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شبكة المعلومات الجامعية

# بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



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# شبكة المعلومات الجامعية التوثيق الالكتروني والميكروفيلم





سامية محمد مصطفى



شبكة المعلومات الجامعية

# جامعة عين شمس

التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

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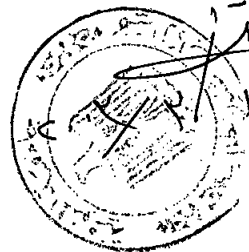
شبكة المعلومات الجامعية



# بالرسالة صفحات لم ترد بالأصل



**Minufiya University**  
**Faculty of Arts**



# **Identity and the National Voice in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas: A Thematic and Stylistic Approach**

**An M. A. Thesis**

**Submitted to:**  
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Faculty of Arts,  
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

رَبِّ إِنِّي لَمَّا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرِ فَقِيرٍ

صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ

**To my mother, my sister and  
the spirit of my father.**



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## Introduction

(R)onald (S)tuart Thomas (1913 – 2000) has always been known for his independence and individuality in regard to the literary fashions of the day. In fact the poet himself has expressed his position in a B. B. C. television interview in 1972. He stated that “any form of orthodoxy is just no part of a poet’s province at all ... After all what is today’s orthodoxy is tomorrow’s antiquity.”<sup>1</sup> In comparison with his contemporary fellow poets, R. S. Thomas occupies a peculiar place, because his link with the literary trends of the century is not as congenial as his bond with the Anglo-Welsh school with peculiar interests. Robert Bernard suggests that “two poets have stood outside the swings and counter swings of poetic fashion - such independence is not easy in British literature – [they] are R.S. Thomas and Seamus Heaney, both of whose work is rooted in Celtic fringes of the islands.”<sup>2</sup> R. S. Thomas’s poetry reflects a profound rural Celtic touch, where the poet describes himself as a mystic poet of nature. W. J. Kieth includes Thomas in the last chapter of his book, The Poetry of Nature, in which he argues that “Thomas represents an association with the English tradition of nature poetry not dissimilar to Robert Frost but with palpable Welshness.”<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, Wales is the poet’s first concern especially in his early poetry. R. George Thomas, comparing R. S. Thomas with his contemporaries, finds that he “is specifically concerned with one small area of recognizably Welsh life and is motivated by a desire to capture the essential quality of the national voice.”<sup>4</sup> For this reason, R. S. Thomas has often been described as a regionalist whose poetry hardly transcends the limitation of place. C. A. Runcie pointed out



that "...The reputation of R. S. Thomas as a regional poet has kept his work from travelling."<sup>5</sup> R. S. Thomas did not write with the idea of regionality at the back of his mind. It is rather a kind of fidelity to the Anglo-Welsh movement to which he belongs. John Williams argues that it "would be no more adequate to describe Thomas as 'regional' poet than it would be to describe Wordsworth or Hardy. The writer gets to the centre by digging deeply into his own locality."<sup>6</sup>

The publication of 'H'm' in 1972 was a break in R. S. Thomas's career. It marked a second phase in his writing and rebutted the claim that Thomas was a regional poet. Religious problems in the twentieth century dominated Thomas's subsequent works. By relying on biblical stories and myths Thomas has touched upon the universality of the archetypes occupying not only a single person's mind but the mind of the whole community.

Thomas is not totally isolated as he is "peripherally associated with the Movement in Britain"<sup>7</sup>, for he shared with them an interest in clarity of expression and the "plain style." But in subject-matter he is at heart an Anglo-Welsh poet, thus creating a diversion from the thematic grounds of the 'Movement' which was against mysticism and politics. The Movement themes tend to be wholly taken from the ordinary daily facts of life. R. S. Thomas is a poet with a mission, quoting Yeats' words, he writes for "his race and the truth." Probably such an interest has led Thomas Knapp to consider Thomas not as "a member of the Movement but always admired by the Movement poets for the qualities of clarity and economy which his verse displayed as early as 1946."<sup>8</sup>

### III

Calvin Bedient values R. S. Thomas's words as clear and deeply crimsoned yet harsh enough to reflect the harsher realities of rural Wales. Thomas, Bedient writes, is "like most of the better British poets now writing, puts little between himself and his subject."<sup>9</sup> In early poetry R. S. Thomas depends on his senses, he never tires of speaking of what is around him. R. George Thomas gives a complete account of Thomas's poetic characteristics when he writes that his poetry has an apparent "visual sense conveyed to the reader in hard taut rhythms which are dominated by monosyllables and riveted together by short, alliterative phrases."<sup>10</sup> Thomas's dependence on outside nature cannot hold true for his late poetry whose imagery turned from the physical to the mental and the abstract.

R. S. Thomas's work is always praised for its clarity, economy and purity. As for his tropes, he has a magnificent talent for metaphor which is praised for its vividness and surprise. For Kingsley Aims, Thomas "is one of the best half dozen poets writing in English."<sup>11</sup>

Chapter one sheds light on R. S. Thomas's primary task as an Anglo-Welsh poet who is set first to speak of his people and his country. Thus, the chapter explores the national aspect of identity. Wales is, thus, the paramount issue in Thomas's mind. The chapter sets out to define the Anglo-Welsh movement and to name its concerns. The chapter develops to encompass Thomas's attempt to revive the spirit of Welshness, long lost, under the progressive advance of the quest after materialism. Thomas revives Welshness through contrasting the present Welsh people with their ancestors and contrasting them with their oppressors, the English.

Chapter two seeks to pinpoint another aspect of identity, the cultural one. Thomas proposes that urbanization has led to a political recess. Now he calls for a return to the old rustic, Celtic culture that forms the authenticity of Welshness. Thomas exposes the traits of the cultural identity of Wales through explicating the character traits of the Welsh farmer Iago prytherch. Thomas's attitude towards the farmer, who stands for the Celtic culture, passes by three main stages: indifference, dissociation, and finally association. In details, chapter two would show the development of such a complex relationship.

Chapter three is concerned with a third version of identity, the religious one. Thomas is a priest who is appointed in north Wales to preach Christianity in a rural community. North Wales community has allegiance to farm life rather than to the church. The community is still absorbed in the quasi-pagan tradition of the Celtic culture. Thomas has been faced with the challenge of introducing a God of abstraction to a community whose culture cannot separate divinity from the physical evidence characteristic of pagan rituals that resides deep in the Celtic mentality. This chapter shows how Thomas has contrived a compromise between those two extremes. Thomas proves his vocational identity through a theology of absence that shows God's presence through his handcraft.

The fourth chapter studies three stylistic varieties in Thomas's poetry. First, imagery which is approached by analyzing the characteristic traits of metaphors in early and late poetry. Second, a contrastive study is made between '*and*' the paratactic and the conjunctive. Third, the indication of the verb tense in Thomas's myth of the machine shall be examined. This part aspires to introduce



Thomas's personal trial of mythologizing and his adopting of already created myth in poetry.

The conclusion seeks to prove that there is continuity linking Thomas's late and early poetry. By tracing three versions of identity in Thomas's poetry, it attempts to prove that there is unity despite the diversity of topics explored in Thomas's poetry.