty tree
Stretching its branches, birds and fruit out to dawn.
I feel this world of sorrow
Gushing over with blood and tears, like rain.
Bells tolling for the dead shudder wailing through
my veins,
And in my blood as sombre yearning
For a bullet whose sudden ice
Will bore the depth of my breast,
Like hellfire set ablaze my bones.
I long to sink to the depths in my blood,
To bear my load with other men,
To resurrect life. Then is my death a victory!'[15]

And this state of dejection coupled with a strong sense of nostalgia towards his childhood in Jaikur, were totally transformed into mere elegies and laments in 1962 - the year in which he realized that he would soon die.

In these elegies which are in fact, based on his recollections of the past, he endeavours to remember every incident that happened to him in his childhood, every character he met, and every place he visited. And eventually he becomes so deeply involved in such memories of his childhood in Jaikur, that it becomes simply part of him. Here, Jaikur is not the village that he wrote about in his previous collections, mainly in Hymn to Rain, where he viewed it as the source of social and political stability, compared with Baghdad, the bastion of tyranny.

Jaikur now becomes a refuge for his dying body, a world beyond one's perception where he can find a cure for his suffering.

Having visited many physicians including those in London and Paris for a possible hope of life, and every time is denied that hope, al-Sayyab now, in defiance of time, seeks asylum in the past to escape death, and Jaikur is his destination.

'The Shades of Jaikur' begins by celebrating the beauty of the village:

> 'A fountain of shades, of roses,
> And of sparrows ...
> Jaikur, Jaikur you are an abundance of light

You are a brook of butterflies we chase in the night
In the world of dreams and moon
Which are tenderer when spreading over their wings
Than rain in early summer.' (16)

That overflow of recollection suddenly comes to a halt as he becomes aware of the reality of his situation, and he wishes that he could forget that he is in fact in the present. He appeals to Jaikur to make him oblivious of his surrounding so that he could enjoy his past days in Jaikur:

' ...Load the branches of sleepiness with fruits;
Peaches, figs and grapes,(that are)
Peeled from their cold skin.
Return to me my lost life
The days of pleasure ...' (17)

As the title of the poem indicates, the shade is a symbol of peace and relief. But the irony is that instead of tranquility of mind, the shade reminds him of his mother's grave and eventually of his own death:

'The shades of Jaikur I desire
As though heading away from their old grave
From the grave of my mother
Whose tired ribs and eyes
Became part of the land of Jaikur
Caring for me and I for her.'(18)

In another poem entitled 'The Ageing Jaikur', he doubts whether Jaikur really exists in his memory, so he confronts it with a question:

'Are you buried in my memory?
Or you are its grave?
So resurrect it.
And resurrect me.
But alas! there's no return to boyhood.
My past is my grave and I am the grave of the past.'(19)

Nevertheless, he cannot divest himself of the memory of

Jaikur. Besides, there is no one to turn to in his condition, but Jaikur. In 'Jaikur My Mother', he yearns to embrace its grass and trees, and wishes that Hala, or Wafiqa or Iqbal would pour him some water. This is one of al-Sayyab's abnormalities; the last thing one would expect from a dying man to utter is the names of his lovers. But as clearly stated by I.J. Boullata, al-Sayyab 'had something Dionysiac about his character which showed itself early in his life with his desire for bodily pleasures ...' and 'that is why it was particularly tragic for him to be ugly and to fail in his early love affairs, then to be doomed to an intellectually incompatible marriage and finally to have his sexual power impaired by paralysis and his whole body gradually wrecked by disease.' (20)

Among those girls who inspired him in his later years and evoked in him a sense of nostalgia was Hala, the Bedouin girl whom he met while grazing his grandfather's flock. Hala, however, disappeared suddenly, and her image was almost forgotten by al-Sayyab in his youth, but significantly she re-appeared in his mind, not as the beautiful Hala, but as an old woman.

There are three other women who played individually a vital role in his life. In his youth in the village he showed interest in his cousin Wafiqa and fell in love with her. But to his surprise, She married another man, to die a year later in childbirth. Thirty years after her death, al-

Sayyab, tormented by the shadow of death, remembers her. In 'Wafiqa's Window', he asks her to wake up and look from her window which symbolically stands for a grave:

'Look, for your blue window
is a hungry sky,
Evident from the tears
In which I shiver
like a boat.' (21)

This is a desperate cry for companionship; al-Sayyab seems to be asking her not for love, but to escort him to his death.

In another poem addressed to Lamia, his class-mate at the college, al-Sayyab displays the same longing. Her memory flashes in his mind while he is in London:

'Oh Lamia, I remembered you
When the darkness was snow and rain
When the night and the light's breath
died in London.
I saw someone like you
Whose hair was darkness and rivers
And her eyes two springs of nymphs
In a forest.' (22)

But this passion for the women of his childhood never exceeded the love he offered to one particular woman, his wife, Iqbal, who lived and suffered his misfortune.

In his poem 'Take Me' published in the volume The House of Slave Girls (1963), he expresses his deep feeling towards her. She becomes almost synonymous with the image of his homeland, Iraq.

'Take me for I am sad
Don't leave me on the road on my own
Walking towards unknown lands.

For my paths were threads of yearning
Of joy and love
To a house in Iraq
Where its windows brighten the darkness of my heart,
To a wife who in it was my happiness
And my sky
Where its planets draw the path,
My path.' (23)

And always the memory of his wife brings to his mind the image of his son Ghaylan whose birth he celebrated in various poems. Ghaylan triggers in his mind the memory of his own childhood; when he was only six and his mother died. Ghaylan at the same age would be losing his father. Now he could hear him crying, asking for him as he did for his mother:

'I hear him cry, calling for me
In my dreary chilly night
Calling, 'father how could you leave me
Alone without a guardian?"
Ghaylan, I did not desert you on purpose ...
The disease made between me and you a distance.'(24)
(I Hear Him Cry)

Besides these personal yearnings which marked his poetry at the end of his life, al-Sayyab also exhibited a great interest in the Arab heritage of the past, in particular the Babylonian myths.

Like R.S. Thomas whose adoption of the Celtic literary heritage, and of ancient Wales, was motivated by his political views, al-Sayyab's use of myth was also political. He revealed that in an interview in 1963:

'Perhaps I am the first contemporary Arab poet to begin using myths and make symbols out of them. My first motive in this respect was political. When I wanted to resist the royal Saidi regime with poetry, I used myths to veil my intentions, for the myrmidons of Nuri al-Saidi understood no myths. I also used them for the same purpose in the regime of Qasim.' (25)

But the political implications of his myths are gradually diminished as he becomes more aware of his own death, and thus the myth of his later poems becomes an embodiment of his own personal agony.

Among his poems which depict various mythical and historical figures, and are politically motivated, one can name the following; 'The City of Sinbad', 'Cerberus in Babylon' , 'A Song in the Month of August', 'A Vision of 1956', 'The City Without Rain', and 'In the Maghreb'. (26)

'The City of Sinbad' is a political poem written during al-Sayyab's rebellion against the Iraqi Communists. It focuses on good characters like Mohammad and Christ as well as evil ones like Judas.

The poem illustrates how the Iraqi Communists during the regime of Qassim, launched a campaign of liquidation against their opponents, the Arab nationalists who are in the poem represented by the pagan gods Tammuz and Attis. The title of the poem is also significant. It shows al-Sayyab's interest in the mythical character of Sinbad which is drawn from The Thousand And One Nights. It also reveals his sense of identification with Sinbad who during his adventures encountered numerous mishaps and misfortunes.

The poem opens with a touching picture; the country is affected by severe drought, as a result of the Tartar's invasion. In other words, Iraq is in chaos under the Communists' control:

'Hungry in the tomb without food,
Naked in the snow without cloak,
I cried out in winter;
Make hard my bed, O rain,
My bed of bones or snow or particles of dust,
My bed of stone,
But make the seeds grow, let the flowers open,
And set the sterile threshing floors
On fire with lightning
Make the roots break through,
And burden down the trees.' (27)

It is not worth living in this country, but if one does, one should be unconscious of this horrific situation. For those who wake up and find the country in this turmoil, it is more than a shock.

Lazarus is one of those who woke up too early to see the situation with his own eyes:

'Who awakened Lazarus from his long sleep?
That he might know the morning and evening,
And summer and winter,
That he might be hungry, or feel
The burning coal of thirst,
And sting of death,
And count the heavy, swift minutes
And praise the rabble
And shed blood!
Whoever it was who revived us
Did he revive too what we fear?
Who is the god in our dwelling place?
His fire takes life upon our wax candles,
His malice takes life on our tears.' (28)

And there are prayers made to Adonis to save the country and bring the spring and rain, but the prayers are not answered, and both Muhammad and Christ are tortured:

'There is death in the streets,
And barrenness in the fields,
and all that we love is dying.
They have bound up the water in the houses
And brooks are panting in the drought.
Behold, the Tartars have advanced,
Their knives are bleeding,
And our sun is blood, our food
Is blood upon the platter.

They have burned Muhammad, the orphan,
And the evening glows from his fire,
The blood boiled up in his feet,
in his hands and in his eyes,
And in his eyelids the god was burned.
They have bound up Muhammad,
The prophet, on Mt. Hira (29)
and the day was nailed down
Where they nailed him.
Tomorrow Christ will be crucified
In Iraq, and the dogs will feast
On the blood of Buraq.' (30)

And the poem ends in the death of the goddess Ishtar or Astarte:

'And in the village Ishtar is dying of thirst,
There are no flowers on her forehead
And in her hands there is a basket, its fruit are stone.
Every woman is stoning it. And in the palm trees
On the city's shore there is a wailing.' (31)

In another poem entitled 'Cerberus in Babylon', al-Sayyab again shows his antagonism towards the Iraqi Communists by using both Greek as well as Babylonian myths.

Cerberus in the Greek mythology is the dog which guards the Underworld, but here it stands for the Communists in Iraq, and Tammuz is the nation. According to the Babylonian mythology, Tammuz is the God of harvest and fertility. He dies every year, during which the earth loses its fertility, and his beloved Astarte starts a journey in his search. It is only after she finds him that life on earth is restored.

The poem opens with the description of Cerberus destroying the city and tearing the children into pieces:

Let Cerberus howl in the lanes
in derelict distressed Babel
and cause a commotion,
Tear the children with canine teeth

Gnaw the bone
and drink the hearts' (blood). (32)

Even Tammuz in his grave is harassed by Cerberus:

'let Cerberus howl in the lane
and unearth our buried God
Our wounded Tammuz.' (33)

And to Astarte is left the restoring of order and justice. She appears on the scene to gather the remains of Tammuz's body, but Cerberus chases her, tears her clothes and thus poisons her blood:

'And the Goddess of Harvest,
the friend of roses, waters and scents
Approached.
Astarte, the Goddess of the North and the South
Is walking on the plains and the low grounds
In the lanes
Picking up the flesh of Tammuz
Gathering them in a basket, if scattered
Like fruits.
But Cerberus of Babel - the hell (hound)
Is galloping down the lanes after her,
Biting her soft legs, snapping her hands
And tearing her gown
Smearing it with old blood
and blending the new blood with howls.' (34)

The impression that one might get from reading the above lines is that both Tammuz and Astarte have fallen victims to Cerberus, which means there is no resurrection of Tammuz. The final lines of the poem, however, contain an answer to this enigma:

'let Cerberus howl in the lanes
Snapping the distressed goddess, the alarmed goddess;
For her blood will fertilise the grains
Giving birth to the God,
(Whose) scattered flesh have been hurriedly gathered.
The light will be born
From a bleeding womb.' (35)

The light will only emerge from the spilled blood and so if the nation is prepared to resist and shed blood, there will be a resurrection.

In 'A Song in the Month of August', al-Sayyab again uses the Babylonian myth of Tammuz to convey his political message.

It is worth noting at this point that Tammuz is used in Iraq for the month of July while the word for August is Ab, another Babylonian term. The first revolution against the royal family in Iraq occurred in the month of July 1958, and this was seen by al-Sayyab as the victory of Tammuz, and so he praised the revolution.

Within a month he was disappointed; the revolution seemed to have killed Tammuz. 'A Song in the Month of August', therefore, begins with the death of Tammuz:

> 'Tammuz dies on the horizon
> And his blood with the evening twilight
> Sink the dark cave.' (36)

The death of Tammuz is a preface to other disasters. The people among whom Tammuz has died are oblivious to what is happening to the country. The people, or rather, the masses, are exploited by the ruling class represented in the poem in the characters of the hostess and her guest. The black maid is the symbol for this people who are enslaved by the Communists.

In 'A Vision of 1956', al-Sayyab reaches the peak of his animosity against the Iraqi Communists. In that poem he creates a picture of what he thought to be the terrifying

reign of Qassim. The Babylonian myth of Astarte is used to refer to Hafsa who was alleged to have been crucified by the Communists in the city of Musil:

'Astarte was crucified and nailed
On the trunk of a tree.' (37)

And as she bleeds, there are signs of rain:

'Pray ... this is the climate for rain
Pray ... this is the age of stone
Pray and put her in fire.
From Hafsa Tammuz has become a nail
Walking out the tree.' (38)

In 'City Without Rain' Astarte, the goddess who is supposed to save Tammuz, is not powerful. She is indifferent to the misery of children. She is not in search of Tammuz either:

' 'A fire with no flames keeps our city awake at night.
Its lanes and houses have fever. When the fever goes
And sunset colours it with all the clouds it carried,
A spark is about to fly, its dead are bout to rise:
'Tammuz hs awakened, returned to green Babel to care
for it.'
The drums of Babel are about to beat, but through its
castles
The wind's whistle and the moan of its sick predominate
In the chambers of Astarte.
The earthenware censers remain empty with no fire.
Invocation rises as if all the throats of the reeds
In the swamp were crying.
'panting with exhaustion,
The goddess of blood returns, the bread of Babel,
the sun of March.' (39)

This is the barren Astarte, insensitive and unmoved by the appeals of the people of Babel. She is unable to bring rain to the city - and yet there is still a hope of rain:

'We spent year after year after year watching
Thunderous, lightning clouds with no rain
And winds like storms which neither pass as a storm
Nor lie quiet - we sleep and wake up in fear of them.'(40)

And the people, in their desperation, practise a pagan ritual to Astarte:

> 'Our virgins are sad and listless around Astarte
> As water dries up bit by bit in her face
> And branch after branch the vine withers.
> Slow is our death inching its way between light and darkness,
> What a lion it is, woe to it, from whose wide jaws we suffer.'(41)

The lion here is the tyrant before whose power Astarte is petrified, and thus unable to bring justice to the city. Nevertheless, there is a flicker of hope; the children of Babel do decide to march to Astarte:

> 'The little ones of Babel walked carrying cactus basket
> And fruits of earthenware as offerings for Astarte.
> Like a shadow of water, plant and fire
> A shimmer of lightning lights
> Their little round faces as they pray for rain
> A field of blossoms is about to open up as they shine.'(42)

And when at the end, the rain falls, it never reaches Babel, for its walls prevent it from pouring inside:

> The sky lit up with lightning as if a lily of fire
> Was opening itself up over Babel. Our valley shone,
> And incandescence penetrated the bottom of our land and bared it
> With all its seeds, its roots and its dead:
> Beyond the walls that Babel built around its fever
> And its thirsty earth, beyond its pillars and its ramparts,
> Clouds burst in rain which would have satiated it, but for these walls.'(43)

As already mentioned, al-Sayyab's aim in adopting the Babylonian myth of Tammuz and Astarte was both political and personal. The myth of Tammuz served him well in attacking his opponents and at the same time revealing his own anguish and grief. But al-Sayyab was not the only Arab poet of the twentieth century to use the Babylonian myth of Tammuz. He is, however, the first modern Arab poet to give it a symbolic significance.

In other words ' he resorts to the myth of Tammuz in his search for symbols to represent the victory of life over death, and finds in it all that he needs to embody his vision of a plenteous, new life for his people. He finds in it a means to give expression to the civilizational moment he is living and the hope he is cherishing for his country and the Arab world.' (44)

The Babylonian, Assyrian and Egyptian myths which were suppressed during the Islamic Empire, were revived and manipulated with utmost craftsmanship by the twentieth century Arab poets, in particular, al-Sayyab and the Syrian poet Adunis (Ali Ahmed Said).

In his poem 'In the Maghreb' (45), al-Sayyab departs from the Babylonian myth of Tammuz to illustrate the glory of Islam in the past. There is a contrast between the greatness of the past and the disgrace of the present. From the great past only a few aspects are left to be observed:

'I read my name here
On a rock
In a desolate desert
On a red brick
On a grave.
So what will be the feeling of man
Seeing his grave?
He will be amazed! Is he alive or dead?'(46)

The dead past of the Islamic civilization is represented by the graveyard and the minaret. Both the graveyard and the minaret are signs of the glory that has vanished. But it is not only the Islamic civilization that is dead, Muhammad is dead as well:

'And He died ...
And we, who are alive and dead
died in Him.
For we are all dead;
I and Muhammad and Allah.
And this is our grave; a debris of a
dusty minaret
with the names of Muhammad and Allah
written on it,
on a scattered fragment of
bricks and pottery.' (47)

According to S. al-Jayyusi, 'this is the death of heroism, of life, of all Arab civilization,for not only the living but also the dead have died.' (48)

And like Jesus Christ, al-Sayyab's God also undergoes suffering:

'The Almighty God of Al-Ka'bah (49)
Was in armour yesterday,
With relics on its rims,
Of the blood of Al-Nu'man.
The God of Muhammad,
The God of the fathers, of the Arabs
Was seen in the village mountains
Lifting the banner of rebels.
And in Jaffa the folks saw him cry
In an abandoned house
And we saw him descending from the clouds,
Wounded,
Walking in our district and begging for alms.
We didn't bandage his wound
Nor anyone of us sacrificed.
He was only given bread and
Charity by a slave.' (50)

The events of the past are juxtaposed with those of the present. The Almighty God was seen in the battle of DhiQaar where the Arabs, led by their king alNu'man defeated the Persians. He was also sighted among the Algerian patriots fighting the French Colonialists, in the mountains. But in Jaffa in Palestine, the villagers saw him crying. And now in the present, he is wounded and like a beggar asking

for alms. This is reminiscent of Taliesin's technique of shape-lifting.

Nevertheless, the poem, despite the suffering of God, does not end on a pessimistic note. Muhammad who led the Arabs to victory after victory, rises from his grave along with the rising of God:

> 'The graves were shaken to spread our dead in millions,
> and Muhammad, his Arab God, and his followers rose:
> Our God is in ourselves.' (51)

In his voyage to the past, al-Sayyab has touched upon various themes, and all these themes emerge from his realization that it is in the past that his comfort lies.

The realm of the past encompasses not only his memories of childhood, of his dead mother, of his village Jaikur, of Hala, Wafiqa and lamia, but it is also impregnated with the names of Tammuz, Astarte, Christ and Muhammad.

Notes and References

1. M.M. Badawi, A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry. p.250.

2. Issa J. Boullata, The Poetic technique of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab. Journal of Arabic Literature (1971) p.109.

3. Ibid, p.112.

4. M.M. Badawi, A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry. p.253.

5. Issa J. Boullata (ed.) Modern Arab Poets p.7.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid, p.8.

8. Ibid, p.9.

9. Ilia al Hawi, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: The Poet of Hymns and Elegies. Part IV, p.133.

10. Journal of Arabic Literature, Vol II (1971) p.136.

11. Ibid, p.137.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid, p.138.

14. Journal of Arabic Literature, Vol. I (1970), p.123.

15. Ibid, p.124.

16. Ilia al Hawi, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: The poet of Hymns and Elegies, Part VI, p.103.

17. Ibid, p.105.

18. Ibid, p.106

19. Ibid, p.109.

20. Issa J. Boullata,'The Poetic Technique of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab', JAL II (1971) p.114.

21. Ilia al Hawi, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: The Poet of Hymns and Elegies, p.56.

22. Ibid, Part V, p.45.

23. Ibid, Part VI, pp.73-74.

24. Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, The House of Slaves, pp.99-100.

25. Issa J. Boullata,'The Poetic Technique of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab', JAL II, p.113.

26. The title refers to those Arab countries in North Africa especially Algeria and Morocco.

27. Journal of Arabic Literature I p.124.

28. Ibid, p.125.

29. This is the name of the cave on a hill where Prophet Muhammad used to meditate.

30. The name of the horse on which Muhammad was riding on his journey from AL-Kabah to Jerusalem.

31. Ilia Al Hawi, Badr Shakir Al Sayyab: the Poet of Hymns and Elegies, Part IV, p.184.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid, p.186.

34. Ibid, p.187.

35. Ibid, p.187.

36. Ibid, Part II, p.126.

37. Ibid, Part IV, p.141.

38. Ibid. p.142.

39. Issa J. Boullata, Modern Arab Poets p.3.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid, p.4.

43. Ibid, p.5.

44. Issa J. Boullata, the Poetic Technique of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, JAL II, pp.109-110.

45. Literally the title means 'In the Arabian Maghreb'.

46. Ilia Al Hawi, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: The Poet of Hymns and Elegies, Part III, p.165.

47. Ibid, p.166.

48. Salma Khadra Jayyusi,'Trends and Movements in Contemporary

Arabic Poetry (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1970)p.1059.

49. The place of worship, previously of pagan gods and now of Allah.

50. Ilia Al Hawi, Badr shakir al-Sayyab: The Poet of Hymns and Elegies. Part III, p.168.

51. Ibid, p.172.

PART TWO: THE LOST LAND

I grow old,
bending to enter the promised
land that was here all the time,
happy to eat the bread that was baked
in the poets' oven, breaking my speech
from the perennial tree
of my people and holding it in my blind hand.

R.S. Thomas

My homeland is no bundle of legends
It is not a memory, not a field of crescent moons.

My homeland is not some story or anthem,
Not light on the boughs of some jasmine bush.

My homeland is the anger of the exile at being made to grieve
A child wanting festivities and a kiss.

And winds confined within a prison cell,
An old man mourning his sons, his field.

This land is the skin on my bones,
And my heart
Flies above its grasses like a bee.

Mahmoud Darwish

CHAPTER FIVE

WALES UNDER ENGLISH DOMINATION

The failure of Owen Glyndŵr to establish an independent Wales resulted not only in English domination of the land, but also in severe repurcussions against the Welsh.

The effect of the war was devastating. 'Everywhere there was desolation and ruin. Church and monasteries had been desecrated; lands laid waste, mills and weirs wrecked.' (1) Chaos and disorder prevailed in every corner of the country, there were raids against the English merchants and lords on the border.

Under the pretext of protecting English interests in Wales, Henry IV passed a number of laws restricting the freedom of the Welsh and limiting their rights on their own land. Such laws affected more the life of the ordinary Welshmen; for the Welsh gentry had already merged in the life style of the English lords, and the Welsh ex-fighters or adventurers had fled to England to enlist in the English army in France.

One of those popular Welshmen who later became an epitome of Welsh heroism was Mathew Gough. He fought the French, and was taken prisoner, but later was released on ransom. Gough was slain in a fight with John Cade's rebels in the battle of London Bridge. The news of his death caused 'universal grief in Wales'. (2)

But there was another Welshman with whom the Welsh showed a great sympathy; none other than Owen Tudor, who won the affection of Queen Catherine, the widow of Henry V.

After the queen's death, Owen was arrested and imprisoned, and thus the fate of his two sons Edmund and Jasper Tudor fell in the hands of their half-brother Henry VI who became their guardian.

But Edmund Tudor who was made the Earl of Richmond died soon enough to watch his son Henry march triumphantly towards London, after defeating King Richard at Bosworth. And 'thus at long last a Welshman once more sat on the throne of England. What the bards of Wales had so often prophesied had come to pass.' (3)

It was not the victory over the English army that made the Welsh rejoice; Henry Tudor revived the legacy of Welsh heroic tradition, first by carrying the banner of the Welsh hero Cadwaladr, the Red Dragon, and then by christening his son Arthur.

But not everyone in Wales celebrated the victory. The bard Guto'r Glyn, who led a secluded life after the Tudors came to power, was not joyful at all. He was aware that 'the victory of the Tudors would, in the end, make his Wales less Welsh'. (4)

In the next chapter of this part, we shall see how

another Welsh poet, R.S. Thomas, responds to this victory. Meanwhile, it is fair to state that Henry Tudor (Henry VII) showed deep interest in Welsh history as well as poetry. The Welsh bards were often rewarded by him, and it appears that many Welshmen who fought with him, settled in England and became his aides.

In Wales, his first duty was to remove those restrictions imposed by Henry IV against the Welsh.

During his reign, the feudal system in both England and Wales was abolished, and there were courts established, in particular, to deal with cases of injustice.

Henry VII died in 1509, and it was recorded that at the time of his dying his advice to his son Henry VIII was 'that he should have a special care for the benefit of his own nation and countrymen the Welshmen'. (5)

But apparently Henry VIII never understood his father's last words, for the gap between him and the Welsh lords gradually began to widen. His first confrontation was with Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham who owned large estates stretching from Newport to Brecon. He was found guilty of treason and was executed in 1521. Another Welshman who fought with the Tudors, and later was executed was Rhys ap Gruffudd. To put it in a nutshell, the reign of Henry VIII was a turning-point in the Tudors' policy in Wales. The superiority of the English barons was once again established presumably to bring order to those chaotic

parts of Wales.

A notorious name, in this connection, was that of Rowland Lee, appointed by Henry VIII to try in English courts all those who committed crimes in Wales.

Lee was very unsympathetic towards the Welsh tradition, and it is recorded that because of him the Welsh were compelled 'to shorten their names and use only the last elements as a surname'. (6) But it seems that Lee's tyranny in Wales was part of a well-planned conspiracy against the Welsh, and perhaps a prelude to that famous Act of Union, passed in 1536, by which Wales was legally 'united and annexed' to England, and which had such a pernicious effect on the Welsh language.

It stated that 'from henceforth no person or persons that use the Welsh speech or language shall have or enjoy any manner office or fees within this realm of England, Wales or other the King's Dominion upon pain of forfeiting the same offices or fees, unless he or they use and exercise the English speech or tongue.' (7)

The direct result of the Act of Union was not discernible at that time; many Welshmen welcomed it, and many others kept silent. It is in this century however, that one can observe its consequences: the Welsh have come to realize with a sense of bitterness that the Welsh language is, in fact, on the verge of annihilation. And no Welshman has expressed such a dilemma in the English language so

patently as R.S. Thomas. In the next chapter we shall study R.S. Thomas's reaction to the English settlers and tourists in Wales, and his view on the Welsh language. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that despite the pressures on the Welsh language as a result of the Act of Union, it survived throughout the centuries. Its survival, however, seems to be fortuitous for 'Wales had no university, no royal court, none of the attributes of Italianate high culture which would normally be considered essential to allow humanist scholars to work freely and without restriction in the native language.' (8)

The Welsh language underwent serious changes during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who was well aware of the fact that 'the Welsh people would never accept Protestantism while it was presented in English'. (9)

And so, her attention was directed towards the Welsh language. Not only did she commission her representative in north Wales to hold an eisteddfod in which the Welsh bards, both qualified and unqualified, could compete, but also approved the translation of the bible into Welsh. (10)

The translation of the bible into Welsh, undertaken by William Morgan, the vicar of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, was undoubtedly, a great help in preserving the Welsh language.

Thus during the Tudor period, the Welsh language survived despite being 'tucked into a corner of the Tudor baggage train, like a cooking pot, along with the crumbling effigies of Arthur, Merlin, Taliesin and Madoc.' (11) and retained

its traditional status.

Tudor Aled was a bard of unique calibre who spent nine years in reaching the rank of Chief Bard. His pupil Gruffydd Hiraethog undertook the responsibility of producing a book about the Welsh bardic school, but died before the work was finished.

Another Welsh poet of the time, who was also a pirate, was Thomas Prys. His poetry reflects his adventurous spirit and love of nature.

The Civil War of the seventeenth century also had its impact on Wales. On the one hand, the Welsh gentry became involved in the war, and on the other hand, there were attempts by Cromwell to impose Puritanism on the Welsh. And although 'the first Puritan communities were formed in the anglicised parts of Wales and through the medium of English', (12) it never reached the majority of the Welsh people until the reign of Charles II and after the Act of Toleration in 1672.

It was then that the Welsh preachers like Samuel Jones became directly involved in preaching puritanism in Wales.

A staunch Welsh puritan of the age who also 'served as a chaplain in Cromwell's army'(13) was Morgan Llwyd a poet of mystical outlook who wrote in both English and Welsh.

The exodus of the Welsh dissenters to North America occurred in the period following the Restoration. The name of William Penn is often referred to as the one who promised the Welsh Quakers their own colony in Pennsylvania.(14) The Welsh community in North America, like their brothers and sisters in Wales, displayed the same enthusiasm to preserve their indigenous customs and way of life, and in both situations the difficulty of such attempts was obvious, for while one can state that the Welsh in North America were in exile in the sense that they lived outside Wales, the Welsh in Wales today, see themselves as exiles on their own land. This feeling of alienation is strongly felt among some Welsh writers in English, but recently it has been given a wider significance in the poems of R.S. Thomas. In his treatment of this issue, as we shall see in the next chapter, he touches upon both the feeling of the Welshmen who were really in exile like Goronwy Owen, and the sufferings of those Welsh like himself who do not feel at home in Wales.

The eighteenth century is considered to be a turning-point in the revival of the Welsh language and culture.

The names of Iolo Morganwg, who reshaped the old history of Wales according to his own fantasies; Edward Lhuyd, and the Morris brothers who with their London friends founded the first Welsh society, 'the Cymmrodorion', belong to this period of Welsh history.

But significantly enough, the revival was not confined

to cultural issues: a series of revivals in religion, education and industry were 'changing the face of Welsh society.' (15)

Nevertheless, it was through the cultural revival which itself was part of a wider interest in Celtic heritage, that the religious and other reforms in Wales emerged.

And so as 'Welsh culture was becoming more and more 'nonconformity in a cultural mood'; the same process occurred in Welsh politics - the rise of radicalism in politics in Wales from the 1840s to the 1870s, and then the rise of Liberalism from 1868 to 1922, has been called 'nonconformity playing at politics'. (16)

Notes and References

1. H.T. Evans, Mediaeval Wales, p.177.

2. Ibid., p.180.

3. Ibid., p.196.

4. Emyr Humphreys, The Taliesin Tradition, p.38.

5. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.110.

6. Ibid., p.116.

7. Ibid., p.118.

8. Emyr Humphreys, The Taliesin Tradition p.46.

9. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.128.

10. The translation of the Bible in effect helped to safeguard the Welsh, but that was not its intention. On the contrary one of the purposes of doing it was because the English felt it would help the Welsh to learn English.

11. Emyr Humphreys, The Taliesin Tradition, p.46.

12. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.154.

13. Emyr Humphreys, The Taliesin Tradition, p.56.

14. Penn's friendship with the Welsh Quakers and later his confrontation with them are fully described in Emyr Humphreys's The Taliesin Tradition, pp.68-72.

15. Prys Morgan 'Welsh National Consciousness' in The Welsh Dilemma, p.22.

16. Ibid., p.23.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LAND OF LOST HOPE: R.S. THOMAS'S IMAGE OF WALES

In this part an attempt is made to study the views of two contemporary poets, each in his own situation towards the land.

Here we shall try to trace R.S. Thomas's image of Wales from his early poetry on, in respect of effects and the consequences of English domination of Wales.

In the next chapter, the poems of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish are studied and analysed in relation to the tragedy of the Palestinian people.

At the outset, before proceeding to study R.S. Thomas's poems on Wales, it is worth stating that the Wales of our concern, the setting of R.S. Thomas's poetry as far as the issue of the land is concerned, is essentially rural. This does not, however, imply that R.S. Thomas is not aware of the reality of the industrial areas of Wales. The aim of this study is to illustrate an individual view which is in this case that of R.S. Thomas despite the fact that his view is not immune to criticism.

It is then, R.S. Thomas's Wales that we are concerned with, which, as described by Ned Thomas, 'is rural, upland, a place where life can still be measured in the scale of nature'. (1) And this is probably the precise picture of Wales, which was for a long time in R.S. Thomas's imagination and as a matter of fact has existed for centuries.

This is also a romantic view of Wales; R.S. Thomas was inspired by the Romantic's love of nature. And yet it seems that the first seeds of his nature doctrine were not planted by the Romantics, but by his parents. Long before he started writing poetry, and while still a small boy in Liverpool with his parents, he could hear his father say to him, pointing towards the west 'that's Wales'. It was, therefore, his father who first opened R.S. Thomas's eyes to the beauty of Wales. His mother, on the other hand, who was brought up by an English-speaking family taught him how to express his feeling in the English language. (2)

It was, however, after the family had moved to Holyhead in North Wales, that R.S. Thomas could sense and touch Wales. He developed a Wordsworthian 'inward eye' enabling him to contemplate and thus, experience the highest level of joy.

