

I am a huge fan of the poetry of the great Welsh writer Dylan Thomas, but perhaps his greatest work is *Under Milk Wood*, which he described as a "play for voices." I have provided the text of the play, although there are a couple of places where I could not find proper text and I have indicated that by typing ???????. If you can provide the proper text, please email me.

(I have altered the British spellings and punctuation in the text, for the most part, leaving them where appropriate).

I will present my discussion of the play in three parts:

- 1. The characters of the play**
- 2. The text of the play and my sectional analysis**
- 3. My conceptual analysis of the play**

1. THE CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Voice 1 & 2 – narrators. Their role is scene setting and continuity. Large reading parts of almost half the text. **Voice 1** - male. **Voice 2** - probably female.

Adult male parts (26)

Captain Cat (*70ish* perhaps) – blind retired sea captain. He hears and comments on the activities of the townsfolk and their children. His world is his memories and his dreams of a former seafaring life, especially his favorite tart, Rosie Probert. A sympathetic part. Sings a little.

Rev. Eli Jenkins (any age over 30) - dreams of eisteddfodau, thinks himself a poet though his poetry is almost childlike. He recognizes Llareggub's many limitations and loves it all the more because of them.

Cherry Owen (any age over 30) – Jolly drunkard. Genuine mutual affection with Mrs. Cherry Owen.

Sinbad (any age under 40) – barman at the Sailors Arms. Loves Gossamer Beynon but without the courage to declare it.

Mr. Edwards (30-45) – “I am a draper mad with love”; but what for? Miss Price as he declares, or really just for his own draper's business; just a confirmed bachelor who kids himself otherwise. He and Miss Price, own shops at each end of the town. The passion of their romance is in their letters; they never meet.

Mr. Pugh (any age over 40) - He and Mrs. Pugh hate each other with a cold poison and an icy contemptuous passion respectively.

Organ Morgan (any age over 30) – A passion for organ playing and nothing else.

Mr. Waldo (40 - 60) - 17 gentle snoring stone, a drunkard with many paternity suits against him, has been surrounded and dominated by women all his life. Sings

Jack Black (any age) – alone and aggressively sexually repressed (a very Freudian character)

Lord Cut-Glass (66) – manic, sees his death coming and so is obsessed with time.

Nogood Boyo (under 40) – not bright, socially inept, shows “inappropriate behavior”.

Willy Nilly (almost any age) – The postman whose wife steams open all the town’s mail so that on his rounds so he can tell everyone about everyone’s news including their own before they read it.

Five Drowned Sailors (any age) – apparitions in Captain Cat’s dream.

Butcher Beynon (40 - 60) – enjoys teasing his wife over his supposed pet butchery

Dai Bread (30-50) – A baker, frenetic and “hairy little man with big pink lips” Lover of his two wives in ménage-a trios.

Mr. Ogmore and **Mr. Pritchard** (over 40) – dead former but separate husbands of, and nagged to death by, Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard. They dread their nightly encounters with her.

Utah Watkins (over 40) – A farmer who hates his animals

Ocky Milkman (any age) – A snuffling little man

P.C. Attila Rees (over 30) – A bullish policeman (non-speaking)

Old Man (very old), **Evans the Death** (any age), **Fisherman** (any age) – one liners

Adult female parts (23)

Polly Garter (20-40) – blonde, ample and comfy, loves all her men, and the consequent babies, quite indiscriminately. She knows her place in the world and is content. Sings

Mrs. Pugh (any age over 40) - She and Mr. Pugh hate each other with an icy contemptuous passion and a cold poison, respectively.

Gossamer Beynon (20-30) – Cool schoolmistress, but keeps her lust for Sinbad to herself (if only he knew!).

Mary Ann Sailors (85) – the link to a former and simpler time

Four Neighbors (any age) – gossips. *Doubling with Five Women* – Mr. Waldo’s dead former wives/lovers

Lily Smalls (teens) – the Beynon’s live-in help who has a secret passion for a local lad.

Mae Rose-Cottage (17) – dreams in anticipation of adult passion

Mrs. Dai Bread One (30-50) - generously built, “nice to comfortable, nice to be nice”. Lives in a ménage-a-trios with Dai Bread and Mrs. Dai Bread Two.

Mrs. Dai Bread Two (30-50) – a hard bodied slinky gipsy. Lives in a ménage-a-trios with Dai Bread and Mrs. Dai Bread One.

Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard (over 40) - obsessively clean and widow of Mr. Pritchard and Mr. Ogmores. Nags them both in death as she did in life.

Mrs. Organ Morgan (any age over 30) – a timid groceress. A martyr to Organ Morgan’s music.

Mrs. Willy Nilly - (almost any age) – wife of the postman. She steams open all the town’s mail so that Willy Nilly, on his rounds, tell everyone about everyone’s news.

Rosie Probert (25-40) – like Captain Cat’s former comrades she is long dead but haunts his memory. Could be a tear-jerker of a part.

Miss Price (30-45) - confirmed spinster who kids herself otherwise. She and Mr. Edwards, own shops at each end of the town. The passion of their romance is in their letters; they never meet.

Bessie Bighead (40-80) – gruff and unattractive and condemned to live alone.

Mrs. Beynon (40 - 60) – believes every word her husband says about his supposed pet butchery and is hysterically horrified.

Mrs. Cherry Owen (any age over 40) – wife of Cherry Owen who loves him, drunk or sober, in equal measure.

Mother (20-40) – Young Waldo’s mother in his dream.

Mrs. Utah Watkins (over 30) – A ewe of a woman.

Wife (20-50) – Mr. Waldo’s last dead wife; hysterical.

Youth parts (11)

Little Boy – Young Waldo in his dream

Little Girl - Young Waldo’s first love in his dream

Girl (Gwennie) – leader of the singing group. Sings

Three Girls’ Voices - chorus. Sing

First Boy – in playground game. Sings

Second Boy – in playground game. Sings

Third Boy – in playground game. Sings

Child - young

Child's Mother

2. My Section by Section Analysis in which I present a section of the play followed by an analysis.

1) To begin at the beginning: It is Spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and Bible-black, the cobble streets silent and the hunched, courtiers'-and-rabbits' wood¹ limping invisible down to the sloe-black, sloe,² slow, black, crow-black, fishing-boat-bobbing sea.³

Analysis: Dylan Thomas starts by saying he is beginning at the beginning in his reading of the play i.e., it is dawn and the play will take us through the lives of the townsfolk to dusk and into their dreams. There is another beginning. As the First Narrator, Dylan Thomas announces: "It is Spring" and goes on to describe the town somewhat. The theme of Spring and its reproductive renewal infuses the play. Spring also stands for "lustiness," a strong symbol of Nature. It is to the woods that lovers go to make love and later in the play Dylan Thomas has Miss Myfanwy Price dream of "her lover, tall as the town clock tower, Samson-syrup-gold-maned,⁴ whacking-thighed and piping hot, thunderbolt-bass'd and barnacle-breasted, flailing up the cockles with his eyes like blowlamps⁵ and scooping low over her lonely, loving hot-water-bottled, body." Spring, to Thomas, is symbolic of lust and dreams

¹ woodland where lovers go and rabbits live.

² Color of blackthorn berries, which is a dark purple or black,

³ Consecutive words changing only one sound or letter (paragram); this device was popular with British poets such as Gerald Manley Hopkins, a favorite of Thomas's.

⁴ Samson syrup was an old trademark for Tate and Lyles golden syrup, which used the catchphrase: "Out of the strong came forth sweetness." Too, Samson's mane occurs in the biblical story of Samson, which of course also includes a lion (Judges V, 5-9). However, in this rather James Joycean piece of word-play, this refers also to the lion trade-mark for Tate and Lyle's famous "Golden Syrup," which incorporates the sentence "Out of the strong came forth sweetness" from the Samson story. Myfanwy Price is a "sweet-shop keeper," and the same conjunction of ideas is picked up again on p.42: "MR EDWARDS: I love Miss Price. FIRST VOICE: Syrup is sold in the Post Office..."

⁵ A metaphor for 'bright-eyed'. Blowlamps (or kerosine lamps) were used by the cockle-fisherman to see their work at night; cockle are a type of edible shell-fish found along the South Wales coast.

of lust, even for spinsters like Miss Myfanwy Price whose “lonely, loving hot-water-bottled, body” will never be bedded in the clover. Here, we can take the hot-water-bottle as a sign of the opposite of Springtime frolics in the woods, an “inside” symbol, if you please.

Springtime is also when “Young girls lie bedded soft or glide in their dreams, with rings and trousseaux, bridesmaided by glowworms down the aisles of the organ–playing wood.” Later the author writes of the fictitious town of Llaregub, “Llaregub, this snip of a morning, is wild fruit and warm, the streets, fields, sands and waters springing in the young sun.” The play opens with the town awakening to a glorious Spring day.

2) The houses are blind as moles (though moles see fine tonight in the snouting,⁶ velvet dingles⁷) or blind as Captain Cat,⁸ there in the muffled middle by the pump and the town clock, the shops in mourning,⁹ the Welfare Hall in widows' weeds.¹⁰ And all the people of the lulled and dumbfound town are sleeping now.

Analysis: blindness is another theme in the play, one that is a counterweight to Springtime. Dylan Thomas is saying that the townsfolk are blind to the transience of their domesticated existence and to the eternal natural world around them. The transient acts of Humankind are framed in cyclical time, that of the clock; while Nature is cast as ongoing, its time flowing lineally from past to future through the limited time frame of the town’s hustle and bustle. The “blind houses” represent the limited view of Humankind. Captain Cat, the old sea captain, is blind, but Dylan Thomas has named him “Cat” and that is not by accident. Cats are reputed to see at night and Captain Cat can see things that most townsfolk miss. He even sees the dead and likewise the “moles see fine tonight in the snouting,¹¹ velvet dingles.”¹² Notice that Dylan Thomas presents the town (i.e., the townsfolk) as “blind, muffled, lulled and dumbfounded.” It is an image of a town and its population that are “sleeping now” and

⁶ Using snouts or noses to operate in the earth, as with moles.

⁷ Small valley or glade.

⁸ According to ancient belief, cats can see in the dark, thus Captain Cat, though blind, serves, along with the FIRST VOICE and SECOND VOICE, as a narrator whereby we “see” a world that the voices of the characters cannot entirely reveal.

⁹ The mourning effect of blinds drawn overnight in shop windows, a funerary custom as well.

¹⁰ Refers to the unkempt, un-mowed state of the grounds around the town hall.

¹¹ Using snouts or noses to operate in the earth, as with moles.

¹² Small valley or glade.

the author clearly means sleeping in the sense of missing out on a great deal of reality while attending to their petty projects. They are *twice asleep*, so to speak.

3) Hush, the babies are sleeping, the farmers, the fishers, the tradesmen and pensioners, cobbler, schoolteacher, postman and publican, the undertaker and the fancy woman, drunkard, dressmaker, preacher, policeman, the webfoot cockle-women¹³ and the tidy wives.

Analysis: Sleep is ascribed to all in the town, including “the tidy wives,” who for Thomas are more blind and asleep than most.

4) Young girls lie bedded soft or glide in their dreams, with rings and trousseaux, bridesmaided by glowworms down the aisles of the organ-playing wood. The boys are dreaming wicked or of the bucking ranches of the night and the jolly-rodgered sea.¹⁴ And the anthracite statues of the horses¹⁵ sleep in the fields, and the cows in the byres, and the dogs in the wet-nosed yards; and the cats nap in the slant corners or lope sly, streaking and needling,¹⁶ on the one cloud of the roofs.

Analysis: Girls and boys sleep of different things – the girls of marriage and the boys of sex and adventure. The “anthracite statues of the horses” also sleep in the fields, as do real animals. The miners of South Wales made extra money by carving statues of animals and Dylan Thomas is using this fact to note how sleepy and asleep is everything in the town of Llaregub. How does Dylan Thomas feel about such sleepy beings in the town? Much has been made of the fact that Llaregub is “bugger all” spelled backwards, or almost anyway. In any case, I think we can safely say that as an insightful poet and intellectual, Dylan Thomas compares himself to a “lump of coal” humanity in Llaregub, and perhaps in all the towns in which he lived in Wales.

¹³ In South Wales, some families make their living collecting shellfish called “cockles,” rising early in the morning to catch the clear beaches before the tide. The use of the adjective “webfoot” may refer to the fact that web-footed birds also work the beach.

¹⁴ Images of Jolly Roger, the ensign of pirates, with his black flag with skull and crossbones; originally “jolly, rodgered”; also, rodgered and bucking give the passage its slang sexual slant.

¹⁵ Miners in South Wales have created a craft industry from carving coal (anthracite) into figurines such as animals, hence the metaphor.

¹⁶ Moving forcefully.

5) You can hear the dew falling and the hushed town breathing. Only your eyes are unclosed to see the black and folded town fast, and slow, asleep. And you alone can hear the invisible starfall, the darkest-before-dawn minutely dew-grazed stir of the black, dab-filled¹⁷ sea where the Arethusa, the Curlew,¹⁸ and the Skylark, Phoebe, and Sally and Mary Ann, Zanzibar, Rhiannon, the Rover, the Cormorant and the Star of Wales¹⁹ tilt and ride.

Analysis: In this paragraph we are presented with a town “fast, and slow, asleep.” Again, Dylan Thomas is undoubtedly saying that the townsfolk are slow mentally and asleep to the finer things in life and for Thomas those “things” would not be material things, but rather words and the ideas behind them. The author is also inviting the playgoer or reader into his world of ideas, noting that: “You can hear the dew falling, and the hushed town breathing. Only your eyes are unclosed to see the black and folded town fast, and slow, asleep. And you alone can hear the invisible starfall, the darkest-before-dawn minutely dew-grazed stir of the black, dab-filled²⁰ sea...” Evidently, we are invited into Thomas’s world of imagination. Presumably the townsfolk would not consider such an invitation as enticing.

6) Listen. It is night moving in the streets, the processional salt slow musical wind in Coronation Street and Cockle Row. It is the grass growing on Llaregub²¹ Hill, dewfall, starfall, the sleep of birds in Milk Wood.

Analysis: Here Dylan Thomas uses words like: “salt slow” and images like “grass growing” and the “sleep of birds” to provide the playgoer or reader with a sense of a town in less-than-dynamic slumber.

¹⁷ A "dab," a nautical term for fish bait.

¹⁸ Sea bird.

¹⁹ Names of small fishing boats.

²⁰ A "dab," a nautical term for fish bait.

²¹ “Bugger All,” spelled in reverse. Sometimes spelled: Llaregyb.

