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# A study of aspects of Gwyn Thomas's humor

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A STUDY OF ASPECTS OF GWYN THOMAS'S HUMOR

by

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## A STUDY OF ASPECTS OF GWYN THOMAS'S HUMOR

## INTRODUCTION

From the Welsh mountains, with their coal, chapels, and choruses, came Gwyn Thomas. He was born in 1913 in Porth, deep in the Rhondda Valley of South Wales, and was reared there in the harsh years of the strikes of the twenties and the Great Depression of the thirties. This environment, which shaped his thinking through the long, calamitous years, is reflected in Thomas's own view of his writing.

What I write is tied umbilically to the astonishing Rhondda Valley where I was born and brought up. It is a great sprawling mining community, hemmed between high close hills .... The people, largely of Celtic stock, shrunken and twisted under the impact of long strikes and a bitter depression ... already plagued by a vague 'mystique' of racial defeat and a passionately lyrico-religious temperament ... found their life-view darkening as their economic and spiritual underpins were sent spinning .... I was ... never free from the fierce conviction that the essence of their strange wild humor could and should be communicated, making audible every tone of their bawled comment on a pitiless and crumbling environment. Into that humor went a comradeship in multiple discomfort and mutilated longing, the pervasive memory of a half-buried, brooding, bardic culture, tales of immemorial grief set to the sweep of harps, and to frame man at his daftest, nature in the shape of hills of a mould superbly smooth and insistent rain edging down towards the valleybeds ....<sup>1</sup>

Thomas thus defines what he will write about, giving it a quality of wild humor, a natural ebullience that bursts forth in uninhibited spirits. One might wonder that Thomas could find a humor of exaggerated absurdity in a dark world of industrial slump and depression. An economic catastrophe that affected the lives of nearly all the inhabitants of the Valley, that beggared their bodies and spirits, would hardly seem to be a source of hilarity. But from this material Thomas creates novels and short stories that describe the life of South Wales with a sardonic but essentially loving

humor, the humor of a writer who, like Byron, laughs that he may not weep. Perhaps humor is Thomas's instrument for survival and his confirmation of Carolyn Wells's comment that all laughter has its origin in sorrow. In a 1950 radio interview with Glyn Jones, Thomas said, "... on certain levels of deprivation, life and speech cease to be cautious and hedged in; humour then can express itself without inhibitions ...."<sup>2</sup>

It is with some of the aspects of Thomas's humor, which is indeed neither cautious nor hedged in, that this paper will deal, aspects of a bitter time in the lives of Welsh workers caught in an economic vise. Thomas chooses to engage our compassion with his humor, while he also captures realistically the data of sorrow. I shall address my discussion to the following aspects: 1) humor of character: an appraisal of the characteristic types in Thomas's books and how they relate to the human comedy; 2) humor in language: Thomas's use of extravagant but robust imagery to convey the humor and vitality of the Welsh; 3) humor of situation: the use of comic episodes to construct plot; 4) humor of political views: how Thomas creates comedy through the conflict of those involved in the political-economic struggle in the Rhondda of the thirties.

Also included in this discussion is a canon and a brief biographical sketch, with a background view of that corner of Wales about which Thomas writes.

It may be well to explain here why I chose Thomas for my study. I first read his early novels in the forties and was captivated by his combination of effervescent language and social conscience, a combination referred to by James Hilton as a mixture of Damon Runyon and John Bunyan. Thomas had a brief, limited appeal in this country which was eclipsed by

what I consider to have been a politically repressive period in the early fifties. Only recently did I discover that his books were again being published in this country, and I read A Welsh Eye and A Few Selected Exits. They opened for me a new view of Wales, a principality rich in a literary tradition that remains largely unknown outside Wales, except for the poetry of Dylan Thomas and a best-selling novel by Richard Llewellyn, How Green Was My Valley. The world of Gwyn Thomas is a land darkened by economic dissolution, its people resisting the enveloping depression with humor and courage. One need not have lived through the depression to appreciate Thomas's writing, but since my generation was formed in this crucible of time, I felt such a study to be a worthwhile excursion into the work of a writer whose characters endured and prevailed. What follows is the result of that excursion.

## BIOGRAPHY AND BACKGROUND

For someone who is, by his own account, (A Few Selected Exits, 1968) still alive, comparatively well, and living in Wales, Gwyn Thomas is a remarkably elusive biographical subject. That he is not listed in most of the conventional biographical reference sources bespeaks either an inordinate modesty or an insouciant indifference to fame. Neither quality seems likely, since he has already written and published his autobiography.

The Author's and Writer's Who's Who gives Thomas's birthdate as 1913 in Porth, Glamorganshire.<sup>3</sup> There were twelve children in the family, and he was the youngest of eight brothers. His mother died when he was six, worn out with child-bearing and overwork, and his father's "patchy efforts as a provider"<sup>4</sup> made survival difficult for the family. In 1921, when the first of the long coal strikes occurred, he and his brothers were fed in soup kitchens. By the thirties, he says in A Few Selected Exits, "the great economic palsy was now well under way" (p. 6). Despite the atmosphere of unemployment and the dole, in the midst of a precarious and threatening way of life, talk and laughter still burst irrepressibly from Thomas, his brothers, and the people of the Valley. "People tell me there are comic overtones in even my most sombre imagery. I can easily believe it. Humour is a sense of the incongruous or absurd, an aggravated sense of the contrast between man's divine promise and his shambling, shabby reality" (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 109).

In 1931, having won three scholarship awards from urban, county and state sources, Thomas applied for admission to and was accepted at Oxford, since the University of Wales then had no department of Spanish, his major

subject. He passed through Oxford, he adds with typical diffidence, "in three years, one stupor and four and a half suits" (A Few Selected Exits, p. 59), and he describes his reaction to the great English university as a place of towering English undergraduates, a startling contrast to the average, rather short Welshman. From Oxford he went on to the University of Madrid, to fulfill the requirement of a stay in the country of the language one studied. Upon his return home, he spent a short time in social work. During World War II he began a teaching career in Cardigan, where he also wrote his first novels. He now lives in Barry, Wales.

Thomas writes of his life and background as "a time when in South Wales alone a whole generation had their lives outraged by a monstrous State-regimented poverty ...."<sup>5</sup> His references to his life are oblique, for when he seems almost to touch on the most serious aspects of his experiences, he will turn aside in a wry, almost mocking self-deprecation. His father, he says in the short story, "And a Spoonful of Grief to Taste," "had new brands of debt named after him,"<sup>6</sup> a comment on the facts of life that formed Thomas's past.

