

**THE FILM SCRIPTS
OF
DYLAN THOMAS**

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The aim of this thesis is to examine the importance of Dylan Thomas's filmscripts as artistic creations in their own right and to analyse the effects of the film work on Thomas's subsequent writing. This study examines the poet's work in documentary and feature film, and looks at the methodology and philosophy behind the writing. A detailed breakdown of the constituent parts of the thesis is given in the introduction.

I have separated this study into five chapters, each chapter examining a specific area of Thomas's writing. These areas are documentary film, feature film, the 'Thomas Style', *Suffer Little Children* and *Under Milk Wood* and Thomas's subsequent writing respectively. There are many individual topics, such as Thomas's politics, which require a separate analysis in relation to each chapter. To allow the reader the opportunity to cross-reference in regard to these topics, I have divided each chapter into sub-sections. Full details of these are given in the introduction.

The Appendix to this thesis contains an edited and annotated version of a previously unpublished Dylan Thomas screenplay, *Suffer Little Children*.

I have located and obtained copies of all the source material used from original manuscripts, ministerial files, and my own and John Ackerman's transcriptions of film prints held at the Imperial War Museum and the British Film Institute. Edited versions of the majority of the source

material has been made available subsequently in John Ackerman's book *Dylan Thomas: The Filmscripts* (London:J.M.Dent,1995).

This thesis is the first detailed study of Thomas's film work, and my research has revealed new insights into Thomas's methodology and working method. This thesis also analyses the linear development of Thomas's style resulting directly from his screen writing and presents new information pertaining to the creation of the radio play *Under Milk Wood*.

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PREFACE

This thesis was generated in the first instance by my interest in and insatiable curiosity about the writings of Dylan Thomas. While researching a previous dissertation entitled 'Music in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas', I came across several references to film screenplays written by the poet but aside from the published edition of *The Doctor and The Devils*, I could find no other available scripts. From *The Doctor and The Devils* it was obvious that I had come across an important and hitherto ignored area of Thomas's writing output. From early 1993 I began the long process of locating these other scripts and through many letters, phone calls, and a great deal of painstaking research I began to uncover the first of the 23 extant scripts. In 1994 Gilbert Bennett, the President of the Dylan Thomas's Society, put me in touch with John Ackerman, who was simultaneously searching for the scripts in order to produce a script anthology for Dent. Unfortunately the scripts we had located were identical, with the exception of the script for *Suffer Little Children*, of which Ackerman only held a small portion. All of the available scripts are analysed in this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is to further the understanding of Thomas's literary development and to provide new insight into the importance of the poet's film writing. It also presents new explanations of Thomas's methodology and raises questions about the nature of his post-war output, suggesting new directions in terms of style and subject matter. The analysis of these scripts has provided a great

deal of insight into Thomas's writing, and has revealed a previously unrecognised line of direct stylistic development.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the many debts I owe to those who assisted in the research and writing of this thesis. To Anthony Barley and Geoff Ward for their patient and informative supervision and to Gilbert Bennett, ex-President of the Dylan Thomas Society, whose assistance has been invaluable. To the British Academy, to the staff of the Public Records Office, the British Film Institute and to Toby Haggith at the Imperial War Museum. To Bruce Hunter of David Higham Associates and the Trustees of the Dylan Thomas Estate for access to original Thomas manuscripts. To Robert Bertholf and Michael Basinski at the Lockwood Memorial Library at the University of Buffalo and to the late Dr Daniel Jones, John Ackerman and Bob Kingdom. Finally I must thank Cathy Rees and Barbara Smith, John Caswell, Colin Morgan, Jeff Towns, Bill Barnes, Emma Morgan, Peggy Rust, Gwen Watkins, Edward Burns, Michael Pitt, Ben Chesterton and Anne Williams, without whom none of this would have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

In the popular perception, Dylan Thomas is best known as the author of *Under Milk Wood*, probably the most widely recognised radio play of post-war Britain, and as the semi-surrealist poet of the 'thirties, the apocalyptic voice of 'forties poetry, and above all as the bardic icon of twentieth century Welsh literature. Outside the fields of poetry and drama Thomas is perceived as a renowned drinker and notorious womanizer, the epitome of the anti-establishment literary rebel. What is less widely recognised is that the Thomas's legacy also includes many radio broadcasts, two novels¹, numerous short stories and at least 31 film scripts.

Even though Thomas's film work is referred to in the two best known biographies of Thomas², this area of his writing has been largely disregarded as 'hack work' and thus has escaped the attention of serious critical studies. Most of Thomas's major film work was never produced in cinematic form and few of the scripts were published until recently³, helping to explain the lack of academic interest. Due to the non-production of the scripts, the general population has also been unaware of Thomas's contribution to film. Leaving aside the suggestion that Thomas's scripts represent 'hack work', the other major justification for disregarding or belittling them is the view that a film script is merely one element of the composite that is a film, and cannot be examined without reference to a director, actors and the other elements which contribute to a finished celluloid

product. These reasons for leaving the filmscripts as a minor footnote in Thomas's career were given by Derek Stanford in his book *Dylan Thomas*⁴. Unfortunately, Stanford's book was the first criticism to mention Thomas's film work and his opinions have been generally accepted without question or further study by subsequent scholars.

In this thesis, my aims are to substantiate the autonomy of Thomas's scripts regardless of production, to demonstrate the importance of these film writings in terms of Thomas's career and development, and to examine the literary value of the texts in their own right. The volume of writing alone demands an examination of the scripts and in the following chapters I will show the links between Thomas's war work and later poetry, paying particular attention to the role of cinema writing in the creation and development of *Under Milk Wood*. Many of the stylistic devices and structures of Thomas's later works originated in his documentary and feature film experiences, and in the following chapters I will detail how and where these features first occurred in Thomas's writing.

Source Material

Between 1942 and 1951, Thomas wrote at least 16 documentary scripts for the Ministry of Information (M.O.I) and made a substantial contribution to the writing of a minimum of 15 feature films. As the files of Strand Productions and her sister film companies were destroyed post-war, the exact number of works cannot be categorically

ascertained, but for the purposes of this thesis, I shall assume the 31 documented film projects to be the sum of Thomas's work in this area.

The major obstacle to overcome in the study of Thomas's film writings is the physical whereabouts of the actual scripts themselves. Several versions or stages of these commentaries were written and stored at the offices of Strand films, but most of the files containing the manuscripts were destroyed after the war. These files were important as they contained many corrections, alterations and handwritten manuscripts in their original, pre-censorship format. The scripts I have located and used are therefore often 'second hand', coming from transcriptions of the films themselves, contemporary reviews and copies held in ministerial files at the Public Records Office (PRO)⁵. All of the extant filmscripts are now available in an abridged form in John Ackerman's *Dylan Thomas: The Filmscripts* (London:J.M.Dent, 1955) which was published subsequent to my own research. When I began my research, there was only one script still in print, and only four that had ever been published⁶. Through references in letters and through the files of the PRO, British Film Institute (BFI) and the Imperial War Museum (IWM), I have been able to obtain copies of all the surviving scripts, but in order to retain the most definitive versions I have chosen to utilize the PRO copies wherever possible as they are the ones which were finally approved and used, and are the closest to Thomas's final choice of commentary. Minor discrepancies with contemporary reports can be explained as directoral

influence in the shooting scripts, and this has been noted in the text where confirmation was available through surviving prints of the films. Where a different text to the PRO files has been used, a note has also been inserted into the text.

The Filmscripts can be seen as complementary to my work as, although incomplete and containing little comment of any kind on the scripts, it does provide much of the source material (albeit abridged) which remains unpublished elsewhere. I have included a complete edited edition of one major script (*Suffer Little Children*) in my appendix as *The Filmscripts* only includes a very short extract and this particular manuscript is vital to an understanding of Thomas's working method and development. I have therefore also devoted a chapter of my thesis to the close examination of *Suffer Little Children*, the original of which is held in the Lockwood Memorial Library at the University of Buffalo, U.S.A.

As the entire area of Thomas's film work is largely unknown, the five chapters which form this thesis have been structured to provide an overview of Thomas's place in film history, to provide an introduction and analysis of the scripts themselves, and then to deliver a study of Thomas's working method and development through his experiences in the field of screen writing. As the volume of work is so great, certain areas such as the non-filmic origins of *Under Milk Wood*, general explanations of Thomas's poetry and the history of the documentary film movement as such have not been explicated in detail. These areas are well documented

elsewhere, so I have chosen to concentrate the available space on my original research and the specific content of the extant scripts. Where other background information or explanation is too extensive to include, a note has been made in the text along with references to source material which covers the subjects more fully.

Due to the way in which I have separated my research into specific sections such as documentary film, feature film, *Under Milk Wood* etc, some topics such as Thomas's politics or the use of language must be examined several times in different contexts. I have initially presented each of these subjects in detail and located supplementary examinations where relevant in the following chapters.

Organisation of the Thesis

I have divided my first chapter on documentary film into three distinct sections. First, some necessary detail is given as to the genesis and philosophy of the film companies for whom Thomas worked. I have then demonstrated the types of film on which Thomas worked and the methodology used in the creation of the scripts. The specific and personal elements contributed by Thomas as poet are then examined, showing the relevance of the documentary work to any study of Thomas's work and development as a writer.

In a similar way I have separated the second chapter on feature films into three areas. First, I have detailed Thomas's theory and intentions in writing for feature film, paying particular attention to the 'new form of writing' he

was trying to create in the script of a 'film without pictures'. This was to be an original form of prose in which the reader would be able to visualise the working film script itself without the distraction of any camera or stage directions, which would be incorporated smoothly into the text. The second area of study in this chapter is the technical construction of the scripts. This details Thomas's methods of research and development as a screen writer, incorporating the lessons learned as a documentary maker. I have concluded this chapter with a close study of the texts themselves, their use of symbolism, structure and their insistent use of a 'Thomas' morality. I have also demonstrated the elements which make the films identifiably 'Thomas' and the incorporation of Thomas's own experiences and beliefs into the plot and dialogue.

In the third chapter on characteristic themes and motifs, I have examined the overall stylistic and thematic links which bond the different scripts together to form a recognisable body of work. I have made a detailed study of Thomas's use of the opening shot and how this method was developed. Common elements to the film scripts are then considered, paying particular attention to Thomas's politics and sense of social justice, his attitude to Wales and to the war, and his use of hypocrisy and humour as literary devices. I have then demonstrated the relevance of the more marginal and incomplete scripts in relation to Thomas's experimental and literary development.

The fourth chapter of my thesis, '*Suffer Little Children*', I have devoted to the close study of this one

particular script, a fully edited and annotated version of which appears in the appendix. From the ms detail, this chapter studies Thomas's actual working method of composition and demonstrates the different stages a script would go through before the poet would accept it as complete. I have also demonstrated how the themes and motifs identified in the previous chapter would be incorporated into plot and dialogue at the various stages of the story's development.

I have devoted the final chapter to a study of the influence film writing exerted over the creation and structure of *Under Milk Wood* and Thomas's later poetry. This chapter shows the direct line of development from the film writing to the finished form of *Under Milk Wood* in terms of structure, style, and lexical detail. I have also shown how the film work altered Thomas's attitude to the process of writing itself and how this made an important contribution to the change in style and content of the later poetry. Particular attention has been paid to the role of the previously neglected field of Thomas's film writing in the composition and style of all of the poet's subsequent works, including his proposed operatic collaborations with Stravinsky.

The Life of Dylan Thomas

To understand fully the importance of the film years to any study of Dylan Thomas's work, it is necessary to know at least some basic biographical details. I shall therefore

present below a brief history of Thomas's life, paying particular attention to details which relate to film. This will serve to clarify some later statements and suggestions I have made about the line of development in Thomas's life and will help to explain some of the personal reminiscences and beliefs that have been incorporated into the scripts.

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born on October 27th 1914 in Cwmdonkin Drive, Uplands, a suburb of Swansea. During his formative years two major influences on Thomas are relevant to this thesis, his father (known to everyone as D.J.) and the countryside around Swansea.

D.J. Thomas was a local schoolmaster with a very stern disposition and great love of literature who also had a large library through which the younger Thomas would regularly browse. D.J. was also descended from a tradition of lay preachers and had inherited his ancestors' booming declamative voice and love of reading aloud, which he in turn passed on to his son. It was his father's enthusiasm for literature and home readings that first inspired Thomas to write, with the poet later claiming that "I should say I wanted to write poetry in the beginning because I had fallen in love with words". This obsession with words and sound was to form the basis of Thomas's methodology, beginning with childhood word games played with his lifelong friend Dan Jones and culminating in the radio play *Under Milk Wood*.

The other major influence on Thomas's youth came from childhood holidays with relations in Camarthenshire. Playing on these country farms and meeting eccentric

relations in an idealised pre-war and pre-London environment provided the inspiration for many of the scripts, stories and poems (perhaps most famously 'Fern Hill', the home of his aunt Anne Jones). During this early time and through his adolescence Thomas wrote his famous 'notebooks' which provided the genesis for the majority of his poetry, adapted and revised from these childhood verses.

In 1925, Thomas entered the Swansea Grammar School where his father taught, and where he first met Daniel Jones who was to become a lifelong friend. During this period, Thomas's poetic output substantially increased and he also developed a deeper love of cinema. Thomas and Jones would regularly visit the local Uplands Cinema, the 'Itch Pit', and this is where the poet first gained a devoted and serious interest in film, as demonstrated by a school magazine article Thomas wrote in which he shows knowledge of all the foremost directors of the day from Adolph Zukor to D.W. Griffiths. Thomas's real passion though, as revealed in his letters, was the Saturday serials and B-movies, a passion he retained until his death in America in 1953, during which time he would still visit the cinema on a weekly basis to watch detective and comedy movies.

In 1931 Thomas began working on the *South Wales Daily Post* and acting in the Swansea Little Theatre, for which he gained favourable reviews. In 1933 his first major poem 'And Death Shall Have No Dominion' was published in *New English Weekly*, and in 1934 his first collection *18 poems* was published. During 1934 Thomas also met a Swansea grocer,

Bert Trick, for the first time. Trick was a committed socialist and introduced Thomas to the world of politics, many of Thomas's later beliefs originating in this period. At the same time, Thomas also began correspondence with Pamela Hansford Johnson, for whom he developed a great affection. One passion the pair shared was cinema, and throughout the letters of the period there are many references to, amongst others, Greta Garbo, Mae West and German expressionist film⁷.

In 1936 Thomas's second collection, *25 Poems*, was published and on July 11th 1937, after a short engagement, he married Caitlin Macnamara. In the January of 1939 their first son Llewellyn Edouard was born, and later in the year the collection *Map of Love* was published along with Thomas's first U.S. book, entitled *The World I Breathe*.

In 1940 *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* was published and Thomas completed work on a satirical novel entitled *Death of the King's Canary* which he had co-written with (amongst others) John Davenport. At this point Davenport introduced Thomas to the American film producer Ivan Moffat, which was in turn to lead to Thomas's employment as Moffat introduced the poet to Strand producer Donald Taylor in August 1941.

By mid 1941 the paper shortages caused by the war had meant that less new fiction was being published and financial troubles had caused Thomas to sell his poetry notebooks to an American dealer. Although he had been listed Grade III medically unfit for conscription, Thomas was aware he needed work and was looking for an outlet for his talents

in some sort of reserved occupation, as he did not want physically or actively to support the war. Indeed he had written to many authors to try to get contributions for a proposed pacifist publication to be entitled *Objection to War*⁸. Ironically, Thomas's job security eventually came from the indirect support of the Ministry of Information (M.O.I.), for whom many of his documentaries were commissioned. Although not technically a reserved occupation, his 'active support' for the war effort through propaganda meant Thomas's job was relatively safe.

Donald Taylor had always employed the policy of engaging the best writers (the novelists Philip Lindsay and Grahame Greene were already on his payroll) and when he heard that Thomas was available and wanted to work in cinema, Taylor ensured the poet was taken on immediately. Taylor and Thomas worked well together, and although most of the work at that time was documentary based, Thomas was relatively happy at Strand films and his work was well received by critics. When Julian Maclaren-Ross joined Strand in 1943, another close friendship was struck and the idea of working on a new type of feature script was proposed. This 'new form of writing' in time led to the creation of *Under Milk Wood*. The Thomas's gained an extra family member in the same year when Aeronwy was born.

Over the next few years Strand folded to be replaced by Verity and subsequently Gryphon Films, and in 1945 Thomas moved to work for Sydney Box at Gainsborough Pictures. Here he was to write almost exclusively on feature films, with a short period also spent working for British National

Pictures. In 1946 Thomas's fourth collection *Deaths and Entrances* was released and on July 24th 1949 the Thomas's last child, Colm Garan Hart, was born in Camarthen.

From his first tour of America in 1950 onwards, Thomas was thrilled to be given the opportunity of meeting many of his film heroes. Through staying with Christopher Isherwood, Thomas was introduced to Danny Kaye, Marilyn Monroe, Shelley Winters and Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin had been the major childhood idol of Thomas and when, after lewdly (and according to some sources successfully) propositioning Shelley Winters he was given the chance to attend a Chaplin party, the poet was ecstatic. Again recollections of the events vary widely, but according to Winters herself, Thomas began well behaved and in awe of his host, particularly when Chaplin cabled Caitlin in Laugharne in case "she wouldn't beleive it". Chaplin performed a comic routine to his guests (including another of Thomas's heroes, Marlene Dietrich) and everything went well until Thomas got drunk and, after claiming he was being simultaneously patronised and ignored, insulted Chaplin's son and was forcibly ejected⁹.

From 1950 onwards Thomas made lecture tours and broadcasts and worked almost exclusively on more large scale projects. Several plays and opera's were mooted along with a long sequence of poems (the 'In Country Heaven' poems), none of which were completed. Interestingly, the subjects of many of these later works were very different in tone, with the looming shadow of the cold war and the possibility of nuclear destruction being incorporated into both a

projected opera and into poems such as 'In The White Giant's Thigh'.

Eventually, after several days illness and drinking and following the first performance of *Under Milk Wood* in New York, Dylan Thomas died on November 9th 1953 at St Vincent's Hospital. The actual cause of death was never fully ascertained, as a private doctor's treatment of half a grain of morphine could possibly have contributed to his untimely demise, but the term 'toxic encephalopathy', or 'insult to the brain' has remained the given explanation. Thomas's 'famous last words' of "I've had eighteen straight whiskies. I think that's a record"¹⁰ were almost certainly not true and were definitely not his last.

In order to give a context for many of the references in this thesis without relying on an excessively large number of footnotes, I will end the introduction with brief synopses of the seven major texts to which I refer. They have been ordered chronologically for ease.

Synopses

On Wales; Green Mountain, Black Mountain. 1943.

This documentary script takes the form of a lyrical commentary aimed specifically at the Welsh population. The intention of the documentary was to inspire the people to redouble their war effort to enable a quick victory and the opportunity for a better world to be created, free of poverty and oppression. Thomas refers to the pre-war depression and the age old struggle against hardship, equating the very rocks of Wales with its people, 'weathering the storm' and emerging strong and undaunted. Wales is projected as "the voice of all free men" where civilians "fight with pick and shovel and drill", thus emphasizing the vital contribution of non-combatants to the war. Some sections of the script are in verse and some are written in prose.

Our Country. 1944.

This script begins with an introduction by Burgess Meredith, who explains that the purpose of the film is to show (primarily) Americans the realities of wartime Britain. The 'story' follows a sailor on shore leave as he travels around the country. Thomas's script, which is far less literal and more poetic than his earlier scripts, is mostly in verse and describes scenes of urban and country work, again holding up the concept of 'eternal nature' being undaunted by the 'trivialities' of war, the "indifferent

capsizing sea". The visuals show everyday people similarly undaunted, going about their daily jobs with a determination not to be disheartened by the war. Scenes of harvest and market day are cut with timber felling and mining for the war effort. The aim of the film is to call for unification and a recognition of everyday liberties for which Britain and America were similarly fighting.

The Doctor and The Devils. 1944.

This is the story of Dr Rock, a distinguished surgeon and medical academic from Edinburgh who obtains the bodies he practices on from the illegal occupation of bodysnatching. Two low-life characters, Broom and Fallon, grow greedy from the rewards and begin to murder their lodgers to gain more money from Dr Rock. Eventually they are discovered, whereupon Broom turns King's evidence and Fallon is hanged. Dr Rock is suspected of knowing about the murders and is ostracised from polite society, but is not charged, for fear of disturbing the class balance.

The story is a Thomas 'original' suggested by Donald Taylor, and based on the historical events surrounding Dr Knox and the grave-robbers Burke and Hare.

Twenty Years A'Growing. 1944.

This is the tale of the young Maurice O'Sullivan growing up on the Blasket islands. It has no action-filled plot, but tells simply of the boy discovering the delights of nature and an insular way of life. Evocative of much of Thomas's 'childhood poetry', this script spends a great deal of time lyrically describing the scenery and behaviour of the island folk. Despite being tempted by the delights of the 'outside world' as described by a travelling Englishman, the boy opts to remain on the island, even though many others leave. Instead he decides to continue the way of life he knows and loves, and to keep the traditions alive. The story is an adaptation of the book of the same title by Maurice O'Sullivan. Only the first half of the script was ever completed, the remainder still being in the form of a detailed synopsis.

Suffer Little Children. 1945.

As a child, the foster-child Betty London accidentally sets fire to a deserted house and is sentenced to a girl's reform school. Here she is treated harshly by an oppressive regime and becomes hardened, particularly after her best friend Sophie commits suicide. A kindly nurse, Anne Meredith, and her admirer, a journalist named Knott, are appalled by the situation at the school and try to expose the injustice and help Betty.

After finding a placement as a maid, Betty is again

falsely accused of a misdemeanour and when found guilty is sent to a remand home. She escapes and after an attempted rape finds herself working in an illegal Bottle Club. Here, Anne and Knott (who have by now fallen in love) find her, but too late as the club is raided and a now hardened Betty is once more found guilty and this time sent to prison.

The Beach of Falesá. 1948.

This is the story of a merchant named Wiltshire who moves to a south sea island to take over a recently deserted trading post. After marrying a local girl, Uma, he finds the villagers will not trade with him, and that the previous trader disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Another trader named Case turns out to be the person responsible for the disappearance, and is finally tracked down in a secret cave the locals believe to be haunted. After a fight with Wiltshire Case is stabbed, and as he dies he admits to corruption and murder. The story is an adaptation of the Robert Louis Stevenson short story of the same name.

Rebecca's Daughters. 1948.

When Anthony Raine returns from the army to his home town in South Wales, he finds the local peasants to be persecuted by an extortionate toll-gate levy, from which he himself gains. Finding no legal way to alter the system he gathers the peasants who, dressed as women, follow him (in the guise of 'Rebecca') and burn down the toll-gates as fast

as they can be built. Raine fights his cause against the English under the command of Captain Marsden, who is also his love rival for the hand of Rhiannon, and he eventually wins both battles. This is a very comic script which pokes fun at both authority and the Welsh. The story is a Thomas 'original', based loosely on historical events.

Footnotes

- 1 These are *The Death of the King's Canary*, co-written with Henry Davenport (1935-40) and the unfinished *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (1953).
- 2 Constantine Fitzgibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas* (London:Plantin, 1965 [1987]) and Paul Ferris, *Dylan Thomas* (London:Hodder & Stoughton, 1977; London:Penguin, 1978).
- 3 *Doctor and The Devils* was finally produced by Brookfilms in 1985 and *Rebecca's Daughters* was produced by Delta Film in 1991.
- 4 Derek Stanford, *Dylan Thomas* (London:Neville Spearman, 1954), pp.88-9.
- 5 I have referred to some transcripts made by John Ackerman and have made several transcriptions myself from prints of the documentaries held at the British Film Institute and the Imperial War Museum. The files from the PRO were those relating to MOI funded projects.
- 6 *Rebecca's Daughters, Doctor and The Devils, The Beach of Falesá* and *Twenty Years A'Growing*. Some extracts from the documentary scripts were also published in editions of 'Documentary News Letter' produced by the B.F.I. The most important of these are footnoted where relevant.
- 7 *Dylan Thomas: The Collected Letters*, ed. by Paul Ferris (London:Paladin, 1987), pp.65-116.
- 8 *Letters*, p421. Letter to Desmond Hawkins.
- 9 Shelley Winters, *Best of Times, Worst of Times* ([n.pub.], 1990), pp.31-40.
- 10 Ferris, p334.

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

"...bringing the best to as many people as possible to cheer them on to better times¹."

As a direct result of his involvement in documentary film-making, Dylan Thomas made important contributions both to the war effort and to his own development as a writer. In the introduction I have explained briefly how Thomas first became involved in script writing, but before I can elaborate further on the importance of Thomas's work, it is necessary to explain a little about the background and creation of the documentary film movement. The formation of the documentary film movement is of particular importance as the companies for which Thomas initially worked were run by Donald Taylor, who had in turn learned his trade under the tutelage of the foremost pioneer and exponent of modern documentary film-making, John Grierson. It was Grierson's philosophy and methods which had inspired Donald Taylor's approach to producing films².

The Creation of the Documentary Film Movement

In May 1926 the British government set up the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) as a department responsible for the promotion of trade in the Commonwealth. The appointed secretary of this department, Sir Stephen Tallents, then persuaded the relatively unknown John Grierson to head a newly created film unit in the EMB on his return from America

in 1927. This decision was to shape the future of film making in Britain.

Through studying the development of cinema in America, Grierson had noted on his return that "very little had been done to use the cinema in its powers of the observation of the real³". Grierson believed that contemporary British newsreels were far too superficial in their approach and that their potential for education and innovation was, for the most part, being wasted. While his closest rival Cavalcanti worked on the principle of simple 'entertaining information', Grierson attempted to introduce social values to his work whilst simultaneously creating cinema which was artistically valid. The aim was to create 'worthy' documentary films which could be valued as a service to the people. It was this belief and innovative approach that lead to Grierson's success and subsequent reputation as the father of the modern documentary (indeed, it was Grierson himself who coined the term 'documentary' in his review of Flaherty's *Moana* in 1926). The ideal of what was also called "the creative interpretation of actuality⁴" became a boom industry, promoting colonial interests and later being utilized as a recruiting and propaganda device. Grierson was the first producer to unleash and harness the power of mass communication in cinema, pushing for the non-theatrical release of his films and adopting Lenin's maxim of "the power of film for ideological propaganda⁵".

The detailed development of the EMB is well documented elsewhere⁶ and the basic facts are sufficient to demonstrate the relevance of the department to Thomas's film career.

The most important fact is that John Grierson was at the forefront of many of the changes in British documentary cinema, and that for much of this period Donald Taylor was working for Grierson.

From the starting point of the silent 'poster films', which were little more than poor quality copies of Russian cinema, Grierson led the amalgamation of the EMB with 'Gaumont-British' to add sound to the pictures, and then subsequently led the transformation of the EMB into the GPO film unit. Once established at the GPO Grierson ensured more independence from bureaucracy for his film makers and began to develop a philosophy of quality over financial viability. Grierson's philosophy also encouraged the expansion of potential audiences with showings in schools, hospitals, and village halls. This maximised publicity for the films' sponsors, who had by this time extended beyond purely government sources.

As the 1930's began, the commercial viability of film became apparent and companies such as Strand were able to obtain finance from independent sources such as Cadbury and Shell. Whereas the Empire Marketing Board had only promoted those colonial concerns with government approval, independent companies such as Strand could now find more creative freedom and a wider market in the creation of public information films for many different sponsors. As private finance did not necessitate such strict policy censorship, the film producers could experiment on screen and retain far more artistic control (so long as they 'promoted' the relevant product) and this increased freedom frequently

produced more innovative and artistically valued films.

The secretary of the Empire Marketing Board, Sir Stephen Tallents, who had the insight to first appoint Grierson, has subsequently summarized the basic philosophy of film making at the time, a philosophy which was to be later adopted by Donald Taylor, the head of Strand:

the only sensible prescription is to pick out the best team... to put them to grips with their problem, and to leave them, free of undue pressure or interference, to follow, like Socrates, whithersoever it leads.⁷

Grierson did exactly this, putting together a talented team and with the promise of the subsequent delivery of high quality results, persuading the managerial element simply to provide the finance and to hand over complete artistic control, putting their faith in the film-maker.

Armed with his experience of Grierson's methods Donald Taylor left the GPO film unit and went on subsequently to form the companies Strand, Gainsborough and Verity, the three major film employers of Thomas. Grierson's ideals thus formed the basis for Dylan Thomas's own working practices. Specific Grierson innovations such as his use of montage techniques and his attempts to expand beyond the single protagonist film can be seen clearly in Strand's output through films such as *Our Country* (1944) and *This Is Colour* (1942). From 1935 Taylor also employed Paul Rotha, with whom Thomas had been familiar since his schooldays after having read Rotha's seminal work *The Film 'Til Now* (1929). Rotha had been a very influential figure in the world of cinema and brought yet more experience to Strand's

output, which, when combined with the influence of Thomas and Grierson (via Taylor) helped to make Strand one of the most important film companies of the thirties and forties.

Strand Films

The standard reference book on documentaries lists Strand's most significant wartime films as *New Towns For Old* (1942), *These Are The Men* (1943), and *Our Country*⁸. All three were scripted by Thomas, but it is also very important to note that in common with much of Strand's output at the time, the films contain contributions from each staff member in more than one area of production. The way the company was structured and the methods employed by Taylor (again taking the lead from John Grierson) meant that every employee's jobs overlapped. Thomas's credits, for example, include those of 'deviser and compiler' for *These Are The Men*, 'co-director' for *Balloon Site 586* (1942), 'casting and locations' for *C.E.M.A.* (1942), and in all probability combined unlisted assistance in actual shooting, editing and post-production. Members of the Strand team would work closely together on all of the films, performing whatever role was necessary at the time regardless of their own specific job description. This allowed for more informed contributions and suggestions, and ensured continuity in the films, with the same people being involved all the way along the line of creation from script to screen.

Whilst standing up to analysis in their own right,

Thomas's documentary scripts served particularly as a training ground for the fledgeling screen writer, providing trial and error opportunities to identify particular strengths and weaknesses in screen writing. At Strand for example, it was generally accepted that Thomas was less effective than his co-employee Philip Lindsay in the invention of dramatic themes, whilst the illustration and interpretation of subjects would fall more within the remit of Thomas's speciality. Once their area of speciality had been identified, each employee would continue to be involved at all stages of a script's development, but would naturally begin to concentrate on their own areas of expertise. It is necessary to isolate this point in order to recognise the difference in the writers' approach to their personal and cinematic work. Writing for film was a new experience for many of the wartime employees, and each writer came to realise that different constraints and requirements were necessary for documentaries (and the propoganda work in particular) than for their personal writing projects. Through his experiences in writing the documentaries Thomas's own contribution to Strand's output gradually focused on the interpretation of themes and the addition of a complimentary and specifically emotive soundtrack.

Documentary Styles

Within the realm of the wartime documentary there was a definite split into three distinctive forms or styles of film, all of which Thomas employed. This applied not only to

Strand but to all contemporary documentaries, and the vast majority of the films fell into these three recognisable categories⁹. First there were the 'poetic documentaries' such as Cavalcanti's *Coalface* (1935) or Thomas's *This Is Colour*. These were basically explorations of sound and colour employing various montage techniques. In the case of *This Is Colour*, the exploration took the form of an analysis of the use of colour in the contemporary world. The techniques employed varied from descriptions of the use of dyes to surreal montages of sound and colour. The film was sponsored, like many of the 'poetic documentaries', by a private company, in this case I.C.I. The treatment included some poetry by Thomas, but was largely a collaboration in which he contributed to the composition and the direction as well as to the choice of soundtrack.