7) Listen. It is night in the chill, squat chapel, hymning in bonnet and brooch and bombazine black,²² butterfly choker²³ and bootlace bow,²⁴ coughing like nanny goats, sucking mintoes,²⁵ forty-winking hallelujah; night in the four-ale bar,²⁶ quiet as a domino; in Ocky Milkman's lofts like a mouse with gloves; in Dai Bread's bakery flying like black flour.²⁷

Analysis: The author likes up this slumber with religion, where in the chapel “it is night” and “chill” and where dressed to the nines to make their “forty-winking hallelujah.” Apparently Dylan Thomas had little good to say about what occurred in the frosty chapels of Wales. Nor do the women attending chapel

“hymning in bonnet and brooch and bombazine black,²⁸ butterfly choker²⁹ and bootlace bow” seem to rank high in his esteem, for he has them “coughing like nanny goats.”

8) Listen. It is tonight in Donkey Street, trotting silent, with seaweed on its hooves,³⁰ along the cockled cobbles,³¹ past curtained fern pot, text³² and trinket, harmonium,³³ holy dresser,³⁴ watercolors done by hand, china dog³⁵ and rosy tin tea caddy.³⁶ It is night neddyng³⁷ among the snuggeries of babies.

²² A fine twilled fabric often dyed black.

²³ A type of necklace.

²⁴ Bows attached to dress boots.

²⁵ A traditional hard candy.

²⁶ Reference to the type of pub that serves four types of ale or beer.

²⁷ Because of common first and last names in Wales (Jones, Williams, Evans, etc.), men are figuratively nicknamed according to their occupation -- Dai Bread (the baker). Dai is the shortened version of David.

²⁸ A fine twilled fabric often dyed black.

²⁹ A type of necklace.

³⁰ Reference to the practice of placing seaweed as padding on horse-hooves to keep them walking quiet through cobbled streets, used especially at funerals.

³¹ Perhaps cockle shells mixed in with mortar in cobbled streets.

³² A book, most usually a Bible.

³³ A portable organ found in many Welsh homes of the era.

³⁴ A dresser in which dishes are displayed or stored.

³⁵ A popular British ceramic dog figurine (usually in pairs facing each other) for decor.

³⁶ A tray for a teapot and teacups.

³⁷ Floating.

Analysis: In this passage time moves “trotting silent, with seaweed on its hooves,”³⁸ i.e., imperceptibly while the village sleeps. Sleeping, the people are unaware of the onward journey of time.

³⁸ Reference to the practice of placing seaweed as padding on horse-hooves to keep them walking quiet through cobbled streets, used especially at funerals.

9) Look. It is night, dumbly, royally winding through the Coronation³⁹ cherry trees; going through the graveyard of Bethesda⁴⁰ with winds gloved and folded, and dew doffed; tumbling by the Sailors Arms.⁴¹

Analysis: The movement of linear time again highlighted and Thomas has it passing through death or “going through the graveyard of Bethesda”⁴² and even passing one of Thomas’s favorite British institutions – the pub, in this case “tumbling by the Sailors Arms.” I think the author is saying that time marches on and nothing – not even drink – can stop it. It is, of course, ironic that drink so dramatically contributed to the early death of one of the great poets of all time – Dylan Thomas.

10) Time passes. Listen. Time passes. Come closer now. Only you can hear the houses sleeping in the streets in the slow deep salt and silent black, bandaged night. Only you can see, in the blinded bedrooms, the combs and petticoats over the chairs, the jugs and basins, the glasses of teeth, Thou Shalt Not on the wall,⁴³ and the yellowing dickybird-watching pictures of the dead.⁴⁴

Analysis: Thomas repeats his message that time is moving on and people are blind in their sleep or perhaps sleepwalking. He has them slumbering in “blinded bedrooms” surrounded by their beloved belongings, their material comforts – “the combs and petticoats over the chairs, the jugs and basins, the glasses of teeth, Thou Shalt Not on the wall, and the yellowing dickybird-watching pictures of the dead.” He is saying that not even these possessions can halt the unwavering progress of time.

³⁹ Coronation Street.

⁴⁰ The names of Protestant chapels in Wales came predominantly from the place-names of the Holy Land in the Bible.

⁴¹ The name of a tavern where sailors would leave their weapons for safekeeping before going into town.

⁴² The names of Protestant chapels in Wales came predominantly from the place-names of the Holy Land in the Bible.

⁴³ In many British homes, framed placards with quotes from the Bible grace the walls.

⁴⁴ Old and yellowing pictures of dead relatives. They are dickybird pictures because in the olden days, the photographer held up a dick-bird for those being photographed to watch while the picture was being taken.

11) Only you can hear and see, behind the eyes of the sleepers, the movements and countries and mazes and colors and dismays and rainbows and tunes and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and big seas of their dreams. From where you are, you can hear their dreams.

Analysis: Thomas consistently returns to the simile of “dreaming.” It is not by accident that we begin to see the sleeping town, but the author is also saying that the town’s residents are also asleep to the deeper aspects of life, which a poet can “see” but which are only available to villagers in their dreams, if then. He invites us – the watchers and listeners – to penetrate their dreams and observe their behavior.

12) Captain Cat, the retired blind sea-captain, asleep in his bunk in the sea-shelled, ship-in-bottled, shipshape best cabin of Schooner House dreams of.....

Analysis: Thomas purposely begins with a blind retired sea captain – Captain Cat. As with the trope about cats, he can see things that the sighted villagers may miss. The captain, like the other residents of the town, is, however, now asleep in a flat that the author describes in terms reminiscent of a shipboard environment.

13) SECOND VOICE

.....never such seas as any that swamped the decks of his S.S. Kidwelly⁴⁵ bellying over the bedclothes and jellyfish-slippery sucking him down, salt deep into the Davy dark⁴⁶ where the fish come biting out from behind the wet green wallpaper of the undersea and nibble him down to his wishbone, and the long drowned⁴⁷ nuzzle up to him.

⁴⁵ "S.S." stands for screw steamer or steamship. "Kidwelly (Cydweli in Welsh) is an ancient Carmarthenshire town between Carmarthen and Swansea, across the Towy river from Laugharne, where Thomas wrote the final draft of the play.

⁴⁶ A reference to the sea as "Davy Jones's [Jonah's] locker," after a sailing name for the supposed evil spirit of the sea., but also a coal-mining association with the miner's safety-lamp invented by Sir Humphrey Davy (1778-1829), used in the mines from 1816 onwards.

⁴⁷ This passage where the sailors speak guiltily but longingly about their former lives draws influence from the American poet Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology*, and "Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard" by one of Thomas's favorite poets, Thomas Hardy.

Analysis: The second voice chimes in to say that his dreams are, perhaps, a slight exaggeration of his real life at sea.

14) FIRST DROWNED

Remember me, Captain?

CAPTAIN CAT

You're Dancing Williams!

FIRST DROWNED

I lost my step in Nantucket.⁴⁸

SECOND DROWNED

Do you see me, Captain? The white bone⁴⁹ talking. I'm Tom-Fred the Donkey Man. We shared the same girl once. Her name was Mrs. Probert...

Analysis: In his dreaming state, Captain Cat has former dead shipmates appear – Dancing Williams who, although fleet-of-foot, took a bad step and drowned at sea. Another is Tom-Fred the Donkey Man, who is now a skeleton and brings up the fact that he and Captain Cat shared a woman in life. Dylan Thomas is juxtaposing death and life, with dreams as a link between these spheres. Pay attention to what the woman, Mrs. Rosie Probert says next:

15) WOMAN'S VOICE

...Rosie Probert, thirty-three Duck Lane. Come on up, boys, I'm dead.

Analysis: She is symbolic of the linkage between life and death. She still invites the boys up for a little “jig-jig,”⁵⁰ which she did in life and continues in death. We might take this as Thomas’s literary statement that sexual activity is natural and enduring.

⁴⁸ An island town (and town) in the Atlantic, just south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Its Indian name means “far away land,” and its whaling associations evoke Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, in which Captain Ahab, too, “lost his step” in losing his leg to the whale.

⁴⁹ Skeleton.

16) THIRD DROWNED

Hold me, Captain, I'm Jonah Jarvis, come to a bad end, very enjoyable.

FOURTH DROWNED

Alfred Pomeroy Jones, sea-lawyer,⁵¹ born in Mumbles, sung like a linnet,⁵² crowned you with a flagon,⁵³ tattooed with mermaids, thirst like a dredger,⁵⁴ died of blisters.⁵⁵

FIRST DROWNED

This skull at your ear hole is....

FIFTH DROWNED

Curly Bevan. Tell my auntie it was me that pawned her ormolu⁵⁶ clock.

Analysis: Again we hear from the dead sailors, who have been reduced in death, one even to a "skull at your ear hole." But they remain interested in life and long for its pleasures. Curley Bevan even wants Captain Cat to tell his auntie that he had lied bout pawning her clock.

17) CAPTAIN CAT

Aye, aye, Curly.

SECOND DROWNED

Tell my missus: no, I never.....

⁵⁰ A euphemism for sexual intercourse.

⁵¹ A "sea-lawyer" was an argumentative sailor always aware of his own rights.

⁵² A small, brownish Old World finch.

⁵³ A tall, glass or metal cup for beer.

⁵⁴ A fishing boat that dredged for great quantities of oysters.

⁵⁵ A common term for cancer from the Old French *blestre* (tumor).

⁵⁶ Meaning: gilded with copper/gold or brass.

THIRD DROWNED

I never done what she said, I never.

FOURTH DROWNED

Yes they did.

FIFTH DROWNED

And who brings coconuts and shawls and parrots to my Gwen now?

FIRST DROWNED

How's it above?

SECOND DROWNED

Is there rum and laverbread?⁵⁷

THIRD DROWNED

Bosoms⁵⁸ and robins?

FOURTH DROWNED

Concertinas?⁵⁹

FIFTH DROWNED

Ebenezer's bell?⁶⁰

FIRST DROWNED

Fighting and onions?

⁵⁷ A.k.a. lavabread – the Swansea pronunciation. A sea-weed harvested and produced on the coast of South Wales and used as a spread for bread and sold in the taverns; made in bowls (lavers).

⁵⁸ Three meanings: the curve of a sail, but also breasts and birds.

⁵⁹ A squeezebox musical instrument commonly played by sailors.

⁶⁰ A name for warning bell for the launch of lifeboats.

SECOND DROWNED

And sparrows and daisies?

THIRD DROWNED

Tiddlers⁶¹ in a jam jar?

FOURTH DROWNED

Buttermilk and whippets?⁶²

FIFTH DROWNED

Rock-a-bye baby?

FIRST DROWNED

Washing on the line?

SECOND DROWNED

And old girls in the snug?⁶³

THIRD DROWNED

How's the tenors in Dowlais?⁶⁴

FOURTH DROWNED

Who milks the cows in Maesgwyn?⁶⁵

FIFTH DROWNED

When she smiles, is there dimples?

⁶¹ A small fish – especially, the stickleback.

⁶² A breed of dog of the sight-hound family. They are physically similar to a small greyhound.

⁶³ A slang reference to women, usually unmarried, who go to the bar-parlor of an inn or tavern. A snug is a small private room or compartment in a pub.

⁶⁴ A village of the county borough of Merthyr Tydfil, in Wales

⁶⁵ A dairy farm by the name of Maesgwyn (lit. "Fair Meadow"). Thomas lived near a farm by this name as a child some two miles from Fern Hill, his maternal aunt's farm at Llangain.

FIRST DROWNED

What's the smell of parsley?

CAPTAIN CAT

Oh, my dead dears!

Analysis: The dead sailors air list of delicts, sins and peccadilloes they committed in life; but also they remain interested in the minutia of the live world, even to the level of the “smell of parsley.” Dylan Thomas is saying that the living villagers should stop and smell the parsley, a take on the well-known phrase: “stop and smell the Roses.”

18) FIRST VOICE

From where you are you can hear in Cockle Row in the Spring, moonless night, Miss Price, dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper, dream of....

SECOND VOICE

.....her lover, tall as the town clock tower, Samson-syrup-gold-maned,⁶⁶ whacking-thighed and piping hot, thunderbolt-bass'd and barnacle-breasted, flailing up the cockles with his eyes like blowlamps⁶⁷ and scooping low over her lonely, loving hot-water-bottled, body.

Analysis: The two narrators describe real live (though sexually dead) lovers who live at opposite ends of the town and who, while espousing “undying” love, will never even meet. These inhibited letter-writing lovers are Miss Myfanwy Price, a spinster and Mr. Mog Edwards, shopkeeper. Miss Price is a “dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper” and Mr. Edwards is a haberdasher. Both are presented as examples of overly-materialistic people who can only dream of a sexual relationship and has Mr. Edwards sleeping and dreaming, while his

⁶⁶ Samson's mane occurs in the biblical story of Samson, which of course also includes a lion (Judges V, 5-9). However, in this rather James Joycean piece of word-play, this refers also to the lion trade-mark for Tate and Lyle' famous "Golden Syrup," which incorporates the sentence "Out of the strong came forth sweetness" from the Samson story. Myfanwy Price is a "sweet-shop keeper," and the same conjunction of ideas is picked up again when Mr. Edwards says: " I love Miss Price." But the narrator says: Syrup is sold in the Post Office..."

⁶⁷ A metaphor for 'bright-eyed'. Blowlamps (or kerosine lamps) were used by the cockle-fisherman to see their work at night; cockle are a type of edible shell-fish found along the South Wales coast.

mind swoops low over Miss Price's "hot-water-bottled, body" but Thomas leaves us with no doubt that Miss Price will never sleep with anything but a hot-water bottle and that Mr. Edwards loves his money far more than any flesh and blood.

19) MR. EDWARDS

Myfanwy Price!

MISS PRICE

Mr. Mog Edwards!

MR. EDWARDS

I am a draper⁶⁸ mad with love. I love you more than all the flannelette and calico, candlewick, dimity, crash and merino, tussore, cretonne, crepon, muslin, poplin, ticking and twill in the whole Cloth Hall⁶⁹ of the world. I have come to take you away to my emporium⁷⁰ on the hill, where the change hums on wires.⁷¹ Throw away your little bed socks and your Welsh wool knitted jacket, I will warm the sheets like an electric toaster, I will lie by your side like the Sunday roast.⁷²

Analysis: Yet the lovers continue to moon and swoon over each other by post and through daydreams. Mog Edwards declares the very opposite of what is true when he says he loves Miss Price more than his cloth and that he will take the place of those things she uses to warm her body – her bed socks, Welsh wool knitted jacket and hot-water bottle (all material things). Here Thomas shows us the downside of dreams i.e., they can keep us from reality and prevent action.