Thomas describes other details of Welsh life in the Valleys. One was the Workmen's Library and Institute, that "lighthouse of advanced literary and homespun entertainment ... where ... the boys, ... dedicated anarcho-syndicalists, ... really made the dialectic jump."<sup>7</sup> Here there were all kinds of activities, from draughts (i.e. checkers) to drama, from reading to religious debate, from choral singing to discussing Karl Marx. Here the lectures and discussions went on interminably, providing a creative and rhetorical outlet for the energies of men long idled by unemployment. With the emptying of the Valleys, however, the Institutes began to close, and

Thomas, visiting one recently in the silent days of its abandonment, calls it "a quiet cavern," its library so bare that even "the mice now ask each other whatever happened to Caxton" ("A View of the Valley," p. 301).

The sound of singing also has deep meaning for the Welsh, even during the dim days of the Depression. Singing is, says Thomas, the "business of pouring one's essence into sound,"<sup>8</sup> and most activities seemed to be backed by the surging swell of Welsh choruses. Music, like poetry, was woven into the life of Wales, and even in the dark time of the Depression, the singing went on. "You know how it is in our part of the Valley. They are mad for singing in choirs. If you can sing a bit, you get roped into a choir, and if you can keep your voice somewhere near the note, and your morals facing due north where the cold is, someone with pull is bound to notice you."<sup>9</sup> This attitude is hardly surprising in a country that holds an annual National Eisteddfod, or "session," dedicated to music and poetry, and which enthrones or "chairs" its winning bard at the conclusion of the celebratory ceremony.

The cinema houses, anodyne of the working class, also figure in Thomas's description of life in the Valleys. Boasting such glorified names as the "Pontine Palace" and the "Tonypany Empire," they brought brief forgetfulness from the reality of valley life, and occasionally were the setting for scenes of joyful mayhem.

Coffee houses too were warm refuges where, for a few pennies, a man could get something hot to drink to counteract the dismal Welsh rain. In such places as Paolo Tasso's Coffee Tavern or Orlando's Chip and Coffee Bar one could be stimulated by heated discussions with kindred spirits, presided over by kindly Italians who brought their Latin warmth to the madness

of Celtic life. Pubs too offered their consolation, and they bore such poetic names as *The Dew on the Dust* and *The Heart's Ease*.

If Thomas deals with these elements of Welsh life with good humor and affection, he is less sympathetic to and frequently derisive of two other major influences on Welsh life: nationalism and the chapel. With his distinctly socialist convictions, Thomas came to view both these influences as inimical to the interests of the working class. There is little question as to where he stands in regard to the established church. "As children," he says in *A Welsh Eye*, "we tended to regard the English [Established] Church as the recruiting ground of blackleg labour in the disputes that shook the place periodically like earthquakes." His attitude toward the denominational chapels that proliferated up and down the streets of the valleys is equally disapproving. "If the theological vigour of even fifty years ago had kept its impetus, the denominational ratio would by now be running somewhere in the region of one sect per man. Such a rage to dispute and divide must have pointed to some fundamental wish to reject the whole doctrine of revelation" (*A Welsh Eye*, p. 122).

Perhaps this Welsh inclination toward theological schism may have turned Thomas's satire against the chapels for another, more significant reason than merely the religious intransigence of the chapel members. Thomas is wary of such religious fragmentation among the workers of the Valleys because it weakened the militancy of their economic struggle. Bickering among themselves in matters of religious doctrine attenuated the workers' resistance against the miserable conditions of their lives. In *The Dark Philosophers*, Mr. Emmanuel is a preacher who has diverted such militancy into a passive acceptance of life as it is. "It was he [Mr.

Emmanuel ] who said when soldiers were sent into our valley to bring the great strikes to an end that we should give warm welcome to the soldiers and return forthwith to work" (p. 11). For Thomas, the preachers and the chapels held no strong position of leadership in the forefront of the struggle that engaged the workers.

Glyn Jones, who writes with affection and admiration for Thomas, takes him to task, however, for his failure to acknowledge the importance of the chapels in the indigenous culture of Wales, as "one of the custodians of the language, or historically as the disseminator of culture and education, of singing and music, of the poetry of its hymns, the democratic training ground for oratory, for speaking and for organizing" (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 122). Thomas concedes in A Welsh Eye, "The great dynasty of preachers shaped our soul and established the rules of our not inconsiderable rhetoric." But, he adds, "behind the preacher has always stood the image of the powerfully literate ploughman and miner who have given to our working people an impressive and articulate dignity" (p. 27).

Of equal significance is Thomas's negative attitude toward the Welsh language and Welsh nationalism. "We were not, in terms of nationality, a homogeneous people. Into the Valleys had poured as many Englishmen as indigenous Welsh. The only binding things were indignity and deprivation. The Welsh language stood in the way of our fuller union and we made ruthless haste to destroy it" (A Welsh Eye, p. 103). Thomas feels that "anyone who struggles to revive a language that is dying gracefully and without pain is guilty of a most harmful treason" (A Few Selected Exits, p. 70). Glyn Jones's view is that Thomas considers the question of Welsh nationalism from a standpoint [that] is firmly and consistently socialist and

working class .... He does not share either those nationalist aspirations which many admirable Welshmen today cherish, perhaps because he sees in nationalism a threat to the international unity and strength of the working class. His attitude seems to give point to the generalization that in South Wales the Laffer a man is the less Welsh he is likely to be (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 113).

Thomas is certainly a Leftist, conditioned so by the early years he knew in the Valleys. Whether this makes him consequently "less Welsh" is a matter of definition. He equates nationalism with Welsh chauvinism and doubts the need to revive the Welsh tongue. But as Glyn Jones himself says in The Dragon Has Two Tongues, "I am sure Gwyn is a better Welshman than many of his more austere and dedicated compatriots give him credit for being .... Anyone who has known Gwyn Thomas for any length of time must have sensed in him a deep love of the country in which he was born and in which he has chosen to spend his life" (p. 114).

## CANON

Where Did I Put My Pity? (1946) is a collection of short stories that tell of the poverty and desperation of the Welsh valleys in the thirties, reflecting the spirit of people who have been to the bottom of the pit and have still managed to laugh their way up to the light. Two stories, "Simeon" and "Oscar" dwell in such low vales of morbidity as incest and other forms of human corruption, and they appear imitative of other Welsh writers such as Caradoc Evans and Arthur Machen. More characteristic of Thomas's evolving manner is such a typical story as "Dust in the Lonely Wind," which tells of the addition of a Men's "convenience" at the local cinema and its effect on the slow-witted, but kind-hearted Uncle Gomer. Another good story, "And a Spoonful of Grief to Taste," concerns Uncle Cadwallader, a moronic behemoth whose principal activity appears to be flexing his muscles for the terror and delight of his nephew, the narrator of the story.

