



ACTIVITY: WALES – A STIFLING OR INSPIRING PLACE?

Dylan Thomas came from Swansea, a place which he called “... an ugly, lovely town ...crawling, sprawling ... by the side of a long and splendid curving shore. This sea-town was my world.”

He left Swansea for London, having lost his job as a reporter on The South Wales Evening Post, saying ‘The land of my fathers. My fathers can keep it.’

He was both inspired by his home country, and felt great affection for his relatives who featured in some of his most well-loved prose, and at the same time he hankered to move away, to London, to New York.

Another poet with the same surname, who wrote in English, yet felt a great affinity with Wales and the Welsh language, was R.S.Thomas, one of Wales’s finest poets – whose centenary of birth was celebrated just before Dylan Thomas’s, in 2013

Like Dylan Thomas, R.S sometimes felt ambivalent about the country and its people. He wrote a poem early in his career as called A Welsh Landscape. In it, he expresses frustration and some despair about Wales – along with pride, perhaps. Read it and explore what you feel he is saying.

A Welsh Landscape

To live in Wales is to be conscious
At dusk of the spilled blood
That went into the making of the wild sky,
Dyeing the immaculate rivers
In all their courses.
It is to be aware,
Above the noisy tractor
And hum of the machine
Of strife in the strung woods,
Vibrant with sped arrows.
You cannot live in the present,
At least not in Wales.
There is the language for instance,
The soft consonants
Strange to the ear.
There are cries in the dark at night
As owls answer the moon,
And thick ambush of shadows,
Hushed at the fields’ corners.
There is no present in Wales,



And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics,
Wind-bitten towers and castles
With sham ghosts;
Mouldering quarries and mines;
And an impotent people,
Sick with inbreeding,
Worrying the carcase of an old song.

R. S. Thomas 1913-2000

Take a class vote on the topic: Wales – and inspiring or stifling place to be?

GROUP WORK:

Together, have a brief discussion on the topic, exploring arguments for and against. Consider all areas of Welsh life – culture, work, education, family, community, language.

Elect a class chairperson, then invite a member from each group, representing both viewpoints, to address the class with their views.

Open the discussion out to an orderly debate.

At the end, take the vote again, to see whether the debate has changed views.