⁶⁸ A seller of cloth and dry goods.

⁶⁹ The central market for trading cloth in London.

⁷⁰ A clothes shop.

⁷¹ In some large town shops (hence Mog Edwards's ambition), well beyond the Second World War, payment and change for purchased goods were sped between shop-attendant and cashier along a system of sprung pulleys and wires. Thomas would have remembered the device from the Ben Evans Department Store in Castle Bailey Street in Swansea, destroyed by German bombs in 1941.

⁷² A traditional Sunday dinner in Britain with roasted meat, potatoes and peas.

20) MISS PRICE

I will knit you a wallet of forget-me-not blue, for the money, to be comfy. I will warm your heart by the fire so that you can slip it in under your vest when the shop is closed.

MR. EDWARDS

Myfanwy, Myfanwy, before the mice gnaw at your bottom drawer will you say....

MISS PRICE

Yes, Mog, yes, Mog, yes, yes, yes.

MR. EDWARDS

And all the bells of the tills of the town shall ring for our wedding.

Analysis: In this last portion of this imaginary exchange between the stilted lovers, Thomas has Miss Price declaring her love by knitting Mog some protection for his money and he is falsely declaring that a wedding is in their future. Rather savagely, Thomas has the noise of money-tills and chapel bells simultaneously sound at the end of their dreamy conversation.

21) FIRST VOICE

Come now, drift up the dark, come up the drifting sea-dark street now in the dark night seesawing like the sea, to the Bible-black airless attic over Jack Black⁷³ the cobbler's shop where alone and savagely Jack Black sleeps in a nightshirt tied to his ankles with elastic and dreams of.....

⁷³ Under Milk Wood is not a *roman à clef* (novel about real people under disguised identities), but Thomas sometimes linked name and occupation from actual memory. One of Thomas's early schoolmates relates: "In the Uplands [a Swansea neighborhood] was a group of small shops, amongst them Mr. Grey, the newsagent, Mr. Black the cobbler, and Mr. White's, the shoe shop. One day, whilst a group of us waited for the school door to be opened, Dylan told us importantly that no-one was allowed to open a shop there unless their name was a color. We all believed him, especially as, by a strange coincidence, the next shop to open was Mr. Green the Greengrocer." (Joan A Hardy, "At Dame' School with Dylan," *The New Welsh Review*, Spring, 1995, 39).

SECOND VOICE

.....chasing the naughty couples down the grass-green goose-berried⁷⁴ double bed of the wood, flogging the tosspots⁷⁵ in the spit-and-sawdust,⁷⁶ driving out the bare bold girls from the sixpenny hops⁷⁷ of his nightmares.

Analysis: Thomas shifts the scene to another townsman, Jack Black at his cobbler's shop. He is used to show aggressive sexual repression *a la* Freud. He wants sex but has his "nightshirt tied to his ankles with elastic," which is Thomas's roundabout way of indicating that he fights the desire to masturbate, surely a delicate topic in the 1952 when the play was first performed. He "savagely" dreams of girls, but his dreams are really "nightmares" because they will never come to fruition. He will remain a repressed wallflower at "the sixpenny hops" or town dances, never knowing the joys of bedding down in "the grass-green goose-berried⁷⁸ double bed of the wood." Of course, Jack Black is a symbol of the sexually repressed culture of the town, Wales and perhaps Britain. Thomas leaves no doubt as to the source of this repression when he writes that Jack dreams fitfully in "the Bible-black airless attic" over his cobbler's shop. Like Mog Edwards and Miss Price, Jack Black can only dream of sex and with him, even masturbation along with such dreams is an anathema. Thomas ends this brief look at Jack by having him exclaim in Welsh: "Ach y fi! Ach y fi!" which is an expression of disgust, most assuredly with himself, but also perhaps with the religious culture that damns him to such a tight-fitting nightgown of a life.

22) FIRST VOICE

Evans the Death, the undertaker....

⁷⁴ A wild berry that grows on the sides of hills in Britain. Apart from the tale that babies are found under gooseberry bushes, to "play gooseberry" was to act as a chaperon, or be an unwanted third presence when lovers wanted to be alone.

⁷⁵ Slang term for those who drink a great deal.

⁷⁶ Reference to cheap pubs or taverns where the only floor-covering was sawdust.

⁷⁷ Slang for cheap village-hall dances.

⁷⁸ A wild berry that grows on the sides of hills in Britain. Apart from the tale that babies are found under gooseberry bushes, to "play gooseberry" was to act as a chaperon, or be an unwanted third presence when lovers wanted to be alone.

SECOND VOICE

.....laughs high and aloud in his sleep and curls up his toes as he sees, upon waking fifty years ago, snow lie deep on the goose field behind the sleeping house ; and he runs out into the field where his mother is making welsh-cakes in the snow, and steals a fistful of snowflakes and currants and climbs back to bed to eat them cold and sweet under the warm, white clothes, while his mother dances in the snow kitchen crying out for her lost currants.

Analysis: Thomas now takes to an undertaker – Evans the Death – who represents The Final Demise in the sense that the town is locked in deadly repression and blocked from the carnal joys experienced by a only a few deviants in the dew-damp meadows of Milk Wood. He dreams of his childhood and innocence.

23) FIRST VOICE

And in the little pink-eyed cottage next to the undertaker's, lie, alone, the seventeen snoring gentle stone⁷⁹ of Mister Waldo, rabbit catcher, barber, herbalist, cat doctor, quack, his fat pink hands, palms up, over the edge of the patchwork quilt, his black boots neat and tidy in the washing-basin, his bowler⁸⁰ on a nail above the bed, a milk stout⁸¹ and a slice of cold bread pudding under the pillow; and, dripping in the dark, he dreams of

MOTHER

...this little piggy went to market. This little piggy stayed at home. This little piggy had roast beef. This little piggy had none. And this little piggy went.....

LITTLE BOY

.....wee, wee, wee, wee, wee....

MOTHER

.....all the way home to.....

⁷⁹ A British measure of weight. One stone = 14 lbs.

⁸⁰ A traditional British round hat.

⁸¹ A sweet stout (strong beer) made from lactose.

Analysis: The author now gives us on man who represents sexual deviance – Mr. Waldo, a big man, a drunkard with many paternity lawsuits against him, one who has been surrounded and dominated by women all his life. Here he appears to be dreaming the “this little piggy” dreams of a child.

24) WIFE (Screaming)

Waldo! Wal-do!

MR. WALDO

Yes, Blodwen love?

WIFE

Oh, what'll the neighbors say, what'll the neighbors...

FIRST NEIGHBOR

Poor Mrs. Waldo.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

What she puts up with.

FIRST NEIGHBOR

Never should of married.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

If she didn't have to.

FIRST NEIGHBOR

Same as her mother

SECOND NEIGHBOR

There's a husband for you.

FIRST NEIGHBOR

Bad as his father.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

And you know where he ended.

FIRST NEIGHBOR

Up in the asylum....

SECOND NEIGHBOR

Crying for his ma.....

FIRST NEIGHBOR

Every Saturday.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

He hasn't got a leg....⁸²

FIRST NEIGHBOR

And carrying on...

SECOND NEIGHBOR

....with that Mrs. Beattie Morris....

FIRST NEIGHBOR

⁸² Reference to a drunkard. Hasn't got a leg was slang for either "drunk" or "lazy".

.....up in the quarry....

SECOND NEIGHBOR

....and seen her baby.

FIRST NEIGHBOR

It's got his nose.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

Oh it makes my heart bleed.

FIRST NEIGHBOR

What he'll do for drink.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

He sold the pianola⁸³ to....

FIRST NEIGHBOR

And her sewing machine....

SECOND NEIGHBOR

Falling in the gutter.

FIRST NEIGHBOR

Talking to the lamppost.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

Using language.⁸⁴

FIRST NEIGHBOR

⁸³ A player piano.

⁸⁴ That is: using bad language or swearing.

Singing in the W.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Singing in the WC or water closet, a British term for toilet.

SECOND NEIGHBOR

Poor Mrs. Waldo.

Analysis: The childlike dreams of Mr. Waldo are rudely interrupted by the fishwife voice of his wife and Waldo meekly replies, “Yes, Blodwen love?” She admonishes him and is overly concerned with what the neighbors will think, yet Thomas has the neighbor women immediately comment: “Poor Mrs. Waldo” so she has reason to fear the biting gossip of the local biddies. The gossips continue to denounce Waldo – as a representation of all men – as philandering drunkards. Thomas takes us across generations by having the women say that Waldo is as “Bad as his father” and his poor wife is the “Same as her mother.” This play is sated with the stereotyped sexism of the day and Thomas takes every opportunity to poke fun at it.

25) WIFE (Tearfully)

Oh, Waldo, Waldo!

MR. WALDO

Hush, love, hush. I'm widower Waldo now.

MOTHER (Screaming)

Waldo, Wal-do!

LITTLE BOY

Yes, our mum?⁸⁶

MOTHER

Oh, what'll the neighbors say, what'll the neighbors...

⁸⁶ Mum is a British term for mom.

THIRD NEIGHBOR

Black as a chimbley...⁸⁷

FOURTH NEIGHBOR

Ringin' doorbells...

THIRD NEIGHBOR

Breaking windows...

FOURTH NEIGHBOR

Makin' mud pies...

THIRD NEIGHBOR

Stealin' currants...

FOURTH NEIGHBOR

Chalkin' words....⁸⁸

THIRD NEIGHBOR

Saw him in the bushes....

FOURTH NEIGHBOR

Playin' mwchins....⁸⁹

THIRD NEIGHBOR

Send him to bed without any supper....

FOURTH NEIGHBOR

Give him sennapods⁹⁰ and lock him in the dark....

⁸⁷ That is, a chimney or chimneysweep.

⁸⁸ Writing graffiti in public places.

⁸⁹ Welsh slang for playing hooky from school.

⁹⁰ The bitter-tasting pods of the senna plant, which were used like castor oil to induce vomiting.

THIRD NEIGHBOR

Off to the reformatory....

FOURTH NEIGHBOR

Off to the reformatory.

TOGETHER

Learn him with a slipper on his b.t.m.⁹¹

Analysis: In these sequences the author makes some transformations, with the wife dying and Waldo saying, “Hush, love, hush. I’m widower Waldo now;” then we hear Waldo’s mother sounding all too much like Waldo’s fishwife. Of course, Thomas is surrounding Waldo with thorny women, a fate he may have (rightly or wrongly) assigned to himself. In these passage Thomas outlines the violations of boys and the solution to their wayward ways: “Learn him with a slipper on his b.t.m.”⁹² In the live performance of *Under Milk Wood* this line drew raucous laughter from the audience.

26) ANOTHER MOTHER (Screaming)

Waldo, Wal-do! What you doing with our Matti?

LITTLE BOY

Give us a kiss, Matti Richards.

LITTLE GIRL

Give us a penny then.

MR. WALDO

I only got a halfpenny.⁹³

⁹¹ Bottom or bum or butt.

⁹² Bottom or bum or butt.

⁹³ In the old coinage of Britain, a half-penny coin.

FIRST WOMAN

Lips is a penny.

PREACHER

Will you take this woman Matti Richards....

SECOND WOMAN

Dulcie Prothero....

THIRD WOMAN

Effie Bevan....

FOURTH WOMAN

Lil the Gluepot....

FIFTH WOMAN

Mrs. Flusher....

WIFE

Blodwen Bowen...

PREACHER

....to be your *awful* wedded wife.

LITTLE BOY (Screaming)

No, no, no!

Analysis: Dylan Thomas shifts the scene from innocent delicts to sex. He has a mother ask what the young Waldo is doing with her daughter. Then we are given dialog of childish love, which the authority transforms into marital disaster with a preacher uttering marriage vows, but Thomas couldn't resist altering it to: "Will you take this woman...to be your *awful* wedded wife?" At this daunting question, the young Waldo (representing all men) screams: "No, no, no!"

27) FIRST VOICE

Now, in her iceberg-white, holily laundered crinoline⁹⁴ nightgown, under virtuous polar sheets, in her spruced and scoured dust-defying bedroom in trig and trim⁹⁵ Bay View, a house for paying guests, at the top of the town, Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard widow twice, of Mr. Ogmores, linoleum⁹⁶ retired, and Mr. Pritchard, failed bookmaker, who maddened by besoming,⁹⁷ swabbing and scrubbing, the voice of the vacuum-cleaner and the fume of polish, ironically swallowed disinfectant, fidgets in her rinsed sleep, wakes in a dream, and nudges in the ribs dead Mr. Ogmores, dead Mr. Pritchard, ghostly. on either side.

Analysis: In this scene we are presented with the twice-widowed Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard who is in bed with her two dead husbands. She represents a nagging wife, but more. Notice that her nightgown is "holily laundered" and she sleeps "under virtuous polar sheets." She is obsessed with cleanliness. Her second husband, Mr. Pritchard killed himself because of her incessant "besoming,⁹⁸ swabbing and scrubbing," an ironic suicide because he swallowed disinfectant to get away from the wife with "the voice of the vacuum-cleaner." Thomas has several of the village women cleaning obsessively, another of his misogynous statements. In the next exchange between this nag and her husbands, we see her trying to impose such anal excess on them:

28) MRS. OGMORES-PRITCHARD

⁹⁴ A stiff fabric made of horse hair and cotton or linen thread.

⁹⁵ Strong and slender or clean in appearance.

⁹⁶ Cheap floor covering.

⁹⁷ Sweeping. A besom is a broom.

⁹⁸ Sweeping. A besom is a broom.

Mr. Ogmores! Mr. Pritchard! It is time to inhale your balsam.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ An ancient ointment for healing, aromatic.

MR. OGMORE

Oh, Mrs. Ogmores!

MR. PRITCHARD

Oh, Mrs. Pritchard!

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD

Soon it will be time to get up. Tell me your tasks, in order.

MR. OGMORE

I must put my pajamas in the drawer marked pajamas.

MR. PRITCHARD

I must take my cold bath, which is good for me.

MR. OGMORE

I must wear my flannel band¹⁰⁰ to ward off sciatica.¹⁰¹

MR. PRITCHARD

I must dress behind the curtain and put on my apron.

MR. OGMORE

I must blow my nose.

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD

In the garden, if you please.

MR. OGMORE

In a piece of tissue paper, which I afterwards burn.....

¹⁰⁰ A strip of flannel to cushion the side while sleeping.

¹⁰¹ Sharp pain from the pinch of the sciatic nerve along the hip; older people are prone to this.