The Dark Philosophers (1947) and Venus and the Voters (1948) are novels, each having as principal characters four men who have been long unemployed and who have come to a stagnant state of misery. They still have spirit enough, however, to report with bitter humor on the shabbiness of their world. In The Dark Philosophers they deal with the Reverend Emmanuel, a minister who gave up the human struggle long years ago and who learned to temper his rebellion to the wishes of a wealthy and powerful man. In Venus and the Voters these same dark philosophers come to the aid of a forlorn and poverty-stricken waif, "a perfect myth of a girl, a mixture of rags, malnutrition, shining eyes and a life force that refuses to lie down

in the face of all the encouragement offered by her environment."<sup>10</sup>

Leaves in the Wind (1949) is one of Thomas's few novels that do not take place in the Welsh coal mining valleys during the Depression 1930's. It tells of a poetic harpist who, in the late summer of 1835, comes down from the mountains to the village of Moonlea and becomes involved in the Chartist movement of labor rebellion. One of Thomas's less humorous novels, it is also one of sharp contrasts, of black villainy and excessively heroic posturing, with all the characters sounding much alike, speaking in a prose style reminiscent of the Welsh sonorities of John L. Lewis.

The World Cannot Hear You (1952), subtitled A Comedy of Ancient Desires, relates the sad venture of two startlingly dissimilar brothers, Omri and Bodvan Hemlock, who leave the hopeless valley town of Meadow Prospect and move to an equally hopeless farm in the uplands.

Now Lead Us Home (1952) tells of the reactions of the people of Fernclef when Mr. August Slezacher, an American maker of munitions, "fired by the great example of his fellow-phenomenon, Mr. W. R. Hearst,"<sup>11</sup> buys the local castle and settles down to live there. A wildly hilarious conflict develops between the fawning admirers of Slezacher's wealth and power and the stubbornly unreconstructed "prolies" of the neighborhood who detest everything that Slezacher represents.

These early novels give us a "succulent proletarian mouthful of the Rhondda Valley" (A Few Selected Exits, p. 161). They are more sombre than Thomas's later novels and they feature the "wry chronicles of the brighter among our sans culottes" (p. 163), with humor flashing effervescently

through them. In his later books, Thomas deals with characters that are more consistently daft, in situations of increasing lunacy, where exaggeration and absurdity become a way of life.

A Frost on My Frolic (1953) is a series of sketches and short stories about school life that take place in Mynydd Coch, "which is nothing more than a quadrangle of slopes, coal, rent and chaos" (A Frost on My Frolic, p. 8). The book probably reflects Thomas's own experiences as a school teacher, a profession he describes in A Welsh Eye as one "that holds more opportunity for static misery than most others" (p. 96).

The Stranger at My Side (1954) mixes plot and character in a highly comic style, revealing Thomas's boisterous imagination at an almost surrealist level. The principal character, Edwin Pugh the Pang, has become disheartened by his long years of bitter resistance against the oppressive misery of the Valley. He decides to eschew further sorrowful involvement with the workers and to embrace a carefree life. The hilarity of the book derives from the situation of a Calvinist-indoctrinated, Marxist-oriented Welshman trying to win through to his version of "hedonism."

A Point of Order (1956) is about Eryl Pym, a sharp, pragmatic Alderman from the township ward of Minerva Slopes. Pym's leftist dialectical fires have banked down to a moderate liberalism, and he is kept busy and off-balance countering the attacks of the militant leftists who consider him a mealy-mouthed renegade.

Gazooka and Other Stories (1957) is composed of a novelette and twelve short stories. Gazooka, the novelette, is a memory story of the long, quiet

months of summer in 1926 during the enforced idleness of the Great Strike. To fill the strange calm, the people of the Valleys engage in costumed band competition, improvising as band instruments the gazooka, a small, tin fife through which one hummed. Two other stories in this collection are "Where My Dark Lover Lies," a bitter-sad comedy about the burial of a friend, and "The Teacher," a poignant salute to a fine teacher and a compelling human being.

The Love Man (1958) is a strange departure for Thomas, for it is set in 17th century Spain, and deals with the famed Don Juan Tenorio, the legendary lover and libertine. It is a mocking revelation of the cynical corruption of the Inquisition and of the creation of the myth of Don Juan's life and fate. Very unlike the novels Thomas writes about the Welsh Valleys, The Love Man is made unpleasant by its uncharacteristic bitterness.

Ring Delirium 123 (1960) is, as the title implies, comic story interludes that ring with Marx Brothers' delirium, heightened by Thomas's compassionate eloquence. "The Living Lute" tells of a group of reluctant World War I draftees who get drunk in Dieppe, are put aboard a troop train to the front, and ride directly into the arms of the Germans and into a prisoner of war camp. "Brightest and Best" has Horatio Bagley, a policeman, helping Uriel Clure carry his "tools" up the steep slopes to his house, not suspecting that Uriel is really carting away, piece by piece, the factory where he works. "An Excessive Autumn" continues the adventures of Edwin Pugh the Pang, that sad and pensive champion of human rights. Engaged temporarily as a bus conductor, he has to contend with the depredations of local toughs who throw Guy Fawkes firecrackers on his bus; with snobbish ladies who attack

his efficiency; and with a decamping bus driver who rushes to reclaim his flighty wife from the arms of a local wrestler.

A Welsh Eye (1965) is a Celtic melange of reminiscences, history, literary criticism, and travelogue. It incorporates a variety of styles, subjects, and attitudes, and is a book, according to D. A. N. Jones, "as Welsh as a drunken hymn."<sup>12</sup>

In A Few Selected Exits (1968) Thomas looks back over his life and describes some of the exits he has tried and rejected: as a university student at Oxford and Madrid; as a teacher; as a somewhat reluctant member of the BBC-TV "Brains Trust" program, self-consciously apologetic about his role as an "intellectual;" and as a London dramatist, a brief career which he describes as somewhat less than successful. But always there were ties that drew him finally back to Wales: "I was home, at my earth's warm centre. The scared monkey was back in the branches of his best loved tree. I've never had any truly passionate wish to be elsewhere" (A Few Selected Exits, p. 239).

Thomas has also written at least three plays, The Keep (1961), Loud Organs (1962), and Jackie the Jumper (1962), all unavailable to me for reading at this time. He is also a contributor of articles and essays to Punch, Vogue, Holiday, and other publications.

## HUMOR IN CHARACTER

The jacket note of The Dark Philosophers refers to the "strange wild humor of the Celtic inhabitants of the Welsh valleys. Here are the perplexed, the badgered, the wondering and the compassionate ones of this earth; those who compose the inextinguishable core of dignity and laughter within the anguish of our kind." This note is a brief yet concise summary of the characters in Thomas's books. In this section I shall discuss the comic aspects of such character-types as the little men, intimidated by life; the militants, vocal against the oppressive indignities of life; the comic Lotharios, functioning within Puritanical restrictions; and the traditional enemy, those unfeeling "elements" who were the castle owners, the ironmasters, and the coal mine owners, who contributed to the bitterness and misery of life in the Welsh valleys of the thirties. All these would hardly appear to be comic types. Thomas makes them so.