The second 'group' or 'style' of film was the 'story documentary' such as Auden and Cavalcanti's celebrated *Nightmail* (1936), or Thomas's own *A Soldier Comes Home* [n.d.]. These films were far simpler, with only a single-strand narrative, but were often the most adaptable in terms of innovation. *Our Country* for example, allowed Thomas (in what was perhaps his most famous wartime film) to combine poetry, montage and narrative with the pictures themselves to create a fluid 'whole film' which, in the words of a contemporary review proved that Thomas could "wed...and subordinate his style to the needs of the medium...for the first time¹⁰".

The third style common to the films produced was that of the 'instructional documentary', the type of film least

favoured by Thomas. This group of films includes productions such as Anstey and Elton's *Housing Problems* (1935) and Thomas's *Conquest of a Germ* (1942). These relatively straightforward films allowed little room for interpretation and were purely informative. Even though Thomas disliked this type of film intensely, his letters to Caitlin and to Donald Taylor prove just how diligently the subjects would be researched by the poet¹¹. Working on this type of film Thomas would retain a strict professionalism, regardless of his own personal dissatisfaction.

Methodology

Whilst introducing a background to the documentaries it is necessary to look at one or two of the working practices which were employed by Thomas. In cases such as *Conquest of a Germ*, detailed research could obviously not be overlooked as the film would be dealing with a new area of medical discovery. On other films however, Thomas would take the same amount of time to ensure geographical exactness, (*Our Country*¹²) check actual locations and casting, (*Balloon Site 586*¹³) or gain as much accurate background as was possible. Far from 'dashing off' the scripts, a great deal of time was put into every stage from conception to completion. Thomas was always the opportunist and this attention to detail allowed freedom to travel away from his wife and the company on occasion, which led in turn to at least one affair (begun during the filming of *C.E.M.A.*) and to some very creative expense claims, but the work was always thorough and

complete. Aside from the detailed research, Thomas's attitude to working in the office is worthy of note. One of the most famous and surprising incidents occurred whilst Thomas was still in London at the Strand offices. After a heavy night of drinking Julian Maclaren-Ross suggested that the pair should buy and keep a bottle of whisky in the office for morning drinking, the 'hair of the dog'. Thomas was reputedly appalled at the idea and refused outright. Although happy to binge in the evening Thomas would not entertain the idea of drinking in the office, and even in his lunch hours would accept no more than one or two pints of bitter, something he regarded as simple lubrication. His attitude towards working commitments remained serious and sober¹⁴.

Thomas was also very fastidious regarding the possible publication of documentary scripts, a trait brought from his own experience with poetry and later carried over into the publication of the feature scripts and *Under Milk Wood*. Writing about the suggested publication of the verse commentary to *Our Country* Thomas stressed that the words were "written to be spoken & heard, & not to be read", as he felt that publication in the commentary's cinematic form might "presuggest an artiness that is not...in the film¹⁵". Taylor and Thomas had adapted the original script to complement the visuals by removing what Thomas called a 'too literary thread' which might have detracted from the film as a whole on account of its being overly distinctive. Whilst this edited version was perfect for the finished film, Thomas argued that publication of the verse in this form was

unacceptable. If the verse was to be published at all he felt that it would be necessary to restore what he saw as this 'literary thread', and to re-form the words into a different piece more suitable for a purely literary purpose. Thomas's arguments here demonstrate how he had learned from the documentary form that screen verse was not always consistent with what he expected from a purely literary work. He had recognised and accepted that the two mediums required a different approach, something that was to make a major contribution to the poet's subsequent scripts.

Although Thomas's ultimate ambition had been to write for feature films, there are many other important influences and effects arising from his time working on propaganda shorts. Apart from beginning to formalise his writing regime (something that was to remain with the poet until his death), the early days at Strand brought Thomas his first contact with figures such as Graham Greene, Donald Taylor, Julian Maclaren-Ross and Jack Lindsay, from whom he gained experience and education in screen writing. The content of the documentaries themselves also give us a useful insight into the genesis of certain stylistic devices which occurred within Thomas's later scripts and other writings. Being forced into the simpler and necessarily more direct language of the documentary for example, had a profound effect on much of Thomas's later verse and prose. It also formed the background necessary for the writing of feature scripts, which in turn lead to the genesis of *Under Milk Wood*.

Often, as in *These Are The Men*, the actual wording of a script would be comparatively simple, the effectiveness

frequent disagreements with the censors. In line with Strand policy Thomas had worked on *These Are The Men* as script writer, deviser and compiler, and had been involved at every stage of development. The film was a big success, and this can be put down to a mixture of the 'Taylor method' and the fact that Thomas had consciously put the needs of the film ahead of the literary value of his words alone, writing for rather than just alongside the pictures.

Arguing the case for 'complementary scripts' could be interpreted as undermining my argument of the scripts' inherent literary value, but this is not really the case. Being involved throughout production, Thomas had simply adapted his style of writing to deliver one element of the composite creation which is a film. I will return to this concept of the 'composite film' in my chapter on feature films, as Thomas's later scenarios sought to overcome this 'problem'. Whereas Thomas had worked on the non-written production elements of *These Are The Men*, the feature scripts were intended to encompass both the visual and the directoral contributions within one all encompassing scenario.

The most important lesson Thomas had learned from scripts such as *These Are The Men* was that different mediums required different approaches to writing. Armed with the experiences of writing for 'forced mediums' such as the propaganda documentary, Thomas was well prepared for his later projects in the unfamiliar fields of the feature film, the radio play and the operatic collaboration.

The Use of Language

In terms of documentary (and particularly propaganda) film, the most important element of a script had to be accessibility. Information films of any type had to appeal to their target audience and during wartime this audience consisted of the general populace. As this included both the upper and the lower classes, the language used within the scripts had to be straightforward and understandable and any 'reference points' incorporated into the film had to be easily recognisable to all viewers regardless of class. The general trend in screen writing moved towards simpler language, the use of obvious parody, and the idea that "only the stereotype can be trusted to appeal to so large a number of people¹⁶".

The movement towards simpler, accessible, and a less class-oriented language had been growing in Britain since the Great War, with Ogden's campaign for 'Basic English' gaining momentum in the early 1930's. From the outbreak of war in 1939 ministers had also been considering educational reforms aimed at the lower classes. These reforms appeared in 1944 in the Education Act¹⁷. Combined with scientific advancements, the growth in industrialization and the borrowing from other languages facilitated by the war, all classes now held a larger vocabulary¹⁸.

At a time of war, the need for some type of perceived 'common language' was paramount, in terms of national identity and material security, as well as to facilitate the dissemination of information¹⁹. In terms of writing, the

thirties also heralded a push from the left towards declamatory literature which could be performed to large working class audiences. This push was led by Jack Lindsay, the brother of Philip, Thomas's co-worker at Strand²⁰. All these influences combined in cinema where straightforward standard English was employed to appeal to people of all classes and dialects.

The requirements and restrictions of vocabulary and language, and particularly the directness and simplicity of language required for these public information films meant that Thomas had to experiment with new linguistic devices which would make an impact on his audience. These linguistic devices included the implementation of a variety of styles and versatile voices to complement the effectiveness of his scripts. This 'developmental experimentation' (as it is perhaps best described) he had discarded in his teens as a poet, but found useful in film, particularly in the ability to parody, mimic and remind the audience of other poets. This was not usually done for comic purposes however, but rather to heighten emotion by evoking memories of earlier, happier days. The most obvious example of this is in the sections of *Green Mountain*, *Black Mountain* where Thomas introduces an Audenesque quality to his verse. This was done in order to call on the audience to remember their hardships after the first war and to imply that after the enemy was defeated, the same mistakes in social policy would not be made. As WH Auden had been the most prominent poet of the late twenties and of the thirties, the use of Auden-like verse allowed Thomas to bridge the (pre-war) past, present

and future, implying that the present fight against Germany was in essence the same as the age old battle against poverty and hardship. Echoes of industrial decay seen in poems like Auden's 'Get there if you can...' or financial corruption as in 'Consider' are taken and turned to a more positive light in order to claim that we (society) have learned from our mistakes and such scenes will not have to be witnessed again:

Remember the procession of the old-young men
From dole-queue to corner and back again,
From the pinched, packed street to the peak of slag
In the bite of the winter with a shovel and bag,
With drooping fag and turned up collar
Stamping for the cold at the ill-lit corner...
Remember the procession of the old-young men.
It shall never happen again!...
The voice of Wales is the voice of all free men.
We will work to win. War shall never happen again.

PRO script INF6/483. *Wales "Black Mountain, Green Mountain²¹". pp2/3.*

This section uses verse with deliberate echoes of Auden in order to evoke memories of the pre-war days when the only fight was that against unemployment and poverty at home and suggests that the present war is no different. The poetry suggests that if people fought with the same vigour and stoicism now, then winning the war would simultaneously begin a victory for improved conditions and a better society.

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The Use of Reference Points

The use of 'poetic borrowing' and parody was to some extent necessary for the success of mass appeal documentaries. Reference points which were easily recognisable to the audience helped to retain their attention, and in critical circles there was also a certain antipathy to highbrow 'art' in commercial propaganda films. Thomas's brief was naturally to appeal to the largest audience possible whilst retaining the approval of the MOI. This general attitude is best summed up by a contemporary review:

It is no use playing Honneger [sic] and Stravinsky to a people whose musical appreciation does not go beyond 'The Lambeth Walk' in the hope that they will eventually prefer those composers. Propaganda must be disseminated in the language most widely understood... Symbolism may make its appeal to the few cultured minds, but [for] propaganda to have its widest and strongest appeal, must speak what a former generation called "The vulgar tongue".

Kine Weekly 2nd Jan 1941. p36.

Language itself was therefore used as a reference point. Building on the basis of a 'cross-class' or 'basic' English, the audience could sometimes be addressed directly, and rhetorically questioned in 'their own tongue' about propaganda issues. *These Are The Men* is the prime example here, the basis of the script being the repeated question 'who are we?' followed by the answers of each protagonist. This is followed by a simple (if blatantly obvious) message that these men (the German leaders) were the evil who could not be forgiven. The aim was to reflect

everyday conversation in film and to thus educate and inform in a 'non-threatening' and less overtly didactic manner.

In a different script we can see an example of just how easily and successfully a message could be delivered:

Art Show

Newton: "We all know what we're fighting against, but don't you think we sometimes forget what we're fighting for?...
We've got to fight because if we didn't we wouldn't be free. Free to work, free to play, to listen, to look at what we want to."

3rd Girl "I like that, but I don't know why."

Newton: "I'll tell you why I like it..."

PRO script INF6/471, C.E.M.A. p2²².

This use of conversational dialogue, or dialogue of connection, uses repetition in an informal and colloquial tone to project a feeling of camaraderie with the audience. This method of propaganda may seem a little obvious, and even perhaps a little patronising, but the necessity to transmit an easily understood 'set message' was what the government required. Understandable dialogue which delivered a clear message was the unwritten rule, although in several examples of Thomas's work, there are cases to argue for overdirectness.

Thomas's Use of Stage Directions

We must not forget that this was a period when Thomas was still learning his trade as a screen writer, and had not always mastered the art of tailoring his material to the

relevant medium in the way he had by the time he wrote *Under Milk Wood*. Even at this stage though, the flaws that do exist are very minor. The use of underlining for emphasis in the script of *Conquest of a Germ* or the repetitious ending to *New Towns For Old* (1942) may be seen as overkill in terms of necessity, but are not out of place in comparison with other scripts of the period. In other ways this 'overkill' can be viewed in a different light, in terms of Thomas's working method.

Looking at the script for *These Are The Men* we find a number of stage directions describing the events seen on screen. Like the underlining on the script of *Conquest of a Germ* they are unnecessary except in the creative imagination of Thomas himself, who was building up a mental picture of the film as it will eventually appear on celluloid. As a forerunner to the later devices we see in *Under Milk Wood*, the unspoken commentary in the scripts describe events more symbolically than literally, as the first line of the following passage demonstrates:

(Now we see behind the workers, behind the jobs they are doing, the shadow of war. The men are still doing their jobs, jobs that are done all over the world... but we see too what they or their brothers all over the world are doing now - fighting on every front.)

Script for *These Are The Men*.²³

Features such as the metaphorical 'shadow of war' cannot be literally represented and so are redundant in visual terms. Phrases such as this, though, are as much part of Thomas's working method as they are of the script itself.

Looking at the final approved version of the script this entire sequence, surplus to requirements, has been removed.

Similar to the alternative 'poetic' and 'working' versions of other scripts (notably *Our Country* and later, *Doctor and the Devils*) Thomas created an entire script with which he was happy and then revised it into a form more suited to the medium. As this particular film is credited as having been 'devised and compiled' by Thomas and Alan Osbiston, we know his roles would have included input to editing and direction. The more flamboyant descriptions given in the passage above (the MOI approved shooting script merely refers to "(Scenes of workers - scenes of war)²⁴") could well be explained as director's notes from Thomas to himself.

This interpretation is also useful in understanding the methodology of *Under Milk Wood*. In its format of a descriptive aural drama devoid of visuals, the use of symbolism and metaphor in simple narrative ('seeing the shadow' of war, 'hearing the houses' sleeping in the streets) helps Thomas to 'direct' the listener, creating a mood against which he can set the action. The use of stage directions within the dialogue of the performed text is a recurrent feature which I shall explain more fully in subsequent chapters.

Experiments and Innovations

Several other features which were first introduced in the documentary scripts form important elements of Thomas's development towards the writing of *Under Milk Wood*. Two of

As this section demonstrates, the film returns very closely to its beginnings using a time scheme similar to that of *Under Milk Wood*, sections of description showing facets of life set between a closely organized framework of cyclical verse. Although very different from the radio play in terms of content (there are only two 'characters' in *Our Country*), this script (which was acclaimed as Thomas's most successful by contemporary critics²⁵) suggests the origins of many structural features which were refined and repeated in *Under Milk Wood*.

Contemporary Reaction

One of the problems Thomas found with *Our Country*, (and indeed with other scripts) was perversely that he was often chastized for being too poetic. This is a difficult argument to counter, particularly as sections of the verse could indeed stand alone as poetry in their own right (such as many of the sections within *Our Country*). This was a problem of which Thomas was quite aware, and the removal of what he called 'rather tooliterary phrases²⁶' formed the essential difference in many of the alternative versions of the scripts. The different versions Thomas wrote for the mediums of film and poetry demonstrate the poet learning his trade, but also show his personal pride in the work. Knowing he must adapt his writing to different audiences, Thomas would retain a longer poetic version of each script. This longer version would aim to encapsulate the entire visual film in written form. This could then be used as the basis

for the commentary, the effect envisaged in the original being achieved by adapting the dialogue to the visuals.

Contemporary reaction to the end product of this process varied, but was generally positive. In one review of *Our Country*, two viewers gave differing responses to Thomas's contribution, but both affirmed positive reactions to the film as a whole²⁷. The first refers to a "poetic" commentary... which pound[s] on and on with very little relation to what the picture's doing - like somebody determined to finish a funny story in spite of the fact that all the company is busily engaged on something else'. Thomas's transposition from page to screen is viewed as unsuccessful here, but if we look at the second writer, we find a more specific and approving critique:

'There are things wrong in the film - patches of commentary which are a mere combination of hurriedly spoken words... which stand out all the more alarmingly amongst the long stretches in which Thomas succeeds for the first time in wedding (and subordinating) his style to the needs of the medium.'

'Documentary News Letter' (BFI,1944), V.IIII.

(p47).

Both seemed to argue that Thomas failed to consistently retain the correct balance between the narrative and the poetic but despite this, the film was one of the best received, and even premiered at the prestigious Leicester Square cinema.

Thomas's Use of Personal Reminiscence

In terms of the subjects and contents of the documentary films, Thomas would often impose facets of his own character and memories of his own childhood onto the scripts. The main feature running through the scripts, which stems from Thomas's recollections, is a sense of childhood wonder. As in many of Thomas's most famous poems, we are given descriptive verse tinged with a kind of reflective reverence to nature. Looking at *Our Country* and 'Fern Hill' for example, we can see a similar mood stemming from Thomas's childhood in pre-war Wales:

War hangs heavy over the apple dangled acres
shadowing the small round hills of the heavy hanging
fruit. Only the fruit-loving birds flew once over these
treetops.

PRO script INF6/630. *Our Country*. p2

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was
green,
The night above the dingle starry,...
So it must have been after the birth of the simple
light.

'Fern Hill'. v1 & v4.

The vision of the idyllic past recounted in both extracts is typical of Thomas's work from the period and throughout the other scripts we can see a similar method employed. An example of this is outlined clearly in the prologue to *A Soldier Comes Home*, where an explanation of the action is given as "Their [a soldier and his wife] small son repeatedly talks and asks questions about life in Burma...". Thomas's deliberately adopts the persona of a child in order

to convey a sense of innocence and wonder, which is then used to prompt the audience into a re-evaluation of the things they may take for granted. The natural world around them, the way life had been pre-war and the way life will be after the war are shown through the uncynical eyes of an innocent. Thomas draws on his own memories of boyhood in Wales to do this and many of the reminiscences incorporated into the scripts are clearly autobiographical:

...the voices of children brought up to play Indians on the slagheaps, or pirates in the cattle-voiced meadows, are sweet and powerful, wild and gentle, as the weather over the mountains or the windlike movements of light and shadow through the high, chill streets.

PRO script INF6/483. *Wales "Black Mountain, Green Mountain"*. p2.

Thomas's Politics

Another area much neglected in the study of Thomas is that of his politics. These too are often imposed on the scripts of the documentaries. Scripts such as *Building the Future* (1944)²⁸ and *Our Country* demonstrate elements of social and philosophically political opinion in addition to their purpose as war propaganda. Unfortunately this subject is a very grey area in our knowledge of Thomas and many of the references we find to political ideals and affiliations are contradictory, many of them propagated by the poet himself. What is certain is that Thomas professed a great love of peace and maintained a vague notion of a 'universal communism', although this occurred less in terms of political construction than in more general idealised

terms. His early associations with the Swansea grocer Bert Trick²⁹ and the effects of the war in general emphasized the humanitarian side of Thomas and helped shape his (perhaps naive and child-like) view of the pervading and conquering nature of basic humanity. This underlying belief had formed the basis of Thomas's politics since his early youth, and it was on this that he hung his sometimes perhaps misguided affiliations. The prime example of this would be Thomas's blindness to the political undertones of the Czech Writers Union inauguration which he attended in March 1949. Many other writers had stayed away and had warned Thomas to do likewise. They were proved right in the official reporting of Thomas's speech, which those present say was complete fiction, and which seemed to focus more on Thomas's alleged support for the pro-Stalinist government than on writing³⁰.

One of the few people to approach the subject of Thomas's politics is Jack Lindsay. In his book *Meetings With Poets*, Lindsay mentions Thomas's active support for the Stockholm Peace Petition, the Rosenberg Petition and the Authors World Peace Appeal amongst others³¹. Lindsay was an active supporter and member of the Communist Party from 1936 onwards but his own politics were generally in sympathy with the non-party views of Thomas. Although Lindsay refers to Thomas's attitude as that of 'universal sympathy', to simply assume political ignorance is to ignore an important element of his war work, poetry and general philosophy. Certainly Thomas was at times politically naive (such as the attendance of the meeting in Prague mentioned above), but

that is not to say that he was either not aware or did not care about what was occurring in the world around him. Although Thomas's private political beliefs may have been simplistic they were prominent enough to feature in works such as the poem 'The Hand That Signed The Paper' or the script for *These Are The Men*. As early as his school article 'The Films' Thomas had been aware of and had condemned discrimination. This is demonstrated by his criticism of the devastating racial effects of D.W. Griffith's otherwise seminal film *The Birth of a Nation*. This example also shows us that Thomas was aware of the possible power of film as a tool of social manipulation. This may have influenced Thomas's decision to work in the field of cinema. He certainly didn't want to fight in the war and given the possibilities open to him, a job where he could still write, could learn more about the cinema which he had always loved, and could still make an effective contribution towards an eventual peace would have seemed very attractive.

Apart from his generalised political idealism Thomas did not actively involve himself in party politics. Thomas had an active distrust and cynicism towards officialdom, and this was partly the reason for his lack of interest in the daily practicalities of domestic politics. This cynicism was manifest in some of Thomas's scripts. His film on the subject of transport regulations (*Is Your Ernie Really Necessary* (1945)) for example, only got as far as the censorship viewing before being rejected and destroyed. Subjects in which Thomas felt no personal interest could and would be treated with flippancy and disrespect, and the

government did not believe that such a serious subject as wartime transportation should show a signalman playing 'The Bells of St Mary' on signal levers, or the same man dressed as a chorus girl multiplied by optical effects to create a dancing chorus line of transport workers³².

Building The Future is another example of a film which did not gain universal approval as there were complaints that elements of the script were 'of political propaganda'. Concentrating on the need for a strident approach to the 'common good' post-war, this film demonstrates the sort of 'universal communism' in which Thomas believed: "...in peace we must work with no less vigour for the common good" (PRO Script for *Building The Future*, p8.). Many quotes which were incorporated in this way were short and simple but combined over the entire film to deliver a message of 'universal communism', and it was this which provoked complaints in some quarters of the film press. Other scripts followed this trend and, although it is sometimes difficult to separate the government message from Thomas's own opinion because the government policy itself called for classless co-operation and unification. The collective effort demanded in *New Towns for Old*, the cross cultural bonding of *The Unconquerable People* and the delicate balance of man and nature in *On Wales; Black Mountain, Green Mountain* show us just how important social politics were to the poet. It is the final passage of *Building The Future* which sums up the Thomas philosophy in the clearest terms however:

It must be, not every man for himself, but every man for the good and happiness of all people living... Every man must believe in the good and happiness that is to be shared... to be shared, equally.³³

Although this example smacks of schoolboy idealism, the message is clear and permeates Thomas's scripts. Despite having very few ideas as to how these political objectives should be achieved, he believed firmly that they should be achieved. The necessity for peace and harmony leading from this 'universal communism' is prevalent throughout Thomas's scripts and letters, and although this necessity is presented in terms of the balance of man and nature, specific world politics sometimes fade slightly, accurately reflecting Thomas's real-life lack of political practicality. This is summed up by a contemporary review of the script *These Are The Men* in *Documentary News Letter*:-

The verse which accompanies the ordinary peaceful citizens of the world is... less effective, perhaps because the poet has too often found himself obliged to fall back upon an over-conventional democratic line. His democrats are over-passive in spirit to the point of becoming puny in moral stature.³⁴

The same could easily be said of Thomas. The poet does redeem himself however, making up for the sections which lack substance with an overall attempt to create an empathy and a camaraderie with the audience. The tone of the voice employed by Thomas in the majority of the scripts is very similar to that later employed in *Under Milk Wood*, the narrator's words being deliberately angled and phrased to represent the audience themselves. This echoes the example given above in the quotation from *These Are The Men* where the

overt intention is to ingratiate and involve the viewer directly.

With scripts such as *Building The Future*, *C.E.M.A.*, and *Our Country*, the voice of authority is written to connect with the audience, as though the narrator himself is, one of the everyday working people, like his audience. This allows the message to be delivered as a reminder of what we already know rather than as an unsolicited demand, which in turn makes it more palatable and easily acceptable to the audience. In *Fuel For Battle*, as one example, the characters themselves are inspired by propaganda of this nature. The message of the film is that people are working for their own benefit, as opposed to just 'following orders'. One of Thomas's strengths in the documentary field was his ability to be one of the people he was addressing and thus empathise with his target audience.

Alongside this 'empathic' approach Thomas introduces details of physical realities (such as the scripts *Battle for Freedom* and *The Unconquerable People*) both to remind his audience of the general state of the war and also to inform them of the wider picture of overseas campaigns and victories. In *Conquest of a Germ* Thomas employs the technique to facilitate the introduction of complex medical discoveries from the point of view of the layperson. The protagonist there, although a doctor himself, learns about medical discoveries ("Prontosil works!") with a sense of wonder similar to that of the child's-eye view given in 'Fern Hill', or the small boy in *A Soldier Comes Home*. Using such an 'empathic approach' complex or harsh realities can be

introduced in a more audience-friendly way and, importantly, can be more easily absorbed.

Combining the lessons and methods developed on the documentaries, Thomas was then armed with enough experience to tackle feature scripts. Although the documentaries and feature scripts were often written simultaneously from this point onwards, Thomas continued to learn and experiment on documentary scripts whilst refining his methodology on the feature films. Some of the earlier feature scripts show the same flaws as the early documentaries, but working in a medium which he adored and in which his imagination was unchecked, the standard of the work quickly rose and continued developing in innovative ways.

Footnotes

- 1 From the script for *C.E.M.A.* p4. Taken from the P.R.O. file no. INF6/471. Absent from the shorter version of the script found in *The Filmscripts*.
- 2 A more detailed description of Grierson's innovative philosophy can be found in Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary* (London: University of California Press, 1975)
- 3 *Rise and Fall*, p2.
- 4 Charles Barr, *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London:British Film Institute, 1986), p74.
- 5 Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement 1926-46* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1989) p7.
- 6 This subject is covered with particular accuracy in *The British Documentary Film Movement*.
- 7 *Rise and Fall*, p5.
- 8 The Arts Enquiry, 'The Factual Film, A Survey.' (London, 1947) p99.
- 9 Definitions taken from *All Our Yesterdays*, various pages.
- 10 'Documentary News Letter' (BFI, 1944), V.IIII (p46).
- 11 *Letters*, p509. Letter to Caitlin.
- 12 *Letters*, p526. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 13 Paul Ferris, p190n.
- 14 Julian Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs of the Forties* (London:Penguin, 1984; London:Sphere, 1991), p125.
- 15 *Letters*, pp525-6. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 16 Eric Partridge and John W. Clark, *British and American English since 1900* (London:Andrew Dakers, 1951), p177.
- 17 Adrian Caesar, *Dividing Lines:Poetry, class and ideology in the 1930's* (Manchester:University of Manchester Press, 1991), p15.
- 18 *British and American English*, p139.
- 19 *British and American English*, p135.
- 20 *Dividing Lines*, p219.
- 21 This was the official name given on the PRO documentation, although the generally accepted title reversed this to *On Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain*, or simply *Green Mountain, Black Mountain*. When referring to Audenesque verse, I am thinking of rhythms and the choice of words such as those found in vll of 'Song for the New Year':

The buying, and selling, the eating and drinking,
The disloyal machines and irreverent thinking,
The lovely dullards again and again
Inspiring their bitter ambitious men.
- 22 Also to be found in an abridged form in *The Filmscripts*, p20.
- 23 Taken from an early Thomas ms. This version is reprinted in *The Filmscripts*, p40.
- 24 Final version of the script used for filming. Found in PRO file INF6/560, p1.

- 25 *Rise and Fall*, p2.
26 *Letters*, p521. Letter to Donald Taylor about the script for *Unconquerable People*.
27 'Documentary News Letter' (BFI, 1944), V.IIII. (p46).
28 This script was also known as *A City Re-Born*.
29 See introduction.
30 Constantine Fitzgibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas* (London:Plantin Publishers, 1987 [1965] p346.
31 Jack Lindsay, *Meetings With Poets* (London:Frederick Muller, 1968) p31.
32 Fitzgibbon, P281.
33 *The Filmscripts*, p95.
34 'Documentary News Letter' (BFI, 1944), V.IIII. (p46).

FEATURE FILMS

In talking about this work as if it were a novel or a play, [we] forget the fact that... a film script, even by a man of Thomas's genius, is only one contribution to the composite that is a film.¹

T.H. Jones's comment on the film script for *The Doctor and The Devils* is one which would have annoyed Dylan Thomas. Throughout his career as a feature film screen-writer Thomas strove to create a script that could encompass every aspect of the cinematic visuals within the written text. His ultimate aim was to create a scenario which could be seen (or rather read) as what Donald Taylor called 'a film without pictures', namely the perfect film script. Whether or not he succeeded is a matter of opinion, but the idea of a complete 'film' embodied within the text itself is vital to an understanding of Thomas's work. Within this chapter I will demonstrate the scripts' importance in the development of Thomas's writing. I will also examine how the incorporation of specific technical features make the style of the scripts unique to Thomas. As it is not possible to comment on the pieces as visual feature films (they were never produced during his lifetime²), the only analysis we can make is of the scripts as independent artistic creations in their own right, and as potential for projected film production. Several of the scripts were produced subsequently including *The Doctor and the Devils*, *Rebecca's Daughters* and *Me and My Bike*, which does allow for comparisons between script and screen 'versions'. We cannot judge the celluloid versions to be the true 'Thomas' product however, as many script

alterations and additions were made to adapt the works for a modern audience. Regardless of this, the quality of writing and storytelling within Thomas's 'posthumous films' has attracted actors and diverse as Beryl Reid, Denholm Elliot, Joely Richardson, Peter O'Toole, Patrick Stewart, Twiggy, Timothy Dalton and Jonathon Pryce.

Between 1944 and 1950 Thomas worked on at least 15 feature scripts either as sole author, collaborator or as script editor. Thomas had commented to friends about his dissatisfaction with the documentary films he was creating for the British Council, even referring to them as 'hack work'. This, however, stemmed from a sense of frustration that his horizons were being constrained by MOI censorship rather than from a sense that his talents were being in any way prostituted. Thomas was unhappy because his ambition had always been to write feature scripts. As he had said in a letter to Donald Taylor:

You know that, above everything, I want to work with you, again, on films, and exclusively, if possible, on feature films this time.³

Thomas's ambitions went even further with his vision of creating an entirely new medium in which a film scenario could be read on the page and visualised exactly as it could and would be seen on celluloid. This involved writing without the direct use of camera directions or technical descriptions that might detract from the script as an artistic creation in its own right⁴, an area I will examine specifically later in this chapter.

Thomas had recognised the opportunity for

experimentation and creativity in cinema since his schooldays⁵, at which time he had been a regular cinema-goer at the Uplands Cinema in Swansea, the 'Itch Pit'⁶

Thomas had educated himself in all film styles from those of the German expressionist movement to those of the 'B' movie⁷. It was the latter of these, which Thomas preferred to call 'really bad films', that most inspired the poet, giving him a "peculiar type of thrill"⁸. Thomas loved to write the type of films he himself would have enjoyed watching, and although experimental and innovative he would later take an unusual pride in claiming his own scripts to be "very class B"⁹. It was not until Thomas met Julain Maclaren-Ross at Strand pictures that the opportunity arose for this type of 'experimental 'B' film' to be written. In Donald Taylor, Maclaren-Ross and Philip Lindsay, Thomas found writers who shared his love of 'B' movies, but who all wanted to push the medium to new and more innovative heights.

'A Film Without Pictures'

Working with Maclaren-Ross and Philip Lindsay in the offices of Strand, Thomas began to develop the theory of the complete script scenario. The concept was originally formulated by Thomas and Maclaren-Ross in a projected mystery film to be entitled either *The Whispering Gallery* or *The Distorting Mirror*. The basic plot idea was to follow the exploits of some type of androgynous super-villain taking control of a stately home. Much of the film was to be presented within an atmosphere of mystery and suspense and to

be set in a hall of mirrors, hence the title. The basic theory behind both the film and the 'complete script' scenario is described by Maclaren-Ross in his *Memoirs Of The Forties*:

We... shared another ambition, which was to write a film-script, not a Treatment as the story-form is called, but a complete scenario ready for shooting which would give the ordinary reader an absolute visual impression of the film in words and could be published as a new form of literature. Carl Meyer... is said to have written such scripts; but neither Dylan or I could get hold of a script by Meyer, and the only ones we knew which almost succeeded in doing what we had in mind were those printed in *The Film Sense* by Sergei Eisenstein.