MR. PRITCHARD

I must take my salts, which are nature's friend.

MR. OGMORE

I must boil the drinking water because of germs.

MR. PRITCHARD

I must make my herb tea, which is free from tannin.¹⁰²

MR. OGMORE

And have a charcoal biscuit,¹⁰³ which is good for me.

MR. PRITCHARD

I may smoke one pipe of asthma mixture.¹⁰⁴

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD

In the woodshed, if you please.

MR. PRITCHARD

And dust the parlour and spray the canary.

MR. OGMORE

I must put on rubber gloves and search the Peke¹⁰⁵ for fleas.

MR. PRITCHARD

I must dust the blinds and then I must raise them.

¹⁰² Tannic acid, which is said to hurt the lining of the stomach.

¹⁰³ A biscuit containing wood-charcoal as an anti-fermentative (antacid), absorbent or deodorizer.

¹⁰⁴ A smoking mixture containing Australian Asthma-herb (*Euphorbia pilulifera*). This would have been less preferable to smoke, for most men, than regular tobacco.

¹⁰⁵ A Pekinese dog.

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD

And before you let the sun in, mind it wipes its shoes.

Analysis: Here she forces the husbands to inhale an aromatic healing ointment and commands them to list their daily tasks, which are designed to ward off germs or clean out their bowels. When Mr. Pritchard is allowed to smoke, he must only smoke an asthma mixture¹⁰⁶ and then only in “the woodshed, if you please.” They even have to search the Pekinese dog for fleas. Mr. Pritchard is set to dusting the blinds and then must open them to let in the sun, but the fishwife warns him: “before you let the sun in, mind it wipes its shoes.” Is there a more anal woman “on the Dai-Adamed earth?”¹⁰⁷

29) FIRST VOICE

In Butcher Beynon's, Gossamer Beynon, daughter, schoolteacher, dreaming deep, daintily ferrets¹⁰⁸ under a fluttering hummock¹⁰⁹ of chicken's feathers in a slaughterhouse that has chintz¹¹⁰ curtains and a three-pieced suite, and finds, with no surprise, a small rough ready man with a bushy tail winking in a paper carrier.

GOSSAMER BEYNON

At last, my love...

FIRST VOICE

...sighs Gossamer Beynon. And the bushy tail wags rude and ginger.

¹⁰⁶ A smoking mixture containing Australian Asthma-herb (*Euphorbia pilulifera*). This would have been less preferable to smoke, for most men, than regular tobacco.

¹⁰⁷ A play on "diademed" (crowned), or, in context, "Adamed with Dai's (Welshmen).

¹⁰⁸ To hunt (as the animal ferret hunts rabbits).

¹⁰⁹ Pile,

¹¹⁰ Calico cloth from India.

Analysis: In this short passage Dylan Thomas shows us another withdrawn character, Gossamer Beynon, a cool, repressed schoolmistress who keeps her lust for Sinbad to herself. A schoolmarm, she is so prim and proper that in her dream, a slaughterhouse has “chintz¹¹¹ curtains and a three-pieced suite.” Furthermore, it is only through dreaming that she can access her lover, Sinbad, the barman at the local pub, the Sailors Arms. In real life, she wouldn't dream of going into such an establishment, let alone take up with a bartender.

30) ORGAN MORGAN

Help!

SECOND VOICE

...cries Organ Morgan, the organist, in his dream.

ORGAN MORGAN

There is perturbation¹¹² and music in Coronation Street! All the spouses are honking like geese and the babies singing opera. P.C. Attila Rees has got his truncheon¹¹³ out and is playing cadenzas¹¹⁴ by the pump; the cows from Sunday Meadow ring like reindeer; and on the roof of Handel Villa see the Women's Welfare¹¹⁵ hoofing, bloomed,¹¹⁶ in the moon.

Analysis: In this short piece, Thomas gives us Organ Morgan, a man obsessed with organ music. He too is dreaming in the wee hours of the morning and his vision is laced with music, his only true love. He is as obsessed with music as Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard is with cleanliness. Thomas contrasts such tidy and obsessed people with freedom, of which he finds little in Under Milk Wood.

¹¹¹ Calico cloth from India.

¹¹² A disturbance.

¹¹³ A short thick staff or club.

¹¹⁴ A vocal solo in classical music.

¹¹⁵ Womens' group involved with charities.

¹¹⁶ Women's knee-length underwear.

31) FIRST VOICE

At the sea-end of town, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd, the cocklers, are sleeping as quiet as death, side by wrinkled side, toothless, salt and brown, like two old kippers¹¹⁷ in a box. And high above, in Salt Lake Farm,¹¹⁸ Mr. Utah Watkins counts, all night, the wife-faced sheep as they leap the knees on the hill, smiling and knitting and bleating just like Mrs. Utah Watkins.

UTAH WATKINS (Yawning)

Thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-six, forty-eight, eighty-nine...

MRS. UTAH WATKINS (Bleating)

Knit one, slip one. Knit two together. Pass the slipstitch over.

Analysis: Though Mr. and Mrs. Floyd are mentioned; the real subjects here are the obsessive couple, Mr. and Mrs. Utah Watkins. Both are counting in their dreams – he counts “wife-faced sheep,” a metaphor to which he returns when he has her (bleating): “Knit one, slip one. Knit two together. Pass the slipstitch over.”

32) FIRST VOICE

Ocky Milkman, drowned asleep in Cockle Street, is emptying his churns¹¹⁹ into the Dewi River....

OCKY MILKMAN (Whispering)

....regardless of expense....

FIRST VOICE

....and weeping like a funeral.

¹¹⁷ A small ocean fish, usually salted and canned. The British sometimes eat them for breakfast.

¹¹⁸ Salt House Farm actually exists near Laugharne. Changing the name to "Salt Lake" gave Thomas the name "Utah" Watkins for the farmer, after the Great Salt Lake in Utah. In the original notes to the play, Utah Watkins was called "Mormon Watkins."

¹¹⁹ Milk cans.

Analysis: Elsewhere, Thomas will chide Ocky Milkman for cheating the townsfolk by selling milk to which he has added water from the River Dewi, something that presumably makes him happy. Here we have the reverse. He is putting his milk into the River Dewi, which makes him weep. This is another comment on the relationship between money and happiness.

33) SECOND VOICE

Cherry Owen, next door, lifts a tankard to his but nothing flows out of it. He shakes the tankar'.¹²⁰ It turns into a fish. He drinks the fish.

Analysis: Here Thomas makes a quick comment on how thirst sometimes gets the best of men, a fact which Thomas knew all too well.

34) P.C.¹²¹ Attila Rees lumps out of bed, dead to the day and still fog-horning,¹²² and drags out his helmet from under the bed; but deep in the backyard lock-up¹²³ of his sleep a mean voice murmurs.

A VOICE (Murmuring)

You'll be sorry for this in the morning....

FIRST VOICE

...and he heave-ho's back to bed. His helmet swashes in the dark.

Analysis: The policeman is another of the townsfolk who hears things in his sleep, often a voice of the conscience.

¹²⁰ Slang for tankard, a container for ale or beer.

¹²¹ Presumably, Police Captain.

¹²² Snoring.

¹²³ Jail.

35) SECOND VOICE

Willy Nilly, postman, asleep up street, walks fourteen miles to deliver the post as he does every day of the night, and rat-a-tats hard and sharp on Mrs. Willy Nilly.

MRS. WILLY NILLY

Don't spank me, please, teacher....

SECOND VOICE

...whimpers his wife at his side, but every night of her married life she has been late for school.

Analysis: The postman and his wife apparently play sex games, if we are not reading too much into this brief scene. It is one of Thomas's fine piece of sly humorous writing.

36) FIRST VOICE

Sinbad Sailors, over the taproom¹²⁴ of the Sailors Arms, hugs his damp pillow whose secret name is Gossamer Beynon. A mogul¹²⁵ catches Lily Smalls in the washhouse.

LILY SMALLS

Ooh, you old mogul!

Analysis: Gossamer Beynon loves Sinbad Sailors, the barman at the pub, but is too repressed to act upon such feelings and, ironically, he loves her in secret and has named his pillow, which Thomas makes to be damp from masturbation, by the "secret name" of the very same lady. We are also introduced to Lily Smalls, the live-in maid of the Beynons who also has a secret lover, though we don't know who. He is just referred to as a "mogul," which was a romantic term at the time of the play's writing that, in the British Empire, referred to an exotic ruler from afar e.g., a Persian Lord i.e., she had "big dreams." Again, throughout the

¹²⁴ The main barroom in a tavern.

¹²⁵ Romantic slang for a Persian lord or mongol.

play the author is telling us that these people are dreamers and therefore miss the joys of real life all around them.

37) SECOND VOICE

Mrs. Rose-Cottage's eldest, Mae, peels off her pink-and-white skin in a furnace in a tower in a cave in a waterfall in a wood and waits there raw as an onion for Mister Right to leap up the burning tall hollow splashes of leaves like a brilliantined¹²⁶ trout.

MAE ROSE-COTTAGE (Very close and softly, drawing out the words).

Call me Dolores, like they do in the stories.¹²⁷

Analysis: Repressed and withdrawn people surround us in this play and Mae is an example of a seventeen year old who dreams in anticipation of adult passion. In her dream of “Mister Right” she peels herself naked somewhere in the woods and says seductively, “Call me Dolores, like they do in the stories.” This was a reference to H.G. Wells’ story, *Apropos of Dolores*, but can be modernized to mean, “Call me Dolores, like they do in the *movies*.” In either case, Mae wants to be seen as a star, not just a common girl, again a dream – not reality.

38) FIRST VOICE

Alone until she dies, Bessie Bighead, hired help, born in the workhouse, smelling of the cowshed, snores bass and gruff on a couch of straw in a loft in Salt Lake Farm and picks a posy of daisies in Sunday Meadow to put on the grave of Gomer Owen who kissed her once by the pig-sty when she wasn't looking and never kissed her again although she was looking all the time.

Analysis: Having given us Mae Rose-Cottage, who wanted to be seen in an exalted light, Thomas presents the all too common Bessie Bighead, who only got one kiss in her life and couldn't forget it, though apparently Gomer Owen did, much to her spinstery chagrin. This kiss by the pig-sty got huge laughs from the audience in the Caedmon 1952 recorded version of the play, but there is sadness here too, as she is fated to be “alone until she dies” and is

¹²⁶ A glossy substance used on mounted fish..

¹²⁷ In the *New English Weekly* in November 1938 Thomas had reviewed Thomas had reviewed H G Wells's novel *Apropos of Dolores* – the story, according to Thomas, of "a superlatively common woman" (*Early Prose Writings*, Ed. Walford Davies, Dent 1971, 191).

pinning for a long-ago boy who is already in his grave. We will meet her only once more in section 104.

39) FIRST VOICE (continues)

And the Inspectors of Cruelty fly down into Mrs. Butcher Brynon's dream to persecute Mr. Beynon for selling....

BUTCHER BEYNON

....owl meat, dogs' eyes, man-chop.

SECOND VOICE

Mr. Beynon, in butcher's bloodied apron, spring-heels down Coronation Street, a finger, not his own, in his mouth. Straight-faced in his cunning sleep he pulls the legs of his dreams and....

BUTCHER BEYNON

....hunting on pigback shoots down the wild giblets.¹²⁸

Analysis: Here we are given a man, Butcher Beynon, who enjoys teasing his wife over his supposed pet butchery and claims to use pet meat for their meals. In Mrs. Beynon's dream, very humorously "the Inspectors of Cruelty" fly down to persecute her husband for his nastiness while "hunting on pigback." In fact, right next to her he is dreaming of killing pets and even has a human finger in his mouth.

40) ORGAN MORGAN (High and softly)

Help!

GOSSAMER BEYNON (Softly)

My foxy darling.

¹²⁸The edible offal or entrails of a fowl, typically including the heart, gizzard, liver and even the anus.

Analysis: These are dreamy whimperings of two of the sleeping townsfolk to whom we have been previously introduced.

41) FIRST VOICE

Now behind the eyes and secrets of the dreamers in the streets rocked to sleep by the sea, see the....

SECOND VOICE

...titbits and topsy-turvies,¹²⁹ bobs and button-tops, bags and bones, ash and rind and dandruff and nail parings, saliva and snowflakes and moulted feathers of dreams, the wrecks and sprats¹³⁰ and shells and fish bones, whale-juice and moonshine and small salt fry dished up by the hidden sea.

Analysis: Now the narrators take us away from specific persons to a larger view of the sleeping town. We are given little tidbits of the town's minutia and the delicious invitation to see the townsfolk's "moulted feathers of dreams." Their dreams, Thomas is saying, are like so much of the other detritus scattered about the seaside town.

42) FIRST VOICE

The owls are hunting. Look, over Bethesda gravestones one hoots and swoops and catches a mouse by Hannah Rees, Beloved Wife.

And in Coronation Street, which you alone can see it is so dark under the chapel in the skies, the Reverend Eli Jenkins, poet, preacher, turns in his deep towards-dawn sleep and dreams of

REV. ELI JENKINS

Eisteddfodau.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Slang for a type of candy.

¹³⁰ Small ocean fish.

¹³¹ Traditional Welsh poetry contests in which the best poet wins either the crown or the chair; from Welsh *eistedd* (to sit) + *bod* (place).

SECOND VOICE

He intricately rhymes, to the music of crwth¹³² and pibgorn¹³³ all night long in his druid's seedy nightie¹³⁴ in a beer-tent black with parchs.¹³⁵

Analysis: Again, the narrators ask us to look at some of the townsfolk. We are given the Reverend Eli Jenkins, a preacher who confuses his sermons with poetry. Is Dylan Thomas saying that poetry is the true religion, or would he be that bold?

43) FIRST VOICE

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

MR. PUGH

Murder!

Analysis: Mr. Pugh and Mrs. Pugh hate each other with a sneering contempt. They are given as the worst case of marital hell in the town. Mr. Pugh dreams of poisoning his wife and she considers him piggish. We will learn more of this fractured marital relationship, which got great roars of laughter from the live audience. I suspect that many married couples in the audience could relate to the over-the-top presentation of the kind of tension that exists in most marriages.

44) FIRST VOICE

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

¹³² Traditional Welsh stringed instrument.

¹³³ A.k.a. pigcorn. Traditional Welsh pipe or reed instrument.

¹³⁴ Reference to the long white robes worn by the druid poets at the National Eisteddfod in Wales.

¹³⁵ Reverends. From the Welsh *parchedig*, a title for a minister.

