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Prythoroch and Pastoral: Rural Reality in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas

by

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ABSTRACT

PRYTHURCH AND PASTORAL: RURAL REALITY IN THE
POETRY OF R. S. THOMAS

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The poems in which R. S. Thomas depicts the hill-farmers of his native Wales are examined in this thesis, primarily in terms of genre and theme. The particular genre within which this large segment of the poetry seems to fall is the pastoral mode, as interpreted mainly by Wordsworth and William Empson. The argument that pastoral is a genre that presents certain environmental characteristics of human behavior, particularly those evident in a rural or primitivistic situation, and is not necessarily defined by traditional stylistic criteria, forms the basis of the first chapter. In the subsequent chapters the poems by Thomas that fall within this pastoral category are examined. In pastoral there usually exists an implicit contrast between town life, the sophisticated environment of the writer, and rural life in which man is in immediate contact with the reality of nature's life-death cycle. The extreme contrast between these two forms of existence—urban and rural—as it appears in Thomas's poetry, is discussed in the second chapter. The third chapter concerns the nature of this rural reality. Throughout the
farmer poems run a contrast between what Thomas calls the "light" and the "dark". Glimpses of an ineffable purpose underlying the life force fluctuate with moments of bleak certainty that nature's survival ethic reflects the complete absence of divine love. The last main chapter of the thesis traces the acceptance of this "dark" side of nature that Thomas's poet-priest persona achieves through his evolving relationship with Iago Prytherch, an Adamic type of farmer whose life epitomizes man's potential harmony with the universe.
In his study of two very different poetic styles entitled "Extremes in Poetry: R. S. Thomas and Ted Hughes," J. D. Heinsworth, a lecturer at Sheffield University, has said, "Who are the most significant of contemporary British poets? I am sure others besides myself would answer, without hesitation, R. S. Thomas and Ted Hughes." Heinsworth, as he suggests, is not alone in this high estimate of Thomas; critics of the Welsh priest's poetry are almost unanimously as appreciative. Under the circumstances, it is remarkable then that its paucity is the most noticeable aspect of their criticism. One dissertation written at the University of Connecticut is virtually the only acknowledgement to date by American scholarship and, as the fairly comprehensive bibliography appended to this thesis illustrates, English critics have scarcely been less hesitant in discussing him. Even anthologists of modern poetry rarely include samples of Thomas's poetry, though the work of Hughes is liberally represented. The reasons for this disparity among those who are qualified to judge the merit of Thomas's poetry seem to hinge on the criterion of topicality. Thomas is an avowed anachronism in the twentieth century and two aspects of the
poetry, its pastoral setting and its simplicity of style, reflect his lack of concern for the vogue in literary taste.

Poetry, like religion, is primarily concerned with the nature of reality in our universe. Judging by the social themes of their poetry, contemporary writers seem to indicate that this reality can still be found only in the modern urban world. In this context the pastoral setting of Thomas's poetry would seem to convey a suggestion of escapism from the unpleasant reality of one world to the idyllicism of another. The poetry of Thomas, in fact, could hardly be less escapist; indeed it examines reality with an unusual lack of compromise, even for modern poetry. His belief that reality is found only in the country and not in contemporary society is a major theme examined throughout this paper. The apparently simple style of the poetry goes hand in glove with its pastoral setting and is similarly somewhat out of favour. In most modern poetry the complexity of our urban society is reflected in syntactical intricacies by such poets as Cummings and Ferlinghetti, or in complex patterns of allusion inspired by such poets as T. S. Eliot. By contrast, Thomas's poetry is tersely conversational and rarely allusive. Furthermore the imagery is archetypal in its stark simplicity. An example of this is the recurrence of the blood image throughout the poetry. Blood is one of the most basic yet most charged images a poet can employ; depending on its context
it can evoke any one of a wide range of responses. Thomas uses it simply, yet graphically in the early poetry to underscore man's affinity to the physical world of nature. The metaphysical association between the flow of rivers or the flow of sap and the flow of the bloodstream recurs constantly: a farmer cuts his hand digging turnips and the blood seeps "home" into the soil. In the later poetry the image is often more subtle. "...and the prey hung/Jewels of blood round the day's throat," is one of many images illustrating the cruelty of nature that are discussed in this paper.

This fundamental lack of any elaboration in the style, imagery and themes of Thomas's poetry forms the major criterion of Hainsworth's comparison between Ted Hughes and the Welsh poet:

In all these aspects—vocabulary, syntax, imagery and verse-movement—there is an element of shock in Hughes's use of language that contrasts with the unobtrusiveness of Thomas. This is usually justified, it is only fair to add, for the contrast in styles between the two poets corresponds to a contrast in the themes they treat of.3

James Franklin Knapp, in the American dissertation referred to earlier, R. S. Thomas and the Plain Style in Post War British Poetry, associates the simplicity of Thomas's style, the "unobtrusiveness" Hainsworth refers to, with a possible trend in post-symbolist British poetry. He asserts that the plainness of Thomas's style is strictly functional in a
social sense, that it is part of the poet's attempt to counteract the increasing complexity of society:

...instead of attempting to mirror the phantasmagoria in his words, he strove for a clarity of statement which might help man to orient himself in such a world. And this is the heart of my assertion that Thomas' plain style is a function of his belief that the poet's role must be a public one.⁴

Whether Dr. Knapp really proves his assertion of a trend in "plain style" may best be determined through familiarity with his dissertation. One point is fairly certain, however; judging by the very active role Thomas assumed in the recent Welsh outcry against the investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales, his interpretation of the function of either the poet or of the priest can hardly be considered monastical.

The only book-length study of modern poetry in which Thomas's poetry is examined at any length appears to be Rule and Energy: Trends in British Poetry since the Second World War, by John Press. Press, like Knapp, is interested in Thomas's dual role of priest and poet, though his critique does not focus on Thomas's consideration of the pragmatic function of poetry but on the judgement that Thomas, as a priest, brings to bear on the people he depicts. Comparing Thomas with Morgan, the zealous young priest in Thomas's early poem "The Minister," Rule asserts:
Morgan died, worn out by his fanatical struggle against the inhuman force of Nature and the power of sin. Thomas is spared this doom by the warmth of his compassion and the wider generosity of his faith, which is profoundly Christian but not sectarian. His verdict on the sour, sterile inheritance of Welsh Calvinism is uncompromisingly severe.  

The weakness of this and similar statements Mr. Press makes about the poetry of Thomas is that at best they present a very limited assessment. In fairness, the limitation is partly unavoidable—*Rule and Energy* was published in 1963 from lectures presented by Press in 1962—prior to the publication of Thomas's last three volumes and their strikingly divergent viewpoint from the first volume which Press emphasizes. (This divergence is discussed in Chapter IV of the present thesis.) Usually Press is also too general in his assessments. As the reviewer of his book in the *Times Literary Supplement* eloquently described it: "*Rule and Energy* is animated neither by fervour, distress, nor the curiosity that insists on an explanation. It glows gently rather with a sort of motiveless benignity." Most of the criticism on Thomas's poetry is similarly inadequate. There is a notable absence of an in-depth analysis of Thomas's themes and imagery among the criticisms which the single dissertation does not fill. Moreover, in only one instance, in a critical article written by R. George Thomas, has a
really constructive attempt been made to establish thematic guidelines that can help any reader orient himself in the world of farmers painted by R. S. Thomas. This thesis should help supply both needs.

R. George Thomas, the critic mentioned above, also wrote the biography-criticism of Thomas for the British Writers and Their Work series. A Welsh poet like his namesake, this second Thomas displays a familiarity with the life of R. S. Thomas and an understanding of his work that must rank him as a foremost authority on the subject. His critical article, "The Poetry of R. S. Thomas," has really only one major failing—it is dissatisfyingly brief. The article, obviously written by a poet, shows an insight into Thomas's technique, touched on but briefly in this thesis. R. George Thomas cautiously treads the discriminatory line in examining the important relationship in Thomas's verse between the poet and the subjective voice: "In this early work Thomas's continual address to the reader is relieved from monotony by a continual shift of attention from the poet's subjective moral statement toward the object to be described." The article was published in the October 1962 issue of A Review of English Literature, like Press's work, too early to encompass the change in Thomas's attitude as well as the refinement of his poetic skills that appears in the latest volume, Pietà. This thesis, in these respects, supplements what R. George Thomas says.
NOTES
Preface

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Although R. S. Thomas’s poems encompass the city, the sea, the church, marriages, funerals and the creation and the function of poetry, his primary concern is with the hill-farmers of his Welsh parish. These farmer poems are the ones discussed throughout this thesis. As suggested by the thesis title, the major portion of the discussion focuses on the theme of “rural reality,” i.e., on the knowledge man can have of God—the cosmic force embodied in the flux of nature—only through participation in rural activity. The important role played by “Prytherch,” one of the farmers, is another major concern. In this first chapter the farmer poems are compared with their precedents in the “Pastoral” genre in order to provide a literary perspective.

“Pastoral,” in its literary sense, is a relatively non-specific term that has probably been described most accurately by William Empson as “the obscure tradition.” ¹ Although in recent years the term has been applied almost indiscriminately to any kind of literature dealing with the countryside, in the field of criticism it has usually referred specifically to the stylized mode of poetry that flourished in England between the 16th and 18th centuries, to such conventional
poems as Pope’s early *Pastorals*. This was a type of poetry deliberately patterned after the *Idylls* of Theocritus and the *Bucolics* of Virgil. Three of the foremost modern authorities on the subject of pastoral poetry—Walter W. Greg, Frank Kermode, and J. E. Congleton—focus exclusively on this earlier English period in their major criticism, generally acknowledging as pastoral literature only those works which, like Pope’s, more or less comply with certain pastoral criteria outlined by Renaissance and 18th century critics like Rapin and Fontenelle on the Continent or E. K., Sidney and Pope himself in England. As shown throughout Congleton’s exhaustive work on pastoral theory, these early critics, following guidelines suggested by Aristotle and Horace, attempted to define the genre by establishing certain rigid, basically stylistic, laws of pastoral decorum, which, by de-emphasizing the importance of theme or content, stifled both innovation and realism in the genre. It is not really till we reach Wordsworth and poems like “Michael: A Pastoral Poem,” with its rambling narrative and moral commentary on city life, that we find the genre really becoming established less as a formalized mode and more as a relatively informal type of poetry reiterating a theme of harmony between man and nature. More recently, William Empson further extended the boundaries of pastoral. By virtually ignoring the traditional
stylistic peculiarities and discussing pastoral instead in terms of its common themes and archetypes. Empson extended the scope of the genre within criticism to encompass works not previously thought of as pastoral in nature. A few of the suggestions he puts forward in *Some Versions of Pastoral* will help provide the basis for my definition of Thomas's pastoral poetry.

Empson identifies pastoral as a literature that expresses the traditional patterns of life and growth in a specific area. It is a premise that seems to call for one important qualification. As John F. Lyne, a critic who otherwise enthusiastically endorses Empson, has pointed out, this is a somewhat unrestricted definition. It enables Empson to discuss a work about life in London like The Beggar's Opera, which is really mock pastoral, or pastoral only in an arbitrary sense. As with Lyne, it appears to me that true "pastoral" more realistically defines a literature that describes country life alone. It describes the traditions of growth in rural areas, not urban areas. At the same time, pastoral poetry is differentiated in this paper from simple landscape or nature poetry. The poetry of Thomas that is identified as pastoral focuses on man in a rural setting. The poems selected all express to some extent these patterns of life and growth that Empson specifies. The distinction
between country life and town life that Empson blurs, actually forms the substance of the first chapter on Thomas's poetry. The predominant motif of conflict between the two patterns of existence that runs throughout Thomas's poetry will be examined in depth. It is a conflict that is much more evident in pastoral written since the Industrial Revolution, but it has an important literary background.