The rules we laid down ourselves were that the script had to be an original specially written in this form and not any kind of adaptation, and that actual film production must be possible. Our main obstacle consisted in the camera directions, which if given were apt to look too technical, and if omitted would lose the dramatic impact of, for instance, a sudden large close up, which Dylan hoped could be conveyed by one's actual choice of words."¹⁰

This last line is at the centre of their writing philosophy. It was to be through the 'actual choice of words' that all visual film effects, down to the level of small camera movements, were to be conveyed. This 'ultimate script' was to be *The Whispering Gallery*, but was never (to my knowledge) even started, let alone completed. As Maclaren-Ross goes on to say in his memoirs, Dylan Thomas in *The Doctor and The Devils* came as close as anyone to succeeding with this form of writing. This is probably the reason the scenario was printed before any production deal for the film was arranged, and thus became the first script ever to be published before its film counterpart. Even this completed version did not fully satisfy Thomas, who was sure he could improve on the style and structure, remarking in a letter to Graham Greene

that "I should like it to be regarded as a *sample of what I can write for the films*"¹¹. Other scenarios followed in the same vein, with *Twenty Years A'Growing* being probably the closest of the extant scripts to the intended 'film without pictures'. In both *The Doctor and The Devils* and *Twenty Years A'Growing*, Thomas succeeds partially in replacing camera directions with linguistic devices and in the creation of a tangible ambience through the text. But neither film could claim success in fully achieving the aims set out with Maclaren-Ross. Following the 'trial and error' line of development in his screen writing, Thomas was constantly experimenting and learning about the medium, with completed scripts such as *The Doctor and The Devils* only being proffered as 'a sample' of what he could write. This is not to say that Thomas was not proud of his achievement in *The Doctor and The Devils*, merely that he was aware of the weaknesses in his work and was constantly searching to revise and improve his writing for the next project.

Through the film work Thomas discovered the means and methods which were later to create *Under Milk Wood*, and it is in this respect that the scripts are of most interest to the general reader of Thomas. The use of linguistic devices to visualise and involve the reader/listener (and prototypes of several of the specific characters) were vital to the development of *Under Milk Wood*. The 'Milk Wood' story itself was also originally created by Thomas and Maclaren-Ross as a film scenario. I will analyse the implications for *Under Milk Wood* later in this and subsequent chapters.

Working Methodology

I have already described some of the physical working procedures during the war years¹², but there are also several elements of Thomas's methodology which are specific to feature films, and are therefore worthy of particular note.

Thomas would research the background of his feature film subjects in great detail. In the script for *Twenty Years A' Growing*, for example, he drew deeply on Caitlin's childhood memories of the west coast of Ireland. In addition to this, what could be termed the 'stage directions' of the script are phrased in a Gaelic dialect. A good example would be the phrase "All the other children are making a power of noise", where the dialectal 'power of noise' is irrelevant to the actual direction of the scene ('are being noisy' would be perfectly sufficient for that purpose), and is only useful in maintaining the atmosphere and tone of the prose to a reader of the script. Thomas also obtained copies of *The Islandman* by Tomás Ó Crohan and *The West Island* by Robin Flowers in order to gain a fuller background picture of the culture and the way of life on the Blasket Islands (where *Twenty Years A' Growing* is set). He suggests in the letters that a knowledge of these books would allow him "to tell the story of life *in its entirety*"¹³, an important concept to Thomas. This was before he would even begin to attempt an adaptation (the original novel of *Twenty Years A' Growing* is by Maurice O'Sullivan) and demonstrates the lengths Thomas would go to to ensure the accuracy of his finished piece with regard to

local detail (a quality frequently overlooked in other 'forties feature films).

To ensure the reader was more fully informed about the background to his stories Thomas also suggested extra source material might sometimes be included. When *The Doctor and The Devils* reached a form in which it might be published, Thomas asked Donald Taylor whether the script book could contain reproductions of trial documents and drawings of Burke and Hare and Tanners Lane (the historical basis and location of the story)¹⁴. This close attention to detail helps to refute the claims of those who refer to Thomas's 'film era' as entirely hack work, and instead shows the pride and intense involvement which made the scripts as important to the poet (at the time) as his poetry.

Thomas also took an active interest in the proof-reading and in the pre-publication process, frequently correcting and amending proof sheets to ensure continuity sections were not printed in italics (which he felt would ruin the prose 'flow') and commenting on the inclusion of artwork and on the title itself. *The Doctor and The Devils* was originally to be called *The Business of Death*, but Thomas was unhappy with this and eventually complained about the subtitle ('A Film Without Pictures') as well¹⁵. This subtitle, he claimed, was likely to restrict the potential readership to mainly film-goers, whereas he had hoped it would include "general readers of fiction & perhaps readers of thrillers"¹⁶. It is probably no coincidence that thrillers were one of Thomas's own favourite literary genres. He wanted to bridge the gap between the film and the

novel markets, appealing to both.

In the case of the manuscript itself, Thomas was repeatedly insistent that Dent (the publishers) should be sent 'both copies' of the play, specifically "the one with more descriptive writing."¹⁷ This arose from the fact that Thomas held two versions of the script (as he did with *Our Country*), a less flamboyant version to show film (work) people, and a more free ranging (private) version which he would happily stand by as 'literature'. Unfortunately the original manuscripts are unavailable, presumed lost, so the published version and Thomas's own references in the letters are all we have in terms of source material.

When working on all the commissions for Strand and the other companies, Thomas was given a relatively free reign in his working practices, an opportunity of which he took full advantage. In his introduction to *The Beach of Falesá*, Jan Read (the then script editor at Strand) reports how Thomas would frequently turn up days late for script meetings and would then conveniently 'forget' about points relating to technical requirements which he had previously agreed to. He would then return home to continue working on his own ideas about the scripts. This (and the fact that Thomas did indeed work from Wales for much of the period) did not greatly bother Donald Taylor, who defended his writer pointedly at a meeting of Strand backers:

'Surely it would be preferable Mr Taylor if these, er, writers performed their duties in the office like any other employee?' 'Yes it would' Donald said.
'Thank you Mr Taylor,' the accountant said in triumph. 'I thought you would agree.'

But Donald said: 'I'm sorry, you didn't allow me to finish my sentence. It would be preferable- if we were making let's say sausages. Instead we are making...films, or am I mistaken?'¹⁸

This is an excellent example of Taylor's confidence in his writers. With such support Thomas's own confidence never waivered, although he was still very aware of his own shortcomings as a screenwriter. In a series of letters to Graham Greene¹⁹ he comments on the looseness of construction, over-wordy dialogue and general amateurishness of *The Doctor and The Devils*. The letters are very deferential to Greene and are also blatant in purpose: Thomas wished to gain employment at Rank where Greene was then working. It is true that he shows a willingness to learn more about his new trade, but I believe the letters also echo the underlying doubts voiced by others about Thomas's suitability to screenwriting (they sound very similar to the opinions of Caitlin). At the end of the letters, however, Thomas twice refers to the fact that "I am capable of writing for the screen" and even offers to write a script specifically for Michael Redgrave, who had expressed an interest in Thomas's work. Thomas was never shy when it came to promoting his own interests and believed he could make a valid contribution to the cinema. Although he had not yet mastered the art of scriptwriting Thomas believed that in time he could make a success of his formula for the 'new form of writing' outlined by Maclaren-Ross.

Stylistic and Thematic Features

The film scripts themselves exhibit several major features which characterize the direction Thomas's screenwriting was taking. These features recur and form part of the distinctive 'Thomas style'. First there are the general subjects, themes and motifs that occur frequently in the scripts. Thomas's love of detective fiction, for example, can be seen clearly in *The Beach of Falesá*, which is based around the mystery of an undisclosed but corrupt act which had been committed on a south sea island (from the Robert Louis Stevenson short story). The detective 'theme' can also be found in the sleuthing of Captain Marsden in *Rebecca's Daughters*. With the notable exception of *Twenty Years A'Growing* (without doubt Thomas's most evocative and personal script), each scenario has a definite bias towards tension, mystery and suspense (and, of course, humour). This will be examined in more detail in my chapter 'The Thomas Style'.

The second feature of note is that Thomas would labour over the choice of specific words and names for all of his characters and scenarios, ever attentive to the symbolic potential of the work in hand. Instances of this can be seen in the naming of characters in *Rebecca's Daughters*: 'Jack Wet' is chosen for the ineffective toll-gate keeper, 'Dave Button' is chosen for Anthony Raine's sidekick, or accessory. 'Billy Bedlam' in *The Doctor and The Devils* is given a name relating to his physical and mental disabilities. Thomas deliberately chose non-naturalistic

names for his characters to emphasize their moral, physical and psychological qualities. This helps to direct the readers' response to the characters in addition to the humour it provides. The 'Bunyanesque' naming of characters to reflect specific characteristics is a trait later carried forwards to *Under Milk Wood* with 'Nogood Boyo', 'Polly Garter' and 'Mary Ann Sailors'. The best example of the care given to naming characters is explained by Thomas himself in a letter to E.F. Bozman where he requests that the lead character of *The Doctor and The Devils* be re-named, despite the fact that the pre-publication proof was already completed. The character (historically Dr Knox) was originally called 'William Salter' in the manuscript, but the author decided that 'Thomas Rock' would symbolise the character far more effectively:

"I know the expense wd be considerable; but the script wd, in my opinion, gain *enormously* in strength & distinction just from that alteration. I do think it important."²⁰

As usual Thomas got his way. In single words and phrases too, Thomas took extreme care to convey exactly the right message or symbol. In *Twenty Years A'Growing*, a good example can be found in the 'dream sequence' which is expanded and relocated from the O'Sullivan original.²¹ Thomas has carefully chosen to relocate the episode from a field to the schoolhouse, to demonstrate the dreams of escape of schoolboys (a theme common also to many of his poems and short stories²²) and to increase the dramatic effect by use of cinematic juxtaposition (the dream originally occurred while the boy was outside on a summer day). The 'Thomas' sequence

is also written and expanded to create an intimacy and immediacy for the reader with the introduction of the 'simple present tense' in simple one clause sentences:

And closer still we see a butterfly above Maurice sleeping.

We see the butterfly fly away down the meadow.

Still it is flying...

Maurice is running along the sunlit meadow towards the dusk.

And as he runs, so the sunlight behind him grows suddenly dusky

and the dusk before him lightens.

Still the butterfly is flying.

It flies on to a gate. Birds are singing...

The sunlit field is darkening, dusking.²³

Although this is nearer to the tone of conventional film scripts than much of Thomas's work, the splitting of sentences to separate lines and the use of inversions ("the sunlight behind him grows suddenly dusky and the dusk before him lightens") and the more poetic language superfluous to a director ("The sunlit field is darkening, dusking") demonstrate the care and attention Thomas took as regards the creation of atmosphere and continuity in the language of the script. There are also many specific features of Thomas's scriptwriting which show how the original idea of 'a new prose' (formulated with Maclaren-Ross) developed along with his skills as a screen-writer. Foremost of these (as demonstrated by previous examples) is the use of extraneous detail in descriptions (such as the dialectal 'power of noise', or the descriptive 'darkening, dusking'). This method is most obvious perhaps in the opening lines of *The Doctor and The Devils*:

MORNING

Music.

From a long way off, we see a deserted road winding downwards from a hill/top.

Huge sky, slow clouds.

A small black figure appears at the top of the road, and moves downhill. A small black figure with another darkness billowing around it...

Closer still, we see his body and face as he strides down towards us. He wields his stick like a prophet's staff. We see the deep/set eyes behind the large spectacles; the wide sensual mouth tightened into its own denial... the coffin/shaped forehead; the insatiable, and even predatory, curiosity of the bent/forward head.²⁴

The poetic components such as the 'huge sky', '...other darkness billowing' (his cloak) and 'insatiable...predatory curiosity' of the head are necessary both to Thomas himself and to the script's reader, but are not of particular use to the director who would have great difficulty in conveying this on celluloid. In fact when the film version was finally made in 1985, these descriptions were not conveyed and consequently the scene seems far less impressive. Transposing a written script to celluloid is very difficult without losing nuances of phrasing and word order. Thomas had recognised the complexity of working ideas into the constraints of an artistic discipline when writing poetry, commenting in his verse and letters about the difficulty of putting thoughts and images from the mind down on paper with the same conviction.²⁵ The 'complete film scenario' was an attempt, on one level, to ease the transition of the script into the discipline of filming, and although partially successful, the weaknesses of the celluloid *The Doctor and The Devils* demonstrate the need for an expert director in the interpretation of the script.

With Thomas's poetry being naturally image-based and

non-linear, the detail and atmosphere of the script helped the writer picture the scene he was creating. For the reader and director the details of the scene perform a similar function. In the opening of a script Thomas employs a method similar to that of Ibsen and O'Casey in the incorporation of detailed stage directions. Obviously the introduction of the directions into the prose flow is a development, but the ultimate aim is the same: to suggest that the action is the continuation of events 'supposed to have happened before the rise of the curtain'²⁶. Thomas takes this further, using directions to try to echo 'nuances of phrasing' and to intimate mood, atmosphere and intent with sentences such as 'He wields his stick like a prophet's staff'. In this particular example the literal stage direction suggests a 'Prospero-like' Dr Rock to the reader. To the viewer, the direct comparison to Prospero could not be conveyed, but if interpreted literally by the director the line should create the suggestion of a powerful ('wield'), intelligent, imposing and self-confident ('prophet') man. Either written or seen, we learn something of Rock's character and a little of the atmosphere his intimidating presence can create.

Technical Directions

The scene cited above is typical of Thomas's screen method, and also demonstrates several other recurring traits. The major problem encountered by Maclaren-Ross and Thomas was that of technical requirements (Maclaren-Ross

mentioned specifically camera directions). In this scene Thomas uses the linguistic devices ('Now...', 'Closer now...', 'Closer still...') that were later to re-appear with great success in *Under Milk Wood*. Combined with the immediacy and confidentiality created through terms such as 'Closer still, we see...' and later in the scene, 'Now, with his eyes, we see...' the reader gains a shared perspective with Thomas, that, as he described in *Under Milk Wood*: "Only you [and the narrator] can see...". This intimacy helps to give the reader access to the atmosphere of the piece and allows the breaks ('Suddenly...' etc) to gain in effect. This particular linguistic device is another element which was developed from experiments in documentary scripts such as *Our Country* and is something the poet attempted to refine and improve throughout his subsequent career. Unfortunately though, this was not ultimately successful as consecutive screenplays (most noticeably *The Beach Of Falesá* and *Twenty Years A'Growing*) contain exactly the same repeated phrases, with 'Closer still...' re-appearing the most frequently. In effect instead of doing away with technical terms such as, in this case, 'ZOOM' or 'CLOSE UP', he merely replaced the cinematic generics with an alternative set of linguistic terms. Whether this was through laziness, desperation, or intention is unclear, but one of the major aims of the 'new writing' had failed at the first hurdle.

The Influence of Dickens

Another recurring motif in Thomas's scripts is the incorporation of quasi-Dickensian descriptions and locations. In many of the scripts for example, we can see what Stanford calls "the Dickensian spirit [of Mayhew's 'London poor']".²⁷ Both Gwen Watkins and Julian Maclaren-Ross refer in their memoirs to Thomas's love of Dickens, and in *The Doctor and The Devils* particularly (and presumably the lost scripts *Crippen* and *Dickens*) we can see examples of a Dickensian influence:

INTERIOR OF A TAVERN.

On a bench in a corner sit three men. No one sits next to them, though the tavern is crowded. We recognise them as the three men of the graveyard. All three are drunk, though solemnly as befits men whose business is death.

The very tall top-hatted man (Andrew Merry-Lees) is a cadaverous clown: a deacon of the drinking cellar, a pillar of unrespectability.

The other top-hatted man (Praying Howard) has an almost benevolent, almost sweet and saintly, appearance run to seed and whisky.

The short man (Mole) is very hairy; almost furry, like a mole.

They raise their tankards to one another.

ANDREW MERRY-LEES: To the dead!

PRAYING HOWARD: To the surgeons of our city!

The Doctor and The Devils Sc15.

Thomas creates an atmosphere (particularly in this opening sequence) of Victorian-Gothic mystery, loneliness and aristocratic amorality (seen more clearly by considering how the low-life scenes compare with those of the intellectual society at Dr Rock's dinner table). Thomas juxtaposes scenes of aristocracy with those of 'Mayhew streets' to highlight the imbalance in both the lifestyles

and the morality of the upper and lower classes. The juxtaposition of the upper classes with the poor is borrowed from Dickens²⁸ and brought to the foreground through the words of Thomas's characters. In Thomas's scripts, it is the privileged hero who openly condemns the class inequalities. This condemnation of class prejudice occurs regularly in other scenarios, being central to the plot of *Rebecca's Daughters*, inherent in Norma's views from the opening of *No Room at The Inn*, and paralleled in the racially imbalanced world of 'Falesá' (here the natives represent the lower classes and the expatriate British the aristocracy).

Symbolism

The Dickensian and Victorian 'aura' is a specific trait which is introduced in location as well as characterisation. At the end of the first page of *The Doctor and The Devils*, Edinburgh is described in flamboyant terms, bringing all the implications of 'Mayhew's London' to Thomas's own work:

An early nineteenth/century City, its crossing, twisting patterns of roofs at so many different levels, its streets and houses dangerously clambering, scaling, falling down from a steep hill, its patchwork of threading alleys, its compact wilderness of little archwayed courts and closes, sunless dead ends, market spaces surrounded by tumbling top/heavy tenements, hovels, cottages, pigsties...²⁹

As in his poetry, Thomas builds image upon alliterated image to create a complex and adjective-heavy montage. This poetic element lends an extra layer to the motif and heightens both the mood and emotional tension of the scene.

The echoes of Dickens provide an added reference point for the audience, something again learned through the documentary scripts³⁰.

Symbolism weighs heavy in both the description and plot of Thomas scenarios. The opening passage of *The Doctor and The Devils* demonstrates this in the 'coffin/shaped forehead' of the doctor, the 'Prospero-like' wielding of the staff and the dark figure surrounded by 'another darkness'. All these specific phrases relate to the occupation and character of Rock as the Faustian figure trying to overcome death, a figure with the power to save life, but one who is ultimately doomed. In a comparable image, the first sight of Anthony Raine, the main character of *Rebecca's Daughters* is seen next to a man in a billowing cloak on the open road. In this instance though, the character appears 'desolate... beneath the sign post' at a fork in the road, symbolising his loss of direction and the choice between the 'rich' and 'poor' ways of life which he must later choose.

The overt use of symbolism is also evident in the abstract speech and song in *The Doctor and The Devils*, one example being the images of Broom and Fallon as animals. Broom is described as "dog-haired", and his actions comprise frequently of 'leering', 'leaping', 'snarling' and 'snatching'. Again, the Faustian image comes into play, with Fallon and Broom as Baliol and Belcher, or perhaps even with Fallon as the debased Faustus we see in the middle scenes of Marlowe's play, intent purely upon physical pleasure. The amoral Fallon dances and gloats over the murders he commits, and recognises only after his final

murder that his reign of physical abandon is ended. This links with Rock's final speech in which he realises his moral abandon in the name of science is over, and that he perhaps knew all along about the murders committed in his name:

ROCK "Did I set myself up as a little god over death?
Over death...
All over... over... over...
Did I set myself above pity?...
Oh, my God, I knew what I was doing!..."³¹

We can compare this dialogue with Fallon's speech after his final murder:

FALLON "It's cold in hell today.
The fires are out...
Nothing can burn me any more.
I'm numb all over, like an old dead finger-nail.
No more dancing.
No more drinking and singing."³²

The similarities are obvious. Rock's life as the 'little god' has ended and Fallon's hellish reign is over. The doctor's sense of superiority is destroyed as he realises the amorality of his actions and his own hypocrisy after lecturing his peers about their own twisted class morality. Fallon's debauchery is at an end and he recognises the loss of not only his opportunity, but also his capacity for physical enjoyment ("I'm numb all over"). Both characters lose the thing they value most and suffer the more for their own self-awareness.

The allusions and parallels to other literary characters are commonplace in the scripts, scenes 88 and 89 of *The Doctor and The Devils*, for example, showing Rock

defending himself from Murray's accusations of indirect complicity in the murders. Thomas uses Rock's line "My hands, to him, are red as Macbeth's..." in conjunction with the image of Rock's 'very white hands' ([as he]'smooths the palm of one hand along the back of the other hand) in a mime of washing. This is followed at the opening of the next scene with Fallon committing murder 'hands, palms downwards, fingers stretched and tautened' shouting "There's devils in my hands. Let me go, my hands!". The echoes of imagery from *Macbeth* in both are obvious if a little clumsy, but demonstrate symbolic and 'alter-ego' qualities in the two characters. Indeed, in scene 113 this interpretation is qualified by the voice of one of the professors spelling out Thomas's methodology with the line: "But Rock is a *symbol*...".

On a different level, the use of symbolism in the songs, such as in the circular refrain of "...Cat/skin...human hair..." (occurring at the beginning and end of the play) is another Thomas trademark which was developed and which re-appeared later in *Under Milk Wood*. This particular song refrain is used to reflect the morality of the characters in the comparison of 'human' and 'cat' as equal in value, with the obvious implication that the dead 'human' and 'cat' are equally worthless. The song echoes the symbolism of Rock and Fallon as the two sides to the immorality of society (one intellectual -human- and one intent on only physical excess -animal-) but it also shows how the two are equally flawed. It is true that Rock's motives are for 'higher purposes' (to further knowledge and 'improve' medicine), but this is

reflected in the fact that Rock escapes relatively unscathed whereas Fallon (who demonstrates no redeeming features) is executed. The punishment fits the crime: Fallon loses physical life and the doctor is ostracised and tormented intellectually with self-guilt.

Thomas's choice of specific settings and locations also allows for symbolic elements to be introduced. At the end of *The Beach Of Falesá* for example, after the deaths of Case (the villain) and Little Jack, life returns to normal as Wiltshire leads the men to the night fires, and "Beyond them, the sounding sea."³³ The image of the sea is common and significant in much of Thomas's work, and in this particular case is used to represent both stability and the 'mother' image of one who hears and tells all, but cannot change anything. It refers specifically to the characters of Wiltshire (the outsider) and his wife, the native Uma, who is aware of all that has occurred, but is powerless in society. This type of semi-allegorical device is common and very effective in the scenarios in the re-enforcement of themes. The use of locations to reflect and complement themes is again a methodology brought forward from the documentary scripts. Having learned the importance of his words working with and for the visuals in films such as *Our Country* and *On Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain*, it is only natural that Thomas should choose locations and visual images (such as the sea) which complement and work with and for his words.

Plot Weaknesses

One of the major weaknesses of *The Doctor and The Devils* comes when Thomas leaves the symbolism aside and attempts direct narrative. The scenes containing the 'two gentlemen' and the 'two professors'³⁴, as a prime example, are blatant expositional devices to explain the narrative. Their only purpose in the screenplay is to discuss the activities of Rock, as a type of Greek chorus representing the intellectual aristocratic Edinburgh society. They are unnecessary both on the page and on the screen and simply appear clumsy with blatantly anti-Rock statements such as:

FIRST PROFESSOR: "...and we begin to see what a pernicious effect the fellow might have upon the whole scholastic life of the City; indeed, upon the the trend of scholastic thought everywhere..."³⁵

It may well have been Thomas's intention to re-create a 'chorus' effect to echo the thoughts of characters outside of the narrative action, as he does so successfully with the songs of the four voices³⁶. The vital difference between the songs and the professors is that the former are used to echo the themes and motifs of the script. The professors simply inform the reader of plot developments as seen through the eyes of the establishment. They are one dimensional stereotypes with no individual personality and yet are presented as 'real' within the context of the story. The lack of success of these characters perhaps helps to explain the subsequent introduction of the disembodied narrators

(the 'voices') in *The Unconquerable People* (1944) and *Under Milk Wood*.

Characterization and Atmosphere

Thomas's particular strength in screen writing was in the creation of atmosphere through dialogue, characterization and description. *Twenty Years A'Growing* is of particular interest in this respect as, although unfinished³⁷, the script combines Thomas's use of linguistic effects to create an intimacy with the reader (such as the use of the phrase 'closer now') with personal reminiscences.

Thomas uses his own childhood memories to evoke emotions and combines the framework of the O'Sullivan's original story with his own recollections to create what is his most personal and evocative scenario. Thomas used his own experiences to develop atmosphere and believability in much of his writing, and the obvious joy he feels for the location and subjects of *Twenty Years A'Growing* shows through in the descriptions given by the narrator:

Oh, the morning then would have raised the dead from their graves-an edge of golden cloud over Mount Eagle from the sun that was climbing in the east, a calm on the sea, not a stain in the sky and the lark singing sweetly above my head.³⁸

As the early part of the scenario is of the 'adult' O'Sullivan's voice describing his childhood memories to visuals of the 'young' O'Sullivan, Thomas found it quite easy to draw upon the memories of his own childhood, which had already provided so much inspiration for his poetry³⁹.

Although the book is a relatively close adaptation (using many of O'Sullivan's own narratives, word for word), there are many sections where Thomas can give free rein both to his imagination and to his memory. In these sections (such as the example given above), he employs a style which is in many ways like his poetry, very visual, image-laden and reflective. Thomas had learned the effectiveness of this particular device through his work on the documentaries, and with *Twenty Years A'Growing* he was able to relax a little more, the relatively action-free plot of the script also being the perfect environment for the lyrical 'too-literary phrases' he had tried to avoid in the documentaries.

Twenty Years A'Growing, despite remaining unfinished, can nevertheless be seen perhaps as Thomas's most complete 'prose script'. Scenario's such as *Rebecca's Daughters* are adequate as shooting scripts, but do not achieve quite the same level as independent reading material. It was perhaps the choice of a subject with which Thomas could closely associate that allowed his passion to be more clearly conveyed. Building on the most successful elements (in his eyes) of *The Doctor and The Devils*, the author was able to utilize the same linguistic devices to deliver his themes and also his own reminiscences and sense of personal morality.

The 'Thomas Morality'

In *Rebecca's Daughters* and *The Doctor and The Devils*, Thomas drew heavily on personal experiences and opinions,

but in different ways. *Rebecca's Daughters* gave us the Welsh wit and endurance Thomas knew well and *The Doctor and The Devils* gave us specific references to Thomas's own views and attitudes through self-serving characterizations. These occur around and emanate from the character of Dr Rock, who is given great freedom to examine the subjects which interest Thomas within several lengthy monologues.

The voice of Rock is frequently that of Thomas himself, particularly in cases such as scene 13, where Thomas's dislike of what he called 'furtive academia' is introduced into a general conversation about class. Rock (who 'married below himself') is having a discussion at⁴⁰ his wife about the artificiality of class difference, and illustrates his point with the line:

"I wish the professors would marry their cooks and breed proper children, not more little scholars in diapers."⁴¹

Thomas's own dislike for the hypocrisies of intellectual and 'class' behaviour are well documented and are demonstrated in the voice of Rock throughout the text. Thomas's use of Rock as a mouthpiece can be seen even more clearly in Murray's speech of scene 10 with its thinly veiled in-joking reference to Thomas and his reputation as a conversationalist: "Dinner will be a monologue, as usual, Thomas." Through examples such as this, and with the addition of the irreverence and wit found in other speeches, we can see a definite transposition of Thomas into Rock. The poet's own frequently outrageous behaviour is also reflected and explained in the script as the simple result of

society having allowed and thus encouraged it. In the case of Thomas, liberal and bohemian society would be exposed as hypocritical if it did not allow indiscretions, and the image of the eccentric artist was openly encouraged. In the case of Rock however, open indictment of his actions would mean admission that the aristocracy is fallible, and ultimately the possible "*death of class*."⁴²

The doctor's character is used to voice Thomas's own concerns about morality and hypocrisy on all levels. The disapproval of the class bigotry shown by Annabella on the subject of Rock marrying Elizabeth, the "academic calm" of the upper classes who ignore the "bowels of squalor" from their "seat of learning"⁴³, the insistence on 'keeping up appearances', the list is exhaustive. The fact that Rock, the 'moral guardian', is ultimately guilty of the same indifference and hypocrisy may be seen as weak, but can be explained as the 'tragic flaw' in an otherwise heroic character: one of the final questions, the Promethean "Did I set myself up as a little god over death?", demonstrating the tragedy of self-knowledge. In his own criticism of the script, Derek Stanford claims Thomas "failed completely" in the aim of posing the question 'do the ends justify the means?.'⁴⁴ He claims that there is no inwardness of character and that only the final two lines of the work ("Did I set myself above pity?/Oh, my God, I knew what I was doing!") suggest that question. However, there are many suggestions earlier, both visually and linguistically, to lead the reader/viewer to question the doctor's methods and morality - the quotation printed above and the heavy

symbolism described in the previous section being just two such examples.

Thomas's Character Reflected in the Text

Aside from morality, Thomas's own attitudes and personality are reflected in the actions and dialogue of the characters through numerous instances of textual inversion, humour, and irreverence. The direct humour can be disregarded as it is present throughout all the scenarios, from the cat named 'Rover' in *Rebecca's Daughters* to the description of a cow as "like a coconut with four legs and a tail" in *The Beach of Falesá*. One of Thomas's favourite devices, however, was to bring humour through unexpected dialogue inversions. In this way, an underlying cynicism can also contribute to the motifs or themes of the story:

ANNABEL:

"You have to bring your shabby amours back into the house and *legalize* them."⁴⁵

We can see the same device in *Twenty Years A'Growing*. In an otherwise word for word narrative adaptation, Thomas inserts an additional sentence to the middle of a speech in order to air his own comic prejudices: "[I was going to school every day], growing older and none the wiser at all."⁴⁵ The direct humour aside, the inversions and irreverencies are also used to highlight and underline the themes and characteristics of individuals. In a similar tone to both the poetry and the later *Under Milk Wood*, Praying Howard (a graverobber from *The Doctor and The*

Devils) is given the lines "Quiet as death tonight/Praise be the Lord"⁴⁷ to show the inverted morality and lack of respect for convention. On a broader non-dialogue level, scene 17 of the same script shows the character of Murray stepping "quickly, carelessly" over the bodies of the poor in the street. This links visually to the previous scene, where Rock's condemns the hypocrisy of aristocracy, to be rebuffed by Murray's implication of awareness to the plight of the poor. These demonstrations of the thematic use of inversion extend beyond 'clever word play' and are integral to Thomas's ideal of the perfect film script where symbolism, themes and morality can be delivered through textual devices (in this case inversion and juxtaposition).

Under Milk Wood

In terms of stylistic development through both documentary and feature scripts, the films should be examined in relation to *Under Milk Wood*. I shall do this fully in a separate chapter, but there are several key points relating to the genesis of *Under Milk Wood* which must first be understood. The original prototype for *Under Milk Wood*, a projected feature scenario known as the 'Home Guard' script is thought to be lost although there is a possibility that it could exist somewhere within the Public Records Office. Extensive searches by both myself and John Ackerman have revealed nothing so far, but as there are complexities and inaccuracies within the system, the script may yet be discovered there. The fact that the script has not yet been

found is unfortunate as *Under Milk Wood* went through many stages from that original version to its production in 1953 and this early manuscript would help us to understand the development of the author during the course of one extended project. Regardless of this, the fact that *Under Milk Wood's* original presentation was to be cinematic helps us to realise the influence of Thomas's stylistic experimentations. Realising the problems he was having in overcoming the technical difficulties of the 'prose film' (problems such as those involving the replacement of technical directions with literary terms and the weaknesses in 'expositional' characters), Thomas dropped the original idea of presenting *Under Milk Wood* as a film.⁴⁸ Given the uninspiring attempt to transfer the play to film later, this was a wise move.