In one of his pre-1935 poems, Thomas celebrates this joy:

> 'The waters strive to wash away
> The frail patch of her melody
> This little bird across the lake
> That links her gentle soul with me ...' (3)

And in another one he rejoices at the ecstasy of a memory:

> 'Once through the friendless dark so close I came
> Like Sisyphus, to the mount of desire ...' (4)

This was, undoubtedly, a 'marvellous experience', which Thomas experienced in his early life in Holyhead. It was the beauty of the land rather than 'the sorrows of the human condition', that dominated his mind, and he admits that:

> 'I was not born in the country, but I was brought up in it, and most of my later life has been spent in it or in contact with it. It was natural, therefore, that when I began to write, I should take my first subjects for poems from the countryside, as many of the Romantic poets did.' (5)

Furthermore, it seems that English Romanticism was not the only inspiration behind this image which he portrayed at that time. The Celtic literary revival in Ireland in particular, which started in the nineteenth century, fostered this image as well.

So Romanticism on the one hand, and the Celtic revival on the other hand, shaped his early image of Wales. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear him say, while on his journey from Llandaff to Holyhead that he could see 'in the west a land of romance and danger, a secret land'.(6) And even when he left the Theological College and became a curate at Chirk in 1936 his yearning for Wales was a mixture of romantic inspiration and Celtic imagination:

> 'And from there, in the evening I could see the Welsh hills some fifteen miles away in the evening, magical and mysterious as ever.' (7)

R.S. Thomas's image of Wales underwent a shift in Manavon; his depiction of the land became less pastoral and more realistic. There are many causes to which one can attribute this change of view. Perhaps the most relevant would be the impact which the Welsh nationalists left on the Welsh literary scene in the thirties.

The burning of the Bombing School in Llŷn in September 1936 and the trial of Saunders Lewis and his two colleagues on 13 October 1936 are only two examples of the publicity the Welsh nationalists achieved in Wales.

The burning of the Bombing School, in fact, marks the start of a long-running campaign to save the land and its language from 'national extinction'. It also heralded the birth of committed poetry in Welsh.

But the event seems to have had no effect on R.S. Thomas, who at that time was living in Chirk. Amazingly, he claims to have heard neither of the bombing nor of the trial. (8)

So what was the impetus behind the change in his image of Wales?

The first reason is given by Ned Thomas:

> "Learning Welsh gave R.S. Thomas access to the long and rich literary tradition that exists in this Celtic language; it also made him aware of the pressures that within the span of a century have reduced Welsh to being the language of only twenty percent of its people, from the position of being the majority language. When he turns to those themes his bitter and angry cadences touch many of the nerves of contemporary Welsh consciousness.' (9)

And there was another reason, and this time explained by R.S. Thomas himself:

> 'My awakening to the possibility of a more robust poetry came with my removal to my first incumbency in the Montgomeryshire foothills in 1942 ... I came in contact for the first time with the rough farm folk of the upland valleys. These were pre-tractor days. Their life was a hard slog in wind and mire on hill slopes with the occasional brief idyllic interludes. Their life and their attitudes administered an inward shock to my Georgian sensibility. ' (10)

But there was also a more fundamental factor, which helped him portray a less romantic picture of Wales in his poetry, and that was the publication of two Anglo-Welsh magazines,

Wales , and Welsh Review . While Wales was edited by the poet Keidrych Rhys who showed a lot of sympathy towards the Welsh nationalists, (11) Welsh Review was founded by the novelist Gwyn Jones. R.S. Thomas published most of his prose and poems in Wales , and it was through this magazine that he came to know and meet many Welsh nationalists. (12)

These three factors emerged at a single time, in the early forties, and in a single place, Manavon, and they were so influential that their impact on R.S. Thomas's mind was visible. Manavon was more than 'an eye-opener' to him. It was there that he began to learn the Welsh language; it was there that he wrote the first poem, 'A Peasant', about the harsh life of the Welsh farmer; and lastly it was in Manavon that he wrote his first article in English for the magazine Wales , entitled 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country'.

In Manavon, as noted by Ned Thomas, R.S. Thomas's 'first impulse was to de-romanticize the landscape and people, to show things as they really are.' (13)

After he had encountered the hill-farmer he realized that this 'secret land' was not as gentle as he had thought it to be. The land was cruel and harsh; it squeezed out every drop of emotion and tenderness from the farmer.

Furthermore, he came to know that the farmer in his struggle with the land was always 'beaten'. It was the 'bare land',

which demanded patience and acceptance.

It is interesting to note that a great number of his early poems published in his first collection 'The Stones of the Field', like 'Frost', 'Cyclamen', 'The Question', 'Birch Tree', 'Song', 'Evensong', and 'Spring Equinox', which illustrate his romantic view of the land were not collected in his Selected Poems (1946-1968). They must have been written sometime before he came to Manavon. Looking on those poems which had been written in Manavon, one can easily detect a sense of obsession that R.S. Thomas shows with the farmer's harsh life, to the extent, that his Wales becomes merely uninhabitable land. He describes every bit of it as 'starved', 'lean', 'dry', 'crude', 'bare', 'harsh', 'bitter', and 'desolate'. These epithets undoubtedly manifest his 'sensitive awareness' of the land, they also indicate how drastically his view of the land has changed.

It is, therefore, appropriate to state that R.S. Thomas's portrayal of Wales, at this early stage, was derived from his encounter with the Welsh farmer, and illustrated in the light of the Welsh farmer's role on the land. But because the encounter which eventually led him to understand the farmer's way of life was a slow process, his remarks on him were a mixture of scolding and praise. And yet there was always sympathy and affection for him:

> ' ... and this muck and blood and hardness, the rain and the spittle and the phlegm of farm life was, of course, a shock to begin with and one felt that this was something not quite part of the order of things. But, as one experienced it and saw how definitely part of their lives this was, sympathy grew in oneself and compassion and admiration.' (14)

The farmer's role on the land is delicately depicted in 'Man and Tree', one of the uncollected poems of The Stones of the Field. First we are given a description of the farmer himself:

> 'Study this man; he is older than the tree
> That lays its gnarled hand on his meagre shoulder.'

Then his merits:

> ... yet this man can teach,
> Even as an oak tree when its leaves are shed
> More in old silence than in youthful song.'

And finally his attachment to the land:

> 'See how earth claims him as he passes by,
> Drawing him reluctant to her ample breast.' (15)

What is significant in this poem, besides the theme of union between the farmer and the land, is the image of the tree.

While it is obvious that it is a remnant of the Romantic tradition which according to Ned Thomas makes possible 'a multiplicity of comparisons, with Yeats, with the early Romantics in England and Germany, but perhaps most interestingly with the Welsh language poet of his own generation Waldo Williams, who also subscribed to the Coleridgean theory of the imagination'. (16) Yet a close study of it will reveal that it develops along with Thomas's own vision of Wales, from being simply an element of nature in his early poems, to an instrument of historical and genealogical significances in 'The Tree', to the symbol of Welsh resurrection in 'To pay for his keep', till it appears with the land itself in the clouds of eternity. And to come back to those poems which illustrate this inseparable bond between the Welsh farmer and Wales, one may mention the poem 'A Peasant',

which represents R.S. Thomas's first reaction to the Welsh farmer:

> 'Iago Prytherch his name, though, be it allowed,
> Just an ordinary man of the bald Welsh hills.' (17)

While on the one hand, Iago Prytherch becomes simply a label for a real person, on the other hand the images of 'hills', 'seasons' and 'trees' become symbols of Wales. The poem ends in an asserting note that like a tree, the farmer is also 'enduring':

> 'Remember him, then, for he, too, is a winner of wars,
> Enduring like a tree under the curious stars.' (18)

This, however, does not mean that R.S. Thomas's attitude towards the farmer is always humane. In some of his early poems, the Welsh farmer is reduced to a simple creature. In 'Out of the Hill', he describes his naivety:

> 'The shadow of the mountain dwindles; his scaly eye
> Sloughs its cold care and glitters. The day is his
> To dabble a finger in, and, merry as crickets,
> A chorus of coins sings in his tattered pockets.'(I9)

And in 'Country Child', his doomed fate:

> 'Dropped without joy from the gaunt womb he lies,
> Maturing in his place against his parents' ageing;
> The slow scene unfolds before his luckless eyes
> To the puckered window, where the cold storm's raging
> Curtains the world, and the grey curlew cries,
> Uttering a grief too sharp for the breast's assuaging.'
> (20)

While in 'Peasant Greeting' he focuses on his weakness:

> 'The knees crumble to the downward pull
> Of the harsh earth, the eyes,
> Fuddled with coldness, have no skill to smile.' (21)

And finally his portrayal of the Welsh farmer as a solitary creature:

> "Without joy, without sorrow,
> Without children, without wife,' (22)

One aim of quoting these numerous lines about the life and fate of the Welsh farmer is, in fact, to show R.S. Thomas's own confused mind and sense of insecurity. There is a feeling that these descriptions of the Welsh farmer are more than everyday observations. They prophesy more than they describe; they are the horrified scenes of a mishap which will happen soon to the land. While R.S. Thomas is aware of this disaster, the farmer is ignorant. He is reluctant to embrace the beauty of the land, and be part of the land. And thus, in his frequent encounters with the Welsh farmer, R.S. Thomas seems to be involved in a series of tactics aimed at enlightening and instructing the farmer in what to do, before it is too late. For R.S. Thomas this mishap with its devastating consequences on the land is nothing other than the machine, the destroyer of the landscape of his joy and inspiration. And here lies his dilemma; he is simply unable to communicate with the farmer. He can only say to the reader what he thought he should have told the farmer:

> '... the beauty
> And grace that trees and flowers labour to teach,
> Were never yours, you shut your heart against them.
> You stopped your ears to the soft influence
> Of birds, preferring the dull tone of
> Of the thick blood, the loud, unlovely rattle
> Of mucous in the throat, the shallow stream
> Of neighbours' trivial talk.' (23)
> (Valediction)

Having said this, one can add that by portraying the Welsh farmer with various differing characteristics, naive, weak, ignorant, graceless, R.S. Thomas might have something else in mind. His remarks about the Welsh farmer, his life and fate, could not have been uttered without a purpose.

There is an assumption that R.S. Thomas, at this stage, being aware that sooner or later the machine would replace the farmer's tools, and eventually would change his life, probably putting an end to his own personal joy, is appealing to those industrialists to have sympathy with this farmer and just treat him like any human being. This fact is revealed in one of his recent interviews:

> 'Realizing that in a vague sort of way the enormous pressures that were on us from industry - just short of a hundred miles to the east of Manafon there is the conurbation of Birmingham with all its factories, and everybody's saying, 'we must produce, we must industrialize, we must step up production,' et cetera, et cetera - I wanted to say 'yes, but there is this man as well, he is an individual, he's a human being, he exists in a few small fields, the beauty of nature is around him, though it doesn't seem to mean much to him, but his figure is human, it casts a human shadow across the landscape. You can't ignore him, he may be just as close to the truth as anybody else.' (24)

And to make his appeal more powerful, he puts the same words in the mouth of the farmer himself:

> 'I am the farmer, stripped of love
> And thought and grace by the land's hardness;
> But what I am saying over the fields'
> Desolate acres, rough with dew,
> Is, listen, listen, I am a man like you.' (25)
> (The Hill Farmer Speaks)

It seems doubtful whether the Welsh farmer ever shares R.S. Thomas's worries about the roughness of the land or even about the machine. On the contrary, the machine, for him, is probably the sign of relief rather than regret. It is therefore, more than an assumption to say that the whole of the worries attributed to the farmer, derive in fact, from R.S. Thomas's own personal predicament.

At this stage of his career, and having lived in Manavon

for several years, R.S. Thomas became extremely attached to the land and wholly absorbed in its beauty. The word he uses for himself is 'nature mystic'. This was, as he says, 'some sort of attempt to describe what I get from nature'. And he elaborates on that by stating that 'I have feelings - I used to get them more like Wordsworth's feeling for nature. I like to be alone, I delighted in the, you know, where he speaks of the mountains being like a presence ...' (26)

In this manner, he is not only close to Wordsworth, of whom he said, 'he believed in the quiet mind, the inward eye; the time for contemplation', but also to another Welshman, Edward Thomas, of whom he thought:

> 'His taste was for solitude, the quiet observation of birds, beasts and flowers, but salted always by chance conversation with the earthy inhabitants of the country through which he passed.' (27)

And in one of his early prose works, he refers to this almost mystical experience of living in a Welsh countryside:

> 'Anyone who can feel for the life of the Welsh countryside has experienced something too strong and too profound to be ascribed to another world, or another life.' (28)

This is the land of 'muck and blood and hardness', which gradually emerged as 'the half-glimpsed turrets', to which 'men return in thought, in reality, seeking for something unnameable, a lost Eden...' (29)

And when this unique experience is expressed in words, we are presented with a land as sacred as the Church:

> 'It was like a church to me.

I entered it on soft foot,
Breath held like a cap in the hand.
It was quiet.
What God was there made himself felt,
Not listened to, in clean colours
That brought a moistening of the eye,
I movement of the wind over grass.' (30)
(The Moor)

It is not only the spiritual comfort that one may derive from walking in the countryside; there are other qualities as well:

'Don't think it was all hate
That grew there; love grew there,too,
Climbing by small tendrils where
The warmth fell from the eyes' blue
Flame,' (31)
(The Cry)

But besides these spiritual and moral pleasures that R.S. Thomas obtained from his dwelling in the Welsh countryside, there was apparently another reason which made him committed to his view, and this was a political one.

For R.S. Thomas, and probably for a few other Welshmen Wales was and is rural; towns and cities are unlikely to fit in the map of Wales. Furthermore, the history of Wales throughout the centuries reveals that there were always attempts by the invaders to force the Welsh into town-f$_o$lks. While the Romans tried hard to 'turn the Celts of the country into a town-dwelling, taxable population', (32) the Normans encouraged the building of walled towns and castles though they kept the Welsh out. The English, however, first divided Wales into estates, and then into urban and rural areas. And so 'the rise of industrial towns', according to Brinley Thomas 'on the one hand and rural depopulation on the other are two sides of the same coin; the deserted village is the price that has to be paid for a rise in the general

standard of living'. (33)

But 'the price' seems to have been much dearer than one would have expected. The exodus of the Welsh farmers to industrial towns for better wages, affected the Welsh countryside not only by its becoming a scene of deserted farms, but also the Welsh cultural heritage. In the words of David Williams 'the area which has suffered this depopulation is, of course, the area which is predominantly Welsh in speech, so that the economic forces which have caused depopulation have affected the fortunes of the Welsh language and the preservation of the cultural heritage of Wales.'(34)

In the light of such views, one can realize how heartbreaking it was for R.S. Thomas to observe such a sudden transformation in the map of rural Wales, from a spiritual as well as cultural haven to a land of deserted farms and villages.

In his article 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country', he urges the authorities to do something otherwise:

> ' ... these hardy and extremely individual people, whose crofts blend so well with their environment, people who are attuned to the old, traditional life of the earth, who see every evening the sun go down over Cader Idris or Aran Mawddwy, and every summer the moor white with bog cotton, people who are the descendants of those most colourful rogues, Y Gwylliaid Mawddwy, one by one, I say, will be allowed to die out or resort to a life in the towns or lowlands, a life which to them is no life at all, for they would be deracinés.' (35)

It is, therefore, in the rural Wales that 'beats the true heart of Wales'. The towns and cities represent the English domination as much as the roads and castles in Wales stand for the Romans and the Normans. 'Towns', in his words,

'are not characteristic of Wales; they are evidence of foreign influence, and the sooner they disappear the better.'(36)

In 'Rhodri' a poem about the Welshman's life in the town, R.S. Thomas is more cynical than critical of Rhodri's way of life:

'Rhodri Theophilus Owen,
Nothing Welsh but the name;
He moves in a landscape of dust
That is sourer than the smell
Of breweries.' (37)

Rhodri's indulgence in earthy pleasures, and his sense of apathy towards his land, are also unravelled by Thomas:

'He has six shirts
For the week-end and a pocketful
Of notes. Don't mention roots
To Rhodri; his address
Is greater than the population
Of Dolfar, many times
Greater, and in that house
There are three Owens, none with a taste
For the homeland with its pints
Of rain water.' (38)

So towns, in the opinion of R.S. Thomas are the main cause behind the Welshman's lack of commitment; they divert his attention from devotion to the national cause to indulgence in the town's materialistic life:

'It is dry
Here, with the hard, dry
Urban heat, that is sickly
With girls. But Rhodri is cool;
From the shadow of his tree
Of manhood he watches them
Pass, or selects one
To make real the power of the pounds,
That in Wales would have gone rather
To patch up the family stocking,
Emblem of a nation's despair.' (39)

In 'Border Blues', there is more than one Welshman on the move to the town. They are forsaking their cultural heritage and ancient language to watch a pantomime in an English

town:

> 'All along the border the winds blow
> Eastward from Wales, and the rivers flow
> Eastward from Wales with the roads and the railways,
> Reversing the path of the old migrations.
> And the winds say, it is April, bringing scents
> Of dead heroes and dead saints.
> But the rivers are surly with brown water
> Running amok, and the men to tame them
> Are walking the streets of a far town.' (40)

'On Tour', is another poem on the same theme. Here he gives his own response to the life in towns. Living in a town, as he views it, is not as inspiring as life in the countryside:

> 'And the towns say:
> Spare us some of your hate.
> And the signs lie for them;
> What saints would reside here?
> Their breath has become smoke.
> Irritable summers
> Smear the pavements with sun,
> The trees are rusty.' (41)

But it is significant at this point to mention that it is not on all occasions that R.S. Thomas appears to be antagonistic to the life in towns. This is, however, not to refute or under any circumstances, show a contradiction in his main principle, but simply to reveal that even in the peaceful surroundings of the countryside there comes a time when the routine exercise of daily contemplation becomes mere boredom:

> 'What to do? It's the old boredom
> Come again, indolent grass
> Wind creasing the water
> Hardly at all; a bird floating
> Round and round.' (42)
> (Again)

And it is because of these monotonous scenes, which he watches every day, that he seems to be on the verge of losing interest:

> 'Nothing has changed; the day goes on
> With its business; watching itself
> In a calm mirror.' (43) (Again)

In 'Rhodri', which has been mentioned earlier, R.S. Thomas makes a reference to the same argument of boredom. But the irony here is that R.S. Thomas, in a way, is defending Rhodri's flight to the town:

> 'What are the moors
> To him? Shadows of boredom
> In the mind's corners.' (44)

Moreover, as far as his view of the towns in general is concerned, he does not seem to be furious about all of them. In 'The Letter', he shows a totally different view of the two ancient cities of Athens and Florence:

> 'And to be able to put at the end
> Of the letter Athens, Florence - some name
> Tht the spirit recalls from earlier journeys
> Through the dark wood, seeking the path
> To the bright mansions; cities and towns
> Where the soul added depth to its stature.' (45)

And in 'Sorry' though the town is described by the son to his parents as 'drab', yet one can notice that there is 'still the remains of sunlight'.

However, these are occasional remarks which are made by R.S. Thomas and do not produce a substantial evidence of validity. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether he shares the view expressed by Moelwyn Merchant that 'if it is in the nature of the city to deteriorate into corruption and become parasitic on the countryside, the countryside in turn has its own in-built principle of cruelty and of attrition upon its inhabitants'. (46)

For R.S. Thomas the 'cruelty' of the countryside is the mark of its originality and its Welshness, whereas the 'corruption', of the city is an indication of its foreign

inclinations. And here lies the core of the whole argument; in the Welsh countryside R.S. Thomas feels at home, while in town, he's simply an alien. And there is no difference between Welsh and English towns.

As is aptly stated by Anthony Conran,'the Wales of Dafydd Iwan and Ffred FFransis must be as strange to him as pop music or marijuana. Cardiff is a very long way from Aberdaron.'(47) (Dafydd Iwan in those days lived in Cardiff.) It is, therefore, the artificiality of towns that he mostly hates. In 'A Welshman at St. James' Park', despite the natural surrounding (there are flowers as well as birds in the park), yet he still feels that he is not 'one of the public'. Here, there are regulations:

> 'To keep off the grass and sample flowers
> Without touching them; to admire birds
> That have been seduced from wildness by
> Bread they are pelted with.' (48)

He finds himself unable to be 'one of the public' following the above instructions. His sense of alienation is aggravated as his thoughts are diverted towards Wales:

> 'I think of a Welsh hill
> That is without fencing, and the men,
> Bosworth blind, who left the heather
> And the high pastures of the heart.' (49)

The Welsh hills which deserve every kind of care have been deserted, and the Welsh who fought at Bosworth without foreseeing its consequences have moved to towns for better living.

In 'The earth does its best for him', R.S. Thomas shows that it is not only the flowers and birds of the park that could not interest him, the paintings and sculptures of

a museum cannot move him either: (50)

> 'The paintings are under glass,
> or in dry rooms it is difficult
> to breathe in; they are tired
> of returning the hard stare
> of eyes. The sculptures are smooth
> from familiarity. There is a smell
> of dust, the precipitation
> Of culture from dead skies.' (51)

And again the sense of alienation eventually leads him to leave the place:

> ' I return to Lleyn,
> repository of the condescension
> of time. Through the car's
> open windows the scent of hay
> comes. It is incense, the seasonally
> renewed offering of the live earth.' (52)

This strong passion for the Welsh countryside, symbolically towards Wales, originates from his belief that this land is not only romantically inspiring, but also mythically enchanting. Wales is the mythical Eden, the ancient land of legendary heroes and the oldest animals on earth.

The threat to this ancient land, in his view, comes from inside as well as outside. The eternal threat as he can see it, lies in the Welshmen's lack of commitment - these are the Welsh who have drifted towards the English way of life in towns and cities.

The English, on the other hand, constitute the main danger to the land as well as its cultural and traditional values.

To start with the first threat to the land, which comes from the Welsh themselves; one can easily feel it in R.S. Thomas's attitude to the Welsh peasants on their way to towns. Such an attitude is revealed in one of his early

prose works 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country', in which he seems to be concerned with these peasants 'who are the true Welsh peasantry', and at the same time 'resort to a life in the towns on the lowlands, a life which to them is not life at all'. (53) And gradually as he becomes more familiar with the problems of rural Wales, his attack on his countrymen becomes stronger.

This is one of the views that R.S. Thomas shares with other Welsh nationalists like Saunders Lewis and Gwenallt, 'and like them, he reserves his sharpest criticism and scorn not for the historical oppressors and present-day exploiters but for the 'quislings', those Welshmen who do not recognise the situation and drift with the English tide'. (54)

In 'Those Others', R.S. Thomas adopts a line by the Welsh poet Dewi Emrys which translates as, 'A whole folk's sorrow in my fire-urgent cry', to illustrate his frustration with his countrymen. Here the land is harsh and brutal, but it is the Welsh who are the focus of attention. To him, these Welsh whose sorrows he helped to bear, are more brutal than the earth. His hate, is therefore, for them and not the land:

> 'I find
> This hate's for my own kind,
> For men of the Welsh race
> Who brood with dark face
> Over their thin navel
> To learn what to sell; ..' (55)

It is not often the case that we find R.S. Thomas, as in the above lines, serious in denouncing his fellow Welsh. He is, undoubtedly, unsympathetic towards them, but there

is always 'a kind of doom-rattle of fun, both sardonic and perceptive' (56) in his remarks:

> 'If you hear me use
> English, it is not for you to judge
> the accent. I have ways, too,
> of getting about; my nose tells
> the seasons, as your calendars do.
> I am more equal; in twelve towns
> under the grinding of the shillings
> I have heard the muse purr. My father
> was after all one of those born
> to preferment - Rural Dean
> of the Bottom Hundred I have known him called.' (57)

If R.S. Thomas in his remarks to his countrymen appears to be cynical, his attitude towards the outsiders in Wales is uncompromising. In his address to the English settlers or tourists, he is tense and furious.

The English infiltration in Wales is not a recent phenomenon; it started centuries ago, and received a sanction with the passing of the Act of Union in 1536.

R.S. Thomas and many Welshmen are aware of the damaging effect of the Act on the Welsh way of life but while many Welsh today accept the English in Wales, either as tourists or even settlers, R.S. Thomas is reluctant to admit that according to the Act, the English have every right to do what they like in Wales as in England. And yet since we are concerned with R.S. Thomas's views towards the English, it is worth contemplating the consequences, according to R.S. Thomas, of the English infiltration in Wales.

First of all, there is the matter of the language. The Act of Union recognized the English language as the only legal language in England and Wales, and thus affected

the Welsh language very seriously. R.S. Thomas expresses his response to this Act in 'It hurts him to think':

> The decree went forth
> to destroy the language - 'not cariad'
> they said,'love'. The nursing future
> saw the tightening lips
> of the English drawn on the hard sky
> to the east.' (58)

The Welsh language does not seem to be a physical obstacle for the English, who wish to come to Wales but R.S. Thomas thinks it could be a psychological bar:

> 'You can come in,
> You can come a long way;
> We can't stop you.
> You can come up the roads
> Or by railway;
> You can land from the air.
> You can walk this country
> From end to end;
> But you won't be inside;
> You must stop at the bar,
> The bar of speech.' (59)
> (Welcome)

For R.S. Thomas, then, ' without the key of the Welsh language one and all must needs pass by the door that opens on the real Wales, even if the interior be something of a museum.' (60)

And he goes on to raise a simple question for the English:

> 'Why among English people should it be a sign
> of cultivation to know French, while remaining in
> crass ignorance of the language and literature of
> the small, but older, nation with whom it shares
> this island?' (61)

But then there is no reason for the English to learn Welsh since the Welsh themselves are bound by the law to speak English. For this precise reason, R.S. Thomas regards the English language superiority in education, and the media, as well as in daily life, as an attempt to annihilate the Welsh language and culture:

'Seeing how Wales fares
Now, I will attend rather
To things as they are: to green grass
That is not ours; to visitors
Buying us up. Thousands of mouths
Are emptying their waste speech
about us, and an Elsan culture
Threatens us.' (62)
(Looking at Sheep)

And when he finds no response at all, he changes his tactics; he simply reminds the English:

'You have not been here before.
You will offend with your speech
Winds that preferred hands
Wrung with despair, profound
Audiences of the dead.' (63)
(Strangers)

But there are occasions when he loses control of himself and becomes aggressive:

'We don't like your white cottage.
We don't like the way you live.' (64)

And what about the English tourists who come to Wales merely for its beauty? R.S. Thomas's answer to them is direct:

'We've nothing vast to offer you, no deserts
Except the waste of thought
Forming from mind erosion;'
(A Welshman to any Tourist) (65)

He even elaborates on this view by stating that:

'Wales is a small country - its quietness and beauty cannot be thrown open to the masses. When you see people sitting on these rocks with their transistor radios, smoking and reading newspapers, it becomes a trivialisation of life. It's a failure of education - they've been educated to fit a niche in the industrial scene. They can't see birds, butterflies, archaeological remains - they haven't got that kind of awareness.' (66)

R.S. Thomas illustrates the above view in his poem 'The Small Window'. The 'jewels' in Wales are not for everyone 'to gather':

'This wealth is for the few
And chosen. Those who crowd

A small window dirty it
With their breathing, though sublime
And inexhaustible the view.' (67)

But apparently, his protest against the English tourists seems to have had no effect on his fellow Welshmen whose livelihood is based on tourism. He feels that he has been rejected by the Welsh for his campaign to keep Wales pure and free from outsiders. Consequently, he becomes exhausted and dejected. Now there is no place in Wales for him to visit.

The picture of Wales which was portrayed by Saunders Lewis as:

'The carcass of Wales lies in outrage
With few to weep her shame,
The sorry slave of her conqueror, served yesterday
His taste, and is dirty today.' (68)

reverberates stronger than ever, in R.S. Thomas's mind:

'Where can I go, then, from the smell
Of decay, from the putrefying of a dead
Nation?' (69)
(Reservoirs)

This is obviously a sign of total despair. The land which he often celebrated now is dead:

'Come to Wales
to be buried; the undertaker
will arrange it for you.' (70)
(Welcome to Wales)

In reality Wales is not dead, but only being diverted in another direction, the direction that to R.S. Thomas and some other Welshmen is the beginning of annihilation:

'Our best farming land shrinks as more and more of it disappears under council housing and speculative estates, caravan parks and motorways. Our less spectacular moorlands are ravaged by tank, artillery and rifle ranges; our valleys are drowned to provide much more water than we need - water which we are not so far allowed to sell. Our sky in the rural areas is torn apart by low flying jet planes playing their

> fearful war games. Our more picturesque parts have been designated National Parks and we are now realising what this means.' (71)

The core of this argument has already been put forward by J.R. Jones: 'Wales could not really be considered a nation', in his view without a 'separate identity', and it is only the Welsh language that can make 'the Welsh a separate people'. (72)

This formula of J.R. Jones's eventually leads us into the assumption that since the Welsh language is not the language of the majority of people in Wales, and thus there is not a separate identity for the Welsh, therefore, the Welsh in Wales are more or less aliens on their land, probably by their own choice. This theme of exile is not new in Welsh history or even in Welsh poetry. The Welsh history of the past reveals how the Welsh bards, after the defeat of their masters became wanderers, and how the Welsh princes lived part of their lives in exile.

But it is in the poetry of the twentieth century Anglo-Welsh poets, Dylan Thomas, Alun Lewis, Vernon Watkins, R.S. Thomas, and many London-based Welsh poets that this theme of exile is fully exploited. For those Anglo-Welsh poets who lived <u>outside</u> Wales 'it was a physical exile from Wales'. (73)

Yet for those who lived inside Wales, it was both literal and cultural exile. R.S. Thomas who lived in Wales, and is still living in Wales, experienced physical as well as literal and cultural exile. According to Anthony Conran,

'it was R.S. Thomas who anticipated the new poetry of exile, and indeed exemplified it. The model of which we were all most conscious was his alienation from his peasant parishioners and at the same time from the historical Wales he identified with'. (74)

Among those Welshmen who lived outside Wales and became in the eyes of R.S. Thomas a symbol of Welshmen in exile was Goronwy Owen whose misfortune is described in Part I.

In 'Welsh Border', there is Thomas himself in his wanderings:

'It is a dark night, but noisy.
Cars pass on the road,
Their lights dissect me.
In the fields are the trees,
Brushed by a few stars.' (75)

And again, it is worth contemplating R.S. Thomas's reference to the image of the tree in the above lines, and its significance to the theme of exile.

As referred to earlier, the image of trees stood for the Welsh family roots which have been preserved for many years in the activities of the Welsh farmer. Now having realized that the family roots have been neglected, he still, in his contemplation, can see the trees in the field, surrounded by the hooting of the owls and the shadows of the dead:

'Trees grow no arrows
For the dead, enlistment
Of memories is over.' (75)
(Welsh Border)

The trees, like, R.S. Thomas himself, are there, but they have less significance; they have become simply symbols of the past. It is not only the image of the tree that gradually disappears from Wales; the land itself is going

through the process of transformation.

Yet, still in his search for the land, R.S. Thomas hopes to put an end to his self-imposed exile and feel at home in Wales:

> 'At fifty he was still trying to deceive
> Himself. He went out at night,
> Imagining the dark country
> Between the border and the coast
> Was still Wales; ...' (77)
> (A Country)

Yet though it lies before him, he cannot feel it:

> 'And yet under such skies the land
> Had no more right to its name
> Than a corpse had; self-given wounds
> Wasted it. It lay like a bone
> Thrown aside and of no use
> For anything except shame to gnaw. (78)
> (A Country)

Such a picture of Wales described as a 'bone' does not seem to be original to the poetry of R.S. Thomas. Among the Welsh poets, both Gwenallt and Saunders Lewis had already expressed a gloomy picture of Wales (79). But then, if R.S. Thomas has derived this image of Wales from Gwenallt and Saunders Lewis, he must have also come to accept the view that 'truly human society exists always in the light of God.' (80)

And as the land, the Wales of his imagination, disappears in the clouds of eternity, his search for his lost land comes to an end. He becomes content with the view that Wales now exists beyond our perception, though there are possibilities of reaching to it:

> 'But through striving to see it, through longing for it, through refusing to accept that it belongs to the past and has fallen into oblivion; through refusing to accept some second-hand substitute, he will succeed in preserving

it as an eternal possibility.' (81)

It is relevant at this point to mention that the tree, like the land, assumes religious connotations:

'The shadow of the tree falls
On our acres like a crucifixion,
With a bird singing in the branches
What its shrill species has always sung,
Hammering its notes home
One by one into our brief flesh.' (82)
(That)

R.S. Thomas took a long time to realize that the land he had been searching for had been there all the time, and the tree which bears on its branches the history of the Welsh race was here as well:

'I grow old,
bending to enter the promised
land that was here all the time,
happy to eat the bread that was baked
in the poets' oven, breaking my speech
from the perennial tree (83)
of my people and holding it in my blind hand. (84)

This is, undoubtedly, the kingdom of eternity or in the words of Moelwyn Merchant the 'rare and ideal paradise'.(85)

This 'ideal paradise', invisible as God Himself, would emerge for those who seek it:

I am a seeker
in time for that which is
beyond time, that is everywhere
and nowhere; no more before
than after, yet always
about to be; whose duration is
of the mind, but free as
Bergson would say of the mind's
Degradation of the eternal.' (86)
(Abercuawg)

Wales, then, lies beyond time's reach where man 'can neither see nor comprehend' its present agony. There are no traces of outsiders polluting its cultural heritage with their foreign speech. There is no sign of the machine distorting its landscape. Here, history of the past or the events

of the future have no effect on its 'process of becoming' the everlasting land:

> 'I have seen the sun break through
> to illuminate a small field
> for a while, and gone my way
> and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
> of great price, the one field that had
> the treasure in it. I realize now
> that I must give all that I have
> to possess it.
> (The Bright Field)

This is the land of eternity for which he is always ready 'to make sacrifices, maybe even to die'. (88)

By adopting such an abstract image of Wales, R.S. Thomas seems to have fulfilled his promise that he no longer wants to 'propagandize on behalf of Welsh country life' or 'on behalf of the Welsh identity'. (89)

But it is doubtful, whether he can detach himself from the Welsh political scene. In recent years he has emerged more enthusiastic than ever in defence of the Welsh language and in protest against the selling of Welsh cottages to the English. Moreover he has become an international figure in campaigns for peace and disarmament.