Much of the characterization in pre-Wordsworthian pastoral is artificial and incongruous. The Augustan or Neo-classic pastoralist in particular made little pretense at realism but imitated rather, in the language and ethics of his nymphs and swains, the language and ethics of his own urban society. In line with the general concepts of neoclassicism, the polished, latin poetry of Virgil was the model for pastoral poems. It was a mode easily adapted by the Newtonian poet, whose ordered, anthropocentric universe was similarly reflected in the prevalence of antithesis and couplet. Empson differentiates between this artificial pastoral and "realistic" pastoral, and says about the artificial pastoralist, "By comparing the social arrangement to nature he makes it seem inevitable, which it was not, and gives it a dignity that was undeserved." In other words, the artificiality itself signifies a conflict between city life and country life; it is an attempt to raise the value of the one at the
expense of the other. Although the artificial pastoral largely prevailed through the early 18th century, J. E. Congleton illustrates the strong countercsentiment for a form of neo-Theocritan realism that existed concomitantly; the language and characteristics of the Greek poet's shepherds are often naturalistic to the point of crudity, particularly when they are contrasted with Virgil's. It is a sentiment that becomes uppermost at the end of the century. In the preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth expressed the preference for realism which many subsequent pastoralists would echo: "The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems, was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men...."

This town/country dichotomy, expressed implicitly in the conflict between artificial and realistic expression assumes a more explicit form in the poetry of later pastoralists who, like R. S. Thomas, are increasingly conscious of the effects of life within an industrialized, materialistic society. John F. Lynen, writing about the pastoral poetry of Robert Frost, has said,

Pastoral comes to life whenever the poet is able to adopt its special view--whenever he casts himself in
the role of the country dweller and writes about life in terms of the contrast between the rural world, with its rustic scenery and naive, humble folk and the great outer world of the powerful, the wealthy and the sophisticated...the poet always tends to view (rural life) with reference to the more sophisticated plane of experience upon which both he and his audience live.\[11

The poetry of R. S. Thomas, in common with much recent pastoral, suggests that city life, relative to country life, actually inhibits man's understanding of the universe and of man himself. By presenting rural man in a relatively harmonious association with the elements of nature many pastoralists, such as Wordsworth, have presented what is basically a primitivistic expression similar to the sentiments that were expressed by Thoccles throughout Shaftesbury's The Moralists.\[12 or again by Ezra Pound in his Spirit of Romance in 1910: "Our kinship to the ox we have constantly thrust upon us; but beneath this is our kinship to the vital universe, to the tree and the living rock, and because this is less obvious—and possibly more interesting—we forget it."\[13 Life in the country involves man with this "kinship", As Lewis Mumford, writing about urban expansion, has pointed out, urban life divorces him from it.

The whole routine divorces itself completely from the soil, from visible presence of
life and growth and decay, birth and death
... the rhythm of the seasons disappears, or rather, it is no longer associated with natural events except in print. Millions of people grow up in this metropolitan milieu who know no other environment than the city streets, people to whom the magic of life is represented, not by the miracles of birth and growth but by placing a coin in a slot and drawing out a piece of candy or a prize.

A. N. Whitehead, in discussing the poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley, further asserts that the concept our modern, urban man has of reality is inverted, that science and industry have created around man a simulacrum in which abstractions become tangible and in which artifacts create a sense of pseudo-permanence that is alien to the reality of flux-in-permanence understood by both Wordsworth and Shelley when they turned back to nature.

We encounter a suggestion of this basically primitivistic belief most often in pastoral in the form of the "Golden Age" or "Arcadia" convention, where urban poets depict a remote era in terms of innocence, simplicity and harmony in nature. Theocritus, in urban Alexandria, wrote of an earlier unsophisticated Sicily while Virgil wrote of an idyllic and mythic Arcadia: the Renaissance and eighteenth century writers employed the continental tradition of Strephons and Damons singing in ancient Greek fields; Spenser, like many of the later Romantics, turned to an ancient Britain; at the beginning of this century Yeats wrote in Soho about Innisfree.
and Gaelic Ireland, while Ezra Pound wrote of troubadours and Provence. Frank Kermode, examining the implications of this projection back to an idyllic era, has stated that "Pastoral flourishes at a particular moment in the urban development, the phase in which the relationship of metropolis and country is still evident..." If this is the case it would suggest that each pastoral Arcadia is created by a poet intimate with the juxtaposed values of urban and rural life, who is aware that certain values are irretrievably lost in the changeover. Kermode's suggestion is corroborated in part by Ezra Pound's claim that the Renaissance, which saw the first great urban expansion and the birth of modern science, was the point at which man lost his cosmic awareness, his intimacy with "the whole and the flowing." That this was also the time that the English pastoral mode first appeared seems significant. Spenser and his successors were inextricably involved with their changing society and their awareness of lost values becomes increasingly reflected in the nostalgia of the new pastoral mode.

As Empson and other critics before him have pointed out, pastoral also has a long history as an allegorical extension of Christian mythology. This is most obvious in the poetry of the Renaissance church poets such as Crashaw. The pastor symbol—the Christ/shepherd figure that had appeared in English literature as early as Piers Plowman and which
personifies, according to Empson, an implicitly critical commentary on the contemporary society was the central motif. The various Arcadies of English pastoral, in varying degrees, similarly owe much of their inception to Christianity's primary myth of the Garden of Eden with its assertion that an intimate and harmonious relationship had once existed between prelapsarian man, God and nature. *Paradise Lost* is of course the outstanding statement of this belief. When we turn later to the poetry of R. S. Thomas, which is at times as explicit a fusion of pastoral and Christian mythology as many of the poems in the Renaissance, we will find constantly juxtaposed in the background two faces of Wales: on the one hand is the archetypal and Celtic Wales, an explicitly Edenic type of Arcadia; on the other hand is its symbolically bleak, post-lapsarian counterpart.

The equivalent of Empson's critical commentator on society is a man called Iago Prytherch in Thomas's poetry. A scarecrow-like farmer, Prytherch embodies the alternative meaningfulness to the society that Empson requires. Although scorned by twentieth century society and by his peers, the harmony with the spiritual reality of nature that his life expresses, explicitly underscores the meaninglessness that pervades the lives of city dweller and materialistic farmer alike. Prytherch embodies, like Shakespeare's Touchstone,
man's potential insight into the nature of existence. Empson has said about such archetypal figures, "the fool sees true."  

The simple man becomes a clumsy fool who yet has better "sense" than his betters and can say things more fundamentally true; he is in contact with nature which the complex man needs to be, so that Bottom is not afraid of the fairies; he is in contact with the mysterious forces of our own nature.

Thomas largely avoids the more clichéd aspects of the motif by employing Prytherch in the poetry as an unconscious medium through which he—Thomas—as an observing poet-priest persona, can work toward reconciling his own belief in a just and meaningful universe with the apparently needless and haphazard cruelty of nature. The theme evolves around the archetypal struggle of man with the soil—with Nature—and the necessity to maintain dignity and perspective in the face of defeat and futility. Empson also outlines precedents to the theme in earlier pastoral:

The idea of ... the Hymn to David and The Ancient Mariner, the Orpheus idea, is that by delight in Nature when terrible men gains strength to control it.... So long as the Mariner is horrified by the creatures of the calm he is their slave; he is free to act, in the supreme verses of the poem, as soon as he delights in them.
In Thomas's poetry, Iago Prytherch escapes his slavery to the earth in a similar fashion. He is a lonely figure of meaningfulness in a world that has become largely futile, if not absurd. On one hand Thomas shows us the typical Welsh farmer—gross, materialistic, cursing the earth and his heritage, and existing within a totally meaningless world of habit that is symbolically bounded by the fenced edges of his field. On the other hand we see Prytherch; intuitively respecting and, in the Empsonian sense, delighting in the beauty of Nature; willingly observing the rituals that are his heritage and, by these means, transcending the bitter futility of his immediate world.

In the chapters that follow this discussion of the meaning of "pastoral," many of the poems of R. S. Thomas are examined. In the second chapter, "The Town," we will examine the contrast that exists in the poetry between modern urbanized and industrialized society on the one hand and the country on the other. In a passage from his published address to the University of Wales, Words and the Poet, which is quoted in the second chapter in more detail, Thomas says: "I don't allow for a moment the superiority of urban to country life. I don't believe that town life is any more real than rural."22 The poetry, as is so often the case, states his position with an even more uncompromising vehemence, Like Whitehead and Rumford, Thomas posits in his poetry that
the town, by almost any criterion, is a totally unreal environment in which man loses all perspective, all knowledge of the meaning of life. It is directly opposed to the country, where man is unceasingly exposed to the reality of existence. The country is itself examined in the subsequent chapter, in light of the tensions that give it its meaningful reality: the tensions that exist between Nature as a force that is both inimical and protective in its relationship to man, and those that exist between ancient, rural Wales and its contemporary, English dominated counterpart. In the fourth chapter, "Prytherch," the focus is directed on the partial resolution of these tensions, as embodied in the understanding Thomas reaches through his atypical farmer.
NOTES

Chapter I. Introduction: Pastoral

5. Empson, p. 12.
7. Empson, p. 17.
8. Empson, p. 4.
9. Congleton, Ch. 5, pp. 97-114.
12. Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, The Moralists, Part II, Section III.
17. Pound, p. 93.
18. Empson, p. 17.
21. Empson, p. 120.
CHAPTER II THE TOWN

In the passage from A. N. Whitehead's writings referred to earlier we find this basic thesis: "The doctrine which I am maintaining is that the whole concept of materialism only applies to abstract entities, the products of logical discernment."¹ This apparent paradox is, according to Whitehead, fundamental to contemporary science and hence to society. It implies that both operate on a fallacious level of distorted actuality, as suggested by Wordsworth when he wrote "Our meddling intellect/mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things."² When Wordsworth wrote "The Tables Turned" the nature of reality was changing for many people. With the Industrial Revolution and increased urbanization each relocated individual experienced a reorientation or rebalancing of his sensorium; the olfactory sense, for instance lost importance while the visual sense became overemphasized. With this reorientation man's perception of the universe changed from one of an intuitive, sensually balanced apprehension of the evolving processes of life to a more consciously intellectual shaping of sense data within rigidly linear, static forms. When we turn to the pastoral and Romantic types of poetry that are, in part, reactions to the
urbanization, we meet a reactionary awareness of the trans-
cience that is integral with beauty, combined with a
conscious appeal to many, not just one, of the senses. The
symbolic rose of the Romantic, for instance, involves an
aesthetic appeal to more than one sense and depends, as a
meaningful symbol, on its "hour" of beauty. Its urban wax
or plastic counterpart involves an appeal to only one
sense—again the visual—and is a rigidly unchanging form
that apparently transcends growth and decay.

The pastoral poetry of R. S. Thomas is the product of
an organic viewpoint similar to that of Wordsworth and
Whitehead. In his poetry the modern city represents deceit;
it presents a facade of attractiveness and meaningfulness
which masks a devitalized existence, much like that of the
wax rose. Nature, on the other hand, occasionally beautiful,
usually bleak and cruel, is always vital and real. This
dichotomy occurs at its earliest and simplest level in the
poem "Out of the Hills" which Thomas retained from his first,
privately published volume of poetry, The Stones of the Field,
and repositioned at the beginning of his collected volume,
_Sons of the Year's Turning._

_Dreams clustering thick on his callow skull,
Dark as curls, he comes, ambling with his cattle
From the starved pastures. He has shaken from
off his shoulders_
The weight of the sky, and the lash of the wind's sharpness
Is healing already under the medicinal sun.
Clouds of cattle breath, making the air heady,
Remember the summer's sweetness, the wet road runs blue as a river before him; the legendary town
Dreams of his coming; under the half-closed lids
Of the indolent shops sleep dandles, emptying the last
Tankards of darkness, before the officious light
Bundle it up the chimney out of sight.
The shadow of the mountain dwindles; his scaly eye
Sloughs its cold core and glitters. The day is his
To dabble a finger in, and, merry as crickets,
A chorus of coins sings in his tattered pockets.
Shall we follow his dom, witness his swift undoing
In the indifferent streets; the sudden disintegration
Of his soul's hardness, traditional discipline
Of flint and frost thawing in ludicrous showers
Of maudlin laughter; the limpid runnels of speech
Sullied and slurred, as the beer-glass chimes the hours?
No, wait for him here. At midnight he will return,
Threading the tunnel that contains the dam
Of all his fears. So then his fingerpost
Homeward. The earth is patient; he is not lost. 3

The first sixteen lines of the poem are a subtly inverted
contrast between nature and the town. The farmer's movement
toward the town is described in an increasingly cheerful
pattern of imagery that apparently blocks out the harshness
of the world he is leaving. Whereas his immediate past is
revealed in a mosaic of short, unpleasant noun phrases:
"starved pastures," "the weight of the sky," "the lash of the
wind's sharpness," "the shadow of the mountain," and "its
cold core"; the farmer's "amble" toward the town is gradually
expressed in a series of active clauses that combine excitement
and promise: "the wet road runs/Blue as a river before him,"
"the legendary town dreams of his coming," "sleep dwindles ...
empties tankards of darkness," "the shadow dwindles," his
eye "glitters", and, finally, "merry as crickets,/A chorus of
coins sings in his tattered pockets." From this point reality
sets in. The "down" of the following line is a form of pun--
the journey "down" the hill to the town has actually been the
farmer's metaphoric descent to a sub-natural level. The road
that appears "blue as a river" and the coins that "sing" like
crickets are, like wax roses, merely sterile imitations, and
the town, for all its promise, is actually a destructive
environment. Whereas the mountains--Nature--had at least
"cold care", the town brings about "his swift undoing/in the
indifferent streets?" Similarly, the drink that offers warmth
and companionship in contrast to the "traditional discipline/
of flint and frost" evolved in nature, ultimately reduces him
to a level of "ludicrous" and "maudlin" incommunicability.
Communication--language--as we shall see later, is an ex-
tremely important symbol throughout Thomas's poetry and these
"limpid murmurs of speech/sullied and slurred," signify extreme
degeneration.

