

**THE SPIRITUAL QUEST FOR GOD, WALES AND SELF
IN SELECTED POEMS OF R.S. THOMAS**

CHAN SIEW YEN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
2003**



**THE SPIRITUAL QUEST FOR GOD, WALES AND SELF
IN SELECTED POEMS OF R.S. THOMAS**

**A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
University of Malaya**

By

CHAN SIEW YEN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
2003**

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on R.S Thomas's enchantment with the spiritual aspect of his relationship with the Divine, his life as a Welshman and his journey as a poet-priest. It discusses why Thomas had such an unconventional view of the Almighty and what his struggles were concerning being a Welsh poet.

Chapter One gives a brief introduction of Thomas's background and the factors that shaped his poetic and spiritual vision. These include his being Welsh-born but English-bred. This introductory chapter defines Thomas's horizons as a poet and how being Welsh and being a clergyman influenced his writings. It touches briefly on his views concerning the unwelcome influence of the English.

Chapter Two deals more closely with Thomas's struggle with a far-away God evident in his earliest poems. It discusses Thomas's image of a machine-like God and the intrusion of modernisation into the relationship between man and God. It further defines the poet's concept of a Dark God, one who is either hidden, far away or even absent. Here, Thomas learns to look for answers in the silent darkness that presents itself to him as a life of faith.

The next chapter looks into Thomas's fascination with Wales and the Welsh. It investigates his 'peasant' poems which are ascribed to his time spent in service in his different parishes. Here, Thomas reflects on the link between man and nature. This chapter also highlights the role of the character Iago Prytherch and examines him in the context of his representation of Wales and his connection with Thomas. It concludes with Thomas acknowledging the unfortunate impossibility of the existence of his ideal Wales.

The subsequent chapter delves deeper into the poet's personal life as poet and priest. It articulates his struggles as a spokesperson for the things of God (a priest), and a spokesperson for the emotions of man (a poet). We find Thomas going to great lengths to define his dual but intricately interwoven roles. We confront the poet's contentions with the challenges in these roles.

The final chapter concludes the arguments of Thomas's spiritual search which led to an acceptance of a silent but real God, an imperfect but inspiring Wales, and a confusing but complementing task as poet-priest. It concludes a study of the life and works of a man who wrote for a span of more than half a century and who remains relevant and interesting to today's world.

ABSTRAK

Disertasi ini meninjau kegemaran R.S. Thomas dengan aspek rohaniyah dalam perhubungannya dengan Tuhan, kehidupannya sebagai seorang rakyat Wales dan perjalanan hidupnya sebagai seorang penulis dan paderi. Ia meneliti sebab-sebab Thomas memiliki pandangan mengenai Tuhan yang begitu berbeza dan apakah pergelutannya sebagai seorang penulis Wales.

Bab Satu memberi pengenalan ringkas latarbelakang Thomas dan factor-faktor yang mendorong visi puisi dan rohaniyahnya. Ini termasuk situasi dimana beliau dilahirkan di Wales tetapi dibesarkan di England. Bab pengenalan ini mendefinisikan penulisan Thomas dan bagaimana sebagai seorang rakyat Wales dan seorang paderi telah mempengaruhi penulisannya. Secara ringkas, bab ini juga membincangkan pandangan Thomas mengenai pengaruh-pengaruh Inggeris yang tidak disukainya.

Bab Dua mengkaji dengan lebih mendalam pergelutan Thomas dengan Tuhan yang jauh dan ini boleh dilihat melalui pembacaan puisi-puisinya yang terawal. Ia membincang mengenai imej Thomas mengenai Tuhan yang seolah-olah mesin dan campurtangan modenisasi terhadap perhubungan manusia dan Tuhan. Seterusnya, bab ini mendefinisikan konsep Thomas mengenai Tuhan seperti 'a Dark God', iaitu Tuhan yang tersembunyi, jauh dan tiada di kehadiran. Di sini, Thomas mempelajari untuk mencari jawapan-jawapan di dalam kegelapan, iaitu untuk menjalankan kehidupan dengan keimanan.

Bab seterusnya meliputi kegemaran Thomas dengan negara Wales dan orang-orang Wales. Ia mengkaji puisi-puisi Thomas mengenai petani-petani yang Thomas

mengenal **semasa** bekerja di gereja. Di sini, Thomas membuat perhubungan diantara manusia dan persekitaraan. Bab ini juga menghujahkan fungsi watak Iago Prytherch dan mengkajinya dan **perwakilannya** untuk Wales dan perhubungannya dengan Thomas. Bab ini mengakhiri **dengan** pengistiharaan Thomas mengenai kesusahan wujudnya Wales yang sempurna.

Bab seterusnya mengemukakan kehidupan Thomas sebagai seorang penulis dan paderi. Ia membincangkan pergelutan Thomas sebagai seorang wakil Tuhan (paderi) dan wakil emosi manusia (penulis). Kita mendapati bahawa Thomas mencuba sedaya-upaya untuk mencantumkan kedua-dua tugas ini. Thomas menghadapi banyak dugaan dan cabaran **semasa** menjalankan tugas kedua-dua watak ini.

Bab terakhir menutup tirai hujahan-hujahan pencarian rohaniah Thomas dimana beliau menerima Tuhan yang benar tetapi diam, Wales yang tidak sempurna tetapi yang membawa inspirasi, dan tugas mencabarkan tetapi membawa komplimen sebagai seorang penulis dan paderi. Bab ini mengakhiri analisis kehidupan seorang penulis yang telah menulis puisi dan prosa untuk jangka masa lebih daripada setengah abad dan masih relevan dan penting untuk dunia kini.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the most significant things in my life happened during the writing of this dissertation. I got married, I started and left my fulfilling but tiring teaching job of four years, my very close grandmother passed away, and my husband and I decided to continue our studies in a country far away. Throughout these events, R.S. Thomas has always been there at the back of my mind. It is now, having completed my study of him, that I am eternally grateful to several persons:

Firstly, to my supervisor, **Ms. Wong Ming Yook**, who stuck with me through thick and thin, and whose very much needed gentle reprimands of "Where's your draft?" enabled me to complete this piece of work. I could never have done this without you. You are truly God-sent!

To my wonderful parents, **Mr. & Mrs. Chan Ah Wa**, who supported me from the very beginning in pursuing this degree, and who quietly encouraged me throughout this long process. Thanks, Mi & Di!

To my invaluable friends, **Dr. Woo Yin Ling and Ms. Christi John**, who scouted around England searching for works of and on R.S. Thomas, and who generously made these available to me.

To my loving husband, **Mr. Eugene Wong Kwok Hoe**, for your support financially, emotionally and mentally. Loving you is the best thing that has ever happened to me. (Sorry for taking so long with the dissertation!)

And finally, but most importantly, to **my Creator and God, Jesus Christ** for being there for me in my tears and my joys.

Writing this page of acknowledgements is the best part of the dissertation!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Abstrak	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: The Spiritual Quest for God	19
Chapter Three: The Spiritual Quest for Wales	47
Chapter Four: The Spiritual Quest for Self	69
Chapter Five: Conclusion	86
Works Cited	92