Notes and References

1. Ned Thomas, 'R.S. Thomas', Welsh Books and Writers (I982) p.4

2. This information has been passed to me by Ned Thomas.

3. R.S. Thomas, 'Holograph', No. (4).

4. R.S. Thomas, 'Holograph', No. (6).

5. 'The Living Poet: R.S. Thomas', 3rd Programme.

6. R.S. Thomas, 'The Paths Gone By', Selected Prose pp I37/8

7. Ibid., p.138.

8. See Appendix C

9. Ned Thomas, 'R.S. Thomas', Welsh Books and Writers, (I982)p.3

10. 'The Critical Forum', Norwich Tapes Ltd.

11. Keidrych Rhys also wrote a poem about the burning of the bombing school in 1936.

12. For this information I am grateful to Emyr Humphreys.

13. Ned Thomas, 'R.S. Thomas', Welsh Books and Writers (I982) p.3

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16. Ned Thomas, R.S. Thomas - Selected Prose, p.11.

17. R.S. Thomas, Selected Poems 1946-1968, p.3.

18. Ibid.

19. R.S. Thomas, The Stones of the Field, p.7.

20. Ibid., p.16.

21. Ibid., p.27.

22. Ibid., p.20.

23. R.S. Thomas, An Acre of Land, p.29.

24. 'R.S. Thomas talks to J.B. Lethbridge', The Anglo-Welsh Review 74 (I983) p. 42

25. R.S. Thomas, An Acre of Land, p.17.

26. 'R.S. Thomas talks to J.B. Lethbridge', The Anglo-Welsh Review 74 (I983) p. 47

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30. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.24.

31. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, p.45.

32. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.34.

33. Brinley Thomas in Wales Through The Ages, Vol. II p.187.

34. David Williams in Wales Through the Ages, vol.II,p.153.

35. R.S. Thomas, 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country', Selected Prose, p.24.

36. R.S. Thomas, 'Two Chapels', Selected Prose, p.47.

37. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.7.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, pp.9-13.

41. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.27.

42. R.S. Thomas, Not That He Bought Flowers, p.41.

43. Ibid.

44. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.7.

45. R.S. Thomas, Poetry for Supper, p.26.

46. W. Moelwyn Merchant, R.S. Thomas, (Writers of Wales Series) p.50.

47. Anthony Conran, 'R.S. Thomas and the Anglo-Welsh Crisis', Poetry Wales VII:4 (I972) p. 7I

48. R.S. Thomas, Pieta, p.23.

49. Ibid. p.23.

50. This is strange for one who has written a volume of poems about painting.

51. R.S. Thomas, What is a Welshman? p.10.

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57. R.S. Thomas, What is a Welshman? p.3.

58. Ibid., p.12.

59. R.S. Thomas, The Bread of Truth, p.24.

60. R.S. Thomas, 'The Welsh Parlour', The Listener (1958) p.119

61. R.S. Thomas, [Review] of The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse, p.74.

62. R.S. Thomas, The Bread of Truth, p. 48.

63. Ibid., p.32.

64. Ibid.

65. R.S. Thomas, Song at the Year's Turning, p. 112.

66. Planet, 29 (1974) p.52.

67. R.S. Thomas, Not That He Bought Flowers, p.38.

68. Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas (eds.) Presenting Saunders Lewis, p.181.

69. R.S. Thomas, Not That He Bought Flowers, p.26.

70. Ibid., p.30.

71. Gwyn Williams, The Land Remembers, p.230.

72. J.R. Jones, 'Need the Language Divide Us?, Planet 49/50 (1980) pp. 25 & 26

73. Anthony Conran, The Cost of Strangeness, p.267.

74. Ibid., pp.266-67.

75. R.S. Thomas, The Bread of Truth, p.9.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid., p.30.

78. Ibid.

79. Gwenallt's image of Wales is vividly illustrated in 'Rhydcymerau':

'And in the dark at the heart of it
Is the English Minotaur's den,
And on branches, as if on cross,
Skeletons of bards, deacons, ministers, Sunday
School Teachers,
Whitening in the sun,
And washed by the rain and dried by the wind.'
(translated by Joseph P. Clancy. Twentieth Century Welsh Poems, p.100)

He portrays the same disturbing images in 'Wales':

'The cancer desiccates your face and form,
Your soul reduced to abcesses and scabs,
You are merely a nightmare in your own land,
And your survival but a witch's dream.'
(translated by Joseph P. Clancy. Twentieth Century Welsh Poems, p.95)

Saunders Lewis's gloomy picture of Wales can be found in 'The Carcass':

'The carcass of Wales lies in outrage
With few to weep her shame,
The sorry slave of her conqueror, served yesterday
His taste, and is dirt today.

To lick her disgrace and to foul her underfoot
A barren swine-herd of justices
Gathers, grunting over her blood,
And the wrathful, parliamentary bitches.'
(Presenting Saunders Lewis, p.181)

In 'The Deluge 1939', Saunders Lewis depicts a scene from the south to represent Wales:

> 'The tramway climbs from Merthyr to Dowlais,
> A slug's slime on a heap of slag;
> Here once was Wales, and now
> Ruins of cinemas and rain on stagnant tips;
> The pawnbrokers shut their doors, pegging clerks
> Are the peers of the plain;
> All flesh has festered its way on the face of the earth.'
> (translated by Joseph P. Clancy, p.75)

80. Ned Thomas, The Welsh Extremist, p.46.

81. R.S. Thomas, 'Abercuawg' -Selected Prose, p.164.

82. R.S. Thomas, Not That He Bought Flowers, p.44.

83. The image of trees is also depicted by Gwenallt in 'Rhydcymerau':

> 'And by now nothing is there but trees,
> Their impudent roots sucking the ancient soil:
> Trees where a neighbourhood was,
> A forest where once there were farms ...'
> (translated by Joseph P. Clancy. Twentieth Century Welsh Poems, p.100.

84. R.S. Thomas, Frequencies, p.19.

85. W. Moelwyn Merchant, 'The Sense of Place in the Poetry of R.S. Thomas and Henry Vaughan', Trans. of the Hon. Society of Cymm. (I983) p. 78

86. R.S. Thomas, Frequencies, p.27.

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88. R.S. Thomas, 'Abercuawg', Selected Prose, p.158.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ENVOY OF A WOUND: A STUDY OF MAHMOUD DARWISH'S POETRY ON PALESTINE

There are hardly any resemblances between Palestine and Wales as far as their political entities are concerned. Geographically, Palestine does not exist on the maps, it is referred to as the Holy Land of the past.

The agony of the Palestinians does not lie in the fact that their land has been occupied; they simply do not own a land. Palestine, as seen by many people is a composite of several hundred refugee camps scattered in the slums of Beirut.

But the Palestinians never give up a hope of returning to their homeland. They stick to their nationality, though it is easy for them to adopt the nationality of the country they live in. (As a matter of fact, those who live in Arab countries still prefer to be called Palestinians.)

The Palestinian poets also display a certain amount of hope. In their poetry the image of Palestine is well-preserved, and kept alive even among the younger generation of poets.

It is very interesting, indeed, to notice how the Palestinian poets who live in exile nurse hope for their return to the homeland. After years of occupation, they still fight despair and frustration.

Both Mahmoud Darwish and R.S. Thomas are sufferers from

the loss of the land, and both in a way live in exile. While Mahmoud Darwish yearns for his country, and awaits impatiently the day he returns, R.S. Thomas finds himself living in an alien land and longs for the Wales of the past.

Like most of the Palestinian poets, Darwish is a Socialist. His views are shared by his fellow countrymen as well as Socialists in other countries, including those in Israel itself.

R.S. Thomas, on the other hand, is a disillusioned nationalist. His campaign is based on his individual efforts. In other words, he is launching a single-handed battle against the English and many of his fellow Welshmen. Nevertheless, both poets exhibit such a tremendous degree of affection and devotion for their countries, that there is no doubt at all of their sincerity.

Mahmoud Darwish was born in the small village of Birwa in Palestine in 1941. Seven years later and as a little boy, he watched with horror how his village like others 'was razed to the ground by the Israelis' (1), and how like many other Palestinian peasants, his family were driven out of the land.

After the 1948 war, the family returned to Palestine to find their village already occupied, and to encounter new threats to their lives. Darwish's early awareness of the tragedy has helped him a lot in colouring his poetry with vivid images of the land of his childhood. He is also indebted

to his parents in keeping the image of the land alive, in particular, his father, who never stopped bewailing the loss of his farm and his cattle. Having had only a limited formal education, Darwish luckily got involved in journalism early in his career. He also started writing poetry very young.

His first volume 'Birds Without Wings' was published in 1960. Four years later, 'Olive Leaves', appeared, and in 1966 his third volume 'Love From Palestine', established his fame in the Arab world.

A breakthrough occurred in his writings after the defeat of June 1967, and this change in style was clearly manifested in 'The End of the Night', which he wrote after the war.

While living in Moscow in 1970, he published his fifth volume 'Birds Die in Galilee'. A year before he was awarded the Lotus Prize by the Union of Afro-Asian Writers.

In 1971 Darwish decided to live in Cairo. 'The importance attached to this can be measured by the fact that his leaving Palestine was the cause of considerable dismay and controversy among Palestinians, some of whom felt a sense of betrayal as well as simple loss, even though his position (surveillance, house arrest, detention etc.) had clearly become intolerable' (2).

But two years later, Darwish left Cairo for Beirut, probably to be closer to his compatriots in the refugee camps. In

the same year he published 'I Love, I Love Not'. He published two more volumes while living in Beirut: first 'Attempt Number 7' in 1974 and then 'Wedding' in 1977.

Darwish's main concern in his poetry is his homeland, Palestine. His poetry is, in fact addressed to, and dedicated to his land. His romantic language, imbued with patriotism, has won him the epithet of the 'Lorca of Palestine'. His concern with Palestine and the agony of his people brings him into close comparison with R.S. Thomas. Both seem to be in an endless search for their lands which have been occupied. Both are dissatisfied with the present conditions of their lands, though they know that there are many of their countrymen who are content with their lives, despite the occupation. But while Darwish strenuously avoids referring to those Arabs who have lost faith in the Palestinian cause as 'puppets', R.S. Thomas spurts out his anger against his countrymen or those whom he calls the 'quislings'.

However, Darwish lacks the astringent language, the masculinity of R.S. Thomas's voice and his totalitarian spirit. To read Darwish's poetry is, therefore more like listening to Dafydd Iwan's songs. Though Darwish is a modern poet, his poetry shows touches, and to a great extent, techniques of Classical Arabic poetry. Like the Pre-Islamic poets, his images are derived from natural phenomena, especially the moon, the sky and the stars.

His early poems illustrate the image of the wound which

has been inflicted on him as the result of the occupation of the land. But interestingly, the image of the wound, develops from simply a physical comparison to acquire other implications:

'In my country
they opened the wound and then said: It must be sutured!
They silenced it anaesthetized it
wrapped it with fog
taught it silence and the early autumn of torture.'(3)
(A Poem which is not Green, from my country)

And as they try to heal the physical wound, there appear other wounds; the Israelis' attempt to eliminate the Arabic language is a wound:

'The colours of our letter are persecuted.
Trussed it cries out.
They stifled it.
They squeezed its spark from it.
They robbed it of the borders of kindness.
They crushed it till it began to burn
and then burst.
Our letter became a wound where dusk is swimming.'(4)
(A Poem which is not Green, from my Country)

The wound also becomes a symbol for martyrdom:

'Our love is a nightingale and a rose-thorn.
Place my pillow on the wound.
I have no taste for songs but those of a martyr gently bleeding soul and lifeblood.'(5)
(Our Love)

Or a symbol of resistance:

'The voice of blood was
imbued with the colour of the tempest
And the pebbles of the battlefield were mouths of bleeding wounds
And I was laughing awed by the bird of the wind.
when the Sultan resisted me
I clasped the key of the morning
And groped my way with the lanterns of wounds.' (6)
(the Lanterns of Wounds)

Every struggle against injustice should result in wounds; they are the blood of the fighters and the hope of victory:

> 'In my country; in the country of mankind; in every country
> the wound grows silent but never heals.
> The wound believed in its future.
> Is there anything without future?
> Where the wound is watered by the blood of songs
> in gardens where the colour of life is dry
> And the larks sing
> and the swallows which returned sing
> having come back to life ...' (7)
> (A Poem which is not Green, From my country)

And gradually, the wound expands and becomes a separate entity to represent or symbolise not merely an aspect, but the land itself: 'the wound has become Palestine'.(8) And when he looks at Palestine, he sees a threat, not only to his people, but to his cultural heritage as well. The Zionists have banned the Arab traditional festivals. In the Islamic world the feast of El Adha 'which marks the end of the haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca'(9), is celebrated by the young and the old. The children, in particular, are given new clothes. Darwish expects them to run in the streets with joy, but:

> 'The children never came out like a circlet of stars
> like a brightly dyed world
> and the street was deserted by its well-loved sounds
> and the sun did not rise
> did not rain down life
> into every vein disgusted
> through love of life
> with the hardships of life.' (10)
> (The Festival and the Sun)

Out of these threats emerges the inhumane attempts to annihilate the Palestinian identity. Darwish retaliates by emphasising his identity:

> 'Write down
> I am an Arab
> I am a name without a family-name.
> I am patient in a country where everything
> lives by the eruption of anger.

My roots
gripped down before time began
before the blossoming of ages
before cypress trees and olive trees
... before grass sprouted.' (11)
(Identity Card)

Not many Palestinians could face such threats; the poor fled to Lebanon to be accommodated in the refugee camps, while the affluent families sought life in rich Arab countries. Only those who still lived in Palestine under such an oppressive regime, came to know that only by sacrifice can they counter such threats:

'They relate in our country
they relate with sadness
how my comrade who went away
came back in a shroud.
When his footsteps gave tongue behind the door
he didn't say
to his mother: Goodbye! (12)
(And He Returned in a Shroud)

When the mother receives the body of her dead son, she only weeps. Darwish appeals to her not to do so:

'Mother of him!
Do not uproot your tears!
Leave two tears in your heart's well!
Perhaps tomorrow his father will die
or his brother
or I his comrade.
Leave for us
for those who may die tomorrow
Just two tears
two tears.[13]
[And He Returned in a Shroud]

This is probably a reference to his own mother whom he loved; their relationship was very strong. But the use of the word 'mother' does not necessarily indicate or refer, in Darwish's diction to a human mother. Palestine could be his mother as well.

However, in any of his addresses to his mother, there are genuine attempts to convince her that sacrifices are necessary if she wants to be free. Darwish's lean and sympathetic approach towards his countrymen seems to have worked better than R.S. Thomas's harsh and uncompromising attitude towards his fellow Welshmen. Both poets, undoubtedly, aim at awakening the conscience of their people, but their methods differ from each other.

Darwish is very patient and spends a great deal of time to explain what he has in mind. He proceeds smoothly, touching on sensitive points:

> And you, mother,
> and father and brothers
> and relatives and comrades,
> perhaps you're alive,
> you may be dead.
> Perhaps like me you have no address.
> What is man worth
> if he has no homeland,
> if he has no flag
> and no address?
> What good is man? (14)
> (Letter From Home)

R.S. Thomas rejects such an approach. His address to his Welsh is direct; he never attempts to explain or give reasons for his arguments:

> '... I have walked the shore
> For an hour and seen the English
> Scavenging among the remains
> Of our culture ...' (15)
> (Reservoirs)

Furthermore, he never expects his countrymen to cross-examine him. What he says is the truth. The Welsh should listen to him, and if they don't, they are:

' ... an impotent people,
Sick with inbreeding,
Worrying the carcase of an old song.' (16)
(Welsh Landscape)

In Darwish's message there is always a glimpse of hope, and his poems often end with a note of optimism:

'She pressed my hand
and whispered three words to me.
They were the dearest things I possessed all day long.
'We'll meet tomorrow'.
And the road wrapped her.' (17)
(First Date)

This relationship between him and Palestine, which is expressed amorously, is a sign of his debt to the pre-Islamic poets, though he often claims to have departed from such norms. It happens that sometimes, when he is overjoyed, the Platonic love is replaced by erotic scenes:

'Will it excite the people
if we walk in broad daylight
and I carry your purse for you and the umbrella
and take your lips on the street corner
and pick a kiss?
Your eyes!
I dream I see your eyes open one day
and look at the calmness of the sea at sunrise.
Your lips!
I dream I look at your lips while kissing
and see the sun blazing at the birth of a wedding.'[18]
(Longing for the Light)

And when she deserts him as is often the case, his sadness turns into a blush rather than anger:

'Do you love her?
I fell in love once
and shivered at her shady braids.
She was beautiful
but she danced on my grave
and my dew-drenched days
and she walked out on the long dance-floor
with her arm around others' waists ...' (19)
(Sadness and Anger)

It is significant to notice that Darwish in all those scenes of love with his beloved, who is supposedly Palestine, intends to show that at the end, she is taken from him. The consequence of this desertion is severe: she becomes a bare land:

'The ruined village
and the crop-warden and the fallow land
and the trunks of your olive trees
are nests for owls or crows!
Who prepared the plough for this year?
Who nurtured the soil?
Hey you!
Where is your brother?
Where is your father?
Both are mirages!
Where did you come from?
From the wall?
Or did you come down from the clouds?
Do you think you preserve the dignity of the dead
and knock on a perfumed door at night's end?
and why aren't you angry
while the flesh of your father's father
is crucified on the boots of the night?' (20)

This is, undoubtedly, a reference to his own village Birwa, which was invaded by the Israeli soldiers when he was a child. The villagers, including Darwish's parents, were pushed outside their homeland.

Now the village lies in ruin; there is no one to attend to the land which has become fallow. The inhabitants have either become refugees with no hope to return to their land or fighters on their way to make the olive trees bloom with their blood. But / (continued overleaf)

Darwish hardly attempts a scrutinizing description of his land. As a matter of fact he can never have the boldness and relentlessness of R.S. Thomas in the following lines:

'Too far for you to see
The moss and the mould on the cold chimneys
The nettles growing through the cracked door,
The houses stand empty at Nant-yr-Eira,
There are holes in the roofs that are thatched with sunlight,
And the fields are reverting to the bare moor.' (21)
(The Welsh Hill Country)

Hence, while Darwish seems to be avoiding the minute details of his land, or even his countrymen, R.S. Thomas never hesitates to anatomise the Welsh countryside. He portrays without any regret the private lives of his countrymen and even accompanies them to their graves.

In his address to the English, R.S. Thomas is also direct and straightforward:

'We've nothing vast to offer you, no deserts
Except the waste of thought
forming from mind erosion;
No canyons where the pterodactyl's wing
Casts a cold shadow.' (22)
(A Welshman to Any Tourist)

If the message, under any circumstances, is misunderstood, then he tries to explain it in another way:

'We don't like your white cottage.
We don't like the way you live.' (23)
(Strangers)

Darwish, on the other hand, cannot tell the Israelis to leave Palestine. He can only forecast their downfall:

'O you with bloodshot eyes and bloody hands,
Night is short-lived,
The detention room lasts not for ever,
Nor yet the links of chains.
Nero died, Rome did not;

With her very eyes she fights.
And seeds from a withered ear
With wheat shall fill the valley.' (24)
(On Man)

Such a logical conclusion is not confined to Darwish; almost all socialist poets celebrate in different ways the end of oppression and exploitation. However, only time can tell if really 'night is short-lived'!

Mahmoud Darwish's early poetry, those poems that were written before the June war of 1967, display certain aspects of Romanticism. The images he portrays are soft and sometimes very erotic. Palestine is often pictured as a beautiful woman with delicate lips and lovely eyes, asking the Palestinians to kiss those lips and gaze into those eyes. Such a picture will obviously remind us of R.S. Thomas's 'land of romance'.

The June war of 1967 in which the Arabs, once again, were defeated, was the start of a new phase in the poetry of Palestinian poets, including Mahmoud Darwish. To many Arabs, the defeat was a tragedy; it put an end to the Arabs' prestige and their pride in their glorious past. The Arab leaders were alarmed as well,for they came to realize that the Promised Land which the Zionists had in mind was not meant to be Palestine alone, but the whole Arab world.

Strangely enough, the Palestinians considered the defeat a victory for their cause. In other words, 'they believed that the issue had been stripped to its essentials, that the fate of Palestinians was now to be decided by Palestinians

and not by proxy.' (25) This meant that they could no longer be moved easily like pawns by the Arab regimes. On the contrary, they had won an important issue, self-determination.

The Palestinian poets also shared with their leaders the joy of victory, and as all political factions became united, they, too, were grouped under the name of the Poets of the Occupied Land.

After the war of 1967, Darwish became more concerned with the role and fate of the Palestinian fighters. His poetry is transformed into scenes of thunder, hurricane and lightning - which are all associated with the Palestinian fighters:

> 'If I've been serenading happiness
> somewhere beyond the eyelids of frightened eyes
> then that's because the hurricane
> promised me wine
> and new salutations
> and rainbows
> and it's because the hurricane
> thrashed the voices of lazy sparrows
> and swept counterfeit branches
> from the trunks of standing trees.' (26)
> (Promises from the Hurricane)

The struggle has just begun, and Darwish is happy to see the old wound has not healed yet:

> 'So be it
> I must feel proud
> of you O wound of my city
> and of you O image of lightning
> in our sad nights.' (27)
> (Promises from the Hurricane)

But despite adopting new images and new themes, he has hardly abandoned his sentimentality. In his description of a killed Palestinian fighter, there is a pervasive sense of mourning. In his poem 'Victim Number 48', he first focuses on the

fighter:

> They found in his breast a lantern of roses
> and a moon
> while he was tossed aside dead over a rock.
> they found a box of matches
> and a travel permit
> and inscriptions on his fresh arm. (28)
> (Victim Number 48)

Then comes the fighter's mother to weep on his death:

> 'His mother kissed him
> She cried for him year
> after year.' (29)
> (Victim Number 48)

The poem ends on a sad note:

> 'Oh children of my country
> this is how the moon died.' (30)
> (Victim Number 48)

These are the unknown children of Palestine, whose bodies at the time of death are unidentifiable since under the Israeli occupation they have no nationality. Darwish rejects the Israeli passport, for it does not prove his Palestinian identity:

> 'My masters! O my masters the prophets
> don't ask the trees about their names
> don't ask the valleys about their mother
> the sword of light cleaves from my forehead
> and from my hand gushes the river's water
> all the hearts of the people
> are my nationality
> So take away the passport! (31)
> (the Passport)

There is an irony in Darwish's argument, since though it is through a passport that one can recognise one's nationality, the implication is that Palestinian nationality for recording in a passport, does not exist. Those Palestinians who have fled the homeland, can preserve their nationality as well

as their language without having a passport to prove that. In fact, Darwish is one of them. He is Palestinian by nationality, but since Palestine does not exist as an internationally recognised state, he is bound to adopt another nationality.

By living in Lebanon, and asking his countrymen inside Palestine to reject Israeli nationality, he comes close to R.S. Thomas's situation who writes in English but insists on his Welsh identity.

For the Palestinians who live inside Israel, it is not an easy choice or to be exact the choice is not theirs. They are well aware that under pressure, they will be soon assimilated into a new matrix of society and willy-nilly become Israeli nationals. As for the Palestinians who live in the refugee camps outside, their nationality is safeguarded by the Red Cross. Darwish cannot believe that his people in these camps are fed by the Red Cross:

> 'Do all people in all places have
> arms sprouting bread and hopes
> and a national anthem?
> Why then my father do we feed on branches of holm oak
> and surreptitiously recite melodious poems?
> O my father we are safe and well
> in the embrace of the Red Cross (32)
> (A Naive Song for the Red Cross)

There is a cynical note underlying these lines, but Darwish is also serious about the whole matter. If the father himself lives under the protection of the Red Cross, then how can he claim to be the father of his son?

> 'O my father does the forest of olive trees
> Shelter us when rain comes?

> And will the trees serve us better than fire?
> And will moonlight
> melt snow or scorch off the spirit of darkness?
> I ask a million questions
> and see in your eyes the silence of the stone
> so answer me now my father: Are you my father
> or have I become a son of the Red Cross?' (33)
> (A Naive Song for the Red Cross)

Living in this alien environment is a painful experience for Darwish, and it is through his memory of childhood in Palestine that he gets a temporary relief. In one of his most memorable poems 'A Lover from Palestine', Darwish displays an unusual passion towards his homeland that has never been described before:

> 'Your eyes are a thorn in my heart
> hurting me ... but I worship it
> and shelter it from the wind
> and stab stab with it past night and pains
> its wound lights up the lanterns
> and its tomorrow makes my present
> more precious to me than my soul
> and I forget after a time when eye meets eye
> that behind the door we two were once paired.' (34)

It is significant to note the image of the wound in the above lines; it no longer bleeds but 'lights up the lanterns'. Furthermore, it is through its light that tomorrow becomes visible.

In his next description, he portrays a scene from the past, probably of his own:

> 'In the thorny mountains I saw
> a shepherd without sheep
> fleeing from your pursuers.
> I saw you among the ruins.' (35)

This is a scene from the land that lies now in destruction. For Darwish such scenes become unbearable; they are associated with annihiliation. Compared with R.S. Thomas, who in his wanderings in the Welsh countryside, observes

deserted farms and with a sense of bitterness and frustration, depicts such scenes with utmost accuracy. Darwish, if faced with ruined houses, becomes pathetic. He weeps like a baby for his mother. The mere name of Palestine makes him lose his restrained manner:

> 'O Palestinian eyes and tatoos
> O Palestinian name
> O Palestinian dreams and obsessions
> O Palestinian handkerchief and feet and body
> O Palestinian words and silence
> O Palestinian voice
> O Palestinian birth and death
> I carried you all in my old notebooks
> As the fire of my poems.' (36)

However, both poets express their uneasiness with the influx of new settlers to their lands. R.S. Thomas believes that the English tourists or settlers cannot appreciate the beauty of Wales without an understanding of its language and culture.

Darwish's view is that European Jews who have never seen Palestine, and who have already got their own culture, find it totally impossible to cope with a new way of life in Palestine.

In 'A Soldier Dreaming of White Lilies', Darwish relates the story of an Israeli soldier who came to Palestine with a different view in mind:

> 'I came here because I thought a sun
> was approaching its zenith not setting.
> I refuse to die
> turning my gun my love
> on woman and children
> to guard the orchards and wells
> of oil tycoons and tycoons of weapons factories.'
> (37)

In contrast, the Palestinians are prepared to die for the

land. Such a strong affinity is clearly represented in Darwish's poem 'Diary of a Palestinian Wound', dedicated to the poetess Fadwa Tuqan. In this poem, Darwish congratulates her on joining the poets of resistance, and assures her that her devotion will be fruitful one day:

> 'This land which sucks the skin of martyrs
> Promises wheat and starts to the Summer
> So worship it: we are salt and water in its bowels
> and in its embrace a wound which is fighting!' (39)

But as the years have passed, and he has left Palestine to settle in Lebanon, his concern with the reality of life in Palestine has gradually diminished. Even his past recollections of his childhood in Palestine become less helpful. This, however, does not mean that he has lost his love for his country, or even that his attachment to his land has been affected. He simply does not know if there is anything new he has not written about:

> 'Nowadays
> I find myself dry
> As a tree growing out of books,
> And the wind is a passing matter.
> To fight or not fight?
> That is not the question.
> The important thing is for my throat to be strong.
> To work or not to work?
> That is not the question.
> The important thing is for me to rest eight days a week
> According to Palestinian Mean Time.
> A homeland repeated in songs and massacres,
> Show me the way to the source of death:
> Is it the dagger or the lie?' (40)
> (Psalm 2)

Darwish seems to be in a quandary whether to go and live among his countrymen in Palestine, or stay in Beirut, waiting for the news from the homeland. As he opts for the latter, his reliance on his imagination to depict and recollect scenes of the past becomes stronger.

From now on, he attempts to gather the residue of his past recollections and produce them in a form:

'I want to draw your form,
You who are scattered through files and surprises.
I want to draw your form,
You who are strewn over shrapnel and birds' wings.
I want to draw your form,
But the sky snatches at my hand.
I want to draw your form,
You who are beleaguered between wind and dagger.
I want to draw your form,
In order to find my form in you,
And so I am accused of being abstract, of forging documents and
Photos,
You who are beleaguered between dagger and wind.'(41)
(Psalm 2)

Eventually Palestine becomes an image rather than a reality, andhe wishes she were dead:

'You spread along my body like sweat,
You spread into my body like lust.
Like invaders you occupy my memory,
And like light you occupy my brain.
Die that I may mourn for you,
Or be my wife that I may know betrayal
Just the once. (42)
(Psalm 8)

His departure from Palestine has not only caused a lot of grief, but also left him with the memories of his comrades:

'I envy the winds that suddenly turn away
From the ashes of my forefathers.
I envy the thoughts concealed in the memory of the martyrs,
And I envy your sky hidden in children's eyes.
And yes I do not envy myself.' (43)
(Psalm 8)

Therefore, he bids farewell since their love is over:

'O country cruel as drowsiness,
Tell me just the once:
Our love is over,
That I may be capable of death and departure.'(44)
(Psalm 8)

It is worth contemplating the image of death in the above lines. It is not only associated with the wound but also with the Islamic concept of 'Jihad', a holy war.

For Darwish the process of death is an inevitable effect of the infected wound. Both images go hand in hand: the wound first bleeds then dies, while the spilled blood generates more fighters. The cycle of wound, death and rebirth is the core of Darwish's philosophy of martyrdom.

This concept of martyrdom has been referred to repeatedly by other Palestinian poets as well. For this reason, their constant repetition and writing on the same theme, time after time, may cause their poetry to sound 'too facile and mechanical'. (45)

Darwish has tried, since his move to Beirut, to adapt new themes related to the Palestinian struggle. In one of his recent poems, 'The Wandering Guitar Player', Darwish traces the life of a guitar player who was a painter, a poet, and a soldier; he has lost one of his legs and is given a wooden one. The guitar player might not be a fighter, but his music is as effective as the gun:

'The guitar player will come
And I almost see him,
Almost smell the blood on his strings.
I almost see him
Walking through every street.
I almost hear him
Shouting like a storm;
Take a good look!
That's a wooden leg,
Listen!'
That's the music of human flesh.' (46)

Darwish's poetry as described by himself is 'the music of flesh' which is unlikely to vanish. Its notes are the history of a people who have suffered the loss of their homeland. To read Darwish's poetry is to understand that history.

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PART THREE: THE POETRY OF POLITICS

'The desirable revolution (for Wales) is that which will remove alien government from Wales and will re-create the Welsh nation and the Welsh 'common tradition' as a necessary first step to the social and economic reconstruction of Wales and the swift overthrow of barbaric capitalist exploitation.'

Saunders Lewis

'Fellow countrymen, I have given my life to this Arab Revolution and my life will last for this Arab Revolution. I shall stay here as long as God wants me to; to fight with all my efforts for the sake of the demands of the people, I shall give my whole life for the people's right to life. This nation has given me support of which I never dreamt, and I have nothing to give it except every drop of my blood.'

Jamal Abdul Nasir

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE GROWTH OF WELSH NATIONALISM

In the long history of Welsh resistance to invaders, the bards were often considered to be the force behind the various Welsh uprisings. For this reason, the English kings had always feared the songs of the bards. Some of them, notably, Edward I and Henry V 'made edicts against (them) partly at least, because of their influence in stiffening the Welsh national temper.' (1)

The Welsh bard was also the preserver and protector of the people's interests. He acted as the voice of his countrymen as well as the leader's faithful warrior.

The reign of Llywelyn the Great produced notable bards, like Cynddelw and the ill-fated Dafydd Benfras who fought beside his leader and was killed. The elegy of the bard Gruffydd ab yr ynad Coch after the slaying of Llywelyn the Last, whose head was taken to London in mockery, displays both the bard's gratitude to his king and his genuine feeling. And perhaps even more inspiring is the voice of the Fourteenth Century bard Iolo Goch, whose firm stand beside his prince Glyndŵr was a manifestation of unity between the poet and the leader for the cause of freedom. Although Iolo Goch died before Glyndŵr's uprising, his cywyddau of free Wales rekindled and fanned the flame of patriotism among his countrymen.

However, the role of the Welsh bard was gradually diminished as English law was gradually imposed on Wales. His voice was silenced, and consequently his bond with his fellow countrymen was severed.

Furthermore, his position in society under English rule became uncertain, and eventually he became a wanderer; a man in search of the lost land. It is significant to notice that R. S. Thomas, in his quest for his Wales, the Wales of his imagination, comes very close to this experience. His sufferings are perhaps more severe, since it is in the present century that the effect of the English law on the Welsh language and culture is most clearly perceived. In the previous chapter, we noted the restrictions placed upon the Welsh language under English rule, and the drift of the Welsh towards the English way of life.