"Out of the Hills" is fairly typical of the early part of
the verse in that its dénouement is relatively cheerful: "he
will return... The earth is patient: he is not lost." Many
of the early poems close with what can be taken as a fairly positive affirmation of faith. The tension between the harsh reality of nature—the protective, if cold, "home" of "Out of the Hills"—and the deceit of the urban culture also appears frequently in the first collected volume. In "A Peasant," the first poem in which Frythorock appears, and another that has an affirmative denouement, a similar opposition appears when the description of the crude peasant is contrasted with civilized man in the passage "His clothes, sour with years of sweat/And animal contact, shook the refined,/But affected, sense with their stark naturalness." The word "affected" is one of many that Thomas uses almost as a pun, in the sense that each implication of the word is explored. The word appears again in "Song" of the same volume:

We who have, affected the livery,
Of the time's prudery,
How shall we quicken again,
To the lust and thrust of the sun
And the seedling rain?

Here the implications of artificiality, pretense, disease and effeminacy implied in "affected" oppose the vital and masculine imagery of the sun and rain impregnating the earth. Thomas is usually consistent in these imagistic associations. Coldness as in the "frost" of "Out of the Hills," wetness as in its river imagery and male sex imagery like the above, are
usually opposed to the sterile heat, dryness, and avariciously.

female imagery of urbanized society. The poem "Rhodri," which

will be discussed later, juxtaposes town and country in

exactly these terms.

... in that house
There are three Swans, none with a taste
For the homeland with its pints
Of rain water.

It is dry
Here, with the hard, dry
Urban heat, that is sickly
With girls ..."

The play on the word "heat," with its unloving, animalistically.

ally female overtones, echoes the images that appeared in the

long, somewhat inferior poem "The Airy Tomb" where Tom, an

Adamic hero, turned his back on a town, the characteristics

of which Thomas captured in the complex image "petticoat

town"; a town that was full of girls with "sly haunches," and

"glances busy as moths."

This confrontation between nature and modern urbanized

society is variously expressed. In the opening poem of The

Broad of Truth volume, "A line from St. David's," the

contract is directly stated in a passage that presents nature

as beauty and activity and modern society as scientifically

sterile.

I am sending you this letter.
Something for neo-Edwardians
Of a test-tube age to grow glum about
In their conditioned libraries.
As I case here by way of Plump,
There were hawkweeds in the hedges;
Nature had invested her gold
In the industry of the soil.
There were larks, too, like a fresh chorus
Of dew . . .

In Thomas's poetry, and all pastoral for that matter, the
beauty of the country is an active force—a living acclama-
tion of meaning in the universe. Just as the primitivist
Theocles rhapsodized about the way every small part of nature
worked within a vast harmonious scheme, so Thomas suggests in
the phrase "the industry of the soil" a similar purposeful
harmony between plants, insects and inorganic matter. The
action and the harmony are reinforced too in the last two
lines when the aural image of the larks' song is blended with
the tactile and visual image of dew. In the passage "Nature
has invested her gold/In the industry of the soil" Thomas
suggests a profitable commercial enterprise that is a parody
of the lines about "neo-Edwardians/Of a test-tube age... in
their conditioned libraries." As in the poem "A Peasant,"
cited above, we have here an explicit opposition between
growth and sterility, though this time the commentary
suggested in the words "test-tube" and "conditioned lib-
raries", ("conditioned" is probably a pun on air-conditioned
and intellectually conditioned) is more specifically directed
against the same sterile intellectualism that Wordsworth associated with industrialization in poems like "The Tables Turned".

The conflict takes a slightly different form in "Cynddylan on a Tractor," a poem that is one of the most consistent and most gentle examples of Thomas's irony.

Ah, you should see Cynddylan on a tractor,
Gone the old look that yoked him to the soil;
He's a new man now, part of the machine,
His nerves of metal and his blood oil.
The clutch curses, but the gears obey
His least bidding, and lo, he's away
Out of the farmyard, scattering hens.
Riding to work now as a great man should,
He is the knight at arms breaking the fields;
Mirror of silence, emptying the wood
Of foxes and squirrels and bright jays.
The sun comes over the tall trees
Kindling all the hedges, but not for him
Who runs his engine on a different fuel.
And all the birds are singing, bills wide in vain,
As Cynddylan passes proudly up the lane.

Despite the attack on industrialism this early poem retains an underlying warmth for the farmer that provides an interesting contrast to the bitterness of Thomas's attack on a similar situation in the poem "Too Late" from the more recent volume, *Tunes*.

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?10

In the humorous "Cynddylen" poem Thomas envisions the farmer riding the tractor as if it were a war-horse. This is part of a general technique in his imagery. As we have seen, artifacts are often given a function and apparent vitality similar to that of some natural object, so that the reader is, to some degree, obliged to contrast the two, to the detriment of the artifact. Thus Cynddylen and his tractor are ludicrous when compared to a knight on his charger, while in "Out of the Hills" Thomas's association of the sound of coins chinking with crickets chirping, and the blueness of a road with a river was very subtly undercut by the fact of the artifacts' relative lifelessness. However, the relationship between man and his artifacts has also subtly changed between these last two poems. Besides the obviously increased rancor of the "Too Late" poem, unlike "Cynddylen," it is the machine in the Taras poem that is now significantly the driver and man the driven.

The poem is also significant for another reason. Thomas attempts to capture in his poetry much of what he sees as urban enforced degeneracy in the form of two symbols that are actually systems around which society is structured. These
systems are money and language, both of which appear frequently in the poetry with connotations of their misuse. In the "Out of the Hills" poem the "chinking" of coins in the farmer's pocket presaged the similar aural image of beer mugs "Chiming the hours" later in the poem. This imagistic parallelism conveyed a subtle association between the money and the degeneracy produced by the drink. In the "Too Late" poem quoted above, the farmer is condemned as one who comes "obediently as a dog/To the pound's whistle." "Pound" is a pun with at least three meanings: first of all it refers to the dog pound; secondly it complements the image two lines later of the "machine/That will destroy you and your race," by suggesting the reiterated, mechanical type of involvement man has in contemporary society; thirdly the pound is of course the British monetary standard. In the poem the first two senses of the pun coalesce with the third in the description of man coming "to the pound's whistle" to condemn a materialistically oriented viewpoint that confines and destroys the potential and dignity of man.

The poem "Blondes" from Thomas's most recent volume, Pieta, contains a theme and imagery that are comparative. The poem is about those women who have, unlike the poet, no conception of, or concern about, anything other than their immediate world: "They pass me/with bland looks./It is the
simplicity of their lives I ache for." Their existence is rooted in an unquestioning routine which Thomas expresses, as in "Too Late," by a mechanistic image: "I see them walking/up long streets with the accuracy of shuttles/At work, threads crossed to make a pattern/Unknown to them." The most complex image of the poem is again one of money.

A thousand curtains
Are parted to welcome home
The husbands who have overdrawn
On their blank trust, giving them children
To play with, a jingle of small change
For their pangs.42

The substitution of "blank trust" for "bank trust" is important. Focussing for the moment on the word "trust" as meaning "faith", "blank trust" sounds similar and is comparable, if somewhat more condemnatory, to the conventional phrase "blind trust", hence the phrase becomes first of all an implicit criticism of the totally unthinking nature of man's faith in the established environment. Secondly, when "trust" is interpreted in its financial sense, the implicit equivalency of "bank" and "blank" in the poem calls into question the ultimate reality or meaningfulness of the system of financial credit around which society is oriented. If we compare this to "Rhodri," which we encountered earlier, we find an identical situation. In that poem the persona--Rhodri--stands
on the street corner watching girls pass or "selects one to make real the power of the pounds." For Hodri, money is a real power structure, a power that is expressed in the bodies of the women it buys. The same equivalency holds true in "Blonde." By overdrawing on their bank trust, or "blank trust," the husbands are given "children/To play with, a jingle of small change/For their pangs." To both Hodri and the husbands, money is very real; its reality is a power that is measured in terms of human flesh. The amount of money Hodri has determines how often he can make love; the ability to withdraw money from a bank determines whether or not the fathers can have children. In both cases the "pangs" of the basic physical cycle of love, intercourse and procreation have become less immediate, less real. In their world solvency has assumed the place of virility.

What we have working here is an idea that is akin to Whitehead's thesis that the whole concept of materialism only applies to abstract entities. Whereas the poet in "Blonde" and "Hodri" can determine that "bank" equals "blank," can see that money is an ultimately unreal, abstract entity, his personae, who are certainly materialistic in the accepted sense, cannot. Their world is a simulacrum in which reality has evolved around an arbitrary scale of cash values. When Lewis Mumford wrote about the urban world he said that, to
its people, "the magic of life is represented, not by the
miracles of birth and growth but by placing a coin in a slot
and drawing out a piece of candy or a prize." In Thomas's
poetry the "miracle of birth" is represented, not by the slot
machine, but by the bank trust. Even the children in
"Blondes" represent just so much money, "a jingle of small
change," the bitter irony of the passage lying in the pun on
"small change," which implies that the children are unlikely
to ever see much farther than their parents.

As suggested earlier, language, specifically the English
language, is, like money, an important symbol of the material-
ist point of view in the poetry. Thomas largely blames
England for the materialistic orientation of the contemporary
Welshmen. He is, with the sensitivity of the poet, deeply
aware of the strong sense of ethnic identity that has caused
periodic waves of nationalistic resentment within each of the
three satellite countries against their situation of virtual
economic and cultural dependence on England where most British
industries evolved and where both power symbols—parliament
and monarchy—are based. Each of the Celtic revivals in
Scotland, Ireland and Wales has had at its heart men like
Thomas or W. B. Yeats who were deeply sensitive about their
heritage and the generations of strictures placed on it by
England and on Anglo-Saxon culture. As a poet, furthermore,
Thomas is particularly aware of the ability of words, of a language, to shape a man's and a race's perspective of reality, and the Welsh struggle for racial identity has largely crystallized in his poetry into a curiously ambivalent awareness of the English language as a language that is at once foreign to, yet at the same time a part of, the modern Welshman. In the bilingualism of Wales, Thomas sees a struggle between two viewpoints of reality; the increasingly scientific nature of the English language is an active force that opposes the relatively poetic (i.e. musical and mythic) Welsh language, which embodies an older, intuitive sense of harmony with the reality of nature.