The ideal form for the 'film without pictures' turned out to be the radio play, and several of Thomas's linguistic devices developed in the film scripts are of particular relevance here. The method of including thought and action outside the narrative for example, allows the structure of the action to continue beyond the physical constraints of the visual form. Whereas cinema restricts the visual landscape to that which is seen, radio allows the listener to imagine the scene for themselves, and a much larger setting can therefore be utilized. This is something which Thomas had been attempting to emulate in his scenarios. A good demonstration of this would be the opening to *Twenty Years A'Growing*, where the description of the boisterous children reads;- "And they all scamper past the woman and the little

boy, making quite a noise, and past us and out of the picture." This final "out of the picture" implies that the lives and actions of the characters continue outside both the frame of the cinematic shot, and through a play on words, outside of the picture Thomas is telling us about. Although this is a relatively common device, Thomas states the "out of the picture" explicitly, re-enforcing the suggestion of 'life outside of the script'. Beyond the boundaries of what we actually see or read, the story continues. The narrator's voice then appears (as that of O'Sullivan in the film and book, but through implication, of Thomas in the scenario): "reminiscently talking, as a person to no audience but himself and a friend." This textual device was re-used frequently in *Under Milk Wood*, the intention being to bring the reader closer to the action (he/she is the friend) as only the narrator and reader have access to what is being said. The effect of this combination is to bring an immediacy to the script and action and an intimacy with the storyteller. The same effect is utilized in *The Doctor and The Devils* ("Now, with his eyes, we see...")

As well as utilizing structural and textual devices from the film scripts, *Under Milk Wood* contains several characters developed from the earlier scenarios. The direct prototypes of characters include Jennie Bailey and Elizabeth from 'The Doctor and The Devils' as Lily Smalls and Mrs Cherry Owen respectively. The latter can be demonstrated simply by comparing pieces of dialogue in which the imagery and phrases used by the characters are strongly linked:

ELIZABETH:

"He said his prayers, and then said he was a tiger in his bed."⁴⁹

MRS CHERRY OWEN:

"Then you danced on the table all over again and said you were King Solomon..."⁵⁰

The connection is not only linguistic, the image of the doting wife who supports her husband's 'unacceptable' behaviour being another important basis of both characters (as well as perhaps being an ironic comment on Thomas's own wife Caitlin, whose excesses frequently overshadowed her husbands). The examples given earlier of stylised speech and song were vital to the entire creation of *Under Milk Wood* too, and looking at the opening of *Twenty Years A'Growing* in comparison to the radio play, we can see directly where Thomas first created much of the material:

It is morning in the market/town of Dingle... The main street is wide awake... And suddenly we hear a crying and shouting... no audience but himself and a friend...

Twenty Years A'Growing pl.

It is spring, moonless night in the small town... the houses sleeping in the streets... Only you can hear and see, behind the eyes of the sleepers, the movements and... colours and dismays and rainbows and tunes... Only you can hear..."

Under Milk Wood pl.

Obviously, the phrasing in the 'stage directions' from *Twenty Years A'Growing* are not identical to that of *Under Milk Wood*, but the style and tone are very similar, as is the sense of intimacy and immediacy in both texts. It is another stage in the development of style which was to lead to *Under*

Milk Wood in its finished form. The use of the simple present and direct address to the reader were traits developed for the film scripts (the 'new form of prose') and were simply recalled later, in what turned out to be a far more appropriate and (as it so happened) successful format. The importance of the the feature work remains in its own right, however, in addition to its contribution towards the genesis of *Under Milk Wood*.

Other Scripts

The other feature scripts worked on by Thomas are, in the main, lost and cannot therefore be examined in detail. *Suffer Little Children*, a script which was thought to be lost, I have located in America. *Me and My Bike*, which was planned as a TV operetta, only reached the written form in the first of the five planned sections. The story was to be that of a boy in love with bikes, each section based around a different type of bike, to climax with the boy riding up to Heaven to the ringing of bicycle bells. The first section still exists in limited edition book form, and is of interest as it shows Thomas attempting yet a new form of writing. Although not strictly a feature, it remains relevant to this study, and has thus been examined in the chapter 'The Thomas Style'. The two British National Pictures scripts were apparently published in America, but are now out of print and the manuscripts lost. They are not of great individual interest in terms of originality as they are collaborations with three other writers, but Thomas worked as the final

draft script editor and re-wrote parts of the dialogue. Style, autonomy and unity of a 'Thomas' method or prose cannot therefore be completely claimed and thus these two scripts have been analysed in a separate chapter. *Vanity Faire, The Forgotten Story, Crippen, Robert Burns*, and the 'Dickens film' were all apparently completed, but apart from references in the letters and memoirs of others, no scripts can be found. *Shadowless Man* was started, but that is all the relevant information in existence except for the initial treatment that is printed in John Ackerman's book *Dylan Thomas: The Filmscripts*.

Footnotes

- 1 T.H. Jones, *Dylan Thomas* (Edinburgh & Oxford: Oliver and Boyd, 1963) pp88/9 in reference to Derek Stanford's critique of *The Doctor and The Devils*.
- 2 Only *Three Weird Sisters* and *No Room At The Inn* were produced during Thomas's lifetime. As the writing of these scripts was done in collaboration with three other writers and Thomas's main role was as final script editor, I am not counting these as completely 'Thomas' films. Neither, I believe, would have Thomas.
- 3 *Letters*, p805. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 4 The original idea for the publication of *The Doctor and The Devils* was to subtitle the work 'A Film Without Pictures'.
- 5 As early as July 1930, Thomas was writing in the 'SWANSEA GRAMMAR SCHOOL MAGAZINE' that films are "works of art in an entirely new medium."
- 6 Gwen Watkins, *Dylan Thomas and Vernon Watkins: Portrait Of A Friendship* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1983), p10.
- 7 Walford Davies, *Dylan Thomas; Early Prose Writing* (London: [n.pub.], 1971), pp.142-3.
- 8 *Portrait of a Friendship*, pp33/4.
- 9 *Letters*, p812. Letter to Caitlin.
- 10 Julian Maclaren-Ross, *Memoirs Of The Forties* (London: Sphere, 1991 [1965]) pp129/30.
- 11 *Letters*, p613. Letter to Graham Greene.
- 12 See earlier chapter on 'Documentaries'.
- 13 *Letters*, p540. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 14 *Letters*, p640. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 15 *Letters*, p850. Letter to A.J. Hoppè.
- 16 *Letters*, p850. Letter to A.J. Hoppè.
- 17 *Letters*, p642. Letter to David Higham.
- 18 *Memoirs of the Forties*, p127.
- 19 *Letters*, pp610-12. Letters to Graham Greene.
- 20 *Letters*, p858. Letter to E.F. Bozman.
- 21 Found on pp13/4 of the O'Sullivan version, and p152 of the Thomas version in Dylan Thomas, '*The Doctor and The Devils*' and *Other Scripts* (New York: New Directions, 1966).
- 22 There are numerous examples of Thomas's use of escapism, from the poem 'Once it was the Colour of Saying' and 'Being but men' to the short story 'The Fight'.
- 23 '*The Doctor and The Devils*' and *Other Scripts*, p152.
- 24 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc1.
- 25 Thomas mentioned this in several letters and conversations, but the best examples are perhaps the poems 'The Force that through the green fuse drives the flower' and 'Once it was the Colour of Saying' where the poet's inability to express internal emotions into written text is the very subject of that text.
- 26 Examples of Ibsen's use of stage directions are explained more fully in George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces* (London: Constable, 1934). p672.

- 27 Derek Stanford, *Dylan Thomas* ([n.p.]:Neville Spearman 1954). pp 174 & 180.
- 28 I am thinking here of the similar social divides shown in *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*.
- 29 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 1. I shall refer to *The Doctor and The Devils* by scene number as these are clearly marked in the text to enable any edition of the source material to be used as the version which I am using is no longer in print.
- 30 See previous chapter.
- 31 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 141.
- 32 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 95.
- 33 Dylan Thomas, *The Beach Of Falesá* (New York: Stein & Day, 1963.) p124.
- 34 Among others, this occurs in Scenes 27 and 31. The quote given below in the text is taken from Sc 31.
- 35 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 31.
- 36 I am thinking here of the stylised chant in Sc 118.
- 37 Thomas only completed the first half of this particular screenplay, the rest being in synopsis form. The fact that it was published despite this is a testament to the power and literary value of the work.
- 38 '*The Doctor and The Devils*' and *Other Scripts*, p172. (p32 of *Twenty Years A'Growing*).
- 39 There are many examples such as 'After The Funeral'(1938) or 'Fern Hill' (1945).
- 40 I use the word "at" deliberately, as the majority of Rock's 'conversations' take the form of speeches or monologues with occasional prompts from other characters.
- 41 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 13.
- 42 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 111.
- 43 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 16.
- 44 Stanford, p177. The script was written partly to ask the very question of the 'ends justifying the means' according to Donald Taylor's appendix to the published scenario.
- 45 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 11.
- 46 We can find this on p3 of the O'Sullivan version and in the Thomas version on p144 of '*The Doctor and The Devils*' and *Other Scripts* (p4 of *Twenty Years A'Growing*.)
- 47 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 14.
- 48 *Letters*, p805. Letters to Donald Taylor.
- 49 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 7.
- 50 *Under Milk Wood*, p36.

THE 'THOMAS STYLE'

In this chapter, I intend to show how all of Thomas's film scenarios combine en masse to create a recognisable body of work and an identifiable 'Thomas style'. To do this I shall first demonstrate some influences on Thomas's writing such as contemporary tastes and the legacy of thirties film noir. Several subjects, such as Thomas's politics and personal belief system are also examined in direct relation to style. I will then analyse three scripts, *No Room At The Inn*, *Me and My Bike*, and *Shadowless Man*, in relation to the 'Thomas style' and show how the poet's literary and cinematic diversification resulted in projects as varied as biopics and operatic collaboration.

Influences on Thomas's Writing

Running through many of Thomas's feature scripts (and with particular reference to *The Whispering Gallery*) there are numerous common threads in terms of approach and theme. Thomas often referred to his own love of 'B' movies, and through many of the works we can see devices familiar to numerous other films of the period. The use of mysterious settings (often in the form of gothic houses), a tendency towards the use of suspense thriller motifs and the characteristic presence of the supernatural are all familiar elements which were incorporated into Thomas's scripts. Even without reference to *The Doctor and The Devils*, scripts such as *The Three Weird Sisters*, *The Shadowless Man* and (presumably, given the subject matter)

Crippen could all be categorized as period pieces, easily recognisable as forties film noir. There are problems in respect to definite authorship with many of these films¹, but despite this, we can see how Thomas deliberately incorporated the atmosphere and tone of popular film genres into his own scripts.

Before examining specific elements of the scripts, it should be remembered that only two of Thomas's feature scripts were ever produced during the poet's lifetime. These scripts were *The Three Weird Sisters* and *No Room At The Inn*. The first of these was a tale of murder and intrigue set in an old and eerie house, the other a religious parable about orphan resettlement during the blitz. *The Three Weird Sisters* was created in the suspense genre that was particularly popular at the time, and *No Room At The Inn* was based around a subject still strong in the mind of a contemporary audience, which helps to explain why both scripts were produced when so many of Thomas's other scripts were not. Incidentally, one of the major reasons that *The Doctor and The Devils* was never produced during Thomas's lifetime was that the subject matter was viewed by Rank (who bought the script) as being too horrific for a forties audience, particularly in its being submitted so soon after the war. A letter from Donald Taylor to David Higham on the second of November, 1947, advises 'the film is unlikely to be produced before 1949 because of the general decision in the Rank Organisation to avoid horror and murder subjects'². The fact it was revived at all in the eighties indicates something of the quality of the script (Hollywood never

produces a film merely because a celebrated poet writes the script).

Although the script *The Whispering Gallery* is thought to be lost, Thomas and Maclaren-Ross's intentions towards the construction of the 'ideal script' are demonstrated the most clearly in the treatment written for *The Shadowless Man*³. Conceived specifically with Michael Redgrave in mind⁴, this film was intended to be similar in tone and mood to another Redgrave film, *Dead of Night*. The use of shadows, mysterious strangers and the supernatural would help to generate interest from 'film noir' fans but would also give the opportunity for a more experimental script⁵. Moving away from 'documentary-type realism', a supernatural setting allows more scope for direct visual symbolism, unconventional characters and events, and for non-linear construction. Although I am primarily concerned here with the autonomous artistic value of the scripts, it is too easy to lose sight of the fact that Thomas was working in a commercial market, and that whatever the merit of the script he was writing, the most important factor was still the need to appeal to contemporary audiences and hence to his potential investors. The style of film that was successful at the box office was therefore the type of film Thomas needed to write. Fortunately, Thomas's predilection for 'B' movies, detective fiction and the supernatural were fully compatible with the tastes of the time.

Film Noir

I have referred previously to Thomas's use of 'Film Noir'. Before detailing Thomas's use of this genre in

specific scripts, it is necessary to explain what is meant by the term film noir and why this genre is particularly relevant to the work of the poet. Film noir is not as narrow a term as is generally perceived, as the subjects of this genre can encompass anything from horror and mystery to comedy, and all combinations in-between. The term 'film noir' instead refers to the stylistic qualities of a film rather than any specific subject matter, and although the term has a tendency to be associated in the modern media with specific types of film (particularly the gangster movie), this is not necessarily the case.

It was the detective and gangster films and fiction which had most inspired Thomas however. From early youth the poet had been enthralled by the novels of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and other writers of detective fiction. Indeed, between January 1935 and September 1936, Thomas had worked for *The Morning Post* (later to become *The Daily Telegraph*) as a reviewer of detective fiction and thrillers, reviewing over one hundred novels. These novels themselves had been paramount in the genesis of film noir. Hammett, Chandler and many of the lesser known authors of the 'detective' genre had worked on the premise that they were writing more about the observable than about the fantastic. The plots of these stories would be relatively commonplace as similar events could be found regularly in the newspapers or seen on Pathè newsreels. Famous criminals and their crimes were newsworthy, and many (like Capone and Dillinger) had become popular heroes. Detectives such as Elliot Ness and the early F.B.I. agents had also risen to public

attention. All the detective novels (and many of the early 'film noirs') did was to place the reader (and the viewer) into situations about which they had previously fantasised⁶. The early film noirs and detective fiction from which they had sprung and with which they are still associated had simply provided their (respective and often overlapping) audiences with a way into the 'glamorous' world of twenties and early thirties gangland. As the 'noir genre' developed, films such as *Body Snatcher* (1945) and *Bedlam* (1946) provided a change from the "externalisation of the 'uncanny' towards the internal generation of guilt, fear, and persecution by the unknown"⁷. From gangster films, 'noir' had progressed to suspense and the supernatural.

Noir Dialogue

In both these sub-genres, language frequently became a weapon, often a measure of the hero's prowess; verbal sparring equating with the hero's masculine competence. Such heroic language was often tough yet controlled, cynical yet epigrammatic. Thomas's scripts provide obvious parallels in the form of Dr Rock (*Doctor and The Devils*), of Wiltshire (*The Beach of Falesá*) or even of Owen Morgan-Vaughan (*The Three Weird Sisters*). These characters' verbal dexterity and power acted to place them in the position of authority or superiority. This is particularly true in the case of Dr Rock in the earlier scenes of *The Doctor and The Devils*. From his popularity in lectures (for his style almost as much as from his knowledge) to the power of his moralistic monologues at the dinner table, it is the mastery

and confidence of language that identifies and empowers Rock as the 'hero' figure:

ROCK

"Do not suppose that, even after dinner and in one of those mellow, argumentative moods in which one would try to prove that black is white or that politicians are incorruptible, I regard the Ressurrectionists as anything but the vicious vermin of the gutters of the city; in fact, a pack of devils...

Write a scholastic pamphlet on the things that prowl in the alleys, afraid to see the light; they were men and women once. Be proud of *that* if you can."⁸

In this extract Rock acknowledges his own argumentative prowess whilst re-iterating the strength of his conviction concerning moral issues. He is confidently articulate and specific in his arguments, yet remains in control of his emotional state (he refers to his own 'mellow' moods whilst disputing).

Subtleties of speech and atmosphere-inducing language were particular strengths in Thomas's film writing. The shift in tastes and production of film noir from horror to suspense and the supernatural allowed more scope and range for the poet to focus his writing towards his own personally preferred styles. He could now write the type of script he enjoyed watching.

The Development of Film Noir

Of course many of the the 'noirs' retained in the same subjects (such as the overt horror films of Hammer) as the commercial idiom of 'if it ain't broke, don't try and fix it' came into play. The cyclical horror and detective films therefore remained.

The general shift towards the supernatural in many of the new 'noirs' however, did allow for the possibility of a shift away from the 'documentary realism' of detective biopics. Whilst usually retaining an observable and therefore more believable setting, ideas such as *The Shadowless Man* now became possible. More overt symbolism and more visual camera effects could be used, and the style of film favoured by Carl Mayer (such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*) could again be utilized.

Several times in his letters, and as early as the school essay on 'The Film' in July 1930, Thomas had referred to the importance of Mayer's script for *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*. In Maclaren-Ross's account of their proposed collaboration on *The Whispering Gallery*, he refers to Mayer's scripts as being the inspiration behind their own work. Both writers also loved Mayer's completed films and, for Thomas, the film maker's working methods were also something to be emulated. Mayer was renowned for his meticulous attention to detail at every stage of production and this was echoed by Thomas⁹. Both writers also focused on the use of location and camera as plot-related devices, Mayer having first pioneered the use of "the camera and settings as vital dramatic elements"¹⁰.

Stage Directions as Prose

I have previously explained Thomas's intention to replace generic camera directions, but it is necessary to examine how these directions were subsequently incorporated into the text. Like Mayer before him, Thomas would simply

describe the action, and detail how each frame would be seen. As the generic terms have been excluded, I must paraphrase slightly in order to explain how the intended effects could be achieved.

The opening of *The Doctor and The Devils* begins with Thomas's 'imaginary camera' swooping from a distance up onto a hill, continuing until it fills the screen with the small figure seen moments before in the background of the opening frame. The effectual growing in stature of the central figure in the opening shot against the background of nature (the 'huge sky, slow clouds' and 'lonely hill-top') is then set against a point of view (p.o.v) shot looking down on the gutters and alleys of 'civilisation'. This is in turn closely followed by a shot looking over Dr Rock's shoulders as he strides over the shabby streets and people, immediately setting him above these people and alongside the hugeness of nature, which, in turn, paves the way for the ending of the film.

At the end, this presentation of the doctor as 'more than human' is questioned by the character of Rock, discovering or admitting his own self perception as a 'little god'. The film is brought neatly to a close by recreating the opening shot in reverse, with the camera following Rock back up the huge hill and into the darkness. Without the direct use of camera directions in these opening and closing shots, Thomas creates an extra dimension within the text (as did Mayer) by fully describing the visual effects in narrative prose¹¹. The sections of 'directions' are not separated from the dialogue as they are in a

conventional shooting script. In relation to this particular example, it is also interesting to note that Mayer was particularly renowned for his attention to detail in the construction of the opening shots¹².

Incidentally, Mayer was working uncredited between 1932 and 1944 in various capacities in the London film world¹³. Given Thomas's interest in his work, it is quite possible that they met during this period.

With general regard to the style of the period, there was a common trend towards Mayer's view that the opening shot of a film should be a type of 'totalising overview' (as was the case with *The Doctor and The Devils*). Many of the films would have their opening moments shaped into a carefully edited sequence of shots which would offer the viewer a good general introduction to the film and (preferably) to one of the major characters. The most common method was to present the opening 'establishing shot' as a long shot which would then merge into a close up for the introduction of some significant narrative detail or character¹⁴. Thomas carried this method of introduction right through his cinematic career (and indeed, beyond it in *Under Milk Wood*) as, in relation to film fashion, this suited contemporary tastes.

Stretching the Boundaries of Literature

Thomas was attempting to extend the boundaries of his writing and of film development with his innovations in descriptive camera directions and the 'new form of prose' in *The Doctor and The Devils*. With these and other

experimentations, the scripts can be seen as stepping stones towards *Under Milk Wood*, where Thomas achieved, albeit in a different form, what he ultimately failed to do in the film scripts, namely the complete 'film without pictures' described in my chapter on the feature films.

Thomas tried to advance the limitations of his writing in other ways too. One script that is unfortunately still missing is the script for 'the Dickens film'. Like Thomas's choice of subject for *Shadowless Man, The Doctor and The Devils*, and *Rebecca's Daughters*, here Thomas chose a subject close to his own heart. According to Jack Lindsay, Thomas "had a natural love of Dickens."¹⁵ In her book, *Portrait of a Friendship*, Gwen Watkins details about Thomas's enthusiasm and fascination for Dickens¹⁶. This fascination culminated in one of his most ambitious film projects, namely a film about Dickens' life to be written entirely in Dickens own words, drawn from the autobiographical parts of his novels and other writings. At least part of this script was completed, although it eventually came to nothing due to financial disagreements with the producers¹⁷. This constant artistic stretching for new challenges (there were also two planned operas, a TV operetta, and various adaptations) is important to an understanding of both Thomas's work and life in the forties. The fact that little poetry was written in this period should therefore be seen less as a 'creative drought', and more as literary diversification.

With *Me and My Bike*, Thomas again attempted to extend the range of his writing. As Sydney Box, the producer, relates in his foreword to the book version, Thomas

claimed;- "I want to write the first original film operetta". The story was to be based around a man who loves bicycles. It would begin with a boy whose family were all horse lovers. The boy instead loved bikes. Only part of the first section was ever completed, but this is enough to provide a flavour of the plot and style of the piece.

As with the opening sequence of *The Doctor and The Devils*, this script begins with an extended descriptive overview:

We see, in half-darkness, a large country house. We move past the house towards the paddocks, and, as we move, so it grows lighter. We move into the stables-yards, and now it lightens into a cold, grey, winter dawn. And, from the shut stables, we hear a neighing of horses and the noise of their hoofs on cobbles...¹⁸

There are close stylistic parallels to the openings of *Rebecca's Daughters* or even *Under Milk Wood*. The use of the linguistic 'we see' or 'we move', as I have described earlier, replaces the camera directions. As this script continues, there are yet more examples of Thomas's attempts at innovation, one section even telling us that "we hear a chorus of horses, singing hoarsely in Yorkshire accents"¹⁹. The Thomas humour is always present, but giving himself such a fantasy setting for the script had allowed his imagination to move beyond reality, which would make filming very difficult if not impossible.

Looking on a different level, the natural speech patterns and relatively simple vocabulary indicate that Thomas was trying to write more directly to a mass audience and deliberately attempting to avoid accusations of

obscurity or convolution (such as those he had received for his poetry). It is also a direct result of learning to write documentary films. The script for *Suffer Little Children* also employs a more 'everyday', or at least less overtly poetic language. The balance of linguistic tone to subject matter was one of Thomas's greatest achievements in the later scripts.

Much of the dialogue in *Me & My Bike* is similar to some of Thomas's pub doggerel²⁰, and despite his description of the script as an 'operetta', he mentions it is for television, therefore intended for an ever widening audience of 'everyday' people. Thomas's dislike of what he referred to as "furtive academia" in *Doctor and The Devils* is well known, and by using recognisably commonplace language, he attempts to appeal to his non-academic audience. He also tried to counterpoint the fantastic elements of the plot by couching his descriptions in (generally) simple language²¹:

Morning, Ned!
Morning, Colonel.
How's the head?
Hurts infernal.
How's Brother Ted?
Keeping to his bed.
Something internal,
Maybe duodernal,
He's for the eternal
Overhead.

In this section, Thomas is inviting the audience to share in the parody of common language which is simultaneously accessible and yet retains a shared sympathy with the audience (such as the pun on 'duodenal'). The

phrases are deliberately punchy and direct in order to create an impact with the delivery of each line.

When the text reaches the song between Augustus and Georgina, the dialogue moved into something more recognisable as innuendo-replete music hall parlance than operetta:

GEORGINA: How stern you appear
With your penny-farthen,
Augustus my dear,
So imposing astride it
And not scared a bit
Oh, I'd have a fit
If I ever tried it!

AUGUSTUS: For you I would ride it,
Georgina my dear
From here to Camarthen...
Though it is, I admit,
Very sharp where you sit...

GEORGINA: You wobble and you sway!
AUGUSTUS: O speedily
GEORGINA: Indeedily
BOTH: Take the brute away!²²

Unfortunately, even if the film had ever been made, much of the humour which comes from the descriptions of the characters on the page (as horses, for example) would be lost, from Lady Grig's "neighing laughter" and "nosebag" to the descriptions of the children's lessons, each letter representing a racetrack ("A for Ascot, B for Bangor... G for Galway Races" etc). Because so much description is included in the directions, perhaps a radio-form such as that of *Under Milk Wood* would ultimately have suited the script better. Had Thomas lived it is quite justifiable to suggest the critical and commercial success of *Under Milk Wood* may have spurred a re-writing of unmade scripts such as *Me & My Bike*

into companion radio plays.

Me and My Bike also contains a profusion of names familiar from other Thomas scripts- 'Ned', 'Lightning' and 'Grig' having previously appeared in *Suffer Little Children* for example. Although Thomas took great care in the naming of characters as examined in my studies of *The Doctor and The Devils* and *Under Milk Wood*, when no special meaning is attached to the naming of the characters, the same set of names re-occur frequently. It is interesting to note that the name 'Thomas' appears with surprising frequency in the feature scripts.

No Room At The Inn

In Thomas's more conventional scripts, names and familiar reference points are used to re-enforce the themes of the plot. Where the scripts are set in the 'real world' (as opposed to the fantastic settings of *Me and My Bike* and *Shadowless Man*), the use of parallels and reference points is also introduced in order to convey messages of morality. Good examples of this can be seen in the biblical and literary imagery used by the children and the schoolteacher Judith Drave in the script for *No Room at The Inn*. It is Judith who reminds the other characters (and audience) of the parallels between 'Judas' and the nativity ('no room at the inn') to the narrative events, and through this it is Judith who highlights the hypocrisy of the superficially moral authority figures. Two of the most evocative scenes (and thus best examples of how familiar reference points were used) however, are spoken by the children. The first is

Norma's transposition of Blake's 'Jerusalem' (which she is told to learn for school) into a description of her contemporary world:

MARY O'RANE: 'O clouds unfold'.
NORMA: Cor, in'it tripe?
MARY O'RANE: No it isn't, it's lovely (*in something of her former middle-class tone*)
NORMA: Not *my* style, dearie.
'O clouds unfold'.
Bring me- blimey what do you want to bring me now?
MARY O'RANE: 'Chariots of fire'.
NORMA: Gawd, the things I want! Here, there's a kid pushing a barrer (*looks out of window*) - what yer got in yer chariot of fire?...²³

By couching this patriotic anthem in the speech patterns of lower class cockney children, Norma (Thomas) associates the grand England of patriotism with the realities of hardship, and connects the difficulties of wartime Britain with the grandiose image propaganda has produced, thus providing a social statement in addition to a comic interlude. Such 'debasement for effect' can also be seen in Thomas's other scripts, most similarly perhaps in the interchanges between Rock, his sister, and his wife in *The Doctor and The Devils* where the hypocrisy of 'social class' is similarly mocked.

On a less thematic and more stylistic level, there are strong parallels between *No Room At The Inn* and some of Thomas's documentary scripts. With their balanced audio-visual structure, *Our Country* and *On Wales* join pictures of everyday real life scenes with grand sermonizing dialogue. In these cases, Thomas used the grandiose for positive effects, linking 'working Wales' with the eternal hills:

And a man may journey still within the island gates
through the valleys and troubles over hills slag-black or
grey as slates... to where Wales waits
with hymns and coals and castles and tinplate
... The voice of the pick in the hand hewn seam
the hunger born pit pony and blind pony
... the valley's voice²⁴

In addition to the stylistic devices, there are many personal 'Thomas themes' which bind the 'lesser' scripts together, all of which are demonstrated in *No Room At The Inn*. I shall give specific examples from this script to illustrate this point, and must therefore make a brief comment on the authorship of the scenario. Halliwell's *Film Guide* attributes the script to Louise Birt, David Evans and Dylan Thomas and explains that the script is an adaptation of the 1945 stage play by Joan Temple. The producer, Ivan Foxwell, also contributed to elements of the script. Thomas was employed as the final script editor however, and re-wrote substantial portions of the dialogue. Certain sections are quite recognisably the autonomous work of the poet, and the contribution as final script editor gave Thomas the opportunity to revise the work of his co-authors into the 'Thomas style'. It therefore seems legitimate to analyse sections of this script and the general tone as being the work of Thomas²⁵.

The basic setting of *No Room At The Inn* is that of evacuees being placed in the care of a 'lower class' woman, Mrs Voray. The script describes the changes in the children under her care and the discrepancy in the attitudes of the 'respectable' citizens who condemn the actions of the foster

mother and yet are are unwilling to put themselves out by taking in the children themselves. The recurring theme is of hypocrisy and class bigotry (themes repeated in *Rebecca's Daughters*, *Suffer Little Children*, and *The Doctor and the Devils*).

There are several major points which should be made about this script in respect of hypocrisy and class morality. First there is the way Thomas emphasizes the fact that lack of money or 'respectability' does not necessarily signify that children will grow into wicked or morally bankrupt adults. Of the two main children, Norma continues her shoplifting into adulthood, but Mary O'Rane grows into a respectable woman. Both were in the care of Mrs Voray, and through the opening passage (which looks back on their childhood), Thomas emphasizes how people always have the opportunity to shape their own future:

I shuddered to think how easily it might have been me... Yes, Norma is a thief. I know much more than that. I know *why* she is a thief... You see, once I thought stealing was quite unimportant... How well I remember, years ago...²⁶

Mary is introduced as a respectably raised young girl who has difficulty adjusting to the surroundings of Mrs Voray's. Through her experiences in the new surroundings, and particularly the need she finds for mutual support and friendship (in her case focussing on a sickly boy called Ronnie), Mary learns important lessons about human nature regardless of class or money. She gradually realises that her respectable background does not make her any 'better'

than the other children. Summing this up is Norma's line half way through the script where she points out Mary's failings despite her apparently superior education—"perhaps you won't be so stuck up now, Mary O'Rane".

Many of the themes and devices demonstrated here are similar in tone and execution to sections of *Suffer Little Children*, with the characters of Betty and (in the early drafts) Sophie. I will examine these links in more detail in my chapter on *Suffer Little Children* and Thomas's working methods, as the parallels extend far beyond just those of a child coping and learning through adverse circumstances.

In the above example from *No Room At The Inn* though, the themes are specific in their context. The 'war spirit' of defiance through adversity is shown in the attitudes of the children, yet seems missing in some of the more 'respectable' folk of the town and there is an easily identifiable dichotomy between the positive and negative characters. Delivered in sermon-like sections of dialogue (such as the above example), the moral message is emphasized heavily.

