

# **Minor Research Project**

## **The Prototype of Human Courage: a Critique of the portrayal of the Welsh Farmer in the Poetry of R S Thomas**

The main objective of the Minor Research Project entitled “The Prototype of Human Courage: a Critique of the portrayal of the Welsh Farmer in the Poetry of R S Thomas” was to examine the stark realities of human existence in the harsh Welsh countryside; to expose the spirit of triumph and detachment that figures in the character of the elusive Welsh peasant and to raise awareness and create discussion about this aspect of Thomas’ poetry.

The project begins with an introductory section that explores the history of Modern English Poetry. It traces the paradigms that shaped the current of poetry throughout the ages, the dominant movements that had their say in moulding poetry and the prominent thinkers and philosophers who contributed to the evolving consciousness. Prominent poets have been mentioned along with the groups they were associated with.

The first chapter introduces the poet under contemplation. It recounts the factors that were influential in the development of his poetic career, the works he have produced in the course of his long career spanning over sixty years, the faces and places that played a role in his poetry and the contemporary poets who imprinted their ideas in his impressionable mind.

Wales and the Welsh peasantry forms the subject of the second chapter. R.S. Thomas is a Welsh nationalist, a stubborn regionalist committed to traditional

presentation. The farmer's intimacy with his land and animals forms the subject of his poetry.

The third chapter focuses on Iago Prytherch, a farm laborer who appears in many of his poems. Thomas describes him in the poem "A Peasant" as "an ordinary man of the bald Welsh hills." Prytherch epitomizes Welsh hill-farming life and is a kind of archetypal rural Welshman, standing as a symbol for his people. Prytherch is also used by Thomas as a symbol for humanity itself. His hard labor in an unyielding landscape, though representative of Welsh farmers, also exemplifies the hardships common to all men.

The project concludes with observations about the changes that have come over the poet's mind due to his association with the Welsh farmers. He scrutinizes human life in its lowest terms and as he believes that the truth is not easily won, his poems record the struggle with marked honesty and integrity, thereby providing the context for the necessarily infrequent moments of faith and vision which are expressed with a clarity and gravity rarely matched by any of his contemporaries. In finding in the Welsh peasants a 'prototype' of man, Thomas makes a universal statement - this pared-down existence, in a land of ruined beauty belonging to the past, is more human than any educated sophistication. The peasant thus becomes a prototype of human courage. His shattered faith in humanity is restored, for in man's basic character, he finds grace and spiritual dignity.