The subject of a lecture given by Thomas at the University of Wales was the integral power of words and their manipulation by the writer. The closing passage from that lecture, which was later published as Words and the Poet, seems singularly relevant:

I live in the country by choice. The events of nature are very real to me. I am never far from agricultural activity, the traditional occupation of man. Once an eye for nature and a flair for describing it were the normal appurtenances of a poet. Even if the audience were townspeople, the fields were never far away, the towns being small. Most of that has changed and is going to change still more. The common environment of the majority is an urban-industrial one. The potential audience of a poet is one of town dwellers, who are mostly cut
of touch, if not of sympathy with nature. Their contact with it is modified by the machine. This is tending to deprive country-rooted words of their relevance. The new modes of experience, the new subjects, the new vocabulary are creating the impression that the old words are outdated. Rossetti’s wood-spurge has given way to “the belt feed lever and the belt holding pawl” of Richard Eberhart. And this is a problem which all poets must face. I don’t allow for a moment the superiority of urban to country life. I don’t believe that town life is any more real than rural. I don’t believe that a poet who chooses to write about an agricultural environment is necessarily insular, escapist or even provincial. But the fact remains that a very different kind of life is being lived by a majority of the people in this country now, and that most of the everyday objects of their world have new, often technical names. A vast amount of new knowledge is accumulating, with its accompanying vocabulary. One of the great questions facing the poet is: Can significant poetry be made with these new words and terms? In theory the answer is frequently an affirmative one. People say: “I don’t see why not.” They quote words such as chromosomes as being actually attractive. My own position is usually to allow this as a legitimate theory, but to ask in practice, “Where are the poems?” Perhaps it is my ignorance of other languages that makes me say this. Maybe they are issuing from the presses in Germany or Czechoslovakia. Maybe it is too soon, and there has not yet been time to assimilate or absorb the enormous amount of fresh knowledge and its vocabulary. But I remember Coleridge’s saying to the effect that the opposite of poetry is not prose but science. We have yet to prove that we can have both. I remember also Wordsworth’s “human heart by which we live.” The poet’s function and privilege surely is to speak to our condition in the name of our common humanity in words which do not grow old because the heart does not grow old.15

The main question that seems to be posed in this passage is
whether poetry, which is totally involved with the sensually perceived reality of human experience, can survive in the linguistic atmosphere of an increasingly mechanistic society in which reality is becoming distorted by a force of scientific, pseudo-intellectual terms. R. S. Thomas, the Welsh pastoral poet, does not believe it can. Like Wordsworth in the Lyrical Ballads preface, he sees the poet's traditional struggle to express reality in not just as a struggle against complexity, as a necessity to return to the touchstone simplicity of a rural oriented language.

I can't speak my own
Language — icon,
All those good words;
And I outside them,
Picking up alms
From blonde strangers,
I don't like their talk,
Their split vowels;
Names that are ghosts
From a green era.
I want my own
Speech, to be made
Free of its terms.
I want the right word
For the gut's trouble.

As in this poem, the struggle for reality is resolved in Thomas's poetry in a symbolic, but uncompromising conflict between the English language, representing urban science and materialism, and Welsh, representing poetry and nature. Implicit throughout the poetry is a sort of tragic counter-
awareness that on the literal, if not the symbolic level, the English language must remain Thomas’s primary means of communication.

In the poem “Border Blues,” which opens the *Poetry forsuper* volume, Thomas actually incorporates several Gaelic lines, but this is rare. The poem is one of the first to use language as a symbol to any extent. It is a long significant work, full of parody of archetypes that are intended to convey the breakdown of meaningful traditions involved in the infiltration of the English culture into Wales and the emigration of Welshmen 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.
And the winds say, It is April, bringing scents
Of dead heroes and dead saints.
But the rivers are curly with brown water
Running anch, and the men to tame them.
Are walking the streets of a far town.

The breakdown of Welsh tradition is symbolized by blonde hair
and the modern English language, implicit contrasts to the
dark hair of the Celt and the poetic Welsh Gaelic.

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 the council houses;
Blue eyes and Birmingham yellow
Hair, and the ritual murder of vowels.
Excuse me, I said, I have an appointment
On the high moors; it's the first of May
And I must go the way of my fathers
Despite the loneliness—you might say rudeness.

The poem "Expatriates" in the same volume has the same theme
and employs identical symbols:

Not British; certainly
Not English, Welsh
With all the associations
Black hair and black heart

In the drab streets
That never knew
The cold stream's sibilants
Our tongues are coated with
A dustier speech!

The stock imagery of urban dryness and rural wetness has been
discussed before. The phrase "The cold stream's sibilants"
associates Wales and the Welsh language with nature, the word
"stream's" being opposed phonetically and imagistically to
the drab "streets", which represents urban England and to the
dustier "speech", the English language. In poems like these,
the Gaelic language becomes a symbol for nature and universal
meaning, directly opposed to the unpoetic, unnatural, "split
vowels" of the scientific English language.

Perhaps the closest association of Wales and the Welsh
language with nature is in the poem "A Country": "The old
language/Case to him on the wind's lips;/There were intimations
of farms/whose calendar was a green hill." This poem comes from the volume *The Bread of Truth*, which contains most of the poems in which language has symbolic connotations. The title of the volume may somehow allude to this. One of the poems, "Welsh," we have encountered before: "I don't like their talk;/Their split vowels... I want the right word for the gut's trouble," but at least two of the others are even more specific in condemning England for the degeneracy of Wales and in their use of English as a symbol of the degeneracy. The poem "Eviction" depicts the persona talking to a Welshman: "To me you are an old man/out on the road, robbed by strangers/Of what was your own." A third figure materializes: "And as in a dream/A dear face coming up close/Spits at us ...." The "dear face" is the memory of a Wales that had once been; the spitting is its contempt for its heirs. The poem then concludes:

the reply falls
In that cold language that is the frost
On all our nation. No not you,
But someone who has taken your name,
Your work, your home, and without feeling
Bundles into the hill's hushed
Theatre, where your drama was played,
His jazz band of gadgets and wheels.

The "reply" is given by the Welshman, but the language he uses is English. ("that cold language that is the frost/On all our
nation”) and the Welshman is himself part of the modern, mechanistic, meaningless culture (“jazz band of gadgets and wheels”) that has superseded the meaningful drama of his rural heritage.

The poem “Looking at Sheep,” which concludes this volume, contains one of the most starkly vitriolic condemnations of the English urban culture. The poem starts off with a short romantic description of sheep, coloured by the mind of the poet:

Yes, I know. They are like primroses;
Their ears are the colour of the stems
Of primroses; and their eyes—
Two halves of a nut.22

There is then an abrupt transition to reality:

... But images
Like this are for sheer fancy
To play with. 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.

The central image here, as one critic has pointed out, is that of England as a chemical toilet, the “Elsan” flushed above Wales.23 The image, in this respect, complements that of the English language as vomit that is spewed over Wales. The word
"Elean" is very possibly also a parody, a reflective abbreviation of either "Elysian" or "Eleusinian", maybe both. In this case the word would also embody an implicit contrast between the relatively paradisiac or myth-laden Wales of the past and its degenerate English counterpart.

As in this poem, it is mainly his stark imagery and the fervour of his Welsh nationalism that differentiates Thomas from most pastoralists. Like Wordsworth for instance, he sees that the materialism that has evolved in the towns has completely destroyed man's perspective, but the Welsh poet is much more openly bitter and lends a narrower focus to his diatribe by associating almost everything destructive in an urban oriented culture with the influence of England. In the next chapter the emphasis will change from this conflict between nature and the abstracting materialism of the town to an examination of the tension that occurs within nature itself.
NOTES

Chapter II: The Town

2. William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned."
12. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
CHAPTER III  THE COUNTRY

One of the clearest statements of pastoral sentiment in Thomas's poetry is the poem "A Welshman at St. James' Park" from Plato. In it Thomas depicts himself as he stands at the entrance to one of London's beautiful parks.

I am invited to enter these gardens
As one of the public, and to conduct myself
In accordance with the regulations;
To keep off the grass and sample flowers
Without touching them; to admire birds
That have been seduced from wildness by
Broad they are poited with.

Part of the inspiration for this passage was undoubtedly the large signboard that stands at the entrances of every public park, listing "regulations" and penalties for misdemeanors that range from stepping on the grass to sexual intercourse within the precincts. The park and its signboards symbolize for Thomas the almost senseless, antiseptic travesty of life that occurs in an urban environment. The regulations that control the urban "public" are at odds with reality; in the park one must "sample flowers/Without touching them;" there, one can, by order of society, be no contact, no real sensual awareness within the park's environment. The world of nature within a city, in other words, becomes a museum where one can
observe but not experience. The poem concludes:

I am not one
Of the public; I have come a long way
To realize it. Under the sun's
Feathers are the sinuses of stone,
The curved claws.

I think of a Welsh hill
That is without fencing, and the men,
Ewesworth blind, who left the heather
And the high pastures of the heart. I fumble
In the pocket's emptiness; my ticket
Was in two pieces: I kept half.

The first sentence here, "I am not one of the public," is a repudiation of those qualifications needed to enter the park. Thomas is denying his membership in urban society and simultaneously rejecting its code of ethics. The "public" in the context is a loaded term denoting the thoughtless non-individuality of the mob. The sentence, "I have come a long way / To realize it," is similarly loaded: Thomas has come a "long way" spatially or physically from the Welsh environment to the London park and a "long way" chronologically, and in terms of intellectual maturity, to the point where he is able to understand and reject the unreality of the urban social structure which the park represents. The structure of the poem shows that it is this unreality that is being discussed. The first stanza describes the symbolic park, then the direction of the persona's consciousness abruptly changes with the denial that opens the second stanza. This denial then flow
into the statement "Under the sun's/Feathers are the sinews of stone./The curved claws," which is an assertion of a reality that is totally contradictory to the first stanza. Unlike the enunciated pseudo-harmony of the park with its "seduced" birds, the reality that is nature is the constant beauty and crueltY of the "curved claws" of the predator and the stonelike efficiency of the law of survival. The third stanza is again a transition in the stream of consciousness; the thought of nature leads the poet into the thought of Wales, and the poem concludes with his projected reversal of movement back from the park toward the symbolic Welsh countryside. This Welsh countryside is the backdrop against which the human drama in Thomas's pastoral is worked out. As reflected in the last two stanzas of "A Welshman at St. James' Park," the nature imagery of the whole canon is a constant juxtapositioning of cruelty and bleakness with moments of sheer beauty, this conflict receiving added depth through Thomas's frequent allusions to Wales' myth-like, Celtic heritage.

The almost ultra-realistic harshness which punctuates Thomas's descriptions of nature is a factor in every volume, but is probably nowhere better displayed than in his early poem "The Welsh Hill Country." Although a somewhat inferior poem because of its open carcass and its signs of
underdeveloped technique such as the obvious alliteration, the poem is, nevertheless, also an excellent example of the
tone/country, unreality/reality dichotomy discussed earlier.

Too far for you to see
The fluke and the foot-cot and the fat maggot
Growing the skin from the small bones,
The sheep are grazing at Dwich-y-Fedwen,
Arranged romantically in the usual manner
On a bleak background of bald stone.

Too far for you to see
The moss and the mould on the cold chimneys,
The nettles growing through the cracked doors,
The houses stand empty at Nant-yx-Eira,
There are holes in the roofs that are thatched with
sunlight,
And the fields are reverting to the bare moor.

Too far, too far to see
The set of his eyes and the slow phthisis
Veiling his frame under the ripped coat,
There's a man still farming at Ty'n-y-Pomas,
Contributing grimly to the accepted pattern,
The embryo music dead in his throat.
"Depopulation of the Hills" is at least an explicit in its concluding stanza:

Did the earth help them, time befriend
Those last survivors? Did the spring grass
Heal winter's ravages? The grass
Wrecked them in its draughty tides,
Grew from the chimney-stack like smoke,
Burned its way through the weak timbers.
That was nature's jest; the sides
Of the old bulk cracked, but not with mirth.  

Man and animal are alike in their helpless suffering beneath an uncaring, omnipotent God. In "Because," from the most recent volume, Pietà, Thomas praises Prytherch's ability to see and understand this side of nature:

I praise you because
I envy your ability to
See these things: the blind hands
Of the aged combing sunlight
For pity; the starved fox and
The obese pet; the way the world
Digests itself and the thin flame
Scours. The youth enters
The brothel, and the girl enters
The nunnerly, and a bell tolls.
Viruses invade the blood.
On the smudged empires the dust
Lies and in the libraries
Of the poets. The flowers wither
On love's grave. This is what
Life is, and on it your eye
Sets tearless, and the dark
Is dear to you as the light.

In the poem "On the Farm," from The Bread of Truth, Thomas describes the members of a contemporary Welsh farm family as
vacuous, Faulkneresque retardates and concludes with the following stanza:

And lastly there was the girl,
Beauty under some spell of the beast,
Her pale face was the lantern
By which they read in life's dark book
The shrill sentence: God is love.

Like the poem "Prisoner" which concludes with the image, "The prisoner in the rain's cage/Dios, but his place has to be filled," the pun on "sentence" in the above line is a fundamental commentary about the helplessness of man's condition in a prison-world.