The juxtaposition of lower class characters with high moral attitudes is a Thomas trait which is often used to highlight particular hypocrisies such as the unfair treatment of Betty in the early sections of *Suffer Little Children*²⁷. In *No Room At The Inn*, lower class settings are also used to highlight this juxtaposition, as in the transposition seen just a few minutes before the 'Jerusalem' speech, where Norma recites the story of "Cinder-blooming-grella" to the other children, moving the action from an

unreal fairytale land to the children's own home, still in war-time, but with no ration books, and with dances and individual bath-tubs:

Well once upon a time, and a long time ago it was...so long ago you could pop in a shop and ask for an a'porth of Dolly Mixtures- and they'd give you a bag as big as a barrage balloon- and no coupons either... One day a feller called the Prince- 'course he wasn't a prince really- that was because all 'igh up he was, he own'd a string of barrers, he 'ad a boozer and a pawn shop next door. Well, he was 'aving a bit of a party for his clicks. Dirty-Gertie and Cosie-Rosie were going, but he didn't ask Cinderella, 'cos he didn't know 'er... And the fairy godmother says "I'm your fairy godmother!" And Cinderella says, "blimey!" And the fairy godmother does her stuff!²⁸

Despite Norma's lowly status and characteristics, she acts as a type of social commentator and as a parallel to the schoolteacher Judith Drave. Although Judith Drave is full of good intentions, the obvious religious and social commentaries that come through the dialogue are far more effective from the lips of Norma, a character who is actually living the 'poor' life, and whose hopes and aspirations are simple. The use of Cinderella as a reference point carefully counterpoints Judith's use of the Bible. Although religious references are just as relevant to the 'upper' and 'lower' classes, the fairy tale story of a poor girl oppressed by her 'high status' family is particularly useful as a reference point for the lower class characters.

Through the use of the Cinderella story, the audience can also see direct parallels to the life of Mary O'Rane (around whom the plot is based). Mary comes from a relatively well off background and is forced by the war into a 'lower

class' home. She is initially mocked and isolated by her 'step-sisters', but gradually the girls learn and adopt the positive values of their respective lifestyles. In Ronnie and Norma, Mary finds friends and the spirit of mutual aid that seem to be missing in the other less financially challenged characters. In the opening speech, at which point her character has grown to adulthood, we are told that Mary eventually triumphed over her misfortunes and found regular employment (she also appears quite respectable). More importantly, we are told that she has developed a degree of sympathy and understanding for the plight of Norma, making her a 'better person' than the townfolk who disparaged the lifestyle of Mrs Voray.

Thomas has succeeded in presenting an unsophisticated moral message, and through the realism of setting and dialogue, has created a film which would appeal to audiences of the immediate post-war period, when evacuation was still in recent memory and the ideals of the 'war spirit' were still in currency. It also echoes the ideals of his contemporary society and the post-war labour government.

Elements of social and religious ideal such as the sections of script containing the 'Jerusalem' and 'Cinderella' dialogues are entirely of Thomas's own invention, and show how the poet developed the original Birt/Evans script and incorporated his own style and beliefs (social and religious) into the text.

Understanding Thomas's View of Religion

Unfortunately, the introduction of Thomas's religious beliefs is a difficult and confusing issue. Throughout his life Thomas frequently denied that his work was religious. If we look to the letters, we read that Thomas has difficulty admitting to religious morals, and is even a little vague or unsure on his own status: "I'm afraid I couldn't with honesty *plead* as a Christian, although I think I am one"²⁹. The best way to approach this statement (and Thomas's religion in general) is to remember Thomas's general philosophy and his 'universal sympathy'. Thomas had a religious upbringing, and knew the Bible well, but his attitudes were not specifically Christian. The principles of Christianity (many of which coincide with his theory of 'universal sympathy' anyway) formed the centre of Thomas's religion rather than the institution and dogma of the Church. Equality, freedom, kindness and a belief in some sort of God (even if this sometimes took the form of 'Nature' rather than the more conventional figure) formed the basis of religion in Thomas's scripts. Rock in *Doctor and The Devils* setting himself up as a "little god", Blaise in *Shadowless Man* in his pact with the 'Grey Man', and the first voice of dissension from the preacher Mordecai Thomas in *Rebecca's Daughters* show a direct religious influence. The titles of *Suffer Little Children*, *Rebecca's Daughters* and *No Room At The Inn* themselves are obvious religious references³⁰. Through the characters themselves, from the Missionary in *The Beach of Falesá* and religious characters in *Rebecca's Daughters* and

No Room At The Inn, to the moral and Christian standpoints of Judith Drave, Anne Meredith and the narrators of *Our Country* and *On Wales*, there is an obviously religious layer to be found within the scripts. This is morally or referentially based however, and it is important to remember that the church's institutions and hypocrisies are themselves the subject of examination and attack.

The moral inequality which Thomas disparages in his letters is obviously present in the filmscripts. The concentration is on money over morality, or at the very least the imbalance of the two in *No Room At The Inn* and in the attitude of Rock's sister to his wife Elizabeth in *Doctor and The Devils*. The automatic assumption is that Betty's character in *Suffer Little Children* must be immoral because she is poor. The snobbery of the sisters in *Three Weird Sisters* and the colonial attitude towards the natives in *The Beach of Falesá* also reflect the apparent hypocrisy of money and morality. Thomas blamed the church for much of this. A quotation from his letters (primarily about his reasons for objecting to the war) demonstrates just how strongly Thomas felt about the subject:

Chapel Wales is down on conscription all right, but my objection can't be on chapel-religious grounds, and I'd have little support. What have we got to fight for or against? To prevent Fascism coming here? It's come. To stop shit by throwing it? To protect our incomes, bank balances, property, national reputations? I feel sick. All this flogged hate again.³¹

Thomas openly denigrates hypocrisy and the attitudes that it breeds. Annabella's attitude to Rock marrying

'below himself' exemplifies this:

"People have long memories. They don't forget that you disgraced your name, and mine, and defied every social decency when you married..."³⁰

In an inverted example, there is a parallel to the Committee's defence of Mrs Voray's suitability to foster children in *No Room At The Inn*. In this case, the male Committee members who defend Mrs Voray do so because of their implied sexual relationships with her rather than on the empirical evidence, which suggests she is indeed unsuitable. In *Suffer Little Children*, the Magistrate cannot decide between conflicting character references about Betty, but states that "And that there was the intention to steal, is beyond doubt". Betty is actually innocent of the crime (stealing a ring from Miss Seymour-Carr), but the fact she has previously spent time in a Reform School means that she is automatically assumed to be guilty. Meanwhile Mrs Foster, a lower class and generally unpleasant woman, initially defends Betty, claiming "No-one is guilty until proved so". Thomas highlights that authority is riddled with prejudice here, and that 'lower' characters are often fairer than those conventionally deemed superior (in this case Mrs Foster and the Magistrate respectively). Given that many people viewed the poet himself as being of low moral character, this imbalance of appearance and morality perhaps appears as a reaction to Thomas's own public image.

Thomas 'in' his Scripts

The inclusion of Thomas's views and personal interests is widespread in the lesser known scripts and there are also many examples of self-reference and parody. The directions for *Suffer Little Children* even include lines where Thomas occasionally transfers his own emotions and annoyances to the directions where they are completely irrelevant. In the example below, the word blasted is superfluous to a line with the only purpose of providing stage directions. Thomas's own irritation at being surrounded by draft scripts and re-writes (this section was written in the cramped surroundings of Majoda) is included in the written text:

Knott sits on the edge a chair, lost among books and papers, like a man in a blasted library.³³

The use of characters representing Thomas's own beliefs is quite widespread in the scripts, with elements of Owen Morgan-Vaughan (*Three Weird Sisters*), Knott (*Suffer Little Children*), Case (*The Beach of Falésa*), and Lord Sarn (*Rebecca's Daughters*) being if not autobiographical, then certainly being Thomas's interpretation of his own image.

Thomas's experiences and memories also contribute to his scripts in a non-literal manner. In addition to the semi-autobiographical passages of *Twenty Years A'Growing* for example, the surroundings and social values of his family and friends helped to form the poet's own beliefs. On an additional level, the freedom of a child in the countryside away from the unpleasant practicalities of

finance, image, and social politics also reflects Thomas's own belief system directly. Thomas cared about many things, but longed for the lost escapism of childhood. His general philosophy is therefore often idealized and unspecific in terms of practical solutions to the problems of the world.

Politics and War

To fully understand this 'general philosophy', it is necessary to return to the specific politics of the poet. This is vital in order that a totalizing overview of Thomas's belief system and thus the 'Thomas style' can be created. The underlying belief system explains not only practical politics, but also Thomas's attitude to class, hypocrisy, religion and film writing as a whole.

Despite having broadly socialist sympathies, practical party politics did not concern Thomas during the thirties and forties. Indeed Thomas was as quick to parody the left as the right, as a number of his letters clearly demonstrate³⁴. Thomas's politics instead were based around a broader philosophy. He claimed in 1934 that:

I take my stand with any revolutionary body that asserts it to be the right of all men to share, equally and impartially, every production of man from the sources of production at man's disposal, for only through such an essentially revolutionary body can there be the possibility of a communal art.³⁵

Thomas later went back to review this opinion as being too naive, but retained the same broad outline. Augustus John

claimed (though this is disputed by Jack Lindsay) that Thomas actually did join the Communist party, only to subsequently distance himself in order to avoid his work being seen as propaganda³⁶- rather ironic given Thomas's wartime employment writing propaganda films for the M.O.I. For one so apparently naive, Thomas had a powerful streak of cynicism concerning party politics, claiming in a letter later in 1951, that "I, too, belong to no political party. I am a Socialist, and, so far as I know, there is no Socialist party"³⁷. This disillusionment in itself contributed to some of Thomas's attitudes towards, for example, hypocrisy and Wales.³⁸

Thomas was certainly an objector to war, and was going about collating a book to be called *Objections to War* from articles by other writers in 1939, but his sense of outrage at World events (coupled, with a wish to avoid conscription at all costs) led to his writing the documentary films. Concentrating in his best work on the positive ideals of pre-war England and Wales (particularly *Our Country* and *On Wales*), Thomas still managed to write in the style he felt did not constitute a prostitution of his own talents. Although frequently flippant about the war ("I don't know what to do either: declare myself a neutral state, or join as a small tank"³⁹), Thomas was relieved to still be doing something for the war effort, which he summed up as relating to "Hitler, Poland, and insanity". He felt the poet's work was to write, and this alone should be enough ("I've no wish to propagandise, nor to do anything but my own work") but working in films, even propaganda films, was something

tangible to contribute towards ending the war.

One element which dominates most of the documentaries, and *No Room At The Inn* in particular, is Thomas's view on the unfairness of war itself, and the particular loathing he felt for the enthusiasm some people professed for fighting. Thomas knew the war must be fought, but the following passage, from one of the few letters when his anger showed through, demonstrates how strong his objections to the war 'movement' really was:

Others might like to be told that the only pacifists you come across are sexual perverts or elderly ladies worried about their dividends... Perhaps the only socialists you come across are teetotal fruitarians... If to undergo contemporary reality to its most extreme is to join in a war - the evil of which is the war itself & not the things it is supposed, wrongly, to be attempting to exterminate - against people you do not know, and probably be killed or maimed, then one can only say flippantly that the best poems about death were written when the poets were alive... Is it any worse to receive a good salary for muddling information, censoring news, licking official stamps etc, than it is to kill or be killed for a shilling, or less, a day?... Why a martyr anyway? The only reason one will go to jail is if a tribunal refuses to register one as an unconditional objector & then if one will not do the services, substitute for military service, which the tribunal enforces."⁴⁰

Thomas and Wales

In a previous chapter I have given examples of how the social and general politics of the poet were incorporated into the documentaries, and a cursory glance at scripts such as *No Room At The Inn* or *Rebecca's Daughters* re-affirms this influence in the features. Looking at Thomas's personal and political attitudes to Wales however, we can see an additional facet of the Thomas belief system which was incorporated into the scripts.

In *Our Country*, Thomas had demonstrated his love of the Welsh land and had attempted to link the people's struggle with nature's struggles against erosion and the ravages of time. The purpose of this was to suggest that Welsh men must be the same as the Welsh land - they must be firm and rock-solid against adversity in the same way as the hills and the valleys around them. These words were linked in the film to pictures of common men working in the Rhondda Valley. This was not the director's idea, but is actually marked on the script, the intention being to inspire Wales with a re-affirmation of its natural strength and beauty. Thomas believed this fully and, as his poetry of place proves, the land itself was a source of inspiration.

It is important not to overstate this point, as all wartime documentaries were necessarily positive in their attitude to all parts of Britain. Thomas could not have had an anti-Welsh film produced even if he had wished to do so. The documentary scripts, however, show a genuine enthusiasm for the subject and a genuine love of the Welsh land. We should also remember that Thomas not only wrote the script for *On Wales* and *Our Country*, but was involved in production and selection of location and shots. Incidentally in other scripts, the Missionary in 'Falésa', the pun on 'Dew Drop Inn' (*Suffer Little Children*) to the very setting of *Rebecca's Daughters* in Camarthen are all inspired by the Welsh. The language and rhythms of the Welsh also influenced much of Thomas's work, of course.

The poet's attitude to the people of Wales however, is far more complex and not always so positive. The anomaly

comes in scripts such as *Three Weird Sisters* where the audience is treated to one of Thomas's more famous quotes- "Land of my Fathers. As far as I'm concerned, my Fathers can keep it". Although often comic in delivery, Owen Morgan-Vaughan, Thomas's alter-ego in the script, is fiercely critical and parodic of Wales, and particularly of provincial Wales:

...he's a Welshman by the lilt in his voice. Huh, little black back-biting hypocrites, all gab and whine... Oh the mystical Welsh- huh! About as mystical as slugs!... Where are we now? Hell or Wales?

Dialogue by Owen Morgan-Vaughan
from *Three Weird Sisters*

Similarly, the use of dogs to represent the Welsh congregation during Mabli Hughes sermon is seemingly opposite to Thomas's apparent love of his homeland. The answer to this anomaly would seem to be the same as that to Thomas's politics and religion. Thomas adored the Wales he knew as a child and loved the natural beauty of the scenery. What he often disliked was the pretension and posturing of the Welsh: the apotheosis of the coal-pit and choirs. Looking at *On Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain*, we can see the 'middle ground'. Here, the rocks and mountains are praised and the practical contribution made by the pits and workers are presented together. In reality Thomas had mixed emotions, and never fully reconciled himself with his position in Wales. In London and America he was Welsh, but in Wales he was anglicised and non-Welsh speaking. Even in Laugharne he was an outsider, and this may have prompted his (sometimes vicious) mockery of the pettiness and

provincialism of Welsh towns. This combination of love, memory and displacement perhaps provides the best overview of Thomas's feelings towards the land of his birth.

The Ultimate Script?

Linking together all of the traits common to Thomas's scripts, there is one scenario which typifies the 'Thomas style' in practice. I have previously avoided analysis of *Shadowless Man* as only the initial scenario remains, but this scenario is actually one of the best examples of what Thomas was attempting to create in film. Allegorical in nature, *Shadowless Man* brings together religion, morality, justice and the supernatural, and although areas such as 'Welshness' are absent, it is the nearest remaining work we have to the ethos of the proposed *Whispering Gallery* and is therefore the nearest to the 'ideal' Thomas script.

The idea for *Shadowless Man* was first formulated in 1947, and Thomas envisaged the film as "a dark and fantastic romance of the German 1830's"⁴¹ It was a supernatural tale of a young man, Blaise, who sells his soul (in the form of his shadow) for a bottomless purse of gold, the 'Purse of Fortunatus'. In true Faustian manner, he then recognises and regrets his mistake, eventually redeeming himself by giving his life willingly to save that of his love, Mary. John Ackerman relates this to a film Thomas enjoyed as a youth, *Student of Prague*.⁴² The only remaining manuscript for this proposed film (although it was apparently completed with the aid of Margaret Taylor) consists of the opening passages

plus an extended treatment of about thirteen pages. It is interesting to note that even in this condensed form, Thomas has retained all of his 'cinematic devices', giving detailed descriptions and dialogue and including some of the generic forms he had developed to replace camera directions in earlier scripts:

And, suddenly: the cairn becomes the tall grey man standing there at the sea's edge, still and silent, staring at Blaise...

And now Blaise is a beggar wandering from place to place, doing menial jobs for food and lodging but never for money which he now refuses to touch...

And the voice of Blaise, under the shadow, says to Mary: 'Yes, I can cure you. I can cure you as I cured the animals. I took their pain. You are dying and I can take your death to myself.'⁴³

Though only a treatment, the script is very powerful, and includes those elements, thematic and stylistic, which Thomas wanted in a film. In many ways it parallels the tone, subject and mood of the projected *The Whispering Gallery*.

The script opens with an echo of 'Nosferatu', as the mysterious stranger arrives. After this Mephistophelean 'Grey Man' has tempted Blaise to sell his shadow for the untold riches, Blaise becomes terrified at his own shadowless form, but continues living his rich man's life because he has fallen in love with the beautiful Mary. Meanwhile, Blaise's best friend Johnny is surreptitiously stealing vast amounts of money from him. The 'Grey Man' appears again and offers Blaise back his shadow if he will sign away his soul. Discovering what happened to Conrad, the 'Grey Man's' previous 'partner', Blaise refuses and tries to kill his tormentor. He fails and flings the 'Purse of

Fortunatus', the cause of his misery, over a cliff leaving himself both penniless and shadowless. Blaise's previous servant Nick, has meanwhile revealed his old master's evil pact to Mary's parents, who have given her to Nick as his wife in return. Blaise is alone. Eventually, wandering the country, Blaise discovers he has the ability to heal deformed and crippled creatures, but only by taking their afflictions upon himself. He does so, and after a time becomes hideous and deformed. The 'Grey Man' appears and offers him a return to health, his shadow, and the location of Mary if he will sign away his soul. The disfigurements will return to the animals, but, after all, "what are animals?". Blaise refuses, saving both the animals and his own soul, and commands the 'Grey Man' to go away forever. The film ends as a dangerously ill Mary comes to see this fabled healer, who is by now quite unrecognisable. Blaise takes her death upon himself, and doing so, regains his natural form, which we see in shadow as he dies.

The script takes in many of Thomas's traits and links together the innovations of his other scripts, from the hypocrisy of money (*No Room At The Inn*, *Rebecca's Daughters*, *The Beach of Falésa*) to religious parables (*No Room At The Inn*, *Suffer Little Children*) and to the dark supernatural (*Whispering Gallery*). The script was turned down by 'Wardour Street', but there was a suggestion that Thomas would attempt to work with Cocteau on the film, although nothing further is known about the outcome.⁴⁴ This is very unfortunate, because Thomas's enthusiasm and the quality of the treatment suggest that *Shadowless Man*, if completed,

could possibly have been one of his finest film scripts. The evocative nature of the opening poetry, where Thomas again gives a realistic picture of everyday British life, succeeds in its attempts to convey not only the plot and symbolism, but also the enthusiasm of the author. It also succeeds in combining poetry with narrative like the lexically similar *Our Country*, and can be seen as a precursor of *Under Milk Wood*, with its fluid scene setting and descriptive opening:

There are *shadows* in bright sunlight.
Shadows of tall trees on dusty roads
Of Village bright church towers, the bells ringing.
Of cattle drinking, their shadows on the midged and hazy,
lazy summer water,
Of sheep angled on white cliffs
Of lambs about their mothers...
Of peasant lovers in deep and idle early evening
lanes...
Of large cottage loaves, and large teapots on white tea
cloths spread on tressle tables under garden
trees...⁴⁵

Pushing Back the Boundaries

There are several other scripts worked on by Thomas which I have not yet examined. This is in main, due to the fact they were incomplete or have been subsequently lost. In relation to common themes and Thomas's aim to expand his writing horizons by experimenting with new forms, it would be useful here for me to give a basic 'scriptography' detailing the other areas in which Thomas worked. The 'other films' fall into three basic categories; those planned as films which became something else, those incompleated or lost, and those which were inspired by the experiences and

lessons learned from his film career

There are two scripts worked on by Thomas which began life as ideas for films but which later transpired to be something else. With the growth of television in the late forties, one of these turned into a television script. 'A Story' (later to become known as *The Outing*) was written specifically to be filmed, although the form it eventually took was that of a solo performance piece⁴⁶. 'A Story' was a narrative set in the South Wales of Thomas's youth and was similar in style to many of his 'other' short stories, with which it is now grouped. The second script was to be a documentary on the Anglo-Iranian Oil company, to be written while Thomas was in Persia in January 1951. In his letters he wrote- "I'm going to Persia to write a filmscript for Anglo-Iranian Oil - some kind of technicolour documentary, though God knows what it will turn into..."⁴⁷. Not long after Thomas's return, the film was cancelled for political reasons, when the Anglo-Iranian Oil company had all their assets confiscated. The film then turned into a broadcast for the BBC Home Service on April 17, entitled 'Persian Oil', for which Thomas received ten guineas.

The 'Aborted' Films

The film scripts which were not completed and have been lost run to a larger number, and give us a better idea about the areas on which Thomas worked. The first of these was to be a technicolour version of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, which was to star Margaret Lockwood. Thomas began his 'treatment'

for the film in July 1949 and had hoped to complete the script by October⁴⁸. It was never finished and is presumed to have been aborted. This was to be his last script for Gainsborough, and was intended to provide some financial stability, so would have been taken very seriously by Thomas (and Caitlin)⁴⁹. Thomas only agreed to adaptations of things in which he was interested, and Thackeray was an author whom Thomas admired greatly.

In 1945, Thomas also worked with Donald Taylor on a biographical film of Robert Burns, which was only cancelled when Taylor discovered that Paramount already had a production on the subject under way, a musical with Bing Crosby. Between 1943 and 1945, Thomas also worked at Strand with Phil Lindsay on a biography of Crippen. Apart from his historical interest in Crippen, we can see similarities in the subject matter to that of the Dickens film, *The Doctor and The Devils* and the Victorian and Gothic settings which fascinated the poet.

The Lost Films

There were four other recorded film titles which were apparently completed, three of which have been lost. The first is referred to several times in Thomas's letters as *The Forgotten Story*⁵⁰ but unfortunately, apart from the date it was written (early 1948) and the fact that it was for Gainsborough, no more is known. Another of the films was to be called *Nightingales*, and was based on a story by one of Thomas's friends, the actor Clifford Evans. Thomas was keen

to work on the script, but financial disagreements with Ealing Studios meant he pulled out very early in pre-production⁵¹. The film was later made as *A Run For Your Money*.

Another documentary script with Julian Maclaren-Ross that has been lost is the 'Home Guard' script. As I related in the previous chapter, this is very unfortunate, as this particular script apparently formed the genesis for *Under Milk Wood*, and was by all accounts a bizarre and innovative script. The text included multiple plots and characters such as fifth columnists, free Japanese, and an ex-master of disguise German paratrooper in an eccentric village somewhere in England⁵². The final lost film in this category was to be a film version of Thomas's unfinished novel *Adventures In The Skin Trade*, which was to end, he told Julian Maclaren-Ross, with:

'the hero shivering stark naked on Paddington Station, having lost all his clothes at strip poker in the course of the story. The last shot of the film version was to show a bottle slipping from the hero's finger and shattering on the stone-cold platform'⁵³.

Plays and Opera

There are three operatic collaborations and two more plays on which Thomas worked. The plays (like *Under Milk Wood*) were written in the format he had first developed for the 'film without pictures'. One of these was to be a verse play based around a pub crawl in Camarthen. The second, *Two Streets*, was to be a serious work for two players, a story of

a boy and a girl growing up separately in Swansea who repeatedly come close to meeting but always miss the opportunity. They appear to be destined for each other, but only meet at the very end of the play, too late to become lovers. The play was to begin dramatically with the screams of the two mothers in labour and the screams of the infants. There are many rumours that these two pieces still exist but their owners are at present unknown.

The three operas came again from Thomas's wish to extend his own repertoire and writing abilities. The first of these, to be written with William Walton in 1947, was to be set in the Thames docklands and was, according to Thomas, to be:

...a full length grand opera for William Walton... A very modern tragic opera, in the bombed slums of wharfland. If this ever comes to anything, it will be the biggest operatic event of the century... A whole Covent Garden season on 1949 is contemplated..."⁵⁴.

Thomas began researching with Michael Ayrton, who was to be the designer. According to Ayrton, the poet's eventual contribution was a postcard with only the lines "With a sound like thunder-claps, The little mouse comes out, perhaps" and the proposed collaboration fell through. The other two operatic collaborations (both with Stravinsky) fared better, but were incomplete at the time of his death. The first was to consist of a scene from *The Odyssey*. Descriptions of this project vary, some people claiming Stravinsky's only contribution was to be incidental music, others claiming it was to be a fully fledged operatic collaboration (the former view seems to carry the most

support). According to Fitzgibbon, it was a combination of the two with incidental music, two or three arias, and a section of pure poetry⁵⁵. Michael Powell, the would-be director, has remained tight lipped about how much work was actually completed, keeping this information for his own memoirs⁵⁶. Here too, though, it is quite possible some text still exists.

The third opera (on which Thomas was working at the time of his death) was to be quite innovative in terms of subject matter. According to Gwen Watkins recollections:

The opera was to describe the holiness of Earth which had been devastated, leaving alive only one old man and his children. Visitors from another planet would come to take the children away; and the old man, who alone remembered the beauty and mystery of Earth, would try to describe them to the visitors and his children, who had been too young to know these things.⁵⁷

According to Fitzgibbon, Tremlett and Brinnin, the boundaries of Thomas's writing were to be pushed to their limits. Although their accounts vary slightly, the consensus is that the plot concerned aliens landing on a post-holocaust Earth. Life would start again as a tree ('The Tree Of Knowledge) which would push its way upwards through the radioactive dust. This would begin a second garden of Eden, where the only survivors would first have to find a name for the tree and its uses, and from these beginnings would formulate the basis of a new universal language. There would be a re-creation of language, with no abstractions, only people, objects, and words. "No conceits, I'll knock them all on the head," was Thomas's claim to Stravinsky. Names would be found for everything on Earth, the landscape

would be fantastic, everything shaped and coloured by the dreams of primitive man, and even the rocks and trees would sing⁵⁸.

The script was to combine the anthropomorphic singing and stylisation of *Me and My Bike* with the creation of a new subject matter for the poet. He would attempt to push the fears of post-nuclear destruction to the forefront of his art. Thomas died before the work was completed, but according to a newspaper displayed on the wall of the Thomas Museum at the 'Boathouse' in Laugharne, Caitlin returned from United States after her husband's death with part of the manuscript.

Subsequent Productions

Of the films made from the scripts after Thomas's death, two were eventually produced, namely *Rebecca's Daughters* and *The Doctor and The Devils*⁵⁹. Unfortunately, for the needs of a contemporary audience the scripts had to be edited and revised (by Guy Jenkin and Ronald Harwood respectively). This means that the films we see are not fully as Thomas intended (though much of his original dialogue is retained). Although both are relatively faithful to the story, Thomas's directions and descriptions have, in main, been ignored or re-written. We cannot therefore really view them as the films Thomas actually wrote, the descriptions being an integral part of the poet's vision. An entire feature film purely by Thomas has never been produced in the way he intended.

Footnotes

- 1 *Three Weird Sisters*, though recognisably Thomas, was a collaboration with three other writers, Thomas's contributions being the last in his capacity as script editor. *Shadowless Man* script is still missing, only the initial treatment remaining; this can be found in *Filmscripts*, p268. My assumption is that *Crippen* fits in with the other scripts is based on the way Thomas and the film company worked, as well as the subject matter itself. The actual script is lost, with only references to it in the letters and other books remaining.
- 2 Ferris, p229/30. This is apparently true, despite the retained popularity of Hammer films at the time.
- 3 I am disregarding the sections relating to technicalities such as prose stage directions as the extant section of the script is in reported speech and scenario form.
- 4 *Letters*, p660. Letter to John Davenport.
- 5 I am using the term 'film noir' in retrospect to represent the group of films to which the label was later attached.
- 6 Frank Krutnik, *In A Lonely Street; Film Noir, genre, masculinity* (London & New York:Routledge, 1991), pp43 & 189.
- 7 *Film Noir*, p180.
- 8 *Doctor and The Devils*, Sc 16.
- 9 In the previous chapter I have demonstrated Thomas's interest in every level of production in regard to the scripts for *C.E.M.A.* and *The Doctor and The Devils*.
- 10 Robert Weine, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (London:Lorrimer, 1984 [1972]), p29.
- 11 Although I am referring to Mayer as the pioneer of these techniques, his scripts were never written to be published. This is where Thomas differs in his approach.
- 12 *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, p29.
- 13 *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, p32.
- 14 *In A Lonely Street*, p5.
- 15 *Memoirs of the Forties*, pp21/2.
- 16 *Portrait of a Friendship*, p136.
- 17 *Letters*, p526 & p530. Letters to Donald Taylor.
- 18 Dylan Thomas, *Me and My Bike* (London:Triton, 1965), p1.
- 19 *Me and My Bike*, p11.
- 20 An example of Thomas's pub doggerel is given in Dylan Thomas, *The Poems*, ed. by Walford Davies (London:Dent, 1990 [1971]), p242. ('A Pub Poem') and in a note on p281.
- 21 *Me and My Bike*, p41.
- 22 *Me and My Bike*, pp46 & 48.
- 23 *Filmscripts*, p340.
- 24 *Our Country*, pp3/4.

- 25 The only 'scripts' available are the 'photo' story attributed to Thomas & Ivan Foxwell (the Producer) and the transcript of the script in *Filmscripts*, p320. which must serve as the definitive text for these purposes, as it was taken down aurally by Ackerman from the finished film.
- 26 *No Room At The Inn*, pl. Found in *Filmscripts*, p322.
- 27 Unusually for Thomas, this script actually ends with the unfair system still in place and the heroine (Betty) beaten and abandoning her earlier moral stance. I shall analyse this more fully in my chapter on *Suffer Little Children*.
- 28 *Filmscripts*, p337.
- 29 *Letters*, p421. Letter to Desmond Hawkins.
- 30 These titles are taken from Matthew 19. 14. (*Suffer Little Children*), Luke 2. 7. (*No Room At The Inn*), and inspired by Genesis 24. 60. (*Rebecca's Daughters*).
- 31 *Letters*, p415. Letter to Desmond Hawkins.
- 32 *The Doctor and The Devils*, Sc11.
- 33 See Appendix, p127.
- 34 A good example of this can be seen in his letter to John Davenport of 1939, addressed 'Dear Comrade'. *Letters*, p720.
- 35 'New Verse' 1934, reported in *Memoirs of the Forties*, p28.
- 36 *Memoirs of the Forties*, p29.
- 37 *Letters*, p941. Letter to unknown recipient.
- 38 I will return to the subject of Thomas's attitude to Wales later in this chapter.
- 39 *Letters*, p407. Letter to Desmond Hawkins.
- 40 *Letters*, pp425/6. Letter to Rayner Heppenstall.
- 41 *Letters*, p660. Letter to John Davenport.
- 42 *Filmscripts*, p268. I have been unable to locate a copy of this film, so cannot comment of any similarity.
- 43 *Filmscripts*, pp274-280.
- 44 *Letters*, p774. Letter to Ben Arbeid.
- 45 *Filmscripts*, p269.
- 46 *Letters*, p909. Letter to Ralph Wishart.
- 47 *Letters*, p775. Letter to Ben Arbeid.
- 48 *Letters*, pp713 & 719. Letters to David Higham.
- 49 *Letters*, p713. Letter to David Higham
- 50 *Letters*, p679 & 680. Letters to Sydney Box and Ralph Keane.
- 51 *Letters*, p681. Letter to Clifford Evans.
- 52 *Memoirs of the Forties*, p128.
- 53 *Memoirs of the Forties*, p130.
- 54 *Letters*, p615. Letter to DJ and Florence Thomas.
- 55 *The Life of Dylan Thomas*, p386.
- 56 George Tremlett, *Dylan Thomas; In The Mercy Of His Means* (Lodon:Constable, 1991), p195.
- 57 *Portrait of a Friendship*, p139.
- 58 *The Life of Dylan Thomas*, p386, *In The Mercy Of His Means*, p161. and John Malcolm Brinnin, *Dylan Thomas in America* (New York:Paragon House, 1989 [1955]), p216.
- 59 I will ignore films of works such as *A Child's Christmas In Wales* and *Under Milk Wood* here, as they were not written as film scripts.

