

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

...I had looked forward  
to old age as a time  
of quietness, a time to draw  
my horizons about me,  
to watch memories ripening  
in the sunlight of a walled garden.  
But there is a void  
over my head and the distance  
within that the tireless signals  
come from.

"The New Mariner", *Between Here and Now*

Thomas's journey has clearly been traced and he has drawn his horizons about him, albeit the "void / over [his] head". Concluding this study on Thomas is "as though we [have] emerged from a long tunnel ... There is still at times the acute sense of the disharmony of things." Nevertheless, we must join with Thomas in realising that "in and through this very disharmony [we have] found new possibilities of affirmation. Beyond the darkness there is light" (Allchin 119).

In Chapter One, we saw that the poet-priest struggled to the very end about the reality and tangibility of God in the lives of mortal men. While a number of his poems addressed the unconventional idea of God and the link to the machine, others communicated God as being a Dark God. Thomas was concerned about the encroachment of a rising “antipathy of modern, materialistic, and technologically oriented culture to the spiritual dimension of human life” (Lloyd). The machine came to represent God, then the new god of the age; finally, he pursued the issue of how man’s viewpoint of God was tarnished by the screen of modernisation and urbanisation.

We also discussed how Thomas challenged the conventional views of God as being ever-present and ever-near; instead, man had to continually trace the Divine in clues and hints left behind. Waiting on God became the spiritual foundation on which the poet wrote. In his anguish, Thomas was finally resigned to the “silence to / which we appeal” (“There is a being, they say”, *Counterpoint*). As God was very much the centre of Thomas’s universe, he wanted to see faith in God as relevant to the other things that mattered to him, namely, to Wales and the peasants. This has been difficult as well, because “God is not some false answer to the human predicament, nor simply the brutal cause of their distress but the very predicament itself” (Radner). God himself is the “problem” and Chapter One reflected on how Thomas wrestled with this problem.

In Chapter Two, we traced the more difficult contention this poet had with a passive, dying Wales. Thomas never found complete satisfaction and fulfilment and recorded that he was “worrying continually for a dying nation, and tortured by the unanswerable question: is she being killed or does she *choose* to die? A mixture of both [one] imagine[s]” (Gordon).

Nevertheless to Thomas, Wales was home. Her simplicity and authenticity must have enthralled him right to the very end, thus justifying the unfaltering Welsh fortitude in him. We saw how the peasants and parishioners kept Thomas fascinated. He gave voice to the unassuming country folk who had thus far gone unnoticed. It was in these that Thomas “attempt[ed] to cull some mark of God’s presence” (Radner). He believed that in the rugged hills of Wales where the rugged villagers lived, the unobtrusive God was present.

Thomas was always completely devoted to Wales and her people. But in the end, Thomas’s quest for a wholly spiritual Wales still remained incomplete. The Wales that he searched for never fully materialised, but remained merely a fantasy and an ideal in his mind. Perhaps Thomas had resigned himself to the Wales that he could not change, for example, as seen in her peasants and their backward ways. Journalist Tom Davies explains that this is “Wales as she has always been – where decent honest people conduct decent honest lives, working the land and living in the fear and shadow of the Lord.” Quite naturally, Thomas had to come “to terms with his place within the web of life” (87).

Another resignation that Thomas had was that the very same materialism and technological advancements that affected and influenced the search for God also influenced the Wales that Thomas lived in. He regarded them as a destructive force. This force was ever-present in the lives of the peasants and parishioners of whom Thomas was so fond. The position Thomas longed for was for an uncontaminated and unspoilt Wales, and he strove to restore her to her former glory as a nation with her own language and culture. It appears that Thomas only managed to do this somewhat, but was never completely satisfied with Wales and the Welsh. His passionate feelings for Wales are

regarded by some, like I.R.F. Gordon, as “a partly mythical Wales of his imagination.” He searched for an “Abercuawg” but failed to find it.

In Chapter Three, one more facet of Thomas’s poetry that was studied was the coexisting roles he played as poet and priest. Thomas worked towards an understanding of his role as a representative of the Church to people whom he felt were spiritually uninterested. Thus, this frustration found expression and release when Thomas wrote poetry. With his provocative style, he addressed vexing issues and questions which any ordinary priest would have found difficult to handle. Thomas himself remarked that his “interior monologue” was given “tone[,] pitch and plangency” (D.W. Davies). He demonstrated “the provisionality of all spiritual utterance” (M.W. Thomas 14).

It needs to be reiterated that Thomas did not always find the answer to all his questions or resolve the issues that arose. Resigned to unanswered questions and incomplete puzzles, there were times when Thomas “paused / now for lack of the oxygen / of the spirit” (“Relay”, *Laboratories of the Spirit*). Many times, it felt as if he was moving in circles, like a vicious cycle; as he kept “searching for meaning. / The waves [were] a moving staircase / to climb” (“Correspondence”, *Between Here and Now*).

Ultimately, Thomas searched for the divine in the ordinary. His frugal diction has given us enormous insight into the man he was, allowing for further interpretation and exegesis. Thomas allows us the versatility of personal interpretation, and in our interpretation, “it is helpful ... to regard each of Thomas’s books as a lap in a personal journey ... A map can be imagined that would chart the contradictions and temptations this poet forced himself to overcome as he persevered on his barefoot way. ... [T]here are halting places, pits of despair, a few dazzling peaks of arrival, interspersed with shifts or changes in the overall topography” (Stevenson 43). M.W. Thomas describes Thomas as

being in “the abiding humanness of the world of uncertainties in which he there reluctantly dwell[ed]” (15).

Strangely, Thomas was a man who struggled with intimacy (he and his first wife slept in separate rooms), yet he hungered for an intimate God. While known to many as impersonal and cold, we venture into his heart’s deepest contents through his poetry. Many a time, Thomas has been very transparent with his readers. Thomas seemed, “after retirement, to have evolved spiritually out of unfathomable space, not toward contentment or truce, but clearly into a wider vision. That vision creates a gentle lightening of tone ... a bleeding off of pressure, [and] a calmness of waiting” (J.C. Morgan 56).

Finally, we can see that Thomas’s themes and preoccupations are all intertwined. This study has attempted to draw out certain main themes for discussion, but at the same time, it has also tried to appreciate the interweaving of Thomas’s concerns and to demonstrate the integration of the poet who also called himself a priest. His utterance was that in the end, the “human, the animal, the natural, and ... the divine are ... all in eternal synchrony” (Vendler 72). Thomas has been a difficult study, but most certainly also an enlightening one. Triggs, in his Internet article, describes Thomas’s poetry as “the ancient and modern, the secular and spiritual meet[ing] one another and coexist[ing] – often uneasily.” Thomas is “a rare example of a priest who has faced the reality of the contemporary world with its challenge to faith and morality, and has been able to translate it into believable spiritual terms” (Hanvey). His death at the end of the twentieth century marked the end of an original poet who was unafraid to allow all to read his innermost thoughts:

I think that maybe  
I will be a little surer  
of being a little nearer.  
That's all. Eternity  
is in the understanding  
that that little is more than enough.

"A.D.", *Counterpoint*