The pathos of Thomas's poetry depends largely on this deep awareness of man's incapability in the face of a God that is expressly antagonistic. He acknowledges the farmer's justification for crying out:

No offence friend; it was the earth that did it.
Adam had Eve to blame; I blame the earth,
This brown bitch fawning about my feet

My clothes stink where she has pressed
Her body to me, the lewd bawd
Gravid as an old sow, but clawed.

At the same time Thomas condemns this kind of farmer. His situation is part of a greater spiritual reality that he makes absolutely no attempt to comprehend. His concern is totally with the immediate. He represents a direct contrast with the
other farmer, Prytherch, who understood, in the poem
"Because," quoted above, that "This is what life is ... the
dark is dear ... as the light;" that there are two sides to
the experience of nature, each equally important to man—the
"dark"—the bleakness and express antagonism that we have
just seen, and "the light"—the pattern of harmonious beauty
in nature that signifies an ineffable purpose far trans-
cending the immediate pain of survival.

Throughout Thomas's poetry, poems like "Because,"
"Depopulation of the Hills," "Prisoner," etc., with their
bleak imagery and even bleaker message of man's helplessness,
provide one part of a picture. Balanced directly against
them are certain poems that provide a different viewpoint
entirely; poems that provide an insight into the spiritual
reality of nature by recreating for the senses the power of
its beauty and emphasizing its underlying schematic harmony.
One outstanding example of the latter type is "A Line from
St. David's," the poem that contrasts the sterility of the
contemporary intellectual climate — "neo-Edwardians/of a
test-tube age ... in their conditioned libraries" — with the
beautiful appearance and the concomitant harmony of nature.
"There were hawkweeds in the hedges;/Nature had invested all
her gold/In the industry of the soil." The closing stanza
identifies this harmonious beauty as being meaningful in a
specifically spiritual sense.

... the day has a blue lining
Partly of sky, partly of sea;
Though rust has becalmed the plough.
Somewhere a man sharpens a scythe;
A child watches him from the brink
Of his own speech, and this is of more
Importance than all the visitors, keeping
A spry saint asleep in his tomb.

As implied in these last three lines, the established church
usually appears in the poetry as a symbolically static form
that has little to do with the warmth of life. It appears as
a force that is aligned only with the antagonistic or repres-
sive side of God. The nature of its sermons and inhibiting
regulations is normally expressed in a pattern of bleak,
depressing imagery explicitly opposed to the warmth of spir-
Itual intimacy achievable in nature:

***
Who put that crease in your soul,
Davis, ready this fine morning
For the staid chapel, where the Book's from
Sobers the sunlight?

"The Belfry"

***
I have seen it standing up grey,
Gaunt, as though no sunlight
Could ever tear out the music
Of its great bell; terrible
In its own way, for religion
Is like that.10
Protestantism— the adroit castrator
Of art; the bitter negation
Of song and dance and the heart’s innocent joy—
You have botched our flesh and left us only the
soul’s
Terrible impotence in a warm world.11

These descriptions provide an interesting contrast to "The
Moor" where Thomas describes, in a tone of humble reverence,
the total, sensual experience of God in nature.

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,
In movement of the wind over grass.

There were no prayers said. But stillness
Of the heart’s passions—that was praise
Enough; and the mind’s cession
Of its kingdom. I walked on,
Simple and poor, while the air crumbled
And broke on me generously as bread.12

The use of the church as the vehicle of the poem’s metaphor
brings about an unavoidable contrast between nature and the
church, to the latter’s detriment. In the moor, God’s
presence is “felt,” it is the total sensual experience of
beauty, an experience that completely surpasses the “listened
to” sermon of the church.

In an earlier poem, “The View from the Window,” nature
is similarly described in terms of its sensual appeal, but there is even more of a suggestion of a transcendent purpose underlying its physical appearance.

Like a painting it is set before one,
But less brittle, ageless; these colours
Are renewed daily with variations
Of light and distance that no painter
Achieves or suggests. Then there is movement,
Change, as slowly the cloud bruises
Are healed by sunlight, or snow caps
A black mood; but gold at evening
To cheer the heart. All through history
The great brush has not rested,
Nor the paint dried; yet what eye,
Looking coolly, or, as we now,
Through the tears' lenses, ever saw
This work and it was not finished? 19

"The View from the Window" is an outstanding example of Thomas's organicism. It shows an apprehension of nature as change similar to that which appears in Wordsworth's poetry, particularly in the phase when poems like "My Heart Leaps Up," "To a Cuckoo," and "To a Butterfly" were written—when images of transience and renewal, such as a rainbow or butterfly, were used to symbolize nature as a continual process of change within an eternal scheme. Shelley's "The Cloud" is an even more obvious parallel with its similar imagery and the same basic theme of nature as process: "I change but I cannot die." 14

Within such a viewpoint as these poems propound, death cannot assume the absolute quality that it assumes in the
urban world. Death is inseparable from what Mumford calls "the miracle of birth"; they are the two sides of the coin of evolution—each is equally important to the whole process of growth and change that is nature: "This is what life is... the dark is dear... as the light." Prytherch's understanding of the process is echoed in "Then," a poem in Plato.

It was one of those days not confined
To a country, most of the earth
Knew them: precipiced clouds
Sheer above the blue
Chasms, the sun not hot
But registering for the first time
Its presence, opening the heart's
Flower that winter had clenched

We wandered upon the broad hills*
Back, crumbling the air's
Poetry. Nothing that nature
Did was a contradiction
That time, and the prey hung
Jewels of blood round the day's throat.16

The image in the last two lines of the "day" as a predator with the blood of its "prey"—all of life—still dribbling down its throat, is a shocking contrast to the images of peaceful springtime beauty that precede it. Yet the assertion that "Nothing that nature/Did was a contradiction," plus the conjunction "and," which joins the contrasting images on an equal level, identify the avariciousness of time and death as being as ultimately meaningful as the beauty and growth
with which it is juxtaposed.

This duality of nature is often expressed in a more specifically symbolic form. April, the month of springtime change, the dying-God month of Christianity, is a symbol throughout Thomas's poetry. One example is the early "Lament for Prythoroch":

Your heart that is dry as a dead leaf
Undone by frost's cruel chemistry
Cling in vain to the bare bough,
Where once in April a bird sang. 17

Another example is the poem "Border Blues," in which Thomas uses April and the change from winter to spring as an implicit background that parodies the various internal actions of the poem:

...the winds say, It is April, bringing scents
Of dead heroes and dead saints.
...
Spring is here and the bells are ringing;
Spring is here and the bells are ringing
In country churches, but not for a bride.
The sexton breaks the unleavened earth
Over the grave. 18

This long poem, perhaps one of the most significant in the whole collection, consists of a series of six poems narrated by different persons, each of whom more or less unconsciously reveals the breakdown of tradition and meaningful existence that has occurred in modern Wales. The lines quoted above
are taken from the first poem of the series, which acts as a preface to the other five. The setting of "Border Blues" is the present—the time of an ostensible rebirth for Wales; but, as the above lines suggest, the "rebirth" that takes place is only a kind of parody. Just as the ringing of the bells heralds, in the preface, not the propagation of a marriage but the finality of a funeral, so, in the subsequent poems do we find that the rich heritage of Wales has given way to a form of meaningless existence for all Welshmen. In modern Wales the discordant English language has ousted the poetic Welsh, easily memorized pop tunes drown out traditional airs and the back pews of the church have become a place for "fun", not reverence.

The comparison of modern Wales with its predecessor, explicit in "Border Blues," is implicit throughout the poetry. There are always two countries called Wales in Thomas's poetry; on one side is modern Wales, the parodic imitation of materialistic England; on the other side is its antithesis, the Arcadian original, the Wales that is still real in the mind of the Welsh poet—in the poetry of its language and scenery, in the drama of its history and legends. The two countries are inseparable. When Thomas is discussing one Wales, always in the background is the other, a deeply critical contrast. The conflict between the two also takes
on a more personal form in Thomas's deep awareness of being himself an anachronism: "The swift satellites show/The clock of my whole being is slow." He reveals himself as a man unable to come to terms with the mechanistic world he finds himself in, yet deeply conscious of his inability to turn back the hands of time to a more significant and poetic age. In his struggle to reach a compromise, an answer to this dilemma, Thomas unavoidably adds further pathos to the major conflict of the poetry—the struggle that takes place in nature between the "dark" and the "light"—for the two conflicts are totally complementary. To Thomas, Wales is nature and nature is Wales; no countryside other than Wales appears in his poetry except, as in "A Welshman at St. James's Park," as an example of something that is outside of nature. The reality that is Wales—all of its facets—is the truth Thomas would know and remodel into the universal statement that is poetry.

In the second poem of the "Border Blues" sequence there is a clear illustration of the predicament. Thomas describes himself talking to someone called Buno in Latin and Old Welsh, when the "ladies from the council houses," i.e. the representatives of modern Wales, appear. Buno, who is a memory from the past, disappears. Thomas subsequently rejects the society of the ladies: "Excuse me, I said, I have
an appointment/On the high moors.°° and returns instead to
the scene of the drama that was enacted by his Welsh
predecessors, only to be rejected himself in turn.

Sheep song round me in the strong light;
The ancient traffic of glad birds
Returning to breed in the green sphagnum—
That an I doing up here alone
But paying homage to a bleak, stone
Roment to an evicted people?
Go back, Go back; from the rough heather
The grouse repels me, and with slow step
I turn to go, but down not back.

Like Adam, Thomas cannot go "back" to his Eden. He must find
his answer in the present.

This express desire to return to ancient Wales is more
vehemently stated in Thomas's early poetry than in the later.
Throughout Song at the Year's Turning, the first main volume,
poems like "Welsh Landscape" appear where the past has a more
integral reality to the narrator than the present.

To live in Wales is to be conscious
At dusk of the spilled blood
That went to the making of the wild sky,
Dyeing the immaculate rivers
In all their courses.

...There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics...°°

Thomas's early poetry, like that of Yeats, is full of Gaelic
legend and ancient names, like "Cora Focho" and "Guenlainy's
agle,"22 names that are almost incantatory in nature. As in
the poetry of the early Ezra Pound, the central focus of
Thomas's early poetry is frequently on a troubadour figure
who can make the past live once more.

And as he speaks time turns,
The swift years revolve
Backwards. There Guennny comes
Again to his own shore ..."...
Stones to the walls fly back,
The gay manners are full
Of music; the poets return
To feed at the royal tables...23

As in the verse of both Yeats and Pound, this aggrandizement
of the past is peculiar to the early poetry of Thomas. By
the time he publishes Beoth, his next recent volume, Thomas
has reached a compromise with the present, he has gone "down"
and survived. The volume is almost completely involved with
the present spiritual reality of nature and the Wales of the
past, although as important a factor as ever in its role of
contrast, is no longer obvious.

In order to fully understand the nature of the compromise
that Thomas reaches with the present, it is essential to
understand Paythorsh. The whole poetry, as we have seen,
consists of several conflicts: country and town, reality and
unreality, nature and the church, poetry and science, Wales
and England, Old Wales and modern Wales and the "light" and the "dark". At the centre of every one of these conflicts stands Prytherch, Thomas's symbol of compromise.
NOTES

Chapter III. The Country

1 "A Welshman at St. James' Park," Piétà, p. 23.
2 "The Welsh Hill Country," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 46.
3 "Depopulation of the Hills," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 52.
4 "Because," Piétà, p. 8.
5 "On the Farm," The Bread of Truth, p. 45.
7 "The Slave," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 104.
8 "A Line from St. David's," The Bread of Truth, p. 7.
10 "The Belfry," Piétà, p. 28.
11 "The Minister," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 75.
13 "The View from the Window," Poetry for Supper, p. 27.
14 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Cloud."
15 "Because," Piétà, p. 8.
16 "Then," Piétà, p. 35.
17 "Lament for Prytherch," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 99.
19 "Here," Taras, p. 42.
21 "Welsh Landscape," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 62.
22 "Welsh," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 47.
Examination of Thomas's poetry can reveal curious statistics. Of the 63 poems that comprise his 1956 volume, 
Song at the Year's Turning, 37 poems or 59% are about the 
Welsh farmers. Poems that have already been discussed, such 
"Depopulation of the Hills," "Cyndddylan on a Tractor," etc., 
which focus almost exclusively on the farmer's relationship 
with nature and the modern world, predominate. In Poetry for 
Supper, published in 1956, there are only 15 or those farmer 
poems, or 42% of the 36-poem volume. In the subsequent 
volumes this trend continues: the number of farmer poems 
directly declines in inverse ratio to the poems that are 
involved with matters other than the problems of the farmer, 
such as those that analyze the function of poetry. In the 36 
poem volume Tëwa, published in 1961, there are 14 farmer 
poems or approximately 39%. In Bread of Truth (1963) the 
percentage declines to 28%, and in the latest of the volumes, 
Eitha (1966), 6 farmer poems out of a possible 35 reduce it 
to 17%.