The Welsh national consciousness had for centuries been subdued, the names and deeds of great Welsh leaders of the past forgotten.

It was not until the nineteenth century, that the Welsh once again realized the value of their heritage. The Celtic Revival of the nineteenth century, which started simply as a literary movement, and was surprisingly confined to Ireland and Scotland, had also a political side. It coincided with the Irish struggle for independence, which stirred at the same time the emotion of Celts in Scotland and Wales, but whereas the Irish struggle was political, the Welsh

sought a confrontation on religious issues.

First, there emerged a strong Liberal tendency among Welsh tenants opposing the domination of the Conservative landlords. Behind this lay the fast-growing conflict between the Liberal Nonconformists and the anglicised Conservative Anglicans.

Two Welsh Nonconformist authors, Samuel Roberts and Hiraethog, wrote in support of the Welsh farmers' struggle against the landlords.

But it was through the radical stand of other Welsh Liberals like Tom Ellis, D. A. Thomas and Lloyd George that the battle was won. Yet though this struggle to consolidate the role of Nonconformity and Liberalism in Wales did not take place in isolation from the Irish issue, it was not at all a nationalist movement. It was, as stated by K. O. Morgan, 'rather a campaign for national equality, a struggle against indifference rather than injustice, a search for the principle of nationality rather than for nationalism.' (2)

This campaign was, in fact, directed solely against one class, the Welsh gentry. By their proximity to the English norms, and their adoption of an anglicised way of life, the Welsh gentry had not only drawn a line between themselves and the Welsh peasants, but also set the scene for an inevitable class struggle.

The emergence of the middle class in Wales in the early twentieth century imperilled the interests of the Welsh gentry. This was the start of Welsh radicalism.

The Welsh middle class, being disgruntled with the English church and the anglicised Welsh landlords, sought every means of sedition to inflame the Welsh spirit.

This was not only a class struggle, but also a religious and a cultural confrontation.

The call for disestablishing the Anglican Church in Wales had developed from a mere airing of discontent to a political campaign, in which the election of 1868 was considered to be a triumph for the Welsh-speaking non-conformists against the anglicised Anglicans, and a victory for the Welsh liberals against the Conservative landlords.

Yet it is significant that throughout their struggle for various Welsh rights, the Welsh middle class, which marched under the banner of liberalism, never asked for independence or a Welsh state. 'Only for one brief interlude, did Welsh liberalism show a tendency to turn in a nationalistic direction. This was the Cymru Fydd (Young Wales) movement of the 1894-6 period ...' (3)

The movement soon collapsed, but its short life was enough to stir the national consciousness of many Welshmen.

The campaign for a Welsh autonomy really started when on

5th August 1925 a group of Welsh Nationalists from various parts of Wales founded the Welsh Nationalist Party, later Plaid Cymru.

Coincidentally, this meeting of the Welsh Nationalists in Pwllheli occurred at the time that South Wales was experiencing a period of unrest. The signs of the first General Strike were visible.

In their preliminary meeting at Pwllheli the Welsh Nationalists did not draw up any objectives or a specific policy towards the south. The aim was still 'to save Wales from its present condition and to make it a Welsh Wales.' (4) By 'a Welsh Wales' it was clearly meant to safeguard the Welsh countryside from further deterioration and to preserve the Welsh languge as its main language.

The Welsh Nationalist of March 1936 affirms the Party's policy on protecting the Welsh countryside. It proceeds further to state that:

> 'If Wales as a nation is to live and develop and flourish, it is essential that its future development and culture should have as its basis a happy and prosperous rural community'. (5)

In the next chapter of this part, we shall study the view held by R.S. Thomas in relation to the Welsh countryside, and to what extent he agrees with the Welsh Nationalists on the importance of protecting the Welsh rural areas.

Meanwhile, it is important to realize that the year 1936 is considered to be the start of a nationalist rejuvenation.

This was the year in which the Welsh political scene saw the first open rebellion against the English law for several centuries. On 8th September 1936 three Welsh Nationalists, Saunders Lewis, D.J. Williams and the Rev. Lewis Valentine set fire to the Bombing School in LLŷn.

The incident is significant in the sense that it showed how far the Welsh could go on watching the demise of their culture. It also showed a willingness to resort to violence if peaceful means failed.

The Welsh Nationalists' opposition to the establishing of the Bombing School in Porth Neigwl was based on religious as well as cultural values. From the outset, they referred to it as a 'rural temple of Welsh culture', (6) and their long campaign to convince the British Government of the seriousness of the matter ended in failure. For the Government, as well as the opposition parties, the building of the school was a necessary step towards reinforcing British air defence. For the Welsh Nationalists, on the other hand, it meant:

> 'the destruction of the culture and traditions of one of the few pure sanctuaries left to us of Welsh idiom and Welsh tradition.' (7)

The burning of the Bombing School was seen by many as an act of arson, but for the Welsh Nationalists it was a necessary act. It buoyed up the spirit of the Party, which enjoyed, as a result, a substantial increase in its membership. Consequently, Saunders Lewis, the leading figure in the Bombing School affair, and the Party's president, became the most prominent Welsh leader since Glyndŵr. But his involvement also cost him his post at University College, Swansea, and among some, public rejection. And thus, the

Bombing School Affair, as it was later called, became the start of a new era in the history of modern Wales.

It had also its impact on literary circles in Wales. Many Welsh poets, young as well as old, celebrated the incident. It even led some non-committed Welsh poets, such as Williams Parry, to start writing poetry on political themes.

Among the Welsh poets in English, Keidrych Rhys and Emyr Humphreys wrote poems on that occasion which were dedicated to Saunders Lewis.

But the Bombing incident passed by unheeded in South Wales, where the depression had already shattered the hopes of the Welsh working-class. Thousands of miners were laid off as a result of the recession in the coal export trade and the consequent closure of pits.

The Labour Party, which ostensibly represented the interests of the Welsh working-class, hardly associated itself with cultural issues. Nevertheless, there were Welsh members of the Party who openly espoused the Welsh cause. Men like Silyn Roberts and David Thomas, were, indeed, Welsh Nationists in a Socialist party. Furthermore, during the protest against the establishing of the Bombing School in Llŷn, some Welsh members of the Labour Party in Wales, notably Elwyn Jones, the Caernarfonshire Labour Party Candidate, stood with the Welsh Nationalists against the Government's decision to build the Bombing School.

It was because of this fraternal bond between the Welsh Nationalists and their socialist counterparts, that in the Labour Party, certain Welsh demands, in particular the Home Rule issue, were called for by the Labour leaders, but were never part of the Party's programme.

It seemed that behind the Labour Party's apparent sympathy with the Welsh issues, there was an attempt to isolate the Welsh Nationalists from the Welsh in the south. It started with a campaign to present the Welsh Nationalist Party in a different image to the Welsh. They accused the Welsh Nationalist Party of having sympathies with Fascism.

The allegations were directed against two leading figures of the Welsh Nationalist Party, Saunders Lewis and Ambrose Bebb.

Ambrose Bebb was known to be a staunch admirer of the French right winger, Charles Maurras, who was associated with the Fascist movement Action Française, which was notorious for its anti-semitism. Saunders Lewis, on the other hand, though praising Maurras as a man of letters, rejected his political views and disassociated the Welsh Nationalist Party from the Action Française.

The main difference between Lewis and Maurras is clearly detected by Ioan Bowen Rees:

> 'to Maurras, the benefit of France was the only criterion of worth. To Saunders Lewis, Wales is a society of societies,' (8)

The Labour leaders, to some extent, were successful in bring-

ing the Welsh working-class to coalesce around itself. The south was almost totally under its banner, though there were sporadic traces of Welsh nationalism. The Welsh Nationalist Party in its early stages, eschewed the anglicised Welsh of the south. This was enough to give the Socialists an implicit mandate to lead the Welsh working-class.

Furthermore, the Welsh Nationalist Party's endeavours to safeguard Welsh culture hardly impressed the Welsh in the south. One of the reasons for this indifference, apart from Labour's instigation, was the fact that the Nationalist Party showed little concern for their plight.

The lack of an economic programme made the nationalist leaders unable to provide the south with any cure. Its main objective centred on one aim; to revive Welsh culture. In other words it was:

> ' ... in the poetry of Taliesin and Dafydd Nanmor in, the ruling conceptions of the ancient laws of Wales, far more than in the Special Areas Acts or Five Year programmes that the salvation of Wales is to be found' . (9)

And indeed, their protest and firm stand against the Government's decision to build a bombing school in Llŷn was a manifestation of their determination to preserve the remnants of the Welsh culture. It was part of their belief that like the land, the Welsh culture and, in particular its ancient language, was sacred.

R.S. Thomas's sympathy and support for the Welsh Nationalist Party, as we shall see, was based on the Party's aim of safeguarding the Welsh countryside, and preserving the Welsh

language.

But as years passed, there was a sign that the Party's attitude on these two policies had softened.

J.E. Jones who in 1930 became the Party's secretary, believed that a Welsh-only Wales should be the Party's far-distant goal, when self-government was established: since this far-off goal had not yet been achieved, 'English must be a jointly official language'. (10)

Saunders Lewis, who was one of the few in the Party who opposed Jones's view, responded strongly by saying that:

> 'A 'bilingual Wales' is something to be feared and avoided, that the decrease in the number of monoglot Welsh speakers is a tragedy, and that a Welsh-only Wales is alone consistent with the aims and the philosophy of Welsh nationalism.' (11)

But the publication of an English newspaper, The Welsh Nationalist , in 1932 was seen as a switch in the Party's original policy. It led to the defection and fury of prominent Welsh Nationalists like W.J. Gruffydd, Iorwerth C. Peate and G.J. Williams.

At the same time there was another attempt engineered by D.J. Davies to divert the Party's attention from rural Wales to the industrial south, where it 'could seek to identify itself with the social and economic problems of the country'. (12)

The Welsh Nationalist Party gradually succeeded in infiltrating the English speaking Welsh in the south, and this was

seen as a sign of its capability as a nationalist party to defend the interests of the Welsh working-class in the south.

In 1969 the bilingual policy was fully discussed and approved by the Party, and though it was considered to be a radical change in the policy of the Party as far as the language issue was concerned, it did annoy and irritate many Welshmen including R.S. Thomas.

Even before this, Saunders Lewis in his radio lecture of 1962 entitled 'Tynged yr Iaith' (The Fate of the Language), urged his fellow countrymen to save the Welsh language by 'revolutionary methods'. The emergence of Cymdeithas yr Iaith (The Welsh Language Society) was a positive response to that call. From the outset, the Society's campaign was not meant to destroy the English language in Wales, but 'to get Welsh put alongside English'. (13)

Throughout its long campaign to establish bilingual policy effectively through revolutionary means and civil disobedience, the Society was confronted with a mixture of reactions from the Welsh people . According to Allan Butt Philip, 'spontaneity of action among the Society's members has led to vehement reaction among the public'. (14)

Saunders Lewis had already prophesied such a reaction:

> 'There would be storms from every direction. It would be argued that such a campaign was killing our chances of attracting English factories to

> the Welsh-speaking rural areas, and that would doubtless be the case .... I do not deny that there would be a period of hatred, persecution and controversy in place of the brotherly love which is so manifest in Welsh political life today.' (15)

And he sums up the message in the following words:

> 'It will be nothing less than a revolution to restore the Welsh language in Wales. Success is only possible through revolutionary methods.' (16)

The Society has succeeded in securing the official position of the Welsh language in many spheres of life despite the prosecutions and harassment. It has also succeeded in attracting true Welshmen to its cause. One of these Welshmen who wholeheartedly supported the Society, and is still an active member is R.S. Thomas.

In the next chapter we shall trace his nationalism since he moved to Manavon in 1942; his support and sympathy with the Welsh Nationalists; his frustration with certain issues which forced him into isolation for a period of time; and his re-emergence on the Welsh political scene in the seventies.

In Chapter Ten, the poetry of an Arab nationalist, Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi will be studied in the light of his adherence to the principles of Arab Nationalism.

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15. Saunders Lewis, 'The Fate of the Language' in Presenting Saunders Lewis, p.141.

16. Ibid.

CHAPTER NINE.

THE DRAGON REBORN: R.S. THOMAS AND WELSH NATIONALISM

R.S. Thomas's search for his Welsh identity started while living in Manavon. It was there that he came in contact with the Welsh farmer, and it was there that he realized he had not come to the land of his imagination. In his search for his Welsh identity, R.S. Thomas was faced with two obstacles. Like Saunders Lewis he was a city-born Welshman, but unlike Lewis he could not at that time, speak Welsh.

Manavon, which to R.S. Thomas was a microcosm of Wales, opened his eyes to the harsh reality surrounding the Welsh language. It was there that he realized that Manavon was just one side of a coin that constituted the Welsh identity. The second side was the Welsh language, which, to his great shock, was not there (the linguistic boundary ran some few miles to the west of his parish).

At the age of thirty, Thomas was prepared to undergo the hardship of acquiring a second language, though it was obviously less tiresome for him to take his services in English. And yet learning Welsh for Thomas was an act of nationalism, a duty he had to fulfil. This was without any doubt a show of devotion from a man determined to overcome the linguistic hurdles in order to be among his Welsh-speaking countrymen. It was also a direct response to the Welsh nationalists' appeal to the Welsh to speak their nation's language or to learn it. Like so many early Welsh Nationalists, above all, Saunders Lewis, he became very concerned with the fate

of the Welsh language and the threat of anglicization. But unlike them he owes less to foreign influences. His main source of enlightenment seemed to have emerged from his discovery of the Celtic Twilight. He displayed more interest in the revival of Celticism in Wales, Ireland and Scotland, than in the unity of Europe and the European civilization, which was the motto of the early Welsh Nationalists.

It is true that the Welsh Nationalists had never concealed their indebtedness to the Irish patriots, yet it was to Yeats, Synge, and Colum, rather than to the political leaders like Pearse, O'Connolly and Maud Gonne, that the bulk of their admiration flowed.

Saunders Lewis's nationalism, on the other hand, seemed to have originated in France, in the work of the French Catholic writers notably Maurice Barrès. Later, it was consolidated by the teachings of the nineteenth century Welsh Nationalists, Emrys ap Iwan and Owen Morgan Edwards.

R.S. Thomas's nationalism at its core is Welsh, and in a broader sense Celtic. Apart from the Celts, or Celtic writers, there is no reference in his work to any non-Celtic philosopher or politician who might have led him to be a nationalist.

Apart from the Welsh language issue, in which both Saunders Lewis and R.S. Thomas took uncompromising views on the question of its legal status in Wales, there was another serious concern which was shared by the two nationalists;

industrialism. Saunders Lewis's reaction to the grievances of the miners in the south was always direct: 'there must be a deindustrialisation of South Wales'. (1) To him, the south was the stronghold of the Socialists whom he regarded as on a par with the capitalists. R.S. Thomas also looked at industrialism as an attempt by the English to strip the Welsh of their religious and cultural heritage. Industrialism could be an evil process creating an anti-Christian society.

To Saunders Lewis more than to R.S. Thomas, Christianity constituted the essence of his nationalism. 'What Saunders Lewis has done', according to Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'is to take nationalism and fit it into a broad concept of Christian humanism, where it finds a role and functions'. (2)

R.S. Thomas may not hold such an orthodox view of Christianity, and yet his longing to live in a free Christian Wales devoid of any traces of materialism brings him very close to the Christian humanitarians, like Martin Luther King.

His nationalism is, therefore, an embodiment of political as well as of Christian principles. As a Welsh Nationalist, his main concern is to see an independent Welsh society separate from the English Crown, and free from any trace of anglicisation, be it the English language, English tourists, or industrialism.

As a Christian, he preaches love and peace, which are, to his horror, superseded by hatred and war. What he fears is man's own foolishness, which would cause the destruction

of his race by his own invention. As mentioned earlier, R.S. Thomas's interest or belief in the significance of the Celtic Twilight invigorated his sense of nationalism. It was his Celtic urge that drove him towards W.B. Yeats and Hugh MacDiarmid.

Besides his admiration of Yeats as being 'a supreme artist', R.S. Thomas discovered in him the qualities of a Celtic nationalist whose pursuit of the Celtic heritage was of great significance. As far as Hugh MacDiarmid was concerned, R.S. Thomas regarded him as 'a man of real stature'. (4) His admiration of MacDiarmid derived from the same source as that of Yeats and Saunders Lewis. It was based on the fact that all these nationalists strove to safeguard their Celtic heritage which was threatened by an alien tradition, namely English.

In his Preface to MacDiarmid, he makes this point clear:

> 'Let me, therefore, first of all say what it is in Hugh MacDiarmid's work that appeals to a Welshman. It is his consciousness of the Gaelic past and his concern at the disappearance of his native culture.' (5)

He also shared with MacDiarmid several predicaments. They both showed their frustration at the politicians of the day and their impotence to fulfil the needs of the people. They were also shocked by the apathy of their countrymen. But where MacDiarmid made endless efforts to deliver his message to the Scottish people through various organisations, R.S. Thomas alienated himself from the public.

MacDiarmid's active involvement in politics, undoubtedly sur-

passed Thomas's few slogans of freedom and peace. In essence, there was no similarity between the two except that both were Celtic Nationalists.

Perhaps it was this sense of Celticism that made Thomas overlook MacDiarmid's Marxist ideology and his non-pacifist tendency, cherishing his personality as the embodiment of a nobleman who was 'the living counterpart of ap Hywel, content to abjure the rose of all the world for the 'little white rose of Scotland that smells sharp and sweet, and breaks the heart'. (6)

R.S. Thomas's Celtic enthusiasm was just one aspect of his poetic creativity, which also encompassed his romantic outlook. But the romantic trend in his poetry never overlapped with his sense of nationalism. On the contrary, the Wordsworthian tranquility of mind, coupled with Shelley's Promethean spirit impregnated his poetry with the images of a free man in nature. In Manavon, this image of free man collided with a bitter and acrimonious scene of man and nature in a never-ending battle for survival.

The years from 1942 to 1945 were marked by two significant events in the life of R.S. Thomas. First, and perhaps most important, was the discovery of his Welsh identity. His romantic leanings were gradually replaced by more realistic themes drawn from Welsh history and culture. As a result, he started like Yeats to 'write for my race and the reality'.(7)

The second event, which corroborated the first, was the

republication at the end of the war of two magazines for Welshmen writing in English. Wales was edited by Keidrych Rhys, while The Welsh Review, which was the platform for a more liberal view on Welsh issues, was founded by Gwyn Jones.

These two magazines, however, were committed to presenting the literary and social aspects of Wales. The Welsh Nationalist,(8) on the other hand, the organ of the Welsh Nationalist Party, tackled the most serious issues relating to Wales, and, obviously the most serious issue for the nationalists at that period (9) was the safeguarding of the Welsh language. Interestingly enough, the readers of these three magazines were the English-speaking Welsh. The Welsh Nationalists' campaign which aimed at the majority of Welsh who, for historical reasons, could not speak Welsh, was only partially successful: only a few, of the English-speaking Welsh were genuinely involved in learning Welsh.

R.S. Thomas, like many English speaking Welsh, learnt Welsh, and holds a strong view in its favour. He considers himself to be a Welsh poet in English, and for a long time, rejected the term 'Anglo-Welsh'. To him, the term carried the charge of its Englishness rather than its Welshness. In his reply to the questionnaire sent to him by the magazine Wales about whether he preferred to be called an Anglo-Welsh poet, he said:

> 'An Indian journal recently described me as a young Welsh writer, and that pleased me as being essentially correct.' (10)

To be more accurate, R.S. Thomas considers himself to 'be a Welshman first, a writer secondly'. (11) This emphasis on his Welshness is not his invention: the Welsh Nationalists had already rejected the term 'Anglo-Welsh'. Saunders Lewis only allowed it as 'a term of literary classification'.(12)

Saunders Lewis strongly believed that the Anglo-Welsh movement was a continuation of the English literary tradition, and it originated in South Wales along with the emergence of industrialism which was in any case an English contribution.

If, however, he was obliged to use the term he would reluctantly apply it to 'a Welshman who writes of Wales and of Welsh life in the English language'.(13) Under this classification, he excludes those 'who have found themes or "cases" in Wales',(14) or even those Welsh writers who have been influenced by the English tradition. This includes not only Englishmen living in Wales but also such writers as Richard Hughes and Dylan Thomas. He then adds poignantly that 'the growth of Anglo-Welsh writing in recent years is the inevitable reflection of the undirected drifting of Welsh national life'.(15)

Waldo Williams, another nationalist and a well-established Welsh writer, denied the Anglo-Welsh any 'future as a school'. (16) Waldo Williams's criticism of the Anglo-Welsh writings was based on linguistic evaluations. His fulmination against the Anglo-Welsh seemed apparently to be a personal grudge because of its fast growing popularity. What he feared most,

was its Englishness, since the English language throws the Welsh half into insignificance. His conclusion was that:

> 'If things go on as at present in Wales they will (the Anglo-Welsh) become more and more assimilated to English literature and if the Welsh language is restored they will become, by choice, English writers.' (17)

But the Welsh Nationalists' campaign was not directed against all Anglo-Welsh writers. The main target was those Welshmen who imitated the English in themes, and at the same time presented a distorted pircture of Wales to their English readers.

In an article published in The Welsh Nationalist , Davies Aberpennar objected not to its Englishness, but to its obtrusive mispresentation of Wales.

Having praised 'the restless energy of Keidrych Rhys, and the poetic conscience of R.S. Thomas and the imaginative force of Emyr Humphreys', (18) he refers to some Anglo-Welsh as having traces of racialism. According to him, both Rhys Davies and John Cowper Powys displayed a tendency 'to define essential Welshness as a species of racial character rather than a developing national life.'(19)

R.S. Thomas, from the start, was deeply aware of the language dilemma. His view of the Anglo-Welsh writers derives from his sympathy rather than hatred towards them.

He clearly states that:

> 'the majority of the Anglo-Welsh School write in English not by whim, but from necessity. We have been deprived of our heritage.' (20)

At the same time, he appeals to them to bear in mind their

national responsibility. The Welsh identity can still be preserved despite the language difference:

> 'Ireland has contrived to remain Irish despite her use of English, and there is no overwhelming reason why we should not succeed also.'(21)

But he puts in front of the Anglo-Welsh writers two ways of achieving that goal. The first, is that they should opt for the real image of Wales by portraying and focussing on 'the country tradition',(22) which is essentially Welsh.

Secondly, the Anglo-Welsh should acquaint themselves with the Welsh literary tradition. The Anglo-Welsh in the south, to his disappointment, had cut adrift from these two principles. It is because of their ignorance of the country life, that they attempt 'to give an unbalanced picture of Wales, creating the impression that it is a land of coal-mines'.(23) Furthermore, their obsession with the condition of the working class drove them nearer to the English tradition of Auden and Spender. It was, as Glyn Jones observed, 'the depression and left wing politics'(24) that dominated their life.

To R.S. Thomas, who from the start, sought refuge in the sanctuary of the Welsh countryside, socialism could not be an indigenous outcome of Welsh society. He looked at it as an alien body that had penetrated Wales with the arrival of industrialism and with the influence of the English tradition. For a strange reason, R.S. Thomas viewed the English tradition as 'an ageing body'(25) which will soon die without the contribution of the Celtic writers:

> 'From where have the chief influences on English literature come over the last half-century if not from men such as James Joyce in prose, and Manley Hopkins, Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen and Dylan Thomas in poetry — the first an Irishman, and the others all Welsh?' (26)

Interesting as it seems, his view of the English literary tradition also underlines a sense of dichotomy. His opposition to the Auden generation and the Anglo-Welsh socialist poets of the south is reinforced by his frequent appeals to his fellow Anglo-Welsh poets to become familiar with the Welsh literary tradition. Yet he himself, as an Anglo-Welsh poet, displays, without any doubt, a consistent drift towards the English poets. His early poems, one can easily regard as the replica of English Romantic poetry. His religious poetry also reminds the reader of George Herbert and T.S. Eliot.

In his short poem 'Confessions of an Anglo-Welsh man', published in 1943, he unravels this dichotomy. The poem is significant because, first it has an unwanted epithet 'Anglo-Welsh', which three years later he would reject in his answer to the questionnaire sent to him by the magazine Wales in 1946. Secondly, - and this is more revealing - the poem emulates other Anglo-Welsh poets in their admiration of the English Romantic poets. The opening lines reveal his gratitude to Wales:

> For my own country's part
> Her lore and language
> I should have by heart,
> 'Twas she who raised me,
> Built me bone by bone
> Out of the teeming earth, the dreaming stone.
> Even at my christening it was she decreed
> Uprooted I should bleed.'

And the final lines show his debt to the English literary tradition:

> 'And yet for another's sake
> No wound deletes,
> No patriotism dulls
> The true and the beautiful
> Bequeathed to me by Blake,
> Shelley and Shakespeare and the ravished Keats.'(27)

In another poem entitled 'Taste', published in Laboratories of the Spirit, he refers to the English poets from Chaucer to Hardy. Some he admits to having liked: Shakespeare was the first one:

> 'But Shakespeare's cut and thrust,
> I allow you, was a must
> on my bookshelves;'

Then come the Romantics, Wordsworth and Shelley:

> 'But Wordsworth, looking in the lake
> of his mind, him I could take;
> and Percy Shelley at times;
> Byron, too, but only for his rhymes.'

And in a recent poem entitled 'Passage', he shows a stronger affinity with Shelley:

> 'Shelley put forth
> his waxwork hand, that came off
> in my own and I sank down
> with him to see time
> at its experiment at the sand's table.' (28)

But apparently for R.S. Thomas, the Romantics were more than just poets enchanted by the beauty of nature: they were the rebels from whom he inherited his rebellious spirit. Nor was this all. There is another feature of compatibility. R.S. Thomas, in fact, shares with the English Romantics the prestige of being a bourgeois.

This is, however, not to imply any sense of class-conscious-

ness on the part of R.S. Thomas, for he detests ideologies. It is only to suggest that Wales like England is a class-structured society.

But unlike England, the two classes of landlords and peasantry in Wales were not only divided according to their class strata, but linguistically and religiously as well.

With the demise of the Welsh gentry in the nineteenth century, a new Welsh middle class was born. Its first duty was to safeguard the Welsh language from further decline.

But as it became very powerful, the Welsh middle-class was diverted from its main principle. Not only did it abandon its campaign to strengthen the position of the Welsh language in society, but it, in various ways, allied itself with the English middle-class by adopting the English language and imitating the English writers.

Whatever has been said about the role and significance of the English language in Wales, it is certain that its development is 'a twentieth-century phenomenon',(29) consolidated by Welsh middle-class loyalty to the English tradition.

This, then, was the class that according to A. Conran 'had no tradition of polite feeling behind. It had no idea how to articulate its longings or express its discontent.' (30)

But then the emergence of the Welsh Nationalist movement on the Welsh political scene since 1925, unravelled its false identity. There were only two choices left to the

Welsh middle class in the twentieth century, either to start 'the process of gaining confidence'(31), by searching for their identity or remain as it is, living under the English umbrella.

R.S. Thomas is a middle-class Welshman. He was brought up in an English-speaking family with an atmosphere akin to that of the English middle-class:

> 'I was a proper little bourgeois , brought up delicately, with the mark of the Church and the library on me.' (32)

And at the early age of twenty-two, Thomas affirmed his middle-class background by chanting romantic slogans and approaching Wales, as most English do, from a picturesque view.

But when he came into a close confrontation with the Welsh speakers in Manavon, who as he observed came 'down from the small farms around Adfa and Cefncoch', probably he had the feeling that to them, a middle-class English-speaking Welshman like himself was a stranger.

Furthermore, he may have felt that to them, an Anglican priest would embody the role of the English Church.

Whether R.S. Thomas went through such an experience of realization is difficult to assert, since he hardly talks about his personal life. What is important is that the tension between himself and the Welsh farmer did exist and is vividly illustrated in his poems published while he was in Manavon. In 'Peasant Greeting', R.S. Thomas attempts to communicate

with the farmer, but there is no sign of response:

> 'No speech; the raised hand affirms
> All that is left unsaid
> By the mute tongue and the unmoistened lips;
> The land's patience and a tree's
> knotted endurance and
> The heart's doubt whether to curse or bless.
> All packed into a single gesture.' (34)

In 'Memories', he even approaches the farmer in a very friendly manner:

> 'Come, Iago, my friend, and let us stand together
> Now in the time of the mild weather,
> Before the wind changes and the winter brings
> The leprous frost to the fields, and I will sing
> The land's praises, making articulate
> Your strong feelings, your thoughts of no date,
> Your secret learning, innocent of books.' (35)

But there is no answer from the farmer, though probably their eyes meet. The farmer knows that R.S. Thomas watches his movement, but he does not care, and this cool reception from the farmer irritates the poet:

> 'Blind? yes, and deaf, and dumb, and the last irks most,
> For could he speak, would not the glib tongue boast
> A lore denied over neoteric sense,
> Being handed down from the age of innocence?
> Or would the cracked lips, parted at last, disclose
> The embryonic thought that never grows.' (36)
> (Enigma)

And yet, in 'Invasion on the Farm', the farmer for the first time speaks, defending himself:

> 'I am Prytherch. Forgive me. I don't know
> What you are talking about; your thoughts flow
> Too swiftly for me;..' (37)

This is one side of the tension which stems apparently from R.S. Thomas's own feeling that his middle-class up-bringing could be the barrier between him and the Welsh farmer.

Another aspect of this tension is well displayed in R.S. Thomas's description of the Welsh farmer's religious duties. From the outset, he admits the important role of the chapel

in the Welsh countryside. This view is clearly expressed in his article 'Two Chapels':

> 'I must admit that, generally speaking, it is the Chapels and not the Churches that try to feed the flock in Wales, and by flock, I mean the scattered ones.' (38)

And goes further on to say that:

> 'The formal ostentation of Catholicism won't do here. And the Church in Wales isn't any longer Welsh enough in Spirit.' (39)

The Minister might be, as stated by Thomas himself, (40) a show of 'sympathy with a non-conformist minister', and yet it is obvious that it touches upon an historical fact that it is towards the Chapel that the Welsh farmers march every Sunday. The opening lines of The Minister are an affirmation of that fact:

> 'In the hill country at the moor's edge
> There is a chapel, religion's outpost
> In the untamed land west of the valleys,
> The marginal land where flesh meets spirit
> Only on Sundays and the days between
> are mortgaged to the grasping soil.' (41)

These lines are more descriptive than being suggestive of any importance attached to the chapel. Nevertheless, the mere reference to it is an indication that on the land of Wales there is only the Chapel that gathers the Welsh farmers around itself every Sunday. Besides, the Chapel is not only a rendezvous for the Welsh farmers' Sunday gatherings; it was a political platform where the Welsh liberal leaders displayed their anger and dissatisfaction at the political situation in wales.

Again, in The Minister , R.S. Thomas refers to such political debates, though he deprives the peasants of the gifts of understanding:

'And if the snow thawed
And the roads cleared there was an election
Meeting in the vestry next the chapel.
Men came and spoke to them about Wales,
The land they lived in without knowing it,
The land that is reborn at such times,
They mentioned Henry Richard and S.R. - the great names;
And Keir Hardie; the names nobody knew.' (42)

This emphasis on the role of the Chapel in Wales does not necessarily indicate a gap or a division between the Church and the Chapel. It is only an illustration of the fact that the English Church in Wales failed to gain any ground. In the words of G.O. Pierce it means that:

'The Anglican Church had not made adequate provision to meet the needs of the growing population.' (43)

And this was perhaps a good reason behind the religious dissent in nineteenth century Wales. R.S. Thomas acknowledges the strong role of the Chapel and Welsh Non-Conformity on the soil of Wales. In a recent interview, he states that he is a 'sort of non-conformist', (44) though he shows his reservations as far as 'the average non-conformist place of worship.'(45) which he considers to be 'ugly' is considered. But what he likes most in the Welsh non-conformists is 'their disassociation from the Establishment in England, the king and queen ...'(46)

Having, so far, illustrated the role of the Chapel in Wales, it is not an exaggeration to state that R.S. Thomas may be ranked among those very few Welshmen who endeavour with sincerity to restore the unity, which has been lost, between himself and the Welsh peasantry.

His long journey in search of his people, whom he differs

from in class and denomination, has in fact, restored the confidence of other Welshmen of his class, whose hope of any identification with the Welsh community had vanished.

According to Anthony Conran, R.S. Thomas, 'showed them (the middle class) how to contain in one complex attitude both their middle class alienation from the Gwerin, and their longing to be accepted back into the fold' (47), and it has been often said that R.S. Thomas's long journey ended in Aberdaron, where he found the Welsh-speaking community. But was Aberdaron really the final leg of his quest?

It could have been, had he sought to live and act the way the community in Aberdaron would do. R.S. Thomas might have found the Welsh - the Welsh speaking community he was looking for, but he could not find the Welshmen who would stand by his side and denounce the selling of cottages to the English, who would discourage tourism, and the spread of the English language.

His anger and indignation are not, as before, directed against those Welsh who are indifferent to their language and culture; in Aberdaron the Welsh do speak their own language, but they lack national consciousness.