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

This chapter provides an analysis of a previously unproduced and unpublished film script by Dylan Thomas. It also offers some explanation of Thomas's working method as revealed through the contents of the original manuscript. A complete edited and annotated version of this script, *Suffer Little Children*, is provided in the appendix to the thesis.

Suffer Little Children was written by Thomas in 1945 from an original idea by Thomas and Donald Taylor (as was *The Doctor and The Devils*). Like the majority of the other scripts, it was never actually produced, although some of the dialogue was later used in the film *Good Time Girl*, starring Diana Dors¹. The original manuscript has lain in the Lockwood Memorial Library in Buffalo, New York since the mid-sixties under the title *Life In A Girl's Reform School*, and has until recently escaped the notice of Thomas scholars. As I detailed in the introduction, Ackerman and myself have been researching this subject simultaneously and prior to our research, the only references to the script were in the appendix of Constantine Fitzgibbon's biography (which itself gave only the date, title and names of the production staff), and brief allusions to the plot in Thomas's own letters. *Life In A Girl's Reform School* is the last major unpublished work of the poet², with the only printed extracts appearing in John Ackerman's recent book *The Filmscripts*, which contains only ms pages 87-94. According to my own correspondence with John Ackerman, he

received these pages of the script from Robert Bertholf, curator of the Lockwood Memorial Library, having been informed by Bertholf that this was 'the best part of the script'³. Ackerman did not see the entire manuscript, and so could not have realised the importance of the complete work both in terms of Thomas's development and in relation to his working methods. Because he had not studied the entire manuscript, Ackerman is inaccurate in his reference to the script being 196 pages in length. Although the final ms page number is 196, due to the different stages of manuscript development which have been used (a feature I will explain in due course), the script is actually 210 foolscap pages in length.

The short section published in Ackerman's book (ms pp87-94, Appendix pp282-92) is completely unaltered with the exception of one reference to the deletion of the character Sophie (Appendix note 19). This accords with my own editorial method, as I have retained the ms text as it appears on the page wherever possible, only editing continuity omissions or handwritten alterations. Any other specific changes I have made are noted in either the text or in this chapter.

*The Writing of *Suffer Little Children**

Before studying the text itself more closely, it would be useful to give some background information to the script, to note where it was written and to describe how Thomas actually went about the process of writing. From the letters

we can tell that most of the work on *Suffer Little Children* was done between the beginning of February and early May 1945, whilst Thomas was staying at 'Majoda' cottage in New Quay. 'Majoda' had originally been named after the landlord's children, 'Marjorie', 'John', and 'David', and Thomas later suggested altering the name to 'Cattlewylaer' after his own family of Caitlin, Llewellyn, Dylan and Aeronwy). The work produced during this period includes both the first completed version of *Suffer Little Children* and some of the revisions from the original storyline (there are references in one letter written at Majoda to alterations and plot changes⁴). Whilst at 'Majoda', Thomas was also revising several other scripts, including *Our Country*, *The Unconquerable People*, *The Doctor and The Devils*, *Twenty Years A'Growing*, and *Quite Early One Morning*. The overlap of working on such diverse scripts supports my suggestion of a parallel overlap in character names, themes, and phrases as detailed in previous chapters⁵.

To understand some of the alterations which were made to the script, it is important to recognise that Thomas was not alone whilst living at Majoda. In addition to several of his personal friends, Muriel Box (the producer Sydney Box's wife), John Eldridge, and a Russian secretary from the film company (Fanya Fisher) were also in attendance⁶. The influence of and events surrounding these people contributed to certain elements of the script.

The 'Shooting Incident'

During the period of Thomas's residence at 'Majoda', there is one specific event which occurred that has particular relevance to the script. There are many stories of Thomas deliberately antagonising uniformed servicemen and this was one such case (which, unlike many of Thomas's anecdotes, can actually be verified as the events culminated in a court case, together with a report in a national newspaper⁷).

After a discussion on one of the scripts (possibly *Suffer Little Children* itself), Thomas, Eldridge, and the Russian secretary went for a drink in the local pub, 'The Black Lion'. Also in the pub were William and Vera Killick, Thomas's New Quay neighbours. Vera had been a childhood friend of Thomas in Swansea and their association had continued through the war. In fact, Thomas had even acted as best man to the couple⁸. Captain William Killick had just returned from Greece, where he had served for more than a year behind enemy lines as a commando, and was less than happy to see his wife so friendly with the Thomas's. In fact, the Captain went so far as to believe that his wife was involved in a sexual relationship with both of the Thomas's (something all three have consistently denied). Whether it was this that sparked the argument, the politics of Thomas's group (the Russian secretary was a communist and Jew and the Captain's recent tour of duty had left him with a dislike and distrust of both groups) or, as Killick claimed, the fact that these 'friends' were ignoring him is not known.

Whatever the initial cause, an argument ensued, with Miss Fisher and Killick exchanging insults until a fight broke out and Killick was manhandled out of the pub. Later that evening, back at Majoda, according to Thomas's evidence:

There was a noise from the back of the house of glass being smashed and the rattle of a machine gun. Bullets were heard flying through the living room... then the front door of the living room was burst open and Killick came in with the gun... he fired the gun into the ceiling and said 'You are nothing but a lot of egoists...'⁹

The result was the arrest and trial of Killick for attempted murder and a subsequent verdict of not guilty - he was viewed as a war hero under extreme stress and provocation. It was later to provide numerous 'pub stories' with various embellishments in the Thomas repertoire.

The shooting occurred on the evening of the sixth of March, in the middle of Thomas's work on *Suffer Little Children*, and the subsequent trial occurred in the following weeks. Looking at the manuscript, a number of courtroom scenes appear (often in hand additions), paying close attention to the surroundings, the magistrates and general courtroom etiquette, for example: '... Betty in the spiked dock of the Court, staring in front of her...' ms p122, Appendix p314. There are also three 'trials' undergone by Betty, strongly suggesting that the events surrounding Thomas had a direct effect on his writing.

Apart from the trial, we can see other possible influences. One such influence resulted in the poetic reference (for film) to the "livid lightnined sky" (ms p71, Appendix p269). As references exist to some unusually bad

weather at the time of writing the piece in Majoda, Thomas would appear to have again transposed reality to the page (as with the journalism, and elements of the court case).

Subject Matter

Although some of Thomas's other film scripts have urban settings, *Suffer Little Children* is of particular interest in the area of its treatment of 'real life'. One of the reasons the script was not considered for publication could well be related to the overall mood of the piece. Unlike most of Thomas's other work, there is a gritty urban 'documentary' realism and a contemporary setting to *Suffer Little Children*. Closer to the detective fiction and films Thomas adored than his better known reflective and childhood poetry, *Suffer Little Children* gives an insight into the more 'worldly' side of Thomas's writing. Linking to the harder post-war poetry (such as 'Ceremony After The Fire-Raid' or 'Lament'), and the subjects of his projected operas (London slums and a post-atomic world respectively) we can see how Thomas's recent residence in London had the influence of providing a more robust and contemporizing element to his work. The other similar scripts, such as *No Room At The Inn*, we must remember, were written over two years later.

Which Title?

Examining the manuscript itself, the first problem we come across is the title, given in various sources as '*Betty London*' , '*Life In A Girl's Reform School*' and '*Suffer Little Children*'. The manuscript itself carries no title at all, but I have chosen to retain the third of the suggested titles as this was the one used by both Fitzgibbon and Thomas himself. '*Betty London*' is the name of the central character, so can be assumed to be simply a working title, and '*Life In A Girls Reform School*' seems just a simplified description of the scenario and has, as far as I know, no authoritative connection to Thomas. According to the librarian in Buffalo where the manuscript is held:

...the title '*Life In A Girls Reform School*' was given to the object in question in the early 1960's when the manuscripts were purchased by the University at Buffalo. I have, in fact, no information as to who assigned that title to the manuscript.¹⁰

In the absence of any other information, I have retained the title used by the author as this seems to parallel Thomas's titling policy in certain other scripts: The allusive name *Suffer Little Children*, for example, accords with the use of biblical references such as *No Room At The Inn*, and *Rebecca's Daughters*.¹¹

The Manuscript

The several manuscript stages that constitute *Suffer Little Children* are a mixture of handwriting and type which

have been corrected and amended to provide a complete version. Close examination reveals that there are at least four separate drafts here, which provides additional information on both Thomas's working methodology and on the number of developmental stages through which the script passed. The amendments in Thomas's hand provide an insight into both the construction and the revision of the script and suggest parallels with Thomas's method of composing poetry, as well as highlighting specific alterations arising from Thomas's education in the art of the cinema.

A question worth consideration is whether or not this manuscript, in its typed and handwritten format, constitutes the completed filmscript. The altered page numbers and the significant fact that some pages which fill gaps in the plot only number a few lines gives us the impression that this was indeed the finished (or at least the final) version. The 'short pages' were inserted as linking devices specifically to turn the different ms versions into one complete script. There is no completely typed version of the script in existence (apart from the edited version in the appendix of this thesis) so we can justifiably assume Thomas regarded these ms pages as the complete film.

Editorial Techniques

In editing the text, there are several basic rules I have followed. Wherever possible, I have naturally retained the exact text as it reads in the manuscript, taking the latest hand corrections to constitute the ultimate version

unless they create some specific difficulty with regard to plot continuity or the standardization of lexical form. As an example, the opening line of the script reads 'It is morning in The Town'. This is a handwritten page, with Thomas's own corrections altering '...the town' to '...The Town'. Where corrections of upper or lower case such as these occur, I have omitted to include a note in the appendix for the sake of brevity unless there is a special significance to the change. In the same category of minor changes I am also including small additions, such as the expansion of 'voices' to 'people and voices' (again page 1). In these examples, the later corrections and additions were obviously the ones on which Thomas had settled and have therefore been taken to be correct in my edition.

In many lines, Thomas indents a sentence (as he does in *Under Milk Wood*) for the sake of emphasis and visual form (in the sense of typographical layout). This is indicated on the handwritten ms segments as an open square bracket ('['), and where this occurs, I have indented the typed text. Where Thomas has altered upper and lower case (such as 'The Town') specifically to emphasize a noun I have standardized some other lines into a similar layout (which seems to have been Thomas's eventual intention). These revisions are not marked in the text, and occur where corrections have altered the emphasis of a written section. Such corrections occur to highlight plot or character points, as standard paragraph breaks, and on directions - 'we see', 'now...', 'we move into', 'CUT TO' etc -. This editorial method is concurrent with all the printed versions of Thomas's other scripts.

Certain stylised sections (such as the mealtime scenes at the Reform School) I have also standardized, so that the physical layout of the page conforms each time the scenes occur.

One problem with the script I have not yet detailed is that of the page numbering. Quite apart from the repeated pages (ms pp055-71) and missing page numbers (ms pp157-162), (which do not actually affect the plot), the revisions to certain other sections mean that page numbers are sometimes crossed out and revised. Although this should in theory make reconstruction of the different versions easier, in practice it complicates continuity and thus the alterations are unhelpful in the reconstruction of the separate stages.

Plot Revisions

In the various different amendments to the script, there are at least two significantly different versions of the plot. In the final version, the plot is centred around a young foster-girl, Betty London, who is sent to Reform School because of an accidental fire she had caused whilst playing. Here she meets a girl called Sophie, with whom she becomes close friends. The cruelty and hardships of the school lead to Sophie's suicide and to a subsequent hardening of Betty's initially innocent nature. Meanwhile, in sub-plot, a young and kindly teacher at the school, Anne Meredith falls in love with a reporter (Knott), and together they work to expose the cruelty at the school. Betty is given

a work placement in the Boarding House of a Mrs Foster, who although very strict, is not inherently malicious. Things initially go well, but a misunderstanding leads to Betty being accused of stealing, which results in her being sent to a Remand Home. Betty escapes, and after an unpleasant stay with the lecherous proprietor of the Dew Drop Inn, joins up with a girl she met in the Home, Sonia, to work in a seedy and illegal Bottle Club. Anne and Knott search for and eventually find Betty, only to arrive too late during a raid on the club. Anne and Knott marry, and in the final scene offer Betty a life with them when she is released from her resulting imprisonment.

The earlier versions of the plot are harder to differentiate due to the several manuscript stages, but there are various identifiable differences. In the first draft, Sophie was introduced in the opening scene and was Betty's foster sister. Both girls were sent to the Reform School together, and survived together to be placed at Mrs Fosters' 'Boarding House'. In his letters, Thomas refers to 'Betty Dark' and 'Sophie Fair'¹², and in the earlier version, the characters are differentiated in this respect, Sophie remaining innocent (and in the end, free) while Betty, corrupted by her surroundings, becomes more hardened. Anne and Knott do not appear in this early draft, and it is a different girl who commits suicide. There is a Mr Nott (the precursor of Knott), but also another much more important character, Dr Reeder who had known Betty since she was young, and with whom she falls in love and eventually escapes.

Betty's age would perhaps have made this romance

unacceptable to contemporary audiences, which would in turn explain the introduction of Anne and Knott and their relationship as an alternative 'love interest'. (this is, of course, only inference).

Thomas's other plans for plot alterations are mentioned in the letters. They give some insight into Thomas's intention and method:

...there are, I think, 4 or 5 sticky constructional points, but I have only in one case altered a constructional detail from our original. I have, too, cut out the jewels in the empty house that B. & S. & the boy break into. It seems to be too forced, too much of a coincidence, that Betty's downfall shd [sic] come both times, through jewels left so *absurdly* open for anyone to take. So I think that just 'breaking & entering' is enough to send B. & S. to School for three years. Other suggestions etc. I'll write about at length when I send the entire MS.¹³

As Thomas refers to Betty and Sophie breaking in to the empty house (the original version), we can tell this refers to some of the earliest revisions to the script. Thomas is taking great care with what he calls the 'constructional points', by which he means the plot development. The care taken over 'constructional points' extends to individual lines of dialogue. We can see an example of this in Thomas's deletion of some text from ms p36 (Appendix p230). I have not printed the lines "Which of you is the foster child?" and "I am... ma'am" as they were used purely to differentiate the girls in the earlier version of the script when Betty and Sophie were 'related'. The deletion of the lines is purely to tighten the plot construction. It is worthy of note, however, as the Matron's following line then comments "I know your type, my girl. There's bad blood in you...",

showing a bias against the foster child for her status alone in the attitude of the Matron, something missing in the final version. Interestingly, Thomas has still chosen to retain the comment about 'bad blood' in order to retain an antipathy between the Matron and Betty. This in turn fuels Betty's rebelliousness.

Block Composition

The original inclusion of stolen jewels in Betty's first arrest in addition to her second 'felony' also demonstrates the Thomas trait of multiple imaging. The 'image block' of Betty being falsely accused of theft recurs, as do the courtroom scenes, the parallel course of Sophie in the original and the stylised meal sequences at the School. Akin to his methodology in the composition of poetry, Thomas builds up similar or repeated images to create an overall effect which extends beyond any individual image. A parallel to this would be the verses of 'The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower' or 'Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night', where a similar 'image building' is employed with the repetition of the formulated 'blocks'¹⁴. In the case of these poems, Thomas creates a 'block image' such as 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower' and repeats the block with a slightly altered conceit 'The force that drives the water through the rocks... that whirls the water in the pool'. The overall 'message' or burden of the poem (in this case relating to the force of 'nature' which controls all things) is therefore

built up through suggestion and repetition as opposed to its being delivered in the form of a straight linear argument. One of the advantages of the method of 'block composition' is that each section is a complete argument in itself, in addition to the contribution it has made towards the complete poem/film.

In the case of the film script, however, Thomas recognised the need for a slightly different method of composition, and decreased the occurrence and similarity of images to increase a sense of cinematic reality (as he points out in the extract printed above, the repetition can appear "too forced" in the script). The "other suggestions" about plot construction which were mentioned in Thomas's letter are unfortunately lost, but looking at the hand corrections and revisions to the script, it is possible to suggest where several of these alterations may have occurred. The major deletion of Sophie from much of the plot, the introduction of Anne and Knott, the nightmare vision (Appendix note 7), and the reason for Betty being in the bathroom (Appendix note 24) are three such probable revisions.

Methods of Revision

Several examples of Thomas's method of work and revision, can be found both in the text and in the letters. Using the different stages of ms and the fact that some of the pages are in scenario form rather than complete script, it is possible to postulate Thomas developed his ideas in parallel to changes in the storyline. Other works such as *Shadowless*

Man lend further evidence. Similar to his method of creating a poem, Thomas would build images together (as previously mentioned) in order to re-enforce by repetition in addition to the linear narrative. This can account for much of the cinematically unnecessary prose detail in the script which was used to help Thomas initially visualise the intended end product. In all of his work, Thomas would build up key images (in the poetry, this took the form of a single word or small block of words¹³), and then combine them to form a whole, adding smaller 'link' images at a later stage. It was this that would often provoke accusations of obscurity in the poems. It is through the collection of images rather than through a linear narrative development that Thomas's method of composition is best understood. In the films, he would create visual 'blocks' and link them with dialogue or smaller images. One of Thomas's favourite 'blocks' was the opening overview using the phrase 'It is morning in the...' or 'it is night in the...'. This 'block' can be found in several filmscripts in addition to *Under Milk Wood*).

Looking at the ms pages, we can see several 'short' pages of a few lines in length which are used to join each section of text. Some of these come from the linking of different stages of the script or from different revisions, but the handwriting on some of the earlier pages show that Thomas also used these short pages to link or bridge the 'image blocks' he had already created. Like the poetry, he would build and join the blocks with smaller images. One example of this would be on ms page 66 (Appendix pp281/2), which is a seven line handwritten page. Although this

example was added between typed pages in a plot revision, the page takes a 'scenario form' rather than being a completed dialogue: "Anne beckons her over, and tells her she has just heard that Mrs Shepherd is coming to the School tomorrow to see Betty". The pages give a visual image linking the preceding and following scenes, demonstrating Thomas's method of creating the 'image block' and later expanding it to full linear dialogue.

After the initial creation of the plot, certain restrictions and requirements would be imposed by the films' proposed backers and investors and by company policy. This was to ensure that the film would be viable morally, legally and commercially. There are unfortunately no records as to what these requirements may have been for *Suffer Little Children* and I can only surmise, but changes that could fall into this category would presumably include the plot change of Betty's relationship to Dr Reeder from the earlier draft. In this early draft, Betty had fallen in love with a much older man who has previously been in a position of authority over her. Although this is conjecture, it is reasonable to assume that to make the film more widely acceptable to audiences, the perhaps morally dubious relationship was removed and replaced with the more conventional relationship of Anne and Knott. Thomas is known to have 'conveniently' forgotten several minor changes suggested to him, but in the case of major alterations necessary for the product to be viable, the changes would be made.

Thomas's process of revision would have been

influenced by the many discussions with his producer and co-workers at Strand (in this case Donald Taylor and Sydney Box). Another of his letters (this time referring to changes in *The Beach of Falésa*) gives us a little more insight into the method:

When you read it, you'll see, (I trust), that I've followed the main line of the suggestions on which the three of us agreed, and have tried to remember, & interpolate, all the chief points. One thing you'll notice is that I have cut out altogether the *two other traders*... This, I think, simplifies matters... Perhaps you will think that the omitting of the French Priest's suggestion of 'poison', & the putting-in, instead, of 'driven mad with fear', lessens the tension.... But I can't agree with that; and think, anyway, that it's an improvement to cut out as many invisible characters as possible.¹⁵

This letter exemplifies many important points. Although discussions of the scripts were open, the final decision was actually Thomas's (an examination of *Falésa* shows how he got his way). Looking at *Suffer Little Children*, we can see many individual word changes in the amendments, which then subtly alter the larger meaning. As examples, ms p55 (Appendix p248) the adjective 'unallowed' is a later addition to 'treasures', with the effect of underlining the importance of the objects. Again, this is a description. The addition of an adjective would be unnecessary for a director, so the alteration arises purely from Thomas's insistence on complete images in the prose. Another single word revision of note occurs on ms p167 (Appendix Note 34), where Betty's comment on Sonia's dancing is changed from 'wonderful' to simply 'okay' in line with Betty's less naive and wonder-filled character in the

revised plot.

The letter about *The Beach of Falésa* also shows how Thomas was undaunted by major plot alteration and deletions (which are obvious in the ms for *Suffer Little Children*). Although many of these changes may have originated from Taylor or other associates, Thomas could have 'conveniently forgotten' or avoided their implementation, and would not have undertaken such major re-writes if he was himself not convinced of their necessity. The end of the letter quoted above demonstrates the number of disagreements which occurred ("I hope you & Ralph & I can meet soon: there'll be lots of things to disagree with in this version."), but Thomas was by no means work-shy. It is certainly true that Thomas would often lie to avoid projects in which he had no interest or to obtain money for projects he had no intention of working on, but when committed to a project, Thomas would work, correct, and re-write until he himself was satisfied that the script was the best he could possibly create. We can see this dedication later in *Under Milk Wood*, which was still undergoing major revision in the days immediately preceding his death.

One other element arising from the 'Falésa' letter, is Thomas's wish to 'simplify matters'. Thomas had learned through his work on the documentary films that the powerful medium of film needed less extravagant language, and that the same power could be achieved through simpler, more direct language when wedded with a dramatic image¹⁶. From this discovery, Thomas's work in every written medium became more direct. This included his post-war poetry¹⁷, as well as

his screen writing. As Thomas mentioned in the letter about *The Beach Of Falésa*, his intention was to 'simplify matters' and concentrate on the elements of the plot which he chose to retain. In *Suffer Little Children*, this meant the removal of Sophie from the bulk of the plot and the simplification of the love interest to an almost separate sub-plot. With the exception of a few poetic phrases, the language within the script is also simplified to provide a more contemporized and gritty realism for the 'debased' setting of the story. This method is seen through many of Thomas's subsequent scripts, *No Room At The Inn* being the prime example.

In the next chapter I will study the effect filmwriting had on Thomas's other works in more detail, but in terms of film alone, it is important to return to the lessons learned from the documentaries, where Thomas had gained an insight into the power of simple words in combination with powerful pictures¹⁸. Although not a particularly striking visual screenplay, *Suffer Little Children* is set in a contemporary urban world, unlike most of Thomas's films. Using dialogue which the audience could recognise as comparatively realistic (ie less verbally rich than the 'usual' Thomas style) allowed for a more empathic and understanding relationship with the audience on a literal level. An understanding of this deliberate alteration of style (particularly in dialogue) is necessary to appreciate the development of the poet¹⁹.

Thomas's Working Method in Practice

Looking at the script more closely now, I will give examples of how the different ms stages, changes in story, and alteration of names can give us a wider knowledge of Thomas's work and methods, and how the discovery of this specific ms is important for what it adds to the knowledge of Thomas's writing.

Looking at the handwriting on the ms, we can gain some insight into the order of Thomas's composition, and hence of his overall methodology. The opening of the script can clearly be seen to be a later addition, revising the work; the handwriting is more hurried, and mistakes are made. Looking at the third page of the ms (Appendix p213), there are several deletions, and the form the script takes resembles a novel more than a full script, with reported speech and indirect indication, such as the instruction that:

'(Mrs Shepherd does not, of course, use those phrases but suggests the same to us in her own way)'

Ms p3, Appendix p002.

In revision, this type of description was re-written in the form of full dialogue. For the sake of brevity, and to check the new version was acceptable without labouring over points of detail and dialogue, the draft (which the script is in at this point) is simplified into 'detailed scenario'.

The handwriting of the first four pages continues in the same hand, mixing full script (p1) with the shortened

version of the type demonstrated above. When we reach page 5 of the manuscript however, (Appendix p214), we find only four lines of text. The following page is typed and hand corrected, and obviously belonged to an earlier draft. From this and many other examples, we can decipher the actual order in which the pages were written, with the amount of dialogue telling us almost as much as their actual contents (only four lines were needed here to link the previous and following pages, so this page was therefore a later addition). Following this, we can see the handwritten alterations on the next typed pages were revised twice. Ms pp6-9 (Appendix pp214-8) has corrections in two different pens; one of which revises the story to fit with the preceding pages (the exclusion of Sophie from the early scenes), the other correcting phraseology and 'tidying up the script'. After this, on ms pp10-12 (Appendix pp218/9), we again see handwritten pages in a script which matches that of the opening. This section replaces an earlier (missing) section referring to the finding of jewels. We know this segment existed from Thomas's letter of April 1945, where he mentions this particular constructional revision²⁰. The fact the script remains partially handwritten, and the events surrounding the 'Majoda' trial which obviously affected Thomas's workrate, mean we can quite accurately date this section of the script to early April 1945. Confirming this, another letter sent from Majoda also laments the lack of a typewriter at the house, explaining the necessity for longhand.

To support the theory of the handwritten pages being

completed and inserted at a later date, we should also look at ms pp15-18 (Appendix p221/2). Although these pages appear to be written at a different stage from the opening ones (it is impossible to be sure without a close examination of the original paper), the final page ends mid-sentence, with the line '...he says, "that God is', the next page beginning with the typed 'cleanliness, and life is discipline...' ²¹. From the fact we know the typed version is the earlier (through plot corrections etc), we can tell that these handwritten pages must therefore also be later revisions. Looking at the contents of these pages (the beginning of the relationship between Anne and Knott -a plot revision-), we can also assume they were written after all of the preceding pages. Thomas's letter of April mentioned the importance of removing the jewels from the early scene, but mentions nothing of Anne and Knott, whom we know from corrections and additions were later elements of the script's development, the original love interest, as mentioned earlier, having featured Betty and Dr Reeder. It is safe to assume therefore, that these pages constitute a later revision of the script. This deduction is supported by ms pp27/8 (Appendix pp219/30), where we find handwritten pages amended in what is an identifiably different pen, and hence being another later change.

When we reach ms p51 (Appendix pp244/5), we find a fascinating feature in the existence of two pages numbered '51'. The first is a scruffy work page, with crossings out, boxed and with tiny hand additions; the second copy is in Thomas's best handwriting, small and neat (and obviously

different from the preceding hand-pages). There are therefore three versions here alone (original/expanded/complete). The content (Anne and Knott) and style (we hear what people talk about, but not their actual words) mean that these pages came after the typed script, so we can conclude that there are at least four versions of script here (probably more); typed, handwritten, hand corrected, and again re-written (the neatness of the handwriting compared to the other sheets suggests strongly that they were written at a very different time).

Due to the fact that the numbers of the ms duplicate themselves after p71 (what should be p72 is marked as a second p55, what should be p73 is p56 etc, the reason for which is not apparent), the next important handwriting element occurs on the second ms p60 (Appendix p050).

In the earliest typewritten version where Sophie appears throughout, the suicide at the school was that of a girl called Phoebe. Ms pp60 and 62 have handwritten descriptions and additions giving warnings that Sophie is mentally unstable and could be a danger to herself. The text of p60 is in reported speech ("Nurse Two mentions Sophie & says that, in her opinion..."), telling us that this was another draft addition to re-enforce the new plot. All these examples demonstrate Thomas's working method of composition: originally the plot was drawn up roughly, then placed into reported speech, revised, and eventually put into full dialogue (the typed version). Next, Thomas would draft a number of plot revisions in conference with the staff of Strand, which would result in the handwritten pages in

this script that join the plot of the retained typed pages. These would not take in too much exact speech (as ms p060), but would describe exactly what was said, though not in the form of finished dialogue. This procedure would be repeated several times until all plot requirements were approved. At this stage, details would be refined on all pages (for instance, the exclusion of Sophie's name from the early typed pages, and any specific changes or inaccuracies in the handwritten pages).

Next, the pages would be given a 'final numbering' and any specific refinements to all pages would be made (such as phrasing, description etc). This is the stage the script of *Suffer Little Children* is at in its present form, missing only the final expansion of several reported speeches to exact dialogue, and the typing of the script. This is not to say that the script would not have been subject to alterations later on. As the letters tell us, *The Doctor and The Devils* was constantly revised up to publication, but would have been complete far earlier as a film script. *Suffer Little Children* was almost complete in its initial 'film scenario' form.

Looking at specific examples from the script, we can see various identifiably cinematic devices which Thomas has incorporated. The use of these 'trade devices' is important in relation both to his writing here and in the later works (particularly *Under Milk Wood*). Having said this however, there are also some very stylised sequences, both in terms of writing and in terms of how they actually appeared on the page. This literary stylisation forms a

counterpoint to the simplicity of much of the dialogue, and combining these three elements (overtly cinematic, literary stylised and simplified dialogue) we can get some idea of how the experience of working on the documentaries had contributed to the development of Thomas's style.

Looking at the sections describing the meals at the School (the first of which occurs on ms p40, Appendix p232), we can see a very carefully organised scene. More stylised than the pages surrounding it, the descriptions of the meal are spaced evenly (one action per line) and form a rhythmic echo of the actions described, with the Matron rapping on the table to parallel each action and with each short, spaced line being used to reflect and emphasize the Matron's movements. In terms of actual film production, it is important to note that this spacing is superfluous. In a reflection of Thomas's manifesto of the 'new form of writing', the written script should be completely self contained, the visual cinematic effects being represented by the written page itself.

The use of written effects superfluous to production is also demonstrated by another frequent feature of the scripts, namely the use of capital letters. Apart from the previously mentioned 'Town' and 'School', there are various other examples. Taking 'Symbol of Authority' (ms p71, Appendix p271) as a good source (it is in Thomas's own hand), we can examine a revision in which the use of these textual devices is, once again, completely irrelevant to a director or producer. The use of capitals in this case can therefore have only two functions. Either they are reminders to Thomas

himself about points of specific importance (as some sort of marker); or they are intended for a final printed version, as indicators to the reader or for emphasis. These 'indicators' could be taken as heavy handed, but looking at some of the other scripts (*The Doctor and The Devils* being a prime example), we can see that Thomas did not always avoid obvious devices²². The capital letters are there for a purpose, and even if they might seem unnecessary to us, are part of Thomas's working method and as such are worth noting.

In terms of style, we should also consider specifically cinematic effects which have been incorporated into the script. One obvious demonstration of this occurs on ms p64 (Appendix p267), where we find a hand addition in which the girls look out from the dormitory, and we see from their viewpoint the glass roof of the Dining Hall directly below, setting the scene for both the falling treasures and the later suicide. Although this may again seem a little obvious in its intent, it is a clear cinematic device, linking visual images from early and later in a film. The different hand addition on the manuscript indicates that the action may have been suggested after one of the numerous script conferences, in order to make the script itself more cinematic or to reflect contemporary styles (the 'cut away' to 'p.o.v' shot) is a common device in scripts of the forties. This use of the cyclical image and 'p.o.v' is a literal cinematic device, but a few pages later (ms p73, Appendix p272), we see another more innovative device. Being aware of the power of pictures and sound to connect

images (again from his work on the 'training ground' documentaries), Thomas sets the first post-suicide scene on a windy night, with Anne standing below swaying telephone lines. Thomas describes the singing of the phone lines as being "distorted so that it reminds us of the screaming of voices after the great crash of glass". Linking the visual to an eerie echo of the sounds in the preceding scene, he is then able to heighten the tension and distress we feel for Anne. Thomas is clearly aware of the power of the visual and aural (in this case non-dialogue) effect within cinema, and intimates a powerful image which is able to emphasize the effect of the preceding suicide on the audience while the narrative line continues forward.

Later (ms pp96/7, Appendix pp293/4), we find two handwritten pages amongst their typed counterparts, describing the actions of Knott and Anne, intercut with Betty's experiences in the boarding house. These pages were subsequent additions (and again possibly after suggestions at a script meeting) to cut between the main action and the sub-plot of Anne and Knott's romance. This demonstrates Thomas's awareness of the need to pace a film differently than he might a short story or novel. Unlike the latter, in which each major section of action usually occurs in sequence, the film allows (and often demands) short intercut scenes, building towards the point when the two strands come together near the finale. Thomas was still learning his trade in 1945, but he was able to recognise the capacity of film to incorporate emotion, tension or excitement in a plot through its uniquely cinematic features/opportunities.