Although statistics per se rarely increase one's understand- 
standing or appreciation of an art form such as poetry, in
this instance the statistical decline of farmer poems serves to underline a significant thematic trend in Thomas's poetry. Thomas employs a form of subjective technique; invariably, when discussing his farmers, he also includes himself in his poems as a protagonist who has the conflicting reactions of a priest toward his flock or the more lyrically comprehensive perspective of the poet. For example, his first poem, "Out of the Hills," which seemingly had been an objective depiction of a descending farmer, introduces this subjective element toward the end.

No, wait for him here. At midnight he will return,
Threading the tunnel that contains the dawn
Of all his fears. Be then his fingerpost—
Homeward. The earth is patient; he is not lost.

The image of the "fingerpost" pointing "homeward" is quite clearly the figure of the priest; Thomas is projecting himself into the poem in his own professional role. The image of the "fingerpost" is also important for a further reason. The image is inanimate—non-human. It reflects the austerity or asceticism rather than the humanity of this intercessor for mankind. Thomas, as he is revealed in the early poetry, is a being quite a distance apart from the farmers; as with the austere fingerpost-priest image, distancing normally occurs between the subjective voice and the farmer it is describing. As the poetry progresses however, this rift seems to lessen.
Although the Thomas voice, as we have seen in the previous chapters, stays antagonistic toward the Welsh farmer's apathy for his archetypal role and toward his assumption of English materialism, the antagonism is increasingly counterbalanced by another element. The Thomas persona, through association and gradual identification with one of the archetypal farmers, albeit an atypical one, achieves a level of understanding in the later poetry not previously seen. The atypical farmer is Ingo Prythoroch; his function is that of a symbolic catalyst. Prythoroch personifies the possible unity of man and nature that Thomas, as the subjective voice, is seeking. Prythoroch syncretizes the "light" and the "dark" and through him Thomas achieves the catharsis that is represented, on the authorship level, by the disappearance of the farmer poems.

The early separation between Thomas and the farmer figure takes a different form in the poem that follows "Out of the Hilla". In "A Labourer," Thomas distances both himself and the reader from the farmer in the poem by asking a series of questions about the man.

Who can tell his years, for the winds have stretched
So tight the skin on the bare racks of bone
That his face is smooth, inscrutable as stone?
And when he wades in the brown bilge of earth
Hour by hour, or slopes to pull
The reluctant swedes, who can read the look
In the colourless eye, as his back comes straight
Like an old tree lightened of the snow's weight?
In there love there, or hope, or any thought
For the frail form broken beneath his tread,
And the sweet pregnancy that yields his bread?

Questioning is a technique that largely disappears in the later poetry though it is common in Song of the Year's Turning. As Thomas reaches a resolution of life's dichotomies the need for questions will naturally disappear, but their early predominance also reflects the rift that exists at that stage between Thomas and the farmer. When a question appears in a poem, such as "Who can tell his years?", the reader, first of all, cannot associate or identify with the farmer. In order to comply he must obtain an external perspective from which he can examine the farmer. He must also discriminate between the poet's voice and the farmer the voice is describing as being two entirely different people, particularly when the third person "his" is used in reference to the farmer, as above, or when Thomas uses the directional word "there", as in the question "Is there love there?" The speaker is emphasizing his distinctness from the farmer, he is analytically examining aspects of the man that he does not feel he shares. Another general point exists in relation to the questioning technique that Thomas uses. Even presuming that these questions are, to some degree, rhetorical, when someone asks questions about someone else, as the Thomas voice does here, the impression is unavoidably implanted that the speaker
does not have a full or intimate knowledge of the person he is examining.

Even when attempting to justify or praise the farmer, Thomas’s questions invariably reveal some kind of intellectual schism between the persona and the farmer. For example, in "A Priest to his People," Thomas’s question, "what brushwork/ could equal/The artistry of your dwelling on the bare hill?" puts the farmers on an inanimote, abstract plane, "In a crude tapestry under the jealous heavens...", that negates their mutual humanity. Similarly, the questions that close "An Old Man," another early poem, also seem to suggest that the farmer has a quality that the rest of nature lacks, but the way they depict Thomas consciously attempting to discover it and the nonhuman imagery with which the farmer is associated in the first part of the poem counteract the farmer’s humanity and tend to point up instead the difference between the voice and the farmer.

Looking upon this tree with its quaint pretension
Of holding the earth, a leveret, in its claws,
Or marking the texture of its living bark,
A gray sea wrinkled by the winds of years,
I understand whence this man’s body comes,
Its veins and fibres, the bare bough of bone,
The trellised thicket, where the heart, that robin,
Greets with a song the seasons of the blood.

But where in meadow or mountain shall I catch
The individual accent of the speech
That is the ear’s familiar? To what sun attribute
The honeyed warmthess of his smile?
To which of the deciduous brood is German
The angel peeping from the latticed eye?9

The harshness of the opening lines is reminiscent of "A
Labourer." The metaphor in the earlier poem of a man creak-
ing slowly erect, "Like an old tree lightened of the snow's
weight,"10 is more thoroughly developed here but with similar
emphases. Man-tree metaphors have been used by many poets
but the detailed images that run through Thomas's first
volumes are scarcely traditional. Thomas's trees rarely
symbolize growth or stability but connect rather with the
vegetable feebleness of old men. The wintertime flesh-
lessness of man and tree, the "bark bough of bone," and the
textual and visual similarities between bark and an old lined
face as in a "grey sea wrinkled by the winds of years," are
fairly representative and complement the poetry's major theme
of the apathy of the farmers.

The total lack of appreciation for everything meaningful
in nature shown by the farmers forms the substance of the
rift separating them and Thomas. Blinded by total self-
interest they fumble insensitively through life and through
the pages:

 Soil

***
This is his world, the hedge defines
The mind's limits; only the sky
Is boundless, and he never looks up;  
His gaze is deep in the dark soil  
As are his feet.

ennima

**
The earth is beautiful and he is blind  
To it all, or notices only the weeds' way  
Of wrestling with and choking the young hay  
That pushes tentatively from the gaunt womb.  
He cannot read the flower-printed book  
Of nature, nor distinguish the small songs  
The birds bring him, calling with wide bills,  
Out of the leaves and over the bare hills;  
The squealing curlew and the loud thrush  
Are both identical, just birds, birds;  
He blames them sullenly as the agreed,  
Ancestral ancestors of the live seed,  
Unwilling to be paid by the rich crop  
Of music swelling thickly to the hedge top.

The Last of the Peasantry

**
Moving through the fields, or still at home,  
Dwarfed by his shadow on the bright wall,  
His face is lit always from without,  
The sun by day, the red fire by night;  
Within is dark and bare, the grey ash  
Is cold now, blow on it as you will.

The poem "Valediction" is the most condemnatory. It emphasizes the farmer's willful denial of the spiritual and aesthetic sensibility that separates man and animal.

**
Unnatural and inhuman, your wild ways  
Are not sanctioned; you are condemned  
By man's potential stature. The two things
That could redeem your ignorance, 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 the thick blood, the loud unlovely rattle
Of mucus in the throat, the shallow stream
Of neighbours' trivial talk.14

The farmer is the type of Adam. As his labour is Adam's
labour so should his awareness and knowledge be the awareness
and knowledge of Eden, of the golden age of innocence when
man was intimately aware of his God. Self-centred, material-
istic and apathetic to all that has meaning in life, the
typical farmer denies this heritage: "Blind? Yes, and deaf,
and dumb, and the last irks most;/For could he speak, would
not the glib tongue boast/A lore denied our nectaric sense;/
Being handed down from the age of innocence?"15 Against this
background of apathy Iago Prytherch stands alone.

Thomas uses the name Iago Prytherch for the first time
in "A Peasant," but the extreme un-Englishness of his name is
the only unique aspect of the farmer in this poem. In the
beginning Prytherch is as anonymously vacuous as any other
farmer, as the title, "A Peasant" suggests:

Iago Prytherch his name, though, be it allowed,
Just an ordinary man of the bald Welsh hills,
Who pens a few sheep in a gap of cloud.
Docking mangles, chipping the green skin
From the yellow bones with a half-witted grin
Of satisfaction....16
"A Peasant" is in the first section of _Song at the Year's Turning_—the poems which were first published privately as Stones of the Field. The poems in the second section were originally published slightly later as _An Acre of Land_, and in "Memories," the poem that Thomas uses to open this later section, we see his first real development of the Prytherch figure.

The developments in "Memories" are basically twofold. In this poem the fundamental qualities of Prytherch appear for the first time and the relationship between farmer and speaker changes direction.

_Memories_

Come, Eago, 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,
Do you remember the shoals of wheat, the look
Of the prawned barley, and the hissing swarm
Of winged oats busy about the warm
Stalks? Or the music of the taut scythe
Breaking in regular waves upon the lithe
Limbs of the grass? Do you recall the days
Of the young spring with lambs mocking the snow
That was patched with green and gold in the bare fields?
Or the autumn nights with Sirius loud as a bird
In the wood's darkness?

Yes, though your lips are sealed
By a natural reticence, your eyes betray
The heart's rich harvest, gathered seasons ago
When I was a child too small even to have heard
Under the sombre foliage of the sky
The owl and badger answering my cry.
Prytheroh’s archetypal quality—the association of the farmer with the dim past—appears in the questions “Do you remember the shoals of wheat...the music of the taut scythe...?” ”Do you recall the days of the young spring...or the autumn nights...?” Prytheroh's is the specific archetypal association with the "light" and "dark" that we encountered before, with nature's time-trampling cycles of life and death, expressed throughout “Memories” in the juxtapositions of “spring” and “autumn”, “days” and “nights”, the pictures of growth and harvest, the “lithe limbs of grass” and the “taut scythe”. An intimate with nature, Prytheroh is also different from his peers who prefer “the loud, unlovely rattle of mucus in the throat.” Though silent, Prytheroh’s “lips are sealed/By a natural reticence,” he is not, as are his peers, “Unnatural and inhuman.” As the true progeny of Adam, Iago Prytheroh is R. S. Thomas’s counterpart of the innocent or primitive man of the soil who was the ideal of Shaftesbury, Rousseau and the Romantics.

From the very first line of the poem the considerable difference in the relationship between the speaker and the farmer from the other farmer poems becomes apparent: “Come, Iago, my friend.” Thomas says, “and let us stand together.” In “Memories” and subsequent Prytheroh poems the idea of "standing together" is developed. Prytheroh becomes Thomas's
alter ego. He will be the confidant and the antithesis of Thomas, the embodiment of the awareness that Thomas needs for complete understanding. For example, the differences between the two are carefully delineated throughout "Memories". Thomas consistently addresses Prytherch in the second person, and this I/you dichotomy is again reinforced by the questioning technique. The speaker can also "sing" and "make articulate" the "strong feelings and secret learning" of a silent man whose "lips are sealed by a natural reticence." In the association of Prytherch with "secret learning, innocent of books," lies an implicit contrast between the "natural" man and the speaker, the literate and literary representative of contemporary society. Prytherch represents, on the one hand the world of "the heart’s rich harvest" of "strong feelings", and Thomas, on the other, the world of the intellect, of the mind. In the last stanza the contrast between the two is captured in the images of childhood and age:

Yes, though your lips are sealed
By a natural reticence, your eyes betray
The heart’s rich harvest, gathered seasons ago
When I was a child too small even to have heard
Under the sombre foliage of the sky
The owl and badger answering my cry. 20

Thomas, in terms of experience, is a child in comparison to the ageless knowledge that Prytherch represents. Ostensibly the same is true for Thomas’s society. In particular terms
The last line also reflects that facet of nature with which Thomas has most trouble coming to terms—the "dark" aspect of nature. As a maturing being Thomas must encounter the realities of cruelty, suffering and death that the child need not face. He will hear the cries of the night-hunters, the "owl and badger" and, through Prytherch, learn to understand and accept them.

In Thomas's second volume, *Poetry for Supper*, the figure of Prytherch becomes increasingly important as Thomas strives to ignore the apathy of the more typical farmer.