MRS. ORGAN MORGAN

Silence.

SECOND VOICE

She sleeps very dulcet in a cove of wool, and trumpeting Organ Morgan at her side snores no louder than a spider.

Analysis: Remember that Organ Morgan loves organ music more than anything else in the cosmos, including Mrs. Organ Morgan, and she knows this. She dreams of silence while he dreams of Bach. Later we will hear him say, when the wife asks him an unrelated question and he absentmindedly answers: “Oh, Bach without any doubt. Bach every time for me.” To this, she bursts into tears and exclaims: “Organ Morgan, you haven't been listening to a word I said. It's organ, organ all the time with you.” Of course, he is another example of Thomas's obsessive-anal townsfolk and she is the spouse detached from the loves and desires of her mate.

45) FIRST VOICE

Mary Ann Sailors dreams of....

MARY ANN SAILORS

....the Garden of Eden.

FIRST VOICE

She comes in her smock-frock and clogs¹³⁶....

MARY ANN SAILORS

....away from the cool scrubbed cobbled kitchen with the Sunday-school pictures on the whitewashed wall and the farmers' almanac hung above the settle and the sides of bacon on the ceiling hooks, and goes down the cockle-shelled paths of that apple pie kitchen garden,

¹³⁶ Wooden shoes.

ducking under the gippo's clothes pegs,¹³⁷ catching her apron on the blackcurrant bushes, past bean rows and onion-bed and tomatoes ripening on the wall towards the old man playing the

¹³⁷ Clothes pegs typically sold by gypsies.

harmonium in the orchard, and sits down on the grass at his side and shells the green peas that grow up through the lap of her frock that brushes the dew.

Analysis: Dylan Thomas is very cognizant of the linkage between generations. Like many romantics, he idealizes the past. Mary Ann Sailors is an octogenarian who serves as the link to a former and simpler time. She dreams of the perfection of the Garden of Eden. She takes a mythical journey through the village, where we are given a glimpse of it, to sit and shell peas “down in the grass.” That image should be a clue as to where Dylan Thomas is taking us. It is sexual, to be sure, when he says that she “shells the green peas that grow up through the lap of her frock that brushes the dew.” I will leave it to your imagination as to what “dew” represents.

46) FIRST VOICE

In Donkey Street, so furred with sleep, Dai Bread, Polly Garter, Nogood Boyo, and Lord Cut-Glass sigh before the dawn that is about to be and dream of....

DAI BREAD

...harems.

POLLY GARTER

...babies.

NOGOOD BOYO

...nothing.

Analysis: We are given some locals, dreaming of various desires – harems, babies and nothing. The last is from Nogood Boyo, the bad boy of this piece, who is rather stupid. His brain is empty, in Thomas’s presentation.

47) LORD CUT-GLASS

...tick tock, tick tock, tick tock, tick tock.

FIRST VOICE

Time passes. Listen. Time passes. An owl flies home past Bethesda, to a chapel in an oak.
And the dawn inches up.

[One distant bell-note, faintly reverberating]

Analysis: Of course, time and its passage is very central to this play. The owl, a nighttime symbol flies as the dawn “inches up.” We are about to experience the town in a waking state. In the distance a bell tolls, symbolically a wake-up bell. Lord Cut-Glass is obsessed with time and he is old, with little time left. While dawn is inching up on the town, death is inching up on Lord Cut-Glass. These clocks, of which there are many, go: tick tock, tick tock, tick tock, tick tock and we know that he mourns the passage of time, as all thinking humans should.

48) FIRST VOICE

Stand on this hill. This is Llaregub Hill, old as the hills, high, cool, and green, and from this small circle of stones,¹³⁸ made not by druids¹³⁹ but by Mrs. Beynon's Billy¹⁴⁰, you can see all the town below you, sleeping in the first of the dawn. The hill grazes on the lower fields and the fields go down to the hazed town, rippling like a lake, to drink.

VOICE OF A GUIDE BOOK

Less than five hundred souls inhabit the three quaint streets and the few narrow by-lanes and scattered farmsteads that constitute this small, decaying watering-place, which may, indeed, be called a 'backwater of life' without disrespect to its natives who possess, to this day, a salty individuality of their own.

¹³⁸ Similar to Stonehenge, a circular arrangement of stones created for the Druids' eisteddfod ceremonies.

¹³⁹ Participants in a native Welsh ceremony that crowns a poet yearly. See 23: Eisteddfodau.

¹⁴⁰ Her son

The main street, Coronation Street, consists, for the most part, of humble, two-storied houses many of which attempt to achieve some measure of gaiety by prinking themselves out in crude colors and by the liberal use of pinkwash, though there are remaining a few eighteenth-century houses of more pretension, if, on the whole, in a sad state of disrepair.

Though there is little to attract the hill climber, the health seeker, the sportsman, or the weekending motorist, the contemplative may, if sufficiently attracted to spare it some leisurely hours, find in its cobbled streets and its little fishing harbor, in its several curious customs, and in the conversation of its local 'characters,' some of that picturesque sense of the past so frequently lacking in towns and villages which have kept more abreast of the times.

The River Dewi is said to abound in trout, but is much poached. The one place of worship, with its neglected graveyard, is of no architectural interest.

[A cock crows]

Analysis: We are presented with an overview of the town, but in two forms. The first narrator gives us a poetic look at the town and then we are forced to endure a guidebook analysis, aseptic and certainly not poetic. Perhaps Dylan Thomas meant to make this comparison. I think he did. In the sterile representation, the voice of the guidebook, a vapid, sterile voice, describes the town in guidebook terms. Thank God, after an insufferable description of the town in guidebook terms, we are spared and return to a realistic analysis of the life of its inhabitants, which is much more interesting. A cock crows to return us to a more interesting look at the townsfolk. It also connotes that the residents are about to awaken.

49) FIRST VOICE

A cock crows. The principality of the sky lightens now, over our green hill, into Spring morning, larked and crowed and belling.

[Slow bell notes]

FIRST VOICE

Who pulls the Town Hall bell rope but blind Captain Cat? One by one, the sleepers are rung out of sleep this one morning as every morning. And soon you shall see the chimneys' slow up-flying snow as Captain Cat, in sailor's cap and sea boots, announces today with his loud get-out-of-bed bell.

Analysis: Both the crowing rooster and the town bell announce the morning. Captain Cat pulls the bell rope and the townsfolk arise to another day.

50) SECOND VOICE

The Reverend Eli Jenkins, in Bethesda House, gropes out of bed into his preacher's black, combs back his bard's¹⁴¹ white hair, forgets to wash, pads barefoot downstairs, opens the front door, stands in the doorway and, looking out at the day and up at the eternal hill, and hearing the sea break and the gab of birds, remembers his own verses and tells them softly to empty Coronation Street that is rising and raising its blinds.

REV. ELI JENKINS¹⁴²

*Dear Gwalia! I know there are towns lovelier than ours;
And fairer hills and loftier far; And groves more full of
flowers; And boskier woods more blithe with Spring; And
bright with birds' adorning; And sweeter bards than I to
sing; Their praise this beauteous morning.*

*By Cader Idris, tempest-torn; Or Moel yr Wyddfa's glory,
Carnedd Llewelyn beauty born; Plinlimmon old in story;
By mountains where King Arthur dreams; By
Penmaenmawr defiant, Llaregub Hill a molehill seems, a
pygmy to a giant.*

¹⁴¹ Poet, from the Welsh *bardd*.

¹⁴² The first part of the poem compares famous Welsh mountains with Llareggub Hill; the second half compares noted Welsh rivers to the Dewi River.

*By Sawdde, Senny, Dovey, Dee, Edw, Eden, Aled, all, Taff
and Towy broad and free, Llyfnant with its waterfall;
Claerwen, Cleddau, Dulais, Daw, Ely, Gwili, Ogwr, Nedd;
Small is our River Dewi, Lord; A baby on a rushy bed.*

*By Carreg Cennen, King of time; Our ruin in the spinet;
Where owls do wink and squirrels climb; Is aged but half a
minute.*

*Our Heron Head is only a bit of stone with seaweed
spread; Where gulls come to be lonely. A tiny dingle is
Milk Wood by Golden Grove 'neath Grongar; But let me
choose and oh! I should love all my life and longer; To
stroll among our trees and stray; In Goosegog Lane, on
Donkey Down; And hear the Dewi sing all day; And never,
never leave the town.*

SECOND VOICE

The Reverend Jenkins closes the front door. His morning service is over.

[Slow bell notes]

Analysis: Thomas has the Reverend Eli Jenkins sing the praises of his town, in both English and some Welsh, with many references to local mythology. In essence he is saying that he knows it is a small, inconsequential town; but that it is his town and he loves it with all its imperfections. The preacher recites his morning eulogy to the town, which serves the same function as the cockcrow and the town bell. The townsfolk know it is now time to get up and start their daily rounds.

51) FIRST VOICE

Now, woken at last by the out-of-bed-sleepy-head-Polly-put-the-kettle-on Town Hall bell, Lily Smalls, Mrs. Beynon's treasure,¹⁴³ comes downstairs from a dream of royalty who all night long went larking¹⁴⁴ with her full of sauce¹⁴⁵ in the Milk Wood dark, and puts the kettle on the primus ring¹⁴⁶ in Mrs. Beynon's kitchen, and looks at her face in Mr. Beynon's shaving-glass over the sink, and sees:

¹⁴³ Affectionate term for their servant.

¹⁴⁴ Playing.

¹⁴⁵ Drinking of alcohol.

¹⁴⁶ A small heating element to make tea water.

LILY SMALLS

Oh there's a face! Where you get that nose from Lily? Got it from my father, silly. Oh there's a conk!¹⁴⁷ Where you get that hair from? Got it from an old tomcat. Oh there's a perm! Look at your complexion! Oh no, you look. Needs a bit of makeup. Needs a veil. Oh there's glamour! Where you get that smile, Lil? Never you mind, girl. Nobody loves you. That's what you think. Who is it loves you? Shan't tell. Come on, Lily. Cross your heart then? Cross my heart.

FIRST VOICE

And very softly, her lips almost touching her reflection, she breathes the name and clouds the shaving-glass.

Analysis: The teenage maid, Lily Smalls get up and looks into the mirror and sees a less than desirable girl but she declares that somebody loves her, which is a comfort. Thomas leaves us thinking that this may be a fantasy on Lily's part and we never know who loves her, if anyone.

52) MRS. BEYNON (Loudly, from above)

Lily!

LILY SMALLS (Loudly)

Yes, mum.

MRS. BEYNON

Where's my tea, girl?

LILY SMALLS (Softly)

Where d'you think? In the cat box?

(Loudly) Coming up, mum.

¹⁴⁷ A kinky hairstyle.

Analysis: Here, Dylan Thomas touches on class conflict as Lily Smalls, the maid, sasses her employer behind her back.

53) FIRST VOICE

Mr. Pugh, in the School House opposite, takes up the morning tea to Mrs. Pugh, and whispers on the stairs:

MR. PUGH

Here's your arsenic, dear. And your weed-killer biscuit. I've throttled your parakeet. I've spat in the vases. I've put cheese in the mouse holes. Here's your...

[Door creaks open]

...nice tea, dear.

MRS. PUGH

Too much sugar.

MR. PUGH

You haven't tasted it yet, dear.

MRS. PUGH

Too much milk, then. Has Mr. Jenkins said his poetry?

MR. PUGH

Yes, dear.

MRS. PUGH

Then it's time to get up. Give me my glasses. No, not my reading glasses, I want to look out. I want to see....

Analysis: Having dealt with class conflict between maid and employer, Thomas moves on to marital conflict as Mr. Pugh is taking tea to his bitchy wife. When she asks: “Has Mr. Jenkins said his poetry?” we are told that the town has a pattern of behavior, known to its inhabitants, and used as a way of organizing their own activities. Again, when she asks for her glasses, she proclaims that she wants “to see” but Thomas’s implication is that she will only see “the same old things.” In the next segment (#54) we are made aware of some of what she sees.

54) SECOND VOICE

...Lily Smalls, the treasure down on her red knees washing the front step.

MRS. PUGH

She's tucked her dress in her bloomers – oh, the baggage!¹⁴⁸

SECOND VOICE

P.C. Attila Evans, ox-broad, barge-booted,¹⁴⁹ cumbering out in a heavy huff.

MRS. PUGH

He's going to arrest Polly Garter, mark my words.

MR. PUGH

What for, dear?

MRS. PUGH

For having babies.

SECOND VOICE

...and lumbering down towards the strand to see that the sea is still there.

¹⁴⁸ Slang for an immoral woman.

¹⁴⁹ Wearing large work-boots.

FIRST VOICE

Mary Ann Sailors, opening her bedroom window above the taproom and calling out to the heavens

MARY ANN SAILORS

I'm eighty-five years, three months and a day!

MRS. PUGH

I will say this for her, she never makes a mistake.

FIRST VOICE

Organ Morgan at his bedroom window playing chords on the sill to the morning fishwife gulls who, crying over Donkey Street, observe:

DAI BREAD

Me, Dai Bread, hurrying to the bakery, pushing in my shirt-tails, buttoning my buttons, ping goes a button, why can't they sew them, no time for breakfast, nothing for breakfast, there's wives for you.

MRS. DAI BREAD ONE

Me, Mrs. Dai Bread One, capped and shawled and no old corset, nice to be comfy, nice to be nice, clogging on the cobbles to stir up a neighbor. Oh, Mrs. Sarah, can you spare a loaf, now? There's no bread in the house. How's your boils this morning?

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

Me, Mrs. Dai Bread Two, gaudy to kill in tangerine jumper full of moth holes, dirty yellow petticoat above my knees – dirty, pretty knees – high-heel shoes with one heel missing, tortoiseshell comb in my bright black slinky hair, nothing else, lolling in the doorway, scowling at the sunshine, lighting up my pipe.

LORD CUT-GLASS

Me, Lord Cut-Glass, in an old frockcoat belonged to Eli Jenkins and a pair of postman's trousers from Bethesda Jumble,¹⁵⁰ running out of doors to empty slops – mind there, Rover! – and then running in again, tick tock.

NOGOOD BO YO

Me, Nogood Boyo, up to no good in the washhouse.

MISS PRICE

Me, Miss Price, in my pretty print housecoat, deft at the clothesline, natty as a jenny-wren, then pit-pat back to my egg in its cosy, my crisp toast-fingers, my homemade plum and butter-pat.

POLLY GARTER

Me, Polly Garter, giving the breast in the garden to my new bonny baby. And listening to the voices in the voices of the blooming¹⁵¹ birds.