Thomas was careful not to be too experimental with his films however, even in terms of cinematic effects. When Betty wakes in Sonia's house (ms p179, Appendix p370), Thomas uses "THE VOICE OF HER THOUGHTS" in counterpoint to the visual images. He recognised that this device could be successful in some contexts although in this particular script, due to the conventional normality of the remainder, it does not perhaps work quite so well. Considering both the successes and failures of the different cinematic devices in the scripts, we must be careful to remember that although the films were never produced, the experience of their composition complete with the lessons he had learned from his writing and revision did remain with Thomas, and was utilised both in his following scripts, and sometimes in other forms of his writing such as the poems, the radio play, and the unfinished novel.

Changes In Characterization

Moving away from the descriptive text and dialogue, the second area of the manuscript to re-examine is that of specific changes to the story and characters. The major changes occur in the form of the characters of Sophie, Dr Reeder, Anne and Knott (as detailed in the descriptions of the alternative plots above), but looking closely at the text, we can see certain examples of how additions and amendments to the dialogue and descriptions have subtly changed the characters themselves.

With the removal of Sophie from much of the plot, the

nature of Betty's character is also altered. Whereas before there were two distinct characters (the timid Sophie and the gradually hardening Betty), in the revision, all the attributes are given to Betty. This could result in confusion, but is handled carefully by Thomas. The 'new' Betty is presented as tougher, but still innocent to the harshness of society. A single word changed on ms p68 (Appendix Note 11) moves Betty's eyes from 'downcast' to 'mutinous', altering the tone of the entire scene, and preparing us for Betty's attitude of resentment towards the world. In his revision of the text, Thomas was very careful in choosing individual words which could make Betty (and the end of the new plot) more credible. Unlike the original happy ending with Betty and Dr Reeder together, the second version ends with Betty telling Anne and Knott about the unfairness of the world. Thomas had obviously studied the entire script to identify anything (including individual words such as in the revision detailed above) that would be inappropriate to the new version.

Later, some characteristics of Sophie are given to Betty. One example is where the girls were told about the implied sexual activity in other homes. Originally, Sophie was presented as the bewildered innocent, but in the revision Betty is given this role as part of her characterization²³. Although Betty is headstrong, she is oblivious to the 'outside' world until she experiences each unpleasant aspect of it for herself through the development of the plot. In the same scene, we lose some of the closeness between the girls, with Sophie's previous comment "I've got

Betty" (ms pp128/9, Appendix Note 28) being hand deleted. Whereas the earlier plot had told of Betty and Sophie facing the World together, only for Betty to find love in Dr Reeder, the new story has an entirely different tone, the emphasis being on Betty's experiences and their effect on her, with the romance (now assigned to Anne and Knott) being relegated to a sub-plot.

In another change to the original narrative, the contents of ms pp18-25 (Appendix pp222-24) are re-assigned from the relatively unimportant Mr Nott to the 'new' Knott and Anne, in order to introduce these now important characters. The content of these pages (which combine some of the original typed pages with new hand additions) gives us a first insight into Knott's humour and knowledge of corruption, Anne's innocence before entering the School (parallel to Betty), and the mutual attraction between them. Later in the script, we also find almost all of the 'Newspaper Office' scenes written in longhand, developing both the character of Knott and the growing attraction between himself and Anne. Unfortunately, not enough remains of the original 'Mr Nott' to tell exactly how much he differs from 'Knott', as the pages have in the main been entirely re-written. The same applies to Anne, who appeared in her earlier incarnation as Nurse Stillwell. These pages were obviously later additions to the ms, as none of the earlier plot elements exist (even in deleted or revised form) in the text.

The other major alteration to characters and plot comes from the remaining sections which refer to Betty and Dr

Reeder. Although references occur in the script early on, it is not until ms p69 that we get any real insight into the character of Reeder. After Betty's line "I cut them" (Appendix p260), a large section of dialogue has been excised. I have omitted this from the footnotes to the appendix because it deserves full inclusion here. The text originates in the earlier plotline, when an unknown something 'happened' to Michael Reeder. Although we can only surmise what occurred, the remaining text (both here and subsequently) implies that Reeder was somehow parted from Betty due in part to their 'improper relationship' (he is not however, her real Uncle, but a family friend). No sections remain which detail these surmised events, but the later sections suggest some romantic relationship which was afterwards rekindled. The hand deleted section reads as follows:

BETTY:

"[I cut them!] Where's Uncle Michael?"

MR SHEPHARD'S VOICE:

"He's gone away..."

MRS SHEPHARD:

"But he'll be back, he'll be back to see you... He sent you his love..."

BETTY:

"Perhaps he wouldn't know us now..."

MRS SHEPHARD:(gently, though still a little
bewildered)

"Why do you say such silly things... You're the same as ever... just the same..."

BETTY:

"No..."

MRS SHEPHARD:

"Now let's all sit down and you must tell me everything - and all about yourselves and the School and..."

This section gives us one of the first indications as to the importance of Reeder. Later, we find more dialogue deleted from the top of ms p152: "...see you, ... Dr Michael? Oh tell me about him please...". (See Appendix Notes 44 & 46). We are also told that Betty disappears, only to reappear in the arms of Dr Reeder in a taxi having escaped the raid on the Bottle Club. In this latter section, set in the Bottle Party, Betty's character has been revised by Thomas. Whereas the previous version allowed Betty to retain some degree of naivety, the revision ends with her arrest, demanding that Betty must now be seen as more able to cope independently and must therefore also be less timid. This change is achieved through a number of minor lexical alterations.

At her introduction to the club, the simple deletion of the word 'please' (ms p164, Appendix Note 33) makes Betty seem less vulnerable, followed by other minor changes, such as the description (detailed above) of Sonia's dancing from 'wonderful' to simply 'okay'. These changes subtly toughen Betty, or at least remove the wide-eyed innocence which dominated in the earlier incarnation of her character.

The final appearances of Betty, and in particular one deletion, sum up the changes Thomas made in her character. In the earlier typed version, where Betty was rescued by a man, her last words were spoken in a romantic mood and setting but in the revision, although she does appear again later, the last printed words of dialogue are a statement of her independence, as demonstrated below:

'Dr Reeder stands up.

DR REEDER:
"Oh, Betty dear..."

BETTY:
"Dr. Michael... Michael..."

They look at each other.'

(ms p184, Appendix Note 39.
This text is hand deleted)

'But Betty says that she will not return. To all Anne's pleading, she says that she has never known freedom before and that she will not go back to the Remand Home. She does not mind what happens to her; here she is treated like a human being, she is grown up now, she will not be treated like a child.'

(ms p186, Appendix Note 40.
Final version)

The change in characterisation is obvious. Thomas has remodelled the basis of Betty around the new plot, carefully building minor lexical changes into the earlier scenes in order to create this stronger and more independent Betty.

Naming for Publication

A feature I have already covered to some extent in my analysis of *The Doctor and The Devils* and in my chapter 'The Thomas Style' is the use of specific names in Thomas scripts, and this is quite important in regards to *Suffer Little Children*. The first unusual instance of naming occurs on ms p13, with the hand alteration of 'Mr Nott' to 'Knott'. As there is no difference aurally in the names, there are only four possible contributory factors to the change. The first is obviously the removal of the 'Mr', and the second is that

the two are significantly different characters, so Thomas is marking the differences in his own mind with a 'tag'. We are uncertain of Mr Nott's role due to his early removal in the stages of revision and hence, the entirely re-written pages. The new 'Patrick Knott' must be a different character however due to the fact that his role is now central to the major sub-plot, a newly introduced element (also introducing Anne). The 'new' Knott exists purely in this role, and is not directly related to the 'Betty plot', only being drawn into the search for Betty as a means to get closer to Anne. The earlier 'Nott' was, as far as I can surmise, more directly interested and involved in Betty's plight.

I mentioned earlier that there were two other possible reasons for the change in 'Mr Nott'. The first of these I hope is coincidental as it merely provides the opportunity for a very weak joke ("I am not... I am Knott, too");- the second and more likely is that Thomas was still looking towards a possible book publication at some time in the future, and wanted the visual of the name to be correct, believable, and possibly a little less obviously metaphorical. He also removed Nurse Stillwell, who was the pre-cursor of Anne Meredith in the original text, and whose name represents an element of her character. Despite her hardships and work in the home, she is 'still well', and retains some humanity, as 'Nott' represents something of the character's contrary and somewhat hypocritical nature (his concern stems more from his feelings for Anne than any real philanthropy). There are also instances from the names of Mrs Shepherd (Betty is an orphan and thus, metaphorically, a

'lost sheep'), Dr Reeder (not enough is definite about the character to get the exact reference, but it smacks of the same Thomas method of naming, possibly as a reference to learning), Mrs Foster (who employs the girls into her 'family'), or Mrs Dogwood, the lowly washerwoman, all of which support the theory of a 'Bunyanesque' naming policy, something I examined earlier in relation to *The Doctor and The Devils* and which I will qualify further in the chapter 'Under Milk Wood' and After'.

Parallels with Other Scripts

One other important area we should look at in *Suffer Little Children* is how the text compares to other Thomas scripts. The major ties to *Under Milk Wood* I will, in main, ignore for the moment as they are analysed in more detail in the next chapter, but there are similarities worthy of note relating to some of the other scripts.

The first two of the 'links' are quite general, but are none the less important. First, there are similarities in characterisations with Thomas's later *No Room At The Inn* in terms of social standing and of orphan children. As the latter was written three years later and was an adaptation however, this can be largely (though not completely) discounted. Of more interest is the end of *No Room At The Inn*²⁴, with the scene of Mrs Voray falling down the stairs, an event which bears more than a passing relationship to the fall of Mrs Foster in the earlier *Suffer Little Children*. This supports my theory of Thomas experimenting in the

scripts and sometimes refining scenes for re-introduction at a later date.

Looking specifically at *Suffer Little Children*, we can also see a parallel with other scripts (and *The Doctor and The Devils* in particular) through Thomas's sometimes weak narrative scenes. To fill in any narrative gaps and any background information, Thomas invents several unnamed nurses (ms p59, Appendix p264) who gossip to let us know what has been happening offscreen, in a similar way to the 'Professors' and 'Gentlemen' in the *Doctor and The Devils* script. This is a weak and (in this case) obvious narrative device, but seems to be one on which Thomas frequently fell back on when he found difficulty introducing events or opinions.

Whilst it can be seen as a weakness, it is reasonable to consider the fact that this method of unnamed characters narrating the events was also the basis for the 'Voices' in *Under Milk Wood*. I will examine other more specific characters relating to the genesis of *Under Milk Wood* in the following chapter, but looking briefly at the attitude of Mrs Foster to dust in her house, for example, it is not difficult to conceive a direct line of development to the character of Mrs Ogmores Pritchard in *Under Milk Wood*. Although not obviously a direct ancestor, the character of Mrs Dogwood, with her singing and Bunyanesque name are again things that would not seem out of place in the play. These characters can be seen as the prototypes from which the population of *Under Milk Wood* were derived.

One link between *Suffer Little Children* and *The Doctor*

and *The Devils* appears in the form of the Proprietor of the 'Dew Drop Inn', whose obsession about his hands and Macbeth-like imagery links both to Rock and to Fallon. The similar dates of composition for these pieces lend weight to the suggestion of this parallel, with some overlap of theme and subject occurring. The viciousness of the character of the proprietor is perhaps a little unexpected when compared to Thomas's previous work, but the juxtaposition of the gritty reality and the implied imagery (from *Macbeth*) serve in both scripts to lend tension to the scenes. By the time it came to *Suffer Little Children* however, Thomas had refined some of the more overt symbolism of Rock/Macbeth/Fallon and here he suggests rather than forces the imagery. In *Doctor and The Devils*, (a more symbolic and stylised script) the parallels to Macbeth were literal, but in *Suffer Little Children* it is only the bloodthirsty and guilty imagery that is utilized. The proprietor is no 'tragic hero', and receives a symbolic reference through the 'hands motif' alone. He is less important than Fallon/Rock, but with him Thomas succeeds perhaps better than with any other character in the creation of realistic, contemporaneous and urban dialogue. Using understated images and simple language, Thomas creates in the proprietor what is perhaps the most chilling creation of the poet's film career.

Echoes and parallels with other scripts occur in the form of names and small phrases, but space would not permit analysis of each individual case here. There is one specific and notable exception I will make, although not to another script. In the character of Knott, we find a witty,

well informed and attractive journalist who embarks on a crusade. Thomas's early occupation as a newspaper reporter in Swansea is well documented, and as Thomas was not averse to a little autobiography in his scripts (as I have mentioned previously), it is not unfair to view the character as Thomas's interpretation of himself, or at least of an idealized self. This is, of course, supposition, but the direct influence Thomas's career and experiences had on his writing is indisputable, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, entitled '*Under Milk Wood and After*'.

Footnotes

- 1 Halliwell attributes the script for *Good Time Girl* to Sydney and Muriel Box and Ted Willis, adapted from the novel *Night Darkens the Street* by Arthur LaBern. The story is similar to *Suffer Little Children*, and Muriel Box was a guest of the Thomas's at 'Majoda'. This lends credence to Thomas's involvement in the script.
- 2 The other scripts which may still exist are in private hands and are not publicly acknowledged to exist. Details of these scripts are given in the chapter 'The Thomas Style'.
- 3 Telephone conversation with John Ackerman, July 1995.
- 4 *Letters*, p551. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 5 See the chapters 'The Thomas Style', '*Under Milk Wood* and After' and later in this chapter.
- 6 The other friends are referred to in passing, but are not identified.
- 7 *The News of The World*, 24 June, 1945.
- 8 Jonathan Fryer, *Dylan: The Nine Lives of Dylan Thomas* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1993), p155.
- 9 Reported in the *Welsh Gazette*, 12 April 1945, p6. Other reports appeared in the *Welsh Gazette*, 28 June 1945, p2; *Cambrian News*, 13 April 1945, p8; and *The News of The World*, 24 June 1945.
- 10 Letter to the author from Michael Basinski, Assistant Curator of the Lockwood Memorial Library, University at Buffalo, October 13 1995.
- 11 The exact references have been given in n.30. to my chapter 'The Thomas Style'.
- 12 *Letters*, p546. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 13 *Letters*, p551. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 14 Described in a letter from Dr Daniel Jones (Thomas's childhood friend, collaborator and editor) to the author. I use the term 'small block' as opposed to 'phrase' as this is the terminology used by Dr Jones. Also, this 'small block' could constitute anything from three words to three phrases.
- 15 *Letters*, p687. Letter to Jan Read.
- 16 *In The Mercy Of His Means*, p97.
- 17 The change in Thomas's poetry post-war is detailed in my chapter '*Under Milk Wood* and After'.
- 18 This is examined in my earlier chapter on Thomas's documentary work, with particular reference to the script for *Our Country*.
- 19 The culmination of this development I will return to in the following chapter.
- 20 *Letters*, p551. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 21 In actual fact, the first six letters of the page are missing. This is explained in the Appendix, Note 5.
- 22 Another example detailed in my chapter 'Feature Films' is the use of the 'obvious narrators' in the form of the two Professors.
- 23 The romance with Dr Reeder was also removed in a plot revision, making Betty less 'worldly'.

24 There is no copy of the script known to exist, so my information is drawn from the film itself, a copy of which is held at the BFI, and from *Filmscripts*, p356.

UNDER MILK WOOD AND AFTER

In this chapter I will show how Thomas's writing in the film medium contributed both directly and indirectly to the successes of his subsequent writing. The influence of the film years can be seen clearly in Thomas's post-war poetry, which shows a marked difference from his earlier, more surrealist work. The influence of film is also in evidence in the genesis, the development, and in the actual finished version of *Under Milk Wood*. Indeed, it is my suggestion that the radio play is the logical conclusion to a direct line of development from Thomas's experimentations in film writing. I have previously given examples of individual stylistic devices originating in the filmscripts which then re-occur in *Under Milk Wood*.¹ To avoid unnecessary repetition I will therefore concentrate my comments on *Under Milk Wood* as an entire 'concept', as opposed to re-iterating examples of individual devices with the use of numerous small quotations.

The Origins of *Under Milk Wood*

As *Under Milk Wood* is the keystone to my argument for a 'line of development' in Thomas's writing, it is necessary to provide a little background to the creation of the play. In looking for the definitive sources of *Under Milk Wood*, there is a fundamental problem to be addressed. In the years following Thomas's death, multiple theories as to possible sources of the play were put forward and a great deal has been

written on this subject². There are many legitimate contributors and I do not intend to claim that *Under Milk Wood* is solely the legacy of the poet's film years. The play certainly derives from many varied sources and stages of Thomas's life, so rather than attempting to justify a purely filmic origin, I will instead make my case for specific direct influences and explain how the experiences, successes and failures of his film projects combined to form a vital contributory factor to the overall style and many individual characteristics of *Under Milk Wood*.

In order to substantiate these claims I will first acknowledge some of the definite and accepted stages through which the play passed, as they are necessary to a full understanding of the development of style and construction. Several of these stages also provide concrete examples of direct development to support my case for the influence of film. First there is the well documented question of Thomas's affection for and interest in James Joyce (one need only look as far as the title and content of Thomas's book of short stories, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, to recognise Joycean references). As early as 1932 or 1933, Thomas had told his Swansea mentor Bert Trick of his wish to write a sort of Welsh *Ulysses*, encapsulated within a twenty-four hour timespan³. This is the first known reference to what was to become *Under Milk Wood* and is a significant detail in terms of the often noted 'Welshness' of the play. Location was a very important feature of Thomas's post-war writing, and I will return to this subject in a separate discussion of Thomas's poetry. In terms of *Under Milk Wood*,

the combination of Thomas's living arrangements (in rural New Quay and Laugharne respectively) with the subject matter of his work for *Our Country* and *On Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain* influenced the eventual focus on rural (pre-war) Wales in the radio play.

Looking through Thomas's works, we can see several other projects with a direct line of heritage from *Under Milk Wood*. In January 1945, Thomas began work on the first of these, *The Londoner*, a piece written for broadcast on BBC Overseas Radio. *The Londoner* was a drama based around two streets in London and shows similarities to *Under Milk Wood* in a variety of ways from style and format to near-replica characters such as 'Lily'.

Previously, at the end of 1944, Thomas had worked on and completed another antecedent of *Under Milk Wood*: the broadcast known as *Quite Early One Morning*. The text of *Quite Early* runs parallel to *Under Milk Wood* in terms of characterization, action-free plot and location: it even displays specific similarities of phrase. Indeed, the opening section of the broadcast could easily serve as a prologue to *Under Milk Wood*:

Quite early one morning in the winter in Wales, by the sea that was lying down still and green as grass after a night of tar-black howling and rolling, I went out of the house... The town was not yet awake. The milkman lay lost in the clangour and music of his Welsh-spoken dreams, the wish-fulfilled tenor voices more powerful than Caruso's, sweeter than Ben Davies's, thrilling past Cloth Hall and Manchester House up to the frosty hills...

Quite Early One Morning, pl.

The lyrical descriptions and the way in which the

listener is taken on a 'guided tour' of the landscape ('thrilling past Cloth Hall and Manchester House up to the frosty hills...') are devices perfectly in keeping with the tone and content of *Under Milk Wood*. Phrases such as 'The town was not yet awake' are repeated almost word for word in the later work. Referring back to an earlier point, it is also possible to hear softened echoes of Joyce in all these examples⁴.

In terms of the development of characters, we are also presented with some early prototypes, from Cpt Tiny Evans (the forerunner of Cpt Cat), Miss Hughes 'The Cosy' (laying the groundwork for the creation of Myfanwy Price), and the ubiquitous Mrs Ogmores-Pritchard (who appears with the same name and characteristics in several works and who also appears under the name of Mrs Foster in *Suffer Little Children*). All of these have been documented in previous chapters, and detailing every reference to similarities with other Thomas works would take up an entire thesis on its own, which is not my purpose here. Excellent accounts of these similarities can be found in both Dr Daniel Jones' introduction to the Everyman edition of *Under Milk Wood* (London:Dent, 1954 [1991]) and in Douglas Cleverdon's *The Growth of 'Milk Wood'* (London:Dent, 1969).

During the documentary years, Thomas had also worked with Julian Maclaren-Ross on a feature length 'Home Guard' script⁵, which was combined first with *Quite Early One Morning* to create '*The Town That Was Mad: a Piece for Radio, Perhaps*' and was ultimately developed into *Under Milk Wood* itself. Specific details of these plays are not relevant

except for the fact that they substantiate the theory of Thomas constantly re-working his ideas until the resulting text reached a point where he could do no more.

The 'Post-Film' Poetry

I will return to theory of revision and development at a subsequent juncture, but having provided some background to the creation of *Under Milk Wood*, I will first examine the direct change in poetic style and theme inspired by both the war and Thomas's experiences in cinema.

To do this, it is necessary to look closely at the direct influence of film writing on the post-war poetry, perhaps the best examples being found in *Our Country* and *On Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain*. Alongside the change in 'literary style' (by this, I am referring primarily to simplification of language and complexity of imagery), it is also necessary to analyse subject matter as the two are closely interlinked.

In his post-war poetry and in *Under Milk Wood* we find Thomas focusing on what has become known as 'poetry of place', specifically Wales, and on childhood and pre-war society. Such subjects are naturally complemented by a simpler language and structure, although to grasp the full nature of this link, we should replace the definition 'simpler language' with the term 'more straightforward language'. The structure and form of these pieces was often technically quite complex, as in the visual construction of 'Vision and Prayer' or the strict villanelle of 'Do Not Go

Gentle Into That Good Night' and the carefully balanced planning of *Under Milk Wood* and *Me and My Bike*.

Although Thomas's later works were often technically complex, they were still accessible to the reader, viewer or listener. Indeed, one of the great achievements of Thomas's later work is the apparent ease with which he succeeds in combining the complexity with accessibility (something he did not always achieve in his earlier and surrealist influenced poetry⁶). This is undoubtedly to some extent due to his experiences writing for the mass market in a necessarily populist manner in the wartime documentaries where clarity and immediate impact were of paramount importance.

In terms of the 'poetry of place', Thomas himself claimed his first work of this nature to be 'Poem In October'⁷, but looking at the verse contained within the script for *Our Country*, we can see that this is not necessarily true as the poetry in the film is also centred on location. 'Poem in October' and *Our Country* were written around the same time (1944), and from this point onwards, much of Thomas's work can be categorized as as 'poetry of place', including *Under Milk Wood* itself.

Influences on the Poetry

The most important question about developments in Thomas's writing is not when, but why this change occurred? The answer to this lies again in the documentary films and by causal effect, in the war itself. *Taking On Wales* as an

example, there are several passages and accompanying images which are used to evoke memories of the First World War and its aftermath in Wales. Rather than lingering on the depression which followed the war and was still affecting the people of Wales at the outbreak of the renewed hostilities, Thomas (and the other documentary makers of the period such as Cavalcanti and Taylor) focused instead on an idealized picture of pre-war society. This is due to the fact that this pre-war society was associated by many (including Thomas himself) with memories of childhood times which seemed, in retrospect, free from care. Looking at Thomas's other works, particularly *Under Milk Wood*, which was set in an un-named time period but which evoked an idealized picture of the rural past⁸, we can see a definite move in the focus of Thomas's writing towards memories of childhood. This is partly due to the direct influence of the war, with people naturally reflecting on better times before the outbreak of hostilities and dreaming of (hopefully better) times yet to come. The subjects of the feature film scripts also reflect this pre-occupation with childhood. I make the differentiation as the documentaries were on specific subjects relating to the war and the features were of Thomas's - and Donald Taylor's - own invention. *Twenty Years A' Growing*, *Suffer Little Children*, *No Room At The Inn*, and *Me and My Bike* are all based around the lives of children. Poems written around or after this time such as 'Fern Hill', 'The Hunchback In The Park', and 'Vision and Prayer' similarly concentrate on the experiences of children, and even the more obscure later poems such as

'Lament' or the 'In Country Heaven' sequence retain that child-like wonder and nature based imagery associated with innocence and infancy or youth.

In his book *The Loud Hills of Wales*, Walford Davies emphasizes the change in Thomas's poetry post-war to an even greater extent. Davies suggests that the focus on childhood and 'poetry of place' stems from a sense of outrage at man's inhumanity to man. This hypothesis is re-enforced by poems such as 'Among those Killed in a Dawn Raid was a Man Aged a Hundred' and 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London' and Davies argues that stemming from this sense of outrage, the later poetry and *Under Milk Wood* are in actuality, a celebration of life and of man's triumph over adversity. This, he claims, is the thinking behind the idealized rural Wales of *Under Milk Wood*.⁹

In *Our Country* the beginnings of this pre-occupation can be found with much of the poetry, although constantly referring to the war, being based around idealized country images. This particular element of the script supports my own observations and lends weight to Davies' claim of the idealized being set against an oppressive shadow; the suggestion being that Thomas is fighting to re-establish some pre-existing 'natural' tranquility. The sought-after peace and idyllic descriptions are marred, however, by a shadow of war. We can see a similar theme being incorporated into the other documentary films and in many of Thomas's later projects such as *Me & My Bike*, the 'In Country Heaven' poems, and even in the projected *Two Streets* play. In all of these scripts there is some form of oppression (not always

the war) which hangs over the characters and events. Where the war does not feature, the action is placed within a closed environment with the noticable absence of outside influences (such as the conflict itself). *The Town That Was Mad*, a forerunner of *Under Milk Wood*, even built this specific situation into the plot with the town being physically sealed off from the 'madness' of the outside world. Even when a closed environment such as this was created, Thomas ensured that the audience was aware that there was an outside world and that it was in some way 'corrupting'. The 'oppressive shadow' is always in evidence.

Deconstruction of the 'Thomas Style'

In *Our Country*, we can see how examples of all these elements were physically combined. In the following passage, Thomas is describing how the lorries (a sign of the modern age) are carrying military supplies through the previously tranquil and 'innocent' countryside. The land and buildings themselves are shown to 'ignore the distraction' of war. They are therefore used to represent the indomitable human spirit which will always win through adversity:

Now it is dawn.

All night through the villages asleep
they grumbled past pond and school and green
oast house or windmill
the weathercocked church and the unseen wind-swung inn
sign

By orchard and cottage cluster
the drinking trough and the market square
and the lovers' lanes
they thundered through a hundred
all over the country's strangely singing names...

In this example, although the school, windmill and market square are implied to be 'asleep' and unaffected by events (as are the houses during the opening of *Under Milk Wood*), the thundering lorries representing the war effort are said to be omni-present through 'a hundred' villages. The objective is to provide a reference point to which the audience could relate: Many of them would have lived in rural areas where such transports were the major everyday reminder of the war.

Location and Style

In terms of the influences of Thomas's own surroundings, there are many factors which had quite obviously affected his writing. Apart from individual events such as the shooting incident at Majoda in Newquay, the wider surroundings had a great influence on the work of Thomas. This influence can be seen directly in relation to *Under Milk Wood* and the different versions which constitute its early development. Analysing just three stages, or contributors to *Under Milk Wood* (*Quite Early One Morning*, *The Londoner*, and *Llareggub: a Piece for Radio, Perhaps?*¹⁰) it is obvious how Thomas's surroundings directly affected his work. These versions were written while Thomas was living in very different locations, and the everyday rural and urban

surroundings made a major difference to the tone and settings of these various texts.

One of the earlier 'versions', *Quite Early One Morning*, was written in 1944 (at the same time as *Twenty Years A' Growing*), and in this script we can find the introduction of sound techniques and devices of dialogue which were to re-appear in *Under Milk Wood*. The fact that this piece was written alongside *Twenty Years A' Growing*, and the fact that Thomas was living in New Quay during this period is particularly relevant. The film script for *Twenty Years A' Growing* is based around a child's-eye view of growing up on and around the coast of County Kerry, and would have evoked memories of Thomas's own childhood experiences in the small villages and farms around Camarthen. As the period of writing overlapped, the tone of *Quite Early One Morning* also becomes one of idealized reminiscence, of a world before the war where imagination, sound, and innocence combine to create an idiosyncratic, but importantly safe world. The direct influence of the village of New Quay is reflected in the physical layout of the village in the script, which is an amalgam of New Quay and Laugharne.

The second of the antecedents to *Under Milk Wood*, *The Londoner*, was written in 1946. Although again very similar in construction and stylistic devices to *Under Milk Wood* (such as the narrator, the time frame, the quirky monologues - of Lily in particular -), this piece includes several references to the world outside the direct setting of Montrose Street. These references range from Ingrid Bergman to Hitler and Franco, and from Russia to South America. At

the time *The Londoner* was actually written, Thomas was living in Oxfordshire and commuting to London on a daily basis. Thomas's everyday surroundings at this point were decidedly urban and frequently consisted of business meetings and pub lunches. Thomas was constantly aware of World events through newspapers, newsreels and conversation, and would have been reminded daily of the after effects of the war on the people of London. Bearing in mind the interlinking of Thomas's works, we could also perhaps see here the genesis of the proposed *Two Streets* project. The development of *Under Milk Wood* was well under way in his mind, and through *The Londoner*, Thomas was able to further refine his methods and characterisations. The character of Lily in *The Londoner* is an obvious precursor of Lily Smalls, and the narrator is by now well placed as a completely objective observer.

While living in urban surroundings however, a rural (Welsh) setting such as that of *Quite Early One Morning* was inappropriate.

The third contributant I will mention here, *Llaregub, A Piece for Radio Perhaps*, was written in mid 1949 when Thomas was once again living at the Boat House in Laugharne. Having learnt from his experiences in film and from the earlier scripts for *Quite Early One Morning* and *The Londoner*, Thomas returns here to the rural setting based loosely on New Quay and Laugharne themselves. In each of these three scripts Thomas was setting his work in familiar locations based around his own everyday experiences. Interestingly, whilst working on the wartime documentaries

and touring defence installations for research purposes, Thomas had been working on what proves to be another antecedent of *Under Milk Wood*, the 'Home Guard' script. It could be argued from this that the film scripts were of less intrinsic importance than the general influence of the war and of Thomas's temporary locations. I would dispute this however, as although Thomas was certainly influenced a great deal by his physical surroundings, he was also influenced to the same extent by any other writings on which he was simultaneously engaged. In the same way that the broadening of his political (I use the term deliberately loosely) boundaries led to poems such as 'A Winter's Tale' and the unfinished collaboration with Stravinsky¹¹, the subjects of the film scripts, the relatively strict confines of screen writing, and the challenge of creating the 'ultimate script' also inspired a direct change in Thomas's work. Had Thomas not been surrounded by and immersed in his film writing, it is very probable that *Under Milk Wood* and many of the later poems would never have been written, and certainly not in the form we know them today. The general influence of location on Thomas has been examined thoroughly elsewhere¹², but there is one example which is of particular interest regarding Thomas's awareness of the effect his surroundings had on his writing. One of the draft titles for Thomas's war poem 'Ceremony After A Fire Raid' was to have been 'Our Time' (also the name of the magazine in which it was first published)¹³. With such a title Thomas himself was admitting the influence of the outside world on his work, an influence which is very rarely seen in the early poetry, but which is

witnessed with increasing regularity in the later work.

New Beginnings

I remarked in the previous chapter on the specific change in poetic style which occurred post-war in Thomas's verse. The next issue to be addressed is exactly when, where and why this change came about. It is obviously not possible to identify one single poem which introduced the 'new style' due to Thomas's constant revision of his poems, but the period in which the change occurred was during the early years of the war. This change coincided with the sale of his early notebooks (from which many of the subsequent poems were resurrected) and continued through the period 1941-1944, during which time Thomas began no new poems at all.