The pathetic little men are grey, shadowy creatures who have given up any hope of a better future. Such characters as Omri Hemlock in The World Cannot Hear You and Morris in Venus and the Voters are presented humorously, but with them Thomas's humor is neither wounding nor sardonic. He regards them with an amiable despair, and they seem to be the Welsh equivalent of two stock characters of Yiddish folklore, the schlemihl and the schlimazel, the pathetic fool and the luckless simpleton, whimsically described by Nathan Ausubel in the following way: "A schlemihl is a man who spills a bowl of hot soup on a schlimazel."<sup>13</sup> Omri and Morris have some of each type in them, for they are simple-minded and hapless enough to have catastrophe visited upon them. Omri, small and likeable, is so self-effacing that he

forgave both his wife and the housepainter she ran off with, hoping that the housepainter at least would come back and finish painting the front door. Even in such an activity as trying out for the second tenor section of the Meadow Prospect Orpheans, a local singing group, Omri failed to qualify because Mathew Sewell, the choral director and lover of the well-placed "headvoice," turned him down, saying he had "never heard a dimmer, more negative sound in his life than that which came out of Omri."<sup>14</sup> And so Omri sits in the reading room of the Institute, his teeth gone, but not able to afford a plate, sucking his gums and reading magazines, and wondering "how the people in the 'Tatler' ever get to look so confident on such a planet" (The World Cannot Hear You, p. 8). He is a strange contrast to his brother Bodvan, that "walking glow of energy, the nearest we will ever come to Napoleon in this essentially modest strip of the Celtic fringe," with his way of "threatening life," his mouth set to make him look like a twin of John Knox" (p. 7).

Like Omri, "harmonizing with the grey mist,"<sup>15</sup> Morris creeps timidly through life, "a marvellous comic study of a man completely demoralized, deguttled and reduced to near imbecility by the savage social and industrial climate in which he has to live" (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 121). He is terrified by life, afraid to think, read, or discuss anything with anyone, convinced that any sign of independence might offend the Assistance Board. "I stand on very good terms with the Board," he wails when the four militant companions in Venus and the Voters want him to assert his rights, "... and I would not like those terms to be disturbed" (p. 44).

The wistful, yet comic sadness of characters like Omri and Morris is in sharp contrast to the outspoken aggressiveness of another type of

character, represented by those outrageous individualists who assail their environment and shout at the heavens with Celtic fury. They stream past in confusing patronymics, the Davieses, Morgans, Powells, and Evanses, (the surnames of Wales are few in number and "tag" names are frequently used to differentiate them) and they are angry at a "life-process that has death attached to it."<sup>16</sup> Such a one is Willie Silcox the Psyche, "a busy Freudian," who asks his landlord, Randall the Reaper, "if it was true that the last contract for roof repairs in [the street of] Winday Way had gone to Wat Tyler" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 30). Rollo Vaughan the Hastening Dawn is another protester, described in A Point of Order as a "radical of apocalyptic bent" who drives Alderman Eryl Pym almost off his hinge for failing to be sufficiently militant with the Council. Rollo threatens Alderman Pym by coming at him "with a kind of anthropoidal crouch ... and saying [he] now wished to withdraw from all contact with the human community."<sup>17</sup>

These characters frequent the Library and Institute where courage and hope in the committed struggle can be renewed. They are prophets of a larger faith in mankind itself, and they argue constantly with each other about how this faith can be made manifest. "We were the oldest sons ... of the Slump," says one of the dark philosophers in Venus and the Voters, "and we hated our parent with the kind of feeling from which poetry is made and on that topic we could always work up a high note that left Isaiah standing" (p. 18).

This sense of Old Testament doom affects many of the characters, even the most militant. In The Stranger at My Side, Edwin Pugh the Pang, to whose "well of compassion and active mercy came all the deprived and lost

and desperate," finds that "his hope has died, his once infallible trick of mercy [grown] numb and helpless" (p. 8). But when his hope falters, others continue to move aggressively and with humor against the forces that they characterize as "malign buffooneries." Willy Silcox says,

You expect people for centuries to be mere living extensions of ploughs and picks and the whimsical appetites of the mighty, and then of a sudden to find them walking about looking like scholarship holders .... But here they are, trying to be boldly human and erect and accepting a social contract that for them has never been much more than a dance of aching bones .... Evolution will never be able to count the number of people who have evolved simply out of grace and goodwill (p. 31).

Other characters, however, do not seem so affected by the cosmic struggle against an exploitative system. Thomas's view of generic "man" is different from his attitude toward genitive man, the comic Lothario who is endlessly concerned with the battle of the sexes. In a society that clothes people so scantily that "love is valued among them as a means more of keeping warm than of being happy," (The Dark Philosophers, jacket note) sex becomes comic, even absurd. When love comes to Euphrona, the pathetic waif in Venus and the Voters, Thomas deals with her gently, but with Rollo, the object of her passion, Thomas is more sharply sardonic. Rollo, a bus conductor, cuts quite a figure in the Terraces, and he has limitless opportunities to perform as a seducer of maidens, all panting and sighing after him. "Rollo had only to wink and a maiden would fall and he winked so often it was getting difficult to see a perpendicular maiden in the Terraces any more" (Venus and the Voters, p. 28). The character Rollo joins an entire gallery of leaping lovers whose sexual proclivities keep things lively with their unrelenting revelry. Rowly Burge the Urge is described as "a splendid lover and a pretty fair sprinter" (The Stranger

at My Side, p. 43). He is matched by Dennis Dew the Dervish, "an untamed amorist who had inspired two hundred sermons of reproach in Windy Way alone" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 16). Their tireless devotion to fornication is matched only by the parallel energies of the Calvinist nay-sayers who hound them in the chapels and out in the open. Ogley Floyd the Flame had, as a youth, himself "ploughed a small but rich field of carnality,"<sup>18</sup> but as he grew older he had become an "ardent restrictionist and an apostle of a [narrow] pietism" (Ring Delirium 123, p. 75). He joins forces with Paddington Pawley the Purge, "an actively erupting moralist" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 37), and together they organize a "shrub patrol," poking poles in the bushes to keep the lovers from settling. Their efforts are not fully appreciated by the roosting lovers who swarm out to belabor Ogley with his own pole, demanding to know "what sort of a nature-lover he is supposed to be, interfering like that with one of the most genial aspects of the physical world" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 37).