[Single long high chord on strings]

FIRST VOICE

Now frying-pans spit, kettles and cats purr in the kitchen. The town smells of seaweed and breakfast all the way down from Bay View, where Mrs. OgmorPritchard, in smock and turban, big-besomed¹⁵² to engage the dust, picks at her starchless bread and sips lemon-rind tea, to Bottom Cottage, where Mr. Waldo, in bowler and bib, gobbles his bubble-and-squeak¹⁵³ and kippers and swigs from the sauce bottle. Mary Ann Sailors....

MARY ANN SAILORS

....praises the Lord who made porridge.

¹⁵⁰ A used clothing sale run by a charity organization of the churches, in this case the Chapel of Bethesda.

¹⁵¹ Turning red, i.e. sunburn.

¹⁵² A broom made of twigs tied around a stick and also slang for a woman.

¹⁵³ A traditional English dish made with the shallow-fried leftover vegetables from roast dinner.

Analysis: With her glasses in place, Mrs. Pugh looks out and criticizes others marking her as one of the town's major gossips. Dylan Thomas uses this segment to re-introduce the major characters in the play.

55) FIRST VOICE

Mr. Pugh....

MR. PUGH

....remembers ground glass as he juggles his omelet.

FIRST VOICE

Mrs. Pugh....

MRS. PUGH

....nags the salt-cellar.

Analysis: Thomas takes it back to the conflict between Mr. and Mrs. Pugh, with the husband, as usual, contemplating the usefulness of ground glass, presumably in the nag's food.

56) FIRST VOICE

Willy Nilly postman....

WILLY NILLY

....downs his last bucket of black brackish tea and rumbles out bandy¹⁵⁴ to the clucking back where the hens twitch and grieve for their tea-soaked sops.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Legs spread wide apart at the knees

¹⁵⁵ Drenched food or scraps for hens.

FIRST VOICE

Mrs. Willy Nilly....

MRS. WILLY NILLY

...full of tea to her double-chinned brim broods and bubbles over her coven¹⁵⁶ of kettles on the hissing hot hub, always ready to steam open the mail.

FIRST VOICE

The Reverend Eli Jenkins....

REV. ELI JENKINS

...finds a rhyme and dips his pen in his cocoa.

FIRST VOICE

Lord Cut-Glass in his ticking kitchen scampers from clock to clock, a bunch of clock-keys in one hand, a fish-head in the other.

FIRST VOICE

Captain Cat in his galley....

CAPTAIN CAT

...blind and fine-fingered flavors his sea-fry.¹⁵⁷

FIRST VOICE

Mr. and Mrs. Cherry Owen, in their Donkey Street room that is bedroom, parlor, kitchen, and scullery, sit down to last night's supper of onions boiled in their overcoats¹⁵⁸ and broth of spuds and bacon rind and bones.

¹⁵⁶ A gathering of witches. Dylan Thomas uses it as a personification for the character of Mrs. Willy Nilly.

¹⁵⁷ Fried fish.

¹⁵⁸ Slang for onion skins.

Analysis: Thomas uses this segment also to re-introduce more major characters in the play as he does in segment #54.

57) MRS. CHERRY OWEN

See that smudge on the wall by the almanac? That's where you threw the gravy.

[Cherry Owen laughs with delight]

MRS. CHERRY OWEN

You only missed me by an inch. And remember the fish bucket? Oh but you tumbled sliding and bawling, and the floor was all eels, flatfish¹⁵⁹ and blood. Oh, you were as drunk as a deacon – and sprawling and bawling and....

CHERRY OWEN

Give me a kiss.

MRS. CHERRY OWEN

And then you sang a song and then you did a dance on the table.

CHERRY OWEN

I did?

MRS. CHERRY OWEN

Drop de

CHERRY OWEN

And then what did I do?

MRS. CHERRY OWEN

Then you sang that song all over again.

¹⁵⁹ An ocean fish.

[Mr. and Mrs. Cherry Owen laugh delightedly together].

Analysis: These are major characters too, Mr. & Mrs. Cherry Owen, but ones that deserve a special comment, as they are apparently happy together in spite of the fact that he is a drunkard. This might have been a bit of self-analysis on Thomas's part, as he was certainly as much a drunkard as Mr. Owen, and he and his wife Caitlin had a "drinking and brawling" marriage, a fact that is chronicled in his wife's book, *My Life with Dylan Thomas: Double Drink Story*.

58) FIRST VOICE

From Beynon Butchers in Coronation Street, the smell of fried liver sidles out with onions on its breath.

And listen! In the dark breakfast-room behind the shop, Mr. and Mrs. Beynon, waited upon by their treasure, enjoy, between bites, their every-morning hullabaloo and Mrs. Beynon slips the gristly¹⁶⁰ bits under the tasseled tablecloth to her fat cat.

[Cat purrs]

MRS. BEYNON

She likes the liver, Ben.

MR. BEYNON

She ought to do, Bess. It's her brother's.

MRS. BEYNON (Screaming)

Oh, d'you hear that, Lily?

LILY SMALLS

Yes, mum.

¹⁶⁰ Containing gristle or cartilage fat or soft bony bits of meat, usually fried leftovers.

MRS. BEYNON

We're eating pusscat.

LILY SMALLS

Yes, mum.

MRS. BEYNON

Oh, you cat-butcher!

MR. BEYNON

It was doctored,¹⁶¹ mind.

MRS. BEYNON (Hysterical)

What's that got to do with it?

MR. BEYNON

Yesterday we had mole.

MRS. BEYNON

Oh, Lily, Lily!

MR. BEYNON

Monday, otter. Tuesday, shrews.¹⁶²

[Mrs. Beynon screams]

LILY SMALLS

Go on, Mrs. Beynon. He's the biggest liar in town.

¹⁶¹ Neutered or flavored to hide the taste, usually with cooking sherry.

¹⁶² A small insect-eating rodent.

MRS. BEYNON

Don't you dare say that about Mr. Beynon.

LILY SMALLS

Everybody knows it, mum.

MRS. BEYNON

Mr. Beynon never tells a lie. Do you, Ben?

MR. BEYNON

No, Bess. And now I am going out after the corgies,¹⁶³ with my little cleaver.

MRS. BEYNON

Oh, Lily, Lily!

Analysis: We are again shown the Beynon's and their maid in an exchange that shows, while Mr. Beynon mercilessly teases his wife, that when Lily calls him a liar, the wife defends him. Perhaps this is Dylan Thomas's way of saying that even bad marriages are based on a build-up over time of a relationship and even a bad relationship can be valued and defended.

59) FIRST VOICE

Up the street, in the Sailors Arms, Sinbad Sailors, grandson of Mary Ann Sailors, draws a pint¹⁶⁴ in the sunlit bar. The ship's clock in the bar says half past eleven. Half past eleven is opening time. The hands of the clock have stayed still at half past eleven for fifty years. It is always opening time in the Sailors Arms.

SINBAD

Here's to me, Sinbad.

¹⁶³ A breed of dog.

¹⁶⁴ A pint glass of beer.

Analysis: No doubt that this is a humorous comment on the ubiquity of drink in a Welsh town, or perhaps any small town.

60) FIRST VOICE

All over the town, babies and old men are cleaned and put into their broken prams and wheeled on to the sunlit cockled cobbles or out into the backyards under the dancing underclothes, and left. A baby cries.

OLD MAN

I want my pipe and he wants his bottle.

[School bell rings]

Analysis: Thomas consistently makes the point that life is cyclical, much as it made by the Riddle of the Sphinx.¹⁶⁵

61) FIRST VOICE

Noses are wiped, heads picked, hair combed, paws scrubbed, ears boxed and the children shrilled off to school.

SECOND VOICE

Fishermen grumble to their nets. Nogood Boyo goes out in the dinghy Zanzibar, ships the oars, drifts slowly in the dab-filled bay, and, lying on his back in the un-baled water, among crabs' legs and tangled lines, looks up at the Spring sky.

¹⁶⁵ Riddle: What goes on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon and on three legs in the evening?
Answer: A man, who crawls on all fours as a baby, walks on two legs as an adult and walks with a cane in old age.

NOGOOD BOYO (Softly, lazily)

I don't know who's up there and I don't care.

Analysis: Nogood Boyo is the town's bad boy and apparently an agnostic.

62) FIRST VOICE

He turns his head and looks up at Llaregub Hill, and sees, among green lathered trees, the white houses of the strewn away farms, where farm boys whistle, dogs shout, cows low, but all too far away for him, or you, to hear. And in the town, the shops squeak open. Mr. Mog Edwards, in butterfly-collar and straw-hat at the doorway of Manchester House,¹⁶⁶ measures with his eye the dawdlers-by¹⁶⁷ for striped flannel shirts and shrouds and flowery blouses, and bellows to himself in the darkness behind his eye:

MR. EDWARDS (Whispers)

I love Miss Price.

FIRST VOICE

Syrup is sold in the post-office. A car drives to market, full of fowls and a farmer. Milk churns stand at Coronation Corner like short silver policemen. And, sitting at the open window of Schooner House, blind Captain Cat hears all the morning of the town.

[School bell in background]

Analysis: Thomas has Nogood Boyo look over the town and see Mr. Mog Edwards, the cloth merchant, who is, as always thinking of selling cloth, but also, all too silently and painfully, pining for Miss Price.

¹⁶⁶ A cloth and clothes shop existed in both Laugharne and New Quay where Thomas lived while writing *Under Milk Wood*. In *Under Milk Wood* it is the name of Mr. Edwards' store.

¹⁶⁷ People who wander lazily by.

63) CAPTAIN CAT (Softly, to himself)

Maggie Richards, Ricky Rhys, Tommy Powell, our Sal, little Gerwain, Billy Swansea with the dog's voice, one of Mr. Waldo's, nasty Humphrey, Jackie with the sniff and where's Dicky's Albie and the boys from Ty-pant? Perhaps they got the rash again.

[A sudden cry among children's voices]

CAPTAIN CAT

Somebody's hit Maggie Richards. Two to one it's Billy Swansea. Never trust a boy who barks.

[A burst of a boy barking and crying]

Right again! It's Billy.

FIRST VOICE

And the children's voices cry away.

Analysis: Here we have Captain Cat remembering his childhood mates from the earlier days of Llaregub.

[Postman's rat-a-tat on door, distant]

64) CAPTAIN CAT (Softly, to himself)

That's Willy Nilly knocking at Bay View. Rat-a-tat – very soft. The knocker's got a kid glove on.¹⁶⁸ Who's sent a letter to Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard?

[Rat-a-tat, distant again]

CAPTAIN CAT

Careful now, she swabs the front glassy. Every step's like a bar of soap. Mind your size twelveses. That old Bessie would beeswax the lawn to make the birds slip.

¹⁶⁸ A metal knocker covered in leather to be less noisy.

WILLY NILLY

Morning, Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard.

MRS. OGMORE -PRITCHARD

Good morning, postman.

WILLY NILLY

Here's a letter for you with stamped and addressed envelope enclosed, all the way from Bülth Wells. A gentleman wants to study birds and can he have accommodation for two weeks and a bath – vegetarian.

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD

No.

WILLY NILLY (Persuasively)

Oh, you wouldn't know he was in the house, Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard. He'd be out in the mornings at the bang¹⁶⁹ of dawn with his bag of breadcrumbs and his little telescope.

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD

...and come home at all hours covered with feathers. I don't want persons in my nice clean rooms breathing all over the chairs....

WILLY NILLY

Cross my heart, he won't breathe.

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD

...and putting their feet on my carpets and sneezing on my china and sleeping in my sheets...

WILLY NILLY

He only wants a single bed, Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard.

[Door slams]

¹⁶⁹ Slang for 'break' as in 'the break of dawn.'

CAPTAIN CAT (Softly)

And back she goes to the kitchen to polish the potatoes.

Analysis: Now Dylan Thomas takes us to see Willy Nilly the Postman on his rounds. He has read the mail, which his wife steams open so that they have a jump on the town's gossips. He tells Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard that a man wants to rent a room and she, being yet another example of an oppressive dirt-hating female, says no, "I don't want persons in my nice clean rooms breathing all over the chairs" and again "putting their feet on my carpets and sneezing on my china and sleeping in my sheets." Thomas is pointing out that such anal tendencies can go so far as to prevent the woman with rooms to rent from renting them out. The poet has Captain Cat comment that the absurdly anal woman "goes to the kitchen to polish the potatoes." Many of the townswomen are presented as scrubbing, cleaning and doing anything they can to hold off the savage onslaught of dirt, but surely one who polishes the potatoes is on the outer edge of mania.

65) FIRST VOICE

Captain Cat hears Willy Nilly's feet heavy on the distant cobbles.

CAPTAIN CAT

One, two, three, four, five...

[Sounds of knocking on door]

That's Mrs. Rose-Cottage. What's today? Today she gets the letter from her sister in Gorslas. How's the twins' teeth? Six, seven, eight. Plain sealed brown envelope from Liverpool from the lodger in Craggy Dawn. Don't stick a pin in it Willy. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen.

[Sounds of knocking on door]

WILLY NILLY

Morning, Mrs. Pugh. Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard won't have a gentleman in from Builth Wells because he'll sleep in her sheets. Mrs. Rose-Cottage's sister in Gorslas's twins have got to have them out...

MRS. PUGH

Give me the parcel.

WILLY NILLY

It's for Mr. Pugh, Mrs. Pugh.

MRS. PUGH

Never you mind. What's inside it?

WILLY NILLY

A book called: *Lives of the Great Poisoners*.

CAPTAIN CAT

That's Manchester House.

Analysis: Willy Nilly the Postman continues on his rounds, telling everyone along the route the business of those to whom he has already delivered the post. He stops at the house of Mrs. Pugh and tells her that he has a parcel for Mr. Pugh. She asks what is inside, apparently aware of the nosy habits of the mailman. He replies truthfully that it is a book entitled: *Lives of the Great Poisoners*, so we become aware to the fact that she is on to her husband's fascination with poisons. This will help us understand a later exchange between the married couple when she asks Mr. Pugh what book he is reading and he replies with the falsehood: *Lives of the Great Saints*. To this lie, "Mrs. Pugh smiles. An icicle forms in the cold air of the dining-vault" in which they are eating.

66) WILLY NILLY

Morning, Mr. Edwards. Very small news. Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard won't have birds in the house, and Mr. Pugh's bought a book now on how to do in Mrs. Pugh. And there's ??????? from the lodger in Craggy Dawn.

MR. EDWARDS

Have you got a letter from her?