As I have already discussed, Thomas did not 'dry up' during the war years as has been suggested by some other critics¹⁴, but instead turned his attention to other forms of writing. As this was wartime less new fiction and poetry was being published anyway. Disregarding the broadcasts, co-written novel and other projects for the moment¹⁵, it is interesting to note that Thomas first met Donald Taylor in September, 1940 although he did not actually start writing for Strand until almost a year later. Considering Thomas's well documented attention to detail (for example his background reading to the script of *Twenty Years 'A Growing'*¹⁶) it is quite reasonable to assume that Thomas began studying documentary films from this time. In several letters, he had previously stated his wish to work on films,

and before undertaking such work would undoubtedly have paid close attention to the required form and accepted style. Looking through Thomas's poems chronologically, the first obvious change towards more straightforward language occurs in the poem 'On A Wedding Anniversary', written late 1940 and first published in the January of 1941: the exact period he began to research film.

Although this poem by no means heralds a definitive break in style, it is the first occurrence of what I will refer to as Thomas's 'post-war style' in terms of its simplicity. It is quite fitting then, that Thomas's last poem before this was titled 'Deaths and Entrances'. I cannot claim the change in style to be entirely because of film, and Dr Daniel Jones identifies the 'new style' as beginning even earlier, with the poem 'Altarwise By Owl-Light' from late 1935. Jones's explanation is also slightly different, but is still in keeping with my hypothesis. 'Altarwise By Owl-Light' is a very lexically dense and thematically complex poem and would not fit in with my definition of the post-war style as 'simpler', but Dr Jones instead concentrates on the type of imagery used, claiming that:

Before this poem, Thomas had been moving towards greater extravagance in imagery; after it, he moved towards greater economy¹⁷

Jones then suggests that this change was continued through to the 'In Country Heaven' sequence of poems and 'Alterwise By Owl-Light' could therefore be seen as an identifiable turning point in the development of Thomas's poetry. Dr Jones's theory supports my own suggestion that

the change in Thomas's writing was gradual and natural, the effects of the war and of his film experiences supplementing and extending Thomas's development as he refined and perfected his poetry through a method of trial and error, moving away from the style of his earlier verse. Although the popular perception suggests a 'creative drought' in Thomas's later years¹⁸, we should be careful to remember that many of Thomas's best and most famous poems were written or completed in this post-war period ('Poem In October', 'Fern Hill', 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night', and 'Poem on his Birthday' to name but four). These poems all incorporated elements of the 'simpler' and more straightforward style instigated by the documentary work and by the influence of the war.

Thomas's Own View

In addition to the conclusions I have drawn so far, it is useful to consider Thomas's own comments on the practices of screen writing and film-making. At the 'Cinema 16' forum in New York, the poet spoke about his own experiences in the field of cinema. Thomas's own method of writing poetry had been to create blocks of images, then let these blocks lead him naturally on to new sets of images¹⁹. With the experiences of cinematic (visual) mediums, he had learned a similar method in the creation of film. Thomas had argued for the difference of what Maya Deren had called horizontal (linear) films and vertical (symbolism) films. Thomas claimed that:

...as in a poem one image breeds another, I think in a film its really the visual image that breeds another, breeds and breathes it.²⁰

By using this method of construction, Thomas was now more able to overcome problems of narrative structure and bypass some of the restrictions of the more 'straightforward' film script.

Under Milk Wood is constructed, as Thomas suggested, from numerous 'block images' leading to, from, and through each other. These do not occur only in terms of lexical or phrase blocks, but have been used to build entire sections of the script. A good demonstration of this is found in the block sections describing the dreams of the characters. There is the dream of Captain Cat, the dream of Miss Price, the dream of Jack Black, and many more. As the chosen medium is that of the radio play, the use of dreams allows Thomas to create very imaginative and therefore 'visual' descriptions of what the characters see and hear in their dreams. This gives us an approximation of the 'visual blocks' of film. As Thomas claimed, these 'breed and breathe' into others, one character's dream containing actions and events which follow into the next section or block:

FIRST VOICE:

Mr Pugh, schoolmaster, fathoms asleep, pretends to be sleeping, spies foxy round the droop of his nightcap and psst! whistles up

MR PUGH:

Murder.

FIRST VOICE:

Mrs Organ Morgan, groceress, coiled grey like a doormouse, her paws to her ears, conjures

MRS ORGAN MORGAN:

Silence...

FIRST VOICE:

Mary Ann Sailors dreams of

Under Milk Wood, p22.

My examination of the way in which *Suffer Little Children* was constructed supports this theory²¹. Combine the block construction with the simpler and necessarily more accessible language of the film scripts (compared to the earlier poetry), and we can see how the film work affected *Under Milk Wood* directly.

New Directions

In line with these changes and developments, we should look at the evolution of the 'Thomas style' in more general terms. I have already pointed to some of the influences on the later poetry in terms of film, but there is one other important element to introduce at this time. Dr Jones even postulates that in addition to striving for simpler imagery, Thomas consciously intended to:

turn from the strictly personal kind of poetry to a more public form of expression, and to large scale dramatic works in particular, where there would be scope for all his versatility, for his gifts of humour and characterization as well as his genius for poetry.²²

This more public expression was to be realised with projects such as *Under Milk Wood*, the 'In Country Heaven' sequence of poems and the operas. To create these larger works, Thomas would often return to and revise projects he

had previously completed. These projects could then be utilized either in part, as in the disembodied narrators or 'Voices' of *The Unconquerable People*, or revised as a whole, as in the case of *Quite Early One Morning*. Thomas had a strong sense of artistic integrity on works for which he cared, and although he would, and frequently did, write purely for money this was not the case on projects which held his interest. Even on his 'financial works', Thomas would often revise and review well beyond necessity to ensure that nothing with any potential was wasted. Thomas's entire writing career can and should therefore be viewed as closely interlinked, and as a series of progressions. Bearing in mind his own wish to move towards larger and more versatile forms, it also explains how he arrived directly and indirectly at *Under Milk Wood*. At least in terms of his own ambitions, *Under Milk Wood* was the closest Thomas ever came to the creation of an 'ultimate script'. It combined the 'new form of writing', 'wider and more versatile form', 'accessibility', and was the sum of his experiences with poetry, broadcasts, readings and film scripts. It also incorporated his new bias towards idealised memory and 'poetry of place'. This is not to say that *Under Milk Wood* is necessarily Thomas's best work, but rather that it is the culmination of his work.

Contemporary Innovators

Again, a small disclaimer is needed here to prevent accusations of over-stating Thomas's originality. Thomas

was not the only author of the war years who experimented in different mediums. WH Auden, Henry Reed and other poets all followed similar paths. Of these, Auden and Reed are the most parallel in direction.

Auden's plays with Christopher Isherwood and his collaboration with Stravinsky on *The Rake's Progress* certainly show a development, but it is towards a more visual and plot-based form of expression. *The Dance of Death* (1933) and *The Dog Beneath The Skin* (1935) are experimental in their own ways, but both deliver a political polemic, and even the Brechtian *The Dance of Death* has a clear linear action - reaction 'plot'²³. *The Ascent of F6* (1936) is even more conventional in its approach.

Henry Reed chose a line of experimentation more comparable to that of Thomas when he moved into radio plays, in actual fact with many of the same backers and producers, of whom Douglas Cleverdon and Rayner Heppenstall were the most prominent. Reed's plays were partly experiments, like Thomas's, and Reed refused to classify his work as either poetry or drama²⁴. Looking at actual texts however, we can see obvious differences between the work of the two poets. Whereas Thomas produced innovations in descriptive technique with his narrators' "now... we see" and "only you can hear", Reed retained more straightforward and conventional descriptions such as 'This is the air...', or 'that is the glorious sun'²⁵. The difference here is that while Reed simply describes the scenery, Thomas confides in the reader as an equal and places his audience within the narrative itself. With the use of 'Only you can see' and 'We

see', the listener is positioned as a character in the text, and is referred to explicitly as such. This does not happen in Reed's work, where the listener retains their conventional and non-participatory role. In terms of narrative too, Reed differs from Thomas. Plays such as *The Private Life of Hilda Tablet*, and even *Streets of Pompeii* retain a conventional plot of action, dialogue and development. One of the innovations of *Under Milk Wood* is that nothing actually happens in terms of plot development. The play is a 'snapshot' of everyday life in which characters may speak, dream and interact through conversation, but they do not communicate about, or contribute to any significant event.

While these other authors followed a similar path of literary expansion to Thomas, they did not achieve the same level of innovation within their chosen mediums, and there is no evidence to suggest that they arrived at their creations through the same method of direct revision, repetition, experimentation and development. This is where Thomas's originality sets him apart from his contemporaries.

A Linear Development

To return to the content of *Under Milk Wood* itself, I have already commented on the multifarious origins, but to get a true picture of the importance of film in the play's construction, we should look again at the premise of Thomas's work as a type of linear development. Thomas began

writing poems and short stories before progressing through local journalism to broadcasts, to film scripts, to a novel and lecture tours, to a 'plotless radio play' (his words), a 'TV operetta' (*Me & My Bike*) and to subsequent projects such as opera and other planned plays. In terms of the development of *Under Milk Wood*, these different mediums can be viewed as stages.

From Thomas's readings and poetry, we can find influences on *Under Milk Wood* in terms of theme and imagery, such as the frequently used idealised country childhood. From the short stories such as 'The Outing' or 'Where Tawe Flows' we have the characterization of the rural Welsh and from the readings and broadcasts we have the importance and power of the voice as a form of communication. Through *The King's Canary* (the novel co-written with John Davenport) and *Adventures in the Skin Trade* Thomas displays a sustained and structured narrative, and from direct antecedents to *Under Milk Wood* such as *Quite Early One Morning* or *The Londoner* we have the relatively plotless format and the disembodied narrator. The film scripts were written alongside the latter of these works. In them Thomas learned to structure sustained narrative, experienced the practical difficulties of creating an extended but cohesive story, and even more importantly, stepped aside from the direct poetry to attempt a new form of literature: the 'film without pictures'. *Under Milk Wood* had been referred to by Thomas as a 'dramatic poem', and this is quite important to an understanding of the 'linear development theory'. As the culmination of this development, *Under Milk Wood* combined the drama and poetry,

the film structure and the poetic language and imagery. During Thomas's lifetime, *Under Milk Wood* was described in various ways, and the poet himself never settled on an adequate classification. Although he finally settled on 'A Play for Voices', his earlier sub-titles 'A Piece for Radio, Perhaps' and 'A Film Without Pictures' were probably the most fitting.

The art of film-making was central to the construction of *Under Milk Wood*. From his beginning with the documentaries, Thomas had experimented and discovered the advantages of wedding sound and vision but had also experienced the disadvantages of the film medium such as the practical limitations required by his backers, producers, the censor and the M.O.I. Combining the power of the spoken words (from his poetry) with the advantages of a film structure and sustained narrative seemed the answer. The radio play was to be the next stage in development in what would literally be a film without pictures. In his letters, disillusioned with the non production of his feature scripts, Thomas even talked about turning *The Doctor and The Devils* into 'a full length radio play'²⁶. This, it seems, was the medium towards which Thomas had been gravitating.

At the Cinema 16 forum a few days before his death, Thomas had talked about the role of the poet in the creation of a film. After comments from William Maas on the subject of the poet as integral to the medium, Thomas had suggested that he could even direct in cinema and had re-affirmed his belief in the 'complete film scenario'. Thomas had also, of course, directed (and worked in many other roles) on the

documentaries, but commented that through more complete scripts, the necessity for anyone, even the poet, to direct could be eliminated: "I think the poet should establish a scenario and a commentary that would do that as well"²⁷. This was achieved by Thomas himself with *Under Milk Wood*.

Perhaps perversely, given the medium in which *Under Milk Wood* was written, Thomas had argued that the best and purest films were the silent ones. If we look more closely at the reasons for this argument, however, we see similarities clearly exist between the single-medium based forms of the radio play and the silent film. In the silent film we concentrate on the pictures alone whilst in the radio play, the words are the centre of attention, sound being the only medium. The advantage of the radio play is that visual images are created within the imagination of the listener. We create the 'pictures' ourselves, prompted by the dialogue and the soundtrack. Thomas had learned the importance of writing to complement visual images in the documentaries, but in the radio play, by prompting the imagination of the listener, he could create the 'visual images' too. At the forum, he claimed that:

I think the reason why it seems to many of us that the silent film is the purest film and the best is because it mimics the way we dream²⁸.

The description is unarguably fitting for *Under Milk Wood*, particularly given the literal dream sequences that occur. Watching pictures on a screen cannot compare to the individual dream because of the integral role of the imagination. In a play for voices, the visuals are conjured

by the listeners themselves, prompted by the descriptions, but are actually created in the individual listener's mind. This could therefore be argued to be one step beyond celluloid film in the search for an 'ultimate form'. Combining the complete visualization of the novel with the power of vocalization from film, we find ourselves able to create the pictures, but we still retain the accents, intonation, and the voices of 'real people' which are found in talking pictures.

Having said this, it is important to remember the entire work is 'completely Thomas' and that there is no real need for directors, locations or high profile actors. By this, I am referring to the fact that the play is completely 'self-sufficient', containing its own directions and creating its own locations (again within the listener's mind). Thomas originally envisaged the play being performed by the villagers of Laugharne and thus created no specific 'lead roles'. Although Richard Burton is famous for his performance of the First Voice, the construction of the play is such that the idiosyncrasies of the characters are far more important than the voices of the actors portraying them. Although Thomas was (perhaps paradoxically) a renowned performer, the presentation in which he performed the entire piece single-handed helped to prove the power and believability of the characterizations. Even when performed by the same voice, the plausibility of the characters was not diminished. In terms of audience expectation, Thomas had selected a medium over which he had complete autonomy. The radio play combines the complete

control of the author in a novel, poem or short story with the wider advantages of film. Thomas had commented in the letters of the possible effect of the subtitle for the publication of *Doctor and The Devils* being 'A Film Without Pictures': that it could alienate some readers. Here, the listener would be aware of the content from the outset - a 'completely Thomas' work presented in a highly accessible medium.

Within this medium, Thomas implemented both unsuccessful and 'tried and tested' film devices, and incorporated them into locations and characters drawn from the imperfect antecedents to *Under Milk Wood*. The 'camera directions' in prose from the scripts, for example, were originally intended for the complete film scenario. In *Under Milk Wood* they are re-used to great effect, being combined with the confidentiality of the First Voice and directing not only the pictures, but also the sounds and even the imagination:

Come closer now... Listen. It is night moving in the streets... Now behind the eyes and secrets of the dreamers in the streets rocked to sleep by the sea, see the....

FIRST VOICE, *Under Milk Wood*, ppl-3.

The most obvious of the film 'failures' is the use of voices and numbered characters. From the First Professor' or First Gentleman' of *The Doctor and the Devils* to the First Nurse' of *Suffer Little Children*, I have already described the inadequacies of the numbered and unnamed characters as plot devices whose only purpose is exposition. In *Under Milk Wood* however, First Voice', First Drowned', 'Mrs Dai Bread

1' etc. occur in a dream-like scenario (in the case of the first two as literally disembodied voices) and so are far easier to accept than as physically irrelevant expositors. In the case of First and Second Voice, this distinction becomes even more relevant. Springing from the un-named narrators of *The Unconquerable People*, the Voices introduce characters and direct the listener, but are also integral to the piece in their own right. Although the refrain they give is 'only you can hear', the two voices travel around the village with the listener, sometimes describing directly what they see, sometimes describing what the listener (the 'you') sees. Demonstrating the centrality and importance of 'First Voice' as a character is the fact that in the first performance, it was the two roles 'First Voice' and the Rev Eli Jenkins, the poet, which Thomas chose to perform.

Considering the roles of the narrators as both expositors and companions, Captain Cat could justifiably be seen as a 'Third Voice'. If we accept this, the role of Captain Cat can be seen as a further development of the narrator. With Captain Cat, Thomas has fulfilled the need for exposition and existing 'companionship' without having to revert to un-named narrators existing outside of the society they describe. In the cases of 'First Voice' and '2nd Voice' as well, although not able to interact with the other 'people' of the village, the most important factor is that the expositional characters are actually with and are also 'part of' the listener. Although the numbered narrators do not exist in the village in the same way as Captain Cat, they are as real as any of the described characters or actions,

and so are none the less one stage of development further on than the purely narrating roles of the film scripts. From the sole-purpose expositional 'Voices' of *The Unconquerable People* and the the expositional First Professor', Thomas has amalgamated features of both to create the First Voice' of *Under Milk Wood*. Continuing with this line of development, Thomas then named the character and placed him within the interactional framework of the plot to give us Captain Cat.

An argument frequently given against the film scripts is that only the dialogue stands up to examination, and that Thomas could not follow or create a sustained narrative²⁸. A cursory glance at the narrative structure of the stories and broadcasts disproves this, but bearing in mind the introduction and perfection of the 'voices', we can perceive what these critics mean in terms of Thomas's obvious strengths. Thomas had himself stated that he could follow plot, but that his forte was not in its creation (in my chapter on the documentaries, I have already described how the collaboration with Maclaren-Ross overcame this). I would argue that it was not the creation of the narrative which was the problem, but merely the successful creation of narrative in the medium of film. In *Under Milk Wood*, where the narrators and numbered characters are given specific identities and credible characteristics, there is no problem with sustained narrative. The natural argument against the view of Thomas's narrative as 'successful' would be that the poet himself described *Under Milk Wood* as a 'plotless radio play'. Being 'plotless', it could therefore

not be used to validate or disprove the success of a linear narrative. Although I would argue this point on the very definition of 'plotless'³⁰, the important fact is that Thomas was happy enough with the success of the 'narrative' or 'plot' in this medium to plan adaptations of *The Doctor and the Devils*, *Two Streets*, and at least one other production in the same medium³¹. These other projects contained action, interaction and major narrative development, but were still to be presented in a similar format to that of *Under Milk Wood*. Whether or not we agree that the film scripts were badly structured or narrated (there are cases for both arguments in individual scripts), the simple fact is that Thomas was not unable to create sustained narrative per se. Any inadequacies or shortfalls he felt appeared in any specific script would be used as a 'learning experience', the methods then being revised and re-used in later works.

Structure

One other very important area I have not yet explained is the enormous effect on the physical structure of Thomas's work that ensued from his working in film. Prior to the films, Thomas's work had been mainly autonomous, from the poems and short stories to the broadcasts (where time was the only real restriction). The effect of having to write for visual images that were frequently in existence already, of collaborating professionally and of strict censorship limitations from the MOI meant Thomas had to master a new

type of self-discipline. Combine this with strictures affecting everybody in wartime, rationing, identity cards, and at least some restrictions on physical liberty (if not from the government, then from the bombing raids), and we are presented with a Thomas who is more concerned with structure than ever before.

In the post-film poetry, we discover the physical structuring of poetry such as 'Vision and Prayer' for the first time. We are also presented with the strict villanelle of 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' and the complex inverted rhyme scheme of 'Prologue'. There is also the planned sequence of 'In Country Heaven' poems, partially completed, which was to form a larger work through a sequence of parts (poems). This too can be seen to be a natural progression of Thomas's work. Thomas's method of creating poetry came from the blocks of images which would then form the 'whole poem'. It is unsurprising given the method of block composition that the poetry should evolve into larger projects, and that using the same block method on a larger scale, Thomas would go on to form large-scale poems made up from blocks of 'contributory' poems. This was the methodology behind the 'In Country Heaven' sequence.

In relation to *Under Milk Wood*, the increased emphasis on physical structure can be seen even more clearly. Similar in compositional method to the 'Prologue' and 'In Country Heaven' sequence, every section was carefully prepared by Thomas to create a 'balanced whole'. From the specific to the most general levels, Thomas referred in his letters to the necessity of the play being balanced (being structured

in parallel sections), and the fact that this was never completed is due only to his untimely death.

In the final version of *Under Milk Wood*, the first half runs longer than the second and there are imbalances in the amount of music and in the number of dreams experienced by the characters. On one of his own manuscripts, Thomas refers to additions he intended to make including songs for Mr Waldo, Lily Smalls and Thomas the Death, to a nightmare for Lord Cut-Glass, to conversations for Mr & Mrs Floyd the cocklers and PC Atilla and to some poachers and to the creation of voices for gravestones and epitaphs³². Some sections such as Mr Waldo's song were completed, but the vast majority were not.

Thomas was unhappy that the night sequence was not so long as the opening section, which we can see if we measure the timescale of the events in the play. Pages one to 22 represent the night, 22 to 24 the dawn, 24 to 46 the morning, 46 to 69 the late morning and early afternoon, and only 69 to 89 the late afternoon and evening. Although there is an approximate symmetry and the sections are quite clearly defined, there is a definite imbalance towards the morning time. Examining the text closely, it is possible to see the intended structure: the piece opens and closes with the '1st Voice', and giving perhaps the best clue, Captain Cat first appears three pages into the text and makes his last appearance three pages from the end. The balance is very closely monitored to create a delicate but exact structure. This is a direct result of Thomas's experiences on the documentary scripts where the visuals and the frequently

cyclical 'plots' necessitated a structured and complimentary verse. The carefully divided sections (blocks) of text in *Our Country* and *On Wales* (as detailed in my chapter 'Documentary Films') exemplify this method of balanced construction. Again, the legacy of film has a direct influence on *Under Milk Wood*.

Reputation and Reaction

At this juncture, it is useful to recognise the place Thomas actually held in the contemporary worlds of film and poetry. As regards the documentary movement of the period, what Thomas was doing was not particularly unusual. Thomas collaborated with Donald Taylor and John Eldridge to create the commercial and artistic successes of films such as *Our Country* and *On Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain*. At the same time, other collaborations of writer and director such as Humphrey Jennings and Stewart MacAllister, or Wright and Auden (ie *Nightmail*) were just as successful in both artistic and commercial spheres. During the contemporary period, Thomas's (documentary) scripts were frequently reviewed in the film press, and with scripts such as *Our Country*, the poet gained high praise. The same could be said of Auden. In contemporary reactions however, much was made of the influence of film on Thomas's non-cinematic writing.

Although little has been written since, around the time of his death, several of Thomas's colleagues noticed the link between the film work and subsequent poetry and

attributed the successes of his later work to the time spent in cinema. Stephen Spender noticed the change as early as 1946, commenting how "Writing scripts, broadcasts, and so on, has given him the sense of theme". Later, in the fifties, the effect of working on war documentaries was given as the major contributant to the changes in Thomas's work. The critic G.S. Fraser addressed this point, and went on to surmise that the war period changed not only the poet's style, but also altered Thomas's more general attitude to his entire writings. He commented that:

some work he did on documentary film on the bombing raids, which in the end was found too grim for public release, had a profound effect upon his imagination; an effect that may partly explain the retreat, in many of his later poems, to the theme of childhood innocence and country retreat...³³

Thomas's co-worker, the writer Jack Lindsay pushed this hypothesis even further, claiming that the film work:

...in begetting such poems as 'A Refusal to Mourn...' ... stirred his dramatic sense, made him want to find a cinematic sweep of objectively based images³⁴

This again supports the supposition of Thomas's deliberate change in direction and identifies the film work specifically as the root cause. Exactly why the importance of these film scripts has since been ignored cannot be explained, but the backing of these contemporary figures lends weight to my claim that for a full understanding of Thomas's work, it is time for a re-evaluation of an important period in the poet's development that has previously been passed over.

In many of the examples given above there are direct links from Thomas's film work to the later poetry and *Under Milk Wood*. This has occurred not only in terms of the direct contributory factors, but also from experiences and situations arising from his time working on film. Because I firmly believe that Thomas's work should be seen in terms of a linear development, with methodology and style being constantly improved and perfected, it is only through a more general overview of the work that we can properly see the huge influence the war years had on the poet. Although I believe *Under Milk Wood* (or at least the form of *Under Milk Wood*) was the culmination of Thomas's search for his ideal medium, ignoring the general influence of the film scripts would be to miss a very important contributory factor to not only the radio play itself, but also to Thomas's development as a poet and writer. Even ignoring the intrinsic value of the scripts as artistic creations in their own right, the wide influence which their composition created is vital to a full understanding of Thomas's later years.

- 18 Many critics, including John Ackerman, point to the fact that a great deal of Thomas's later poetry originated in the notebooks and the fact that this would therefore qualify these later works as revisions rather than as new poems.
- 19 This has been explained fully in my previous chapter, '*Suffer Little Children*'.
- 20 'Cinema 16', p57.
- 21 As does my explanation of the music in *Me and My Bike* described in the chapter 'The Thomas Style'.
- 22 *Under Milk Wood*, pvii.
- 23 John Fuller, *A Reader's Guide to W.H.Auden* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), p78.
- 24 Introduction to *Streets of Pompeii* (London:BBC, 1971)
- 25 *Streets of Pompeii*, p229.
- 26 *Letters*, p604. Letter to Donald Taylor.
- 27 'Cinema 16', p60.
- 28 'Cinema 16', p58. Thomas gives no indication as to which particular silent films he was referring.
- 29 *Portrait of a Friendship*, pp33/4. and *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, ed. by E.W.Tedlock (London: Heinemann, 1960), p80.
- 30 *Ulysses* could by the same definition be categorized as plotless. Action-free or lacking substantial tangible developments would better describe the play.
- 31 See my earlier chapter on 'The Thomas Style'.
- 32 Booklet accompanying the compact disc of the 1988 re-recording of *Under Milk Wood*, p12.
- 33 The Spender and Fraser quotations were both reported in Giles Goodland, *Dylan Thomas and Film* (Wales:New Welsh Review, 1992), p22.
- 34 *Meetings with Poets*, p30.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to trace the direct and indirect influence of Dylan Thomas's film scripts on his poetry and other subsequent writings. Through the evidence I have offered it has become obvious that there is an large, important, and hitherto ignored body of work which needs to be assimilated into the study of Thomas. In addition to analysing the merits of the individual scripts, this thesis has focused on the specific ways in which the experiences of screen writing helped to develop the 'Thomas style'. The following appendix also contains the first edited and annotated version of a complete and previously unseen Dylan Thomas script, *Suffer Little Children*.

Major Areas of Influence

Through learning to write in the forced medium of documentary film, Thomas gained the experience of writing for a pre-determined audience. Whereas his earlier poetry had been written instinctively, Thomas now learned to write for and with pictures, and began to direct his work towards certain set audience expectations. This is perfectly demonstrated through his wish to produce a 'new form of writing' which would appeal both to cinema audiences and to the readers of detective fiction. Springing from the same experiences in documentary film, Thomas became interested in form and structure to a far greater degree. This led to the lexical experiments of containing directions and

technical requirements within the text itself, prompted the creation of individual devices such as the use of narrators, the 'Voices' of *Under Milk Wood*, and led to the replacement of generic stage directions with prose descriptions (the 'we see...' and 'we hear...').

The second major discovery analysed in this thesis is the direct method of experimentation and revision which forms the linear development of Thomas's writing. Through the evidence I have offered it is possible to trace, for example, the origins of *Under Milk Wood* in the 'Home Guard' documentary and the gradual development of this script, via *Quite Early One Morning* and *The Londoner*, into the eventual form of the completed radio play. The direct development of the 'Voices' from their first appearance in the documentary *The Unconquerable People* has likewise been traced. Even more important is the fact that I have been able to explain Thomas's actual working method of composition and revision through the study of the original manuscript pages to *Suffer Little Children*. This in turn highlighted the method of 'block composition' which Thomas employed in the creation of his poetry.

Further Study

Arising from my research and analysis, there are a great many questions which have been raised and which warrant further study of Thomas's work. One of these is the method of block composition mentioned above. Critical examination of Thomas's earlier semi-surrealist poetry for

example, would benefit a great deal from the block composition approach.

The major discovery of note, however, concerns the subject matter incorporated into much of Thomas's later work. With the post-apocalyptic subject of the operatic collaboration with Stavinsky and of the 'In Country Heaven' sequence of poems (both of which were unfinished at the time of his death), was the focus of Thomas's work to develop into a more urban and dis-utopian realm? If we also consider the gritty physical and dysfunctional urban realism of the previously unseen script for *Suffer Little Children*, my thesis suggests that a re-examination of Thomas's choice of subject matter may well be necessary. The previously cherished view of Thomas as a nature and 'childhood' based poet would appear to be only one aspect of his later writing.

Linking to the choice of subject matter, the area of Thomas political ideals of 'Universal Sympathy' would also appear to need further study. No major work considering the influence of Thomas's politics and political philosophy has yet been produced, and the evidence of my study suggests that this previously neglected field is of far more importance than was previously thought.

A more detailed and expansive examination of individual film devices on the structure and dialogue of *Under Milk Wood* is now possible, and there are several reference points I will provide which could be used as starting points for such subsequent research.

Blocks of text from 'A Winters Tale' incorporate the 'prose camera directions' from the feature scripts in a

similar way to *Under Milk Wood* ('Listen' - stanza 12 -, 'Look' - stanza 15 ') and this example could be used for an examination of the direct line of experimentation/revision detailed earlier. Following the same line of development Eli Jenkins namechecking of Welsh locations is almost exactly the same as Thomas's own work in *Our Country and On Wales; Green Mountain, Black Mountain*. In terms of characterization, direct comparisons can be drawn between the parallels of Mrs Ogmores-Pritchard and Mrs Foster, and of Bessie Bighead and Mrs Dogwood in *Suffer Little Children*. I have explained the role of film in the creation of *Under Milk Wood* in some detail but due to the size of the radio play, an additional supplementary study is perhaps now necessary.

In terms of subject and emotional reaction, Thomas's location work at Coventry Cathedral for *Building The Future* had a direct influence on the the creation of the poem 'Ceremony After a Fire Raid'. The themes of change and time in respect of seasonal change and the eternal forces of nature sprang from the work on *Twenty Tears A'Growing* to provide the basis for 'Fern Hill' and 'Poem In October'. These poems were written almost immediately after research on the film was begun, and the influence of the war and the documentary subjects (the work of the rural Welsh, the eternal hills of Wales) obviously provided Thomas with some of his source material. Critical examination of the 'Welshness' of the poet could find much source material in filmscripts such as those mentioned above, and some references given in this thesis could assist in the explanation of Thomas's much-discussed sense of dislocated

national identity.

The final major discovery arising from my research concerns the 'creative drought' of the war years postulated by many critics. My study suggests that rather than being an unimportant period in the life and work of Thomas, it was these very 'film years' which provided the genesis and inspiration for Thomas's poetic revival and expansion. Had Thomas lived, it is likely that we would have seen many more large scale projects inspired by his experiences in film.

Finally, it is worth considering that he had written the opening sections to *Me and My Bike*, a TV operetta. Thomas was a bardic icon, master of self image and was shameless in self promotion, very much the equivalent of the modern pop star. Given the growth in television during the 1950's, the opportunities for such mass audience exposure would undoubtedly have been irresistible to the poet, and I would suggest that we may well have seen Thomas concentrating on more and more projects for television. Even if he had not actually written a great deal in this medium, Thomas would undoubtedly have utilized this growing medium for his favourite pastimes: money, performance, and the promotion of Dylan Thomas.

This text box is where the unabridged thesis included the following third party copyrighted material:

Edited version of the unpublished Dylan Thomas film script *Suffer Little Children* using the manuscript 'Life in a Girl's Reform School', held at the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, State University of New York.

Due to the nature of the manuscript as 'works for hire' and subsequent loss of company files the copyright status is uncertain. The Dylan Thomas estate is administered by David Higham Associates, London.