If Thomas is entertained by the libidinous antics of these lusty Welshmen, he is not amused by the characters who have created the "savage social and industrial climate" of Wales: the mine owners, the war makers, the "Normans," those descendants of the feudal castle-builders who seized the land from the Celts and held it for so long by destroying the best that was in Wales. These are the Old County families, "relics of Norman and Tudor stock ... who sit in their cars motionless, pickled in good port and social awareness" (Now Lead Us Home, p. 83). It was they who reduced the little Omris and Morrises to such grey wraiths, and Sylvester Strang is just such a symbol for Thomas's satire:

The County's most venerable family, the Strangs. They came in

at the time of the Norman Conquest and have not yet seen any good reason for going out. They have done the finest bit of hanging on ever seen anywhere except in those serials at the Col [cinema] .... It was the Strangs who led the campaign that finally gutted resistance between these hills .... They were great butchers, and if you have ever been struck by the cool way in which the voters of Meadow Prospect take the mixed horrors of this epoch that is because the Strangs got them used to viewing this universe as harsh and abnormal a long way back.<sup>19</sup>

There is little compassion in Thomas's humor here, even though Glyn Jones insists that in Thomas's attitude toward upper class values there is an "irresistibly comic ... disinfectant element" (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 113). A better descriptive term than "disinfectant" would be "caustic." Once, Thomas says in Now Lead Us Home, a coal mine owner bought a castle in Ferncleft. He hated the people so much, fearing that the miners were threatening him in his castle, that he dismissed his servants, lived austere and alone, and finally committed suicide by "standing on four volumes of Adam Smith and one very big one on Great Methodist Divines, kicked the books aside, and so ended his long devotion to singularity" (p. 6). The castle is later bought by an American munitions maker, a "producer of every article of butchery, providing it be on a scale sufficiently wholesale," a man in his sixties who enjoys fairly good health except for "a touch of cardiac trouble and a tendency to faint at the mention of peace" (p. 8).

Thus the characters of Thomas's books create an atmosphere of wry comedy, shot through with a dark sadness that is as pervasive as the Welsh rain.

## HUMOR IN LANGUAGE

"There is great joy and consolation to be found in standing up and uttering rich prose," Thomas says in A Frost on My Frolic. "We love broad, uncunning, accepting sounds and when we get started we fill up with vowel and, if sound were gas, we would be afloat in no time at all" (pp. 10-11).

This is Thomas's acknowledgment of the Welshman's rage to talk, of his amazing linguistic vitality. "When I was a boy ... we talked endlessly," he told Glyn Jones in a 1950 radio interview. "That was one way of keeping up our spirits in a universe that did not seem very encouraging .... If we lacked sixpence for the pictures we could always float on a sea of metaphor in a session of high Socratic debate under a lamppost in Porth Square or outside the Tonypandy Empire" (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 109). In a disintegrating world, pain and laughter become especially evident in his wild, surging, hyperbolic use of language. He writes, as Dylan Thomas said of the poets of the mining valleys of South Wales, of "coal tips, the dole-queues, the stubborn bankrupt villages, the children, scrutting for coal on the slag-heaps, the colliers' shabby allotments, the cheapjack cinema, the whippet races, the disused quarries, the still pit-wheels ... silicosis, little Moscow up beyond the hills."<sup>20</sup> But he extracts from this material the Welshman's fierce enthusiasm for life and his daft humor, expressed in writing that employs many of the devices in the catalogue of figurative language: metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony. A woman with a large family is described as being "actively trepanned by the racket of her children" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 32), and similes sometimes emerge as full-blown Welsh rhetoric: "Thick as the autumn leaves in those

woods are the good names of maidens betrayed by hot blood and cold designers" (Now Lead Us Home, p. 18).

In his use of exaggerated personification, Thomas shows the Welsh love of rolling language. Mr. Monroe, in "The Teacher," had "the sort of humanity which, laid like a kiss upon any phase of the far past would make death and folly apologize for their crass obtrusiveness."<sup>21</sup> This passion for personified abstraction leads Thomas into drunkenly involuted sentence structure. "Life," he says in The World Cannot Hear You, "which nourishes itself on darkness and hates to have the shaking flare of torches thrown on its threadbare years, will notice the light in a voter's eyes and will take pleasure in dowsing it" (p. 7).

Thomas's use of hyperbole as a humorous device is apparent when one compares George Orwell's description of mine explosions to Thomas's bitter metaphorical joke. In The Road to Wigan Pier, a grim report on conditions in the mines of England and Wales, Orwell says, "The most obviously understandable cause of accidents is explosions of gas, which is always more or less present in the atmosphere of the pit."<sup>22</sup> Thomas, probably more familiar than Orwell with the explosion disasters in mines, reports on them thus: "Safety measures in the mines were so slap-happy that methane explosions crept into our inherently musical society as a kind of percussive section" (A Few Selected Exits, p. 35).

Even an overwhelmingly tragic situation Thomas converts into a bitter, mad absurdity as when he describes a mountain that hangs menacingly over a village street, threatening to slide into the houses: "One day, we say, it's going to come down without knocking and in those houses there's no room for us, let alone a mountain. There'll have to be a lot of moving up or

sleeping in layers if the thing is going to come in and be in any way cosy" (A Frost on My Frolic, p. 22). Hardly fit topics for humor, one might say, considering how terrible mine explosions and sliding mountains are, and yet the humor is a defense against a life condition that moves mountains, not to Mohammed but into houses, houses so small, Thomas says in A Welsh Eye, that "even the mice had to join in the singing" (p. 35).

Metaphorical expansiveness is frequently expressed in humorous terms. The heads of a large business firm are described as being "strictly to the right-wing of Pharoah in their political notions" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 51). Two juveniles of questionable musical ability perform as jazz musicians in Wandle's Ballroom, and Thomas refers to them ironically as "the crown of civilization" (A Frost on My Frolic, p. 41). A school headmaster "functions mainly as a metaphor" (A Frost on My Frolic, p. 54), and the editor of a local newspaper, whose early political radicalism is waning, finds that "his lava is cooling. The old red rose of anarchist syndicalism is shedding its leaves in him" (Now Lead Us Home, p. 199).

The humorous aspects of Thomas's language show little poetic delicacy or subtlety, except for occasional flashes that reveal that he can be as much poet as buffoon. "Childhood," he says in one of his short stories, "among other things, is an alphabet of rapture. The spirit stamps out the letters in light itself" (Ring Delirium 123, p. 183). For the most part, however, Thomas prefers to use homely and familiar images. "I am always crouched on the slender butt-end of silence, hanging on,"<sup>23</sup> says one of his characters. Even the mountain sheep that occasionally roam down into town to maraud in the garbage cans receive the same humorous treatment meted out to the "voters." "These creatures have developed instincts and muscles

which, alongside Canterbury lambs, put them in the timber-wolf class" (Ring Delirium 123, p. 47). They have, apparently, learned the same lessons of survival as the Welshmen.