WILLY NILLY

Miss Price loves you with all her heart. Smelling of lavender today. She's down to the last of the elderflower wine but the quince¹⁷⁰ jam's bearing up and she's knitting roses on the doilies. Last week she sold three jars of boiled sweets, pound of humbugs, half a box of jelly babies and six colored photos of Llaregub. Yours forever. Then twenty-one X's.

MR. EDWARDS

Oh, Willy Nilly, she's a ruby! Here's my letter. Put it into her hands now.

Analysis: The postman continues on to the shop of Mr. Mog Edwards who characteristically asks if there is a letter from his distant love, Miss Price, whose name Dylan Thomas has made purposely to have the ring of the cash register about it. Willy Nilly tells him the “very small news” of his rounds then describes in detail the letter from Miss Price, right down to the way she signs off with “twenty-one X's.” Mog Edwards gives him a letter to carry to Miss Price, continuing the sterile exchange of professed love from afar.

[Slow feet on cobbles, quicker feet approaching]

67) FIRST VOICE

Down the street comes Willy Nilly and Captain Cat hears other steps approaching.

CAPTAIN CAT

Mr. Waldo hurrying to the Sailors Arms. Pint of stout with an egg in it.

¹⁷⁰ Small cooking pears.

[Footsteps stop—softly]

There's a letter for him.

WILLY NILLY

It's another paternity summons, Mr. Waldo.

FIRST VOICE

The quick footsteps hurry on along the cobbles and up three steps to the Sailors Arms.

MR. WALDO (Calling out)

Quick, Sinbad. Pint of stout. And no egg in.

Analysis: Willy Nilly moves on to encounter the philander, Mr. Waldo, who is hurrying to the pub to get a "pint of stout with an egg in it," which is traditionally considered an aphrodisiac. Upon getting his letter, which is "another paternity summons" he orders a pint without egg in it, Thomas's tasty little joke.

68) FIRST VOICE

People are moving now up and down the cobbled street.

CAPTAIN CAT

All the women are out this morning, in the sun. You can tell it's Spring. There goes Mrs. Cherry, you can tell her by her trotters, off she trots new as a daisy. Who's that talking by the pump? Mrs. Floyd and Boyo, talking flatfish. Now, what can you talk about flatfish?

Analysis: Through the eyes of Captain Cat, we continue to view the townsfolk moving up and down the street, where the woman is gabbing about trivial things.

69) That's Mrs. Dai Bread One, waltzing up the street like a jelly, every time she shakes, it's slap, slap, slap. Who's that? Mrs. Butcher Beynon with her pet black cat, it follows her everywhere, meow and all.

Oh, there goes Mrs. Twenty-Three, important, the sun gets up and goes down in her dewlap.¹⁷¹ When she shuts her eyes, it's night.

Analysis: Captain Cat continues to watch – actually “listen,” since he is blind – the townsfolk, one of which is the self-centered Mrs. Twenty-Three, who apparently feels that her genitalia are excessively important. She is a minor character in the play, but she seems to think that the sun rises and sets with her, but Thomas seems to be saying that her tiny world of thought is actually inconsequential. Thomas presents her and other loners as people who are cut off from others. He seems to be contrasting loneliness to sexual love, sort of the “cold and hot” of life in Llaregub.

70) High heels now, in the morning too, Mrs. Rose-Cottage's eldest Mae, seventeen and never been kissed – ho ho, going young and milking under my window to the field with the nanny goats. She reminds me all the way.

Analysis: Then Captain Cat becomes aware that Mae, the nubile teenager, is passing on her way to milk her goats in the field. When the old sea captain says, “She reminds me all the way,” he is reminiscing on his salad days.

71) Can't hear what the women are gabbing round the pump. Well, same as ever. Who's having a baby, who blacked whose eye, seen Polly Garter giving her belly an airing,¹⁷² there should be a law, seen Mrs. Beynon's new mauve jumper, it's her old grey jumper dyed, who's dead, who's dying, there's a lovely day, oh the cost of soap flakes!

¹⁷¹ Slang for female genitalia.

¹⁷² Having sex.

Analysis: Captain Cat listens to the drivel coming out of the mouths of the women gabbing around the water pump. It is mind-numbingly mundane tripe such as “the cost of soap flakes!”

[Organ music, distant]

72) CAPTAIN CAT

Organ Morgan's at it early. You can tell it's Spring.

FIRST VOICE

And he hears the noise of milk-cans.

CAPTAIN CAT

Ocky Milkman on his round. I will say this, his milk's as fresh as the dew. Half dew it is. Snuffle on, Ocky, watering the town.

Analysis: Now Captain Cat hears the cheat, Ocky Milkman, delivering his watered-down milk.

73) Oh, somebody's coming. Now the voices round the pump can see somebody coming. Hush, there's a hush!¹⁷³ You can tell by the noise of the hush, it's Polly Garter. (Louder) Hullo, Polly, who's there?

POLLY GARTER (Off stage)

Me, love.

CAPTAIN CAT

That's Polly Garter. (Softly) Hullo, Polly my love,

¹⁷³ Some felt that if a talkative group fell silent it was a sign that a witch was passing.

SECOND VOICE

Can you hear the dumb goose-hiss¹⁷⁴ of the wives as they huddle and peck or flounce at a waddle away? Who cuddled you when? Which of their gandering hubbies moaned in Milk Wood for your naughty mothering arms and body like a wardrobe, love? Scrub the floors of the Welfare Hall for the Mothers' Union Social Dance, you're one mother won't wriggle her roly poly bum¹⁷⁵ or pat her fat little buttery foot in that wedding-ringed holy tonight, though the waltzing breadwinners snatched from the cozy smoke of the Sailors Arms will grizzle¹⁷⁶ and mope.

[A cock crows]

Analysis: The idle talk of the pump turns to Gossamer Beynon, Thomas's symbol of female attractiveness and fertility. She is his "Earth Mother." The "goose-hissing" biddies gossiping at the pump disparage her as a slut.

74) CAPTAIN CAT

Too late, cock, too late....

SECOND VOICE

...for the town's half over with its morning. The morning's busy as bees.

[Organ music fades into silence]

FIRST VOICE

There's the clip clop of horses on the sun-honeyed cobbles of the humming streets, hammering of horseshoes, gobble quack and cackle, tomtit twitter¹⁷⁷ from the bird-ounced boughs, braying on Donkey Down.

¹⁷⁴ Slang for gossip.

¹⁷⁵ Butt or ass.

¹⁷⁶ Sulk.

¹⁷⁷ Sounds of mating birds.

Bread is baking, pigs are grunting, chop goes the butcher, milk-churns bell, tills ring, sheep cough, dogs shout, saws sing. Oh, the Spring whinny and morning moo from the clog dancing¹⁷⁸ farms, the gulls' gab and rabble on the boat-bobbing river and sea and the cockles bubbling in the sand, scamper of sanderlings,¹⁷⁹ curlew¹⁸⁰ cry, crow caw, pigeon coo, clock strike, bull bellow, and the ragged gabble of the slovenly beargarden¹⁸¹ school as the women scratch and babble in Mrs. Organ Morgan's general shop, where everything is sold: custard, buckets, henna, rat-traps, senna pods, shrimp-nets, sugar, stamps, confetti, paraffin, hatchets, whistles.

Analysis: Thomas steps back and gives us a broad overview of the town's morning activities.

75) FIRST WOMAN

Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard....

SECOND WOMAN

...la di da....

FIRST WOMAN

....got a man in Builth Wells....

THIRD WOMAN

....and he got a little telescope to look at birds....

SECOND WOMAN

Willy Nilly said.

THIRD WOMAN

Remember her first husband? He didn't need a telescope....

¹⁷⁸ Wooden clogs with taps were used in traditional dances.

¹⁷⁹ Small wading birds.

¹⁸⁰ A type of sea bird.

¹⁸¹ Facility for bear-baiting.

FIRST WOMAN

...he looked at them undressing through the keyhole....

THIRD WOMAN

and he used to shout Tallyho!

SECOND WOMAN

But Mr. Ogmore was a proper gentleman....

FIRST WOMAN

...even though he hanged his collie.

THIRD WOMAN

Seen Mrs. Butcher Beynon?

SECOND WOMAN

She said Butcher Beynon put dogs in the mincer.¹⁸²

FIRST WOMAN

Go on, he's pulling her leg

THIRD WOMAN

Now don't you dare tell her that, there's a dear....

SECOND WOMAN

...or she'll think he's trying to pull it off and eat it.

¹⁸² Meat-grinder.

FOURTH WOMAN

There's a nasty lot live here when you come to think.

FIRST WOMAN

Look at that Nogood Boyo now....

SECOND WOMAN

....too lazy to wipe his snout....

THIRD WOMAN

....and going out fishing every day and all he ever brought back was a Mrs. Samuels....

FIRST WOMAN

....been in the water a week.

SECOND WOMAN

And look at Ocky Milkman's wife that nobody's ever seen.

FIRST WOMAN

He keeps her in the cupboard with the empties....

THIRD WOMAN

....and think of Dai Bread with two wives....

SECOND WOMAN

....one for the daytime one for the night.

FOURTH WOMAN

Men are brutes on the quiet.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Men are animals, when all is said and done.

THIRD WOMAN

And how's Organ Morgan, Mrs. Morgan?

FIRST WOMAN

You look deadbeat....

SECOND WOMAN

....it's organ, organ all the time with him....

THIRD WOMAN

.....up every night until midnight playing the organ.

MRS. ORGAN MORGAN

Oh, I'm a martyr to music.

Analysis: We hear the voices of the gossips and their trivial renunciations of their fellow townfolk. There is a strong hint of gender detestation in the scrumptious line, "Men are brutes on the quiet."

76) FIRST VOICE

Outside, the sun springs down on the rough and tumbling town. It runs through the hedges of Goosegog Lane, cuffing the birds to sing. Spring whips green down Cockle Row, and the shells ring out. Llaregub, this snip of a morning, is wild fruit and warm, the streets, fields, sands and waters springing in the young sun.

Analysis: The play's author starts our look at Llaregub in the early morning and in the Springtime. Here the First Voice poetically notes that "Spring whips green" through the town and that Llaregub is made "is wild fruit and warm" by the "young sun."

77) SECOND VOICE

Evans the Death presses hard with black gloves on the coffin of his breast in case his hearts jumps out.

EVANS THE DEATH (Harshly)

Where's your dignity. Lie down.

Analysis: In stark contrast to the life-giving metaphors of passage #76, Thomas brings us up short by savagely inserting Evans the Death, which he intends to use to remind us that Spring does not last and a frigid winter (or death) awaits us all. Yet even when making such a macabre point, Thomas cannot resist a joke and has the undertaker telling an uncooperative corpse, which apparently refuses to go quietly to his coffin, “Where's your dignity. Lie down.”

78) SECOND VOICE

Spring stirs¹⁸⁴ Gossamer Beynon schoolmistress like a spoon.

GOSSAMER BEYNON (Tearfully)

Oh, what can I do? I'll never be refined if I twitch.

Analysis: Thomas has Gossamer Beynon somewhat concerned with her loose sexuality and saying: “I'll never be refined if I twitch,” which is a sly aphorism for the bucking involved in the sex act.

79) SECOND VOICE

Spring this strong morning foams in a flame in Jack Black, as he cobbles a high-heeled shoe for Mrs. Dai Bread Two – the gypsy, but he hammers it sternly out.

JACK BLACK (To a hammer rhythm)

There is no leg belonging to the foot that belongs to this shoe.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas uses the two meaning of stir here. A spoon stirs liquid; but the joy of Spring can also stir someone emotionally.

Analysis: This short section is merely a humorous statement by the cobbler at a client.

80) SECOND VOICE

The sun and the green breeze ship Captain Cat sea-memory again.

CAPTAIN CAT

No, I'll take the mulatto, by God, who's captain here? *Parlez-vous* jig-jig,¹⁸⁵ Madam?

Analysis: From Jack Black we go to Captain Cat, who is ruminating about his sex life in a distant past. In his memory he is pulling rank on fellow seamen to gain access to an especially desirous mulatto whore, presumably a French speaker, because he asks her: *Parlez-vous* jig-jig, Madam?

81) MARY ANN SAILORS (Loudly)

It is Spring in Llaregub, in the sun, in my old age and this is the Chosen Land.

[A choir of children's voices
suddenly cries out on one, high,
glad, long, sighing note]

Analysis: An octogenarian, who is chauvinistic with regard to her town, comments on Llaregub in a biblical manner.

82) FIRST VOICE

And in Willy Nilly the Postman's dark and sizzling damp tea-coated misty pygmy kitchen, where the spitting cat kettles throb and hop on the range, Mrs. Willy Nilly steams open Mr. Mog Edwards' letter to Miss Myfanwy Price and reads it aloud to Willy Nilly by the squint of the Spring sun through the one sealed window running with tears, while the drugged,

¹⁸⁵ A euphemism for sexual intercourse.

bedraggled hens at the back door whimper and snivel for the lickerish¹⁸⁶ bog-black¹⁸⁷ tea.

¹⁸⁶ Sweet.

¹⁸⁷ Dark black or swamp-colored.

MRS. WILLY NILLY

From Manchester House, Llaregub. Sole Prop: Mr. Mog Edwards (late of Twll¹⁸⁸), Linen draper, Haberdasher, Master Tailor, Costumier. For West End Neglige, Lingerie, Tea gowns, Evening Dress, Trousseaux, Layettes. Also Ready to Wear for All Occasions. Economical Outfitting for Agricultural Employment Our Specialty, Wardrobes Bought. Among Our Satisfied Customers Ministers of Religion and J .P 's.¹⁸⁹ Fittings by Appointment. Advertising Weekly in the *Twll Bugle*. Beloved Myfanwy Price, my Bride in Heaven.

MOG EDWARDS

I love you until Death do us part and then we shall be together forever and ever. A new parcel of ribbons has come from Carmarthen today, all the colors in the rainbow. I wish I could tie a ribbon in your hair, a white one but it cannot be.

I dreamed last night you were all dripping wet and you sat on my lap as the Reverend Jenkins went down the street. I see you got a mermaid in your lap, he said and he lifted his hat. He is a proper Christian.

Not like Cherry Owen who said you should have thrown her back he said. Business is very poorly. Polly Garter bought two garters with roses but she never got stockings so what is the use I say.

Butcher Beynon bought a checked cap to go ???, he said.

Mr. Waldo tried to sell me a woman's nightie outside. He said he found it and we know where. I sold a packet of pins to Tom the Sailors to pick his teeth. If this goes on I shall be in the poorhouse.

¹⁸⁸ Welsh for "a hole," implying that Mog Edwards previous residence was "a dump."