It is, therefore, this paradoxical tendency to long for and at the same time withdraw from the community that has won him the adulation of both the English-speaking Welsh and the Welsh Nationalists. 'The most forceful expression of this crisis of modern Welsh society', in the words of the

Welsh writer Alun LLywelyn-Williams, 'is to be found, not in the work of any of the Welsh language poets, but in the poems of the Anglo-Welsh writer R.S. Thomas'.(48) And it is interesting to note that such 'forceful expression' is achieved through the English language.

What is then this unique aspect of the work of an Anglo-Welsh writer that overshadows the significance of the English language? In the opinion of Ned Thomas, ' a style can be found that both does justice to the Welsh reality and communicates adequately with English readers.' (49)

And he continues to state that 'R.S. Thomas's more recent poems are a triumph in this respect. In them the note of desperation and of protest rings true as a style in English, and it is true to the Welsh language culture in which he lives his life.'(50)

R.S. Thomas's nationalism, mentioned earlier, started in Manavon. It was there that he first read one of Saunders Lewis's articles, and was 'so impressed', 'that (he) went to see him to offer (his) service, ... 'and from that time (he) became involved'.(51)

But although R.S. Thomas attended some of the Party's meetings and came to know many Welsh Nationalists, he actually never was 'a fully active member'. (52) His coming to Welsh politics coincided with the time that the Welsh Nationalist Party was in its war hibernation. This was the period of uncertainty about whether the Party would be able to re-emerge

as a Nationalist Party after the Second World War. There were various factors which underlined its efficacy. In 1939 Saunders Lewis handed over the leadership of the Party to his colleague J.E. Daniel. To many Welsh Nationalists this change of leadership was not seen as a good omen.

The Party's financial difficulties were also one of the main factors behind closing inactive branches in various parts of Wales, which obviously shed doubts on the Party's future prospects.

Furthermore, the Party's neutral stand in the Second World War and its policy on refusing to support Welsh conscription into the British army, made it an easy target for the Liberals and the Socialists to accuse the leadership of the Party of fascism. It is significant to note that even today, the effect of such an alleged accusation is still in the minds of the Welsh Nationalists. R.S. Thomas is perhaps one of them:

> 'I've never accepted the word nationalism - a patriot really, because nationalism is a word that has been tarnished by the English and is associated with Nazism in Germany.' (53)

Like many Welsh Nationalists, R.S. Thomas also underwent several changes in his attitude towards the Welsh Nationalist Party. He became, as he says 'rather critical of some of the approaches'. (54)

And as the Welsh Nationalist Party emerged after World War II with more ambitions than ever before and continued in the fifties and sixties to tackle the problems of Wales more realistically, R.S. Thomas became more isolated from

politics in Wales. There was a change in his poetry as well. He showed more interest in other non-political topics. In his words, he 'became rather tired of the themes about nationalism'.(55)

R.S. Thomas's political lethargy which covered the whole sixties came to an end with his appearance once again on the political scene. Ned Thomas illustrates the next stage of R.S. Thomas's political career:

> 'One cannot, of course, know all the deep changes at work in a writer, but there is evidence in his own words for thinking that R.S. Thomas found release from some of the intolerable tensions reflected in the work of the early seventies in action outside the writing of poetry. From the mid-seventies on he became a public figure in Wales making numerous interventions in Welsh language campaigns and more recently on behalf of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.' (56)

Before proceeding to further details, it is worth studying R.S. Thomas's view in the forties and in the fifties in support of the Welsh Nationalist Party's policy in Wales, and his withdrawl in the sixties as the Party's policy was modified.

As mentioned in the previous chapter the Welsh Nationalists' view of the Welsh countryside was direct and clear; every attempt should be made to safeguard the Welsh rural areas, for it is there that the Welsh language and culture survive.

R.S. Thomas in his article 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country' published in 1945, echoes the nationalists' grievances and fear of further depopulation. These Welshmen, according to him, are 'the true Welsh peasantry and to know them is to feel a real affection for them'.(57)

In his portrayal of the deserted farms, R.S. Thomas touches upon even tiny aspects of the Welsh countryside to put through his message. In 'Depopulation of the Hills', his message is:

> 'leave it, leave it - the hole under the door
> Was a mouth through which the rough wind spoke
> Ever more sharply; the dank hand
> Of age was busy on the walls
> Scrawling in blurred characters
> Messages of hate and fear.' (58)

The Welsh peasants have deserted their farms, and have taken their cultural heritage along with them to vanish in the industrialized cities of the south.

To the Welsh Nationalists 'the culture of Wales is essentially the culture of the countryside', (59) and thus their commitment to preserve this culture stems from this conviction.

The threat to Welsh culture as a result of the depopulation of the countryside is also strongly felt by R.S. Thomas.

In 'Wales' the ancient birds of Wales mourn the departure of the villagers. There is no one there except R.S. Thomas himself to listen to their song:

> 'Above the clatter of the broken water
> The song is caught in the bare boughs;
> The very air is veined with darkness, hearken
> The brown owl wakens in the woods now
> The owl, the ousel, and the toad's carousal
> In Cors Fochno of the old laws -
> I hear them yet, but in what thicket cowers
> Gwernabwy's eagle with the sharp claws?' (60)

But it was not only the rural Wales that suffered a great loss in the early twentieth century. The slump in the world economy as a result of the First World War hit the industrial cities of the south, leaving behind thousands of Welsh famil-

ies in poverty. But here the Welsh Nationalists could not do anything; it was left to the Socialists to find a cure.

The Welsh Nationalists, on the other hand, decided on a proposal of repopulating the Welsh countryside. The plan was supported by the chief agricultural spokesman, Moses Gruffydd, who believed that:

> 'Placing the people back on the land is not only appropriate, but is essential if the Welsh nation is to live. The Welsh nation is a nation with its roots in the country and the soil.' (61)

Apparently, one of the worries of the Welsh nationalists as far as the migration of the Welsh peasants was concerned, was how to save Welsh Non-Conformity from further decline. In the south, the Socialists were straightforward in their propaganda. Their argument was that 'the ordinary folk ask for bread but the great ones give us Disestablishment'.(62) The role of the Welsh Liberals, who were strongly associated with Welsh Non-Conformity was fading away, and therefore, it was incumbent on the Welsh Nationalists to save the deserted chapels.

As mentioned earlier, R.S. Thomas holds a very high view of the important role of the chapel in preserving the Welsh way of life. As an Anglican he also shows respect towards this bulwark of pure Welsh peasantry. To him the chapel is the true soul of the Welsh.

In 'Maes-Yr-Onnen', he associates the chapel with Welsh history. The first few lines describe its present condition:

> 'Though I describe it stone by stone, the chapel
> Left stranded in the hurrying grass,

> Painting faith the mossed tiles and the tree,
> The one listener to the long homily
> Of the ministering wind, and the dry, locked door.'
> (63)

And as he steps inside, there is the reverbration of the past:

> 'You cannot hear as I, incredulous, heard
> up in the rafters, where the bell should ring
> The wild, sweet singing of Rhiannon's birds.'(64)

And if he is asked to explain the implication underlying such lines, he is certainly willing to put it in prose:

> Glyndŵr too saw the shadow of the clouds fleeing
> before the east wind; and the first worshippers
> in Maes-Yr-Onnen heard the cry of the buzzard
> above them as I heard it more than two centuries
> later.' (65)

At present, the Chapel has lost its attraction. It has become, sadly enough, an uninteresting place even for the passer-by:

> 'A little aside from the main road,
> becalmed in a last-century greyness,
> there is the chapel, ugly, without the appeal
> to the tourist to stop his car
> and visit it.' (66)
> (The Chapel)

The decline in the number of chapel goers in the north was the direct result of the depopulation. In the south, however, the decline coincided with the gradual disappearance of the Welsh language. The severe economic setbacks in the south, drove the Welsh working-class to seek nostrums in the preachings of their union bosses. In other words, as described by Emyr Humphreys:

> 'the Union, the Labour Party, and industrial
> strife became the main agencies of the people's
> spiritual welfare and the expression of the
> reserves of energy in their communal life.' (67)

R.S. Thomas is hardly concerned with the problems in the south, but when he is, the scenes he depicts become intolerable. In 'He Lives Here', R.S. Thomas dwells in the valleys where 'the smell of chapels gone sour'. The tone

is bound to be cynical since Thomas's aim is mere mockery of the miner's way of life:

> ..... and they stood round
> with white faces
> and the old familiar slang
> of the valleys was on the lips
> of the wind
> Welcome boi bach
> fallen among the slag and clinkers
> of time with a language
> filched from the dictionary
> of the tribes we await.' (68)

But it is not only their language that draws R.S. Thomas's attention. The Welsh miners seem to be living in a 'spiritual vacuum', only to be buoyed up by the calculations of Socialism:

> 'and a pulpit grew up under my feet
> and I climbed into it and
> it was the cage
> of the mine-shaft down down down
> to preach to the lost souls
> of the coal-face reminding
> how green is the childhood
> of a glib people taunting
> them with the abandonment
> of the national for the class struggle.' (69)

But whatever R.S. Thomas's argument against the south, it only originates from the same source; that the Welsh in the South have abandoned their language and become anglicized.

This view does not differ from those of many of the Welsh Nationalists of his generation whose attitude as far as the Welsh language was concerned was uncompromising.

Before we study R.S. Thomas's view on the Welsh language, it is worth examining the policy of the Welsh Nationalists to the language issue, and the reasons which made the Welsh in the south drift towards anglicization.

The Welsh language, according to Bebb, 'had to be made compulsory as was the case with other languages in other countries.' (70)

This was an answer to a proposal made by Professor Morgan Watkin whose aim was to get the Welsh language an'equality of status with English'.(71) The Welsh Nationalists rejected the plan and insisted on a monoglot Wales. Saunders Lewis's view was straightforward:

> 'The Welsh language must be the only official language of Wales, the language of government in Wales, the language of every county and town and district council,of the staffs of the councils,and of courts of law.' (72)

But the flow of emigrants from England and Ireland into South Wales, and the flourishing of coal industries run by the English capitalists, made the situation more favourable to the English language. The Welsh Nationalists' staunch policy on the Welsh language seemed here not only impossible but unrealistic. To the Welsh Nationalists, the rise of industrial cities in the south was the main factor of anglicization of the south.

Brinley Thomas, however, refutes this argument:

> 'The Bethesda quarrymen, the Cardiganshire lead miners, and the farm labourers from all parts who flocked into the Rhondda took the Welsh way of life with them and brought up their children to speak the mother-tongue.' (73)

Nevertheless, and despite Brinley Thomas's explanation, it was apparent that industrialism did play a role in anglicizing the Welsh community in the south.

According to Michael Hechter, there were two causes of

anglicization of the south. First, and perhaps most important, was the 'influx of English-speaking migrants'.(74) The second cause was more or less a sociological one:

> 'The complex individual readjustments required to perceive meaning and social order in this apparently chaotic milieu also might be hypothesized to encourage language shift.' (75)

And yet the situation could have been worse, had the south remained a non-industrial area. The industrial south, in fact, saved many Welsh families from disintegrating into emigration to the English industrial cities or to North America: in fact, as depression began to show its signs, thousands of Welsh families had no choice but to shift to those prosperous English cities.

Industrialism was therefore, a source of both unification and disintegration of the Welsh-speaking community of South Wales.

However, industrialism alone could never annihilate the Welsh language if there had not been another factor: education. the Education Act of 1870 ensured that 'free education would be carried on in English and in English alone'.(76) Hence, the workplace or the factory could have reduced the number of Welsh speakers, but it was the home that put an end to it. In the words of Michael Hechter:

> 'the Welsh language could survive despite the dominance of English in the workplace only so long as it continued to be spoken in the home. Monolingual education ... in English, however, tended to subvert the use of Welsh in the home in the course of several generations.'(77)

Having furnished the possible causes of the disappearance of the Welsh language in the south, it is interesting to

see how R.S. Thomas reacts to such views.

There is no doubt that he looks at industrialism as the main cause, and this was essentially the Welsh Nationalists' view, but R.S. Thomas seemed from the start, uneasy about this language issue. This uneasiness stems from his own ambivalent nature. While he is a staunch supporter of the Welsh language, he cannot be totally antagonistic towards the English language. After all, his wife is English and his son was educated in an English boarding school. Besides, he himself writes in English.

His message to England is therefore, that of guilt:

> 'England, what have you done to make the speech
> My fathers used a stranger at my lips,
> An offence to the ear, a shackle on the tongue
> That would fit new thoughts to an abiding tune?
> Answer me now'.(78)
>
> (The Old Language)

The Welsh language in itself can still 'fit new thoughts to an abiding tune'; but R.S. Thomas feels that he has been deprived of the ability to take part in that natural continuity. Thus, when the Welsh language disappears, no one will sing such songs.'

> 'When spring wakens the heart
> Of the young children to sing, what song shall be
> theirs?' (79)

If R.S. Thomas is ambivalent towards the English language, his view of the anglicized Welshmen is clear; they have simply betrayed the Welsh nation. They have made, by their lack of commitment, the names of those great Welsh leaders who fought the English in various battles become mere words in history books. Even those Welsh Non-Conformists who defied the English Church, like Henry Richard and the Rev. Thomas Charles have become simply statues:

And in Tregaron Henry Richard
Still freezes, cast in shame to preside
Over the pacifism of a servile people.

Thomas Charles, too, has seen the Bible
Petrified. Nothing can stir the pages
Of the book he holds; not even the draught from
Tryweryn.' (80)
(He lies down to be counted)

The Education Act of 1870, not only sundered the Welsh from their old language, but also injected into them the false assumption of the superiority of speaking the English language.

In 'It hurts him to think', R.S. Thomas portrays with unsparing honesty the implication underlying the superiority of the English language:

'The decree went forth
to destroy the language - 'not cariad'
they said, 'love'. The nursing future
saw the tightening lips
of the English drawn on the hard sky
to the east. 'You can have the job,
if you ask for it in the right words.' (81)

What the English did to the Welsh was not simple oppression, they diminished the confidence of the Welsh in themselves. R.S. Thomas is fully aware of this fact when he says:

'The
industrialists came, burrowing
in the corpse of a nation
for its congealed blood. I was
born into the squalor of
their feeding and sucked their speech
in with my mother's
infected milk, so that whatever
I throw up now is still theirs.' (82)

This is an example of what Ned Thomas calls a state of 'obsession' (83) among the Welsh with the Welsh language. They are too much concerned with its future role and its existence.

For the Welsh Nationalists in the forties, industrialism was not the only menace to its continual development. They discovered that besides industrialism, there was a human threat as well, and that was the flow of the English to Wales. During the Second World War, it was decided by the British Government to evacuate thousands of English families from the Midlands to Welsh rural areas. The Welsh Nationalists' reaction was that of shock. Saunders Lewis, more than anyone else responded strongly to this plan.

The settlement would not only imperil the Welsh culture but also would make the Welsh villages direct targets for the German air raids. He summed up his view by saying that:

> 'the movement of population is one of the most horrible threats to the continuation and to the life of the Welsh nation that has ever been suggested in history.' (84)

The Welsh Nationalists, however, failed to convince the government, probably due to their lack of political strength at that time. What they could achieve was that they became the front-page topic of the English journals which accused them of lacking humanity. The evacuation of the English families, as it was seen by the English media, was decided on a humanitarian basis, rather than nationalistic obligations.

Nevertheless, the effect of evacuation was severe. Gwyn Jones, a moderate Welshman and the editor of the Welsh Review revealed one side of the scheme:

> 'The Englishman is bad at learning languages, the Welshman good; the English in these affairs is

> thickskinned, the Welshman courteous: in a free mingling of the two peoples the English Language must triumph.'(85)

But the intervention of the media on the scene, supporting the evacuation plan, consequently forced the Welsh Nationalists to solve the problem from a different angle. It was the Welsh kindness, the Nationalists hailed, that could conquer the heart of the English, and perhaps it could 'Welshnise them as far as possible'.(86)

R.S. Thomas's concern with the English settlement in Wales, in fact, reflects the Welsh Nationalists' stand on this issue. In his poem 'The Evacuee', he asserts this Welsh kindness by illustrating the life of an English girl living in a Welsh farm-house:

> 'And there the table and the gallery
> Of farm faces trying to be kind
> Beckoned her nearer, and she sat down
> Under an awning of salt hams.' (87)

Perhaps the little girl is fortunate to leave the town and live on this farm. After all, it is her home now:

> 'And so she grew, a small bird in the nest
> Of welcome that was built about her,
> Home now often so long away
> In the flowerless streets of the drab town.' (88)

But the evacuation scheme was only one cause of dissatisfaction among the Welsh Nationalists at the start of the Second World War.

Besides the Government's decision to transfer the Welsh workers to the English factories, there was also the plan for establishing training camps in rural Wales.

These training camps were obviously meant to fulfil military obligations, but what aroused the Welsh Nationalists was first of all, that they were built in Welsh rural areas,

and secondly that they held thousands of English families under their shelter.

In addition to these military camps, there was also a plan for industrial expansion in Welsh rural areas, aiming at cultivating the land for gaining more profits by destroying the trees and planting conifers, spruce, scotch pine, and fir. And again, the Welsh Nationalists reacted to the plan with anger:

> 'as usual, English vested interests are the cause. It pays to grow pitprops and there is a huge demand for early-maturing soft wood for wood pulp ... In large part, this is due to the demand of the newspaper for wood pulp.' (89)

R.S. Thomas has always held a pristine image of Wales. As a 'nature mystic', his joy and inspiration derive from his journey in the Welsh countryside. The afforestation plan obviously shocked him, and he felt like other Welsh Nationalists its damaging effect on the pastures and the arable land:

> 'The grass feeds the sheep;
> The sheep give the wool
> For warm clothing, but these -?
> I see the cheap times
> Against which they grow:
> Thin houses for dupes,
> Pages of pale trash,
> A world that has gone sour
> With spruce.' (90)
> (Afforestation)

But it was against the strangers to the land that he mostly directed his attacks. In 'Invasion on the farm' R.S. Thomas himself seems to be a stranger to the peasant:

> 'I don't know
> What you are talking about; your thoughts flow
> Too swiftly for me ...' (91)

And significantly enough, this simple gesture on the part

of the peasant is gradually developed into a form of anglo-phobia - where the voice of the peasant diminishes and instead there is a direct warning from R.S. Thomas himself:

'We don't like your white cottage.
We don't like the way you live.
Their sins are venial, the folk
With green blouses you displace.' (92)
(Strangers)

It is not only their way of life that is rejected by R.S. Thomas; their language is also turned down:

'You will offend with your speech
Winds that preferred hands
Wrung with despair, profound
Audiences of the dead.' (93)
(Strangers)

This is because Wales is a sacred land with its own ancient language. It is the land of saints and bards who enriched this language over the centuries with their wise sayings.

Now this ancient language is replaced by an alien one. R.S. Thomas in 'Border Blues' relates how St. Beuno was struck by hearing the English language in Wales:

'I was going up the road and Beuno beside me
Talking in Latin and old Welsh,
When a volley of voices struck us; I turned,
But Beuno had vanished, and in his place
There stood the ladies from council houses:
Blue eyes and Birmingham yellow
Hair, and the ritual murder of vowels.' (94)

The English influence in Wales has totally eradicated the ancient roots; there are no traces of the traditional way of life:

'Branwen was the Helen of Wales, wasn't she? Many of us, I'm sure, hold an image of her in our hearts, not as she is in her rectangular grave on the banks of the river Alaw in Anglesey, but as she was in her lifetime - the fairest maiden alive. There are still a few Branwens in Wales. Did I not hear the name once and turn, thinking she might steal my heart away? Who did I see but a stupid, mocking slut, her dull eyes made blue by daubings of mascara - a girl to whom Wales was no more than a name, and a name fast becoming obsolete.' (95)

And there are good reasons to believe that the English have infiltrated Wales by offering the Welsh farmers large sums of money to sell their farms.

Eventually, the Welsh farmers would either migrate to the south or work as hirelings on their own farms. The master of the land becomes a slave:

> 'Nothing is his, neither the land
> Nor the land's flocks. Hired to live
> On hills too lonely, sharing his hearth
> With cats and hens, he has lost all
> Property but the grey ice
> Of a face splintered by life's stone.' (96)
> (Hireling)

But the English, not only occupied the land, they also brought an alien body as harmful as themselves to Wales: the machine.

The emergence of the machine in Wales is the direct result of the English intervention in Wales. The Welsh have become politically dependent on the English and economically on the machine.

In 'Eviction', R.S. Thomas illustrates how the machine is associated with the stranger:

> 'No not you,
> But someone who has taken your name,
> Your work, your home, and without feeling
> Bundles into the hills' hushed
> Theatre, where your drama was played,
> His jazz band of gadgets and wheels.' (97)

And eventually, the machine becomes part of the farmer's life as he yields to the stranger's temptation. R.S. Thomas in his address to the farmer, reveals his indignation about the farmer's naivety and lack of social principles:

> 'But look at yourself
> Now, a servant hired to flog
> The life out of the slow soil,
> Or come obediently as a dog

To the pound's whistle. Can't you see
Behind the smile on the times' face
The cold brain of the machine
That will destroy you and your race?' (98)
(Too Late)

The Welsh farmers, therefore, have become servants of the machine and the English masters, the manipulators of the machine.

Consequently, the Welsh countryside, which once was serene and full of inspiration, is transformed into a scene of conflagration, disturbing the dead:

'It is the machine wins;
the land suffers the formication
of its presence. Places that
would have preferred peace
have had their bowels opened; our
children paddle thoughtlessly there in the mess.'
(Welsh Summer) (99)

R.S. Thomas is alone in his confrontation with the machine and its manipulators. He cannot win the war, for the English have also brought up a number of Welshmen who are prepared to safeguard their interest in Wales. These Welshmen are ineffective nationalists:

'Oh, I know them: reputable men,
Makers of verse, scholars, lecturers,
But without power, ineffectual.
None of them will ever set a bomb
Alight or bring disaster
On England. I see them going
About their business, borrowing a glory
From the setting of the Welsh sun.' (100)
(The Need)

The Welsh have become so attached to the English way of life, that nothing can stir their emotion. As a result of the suppression by the English education system and media, Welsh history and culture gradually diminish unnoticed. The Welsh, now are diverted towards English history in the books and on the television:

'I have drawn the curtains
on the raw sky where our history
bleeds, where Cilgwri's ousel
on my ramshackle aerial
keeps the past's goal
against the balls of tomorrow.' (101)
(He agrees with Henry Ford)

It is worth noting that his reproach of his fellow Welsh and his resentment against the English are considered by him as necessary acts of nationalism. R.S. Thomas may not be as militant as many poets in the Third World whose hatred of colonialism and imperialism has become a cliché, and yet his attitude to the English domination of Wales is as solid as it was many years ago.

In the next chapter, we shall study the poetry of an Arab nationalist, Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi, who was a staunch supporter of Jamal Abdul Nasir, the father of Arab Nationalism. Attempts also will be made to focus on the similarities between him and R.S. Thomas. One of the views that both poets share is their attitude to colonialism. Hijazi's position will be discussed in Chapter Ten of this work. Meanwhile , it is significant to note that R.S. Thomas's stand has never changed. 'It is England', he said several years ago, 'the home of the industrial revolution, and the consequent twentieth century rationalism, that have been the winter on our native pastures, and we must break their grip, and the grip of all the quislings and yes-men before we can strike that authentic note'.(102) And some years later he repeated the same view:

'Our land today is being taken over by the English completely legally, according to English law, namely by means of money, and most of our fellow Welshmen do not care at all, so long as they make a profit.' (103)

It is very interesting to observe that while R.S. Thomas appreciated the English Romantics, Wordsworth in particular, as well as Edward Thomas, whose portrayal of English landscape was as pure as Thomas's own depiction of Wales, yet he never envisaged England as the land of beauty. If he turned his eyes towards England, probably, he would see something quite different:

> 'In England I saw the Chained Book
> And prayer like battle smoke rising
> From the leaden Cathedrals, I bruised my hands
> On the bread, my mind on the festering blood
> In the jewelled chalice.' (104)
> (Retrospect)

Furthermore, England is the land of materialism where God's gifts of love and peace do not exist. It is the land of:

> 'tanks
> and guns; the processions
> that go nowhere; the medals
> and gold braid; the government's
> yearly awards; the replenishment
> of the clapped ranks of
> the peerage.' (105)
> (His condescensions are short-lived)

If R.S. Thomas's picture of England is so distorted, his portrayal of the English royal family cannot be better. His view of the queen is that of a despotic and tyrannical ruler who causes suffering to mankind. It was from England that the white man sailed to America to kill the natives and occupy the land.

In a poem meant to be read by young people, R.S. Thomas points to the difference between the Queen of England and the Red American:

> 'The queen sat on the throne of England,
> Fingering delicately the bright stones
> Of its handrail. The heads rolled

In the English dust. The queen smiled.
Meanwhile in America a Red Indian
Fitted a coloured arrow to his bow
And took him. The brush turkey fell
In a storm of feathers.' (106)
(Omens)

This picture of the Queen of England and the Red Indian strikes a bitter note. While the Red Indian, who owns nothing is on his way to repent the killing of the bird, the Queen of England, whose fortune is beyond description, sends more men to America to seek more fortunes and destroy the Red Indians:

'Over the streaming entrails
He saw the first white man come with his guns
and jails.' (107)

And looking at Wales now, R.S. Thomas could see a similarity in the way the Welsh have been brought up to serve the English, though the Welsh 'have not yet been put into a reservation to scrape a living there.' (108)

And yet like the Red Indians, the Welsh have always hoped to live in peace with the English. Even when the English prince visits Wales, there is a reception and a show of loyalty, perhaps of a different kind:

'The prince walks up the carpet
Our hearts have unrolled
For him; a worn carpet,
I fear. We are a poor
People; we should have saved up
For this; these rents, these blood stains,
This erosion of the edges
Of it, do him no honour.' (109)
(Loyalties)

These lines sound like a petition that R.S. Thomas is presenting to the prince. What has been saved for a long time to soothe the poor people's agony, is now spent on this special occasion.

But the poem also implies that the prince is, in fact, unaware of the people's agony, or even what is going on outside the place. In 'To pay for his keep', R.S. Thomas illustrates the true picture behind the ceremony:

> 'He looked round
> At the perspiring ranks
> Of ageing respectables:
> Police, tradesmen, councillors,
> Rigid with imagined
> Loyalty; and beyond them at
> The town with its mean streets and
> Pavements filthy with
> Dog shit.' (110)

These are the people who prevent the prince from watching outside. In other words these are 'the quislings and yes-men' who only care for themselves. The prince is unable to see the dirt on the streets or even those Welshmen who have gathered to protest against the ceremony:

> 'And never noticed,
> Because of the dust raised
> By the prayers of the fagged
> Clergy, that far hill
> In the sun with the long line
> Of its trees climbing
> It like a procession
> Of young people, young as himself.' (111)
> (To pay for his keep)

The above lines refer directly to the demonstration by the young members of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith in 1969 in Caernarfon during the Investiture of the Prince of Wales. These young Welsh, as portrayed by R.S. Thomas, are not mere protesters: they are the Welshmen who have committed themselves to Wales, like faithful Christians who vowed to follow Christ even to crucifixion. It is worth mentioning at this stage that both the prince and the protesters outside the castle are familiar faces to R.S. Thomas. He met Prince Charles while he was chairman of the Bardsey Trust. The prince was on tour of the island which is a bird sanctuary and R.S. Thomas happened to be his guide.

As for the members of the Welsh Language Society, R.S. Thomas admits his debt to them:

> 'they've awakened me after all because I was not conscious of the importance of all these things, but after their efforts and seeing them going to prison, I've awakened to the injustice - and I do support them.' (112)

But R.S. Thomas does not only support the Society, as a matter of fact he is an active member of it. As mentioned in Chapter Eight of this Part, the emergence of The Welsh Language Society in 1962 as a response to Saunders Lewis's call to save the Welsh language by 'revolutionary methods', helped to revive the spirit of those Welshmen who had become disgruntled with the Party's policy on the Welsh language, and, at the same time, to unmask the false nationalism of other Welshmen.

The Society launched successful campaigns inside and outside Wales on behalf of the Welsh language. Their attempts to secure the position of the Welsh language in Wales, were costly, but worthwhile. Although many active members of the Society were sent to jail on charges of obstruction and other offences, yet it seemed that the Society was on its way to victory.

The Society was also successful in gaining publicity outside Wales, and its part in two sensitive incidents made the headlines of many journals. The first was in 1969, when some members of the Society 'began to interrupt the prince as he was about to address the Eisteddfod in Welsh'.(113) The second incident occurred in 1970 when a number of youths from the Society invaded the Law Courts in London.

Such acts of disobedience had in fact infuriated many English as well as Welsh, but, as observed by Ned Thomas, the aim was publicity:

> 'By taking advantage of the interest in the Prince and the Investiture in 1969, and by invading a court in London in 1970, the Society's members attracted more attention to their case than by endless demonstrations in Wales.' (114)

Within less than ten years of its founding, the Society was able to send its message to every corner of Britain. The Times of 15th May 1971 had this to say about it:

> 'Most members are well-educated and sincere in purpose, whatever the merits of their action. More important, they have the approval of a large and influential section of the Welsh-speaking population and the support of many academics, professional people and ministers of religion.' (115)

And in a letter sent to the Times on 28 May 1971, R.S. Thomas, Raymond Garlick, Gwyn Williams and E.M. Thomas protested 'against the contemptuous injustice to the Welsh language shown by the police, and those responsible for non-bilingual road-signs'.(116) This was obviously a direct support for the bilingual road-sign campaign which was carried out by the Society. R.S. Thomas supports the Society's activities and looks at its members with admiration:

> 'The only people who have shown any sign of a certain amount of independence and self-discipline, both necessary I think to the Welsh language, is young people who have been prepared to say, 'we're not going to stand for this, we're not going to see our old Welsh names mutilated by English influence; we're not going to give up speech which has been spoken for hundreds of years because it pays or because they think it pays, to change to English.' (117)

R.S. Thomas was and still is a staunch advocate of a Welsh monoglot society. This was the policy of the Welsh Nationalist Party in its first years. But under the pressure of a number of influential members of the Party, notably J.E.

Jones, the Party's secretary in 1930, and D.J. Davies, the Party's economic policy maker, a change in the Party's language policy seemed inevitable. The publication of The Welsh Nationalist in 1932 for the English-speaking Welsh was a great step towards attracting the Welsh community in the south towards the Party.

Apparently, there were two factors which must have led the Welsh Nationalists to focus on the English-speaking Welsh of the south.

On the one hand, there was clear evidence that the number of Welsh-speakers in the south was in decline. On the other hand, the Labour Party was gaining votes even in the diminishing Welsh-speaking community.

Thus the south was a scene of tremendous rivalry between various parties.

The approval of bilingual policy by the Welsh Nationalist Party in 1969, came as a shock to R.S. Thomas. He expressed his frustration in an article published in 1978 and entitled 'The Creative Writer's Suicide':

> 'This devilish bilingualism! O, I know about all the arguments in favour of it: how it enriches one's personality, how it sharpens one's mind, how it enables one to enjoy the best of two worlds and so on. Very likely. But to anyone in Wales who desires to write, it is a millstone around his neck. That is, I agree with those who claim that the best literature comes from a monoglot nation.' [118]

This bilingual policy, which was regarded by the Nationalist' leaders as necessary, was obviously a setback to R.S. Thomas' dream of living in a Welsh Wales.

Today, R.S. Thomas is among the minority who still argue against bilingualism. To many he seems very narrowminded and perhaps very extreme. And yet taking into consideration his political principles, though one should admit that his political consciousness is not as strong as that of Saunders Lewis or Gwynfor Evans, it is obvious that they are devoid of bigotry.

His argument against bilingualism is based on the assumption that each 'independent nation' has 'its own language'.(119)

A bilingual policy in Wales, would deprive the Welsh language of its proper status which he sees as to be the only language of the people of Wales. Besides, it might not be the second language of many Welshmen either.

The reason why, according to R.S. Thomas, the Welsh language cannot compete or cannot be used along with the English language is because English 'is a richer language, a language more suited than Welsh to the thousands of demands made upon it'.(120)

Supportive to R.S. Thomas's statement is J.R. Jones's philosophical argument why in a dialogue between a Welsh-speaker and a non-Welsh-speaker, the language will automatically be in English:

> 'Welsh would indeed be the subject of the dialogue, but since it would have no part as the language of the dialogue, the dialogue would be distorted to the disadvantage of Welsh from the very start.' (121)

R.S. Thomas, is therefore, not alone in realizing that the Welsh language is doomed once placed side by side with English.