As with a good many other Anglo-Welsh writers, Gwyn Thomas has a tendency to be subjective, to reveal through a "Welsh inclination to eloquence and a natural tendency to speak in metaphor"<sup>24</sup> his amiable eccentricity. Not all the Welsh are totally enchanted with Thomas's linguistic shenanigans, to be sure, but it is amusing to see that even some reviewers, if they are Welsh, indulge in that same strange madness of language that they excoriate. D. A. N. Jones, reviewing A Welsh Eye in the New Statesman, says, "The rash numinous prose of Gwyn Thomas employs dry, boorish nouns ... to sniff the breath of incontinent adjectives ... in sombre mimicry of a tense Sabbath booze-up in stealthy Wales."<sup>25</sup> There must be a contagion that touches the tongues of all Welshmen.

Despite occasional lapses into diffuseness which result in loose and high-flown rhetoric, Thomas presents his view of Welsh life in an individual comic style. One may doubt the accuracy of his exaggerated reporting, but his language is frequently funny.

## HUMOR OF SITUATION

The narrative situations of Thomas's short stories and novels are difficult to define, since his characters wander with unstructured amiability through his "plots." In his autobiography, A Few Selected Exits, Thomas recoils from the "scabrous and sensational, ... the novelist from the decayed areas of the North and Midlands, swarming out of their side alleys and back yards, dragging their tin tubs ... [loaded] with the muck of every known type of defilement ...." He refuses to prowl around the stews and bring back "a bulging bagful of incest, illiteracy, lice, [and] kitchen abortions," although his background had amply familiarized him with the "whole armoury of squalor," for he insists that "to describe in detail the antics of the degraded is, in an odd way, to lengthen the lease of the degraded." But among his own people he saw "much radiance and goodness, a brightness of tongue and heart, an almost witless idealism." These things -- not degradation -- he says, "held my eye and drove my pen" (pp. 161-162).

As a consequence of this view, Thomas's early novels develop along lines of protest rooted in the working class, the characters moving within a framework of despair that was the atmosphere of the Rhondda. The humor of situation is obviously slight in these novels, dealing as they do with the rapacity of the mine owners and the landlords, and the indifference of the government to the anguish of the people. In The Dark Philosophers and Venus and the Voters, four companions in misery, unemployed and without hope, perch on the back wall of a blackened garden, commenting bitterly on the sorrow and decay that surround them. There is little of the "whole armoury of squalor" about the plots of these novels, and no titillating

attention to the kind of detail that so captivates the slumming reader. Compared to such a writer as D. H. Lawrence, who also wrote about the working class, Thomas is described by Glyn Jones as a "proletarian writer ... [who has] nothing fanciful or mystical to advocate like salvation through sex and dark-godism" (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 113). His books rather reveal his socialist and working-class standpoint and his concern with the spiritual and political militancy of his characters. In his early novel, Leaves in the Wind, Thomas tells of the attempt in the 1830's to organize the workers of the early ironworks industry, against the monolithic villainy of the ironmasters. The plot develops along the rather conventional lines of the proletarian novel, with the worker-hero dead in the end at the hands of the master-owner. What humor there is in such early novels derives from character and rhetoric, rather than plot.

In his later writing, Thomas "moves away from the wry chronicles of the brighter among our sans culottes ...." In the hopelessness "... of a mining area moving into dereliction" (A Few Selected Exits, p. 163), with the prospect of economic salvation virtually gone, with the migration of so many young people to other places, the mining towns of the Rhondda began to slip into grey sleep. The Institutes began to close, the chapels were largely silent, and the aggressive vitality of the Welsh who had struggled and resisted in the thirties was now remembered only by those few who still wished to think back on those times. "The tide of our final Radical rapture has drained away," Thomas says in A Welsh Eye (p. 103). As a light overlay of affluence began to cover up the bitter past of the Depression, Thomas's writing began to take on a different tone, his language and characters embellishing comic plot situations of almost bizarre absurdity. This

change, he says with typical exaggeration, was prompted by a "lifelong addiction to grand opera and the mindless melodrama of the cinema" (p. 103). Some of his plots do indeed have the flamboyance, the slapstick wackiness of both opera and cinema. But set as they are against the same dark background of the Rhondda mining towns of the thirties, these later plots seem to highlight the contrast between the dark and the light. In "Mamba My Darling," the slight plot tells of the narrator's father who, being inept at digging coal, is set to caring for the pit ponies. He is not very good at that either, since he tends to irritate the ponies by discussing the decline of Welsh radicalism with them, and they tend to respond by kicking him.

Gazooka is a novelette-length memory story of the summer of 1926 when the silence of the Great Strike fell on the Valley. To fill the lengthening period of idleness, the "voters" of Meadow Prospect form themselves into competing bands, the predominating instruments being gazookas and thundering drums. Dressed in home-made costumes of a rather startling improvisation, the residents of Meadow Prospect appear as Welsh approximations of Foreign Legionaries, Chinamen, and Carabinieri. The members of one impoverished group, forced to strip all available beds for sheets, come leaping and twisting to life as Dervishes, which strange antics disturb the sober "elements" who are against all carnivals and bands.

Most characteristic of Thomas's plotting is the way that he builds his stories out of a series of improbable and disconnected events, related about characters of astounding individualism. "Dust in the Lonely Wind" is a short story that begins with the death of Meirion Farr, "a mean, peculiar man,"<sup>26</sup> who fell into a nearby ravine one night, answering a call of Nature,

there being no "Gents" at the Col [cinema]. No one mourned his death, since he had been silent, obedient, and thrifty, virtues not particularly valued in Meadow Prospect. But when it was discovered that he had left a sum to build a men's room at the Col, it had caused a sensation, since in such a poor place as Meadow Prospect "even the banks take in washing on the side" (p. 153).

When Uncle Gomer, a kind man of no discernible mental processes, sees the new "convenience," he, like everyone else, is enchanted with the luxurious appointments, and he decides to take up residence, there being nothing so beautifully clean and white at home. He resists all efforts to oust him, and when he lays a door over the manager's head, he is sent to jail for two months. When he gets out, he overhears his poor old grandfather enumerate all the things he would like to have if he could afford them: a pocket full of shag tobacco, a few bottles of pickles, a side of Welsh bacon, and an entire round of white Caerphilly cheese. A man of direct action, Gomer "borrows" a barrow from the local grocer, Walter Buckle the Bakestone, breaks into Buckle's store, and brings Grandfather what he wants.