Leave him, then, erased and alone
To pleach his dreams with his rough hands,
Ours to end in a field wisely sown,
His in the mire of his warped heart.

The poems in which Prytherch appears in this volume illustrate better than any that the figure often lacks the vitality that Thomas's other farmers have had. This is partly because the animosity Thomas feels toward their apathy lends an emotional colouring, such as in the pithiness of the "mucous", "phlegm" and "mirem" associations, that the Prytherch depictions lack. As a positive figure the emotional colouring of Prytherch is often more muted. Furthermore, Prytherch frequently seems to exist on a more purely intellectual plane—somewhat ironically, as he is, after all, the embodiment of an emotional point of view. But Prytherch is more entirely symbolic. Thomas
acknowledges this in the poem "Iago Prytherch" when he says, "Iago Prytherch, forgive my naming you." Whereas the other farmers, by and large, move namelessly across the pages, doing the things that irritate Thomas, Iago Prytherch has a name that, from "Memories" onward, is associated usually with the same qualities. It is a functional label, as Prytherch does not grow or develop, or do anything un-Prytherchian. Again, with the subjective point of view that Thomas uses throughout, we can never see inside Prytherch—he remains "you" or "he"—the external alter ego. The person that we do know is Thomas; it is Thomas who fluctuates between anger and awe, but perceptibly develops an acceptance of life such as Prytherch epitomizes.

It seems appropriate then that Thomas juxtaposes Prytherch, in "Green Categories," with Immanuel Kant, for the specificity of the philosophical associations that surround the name "Kant" has a similar dehumanizing effect. Like Prytherch, Kant is really more symbol than man; the name remains firmly associated with certain unchanging ideas while the human attributes, for most of us, evaporate with time and distance. The poem is itself a significant milestone in the development of the Prytherch-Thomas relationship as it acknowledges the superior reality—for Thomas—of the pantheism embodied by Prytherch over the subjectivist theories of one of modern
society's greatest minds.

You never heard of Kant, did you, Prytherch? A strange man! What would he have said of your life here, free from the remote war of antinomies; free also from mind's uncertainty faced with a world of its own making? Here all is sure;

Things exist rooted in the flesh, stone, tree and flower. Even while you sleep in your low room, the dark moor exerts its pressure on the timbers. Space and time are not the mathematics that your will imposes, but a green calendar your heart observes; how else could you find your way home or know when to die with the slow patience of the men who raised this landmark in the moor's deep tides?

His logic would have failed; your mind, too, exposed suddenly to the cold wind of genius, faltered. Yet at night together in your small garden, fenced from the wild moor's constant aggression, you could have been at one, sharing your faith over a star's blue fire.23

"Green Categories" is reminiscent in many ways of a later poem called "The Moor," discussed in the last chapter, in which the moor becomes a church-substitute to Thomas—"It was a church to me..." within which he is aware of an ineffable presence with an intimacy that orthodox religion could only approximate—"What God was there made himself felt, Not listened to..."24 In "Green Categories" it is again the moor that is pregnant with the certainty of universal purpose—"Here all is sure; Things exist rooted in the flesh; Stone, tree and flower..."—that transcends the
abstract manipulations of empirical logic: the "mind's uncertainty faced with a world/of its own making...the mathematics that your will imposes..." From living in the moor Prytherch has become instinctively aware of "the moor's deep tides," of the only certainty in life, nature's recurring cycles of life and death, "the green calendar your heart observes," and has become at one with it.

In some ways "Green Categories" and another of the Poetry for Supper, "Absolution," are the highwater mark in the relationship between the Thomas and Prytherch personae. In this latter poem the close identification between the two even takes on an ironic twist as Prytherch appears as priest and Thomas as penitent:

Prytherch, man, can you forgive
From your stone altar on which the light's Bread is broken at dusk and dawn
One who strafed you with thin scorn
From the cheap gallery of his mind?
It was you who were right all the time...25

The following volume, Tares, opens with a similar acknowledgment of Prytherch's guidance: "To me you are Prytherch, the man/who more than all directed my slow/Charity where there was need...",26 but after the opening poem the relationship alters considerably.

Thomas cites the source of the title of his third volume as Matthew 13,27: "Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field?
From whence, then, hath it Tares?" Most of the poems that make up the volume follow out the theme of disillusionment in the parable, as Thomas lashes out bitterly at the farmers, his creative seed:

"... Let the fagged bitch
Of an earth rot, she's produced all--'

"All that you couldn't. Your love's womb
Is dry, sterile..."?

Hate takes a long time
To grow in, and mine
Has increased from birth;
Not for the brute earth
That is strong here and clean
...

I find
This hate's for my own kind,
For men of the Welsh race
Who brood with dark navel
To learn what to sell...28

The general theme of disillusionment that runs throughout Tares is particularly apparent in the Prytherch poems. In "Too Late" the name actually loses its positive and esoteric associations and for the first time since "A Peasant" it becomes more like a generic term for all the farmers:

I would have spared you this Prytherch;
You were like a child to me...

...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?²⁹

"Too Late" is the only poem that so specifically identifies Prytherch with the degeneracy of his peers, but the disillusionment, of which it is an extreme example, does bring about a re-evaluation of the relationship. Thomas—the person—will become, by piety, relatively independent of Prytherch. The understanding and calm acceptance of nature that Prytherch embodies in *Poetry for Supper* will be expressed instead in Thomas's last volume in the conversation of the subjective voice and reflected in the general tenor, relative to *Tares* or *Song at the Year's Turning*, of the non-vituperative words and images. The above poem, "Too Late," and the other poems in which Prytherch is mentioned in *Tares* by name, reflect the critical point of the relationship from which Thomas heads toward autonomy.

From the allusion in the first three lines to mankind's Sisyphean perseverance in the face of futility, "And Prytherch—was he a real man?/Rolling his pain day after day/Up life's hill?" the disillusion in the poem "Which" is expressed in a series of questions that examine the reality and justification of the Prytherch symbol and reveal an unusual degree of self-doubt on the part of the speaker:

...Was he a survival
Of a lost past, wearing the times'
Shabbier casts-off, refusing to change
His lean horse for the quick tractor?
Or was a wish to have him so
Responsible for his frayed shape.
Could I have said he was the scholar
Of the field's pages he turned more slowly
Season by season, or nature's fool,
Born to blur with his moist eye
The clear passages of a book
You care to finger with deft touch? 30

We discussed, in the preceding chapters, Thomas's feeling
that he was himself an anachronism in the 20th century. In
Tares this consciousness is part of the general disillusion-
ment, as "Here" the poem that immediately follows the above
testifies, "I have nowhere to go. / The swift satellites show/
The clock of my whole being is slow." 31 In "Which," Prytherch
with his "casts-off" and "lean horse" is a similar anachronism
and Thomas is examining the plausibility of his survival in
an era to which he does not belong. "Was he a real man...?"
Thomas asks, questioning the authenticity of his creation. "Or
was a wish to have him so (a survival of a lost past) / Respon-
sible for his frayed shape?"--the projected "survival of
Prytherch into a time that is clearly antagonistic to those
things he represents may be an invalid thesis, the fulfillment
of an impractical "wish". In the second stanza Thomas also
examines the possibility of Prytherch being only a literary
device created specifically for exacting reader sentiment.
("Born to blur with his moist eye / The clear passages of a
Quite clearly then, a considerable change occurs in the portraiture of Prytherch and the attitude of Thomas toward him in this volume. In "Memories," in the first volume, we saw Thomas looking up to him with the admiration of a child for a man. In "Green Categories" Iago was the equal, or even the superior to Kant, while in "Absolution," in the same Poetry for Supper volume, Prytherch had assumed the guiding role of the priest while Thomas was the penitent. In complete contrast, the bitter disillusion of Tares shows Prytherch as another materialistic degenerate in "Too Late," and in "Which" he is completely dismantled and discredited. In "Portrait," the only other poem in Tares in which Prytherch appears by name, an image of blue eyes would suggest the innocence of Adamic man, but in this instance it is associated with the innocence of a retardate:

...eyes that you might  
Have fancied brown from their long gazing  
Beneath were of a hard blue,  
So shrill they would not permit the ear  
To hear what the lips' slobber intended.  

The bitterness of Tares forms a crisis in the poetry. Thomas's poems reveal him as a man searching deeply for a positive approach to the absurdity of life that he can communicate through his medium. Tares is thus a negative book—it attacks
and largely destroys the credibility of the symbol that had
embodies, up to that point, everything potentially positive
in the Welsh landscape.

Neither the bitterness nor the negativity of Tares is
resolved in Bread of Truth, the next volume. Poems like "A
Prisoner," ("The prisoner in the rain's cage/Dies, but his
place has to be filled."33) "On the farm," (...) they read in
life's dark book/The shrill sentence; God is love."34)
"Eviction," "Servant" and "Afforestation" convey a futility
similar to Tares, and although "He" suggests something like a
return to the earlier Prytherch-Thomas relationship:

He has become part of me,
Aching in me like a bone
Often bruised. Through him I learn
Emptiness of the bare mind
Without knowledge, and the frost
Of knowledge, where there is no love.35

the denial of any real communication in "This" is more typical.

I thought, you see, that on some still night,
When stars were shrill over his farm,
And he and I kept ourselves warm
By an old fire, whose bars were bright
With real heat, the truth might ripen
Between us naturally as the fruit
Of his wild hedges or as the roots,
Swedes and mangels, he grew then.

No luck; the thoughts hopefully soon
On such evenings never could break
The mind's crust. Keeping my own
Company now, I have forsaken
All but this bare basement of bone,
Where the one dry flame is awake."36
The setting into which Thomas projects himself and Prytherch is Prytherch's farm, the same setting in which Prytherch and Kent, "fenced from the wild moor's constant aggression," shared their faith "over a star's blue fire" in "Green Categories." "Star" and "fire" are again associated in "This" and again allude to the Christian faith. The image of stars shining, "on some still night," over the farm suggests Bethlehem and the word "old" in the image "old fire" leads out of a literal context into the metaphorical association with the established faith. The main difference between the concluding stanzas of the two poems is that this faith is depicted as "shared" in the earlier poem whereas in "This" the mind of Prytherch provides barren ground for the Christianity of the priest; Prytherch is "forsaken" by Thomas who remains alone; "Keeping my own/Company now, I have for- saken/All but this bare basement of bone, where the one dry flame is awake."

This sense of dissociation is again evident throughout Pielæ. In the poem "Swifts," from this his most recent volume, Thomas asserts, "I have shut the mind/on fools. The phone's frenzy is over," and the theme of non-communication in many of the poems tends to make a thesis statement out of the remark. For the first time the apathetic and sometimes moronic farmers that people so much of the early volumes fail to appear. In his first predominantly non-pastoral volume
Thomas turns instead to the sea for metaphors in "This to Do," "Within Sound of the Sea" and "Schoonermen." He examines the structure and function of the church in "In Church," "Service" and "The Belfry." The degeneracy of town life is the subject matter in "Rhodri," "The Provincial" and "A Welshman at St. James' Park." In "Gifts," "The Visit," "Blondes," "The Dance," "Girl," "For Instance" and "Exchange" the relationship of man and woman are examined, as the last two poems illustrate:

For Instance

She gave me good food;
I accepted;

Sewed my clothes, buttons;
I was smart.

She warmed my bed;
Out of it my son stepped.

She was adjudged
Beautiful. I had grown

Used to it. She is dead
Now, Is it true

I loved her? That is how
I saw things. But not she.

Exchange

She goes out,
I stay in,
Now we have been
So long together
There's no need
To share silence;
The old bed
Remains made
For two, spirits
Hate apart
From the sad flesh,
Growing thinner
On time's diet
Of bile and gall.

As these poems exemplify, Thomæ's themes may not really change as much as the subject matter. The somewhat mechanistic, unloving relationship between man and wife in "For Instance" and the more subtle degeneration of love in "Exchange" emphasize the same isolation of the individual encountered in earlier volumes. Rather than change, Piétà indicates expansion; it seems to suggest an acknowledgement that much more of life is encompassed by the same predicaments as the lonely hill farmer encounters.