In 'Resort', he cynically touches on this issue of bilingualism, while following the English tourists step by step:

> 'On the conveyor belt
> Of their interests they circle the town
> To emerge jaded at the pier;
> To look at the water with dull eyes
> Resentfully, not understanding
> A syllable. Did they expect
> The sea, too, to be bilingual?' (122)

Anthony Conran's remark on the above last two lines in which he argues that, 'what difference would it have made if all the trippers had been Welsh-speakers from Llanelli', (123) might not be to the liking of R.S. Thomas, but he is certainly right when he states that R.S. Thomas's 'nationalism grows more impish as he gets older'.(124)

And naturally at the core of his nationalism, lies his commitment to Wales. Even his position as a priest does not preclude his making a political statement about Wales:

> 'The crisis which is disturbing the nation is
> caused by political pressure; it must therefore
> be resolved politically." (125)

And when he beats on sensitive political themes, his message is clear:

> 'Nations
> Are claustrophobic; they are the small yawns
> of history, the indigestion an empire
> must suffer for doing mankind the service
> of swallowing them. Take Ireland ...'
> 'A fishbone
> in Her Majesty's throat!' (126)
> (The Lecture)

It is not therefore, out of political blindness that he makes such statements; they are the result of his full understanding of the Welsh crisis. He has lived long enough to realize that the Parties slogans and their promises of future reforms are false. It is only during the elections that the candidates appear in front of the people. To

R.S. Thomas, these candidates are like ravens:

> 'It was the time of the election.
> The ravens loitered above the hill
> In slow circles; they had all air
> To themselves. No eyes were lifted
> From the streets, no ears heard
> Them exulting, recalling their long
> History, presidents of the battles
> Of flesh, the sly connoisseurs
> Of carrion; ...' (127)
> (Ravens)

Having observed with suffering the futility of various Parties in Wales in attempting to bring a tangible solution to the Welsh crisis, R.S. Thomas no longer puts his trust in Parliamentary reforms.

When he scrutinizes the Parties in Wales, the real background and role of each Party is revealed. His view of the Conservative Party is that it is the emblem of the old aristocracy which had almost vanished in Wales. The Labour Party is alien, since it is attached to the English Labour Party, and thus its concern is with the working-class. The Liberals, however, are the protectors of the English Empire rather than of Wales. Despite his frustration with the Welsh Nationalist Party (Plaid Cymru), he still believes that it is the only party that represents the interests of the Welsh nation.

R.S. Thomas votes for Plaid Cymru because as he himself says he has 'nobody else to vote for'.(128)

In 'He has the vote', R.S. Thomas traces the background of each Party:

> 'Vote Tory - this little
> nation of ... what does crachach
> mean?

(Every drop
of water is worth the weight
in tears, but they are running
out now like the variations on
the cynghanedd)

Vote
Labour and protect
Your class. There is an aristocracy
Of the pit, too.

Vote Liberal
and allow England to enjoy
your prospects.

Vote Plaid, mun
and be dammed for your own sake.' (129)

The Blaid cannot obviously fulfil the demands of the Welsh landlords, who thus naturally vote Tory. It cannot defend the interests of the Socialists either, and therefore they vote Labour. It is only Plaid Cymru that has not got a label attached to it, because it is the Party for the Welsh and for Wales.

Besides his frustration with the various Parties in Wales, R.S. Thomas became totally furious with his fellow Welshmen, when in March 1979 they voted against the Devolution Bill. Once again they proved to him that they were not yet ready to control their own affairs:

> 'If you're not responsible for your own affairs - and this was very obvious in the referendum, that showed that they prefer not to make the effort to become responsible, would rather leave it, and it showed this, which is a sign of lack of self-respect and self-confidence.' (130)

But there are Welshmen whom R.S. Thomas admired and followed. Both Gwenallt and Saunders Lewis epitomize true Welshness for R.S. Thomas. Gwenallt, in the words of Ned Thomas:

> '... is our national poet of the century not because he celebrates Wales but because he expresses the passions and tensions at work here without

leaving anything out.' (131)

Gwenallt was a devoted Welshman before and after his return to Christianity. Even after he had abandoned his Marxist ideology, one could easily detect a sense of unity between Socialism and Christianity in his poetry.

In his poem dedicated to Saunders Lewis on the occasion of the burning of the Bombing School in Llŷn, he departs from the Welsh tradition of praise offering:

'You were a fool because you lived your land,
A fool - as Christ's and Mary's martyrs were
At you men fling whatever comes to hand
As though you were Aunt Sally at the Fair.' (132)
(Saunders Lewis)

Gwenallt was perhaps one of the most conscientious Welsh poets who imbued the Welsh language with the themes of resistance and devotion. R.S. Thomas, who 'used to see Gwenallt from time to time and have a chat with him',(133) admired his commitment to the Welsh language:

'he'll take you
Any time on a tour
Of the Welsh language, its flowering
While yours was clay soil.' (134)
(A Lecturer)

Saunders Lewis, as well, was regarded by R.S. Thomas as a man of great talent. Though R.S. Thomas found his deserting the literary scene to become more active in politics, as a loss, yet he praised him for this sacrifice 'to avert national extinction'.(136)

It was Saunders Lewis's articles in Welsh on Welsh issues, especially the Welsh language, that converted R.S. Thomas to Welsh Nationalism. Unlike other nationalists, he had

never heard of the Bombing School incident. Later on, he regretted that by saying:

> ' ...had I been living in a Welsh-speaking part I probably would have been aware of it, but I didn't even hear of it.' (137)

While in Manavon, R.S. Thomas went to see Saunders Lewis, and probably he noticed Lewis's skill of speech. Such extraordinary characteristics were demonstrated on many occasions. The most notable were, first, his long and touching speech to the Welsh Jury in 1936 at Caernarfon which ended in their failure to agree on a verdict. Second, his radio lecture, Tynged Yr Iaith (The Fate of the Language) in 1962 which gave birth to Cymdeithas Yr Iaith (The Welsh Language Society).

R.S. Thomas obviously realized the effect of such a skill when he said:

> 'He had that rare gift that what he said,
> Even the simplest statement, could inflame
> The mind and heart of the hearer.' (138)
> (The Patriot)

He also understood the fierce message that his words could convey:

> 'Those, who saw
> For the first time that small figure
> With the Welsh words leaving his lips
> As quietly as doves on an errand
> Of peace-making, could not imagine
> The fierceness of their huge entry
> At the ear's porch.' (139)
> (The Patriot)

But it was not only Saunders Lewis's words that were fierce, and interesting to R.S. Thomas. There is something more in his reverence for Lewis. In fact, they both share the agony of this nation, and bear its sufferings.

Saunders Lewis's participation and active involvement in various national events aimed only at awakening the Welsh from their lethargy. R.S. Thomas not only praises Saunders Lewis, but at the same time seems to identify himself with him:

> 'And he dared them;
> Dared them to grow old and bitter
> As he. He kept his pen clean
> By burying it in their fat
> Flesh.' (140)
> (Saunders Lewis)

For Saunders Lewis was not an ordinary Welshman. His devotion to Wales and commitment to the Welsh language were indisputable. He loved Wales and suffered for its sake:

> 'He was ascetic and Wales
> His diet. He lived off the harsh fare
> Of her troubles, worn yet heady
> At moments with the poets' wine.' (141)
> (Saunders Lewis)

And like R.S. Thomas himself, Lewis was also a rebel:

> 'Unhabited
> He moved among us; would have led
> To rebellion.' (142)

Saunders Lewis's devotion and suffering can be seen as those of a saviour whose law breaking acts have only one aim; to inject into his people the spirit of resistance against injustice.

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CHAPTER TEN

HIJAZI AND THE POETRY OF REVOLUTION

The arrival of Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi on the Egyptian political and literary scene, happened at a time when the Egyptian Revolution led by Jamal Abdul Nasir was already enjoying the support of Egypt and the other Arab nations, and when the 'New Poetry' had become a well-established school.

In 1959 in his preface to one of his moving poems about the Algerian Revolution, he wrote:

> 'I have found in the ideal of Arab Nationalism an embodiment of the spirit of the people, as well as my own personal salvation from a violent intellectual crisis which nearly drove me to a psychological breakdown.'(1)

Hijazi's nationalism is best represented in his poems dedicated to Abdul Nasir before and after his death, and those written in sympathy with other Arab nations in their struggle for independence.

Besides his commitment to Arab Nationalism which was the core of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Hijazi is also regarded by critics as one of the staunchest supporters and advocates of the 'New Poetry' movement. In all his poems except a few, he adopts the new form of poetry which was later on known as free verse.

But before we proceed, it is worth stressing that in the case of Hijazi's nationalism we are dealing with a successful nationalist movement as compared with R.S. Thomas's unful-

filled nationalist dreams. Hijazi's nationalism found an institutional reality as a result of the July Revolution of 1952 in Egypt. Though the comparison between the Arab Revolution of July 1952 in Egypt and the emergence of the Welsh Nationalist Party in August 1925 is very minimal, since the latter has not been, so far, in a position to put its principles into practice by taking control of Wales, the mere fact that both Hijazi and R.S. Thomas show commitment to the principles of nationalism, either within a revolution or a party, is enough to allow some parallel study in relation to their role and adherence to their principles.

Hence, our concern in this chapter is focused on Hijazi's response to the Arab Revolution of 1952. Any similarities or differences which exist between him and R.S. Thomas are analysed from the point of view of the individuals without further elaboration or emphasis on the achievements of the Arab Revolution in Egypt or the Welsh Nationalist Party in Wales.

Hijazi was born in a village,and for a long time he remained a village-oriented man. Later, when he moved to Cairo, he could not rid himself of certain religious and traditional values of Egyptian rural life. But then Cairo became the centre of revolution and the source of inspiration to many revolutionary poets of the time. If Hijazi wanted to be the poet of revolution, he had no choice but to identify himself with Cairo.

While living in Cairo, though, he managed to adjust himself to the complex structure of urban life and became gradually involved in issues and matters related to Arab Nationalism, the sense of alienation and detachment from the life there continued to haunt his mind as is well illustrated in his first collection Heartless City.

Hijazi's description of the complexity and cruelty of life in the city which he portrayed in his early poems, and which produced his strong sense of alienation, brings him very close to the same view held by R.S. Thomas. Both poets reject the life style of the people in the cities, both feel like strangers there.

R.S. Thomas in 'A Welshman in St. James' Park' seems like a lonely wanderer, separate from the 'public'. He is unable to share their joys and does not appreciate the artificial beauty of the flowers in the park.

Hijazi goes through the same process of refusing to accept the fact that now, in the city, he is considered one of the people.

Both Hijazi and R.S. Thomas dissent from the code of life in the city and prefer to return to the countryside. Hijazi's nostalgia for his village is as strong as R.S. Thomas's passion for the Welsh countryside. Both are in search of peace and natural beauty.

In his early poem 'Heartless City', Hijazi expresses his

longing for his village:

> 'In villages the horizon is spacious and free,
> Tender and soft and pink it embraces the cottages
> In it the trees sway like howdahs
> Oh how I wish we were there now, walking under its deep silence
> And its soft, hazy light,
> And island of life.' (2)

R.S. Thomas in 'The earth does its best for him' shows no hesitation in his intention to return to the Welsh countryside:

> ' ... Through the car's
> open windows the scent of hay
> comes. It is incense, the seasonally
> renewed offering of the live earth.' (3)

R.S. Thomas's uneasiness about the life in the cities, as seen earlier on, stems from the fact that he finds cities to be incompatible with the Welsh way of life. They are the creation of the English whose aim he sees as being the disintegration of the traditional Welsh community.

Hijazi's discomfort seems to originate from a similar political source. As a villager he was brought up to believe that Egyptian society was divided into classes and communities: villagers and citydwellers, Copts and Moslems, upper class and lower class and so on.

The Egyptian peasantry was a depressed class in the eyes of the city people, for whom, villagers were naive, illiterate and backward. So it was natural for a village-born man like Hijazi to look at the city with a sense of horror and disgust.

Even after the revolution of July 1952, Hijazi was still ambivalent towards the city. The legacy of its supremacy

haunted him for a long time. But while he gradually succeeded in adjusting himself to the norms of the city, R.S. Thomas remains adamant against coming to terms with the life style of the Welsh industrial cities.

The main impetus behind Hijazi's change was political: in short, one of the responsibilities of the new leaders was to remove this barrier which separated the villager from the city dweller.

In the previous chapter we tried to trace and illustrate R.S. Thomas's views in support of the Welsh Nationalist Party. Here, attempts are made, first to establish a link between Hijazi and the Arab revolution of 1952, and secondly to deal with those poems in which he celebrated the revolution.

In his poem, entitled 'Tammuz', he compares the revolution to the birth of the god Tammuz whose resurrection, which happens once in a year, is a sign of joy and happiness:

> 'Tammuz! the season of our uprising
> We drink from its sun, and water it
> And walk in its path mightily.
> What mountains? What sea? Or its surroundings?
> Tammuz is within every freeman of us,
> A heart as named by its inspirer
> At the dawn of its twenty third
> We rose to our horses with appeal.' (4)

The use of myth in the above poem is significant, for it is an indication of Western influences, especially that of T.S. Eliot, whose poetry was translated into Arabic. In his portrayal of the July Revolution, Hijazi makes every effort to highlight the image of its leader and inspirer

Abdul Nasir.

In the first poem on Nasir entitled 'Abdul Nasir', and published in his first collection Heartless City in 1956, he takes the role of a court poet who accompanies his master in his victory. In his address to the poets, he asks them to watch and follow his movement while he is in the company of his master.

The poem ends with a wish that like Nasir, he be remembered:

> 'You poets and historians of this age
> You may write about a poet
> Who was here
> In the era of the great Abdul Nasir.' (5)

It is worth noting that Hijazi's admiration of Nasir was in fact, shared at that period by many writers in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. This was the period before the 1967 war in which Egypt under Nasir was defeated. Prior to 1967, it was Nasir's achievement inside Egypt and his persistence in calling for an independent Arab nation that mattered.

In another poem entitled 'The Hero' and dedicated to Nasir, Hijazi creates a scene akin to that of the Arabian Nights. He would not sing to 'an adventurous knight', or even to a saint whose 'horse is a moon and his sword the hand of Fate.' (6)

In Wales it was the impact of the burning of the bombing school in 1936 and the rising image of Saunders Lewis that eventually awakened many Welshmen to the harsh reality of their country's condition. Like Hijazi, the keen support-

er of Nasir, R.S. Thomas has never concealed his admiration for Saunders Lewis, and is one of those Welshmen who still accepts whole-heartedly Saunders Lewis's views on the Welsh language and industrialism. R.S. Thomas's withdrawal from Welsh politics in the sixties could be a direct result of Plaid Cymru's new policies, in particular, the adoption of a bilingual policy for Wales.

It is worth noting at this stage that The Liberation Rally, the party which was organized by Nasir with its aim 'to bind the people to the Revolution' (7) also underwent several changes. The most crucial one was in 1961 when The Arab Socialist Union was founded.

But while R.S. Thomas isolated himself refusing to change when the original policy of The Welsh Nationalist Party was modified to suit the present situation, Hijazi remained active, keeping abreast of the development which transformed Arab Nationalism into Arab Socialism.

In his poem 'A Song to the Arab Socialist Union' he celebrates its birth. The Union becomes his family and his country. And being a poet he wants it to:

> 'Be my epic
> So that I relate to simple people
> We ride in it our horses and conquer the cities of love
> And free in it the prisoners.' (8)

But the principles advocated by Nasir, which were a combination of Nationalism and Socialism, could not be easily digested by the Egyptians, in spite of the indoctrination programmes.

Hijazi, like many other nationalists, was aware of this problem of adopting a new ideology.

In 'the Story of the Princess and the Boy who speaks to the Evening', he portrays two different characters; the princess represents the upper-class, whose power after the revolution was diminished, and the boy stands for the poor and needy. While she entertains her guests, the boy who is outside alone contemplates his life:

> 'He speaks to the evening
> You the welcome ethereal sadness
> The strange companion
> I am the earth's speech ... Did you listen to me?
> I am a million eyes ...Did you look at me?
> I have a small request
> That life be the nest of love
> With a loaf of bread and a laughing child.'(9)

Poverty and starvation which were the dominant social problems of the pre-revolution period, still lingered after the Revolution. In 'The Begging Prince', Hijazi describes the daily life of a beggar. In his portrayal of the beggar's life, Hijazi touches on certain sensitive aspects that remind one of R.S. Thomas's delineation of the Welsh peasant. Like the Welsh peasant, Hijazi's beggar is naive and simple. Both poets describe the physical features of their characters with utmost clarity. R.S. Thomas's striking descriptions of the Welsh peasant, which appear more or less like photographs, are the result of his own observation and involvement in the peasants' lives.

For both poets the cause of this hardship is political. R.S. Thomas has always held the view that the English infiltration in Wales has deprived the Welsh farmer of his liveli-

hood.

For Hijazi the cause of poverty and wide-spread begging in the streets of Cairo, are the direct outcome of the previous regime. Most of these outcasts had been driven from their lands by the landowners and consequently became beggars in the cities. But more than to anyone else, Hijazi showed sympathy for the Egyptian farmer. His affection for the Egyptian farmer brings him very close to R.S. Thomas. In 'We Sing on the Road', the farmers present their views without Hijazi's intervention:

> 'We are farmers ...homeless, and without children,
> We walk in a group in the sun,
> Our shadows shorten and lengthen
> As we walk, in search of a country in God's lands
> To sleep in the shade of its mosque
> And drink our tea at the door of its cafe
> And we proceed carrying our axes on our shoulders
> from birth to death
> Our gathering in the sun has increased
> And the desert is filled with us.
> Are all people strange farmers
> Homeless and without children?' (10)

R.S. Thomas in 'The Hill Farmer Speaks' also gives the Welsh peasant a chance to speak:

> 'I am the farmer, stripped of love
> and thought and grace by the land's hardness;
> But what I am saying over the fields'
> Desolate acres, rough with dew,
> Is, listen, listen, I am a man like you.'(11)

In 'Invasion on the Farm', the Welsh peasant presents another view:

> 'I am alone, exposed
> In my own fields with no place to run
> From your sharp eyes.' (12)

As with Hijazi, R.S. Thomas's fundamental affection and sympathy for the Welsh peasants are undisputable. But unlike Hijazi who hardly reproaches his farmers even when

they desert their farms to live in the city, R.S. Thomas's remarks are not always friendly:

> 'The earth is beautiful, and he is blind
> To it all, or notices only the weed's way
> Of wrestling with and choking the young hay
> That pushes tentatively fromthe gaunt womb.'(13)

While R.S. Thomas's peasants are often portrayed as naive and ignorant, Hijazi's farmers are aware of the consequences of their acts. They still remember how they had been sent away when they were children by their fathers with:

> 'Examples of beautiful patience, and some songs,
> A song about love and strangeness
> A song about prison and repentance
> And a song about promise.
> We sing on the road as we look back at our deserted houses
> We sing when we embrace the evening
> And when the city's fences appear
> Stealing the eyes from distance
> We sing when we look from the train's windows
> At our green land.' (14)

The feeling of strangeness on the part of the Egyptian farmers had already been experienced by Hijazi himself. But besides this sense of alienation, the farmers' move to the city often results in misfortunes, they either become beggars or commit crimes. In the words of R.S. Thomas, 'a life in the towns or lowlands', for the Welsh peasants 'is no life at all, for they would be deracinés.'(15)

Besides being the poet of the farmers and homeless, Hijazi also wrote about the patriotic role of the Egyptian soldiers on various occasions.

In his two long poems, the first entitled 'Blood and Silence', and the second 'The Sea and the Volcano', he relates the enthusiasm and the national pride of the Egyptian soldiers

fighting for a glorious cause. Besides his celebration of the Egyptian soldiers on their way to fight the enemy, his portrayal and depiction of the Arabs struggling for independence, constitute another aspect of his commitment to Arab Nationalism.

This was, undoubtedly, one of the principal goals of the July Revolution. From the outset, there were attempts by the leaders of the Revolution to expand their nationalistic principles to other Arab countries, in particular to Syria, Iraq and Algeria.

In 1958 Egypt joined with Syria to form the United Arab Republic. This was to be the first step towards Arab unity, The union also prompted the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, and Algerian Independence of 1962.

Although the Egyptian-Syrian Union came to an end in 1961 as a result of internal pressures from opposing elements - landowners, capitalists, and opportunists in Syria - Nasir's call for 'an Arab nation from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arab Gulf' (16) never ceased. As a devoted nationalist, Hijazi also looked forward to a united Arab state. In 'Syria and the Wind', he displays the same nationalistic enthusiasm. Syria becomes his homeland just like Egypt.

But in 'The Return of February' (February was the month in which the Union with Syria was celebrated) he recalls the later secession with sadness and wishes that February would return.

The poem is filled with references to characters and events in the past as well as the present history of the Arabs. But the most interesting and controversial references are made to Jesus Christ and Hussein Ibn Ali, the third Shi'ite Imam. In his first reference to Jesus Christ, Hijazi establishes the fact that like Jesus Christ, the month of February was to die without any help. Then he refers to one of the great names in the history of Islam:

'As though I heard a voice weeping
Here is Hussein alone in Karbala
Still fighting alone
With a face covered with dust
Dying of thirst
And the Umayyads are on the bank of the near river.'(17)

Whereas February in the first lines is compared to Jesus Christ, since both, in Hijazi's view, are crucified, Nasir is compared to Hussein Ibn Ali,who was killed along with his seventy-two followers on the battlefield of Karbala by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid. In 'Baghdad and Death' which was written a few months after the military officers seized power in Iraq in 1958 and the royal family were dethroned, Hijazi recalls the great Arab leader Saladin who defeated the Crusaders in 1187 and united the Arabs.

Saladin's heroic deeds and personality became an emblem of Arab Nationalism in Egypt during Nasir's reign. Hijazi, in his reference to Saladin, first aims at glorifying his image and secondly, reminds the Iraqi people that such a great leader came from Iraq:

'The Child of Babylon is on the door of defence,
Has not closed his eyes or has quietened next to him
an arm,
Elevated and agitated with an exposed wound
As though preaching to his soldiers on the day of fight

As though still running away reversing the wind
Oh ... Salah!
Oh ... Salah!
The children of Baghdad in the wall whisper
Answer us! Your long silence tear the beautiful patience
Answer us! What have you done the year of your departure
Oh the leader of revolutionaries!
The bewildered of a noble dream!
Will the dispersed Arabs be united?' (18)

It is interesting to note that R.S. Thomas also refers to the names of Welsh heroes of the past for political reasons. In 'Genealogy' he traces Welsh history from Arthur to the present time by relating the events which are attributed to Welsh princes like Llywelyn the Last, Maelgwn Gwynedd, and Glyndŵr. The aim of both Hijazi and R.S. Thomas in reviving the names of past heroes, is simply to remind their people that once such heroes defended their land and fought against invaders.

In another poem about Iraq entitled 'A Song to Baghdad', Hijazi again describes the Iraqi people's uprising against the royal family. In this poem, he assures the Iraqi people that he is, in fact, with them in their march to seize the King's castle:

'Comrades, from here I accompany you
Carrying with you the memories which are our motto
And fight under their shade and sing to the day we meet!' (19)

Hijazi's solidarity with other Arabs, in particular the North Africans of Morocco and Algeria, is seen in his long poem 'Aures' and 'The Saint'.

In his introduction to 'Aures', Hijazi mentions how he wrote the poem after meeting a number of Arab youths from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula:

> 'I was introduced to them in that legendary period which witnessed the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the abduction of Ben Bella, and the affirmation of an Arab Egypt by Abdul Nasir.' (20)

And his new friends told him 'with enthusiasm, suffering and vigour about the battles, the people, the leaders and the grassy flowering woody and flaming land of Algeria.'(21)

In 'Aures' Hijazi attempts to establish the long forgotten fact that, once in history, the Arabs were renowned for their heroism against the foreign invaders, the Tartars and the Crusaders. The struggle of the Algerian people against the French is a continuation of that heroism:

> 'The cities of Al Maghreb
> Tremble on the summit of Aures
> And the eastern wind blows
> Pierces the snow with its claws
> And upturns the waves' entrails,
> And a roar like a glow passes
> Annihilating the summit and the hills.
> Ben Bella!
> They assassinated Ben Bella!
> Revolution. Revolution.
> How great is the day of revolution.' (22)

But the most inspiring account of the Algerian Revolution is recorded in his poem 'The Saint' which depicts the sacrifice of Jameela Bu-herid, the Algerian girl who was viciously tortured by the French during the struggle for independence.

In the early sixties almost all Arab countries became independent, and thus, perhaps Abdul Nasir's dream of independent Arab states was partially fulfilled. His ambition of a United Arab States, however, needed more time to become a reality.

On 28 September 1970, the sudden death of Nasir was announced,

and this brought to an end an era of intensive political activity in the Egyptian and larger Arab Sphere.' (23)

In three poems written after Nasir's death and entitled, 'The Poet and the Hero', 'The Journey Has Begun', and 'An Elegy on the Handsome Age', Hijazi presents with utmost sincerity, his mixed feelings of sorrow, regret and praise. In the first poem, 'The Poet and the Hero', he focuses on Nasir's heroic acts and how he prompted the liberation of Arab countries from the tyranny of the kings. In 'The Journey Has Begun', he creates a rather gloomy scene filled with sorrow and agony, as the poor people await Nasir's arrival. The last poem 'Elegy on the Handsome Age', focuses on the affinity which ties him to Nasir and which has remained even after Nasir's death. In the opening lines, Hijazi offers Nasir his greetings:

> 'This is the end of the land
> And nothing left but separation.
> I shall dig you here a grave
> And keep a nightingale from your brigade as its witness
> And say my greetings.' (24)

As we explore the poem fully, there is a feeling that Hijazi seems to regret those years he devoted himself to Nasir. There is a note of self-condemnation as he realizes that he wasted those years dreaming. Such a feeling obviously reminds us of R.S. Thomas's uneasiness at realizing that he has spent many years propagandizing on behalf of Wales.

But there comes a time when even the most militant poet reaches that stage in his career where he feels that he has nothing new to offer. Hijazi and R.S. Thomas have reached that stage; they have no more to say.

Notes and References

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4. Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi - There Remains Only Confession in Diwan p.265.

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7. Majid Khadduri, Political Trends in the Arab World, p.143.

8. Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi Diwan p.327

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12. R.S. Thomas, Song at the Year's Turning, p.102.

13. R.S. Thomas, An Acre of Land, p.31.

14. Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi, Diwan, p.329.

15. R.S. Thomas, 'The Depopulation of the Welsh Hill Country' in Selected Prose, p.24.

16. R. Hrair Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir, p.93.

17. Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi, Diwan, p.359.

18. Ibid., p.180.

19. Ibid., p.360.

20. Ibid., p.390.

21. Ibid., 392.

22. Ibid., p.402.

23. R. Hrair Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir, p.302.

24. Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi, Diwan, p.346.

CONCLUSION

In his review of Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee, R.S. Thomas, while referring to the predicament of the Red Indians, makes the following statement:

> 'The sufferings of the Welsh are not to be compared with those of the Indians, although the decline of the Welsh has been going on for centuries. But there are comparisons to be made between them, and contrasts, each extremely significant. For instance, Wales was conquered by the English and our best land taken. Our land today is being taken over by the English completely legally, according to English law ...'
> (Selected Prose, p.179)

R.S. Thomas's affection for the Red Indians is obviously an indication of his humanitarian nature and tendency to stand beside oppressed people from every corner of the world.

In a recent interview with the writer of this study, he points to the tragedy of other nations:

> 'When I was in Eglwysfach, I was asked by Radio Diffusion to go up and do a commentary for a film which included the Palestinian problem at that time along with the Hong Kong situation where I saw Palestinians camping along the Israeli border because they had been pushed out, just as there were poor people in Hong Kong living in tin shanties on the side of the mountains while the rich people are in Hong Kong. So there's a kind of comparison in Wales, but it has not taken quite the same form - I mean - we haven't been pushed out in that way; we're still here, but we've been superseded by the English.' (4 May 1984)

It is therefore, important to note that R.S. Thomas's concern goes beyond Wales and its problems, though, undoubtedly, it is from his preoccupation with the political situation in Wales that his wider outlook on the human race emerges.

His affinity with the Red Indians and sympathy with Palestinians and the poor people of Hong Kong, his protest against the Vietnam War and any modern war which was published in his answer to The Review (No. 18, 1968) in regard to the Vietnam War, and his participation and involvement in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, are examples of his passion for mankind in general. Having stated that, it is also significant to state that R.S. Thomas's poetry is universal and his themes are as relevant to the threats to the human race as they are to problems in Wales.

The three Arab poets studied in this work deal with the same universal issues and their portrayal of these issues brings them very close to R.S. Thomas.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study provides an Arab perspective on the poetry of R.S. Thomas. In other words to find out how the three Arab poets chosen have responded to the themes of the past, the land and nationalism which are discussed in the poetry of R.S. Thomas. Have they dealt with the themes in the way R.S. Thomas has done, or does their portrayal show a difference of opinion and stance?

The themes of the past, the land and politics are neither confined to a particular century or literary movement nor even to be defined within the context of certain countries. But obviously, the depictions of such themes vary from one age to another and differ from one poet to another, especially if we take into consideration the social and

political factors of the period. The theme of the past, which is one aspect of man's preoccupation with time, is studied in the light of the poetry of R.S. Thomas and Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab. It is apparent that the concern of both poets is not the philosophical interpretation of time which we often find fused with a sense of pessimism as a result of fear of death or the absurdity of life.

The concept of the past for both R.S. Thomas and al-Sayyab conveys the recollection of events, characters and tradition of a community in the past, and personal memories in the form of reviving names of certain persons or longing for particular places in the past. As noticed in Part One of this study, the theme of the past is not original in the poetry of R.S. Thomas - many Anglo-Welsh poets have expressed their yearning for a past Wales, its history and culture - but it is in the poetry of R.S. Thomas that it becomes a dynamic theme. Thus, enhanced by their political significances, the names of Arthur, and Glyndŵr, the events of Catraeth and Hyddgen appear as alive and real as they were centuries ago.

The poetry of the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab exhibits the same vigorous tendency (tinged with political implications) towards the past.

It is, therefore, relevant to state tht the impetus behind both poets' yearning for the past is political. In this regard, one may mention R.S. Thomas's frustration with the present political situation in Wales and his resentment

of his own countrymen for their lack of action to find a tangible solution to the problems of Wales.

Al-Sayyab, on the other hand, went through a period of political victimization, first by the secret police who sent him to jail more than once, and finally drove him into exile, then by his own friends and Party members who boycotted him because of his change of belief; everything caused him to seek comfort in his memories of the past.

Nevertheless, the contrast between both poets is conspicuous. While R.S. Thomas's depiction of the past becomes less focused on personal contemplations as he embarks on displaying scenes from Welsh history and culture, al-Sayyab, having become aware of his incurable disease, tends to show more concern for his own consolations, and thus his nostalgia for the past becomes self-centred and his approach sentimental.

But then sentimentality has been and is the core of modern Arabic poetry. It reaches an uncontrollable level in the poems of another Arab poet, Mahmoud Darwish in his reference to the theme of the land. In his portrayal of Wales, there is hardly any attempt on the part of R.S. Thomas to romanticize it. For him Wales is the bare and lean land and the man who most suffers on this land, the Welsh peasant, is an inseparable part of it. But as the peasant deserts his land, it becomes derelict and haunted by the ghosts of the dead.

Darwish, on the other hand, is more gentle in his dealing

with Palestine, for it is more than a land; Palestine stands for his mistress that he never wants to hurt. But like R.S. Thomas's Wales which has been dominated by outsiders, Darwish's mistress has also fallen into the hands of intruders.

And who are those outsiders and intruders? Like R.S. Thomas who never conceals his anger against the English intervention in Wales, Darwish is straightforward and outspoken about the occupation of Palestine by the Israelis.

But unlike R.S. Thomas whose image of Wales is derived from the Welsh countryside, Darwish's Palestine, apart from certain metaphorical names, does not exist. One may assume that Darwish's unfamiliarity with the physical condition of Palestine, stems from the fact that like many Palestinians he has lived most of his life in exile.

Significantly, for both poets exile becomes a source of suffering and hope. For R.S. Thomas Wales has become so dominated by the English, that there is hardly a place for a Welshman in it. This is the feeling of living in exile in one's own land which is as agonizing and painful as living outside it; vividly illustrated in the poems of Darwish.

But while R.S. Thomas describes this feeling in rather solemn and controlled words, showing not only his defiance and resistance, but also his capability to cope with this situation as long as it lasts, Darwish is too frail to bear the consequences of living in exile and thus his poems become simply emotional outbursts.

Despite differences in approach which are, undoubtedly, the result of the political situations in Wales and Palestine, the devotion and commitment of both poets to their lands are undisputable.

Relevant to the idea of commitment is the role of politics in poetry and its impact on the writing of poets. It is appropriate, therefore, to note how nationalism coloured the poetry of both R.S. Thomas and the Egyptian poet Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi.

To begin with, R.S. Thomas's nationalism was the result of the influence of the Welsh Nationalist Party on him in the forties. Hijazi, on the other hand, became involved in Arab Nationalism with the rise of the image of Jamal Abdul Nasir.

For R.S. Thomas, Welsh Nationalism is viewed as a cultural rather than political necessity aiming at preserving and safeguarding the Welsh heritage of the past, in particular, the Welsh language, and to secure an independent Welsh state. Thus, his concern is with the welfare of the Welsh community which he sees as having been for centuries a farming community.

Hajazi's nationalism is based on wider issues; liberating Arab countries from the yoke of colonialism and the tyrannies of monarchs, and then uniting them in a United Arab State under the leadership of Jamal Abdul Nasir, remain two of his unfulfilled ambitions. In later years Hijazi's national-

ism developed as the whole principles of Arab Nationalism under Nasir were broadened to become Arab Socialism.