By the time he has spent six months in jail, Gomer is ready to advance to something bigger. This time he "borrows" Buckle's horse and van to load what his grandfather needs, and he drives up the cwm "with Buckle and a band of property defenders again at his heels, Buckle fainting every ten yards with sheer amazement and horror" (p. 169). Buckle finally ends up hiring Gomer to deliver groceries, "and that is why, if you should come to Meadow Prospect, you will find Uncle Gomer an average, steadily working and dreamless lout" (p. 170).

To view poverty and despair in the light of such comic plots as these

would indeed seem cold and unfeeling if it were not for Thomas's sense of comradely identification with the Jacquerie. When Edwin Pugh the Pang and Teilo Dew the Doom bear their dead friend Morlais Moore to the graveyard, they find the gate locked, so they repair to a pub across the road, to refresh themselves and to consider their next move. Since it is raining, and Morlais, who had always been a kind, gentle, and tender man, is out in the wet, they bring his coffin inside and leave it under the table, to be retrieved later when the weather becomes more clement. Edwin and Teilo take it unkindly when the landlord of the pub objects to this sort of will-call.

This comradely identification with and this love for these enduring people of his youth do not keep Thomas from constructing situations of almost farcical comedy. Uncle Edwin, that sad defector from militant responsibility, decides to withdraw to a cave from which he can express his contempt for the human race. Since he cannot find a cave anywhere in the vicinity, he retires instead to what Thomas calls the "convenience" at the end of the garden, to sit and meditate on "the whole squalid net of human relations spun by the deathless spiders of greed, absurdity, and violence" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 64). Unfortunately, the bitter need in the community for any kind of fuel has caused the gradual disappearance of all the doors of the conveniences, so Uncle Edwin, enthroned in his now doorless refuge, is in full view of the bus passengers who pass along the road. Dressed in his funereal best, Uncle Edwin raises his bowler every time a bus goes by, because, he says with the typical aplomb of a Thomas character, "a little civility costs nothing" (p. 65).

These situations create a slightly mad world, inhabited by slightly mad people, who function with the eternal hopefulness of Dylan Thomas's "soul-

possessing Man, erect on his two spindles" (Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work, p. 157). This Man may seem to be a waggish zany, pacing off his comic plot to the accompaniment of our laughter, but to Gwyn Thomas he is the enduring Welshman, brother to the world.

HUMOR OF POLITICAL VIEWS<sup>27</sup>

"Our annals are full of doom-laden utterances," says Thomas in A Welsh Eye, "and they have kept up a pretty steady level of accuracy" (p. 135). These pre-19th century annals of doom may have been familiar to the Welsh, but to most outsiders Wales remained an isolated agricultural principality of Great Britain, known vaguely as a producer of poets, preachers, and heroic princes of the dim past. The development of the coal industry changed that. Thousands of workers moved into coal-mining valleys like the Rhondda, to dig the coal that made Wales one of the chief coal-exporting regions of the world. But with industrialization came the recurrent cycles of depression and destitution that culminated in the economic blight of the twenties and thirties, when the miners found that darkness does not exist only at the bottom of a mine shaft. Resistance came in the form of long, bitter strikes that closed the mines and impoverished the entire area of South Wales. In The Dragon Has Two Tongues, Glyn Jones says that the General Strike of 1926 lasted for nine days but the miners' strike dragged on for seven months; and it is estimated that in the Rhondda "at the height of the Depression of the thirties ... 42% of the insurable male population was unemployed" (p. 110).

Not only the Welsh knew of the conditions in the coal mining towns and at the pits. George Orwell describes the lives of the miners as "exaggeratedly awful" (The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 34), "an endless muddle ... of stagnant, meaningless decay" (p. 17). From this economic erosion, this overwhelming poverty, came a tidal wave of political protest. Richard Llewellyn's green valleys had long ago turned black, but now in the thirties

they turned red. "The years 1900-36 brought South Wales into the mainstream of world protest against poverty, inequality and industrial materialism. The region produced one of the most intense expressions of revolt against the existing order" (The Dragon Has Two Tongues, p. 121).

Against this background of political action Thomas's stories express his socialist views, combining chaos and comedy. Nurtured, he says, on an early political diet of "chopped pamphlets" (A Welsh Eye, p. 15), he makes clear his identification with the working class and his "belief in the unity and brotherhood of man ... a blend of evangelism and Jacobinical socialism" (A Welsh Eye, p. 103). And yet there is in Thomas little of the characteristically dour, accusing style found in many of the "proletarian" novels of the thirties which attest to what Caroline Bird calls "the hidden scar," the lasting bitterness left by the years of the depression. Instead, he makes the bitter political eruptions seem humorous, revealing the funny and daft side of his "voters," the bawling commentators on the political scene. "Wales," says Thomas, "is a place of non-stop protest with mutating consonants. Navels distended by resting banner-poles became one of the region's major stigmata" (A Welsh Eye, p. 18). Workers marched, they demonstrated, and they carried banners at every opportunity. From "Pageant of History" parades where they bore "the portraits of all the world's boldest proletarians from Wat the Tyler to Mao Tse-tung" (Venus and the Voters, p. 65) they marched to the Tonypandy riots where such characters as Uncle Edwin Pugh, dropping in "only as a visitor and an amateur of tumult in all its shapes and forms," had had a policeman's baton broken over his head and had been made a "whole lump taller" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 5).

This Uncle Edwin, a political activist for forty-five years, had

shouted his opposition to the cruel and inhuman system, wearing "the whole of man's martyred past on his head like a bowler" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 22). As a result, says Thomas in one of his typical flashes of satirical exaggeration, Edwin had been led to "enter his head for four eisteddfods to do a bit of chanting scored for one skull and a bitter heart but on each occasion he was disqualified for subversive subtlety" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 6). For some, political action leads only to a weary heart and a battered head, and Uncle Edwin submits temporarily to despair. Under the misguided tutelage of his brother-in-law, Theo Morgan the Monologue, (a non-stop talker married, with poetic justice, to Maggie Morgan the Mouth) Edwin decides to retire from conscience and political action, wrap himself in a shroud of inertia, and begin a new career as an apolitical convert to hedonism, indifferent to the sorrows of the Valley. "Let there be light," shouts Edwin, "let there be brilliance, laughter, carnival, and to hell with such paralyzing thoughts as social security and international brotherhood" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 58).

It is absurd to believe that compassionate souls like Edwin can become deliberately apolitical after so many years of involvement, turning their backs entirely on the "voters" who still struggle to survive in the mining valleys. Political indifference is satirized in Theo Morgan's absurd suggestions for practicing "hedonism" -- engagement in football matches, fireworks displays, and foot races, a "whole curriculum of activities to keep serious thought ducking for shelter" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 60). He also tries to keep Edwin away from any contact with those "voters" who fill the weary time of unemployment at the Institute, that working man's library cum lecture hall and debate club. Those poor "daubs" at the Institute,

shouts Morgan, are constantly debating about the world's sorrows. They "have not yet heard of the complete rout of mechanistic syndicalist Marx viewpoint and ... still think social confusion a more warming hobby than quoits or fornication" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 38).