The staccato sentences in these last two poems, reinforced by the spatial separation into two-line units in the one poem and by the short, three to four syllable lines in the other, are also somewhat extreme examples of the unusually spare, undorned wordage that is evident throughout the verse, but particularly in Piétà. It is a type of poetic structure that obviously has a functional compatibility with the bleakness of his images and themes. "Because," presumably an address to Prytherch, is another example of this extreme compression; the brief, five to eight syllable lines in the poem, and the punctuated listing which makes each unit distinct, complement the concrete type of words he employs to
Because

I praise you because
I envy your ability to
See these things: the blind hands
Of the aged combing sunlight
For pity; the starved fox and
The obese pet; the way the world
Digests itself and the thin flame
Scours. The youth enters
The brothel, and the girl enters
The nunnery, and a bell tolls.
Viruses invade the blood.
On the smudged empires the dust
Lies and in the libraries
Of the poets. The flowers wither
On love’s grave. This is what
Life is, and on it your eye
Sets tearless, and the dark
Is dear to you as the light. 41

The Imagist-like functionalism of Thomas’s vocabulary is seen here in his use of adjectives. Pound and his contemporaries decried the Miltonic and Victorian use of superfluous and florid adjectives, but not one of Thomas’s can be so categorized. Even out of context the words “blind”, “starved”, “obese”, “thin” and “smudged” convey concrete images with noun-like preciseness. In the context the functionalism is made total. “Blind” in association with “hands” creates a compressed image that conveys both the pitiability and the futility of the beggar-like “aged” man clawing the air. The somewhat ironic juxtaposition of “blind” with “sunlight” increases the pathos; like a mariner dying with thirst in an
ocean of water, the "aged" are surrounded by "light" and
cannot reach it. "Starved" and "obese" are similar functional
opposites. On the one hand the "starved fox" symbolizes
nature—cunning and cruel but "starved", gaunt, like the
farmers, for want of proper nourishment. On the other hand
is the pet that is not just fat, but "obese", a symbol of the
gross values of the city. The adjective "thin", in the "thin
flame scours" is similarly precise as it alludes to the narrow
prohibitiveness of Christianity and its metaphysical scourge,
the concept of sin and damnation. The next two lines parody
the non-communicativeness of life; while in the background "a
bell tolls", sounding out Donne's belief in communal exper¬
ience, the "youth enters a brothel" to receive sex without
love and "the girl enters a nunnery" and exits from the
community of life.

The next image, the contrast between "viruses" and
"smudged empires", is also used, with a slight variation, in
"Amen". In this poem, Thomas looks for justification for his
faith in the bleak world around him:

...Under the song

Of the larks, I heard the wheels turn
Hastily. But the scene held;
The cold landscape returned my stare;
There was no answer. Accept; accept,
And under the green capitals,
The molecules and the blood's virus.
The "empires" that are "smudged" and the "poets' libraries" in the poem "Because" are, relative to a virus, vast concepts like these "green capitals", Thomas's generic term for the large, visible aspects of nature: grass, trees, hills etc. "Under"—beneath the surface—of all three, the magnificent empires that time "smudges" in history, the literary empires of the poets' and the vistas of nature, lies the catabolic reality of the virus. In "A Welshman at St. James's Park," also in Plata, it may be remembered that Thomas says "Under the sun's/Feathers are the sinews of stone/,The curved claws ..." and the ideas are parallel. Like the "claws", the virus is the reality behind the façade.

In "Because" Thomas praises Prytherch's complete acceptance of this reality.

I praise you because
I envy your ability to
See these things...
...This is what
Life is, and on it your eye
Sets tearless, and the dark
Is dear to you as the light.44

Milton's Adam shed "some natural tears" when forced to leave Eden for the world outside, "but wiped them soon." (P.L. XII, 645) His modern counterpart is appropriately "tearless" as he embodies complete acceptance of man's position within a universe where the modus operandi always has involved suffering
and violence and always will: "This canker was in the bone/
Before man bent to his image/In the pool's glass. Violence
has been/And will be again." 45

What the volume Pieta mainly reveals is the "tearless"
acceptance by Thomas himself of this dark reality. In the
farmer poems of the first four volumes, particularly in
Taras, Thomas, through his persona, revealed strong emotional
involvement that varied between pity and outright bitterness.
Pieta is different. In this volume Thomas himself embodies
the comprehensive understanding that had been accorded
Prytherch alone. He can now advise the former adviser: "Take
heart, Prytherch. Over you the planets stand./And have seen
more ills than yours," 46 or bid him to come, "like a slave
... to the mind's bidding." 47 In Pieta his former emotional
reactions are replaced by the awe that the whole world-picture
invokes. In "Swifts" for example, Thomas looks at the
patterns the birds create and notes his changing perspective:
"I am learning to bring/Only my wonder to the contemplation/
Of the geometry of their dark wings," 48 and likewise he
enters "The House," "on soft foot/Breath held like a cap in
the hand." 49 It is this sense of reverence for the power of
nature that runs through the pastoral poems in Pieta and
makes the bitter outbursts against the farmers in the volumes
that precede it seem narrow and immature in comparison. The
volume ends with a flat statement of the bleak reality that Thomas now accepts: "...the God/We worship fashions the world/From such torment, and every creature/Decorates it with its tribute of blood."
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Chapter IV: Prytherch

This process of categorizing poems is highly arbitrary. Some other poems could have been included in this farmer category, particularly in the first volume, but have been excluded as being mainly involved with some theme other than the farmer's relationship to the soil. For example, the patriotic Welsh poems are not strongly represented. Despite possible discrepancies in the following listings, however, the major issue hinges on the obvious decline in the number of poems in which the farmers appear and this can easily be illustrated with even a casual comparison of Song at the Year's Turning and Pieta.


"Brothers," "The Face."

"Out of the Hils," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 17.
7 "A Labourer," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 18.
8 "A Priest to his People," Song at the Year's Turning.
5 An Old Man," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 29.
10 "A Labourer," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 18.
11 "A Priest to his People," Song at the Year's Turning.
2 "An Old Man," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 33.
13 "The Last of the Peasantry," Song at the Year's Turning.
14 "Valediction," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 65.
15 "Enigma," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 69.
16 "A Peasant," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 21.
17 "Memories," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 45.
18 "Valediction," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 65.
19 Ibid.
20 "Memories," Song at the Year's Turning, p. 45.
22 "Iago Prytherch," Poetry for Supper, p. 36.
25 "Absolution," Poetry for Supper, p. 44.
28 "Those Others," Taras, p. 31.
29 "Too Late," Taras, p. 25.
30 "Which," Taras, p. 42.
31 "Here," Taras, p. 43.
32 "Portrait," Taras, p. 33.
33 "Prisoner," The Bread of Truth, p. 37.
34 "On the Farm," The Bread of Truth, p. 45.
35 "He," The Bread of Truth, p. 46.
36 "This," The Bread of Truth, p. 42.
39 "For Instance," Pieta, p. 20.
41 "Because," Pieta, p. 6.
44 "Because," Pieta, p. 8.
45 "Aside," Pieta, p. 29.
46 Ibid.
50 "Ah!" Pieta, p. 24.
CHAPTER V  CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the poetry of R. S. Thomas impresses with its originality. That one writer’s work is similar to another’s does not necessarily detract from its value of course—Tennyson’s imagery, for instance, is acknowledged as similar to Keats’ without any particular stigma being attached to the similarity—but Thomas’s poetry surprisingly resembles no other poet’s to any great extent. “Surprisingly,” because, as we saw in the first chapter, Thomas is writing within a genre that has one of the most well-worn themes in all of literature. The pastoral theme, the suggestion that man has a closer, more harmonious relationship with God when he lives in a rural environment, has been used so often that the idea itself verges on cliché. Yet despite this background R. S. Thomas writes fresh and vital poetry. It is both of these because it is the honest poetry of experience. In a genre noted for poems that are escapist to the point of portraying totally impossible dream worlds, the world of Thomas’s pastoral poetry shocks with its uncompromising concern with reality. Thomas breaks down the relationship of rural man and God to its component parts and reveals the reality of the relationship with stark simplicity.
The imagery of the poems is predominantly bleak, with the exception of those few contrasting moments when the persona suddenly experiences a momentary awareness of nature's transcendent beauty, as in "The Moor," when the speaker says "...the air crumbled/And broke on me generously as bread." Thomas's landscapes are scarcely the lush pastures of Keats and Tennyson; they are the barren fields of The Waste Land era, where the God of Love is most conspicuous by his absence: "...And in the foreground/The tall Cross:/Sombre, untenanted..." As for Matthew Arnold in "Dover Beach," reality for Thomas is a "dazzling plain," it is not the world of contemporary society, the "world, which seems/To lie before us like a land of dreams." Similarly, the "note of sadness" which, according to Arnold, "Sophocles long ago heard...on the Aegean," is still integral to Thomas's 20th century refrain. The theme of man's futile struggle against the indomitable will of an unloving God that appears in the Oedipus cycle, involves a pathos that the Greeks excelled in evoking. Euripides' The Bacchae, in which Pentheus, the king of Thebes, is ripped apart for refusing to acknowledge the divine power of Dionysus, a major nature God, is perhaps literature's most extreme expression of Thomas's reiterated advice: "Accept; Accept./And under the green capitals/The molecules and the blood's virus." Thomas Hardy is probably the closest of English poets
to Thomas when all the factors are considered. The extremely compressed imagery of Hopkins and Donne, his major predecessors among the religious poets, is obviously similar and either one could have influenced Thomas's technique directly or indirectly. However the two earlier poets differ considerably from the modern writer in their portrayal of the man-God relationship. Hopkins, with the exception of the introspective "Terrible Sonnets," examines nature for the presence of a God of Love, while Donne's God, if less loving, is at least potentially accessible to the penitent to a degree that Thomas rarely conveys. The characters created by the pre-Romantic pastoralist, George Crabbe, often bear a marked resemblance to Thomas's farmers. Crabbe's deliberate intention, in such poems as "The Village," and "The Borough," was to counteract the artificiality of 18th century pastoral idyllicism by painting rural life as it really was, to "paint the Cot;/As Truth will paint it, and as bards will not."5

Unavoidably, the literary ponderousness of his major works and his attempt to capture reality with the couplet, a device more suited to classical satire, defeats his purpose. "Truth", or reality, does not fit easily into end-rhymed compartments. Hardy did not have to overcome such environmental influences on his technique, nor does his god resemble the beneficent God of Hopkins or Donne in any respect. He has a range of
subject matter that Thomas has only started to approach in
RiftÁ, but his pastoral poems are in the same vein. In fields
as bleak as Thomas's, described in a similarly bland, con-
versational style, ("...a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
Their had fallen from an ash, and were gray..."
man bows
before the "Immanent Hill," a god that differs from Thomas's
mainly because Hardy reveals frustration in his portraiture
and Thomas, acceptance.

The closest single analogue to Thomas's pastoral theme
lies, however, not in English poetry, but again in drama, in
that most magnificent Shakespearean play—King Lear. Through-
cout the play runs a major theme of reality opposed to
unreality. It opens with the presentation of antithetical
values similar to those discussed in the "Town" chapter of
this paper. Just as Thomas contrasts the relative abstract-
ionism of townspeople's values with the touchstone reality of
the country, we are immediately presented in Lear with a
contrast between the power-hungry materialism of Goneril,
Regan and Burgundy flattering the king on the one hand, and
Cordelia, Kent and France on the other, stating their
positions with uncompromising exactitude. Lear, at this
point, wavers toward the Goneril camp which leads to his
resultant madness. The central action of the play takes
place on a wind-swept heath, a remarkably similar setting
to Thomas's Welsh moor, discussed in the "Country" section. Again we have the same suggestion of nature as a primarily dark force. The storm on Shakespeare's heath (cf "Green Categories": "The moor's constant aggression") as a metaphorical extension of the storm in Lear's mind, is a correlative between "nature" in its external and internal senses. As in Thomas's poetry, nature—i.e., the ordering of all existence—exacts its toll, independent of man's desire or will. This is what Lear has completely realized by the end of the play when he is forced to acknowledge the reality of Cordelia's death: ("Never, never, never, never, never!") Finally, corresponding to the Frythorsh-Thomas relationship discussed in the last chapter, we have the association between Lear and Poor Tom. It is through his acceptance of the truths muttered by this similarly ragged figure that he meets on the heath, that Lear will move toward his final insight into reality.
NOTES

Chapter V: Conclusion

3. Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach."
6. Thomas Hardy, "Neutral Tones."
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The following short list is actually a fairly exhaustive bibliography of commentaries on Thomas's poetry, short of book reviews, available in this country.