In contrast, R.S. Thomas, despite the change in the policy of the Welsh Nationalist Party in regard to the issues of the Welsh language and the industrial cities of the south, remained unchanged. But, as stated in the introduction, the aim is not only to pinpoint the similarities and differences between R.S. Thomas and the three Arab poets, but also to present an Arab perspective on his poetry which is studied in relation to the three themes discussed.

It is hoped that this study will provide Arab readers with a sufficient background to the poetry of R.S. Thomas by referring to Welsh history, mythology, and politics.

It is also hoped that it will be of use to non-Arab readers by introducing them to three well-known contemporary Arab poets.

APPENDIX A

The Image of Palestine in the Poetry of Palestinian Resistance.

The ancient history of Palestine is perhaps one of the most controversial issues of our time. The controversy rises from the fact that there are two opposing claims as to who the first inhabitants of Palestine were. The Jewish scholars, on the one hand, strongly believe that the Jews, the Chosen People, had lived in Palestine years before the coming of Islam and the moving of Arab Moslems into Palestine. The Arabs, on the other hand, refute the claim by stating that long before the people of Israel, after being led through the wilderness by the prophet Moses, moved into Palestine, there were Canaanite Arabs living there. 'The Canaanites and their kinsmen, the Phoenicians', according to Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh, 'were the first Arabs to invent the alphabet and to pass it on between 850 B.C. and 750 B.C. to the Greeks, the Romans and beyond.' (1)

But it is apparent that Palestine, for centuries, had not been inhabited only by the Jews or the Moslems, but also by the Christians. Having said so, it is essential to establish the fact that Palestine never belonged to a particular race or religion. It was and it should be the home for the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine; the Arab nomads, the remnants of the Roman and the Crusaders and the ancient Hebrew Semitic tribes who each at one time 'embraced Islam, Christianity and Judaism and

lived side by side as one people, regardless of race or religion.' (2)

There are many factors which are believed to have disintegrated this unified and harmonious society, and consequently led to establishing a Zionist state in Palestine which killed thousands of the inhabitants and drove many others outside the land.

The two main factors were, first, the gradual demise of the Ottoman Empire, and second, a corollary of the first, the British military intervention in the area which led to the occupation of what was left from the ailing Ottoman Empire, including Palestine. During the period between the two World Wars, while Palestine was under British mandate, foreign elements in the form of Jewish immigrants flowed into Palestine.

The British Government not only facilitated the Jewish immigration to Palestine, but also encouraged and financed the Zionist organizations in Britain and Europe. Eventually, as the Zionist movement strengthened, they commissioned the most barbaric acts against the inhabitants of the land:

> 'From 1941 to 1947, the three Zionist terrorist gangs - the Hagana, the Irgun and the Stern - carried out the most dastardly crimes and massacres against the civilian Arabs population, as well as against officials of the British Governments.' (3)

The zenith of the Zionists' atrocities was in 1948, when

thousands of Arab Moslems and Christians were forced to leave their land and settle on the borders of the neighbouring Arab states. Meanwhile, thousands of aliens from Eastern Europe, Canada, and the U.S.A. infiltrated Palestine.

The Palestinians became impatient; the sense of frustration was transformed into resentment and eventually resistance. Such a view is clearly expressed by the Palestinian poet Jabra I. Jabra:

> 'Ten years since we were afflicted with the (loss of) Palestine ... a great, enormously violent experience ... Death? Destitution? Hunger? We know them all ...
> But the scream of woe gave way eventually to a scream of anger, and the general falsehood which had afflicted a whole nation was finally exposed ... We started to uncover ourselves and the first promptings of anger discovered the sterility in us.' (4)

This feeling is best seen in the work of those Palestinian poets who experienced the disaster of 1948; Fadwa Tuqan, Jabra I. Jabra, Mueen Besisu, Salma al-Khadra al-Jayyusi, Tawfiq Sayigh and many others. It had also a devastating effect on the mind and work of younger poets; Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim, Fayiz Suyyagh, Tawfiq Zayad and others.

The Tripartite Aggression on Egypt in 1956, once again shocked the Arabs, but it was above all the June war of 1967, in which the Israelis occupied more territories, that awakened them.

The defeat of June 1967 marked also the birth of the Palestinian poetry of resistance. Their theme was no longer that of anger or resentment, but of defiance and struggle.

It is worth mentioning also that this kind of poetry was not restricted to Palestinian poets. In every corner of the Arab world, the poets raised their voices in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Even the famous Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani whose love poetry made him the most popular poet in Arab countries, reacted strongly to the June defeat in his book 'In the Margin of the Book of Defeat'.

But it was the Palestinian poets who enhanced and enriched the theme of resistance.

Immediately after the June defeat, several Palestinian poets met to emerge under the name of the 'Poets of the Occupied Land'. The announcement came as a shock to many Arab poets. If the aim was political, then the modern Arab poets were already politically active. If, on the other hand, the aim was literary - which it was not - then modern Arabic poetry already provided the most imaginative and rhetorical verse.

Amid such turmoils, Mahmoud Darwish, the spokesman of the group, asserted that 'our poetry is not a substitute for nor a rival to modern Arabic poetry; it is an indivisible part of it, one of the tributaries of the mainstream.'(5)

Since the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish has been dealt with in Chapter seven, it is worth, at this stage, looking at the work of other Palestinian poets whose themes derive mainly from their image of Palestine.

Samih al-Qasim is second only to Darwish in popularity as the poet of Palestinian resistance. He is also believed to be among the few Palestinian poets who still live in Israel. Being a journalist as well, al-Qasim has spent several periods in Israeli jails.

Speaking about himself and the effect of the 1948 disaster on his writings he states:

> 'While I was still at primary school, the 1948 Palestinian tragedy occurred. I regard that date as the date of my birth, because the first images I can remember are of the 1948 events. My thoughts and images spring from the number 48.' (6)

Samih al-Qasim along with Mahmoud Darwish renovated the theme and structure of the Arabic poetry of resistance. Frustration and dejection were replaced by hope, and metrical restrictions were removed to provide the poet with more freedom of expression.

In a poem written after the June defeat of 1967, and entitled 'Resignation from the Death Insurance Company', al-Qasim expresses his desire to leave behind the old style by submitting his resignation:

'Ladies and Gentlemen,
I am a little Citizen
I submit my resignation
To the manager.
Here is my card
At the bottom of which is his mean paltry signature.'(7)

The reason for his resignation is obvious; he no longer wants to live in silence:

'Ladies and Gentlemen,
I submit my resignation
For the profession of death insurance has become melancholy
It burdens the conscience
Let my name be written after today
On the list of angry people
Who stopped dancing on graves
Who believed in the sun and in man
And chose the earth (of the homeland).' (8)

Al-Qasim's decision to live in Israel instead of going into exile like many of his countrymen, has given him the advantage of being in close contact with his people under Israeli occupation and, at the same time, observe the Israeli soldiers' atrocities and cruelties against the civilians. The reason for his decision to live in Israel is simple:

'I have chosen to remain in my own country not because I love myself less, but because I love my homeland more.' (9)

His journalistic skill has also helped him to portray every aspect of life in the occupied land with accuracy. In 'End of a discussion with a Jailer', he describes his cell:

From the window of my small cell
I can see trees smiling at me,
Roofs filled with my people,
Windows weeping and praying for me.' (10)

But as he looks outside he realizes that his cell is so small compared to another cell in which the entire people are imprisoned:

'From the window of my small cell
I can see your large cell.' (11)

This is not only a sign of support and solidarity on the part of al-Qasim with his people, but also expresses his determination to carry on his resistance for their freedom, even if this causes his death.

In 'Travel Tickets', there is a request from al-Qasim to his killer:

'When I am killed one day
The killer will find in my pocket
Travel tickets,
One to peace,
One to the fields and the rain,
One to people's conscience.
(My dear killer, please do not waste the tickets.
Please take the Journey ...)'(12)

Besides writing poetry and his involvement in journalism, al-Qasim is also concerned with preserving Palestinian tales and folklore. Since the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian cultural heritage has come under deliberate distortion and falsification.

Another voice of Palestinian resistance comes from the poet Fadwa Tuqan who was born in the town of Nablus in Palestine. Prior to the 1967 war, Fadwa Tuqan wrote romantic poetry in 'the traditional form'.(13) But after her town had been occupied by the Israelis, she became involved in the resistance movement. It is said that 'Fadwa Tuqan is famous for her eyes', and that only 'two

men have been able to look into them, the Italian poet, Quasimodo, and Mahmoud Darwish.' (14)

Fadwa Tuqan's resistance poems are as soft and tender as her romantic poems. Instead of employing images of blood and wounds, which are characteristic of most Palestinian poets, there are references to silence, denoting death, and to sadness, meaning defeat:

'Children and songs have disappeared
Neither shadow, nor echo,
And sadness crawls in my town nakedly
With coloured steps
And silence in my town
Kneeling like mountains,
Mysterious like night, - silence is disastrous
Carrying the pressures of death and defeat.
Woe to me, my silent town
Do crops and fruits burn
In the season of harvest?
Woe to me, you the end of Journey.' (15)
(My Sad Town)

The above lines reveal how devastating the Israeli occupation of Nablus was to the feelings of Fadwa Tuqan. The whole town seems to be dead under the weight of the Israeli miitary presence.

The same picture is portrayed in her next poem, 'Plague'. Here the Israeli occupation is described as a plague, which can only be eliminated by rain which stands for resistance:

'When plague was spread in my town
I went outdoor
With an open heart to the sky
Shouting from the depth of sadness to the wind
Oh wind, blow and drive towards us the clouds
And make the rain fall down
So that it purifies the air in my town

And wash the houses, the mountains and the trees.'(16)

Had she been deeply involved in writing revolutionary poems before 1967, she would have been able, by then to produce those thundering scenes of flame and blood reminiscent of the poetry of most of her fellow Palestinian poets. But in all her poems written after the Israeli occupation of her town, she appears like an imprisoned bird singing the most delicate songs of melancholy.

In contrast to her, the poetry of Tawfiq Zayad is as harsh as the bullets of Palestinian fighters. Zayad is a committed socialist, and thus most of his poems focus on revolutionary events and characters. His poetry is, in fact, a continuation of an old trend in modern Arabic poetry which was very popular in the forties and fifties and mostly associated with the Arab Socialist poets like the Iraqi Bayyati and the Egyptian Sharqawi.

In one of his poems written after the 1967 war, he warns the Israelis that their victory is momentary and tomorrow will change everything:

'What have you hidden for tomorrow?
You who have shed my blood
Stole the light in my eyes, and crucified my pen
And assaulted the right of a peaceful nation
Who never committed a crime ...
What have you hidden for tomorrow?
You who have insulted my flag
And opened in my cuts another wound
And stabbed my dream
What have you hidden for tomorrow ...
Tomorrow was not deafeated! [I7]
[Words on Aggression]

In another poem, entitled 'Martyrs of Freedom', in which

he celebrates the day when thousands of Palestinian prisoners went on strike in Israeli jails, the note of defiance is as patent as before.

'Martyrs of Freedom' is divided into a number of songs, each one portraying a single event. In one of these, Zayad taunts the Israelis, that even if they try to kill him he won't die:

> 'Chain my legs and hands
> Cut my voice and tongue
> And iron my organs with your cigarettes,
> And pour ...
> Hot water on my face
> And eat my flesh, you occupiers,
> Put round my neck
> The black rope of death
> Bury my dead body
> In a grave inside a grave
> For I,
> Because of my extreme love for my country
> Cannot be annihilated
> I do not die
> But renew ...
> I am always renewed!' [18]

Another Palestinian poet of the same calibre who displays the same militancy is Mueen Besisu. Since 1948 Besisu, has lived in Egypt and has published a number of collections. Though he is considered a Palestinian poet in exile, Besisu seems to have accepted Egypt as his second homeland. He shows the same affection for Egypt as he does for his homeland Palestine. In his early collections, 'Battlefield', Jordan on the Cross,' and 'A Giant from Ears of Corn', Besisu does not only concern himself with the Palestinian tragedy but with the situation in the whole Arab world. Struggle and resistance are the underlying messages of his early poetry:

'My comrade in struggle
If I fell on the ground, take my place
And carry my weapon,
Do not fear my blood flowing from the gun.' (19)

In his recent collection, 'The Killed, The Fighters and The Drunkards', he does not seem to have adopted new themes. His language is as belligerent as before and his images are as violent as in his early poems, and yet there are signs that Besisu displays a stronger passion and yearning for his homeland, Palestine, than before. Egypt has been his host since 1948, and has become his second homeland, but still the feeling of being a stranger haunts him:

'The stranger should die on his own land
Should die in the beginning of the road
Or its end
But not in the middle. (20)

He ends the poem by saying:

'How miserable is the death of strangers ...
How miserable ...
It is like a poem on the blacklist ... (21)

This sense of alienation is, in fact, a major feature of Palestinian poetry. It is displayed by those Palestinian poets who live in Israel and find themselves strangers in their own country. It is also conspicuous in the poetry of those who live in exile. The work of Tawfiq Sayigh is an example of this group of poets. Sayigh, whose untimely death in 1971 shocked his fellow countrymen, was in constant search for a land which could replace his Palestine. 'Sayigh's poetry, 'according to Issa J. Boullata, is anguished by a painful feeling of alienation caused by the loss of his country - Palestine ...' (22)

In his moving poem 'A National Hymn', Sayigh disassociates himself from his country, as though it has committed an unforgivable crime. He does not believe that once it was an inspiration and a source of life.

> 'Is it true that he who sang you with burning love
> Sang you with high esteem,
> Is it true that you led the horses,
> That your sons rode them to distant pastures
> And they did not open their mouths to nibble
> But opened them to emit a neigh like hymns of minarets?
> I do not believe
> I do not believe, O my country. (23)

His disbelief does not stem from the fact that she has 'become old' or even 'secluded':

> 'But in old age you have been crowned with humiliation
> And you brushed off the memory of your husband
> and of youth
> As if they were dust on your soiled body;
> You have castrated your sons
> And I saw them droop their heads for your memory;
> You wallowed with this and that person of immoral
> character
> (How would I believe what is said about your past
> Oh my country
> I who saw your house and its dim lights?)
> If lovers turn away from you
> You have been prostituting your daughters
> Oh my country
> Oh my country.' (24)

Besides this sense of alienation which pervades the poetry of almost all Palestinian poets, there are other outstanding features. The Palestinian poetry of resistance is essentially the poetry of love for all mankind, and solidarity with oppressed nations in South Africa, South America, and where ever the just rights of people have been assaulted. It is the poetry of defiance to dictatorial regimes, military juntas and despotic rulers.

The Palestinian poets do not attack a particular race, religion or belief; they are against chauvinism. For this reason, their target in Israel is not the Jewish people, but the Zionists, and they are not alone in their fight against Zionism. There are progressive parties and organizations inside Israel which share the Palestinians' determination to fight Zionism and establish a democratic state in Palestine.

Notes and References

1. Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh, Palestine and the United Nations p.10.

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APPENDIX B

THE REVIVAL OF ARAB NATIONALISM

The origin and essence of Arab Nationalism may be traced long ago in the traditional role of Arab bards in the pre-Islamic period, who sang and celebrated the bravery of their chieftains and the supremacy of their tribes, which were in constant war with each other.

The advent of Islam in 622, however, ended the power of these tribes, and eventually diminished the voice of the bards. Religion, therefore, superseded Nationalism, and the poets, from now on, had to sing the glory of Islam rather than the heroic deeds of the pagan leaders of the past.

Nevertheless, Arab Nationalism as a principle was never relinquished. In their domination and invasion of the world, there was always an Arab pride, and though their penetration in other countries was under the guise of spreading the new religion, it was an Arab venture rather than a crusade against infidels.

With the decline of the Arab Empire, the Turks subsequently gained control of the Arab world. The Turks under the pretext of religion, ruled the Arabs with the utmost savagery, as though seeking revenge.

The effect of this suppression is conspicuous today in the backward customs and attitudes of many Arab societies, in particular in relation to women.

During their period of dominance the Turks were also successful in consolidating their position among Arab religious leaders who came to look on the Ottoman Empire as the emblem of Islam.

Those Arabs who protested against the Turks were a handful of intellectuals, and a few poets with nationalistic fervour, and their attempts to arouse a national consciousness were often met by strong opposition from the various Islamic organizations established by the Turks to safeguard their interests. But interestingly, while the Arab Moslem poets and intellectuals in Egypt failed to attract the Arab nation towards their cause, the Arab Christians in Lebanon led the resistance movement against the Turks. The Christian poets, who later became known as 'The Emigrant Poets', called for a united front against the Turks. Among these poets, the name of Iliya Abu Madi was well to the fore. Their message was welcomed by many Arab poets in every corner of the Arab world.

But the outbreak of World War I halted the resistance movement. At the end of the war, the Ottoman Empire suddenly collapsed, and the Arab nations fell under the domination of the Western powers. Whereas the Arabs had reacted with a certain restraint against the Turks because of the religious bond of Islam, their attitude towards the Western occupation was totally antagonistic.

The period in which the Arabs were controlled by the Western countries is considered to be the era of the revival of Arab Nationalism. It also produced the most ardent nationalist poets.

Meanwhile, since our concern in Chapter Ten was with the work of the Egyptian Ahmad Abd al-Muti Hijazi, it is more appropriate to focus on the resistance movement during the British occupation of Egypt and its impact on the nationalist poets of the time.

The first foreign intervention occurred in 1789 when a French expeditionary force invaded Egypt; in 1801 the French troops withdrew, and Muhammad Ali, backed by the Turks took control of the country. Muhammed Ali and his successors were fascinated by Western civilization, and thus, during their dynasty, which lasted up to 1952, the aim was to make Egypt part of Europe.

But this drift towards the West, inevitably opened a wide gap inside Egyptian society. There was resentment among the nationalists, and discontent among the religious leaders and army officers.

These groups 'combined their forces into a single resistance movement under the leadership of Urabi'. (1) In 1882, the movement toppled the ruling family and a nationalist government was declared.

But the newborn government was soon crushed by the British forces which eventually occupied Egypt. The name of a prominent nationalist poet, Mahmud Sami al-Barudi, is often associated with this abortive coup.

Al-Barudi had held key positions in the previous Government;

he was head of the Khedival Guard under Ismail and Minister of Awqaf (Religious Affairs) and later Minister of War under Tawfiq.

He became involved in the resistance movement when he was Minister of War. He also headed the Nationalist Government before it was abolished by the British. Along with other leaders including Urabi and Abduh, he was arrested and sent into exile for seventeen years.

His love for Egypt is forcefully illustrated in patriotic poems which he wrote before and after his exile. 'In those poems vivid images of the Egyptian 'rif', (the Egyptian countryside) farms, Nile and other natural scenes are elegantly rendered'. (2)

In the following lines quoted from one of his patriotic poems, there is passion for his land evoked by his memories:

> 'Oh Egypt, may your shadow be extended
> and your soil be drenched with the pure water of the Nile.
> You are the sanctuary of my people and the
> branching place of my family, the playground of
> my age-mates and the race course of my horses.
> A country in which youth took off the amulet
> of my childhood and hung the scabbard of my
> sword on my shoulder.
> I left behind in it noble kinsmen and neighbours whose
> image comes back to me every morning.
> I left the sweetness of life after their departure
> and said farewell to the soft flower of youth.' (3)

The British occupation of Egypt and the restoration to power of Muhammad Ali's dynasty united the opposition forces.

But the interesting point is that when the Khedive Abbas

came to the throne in 1892, he displayed great sympathy towards the Nationalists, and defied the British.

This alliance between the Khedive and the people shocked the British, who believed that another nationalist revolution was on its way. Hence, when at the outbreak of World War I, the Khedive made a visit to Constantinople the British took the opportunity to depose the Khedive and declare Egypt a Protectorate. Consequently, the Khedive Abbas now dethroned, became the symbol of Nationalism.

A great poet who witnessed these events, and was at the same time a close friend of the deposed Khedive, was Ahmad Shawqi.

Shawqi was the court bard, who also went into exile after the deposition of the Khedive Abbas.

> 'During his exile he developed his interest in Spanish Arabic poets, especially Ibn Zaidun, wrote poems commemorating the glories of the past Arab civilization of Spain and describing its remains, and like his predecessor Barudi expressed his deep nostalgia for Egypt in a more subjective and meditative type of poetry.' (4)

In one of his poems directed against the British domination of Egypt, and its consequences for the Egyptian people, Shawqi says:

> 'Today a government has broken its promises, a government whose pledges we took as the Gospel. It entered Egypt, in the name of friendship and its obligations, as a penetrating illness. It destroyed her lineaments and demolished her foundation and caused the loss of her expected independence.' (5)

One incident in particular during the British domination of Egypt left an indelible effect on the minds of the Egyptian people. On June 13, 1906, while the British officers were practising their hunting sport by shooting the pigeons belonging to the village of Dinshaway, a fight started between the villagers and the British officers which ended in injuries and death on both sides. As a result of the death of a British officer, who was apparently affected by shock and sunstroke, a villager was beaten to death by the British soldiers.

The tragedy was much aggravated when a special court sentenced four villagers to death, one to long imprisonment and many others to flogging. The whole blame was directed against the British Consul-General Lord Cromer who announced his retirement soon after the incident.

The incident at Dinshaway and the role of Cromer in Egypt did not escape the attention of Shawqi who wrote the following lines:

> 'O Dinshaway, peace be upon your hills. The days have taken away happiness from your land.
> How are the widows after their husbands (were hanged)?
> And what has become of the orphans?
> Twenty houses were deserted and afflicted by desolation and darkness after their gaiety.
> O would that I knew, was it pigeons in the towers or death?
> O Nero, had you known the age of Cromer you could have learned how sentences are executed.
> O pigeons of Dinshaway, bewail and alarm a people sleepless in the Nile Valley.
> A people, suffering, recalling the horror of a day that made (the earth under) their feet tremble.' (6)

Another Egyptian poet who was contemporary with Shawqi,

and portrayed the Dinshaway incident with the same anger, was Hafiz Ibrahim. Hafiz Ibrahim's name is often linked with those liberal nationalists like Said Zaghlul and Lutfi al-Sayyid, who admired the efforts of Lord Cromer to improve and reform Egyptian society.

In his poem on the Dinshaway incident, he blames as well as praises Cromer:

> 'Were it not for the tragedy of Dinshaway and the affliction which caused hearts to bleed,
> And your charging a people with fanaticism and ignorance, and your portrayal of the oriental as mere dupe,
> We would have melted from sorrow on the day of your departure,
> because we see in you a friendly reformer.' (7)

Another Egyptian poet, Ali al-Ghayati, besides being a strong opponent of the British, was a member of the National Party, but unlike both Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim, he was unsympathetic towards the Egyptian ruling family. Apparently inspired by the French Revolution, Al-Ghayati advocated resistance against not only the British but also their Egyptian puppets.

His indignation and vehemence against the British and their Egyptian puppets, as conspicuous in the lines below, echo the words of Mustafa Kamil, the leading political figure of the time:

> 'Enemies who reigned supreme and did not respect the people's right,
> And governors who swore to bow down whenever the enemies desired it of them.
> O Lord! What should the Egyptian do (save) rebel if patience exceeds its limits?
> Long has been the day of tyranny in Egypt and no longer do we see there a place for justice.

> Does the occupying power believe that we are
> a nation who, accepting peace, cannot show hostility?
> Or does the oppressor believe that we bear humiliation
> and will not seek vengeance?
> Their claims are false, there is no nation whose
> oppressor lasts forever.
> Victory is destined for that nation which, for the
> sake of glory,
> has no fear of death.' (8)

There were other poets, men like Mohammad Abd al-Multalib, and Ahmad Muharram, who wrote against the British domination of Egypt. But unlike al-Ghayati, who wrote patriotic poems and songs of Arab Nationalism, these poets were influenced by the religious leaders who advocated Pan-Islamism and glorified the Ottoman sultan.

The opposition to the British occupation of Egypt, therefore, came from two strong organizations: the National Party, led by Mustafa Kamil, whose aim was to save Egypt from the British, and the Umma Party, a religious party inspired mainly by the teachings of Afghani and Abduh, and controlled by man like Lutfi al-Sayyid and Qasim Amin.

The Umma was essentially a non-violent party aiming to prepare 'the people for eventual responsibility when the occupation came to an end'. (9)

At the outbreak of World War I when Britain was dragged into war with Germany, the Egyptian Nationalists hoped that after the war Britain would terminate its control of Egypt. But when the war ended in 1918, Britain retained its Protectorate. The Nationalists were infuriated by this decision.

The situation was much aggravated when the newly-founded Wafd Party led by Said Zaghlul, demanded 'negotiation with Britain to achieve independence'. (10) In 1919 riots broke out in support of the Wafd call for independence. On February 28, 1922, the British succumbed to the Nationalists' pressure and declared Egypt independent, and thus, once again Mohammad Ali's dynasty which had been deposed by the British, was restored to the throne, although the British still kept part of their forces in the country, controlled the Suez Canal, and held the Judicial and Financial Ministries.

British interference in Egypt came finally to an end, when on 23 July 1952, King Faruq the last of Mohammad Ali's dynasty was dethroned in a military coup d'etat led by General Neguib who was succeeded two years later by Jamal Abd al-Nasir.

Nasir's first task was to free 'Egyptian territory from British military and naval forces, which the monarchical regime was unable to bring about ...' (11).

During his reign Nasir was confronted with tremendous pressures from inside as well as outside Egypt. Besides his social and agricultural reforms in Egypt which eventually put an end to foreign interests in the country, he alarmed the world, in particular the British, by his call to the Arabs under foreign domination, in Aden, Jordan, Iraq, and the tiny Gulf States to fight and liberate their countries from foreign occupation.

Two important events which followed the revolution shocked the world and consolidated the Nationalist cause in Egypt and other Arab countries. In September 1952, the Agrarian Reform Act was passed in favour of land distribution among the peasants. This was a blow against the British and the Egyptian landowners' monopoly of the Egyptian cotton plantations and their exploitation of the farmers. The second memorable event, which infuriated the Western countries, was the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1959. This act eventually led to the tripartite attack by British, French and Israeli forces against Egyptian territory.

The Western invasion of Egypt, precipitated by the closure of the Suez Canal to Western tankers, was inevitable since the canal was considered to be 'the Achilles Heel of Britain and of Europe'. (12) But the invasion proved how wholeheartedly the Egyptians would defend their revolution against foreign invaders.

Besides, it also strengthened the role of its leader Nasir in Egypt as well as in Arab countries. Before we proceed to study the effect of the Tripartite Aggression on the Egyptian poets of that period, it is worth mentioning that the revolution of July 1952, coincided with the emergence of a new movement in Modern Arabic Poetry - a new school of poetry which was free of restrictions in form and content, and less committed to the rules of traditional poetry. Thus there were two revolutionary movements, - the first in politics and the second in poetry.

The first sign of this new movement in poetry emerged in the early fifties in the poems of the Iraqi poets Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964) and Nazik al-Malaika (b.1923). The movement soon spread to other Arab countries, and became the platform for political issues.

In Egypt, however, political poetry was already popular, and as observed earlier on, it was well represented by poets like al-Barudi, Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim. But their poetry, though political in theme, was still restricted by the traditional rules of prosody and versification.

The new movement provided the Egyptian poets with more freedom of expression. The father of this new movement in poetry in Egypt is said to be Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi (b.1920). Al-Sharqawi, fused the spirit of the new movement with his political principles, and the result was modern Egyptian poetry. In his two poems, 'A Letter to My Wife' and 'A Letter from an Egyptian Father to President Truman', he describes the nation's wish for independence, and the role of the Egyptian Revolution in liberating the oppressed countries and the devastation left behind by the invaders in their attack on Port Said in 1956. The invasion of 1956 was well portrayed by the poet Kamal Ayoob in his collection Floods and the Brown City. But the most effective and popular form of poetry denouncing the aggression was written by colloquial poets like Fuad Hadad, Salah Jaheen, Abd al-Rahman al-Ebnoodi and Sayed Hejab.

Notes and References

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4. M.M. Badawi, A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, p.29.

5. Mounah A. Khouri, Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt,p.69.

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7. Ibid, p.81.

8. Ibid, p.96.

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11. Elie Kedourie, 'Egypt the Arab states and the Suez Expedition, 1956' in Imperialism and Nationalism in the Middle East, p.127.

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APPENDIX C INTERVIEW

This is the original transcript of an interview with the poet R.S. Thomas recorded on May 4th 1984 at the Hugh Owen Building, U.C.W., Aberystwyth.

Q1: While at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, were you aware of the problems facing the Welsh language and culture?

RST: No. Not at that time. My mother and father were what are known as Anglo-Welsh. They were non-Welsh speakers, and so I was brought up in a monoglot English home and I went to the University at Bangor as an English speaking person, and I was in a hostel where there were two tables in the dining room; one table was English-speaking, the other was Welsh-speaking. And the Welsh speakers used to try to tempt me to sit with them, but it never really struck me that this was a special culture with its own problems until I had become ordained and I went to an English-speaking parish on the Welsh border and it was then that I became conscious.

Q2: Before 1936 you were in Chirk - what was your reaction to the burning of the Bombing School in Llŷn?

RST: I'm afraid I'd never heard of it. That shows - you

see - had I been living in a Welsh speaking part I'd probably have become aware of it, but I didn't even hear of it.

Q3: But you became aware of it when you moved to Manavon?

RST: Yes. You've probably read my career that I married in 1940 and had to move out - I did not want to go into lodgings - I had to move out into where there was a house for my wife and me, and that meant that I moved even further near the English border and I saw the Welsh hills in the distance and I became conscious where my roots were and I tried to get back.

Q4: When did you hear of Saunders Lewis then?

RST: In Manavon, and I went to see him. Then I was beginning to learn Welsh and I took the Welsh paper and and he used to write articles and I was so impressed by one of his articles that I went to see him to offer my services as it were, and from that time on I became involved.

Q5: Were you a devoted nationalist?

RST: No. I mean I never have accepted the word nationalism - a patriot really, because nationalism is a word that has been tarnished by the English and is associated with Nazism in Germany, and as a priest of

the Church, I've never been violent; I've been for pacifism. I mean Saunders Lewis was willing to use force, but it was not easy for me in the Church.

Q6: You also showed a lot of sympathy towards the Welsh Nationalist Party.

RST: Yes I did go to some of their meetings at that period. I became rather critical of some of the approaches and I've never been a fully active member. What I am now is I am a member of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg. I support them.

Q7: Do you think the young leaders of Plaid Cymru have departed from the Party's original policies by adopting bilingualism for example?

RST: Well. I cannot answer that question really because I am not sure what the original policy of Plaid Cymru was. I know that Saunders Lewis is against bilingualism and I tend to agree with him - but it's a very difficult situation. It's a very difficult point to maintain because my wife is English to begin with.

I married my wife when I was a monoglot Englishman and we had our only one child and it would have been unnatural for me to try to speak Welsh because I was just only learning it. So I've been English in many ways and it's very difficult for me ever to adopt an attitude to refuse to speak it.

Q8: What's your response to the view that the Wales that R.S. Thomas is looking for does not exist in the present; it's the Wales of legends and fairy tales -would you agree to that?

RST: No. But the fact that something does not exist - I mean - what I said in Abercuwag was that we are looking for something that man always has. He's looking for the unobtainable in a way. I mean everybody who's achieved anything has been looking for the unobtainable. I don't accept that criticism in those sort of terms. It's nothing to do with fairies.

Q9: Since you've moved to Aberdaron, you've stopped writing about Wales - does it mean you've found the Wales of your imagination?

RST: No. I haven't found the Wales of my imagination - but I've found a community, that's Welsh-speaking. And you can't go on writing about the same thing all the time. I mean what's happened to me is that I am much more active now. When I was away from it I was writing about it, but I was not very active, but now that I've moved into the Welsh community, I don't write about it, I act more - I mean I take part in Cymdeithas Yr Iaith rallies, I'm working with the CND - Nuclear Disarmament- and this all goes on in Welsh; all our meetings are in Welsh, you see. That's what's happened to me. It is not

that I've found the thing of my ideal, but I've found the Welsh community which makes it unnecessary for me to write about it.

Q10: Would you draw any comparison between the Palestinian tragedy and the Welsh dilemma?

RST: Well. When I was in Eglwys Fach I was asked by Radio Diffusion to go up and do a commentary for a film which included the Palestinian problem at that time along with a Hong Kong situation where I saw Palestinians camping along the Israeli border because they had been pushed out, just as there were poor people in Hong Kong living in tin shanties on the side of the mountains while the rich people are in Hong Kong. So there's a kind of comparison in Wales, but it has not taken quite the same form - I mean - we have not been pushed out in that way. We're still here, but we've been superseded by the English. The English tend to take a lot of the best positions and they allow the Welsh to have a share of the proceeds. There are people who would say that we're doing very well out of tourism. What I say is yes and you're giving a third back to the Inland Revenue Income Tax. If we had our own government it would all be coming back into the Welsh Exchequer. I don't think things are so dramatic in Wales as they are in Palestine, because - I mean, that would be the way to get the Welsh uprising. When people see their own families being subjected to these things without sufficient food, without shelter, then they're driven to rebel,

but this is all rather being kid-glove, kid-glove treatment you know.

Q11: And what about this sense of alienation that most of the Welsh feel - as though they are in exile?