No one who lived in South Wales during this period, however, could have escaped from the "massive trauma" (A Welsh Eye, p. 15) that these years left. The demonstrations and strikes were instruments of resistance that left their mark on the men who marched, for they "were trying to shout a little wisdom and compassion into the world's ear and the world was as deaf as a post" (p. 21). In his book, Rhondda Roundabout, Jack Jones describes the Rhondda of the twenties and thirties as "revolutionary, riotous .... Starting point of hunger marches, religious revivals, and Communist miners' delegations to Russia."<sup>28</sup> To which Thomas adds, "We must have been the first spot outside Asia to send warm greetings to Mao Tse-tung" (A Welsh Eye, p. 21). He augments his support of worker solidarity by having one of his militant characters suggest a re-writing of La Traviata, in which Alfredo "would become a Marxist and persuade Violetta to form a trade union of trollopes affiliated to the largest existing union" (Now Lead Us Home, p. 65).

Perhaps the long, dead years of the dole diminished the pain, as well as the laughter, and in Thomas's view "the warriors of the Marxist word had slipped into apathy or the earth" (A Few Selected Exits, p. 228). But although Thomas's humor derives from the politics of despairing men, their engagement in life refutes the "constant theme of cataclysm ... about the earth and its lodgements of lament" (The Stranger at My Side, p. 16).

## CONCLUSION

My thesis on Thomas's humor has been specifically directed to the juxtaposition of laughter and pain in his writing, to an examination of those aspects of his humor which reveal him as a deeply compassionate writer, involved in the travail of the Welshman he knew in the Valleys, and indeed of all mankind. "The poet carries the load of all our stricken and mutilated lives, and seeks, through intensity of expression, to bring restitution to those who have been too cruelly denied the gifts of beauty, wisdom and dignity," says Thomas in A Welsh Eye (p. 94). He might also be speaking of himself, even if his intensity is expressed in humorous prose, rather than in poetry. Beauty, wisdom, and dignity -- these Thomas sees as the gifts the poet bestows, but he might well include in his catalogue the equally important gift of laughter.

For anyone who lived through hard times like those of which Thomas wrote, his gift of laughter is indeed a precious one. If the experience of the thirties left the Welsh with a humorous "imagination with a perpetual tilt towards the sardonic" (A Welsh Eye, p. 18), this humor may at the same time have helped save their humanity. Through his humor, Thomas enlarges and enhances this humanity, and makes me regret the unavailability of many of his books in America, since his laughter could have a beneficial effect on us all, particularly now.

Still, Thomas does not have only humor to testify to the worth and dignity of man. In The Dragon Has Two Tongues, Glyn Jones says of Thomas that he

has invariably the good word for human brotherhood, for love, for compassion, for simplicity against cynicism, for tenderness as

against cruelty .... He uses metaphor as naturally, as abundantly and as persistently as do most of us the cliché, a mind that enlarges and enlivens and decorates .... The supreme poet of the industrial valleys, the cyfarwydd (expert, authority) of the working class, comic ... of inexhaustible invention (p. 123).

But perhaps the greatest gift that Thomas brings, greater than all these, is laughter.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Gwyn Thomas, The Dark Philosophers (Boston, 1947), jacket note.
- <sup>2</sup>Glyn Jones, The Dragon Has Two Tongues (London, 1968), p. 109.
- <sup>3</sup>Gwyn Jones, in his collection of Welsh Short Stories, p. 266, gives Thomas's birthdate as 1912.
- <sup>4</sup>Gwyn Thomas, A Few Selected Exits (Boston, 1968), p. 3.
- <sup>5</sup>Gwyn Thomas, A Welsh Eye (Brattleboro, Vermont, 1965), p. 94.
- <sup>6</sup>Welsh Short Stories (London, 1956), p. 267.
- <sup>7</sup>Gwyn Thomas, "A View of the Valley," New Statesman, February 24, 1961, p. 300.
- <sup>8</sup>Gwyn Thomas, A Frost on My Frolic (London, 1953), p. 16.
- <sup>9</sup>Welsh Short Stories, p. 266.
- <sup>10</sup>Isabelle Mallet, "Welsh Philosophers," (Review of The Dark Philosophers), New York Times Book Review, January 11, 1948, p. 5.
- <sup>11</sup>Gwyn Thomas, Now Lead Us Home (London, 1952), p. 7.
- <sup>12</sup>D. A. N. Jones, "A Welsh Eye," New Statesman, November 27, 1964, p. 844.
- <sup>13</sup>Nathan Ausubel, ed., A Treasury of Jewish Folklore (New York, 1948), p. 343.
- <sup>14</sup>Gwyn Thomas, The World Cannot Hear You (Boston, 1952), p. 51.
- <sup>15</sup>Gwyn Thomas, Venus and the Voters (Boston, 1948), p. 19.
- <sup>16</sup>Gwyn Thomas, The Stranger at My Side (London, 1954), p. 17.
- <sup>17</sup>Gwyn Thomas, A Point of Order (London, 1956), p. 17.
- <sup>18</sup>Gwyn Thomas, Ring Delirium 123 (London, 1960), p. 75.
- <sup>19</sup>Gwyn Thomas, The World Cannot Hear You (Boston, 1952), p. 21.
- <sup>20</sup>Dylan Thomas, Quite Early One Morning (New York, 1954), p. 109.
- <sup>21</sup>Gwyn Thomas, "The Teacher," Gazooka and Other Stories (London, 1957), p. 145.

<sup>22</sup>George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (New York, 1958), p. 45.

<sup>23</sup>Gwyn Thomas, "Myself My Desert," Where Did I Put My Pity? (London, 1946), p. 192.

<sup>24</sup>John Ackerman, Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work (London, 1964), p. 15.

<sup>25</sup>D. A. N. Jones, "A Welsh Eye," New Statesman, November 27, 1964, p. 844.

<sup>26</sup>Gwyn Thomas, "Dust in the Lonely Wind," Where Did I Put My Pity? (London, 1946), p. 152.

<sup>27</sup>I make no attempt to define or limit my discussion of "politics" as merely the practice of political parties. If this were so, I would have to narrow my attention to such characters as Mr. Paul who was, Thomas says in A Welsh Eye, "the nearest we ever came to a political boss" (p. 132). Instead, I will discuss "politics" as an extension of economics, for in the Rhondda of the thirties they merged into a struggle for survival.

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Ronald M. Lockley, Wales (London, 1966), p. 182.

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