RST: Yes - this is the point I made in the Eisteddfod you know - the speech I gave in the Eisteddfod, about being an exile in your own country. I mean Palestinians are exiled because they've been pushed out. We have not been pushed out, but we have been isolated; we have been made exiles because I want to speak Welsh. Here we're in Aberystwyth - if I stop anybody on the street and speak Welsh, probably he won't be able to answer me, so I have to turn to English. This is the situation in Wales, it's a more dignified and a more deep sort of tragedy. It is not dramatic. It is not visible.

Q12: You've often said that the crisis in Wales can only be solved politically. Wouldn't you think that the constitutional reforms could solve the Welsh problem?

RST: Well I know that Ireland has failed to a large extent, but I think there are signs that we could help a lot if we had autonomy, because there's pressure from the English Government and I know that the Welsh are to be blamed themselves for the majority of their political problems; they will not stand up and say 'we want'. When a people stands up and says 'we want'

otherwise we won't cooperate', it gets what it wants. But on the other hand, there are certain English features. I mean all these shopkeepers who will put up everything in English, if we had our government, we would make it compulsory; if you want to trade, we allow you to trade, but you must trade through the Welsh language. If it became law, we'd gradually - I don't say it could solve our problems, but I think it could help in that way.

Q13: Many people think that the conflict in Northern Ireland is between two communities. Do you think that there is something deeper behind this?

RST: Yes - yes. I mean this English policy again. As you know, James I planted the Scots, he planted the Scottish people to keep the Irish divided and he succeeded over three centuries, and now you've got the IRA who are determined that it will not work and therefore I see it as a political problem, and also I see strategic necessity; I think the English Government is keeping a hold on Northern Ireland from strategic motives. Once Ireland becomes a united Ireland, it's a neutral country and Britain is not allowed to ...

Q14: Would you consider those poets who come from oppressed nations and want to send their message to the outside world as propagandists?

RST: Well it depends on your motives. Yes if you say you're trying to do it for those reasons - I mean this is the conflict which I mentioned it in my talk that great art, great poetry should rise above these things, like rather turning aside if you decide to propagandize. I am uneasy about this because the life of a nation is more important than the life of the individual.

Q15: Have you ever been overjoyed by the presence of God?

RST: More recently I've been influenced by - I think, the eastern approach - Brahma - the Hindu approach. I think that there's really not much difference fundamentally between the 'I' that's within myself and the 'I' that's in the world as a whole. This is God but it's a very mystical and subtle thing. You cannot say I am God because it's nonsense, on the other hand you cannot really say that I am not God. These are the problems that I'm wrestling with.

Q16: Have you ever experienced a sense of unity with God?

R.S.T.: No. You see I have always been a man of the country. I've always lived - since my boyhood in the country and you know how God is mediated to the individual and therefore He chooses His ways of being mediated, perhaps He will mediate Himself through some people, through love between individuals. He will do it

to other people through something else. Well. He, I think, has done it to me through nature, through the beauty of structure and form.

(At this time RST reminds HHM about the Moslems' problem of the use of the word God and that it means different things to them. HMH replies that in Islam God cannot be mediated through love or anything else. RST presents his own views.)

RST: Well I don't think I am an orthodox Christian, you see.

When I was a minister of the Church, I had to try to make sense of this because I was not there to give my own views, I was there to use the Bible and the Prayer Book to instruct the people but since I have retired, I try to take a broad view, to keep and open mind - I mean Allah - Islam is one way, Hinduism is another way, Taoism is another way, Christianity is another, Buddhism is another way, and I don't think any of them, none of them are false, but how much truth they contain I personally don't know.

Q17: I personally find difficulty in understanding your image of God - probably because of my lack of Christian understanding - but would you take Jesus Christ as God?

RST: No. I am ambivalent I think about this. I am not very strong on the Trinity and yet there is Spirit, and whether Spirit is the same as God - this was one of the great problems of the early Christian Church - was the Spirit mediated or was it God, and I think the problem is still there, but I am more inclined towards God and the Spirit than I am to Jesus Christ. I am uneasy about Jesus Christ. I detect too human an element - anthropomorphism. This is heresy. I cannot accept that Jesus Christ is God. So I am not Christian when I say that. I am nearer to Islam. To me God is some being so un-understandable, so almighty that I cannot see Him becoming a human being according to the Christian ... and this is what Judaism cannot accept.

Q18: Do you think the Anglo-Welsh poets of the south have ever tried to portray the problems of Wales?

RST: No. Idris Davies, I do not know if the problems of Wales were so much of his community - the colliery district, but I believe he was Welsh-speaking so he may have ... As you know, what happened in South Wales was that it was primarily a Welsh-speaking area, and when the pits were opened then first of all the work went on in Welsh, and when the English people began to come in to work, they were cymricized, they were turned because of the strength of the Welsh cultural situation, but as more and more came in they gradually changed until South Wales became English speaking,

and unfortunately it's become so anglicized that I think it's not conscious of its Welsh problems. It's more conscious of its class problems, of its industrial problems and to my mind they betray , they've got a bastard, they've got a pseudo-Welshness. They go and shout in the Rugby International for Wales, they become nationalists and want to beat the English on that day, but it does not work into their lives, and unfortunately a lot of them feel a kind of antipathy for the north; north is something a bit mysterious to them. They sense that there's much more Welsh spoken further north, and you get this feeling that's exploited by our enemies - they'd say. If you get Home rule, the Welsh language would be forced on unwilling people - they exploit these things.

Q19: And it seems the Labour Party is more popular in the south?

RST: Yes, and we look upon them, the Labour, the Socialists as betraying Wales, because Neil Kinnock - the present leader, he betrayed, he opposed devolution, he opposed it. He and Leo Abse and George Thomas were largely instrumental in wrecking the thing. They never supported it. If the Labour Movement had said, yes, we want devolution, we would have got it. They hardly raise the finger, and yet they've got the cheek to stand up now and say we did all in our power, but the Welsh people did not want it. It's a lie.

Q20: Do you vote for Plaid Cymru?

RST: I always do. I have nobody else to vote for.

Q21: Don't you think Plaid Cymru has become more realistic in its approach?

RST: Yes. It's in a very difficult situation, because as you know - politics is called a dirty game and they (the politicians) employ the most doubtful methods.

The Tories, the Socialists - they all tell lies and make promises, so it's very difficult for a Plaid candidate, if he tells all truth and says what he believes, the people won't vote for him.

You see, we have this situation now in the Nuclear Power Station in Trawsfynydd. It's going to be closed in a few years time, well. People are up and saying we must have our work. Well. Dafydd Elis Thomas, the M.P. - I am sure he does not want nuclear power but if he is to say so, he's going to lose all those votes, and perhaps, the Tories would say, yes, we'd give you a new station, and the Labour would say, yes, we'd give you a new station and the people would vote for him, saying the future is assured and when they've voted for them, and they've gone to Parliament, they turn round saying that we can't have the one Trawsfynydd as the Government has decided it's going to build somewhere else. They betray the people

like this, but if Dafydd Elis Thomas is honest to say, they won't vote for him. It's an impossible situation. I'm very, very sorry for him.

Q22: And do you think the members of the Welsh Language Society have done anything for Wales?

RST: Well - they've wakened me after all, because I was not conscious of the importance of all these things, but after their efforts and seeing them going to prison, I've wakened to the injustice - and I do support them. Perhaps, occasionally they're not very astute, not very wise in some of the things they do - and as I said, because I had been a priest of the Christian Church - I can't openly support violence - I think violence leads to more violence on the whole, so my job was always to try to bring up some sort of reconciliation and peace, but I can see that it does not work with England. Unfortunately England respects violence. The English don't respect the Welsh because we haven't resisted them enough; we've given in. If the majority of Welsh people say we won't have it - this happened with these little things - I think Ned Thomas was one of the campaigners to get a bilingual disc on the car, the car licence. When they began to say it was not right to drive cars in Wales with just English on, the Government's approach was that it was impossible, but influential people in Wales said 'Alright we won't pay our car licenses', and immediately the English said 'Oh it

was an easy matter.'

Q23: Don't you think that an act of violence is sometimes necessary?

RST: Well it's necessary in dealing with the English unfortunately. And again, the Welsh being what they are, do discriminate between violence to property and violence to people. I mean nobody has been killed in Wales, whereas the Irish have killed many times, but instead of respecting us for this, instead of saying the Welsh are behaving in a dignified and humane way, they simply despise us - whereas the Irish, who are doing these vital things in a way, blowing people up and killing innocent people - although the English papers condemn them and call them barbarian, they secretly respect them.

Q24: Do you think the Irish and the Scottish are more militant than the Welsh?

RST: Well - as you know - consider guerrilla tactics, you can't carry on a successful guerrilla tactic unless the population is with you, and the population is not with us in Wales I don't think.

If I were to go and set a house on fire and people saw me, there are too many people in Wales who would ring up the police and would say 'I saw him, R.S. Thomas it was, I saw him going' - your own people betraying you. so it's very difficult to carry on these sort of tactics. I don't know - I think there

are plenty of people in the other Celtic countries who would do the same, but because Scotland is a bit further up in the north, and because Ireland has got the Irish Sea between, it's a bit easier to do these things, but in Wales - the police is a very strong presence. They don't use the army, but they use the police. I mean take Ireland in the First World War - they have been training people in Ireland, training the IRA and the Sinn Fein - we couldn't start training anybody in Wales. We'd have the police straight away, and they'd arrive by car. It's much more difficult in Wales.

Q25: What's your answer to those Welshmen who would say that tourism is their main source of living?

RST: I've just been taking part in a programme on HTV on this question of tourism and this sort of thing, and it's very difficult to distinguish between need and greed isn't it? Tourism has done a certain amount as it does in every country, but the tendency is for it to put more money in the hands of the people who've already got money. I mean the people who are letting caravan sites and things like this - they are farmers as far as I know - doing moderately well anyway - they could live as farmers I think myself, but I don't know enough about their private affairs.

When I was a vicar I didn't go prying into their business, but this is the tendency - it's not the poor

who have been helped necessarily - they get a certain amount of employment in the hotels, things like this, but they have to speak English, so tourism is destroying even though it's giving money, it is destroying the culture and the language. But the economic is a difficult question for any small country - I mean you're lucky in the Arab world - you've got oil.

Of course we've got resources in Wales. It is a matter of ... the English have got hold of ... you know, most of the industries in Wales are either run by England or by Government. But I am not a political economist so I can't say.

I should have thought that Wales was potentially a rich country. It's got water power, it's got coal resources, its got this very ... it's one of the most beautiful countries in the world. It's got a lot to offer to tourism. So if this revenue was channelled into the Welsh Treasury instead of going into the English hands - and nearly all the hotels in Wales are in English hands, all you get in Wales is a few -one of the few - quite a lot of Bed and Breakfasts being run by the Welsh people, but all the bigger stuff is in English hands all the time. So whilst I agree that it's a problem when you asked that question, I don't think that it's as simple as it is put. I suspect it. It's precious you know.

You see, Aberdaron is a sort of resort; it's a seaside place, so a lot of English people come in the tourist season - and about every May, about this time of the year, there's a sort of a wail of woe going on: "the visitors are not coming", as if this was going to mean economic disaster. Well, I didn't think it was going to mean economic disaster. What it meant was that the few people who were doing the jobs of shop-keepers and hotel keepers were going to see the reduction of income, and I think in certain cases this would mean they would have dismissed one or two of their workers, and this would have been a blow to those workers. I have always been a bit sceptical myself.

Q26: It seems that the Welsh poets of the twentieth century are not very committed to Wales...I mean they are not the Welsh bards...

RST: You're back again to this propaganda idea, aren't you? To what extent you can - where there's a strong culture, where the literature is healthy - I mean, there were early patriotic poets like Iolo Coch and Gruffydd Gryg, Gryffydd Llwyd. They were able to sort of inspire people like Owain Glyn Dŵr, and at the same time write pretty good poetry as well, because the tradition was strong, the language was vital. But now at the end of the period there's a sense of strain, and it's difficult to write really good poetry where the propaganda...

Q27: But wasn't the traditional role of the Welsh bard to make propaganda?

RST: In a way. There was a court poet in the days of independent princes, Llywelyn ap Gwynedd, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd - they would keep court poets or a court poet. One of their main jobs was to praise the prince, to say that nobody was like him; but unfortunately they weren't fighting the English, they were fighting other princes of Wales, so it was a matter of singing a song of praise. This is the human situation, isn't it?

The other poets have done the same; the bards have come in to sing the praises of the conquering persons who employed them. He (the bard) got his bread and butter, his living by doing this, and it continued, but it did need patronage. Once patronage is withdrawn it becomes more difficult, and as the poets drifted out of the family circle and began to be put in touch with international culture, then he had of course other stimuli.

Q28: Like many post-war English poets you seem to be experiencing new forms...

RST: Well, I don't know. I did it when I was young. I haven't often written in the old stanzaic form, but I find myself recently drawn back into using stanzas

again. Several of the poems I read last night, and Later Poems were in stanzas. I think it was one way of...

When I published the book H'm (H apostrophe m) I used a lot of different forms then, I think because I wanted to finish; I'd come to the end of the period, and with changing of my publisher I changed my style, and I went on that way. I did it in Laboratories of the Spirit , and I have kept it up to some extent. Yes, I think this is important. I mean, Philip Larkin doesn't do it, does he? On the whole he keeps to the more traditional stanzaic pattern. Ted Hughes is much freer; he's more free with his forms. Obviously if poetry is to continue, we must find new ways of saying these things.

You see, I am in a difficult situation, because I have no enthusiasm for English. I am just having to use it for reasons I've told you. This is the advantage of somebody like Geoffrey Hill and Larkin for that matter - they're English. They're full bred English poets, so they can feel that they want to do something in English. They want to do it for England, but I have no motivation like that. I don't want to do anything for England, but the very fact that I am writing in English means that I am doing something for England and I'm part of the English tradition. I mean I have propagandized as I said this morning; I have a lot of propaganda in some

of my earlier books - which as Ned Thomas said you've been reading like The Bread of Truth , What's a Welshman - but in a way now it's no more true to call me a Welsh poet than it was to call Dylan Thomas a Welsh poet, because there's very little Welsh about me any longer as a poet. I am a Welshman and I speak Welsh, and I am engaged in activities on behalf of Wales but I always give a wry smile - you know the Americans would think of me as a Welsh poet I suppose. The only Welsh poets we've got in Wales are those who write in Welsh.

Q29: But don't you think that you have done something for Wales?

RST: May be. Yes. You're lucky in having Ned Thomas because he's conscious of these problems. If you were in other universities with a different person, you might not be in the same way because Ned Thomas has been active as well. He's acted in defence of Wales.

I went to Wrexham a fortnight ago. They asked me to go and give some talk in the evening, but in the afternoon they wanted me to talk to schools which I have done before. Well, I thought I know what I'll do, I'll read 'Border Blues' in Poetry for Supper. I'll read 'Border Blues' - these were boys and girls of fifteen and sixteen years of age. I said afterwards 'hands up, anybody who understood that poem'. Nobody

at all. Well I know it's difficult and I know perhaps some of the problems because this was the poem I wrote when I was about thirty-seven, thirty-eight years of age in Manavon - over thirty years ago and things have changed. But on the other hand these are boys and girls in a Welsh school - Wrexham in Wales, and they're having to study, I don't say they have to study 'Border Blues', but they have to study my poems for their 'O' Levels. Well, I think the teachers should have taught them some of these things, but they haven't - you see - because you know what you get in 'Border Blues', I am not saying it's a good kind of poem - it's beside the point, but what you get is the situation that was on the Welsh border when I went to Manavon in 1942. I became conscious of various things that were happening; the depopulation of the hill country, the remnants of the Welsh language; farms that had still got Welsh names and people that had Welsh names - Roberts, Williams and Jones, Evans - but their accent was English; the English Shropshire accent. So you get these conflicts and tensions, and being near the border, we were conscious of the warfare that had gone on, and I was conscious of certain old customs and behaviour that people living up on the hills around Manavon a century back had; when they wanted employment they'd have gone down into England to work in the hay harvest because the hay harvest was earlier down in the lowland, and they walked down and gained a little money and then they came back to their own farms just in time

to mow the hay because the hill harvest was later.

So you've these things going on, and then there were these - I don't know what you'd have in the Arab world - a bit like the African witch doctors, wisemen, there were people living up in the hills who had the reputation of being wise men, magicians in a way that if you had a problem, you went up and consulted these ..., and there were people in Manavon, old people remembered these things - if I referred to jokingly - they'd remember what I meant. Well, I've woven all these in 'Border Blues', but the children haven't been taught.

When I published that poem, a Cambridge reviewer said this was easily R.S. Thomas's worst poem, because he didn't understand. It is not intellectually difficult, but it's difficult from the background point of view and it will be the same in America; Americans reading that poem won't have a clue of what I was saying.

(There is a pause here. HMH assures RST that he's enjoyed reading the poem, and then RST continues his talk.)

But by introducing that little refrain 'Eryr Pengwern, penngarn llwyt heno...' and this is from Llywarch Hen and Llywarch Hen was supposed to be somewhere beyond the Welsh border, a bit in the north, so by introducing

a thing like that I then changed to the fact when Shrewsbury was almost a part of Wales in early days, and Pengwern was the old Welsh name for Shrewsbury, but now Shrewsbury is English of the English.

I was trying to show the tensions on the border that existed. And then another little refrain 'Mi sydd fachgen ifanc ffôl, Yn byw yn ôl fy ffansi,'. This was an old Welsh folk tune, and just by bringing it in like that I immediately changed to some Shropshire accent or something - but it seems all lost on people.

Q30: The motivation to learn Welsh must have been very strong.

RST: Well, yes. I did try - you see - to get right into the Welsh-speaking area but I did not have any help. I wrote and went to see one or two vicars to ask if they'd take me as curate so that I could learn Welsh much more quickly, because there was not any spoken in Manavon, and you know what this means, it takes a very long time. I mean where I live now people speak Welsh all around me - I'd have learnt it in three months, but instead of that it took me years because I could not impose myself on Mr Owen and his family more than once a week at the outside - and so for six days or more every week I was without speaking Welsh at all.

Q31: Where exactly was the chapel where you used to go and meet the Rev. H.D. Owen for your Welsh lessons?

RST: It was on the top of the hill between Manavon and Llanfair Caereinon. There were two parallel valleys there and Manavon was on Avon Rhiw and Llanfair Caereinon was on the river Banwy and in between there was a highesh hill and the chapel was on the top and his house was there.

Q32 : Was your Welsh good when you moved to Eglwysfach in 1954?

RST: Well, it was better. I was able to cope. But Eglwysfach was very much under an English influence; all large houses were in the English occupation.

It was only after going to Aberdaron that I really became more fluent - though it's under such a pressure from tourism - Llŷn Peninsula is a Welsh-speaking area, you can, on the whole, speak in Welsh and get an answer in Welsh. This goes right up towards Caernarvon up through the mountain districts. It will be very unlikely that you meet somebody who can't speak Welsh and you can't get a Welsh answer - not especially in the winter period. What happens now that visitors begin to come ...

I mean I can stop in Aberystwyth ... if I first stopped the first person I met, probably he'd be unable to

answer me.

Q32: But there are a good number of Welsh-speaking people in Aberystwyth.

RST: Yes, this is the point I was making earlier on; we're making such a fuss of this language question. On the continent of Europe where they're used to this language problem ... if you go to places like Majorca as I have - you see notices in German, French, English, Italian, Spanish - the major languages and they cope with them all, but in Wales there's this kind of 'can it be English or Welsh. I propose English', and you know the kind of thing. I am not wildly enthusiastic for bilingualism, but on the other hand and in this present situation, at least if we can get the Welsh in as well it's an achievement, but there's more and more Welsh people who think it must be in English. Emyr Humphreys said that they suffer from schizophrenia in Wales; they've got a divided personality. This is the result of the anglicisation; they don't know who they are.

I've got people in Llŷn who speak Welsh to me and never anything but Welsh if they do any work for me - and when I was a vicar they came to pay me for funeral expenses or something like this - they'd write the cheque in English; they'd give receipts in English, the headings on their papers are in English and I tried to say to them in Welsh, 'you're English are you?' And I'd pull their legs and laugh, but

they've no intention of changing, and when they open up a shop and start up a business, it has all to be in English, as if there's fear inside them that if they don't.....

Q33: But many parents would feel that the future of their children could be better secured through the English language.

RST: Of course. It's a world language. This has been our destiny to be up against one of the greatest languages that the world has ever seen. It's very subtle, and with America speaking it as well, it's got a world-wide influence.

In the hotel where I am staying, I heard this morning that there were some, I think, Hindus, Pakistanis or Hindus, they sounded like Hindus. The mother and father and the little girl about 5 or 6, and she was speaking English and they were speaking English but amongst themselves they were speaking Hindi presumably, and when the older daughter came in, a girl about 18, she spoke Hindi, but the young, I suppose have settled; they are the recent settlers...

(There follows a discussion about the significance of language in understanding the culture of a country. H.M.H. tells R.S.T. how the British are very quick in learning foreign languages. R.S.T. continues his speech.)

I have always said this. It has always been my standpoint that although Welsh is a minority language, you can't hope to understand Wales without the language. I mean my wife being English, she has seen the sort of change in peoples' personalities when they speak English to her and when they speak Welsh to me. It is a translation. I mean there are very nice Welsh people about, and we speak Welsh together, and it's one of the pleasures of life to speak to these nice Welsh people in their own language. You feel that this has always gone on in Wales, and then my wife would come into the room and they speak to her in English ... which is showing in part a false light ...And so it's happened when English-speaking people come into Wales to study the situation, they don't get anywhere nearer to the hearts of the people.

Q34: But Raymond Garlick speaks Welsh.

RST: Yes he's learned it. Yes. I don't think he's very comfortable at it, but he understands it. It was the other way round with him; he was the Englishman who married the Welsh girl, I was the Welshman and married the English person. But on the other hand, whereas his wife was already Welsh-speaking when he married her, I was not Welsh-speaking when my wife married me.

Q35: Q35: Does Gwydion, your son, speak Welsh?

RST: No, for similar reasons. He was born when we were in Manavon and I was still learning the language, I wasn't fluent at all, so it would have been quite unnatural for me to speak, and so he went away to school, to a boarding school because education was so poor where we were living - another aspect of the problem - he got better by going to an English boarding school than if he'd been educated ...

It was not a choice between a Welsh or an English education, but the choice was between a good education in English or a bad education in Wales.

Q36: But you don't think it is very difficult for an adult to learn a foreign language ...

RST: No, as I've said if only some vicars had been willing to take me when I was in my twenties I'd have learnt it in three months.

I did try to go to Llŷn, there was a parish who wanted a curate, and when I went over to see him, he saw my Welsh was more or less non-existent, and he was not willing to take me. But that was a very Welsh area. Then if he had taken me, I would have learnt in three months. It is much easier when you are young, it becomes more difficult when you get older.

Q37: But your Welsh prose is considered by many to be perfect.

RST: I can write Welsh prose. These are articles. I don't know if I can write a novel or even a short story because then you've to use the colloquial; conversational and I am not ... this isn't inside me. People speak quite differently amongst themselves, and you know a novelist has to convey the character that he is, so I don't think I am so good at it.

Q38: Does the nuclear war worry you?

RST: Yes, it worries me mainly because of the fact that I've got a son and he's got a son. I feel a certain amount of - it is not exactly regret - I wonder if I should have ever brought him into the world if this is all that I can offer him, a threat of devastation. I don't narrow it down to family matters, but this is one of my main concerns, one of the reasons why I engage in this activity. I don't worry about myself, I've got to die sometime, I think it'll be terrible if it happens, but my wife and I have more or less had our lives, but young people have it to come. I don't think it's right for us older people to stand by and do nothing when we can thoroughly disapprove.

This is why I lose sympathy with the English; they're a militant people, always have been, fighting people. These are their great historical moments when they go to war. I can't raise any enthusiasm for it at all. And this Falklands business, trying to whip

up feelings over things like this. Just a glorious opportunity to try to relive one of the phases of English history; even intelligent English people would agree with you that it is all rubbish. These are all psychological variations. I mean England, she doesn't count any more, it is America and Russia what they've called the super powers and China possibly - but of course when somebody has been important and then they are no longer important it sets up psychological problems. It is wonderful of the English Parliament to be meeting as in the great old days, giving orders to attack.

Q39: But there are Welshmen who seem to be proud of Lloyd George or even Neil Kinnock ...

RST: I don't know what problems you've got in Palestine, but we certainly have got them in Wales. I mean when I was a vicar, to go out into the hillside in a lonely little cottage and to know that I was going to speak Welsh to a Welsh person, an oldish person, and there on the wall would be Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, all dressed up in the regalia ... this is how they are. If the Queen or Prince Philip were to come to Pwllheli, they all turn out to shout and fly banners and flags, just like English people ... I can understand it but I just cannot sympathize with them at all. I only despise them you know. I always say to them I know what you mean, my Prince was killed, he's been murdered in 1282.

Q40: Is it true that during Prince Charles' visit to Bardsey Island, you were his guide?

RST: I happened to be the chairman of the committee at that time and it fell upon me to - I didn't derive much pleasure from that.

Q41: But Prince Charles speaks Welsh doesn't he?

RST: He was here for a year or something, they pushed a bit of Welsh into him. I think it's come out again. No, you can't expect it, can you? Their lives are completely different. This was just a stunt, you see. It was part of a stunt. It was George Thomas I think who thought that the Investiture in Caernarfon was just to take the steam out of a Welshman.

The English are much more politically astute than we are, they've more than five hundred years practice, they know all the tricks. This is why if they see a slightest sign of violence in Wales they start immediately treating us like children, the headline in newspapers like 'You terrible Welsh people, disgrace', and all sorts of things, because they know it works, and there's so much feeling in Wales about violence 'oh we don't approve of violence'. You get Welsh people very much on our side, but they'd say 'oh no, we don't approve of violence', and the English cash in on this.

And if you even let off a quarter pound bomb somewhere in Wales, you will be immediately dubbed a terrorist, because they know it works because this is the way they handle the Welsh situation, but when they're handling the Irish situation, they're more careful.

Everybody is a terrorist to the English who does not agree with the English way of doing things. English can go in and machine gun people and always it was necessary;'it was a difficult situation and if England had not acted in time it would have got out of hand, so we had to, we had to employ violence. The fact that we killed four or five hundred people, this was nothing, it was necessary, it was expedient'. And when the Welsh think it is necessary to put fire to something, this is seen as terrorism or extremism. It does not get you anywhere.

Q42: But don't you think that everything is working for the benefit of the Welsh language, I mean there are Welsh programmes on S4C and perhaps a Welsh University in the near future?

RST: Yes, some people are more optimistic than I am. I am probably a pessimistic character or personality. I've got an old friend, he's an aged person in Pwllheli, and we have talks, and he is an optimist. He's eighty years of age now, and I think it's wonderful that he feels optimistic. We always sort of cross swords like this, he says, 'well I'm an optimist'. There

are encouraging signs - but I mean the linguistic situation, although it is deteriorating, it is much better in Wales than in any other (Celtic countries) -Ireland or Scotland.

Q43: You admired Hugh McDiarmid, didn't you?

RST: Yes. Well. I think he lambasted the respectability, the Anglophiles, the people who admired the English in Scotland, he pitched into them and he'd written some quite good poems.

Q44: But do you think his writing in Scots was successful?

RST: He was better in Scots than English, yes, I think Scots was quite effective. I don't like it all that much myself but I think it suited Scotland. I mean Gaelic is the old Scottish language, but if you can't write in Gaelic, I think it's better to write in Lalans, in Scots than it is in English. We have got nothing comparable of course, it is either Welsh or English.

You see these things were supposed to be half way houses on the way back. The main impetus of the Anglo-Welsh movement was that it was a way back to a Welsh writing community again but it hasn't worked. All it has done really is to make certain people much more conscious of their Welshness. I think several of the Anglo-Welsh writers, by now, can speak Welsh or at least they can understand it, Glyn Jones, Emyr Humphreys, Roland Mathias, and people like these,

but it has not really made any one of them write in Welsh successfully. I mean Emyr Humphreys can because he learned Welsh when he was quite young I think, but it hasn't had the ... as you know it really came into being during the Second World War, this was the main cause of the Anglo-Welsh movement that when the troops drawn from Wales found themselves in the army or the navy, they became conscious of all these thrown together with all these English people that they were not English, and certain among them like Alun Lewis, Keidrych Rhys, began to write about this experience and through running magazines like Wales, reviving it, gave birth to the Anglo-Welsh movement and as you know this has had its effect on me. This is what I was wanting, I was beginning to want to write, but I was just writing poems in imitation of the people I admired at that period like Edward Thomas or ... but when I came into contact with the Anglo-Welsh movement it gave me a direction.

Q45: Does it mean that now you accept the title 'Anglo-Welsh'?

RST: No, I don't accept it any more than Emyr Humphreys does. I think I'm a Welshman writing in English, I don't want to be called an Anglo-Welsh poet or an Anglo-Welsh anything, because in any case, since I write prose in Welsh it is not strictly true, the hyphenation is true of course. But sais Gymro and an Anglo-Welshman is not quite the same in Welsh.

It's got even a more derogatory dismissive thing about it, I think. When we say sais Gymro we mean a Welshman who has become an Englishman really, it is not the same.

Q46: Do you think an English poet who lives in Wales can be called an Anglo Welsh poet?

RST: It's difficult isn't it? I should say he's an Englishman who sometimes writes about Wales. I mean when I was a young man and came in contact with ... this is why I used to go and give talks to students in Bangor for instance. Professor Price was saying something this morning of how he'd met me at that time giving a talk. I used to think that it was possible that this was a means of becoming much more Welsh, that if you want to deserve the name of the Anglo-Welsh writer you should know Welsh history, geography and natural history. You should know everything about Wales and use it in your work, and I tried to do it for a while. I think amongst the poets, I think I was the most Anglo-Welsh, if you care to call it, but with the passage of time I felt that I can't go on like this. I've done, I've said what I wanted to say and so I drifted away - and I feel if I do write a poem about the Welsh situation, I'm only really repeating what I've already said. I do occasionally, something, some incident will set me off like this marina last year in Pwllheli. Sometime later you suddenly get an idea, just write down

a poem. My heart isn't in it as it used to be.

Q47: Do you choose your own poems for selection, or is it the publisher's decision?

RST: No, my own decision.

Q48: You had some problems in publishing your early poems.

RST: I had difficulty in finding a publisher, yes. It was war time to begin with. The publishers tended to clamp down, they tended to close down on poetry and they were looking for war poets. I wrote a poem which I published in a popular English magazine of that period and it appeared in this magazine, and I got a letter straightaway from the publisher asking me if I've got any more, they were looking for a poet. The poem I wrote was about an airman flying - Homo Sapiens 1941. And when I sent them several poems, none of which were war poems, they sent them back. They were looking for something to justify the war, and to express how the people feel about the war.

Q49: During the war you seem to have isolated yourself...

RST: I was in a place called Tower Green, because I wanted to get married and my vicar didn't want a married curate and I didn't want to go into lodging. So we were just on the edge of the Cheshire border,

people entirely English. Seeing the hills in the distance, I'd say I must come back to Wales, but it was in the country - I mean I get very worried about violence. I don't think I could have stood life in a town under bombardment. It worries me very much. The noise and the destruction, I get very depressed. I am not a man of violence so I wouldn't be much good. This is why, I think if you're not good at things yourself, you've no right to encourage other people.

I am not a man of violence, I don't see why I should encourage other people to violence. This is where members of the Christian Church, the Bishops have been so guilty of being militaristic, encouraging young men to join the forces. I don't see it as part of a Christian duty at all. A Christian is a man of peace. Whatever you believe about Christ he was a man of peace, he came preaching peace.

Bishops and clergymen holding forth and saying 'Oh, Russians are a bad lot, we must resist them', and so on, it is not called for at all, you leave this to the politicians.

Q50: Do you think the CND is worth supporting?

RST: Oh yes, it is a good movement, but I'm afraid it's losing its battle. The government propaganda is

succeeding, they're telling lies and the people are believing the lies.

(At this point, RST asks HMH if there are Arabic newspapers and HMH gives a positive answer. Then RST adds that ...)

The whole of the English press , the main daily papers are pro-government and so they're anti-Welsh, anti-Irish, anti-Scottish, and the Welsh people read these things right away where I live. You can't be further in Wales than where I live. People are buying the Daily Mirror, the Daily Mail, the Sun, they're getting the English point of view all the time.

All we can do with our little local papers which come out twice a month - you know - Y Faner which comes once a week, only about two thousand five hundred people take these, you can't. There's no wonder why the government is winning. Our little local Welsh paper once a month, it is pro-CND and Pro-Welsh Nationalism, what can it do against daily and on the television taking the English point all the time. The Western Mail sells all through South Wales and the Liverpool Post sells through North Wales, and the bulk of the Liverpool Post sales are in North Wales and North Wales is keeping this paper going. Without the readers in North Wales, this paper would probably collapse. English propaganda, the English point of view is being financed by Welsh people.

Bibliography

I The fullest bibliographies of R.S. Thomas's own work have been prepared by Sandra Anstey and published as follows:

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B. For his prose in R.S. Thomas:Selected Prose
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'A blue snake in the valley ran' (The National Library of Wales n.d.)

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