¹⁸⁹ Justices of the Peace.

My heart is in your bosom and yours is in mine. God be with you always Myfanwy Price and keep you lovely for me in His Heavenly Mansion. I must stop now and remain, Your Eternal, Mog Edwards.

MRS. WILLY NILLY

And then a little message with a rubber stamp. Shop at Mog's!!!

Analysis: We are made aware that Mrs. Willy Nilly is steaming open Mog Edwards' letter to Miss Myfanwy Price, which she reads to her husband and we can listen in. The letter is written in an unromantic way on his shop letterhead and he spends very little time with making verbal love to her and most of the letter is taken up with describing his business and complaining about its slow nature of late. Dylan Thomas punctuates the fact that Mog is more concerned with himself and the state of his business than with making a truly concerted effort to woo Miss Price by having him end the letter with a postscript: "Shop at Mog's," which he actually had to have applied with a rubber stamp. His statements about his business are central to the letter and written with feeling but his amorous words are few, effete and barren.

83) FIRST VOICE.

And Willy Nilly, rumbling, jockeys out again to the three-seated shack called the House of Commons in the back where the hens weep, and sees, in sudden Spring-shine....

[sound of gulls]

SECOND VOICE

...herring gulls heckling down to the harbor, where the fishermen spit and prop the morning up and eye the fishy sea smooth to the sea's end as it lulls in blue. Green and gold money, tobacco, tinned salmon, hats with feathers, pots of fish-paste,¹⁹⁰ warmth for the winter-to-be, weave and leap in it rich and slippery in the flash and shapes of fishes through the cold sea-streets. But with blue lazy eyes the fishermen gaze at that milk mild whispering water with no rap or ripple as though it blew great guns and serpents and typhooned the town.

¹⁹⁰ Relish made from fish.

FISHERMAN

Too rough for fishing today.

SECOND VOICE

And they thank God and gob¹⁹¹ at a gull for luck, and moss-slow and silent make their way uphill, from the still, still sea, towards the Sailors Arms as the children....

[School bell rings]

Analysis: This passage indicates the ambiguity fishermen have about venturing into the sea.

84) FIRST VOICE (Continuing)

....spank and scamper rough and singing out of school into the draggletail¹⁹² yard. And Captain Cat at his window says soft to himself the words of their song.

CAPTAIN CAT (To the beat of the singing)

Johnnie Crack and Flossie Snail;¹⁹³ Kept their baby in a milking pail; Flossie Snail and Johnnie Crack; One would pull it out and one would put it back; Oh it's my turn now said Flossie Snail; To take the baby from the milking pail; And it's my turn now said Johnnie Crack; To smack it on the head and put it back; Johnnie Crack and Flossie Snail; Kept their baby in a milking pail; One would put it back and one would pull it out; And all it had to drink was ale¹⁹⁴ and stout; For Johnnie Crack and Flossie Snail; Always used to say that stout and ale; Was good for a baby in a milking pail.

¹⁹¹ Spit.

¹⁹² Long clothing e.g., skirts that drag in the mud.

¹⁹³ Characters of a traditional Welsh nursery rhyme.

¹⁹⁴ Traditional British strong beer. This is place together with stout, another strong beer, both unfit for children.

[Long pause]

Analysis: Dylan Thomas alters a traditional Welsh folk tale to comment on the widespread tendency of the townsfolk to drink, perhaps especially those so poor as not to have a proper cradle for their baby, but enough money to buy beer. Though there may not be any direct connection, Caitlin, Thomas's wife, experimented with mixing milk and whisky at one point in their tumultuous marriage, a mixture she would drink in the morning.

85) FIRST VOICE

The music of the spheres¹⁹⁵ is heard distinctly over Milk Wood. It is 'The Rustle of Spring.'¹⁹⁶

SECOND VOICE

A glee-party¹⁹⁷ sings in Bethesda Graveyard, gay but muffled.

FIRST VOICE

Vegetables make love above the tenors....

SECOND VOICE

...and dogs bark blue in the face.

FIRST VOICE

Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard belches in a teeny hanky and chases the sunlight with a flywhisk,¹⁹⁸ but even she cannot drive out the Spring: from one of the fingerbowls a primrose grows.

¹⁹⁵ A traditional myth from Greek sources that the heavens made divine music when they moved; comically juxtaposed against the earthly and mundane composition, "The Rustle of Spring."

¹⁹⁶ Refers to a salon piece of that name by Christian Sindling (1856-1941), a minor Norwegian imitator of the composer Grieg, popular at the turn of the century. This musical piece became something of a musical cliché, redolent of suburban middle-class taste.

¹⁹⁷ A party of singers associated with village gatherings, formally professional but amateur by the end of the nineteenth century. Thomas is implying that they are a party from the spirits of the dead in the earth, hence the reference to "muffled."

¹⁹⁸ A small hand-broom.

Analysis: Dylan Thomas clearly loved music and Spring and in this passage he combines them to indicate the Llaregub is a wonderful place at that time of year. Furthermore, even the dour Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard or any of the other town biddies cannot squelch to joy of Springtime.

86) SECOND VOICE

Mrs. Dai Bread One and Mrs. Dai Bread Two are sitting outside their house in Donkey Lane, one darkly, one plumply blooming in the quick, dewy sun. Mrs. Dai Bread Two is looking into a crystal ball, which she holds in the lap of her dirty yellow petticoat, hard against her hard dark thighs.

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

Cross my palm with silver. Out of our housekeeping money. Aah!

MRS. DAI BREAD ONE

What d'you see, lovie?

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

I see a featherbed. With three pillows on it. And a text above the bed. I can't read what it says, there's great clouds blowing. Now they have blown away. God is Love, the text says.

MRS. DAI BREAD ONE (Delighted)

That's our bed.

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

And now it's vanished. The sun's spinning like a top. Who's this coming out of the sun? It's a hairy little man with big pink lips.¹⁹⁹ He got a walleye.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ This can be taken as a self portrait in words by Dylan Thomas.

²⁰⁰ An eye of a lighter or speckled color.

MRS. DAI BREAD ONE

It's Dai – it's Dai Bread!

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

Ssh! The feather bed's floating back. The little man's taking his boots off. He's pulling his shirt over his head. He's beating his chest with his fists. He's climbing into bed.

MRS. DAI BREAD ONE

Go on – go on.

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

There's two women in bed. He looks at them both, with his head cocked on one side. He's whistling through his teeth. Now he grips his little arms round one of the women.

MRS. DAI BREAD ONE

Which one, which one?

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

I can't see any more. There's great clouds blowing again.

MRS. DAI BREAD ONE

Ach, the mean old clouds!

[Pause. The children's singing fades]

Analysis: Now we see the two wives of Mr. Dai Bread, a baker. One is a gipsy and is gazing into a crystal ball. The other wife is playing the part of a client. This sequence is a humorous look at the odd *ménage-a-trois* of the household. Dylan Thomas, who was hairy

and had bulging pink lips and his wife Caitlin were once involved in a real life *ménage-a-trois*, which actually led the husband of the second woman to spray a cottage with a machinegun while Dylan Thomas was inside, however Thomas escaped injury.

87) FIRST VOICE

The morning is all singing. The Reverend Eli Jenkins, busy on his morning calls, stops outside the Welfare Hall to hear Polly Garter as she scrubs the floors for the Mothers' Union Dance²⁰¹ tonight.

POLLY GARTER (Singing)

*I loved a man whose name was Tom;
He was strong as a bear and two yards long;
I loved a man whose name was Dick;
He was big as a barrel and three feet thick;
And I loved a man whose name was Harry;
Six feet tall and sweet as a cherry;
But the one I loved best, awake or asleep;
Was little Willy Wee²⁰² and he's six feet deep.
O Tom Dick and Harry were three fine men;
And I'll never have such loving again;
But little Willy Wee, who took me on his knee;
Little Willy Weasel was the man for me.
Now men from every parish round;
Run after me and roll me on the ground;
But whenever I love another man back – Johnnie from the
Hill or Sailing Jack – I always think as they do what they
please;*

²⁰¹ A charity dance for war widows' charity.

²⁰² Derived from a nursery rhyme "Wee Willie Winkle."

*Of Tom Dick and Harry who were tall as trees;
And most I think when I'm by their side;
Of little Willy Wee who downed²⁰³ and died.
O Tom Dick and Harry were three fine men;*

*And I'll never have such loving again;
But little Willy Wee, who took me on his knee;
Little Willy Weasel is the man for me.*

REV. ELI JENKINS

Praise the Lord! We are a musical nation.

Analysis: As the voices of singing children fade, we are given a ribald treat in the music sung by the sexy Polly Garter. Remember, this was performed first in 1952 and the repeated sexual references and innuendos in her song made this a very racy piece in that era. When she ends her singing, Thomas has a preacher, the Rev. Eli Jenkins, say in a fit of naiveté: “Praise the Lord! We are a musical nation.” The juxtaposition of the lusty wench and man of the cloth is quite intentional.

88) SECOND VOICE

And the Reverend Jenkins hurries on through the town to visit the sick with jelly and poems.²⁰⁴

FIRST VOICE

The town's as full as a lovebird's egg.²⁰⁵

MR. WALDO

There goes the Reverend....

203 Fell sick.

204 Candy and get-well poems.

205 Simile for lovelorn i.e., those unhappy because of unrequited love.

FIRST VOICE

....says Mr. Waldo at the smoked herring²⁰⁶ brown window of the unwashed Sailors Arms....

MR. WALDO

....with his broolly²⁰⁷ and his odes.²⁰⁸ Fill 'em up, Sinbad, I'm on the treacle²⁰⁹ today.

SECOND VOICE

The silent fishermen flush down their pints.

SINBAD

Oh, Mr. Waldo....

FIRST VOICE

....sighs Sinbad Sailors....

SINBAD

I dote on that Gossamer Beynon.

SECOND VOICE

Love sings the Spring. The bedspring grass bounces on Goosegog lane.

FIRST VOICE

And Gossamer Beynon, schoolteacher, spoon-stirred and quivering, teaches her slubberdegulleon class.....

[sound of children singing & the teacher interrupts them & corrects them]

SINBAD

206 A smoked sea fish, brown in color – hence the brown window.

207 Umbrella.

208 Poems.

209 Herbalist mixture – a light yellow syrup, a metaphor for ale beer.

Oh, Mr. Waldo. She's a lady all over.

FIRST VOICE

....And Mr. Waldo, who is thinking of a woman soft as Eve and sharp as sciatica to share his bread-pudding bed²¹⁰, answers....

MR. WALDO

....No lady that I know is....

SINBAD

....And if only grandma'd die, cross my heart I'd go down on my knees Mr. Waldo and I'd say Miss Gossamer, I'd say....

CHILDREN'S VOICES

...when birds do sing “hey ding a ding a ding, sweet lovers love the Spring”...

Analysis: The preacher performs his sugar-sweet duties while the drunkards drink away the day in the pub. The town is full of the lovelorn and we hear one of them, Sinbad pining after Gossamer Beynon and proclaiming that if he were free of his grandma, who he presumably must take care of, he would we his true love. We know he is just one of the many stilted lovers in Llaregub suffering from unrequited love. The children singing sweetly the “ding a ding a ding” is important. Dylan Thomas will use this again below and it got a uproarious laugh out of the play’s first audience.

89) SECOND VOICE

Polly Garter sings, still on her knees...

POLLY GARTER

....Tom Dick and Harry were three fine men;
And I'll never have such....

²¹⁰ Very soft, perhaps body-molded bed. An alternate interpretation refers to Mr. Waldo putting “a slice of cold bread pudding under the pillow,” a passage earlier in the play.

CHILDREN

....ding a ding....

POLLY GARTER

....again.

Analysis: The interspersing of “....ding a ding....” into Polly’s song was a clear substitute for some crude word for the sex act.

90) FIRST VOICE

And the morning school is over, and Captain Cat at his curtained schooner's porthole²¹¹ open to the Spring sun tides hears the naughty forfeiting²¹² children tumble and rhyme on the cobbles.

GIRLS' VOICES

Gwennie call the boys. They make such a noise.

GIRL

Boys, boys, boys. Come along to me.

GIRLS' VOICES

Boys, boys, boys. Kiss Gwennie where she says or give her a penny. Go on, Gwennie.

GIRL

Kiss me in Goosegog Lane or give me a penny. What's your name?

FIRST BOY

Billy.

²¹¹ Round window similar to a ship's porthole.

²¹² As in forfeiting a game played by children.

GIRL

Kiss me in Goosegog Lane Billy or give me a penny, silly.

[sound of a kiss]

FIRST BOY

Gwennie Gwennie. I kiss you in Goosegog Lane. Now I haven't got to give you a penny.

GIRLS' VOICES

Boys boys boys. Kiss Gwennie where she says or give her a penny. Go on, Gwennie.

GIRL

Kiss me on Llaregub Hill or give me a penny. What's your name?

SECOND BOY

Johnnie Cristo.

GIRL

Kiss me on Llaregub Hill Johnnie Cristo or give me a penny, mister.

[sound of a kiss]

SECOND BOY

Gwennie Gwennie I kiss you on Llaregub Hill. Now I haven't got to give you a penny.

GIRLS' VOICES

Boys boys boys. Kiss Gwennie where she says or give her a penny. Go on, Gwennie.

GIRL

Kiss me in Milk Wood or give me a penny. What's your name?

THIRD BOY

Dicky.

GIRL

Kiss me in Milk Wood Dicky or give me a penny – quickly.

THIRD BOY

Gwennie Gwennie I can't kiss you in Milk Wood.

GIRLS' VOICES

Gwennie ask him why.

GIRL

Why?

THIRD BOY

Because my mother says I mustn't.

GIRLS' VOICES

Cowardy, cowardy custard. Give Gwennie a penny.

GIRL

Give me a penny.

THIRD BOY

I haven't got any.

GIRLS' VOICES

Put him in the river, up to his liver; quick, quick – Dirty Dick. Beat him on the bum with a rhubarb stick. Aiee! Hush!

FIRST VOICE

And the shrill girls giggle and master around him and squeal as they clutch and thrash, and he blubbers away downhill with his patched pants falling, and his tear-splashed blush burns all the way as the triumphant bird-like sisters scream with buttons in their claws and the bully brothers hoot after him his little nickname and his mother's shame and his father's wickedness with the loose wild, barefoot women of the hovels²¹³ of the hills.

It all means nothing at all, and, howling for his milky mum, for her cawl²¹⁴ and buttermilk and cow-breath and welsh cakes²¹⁵ and the fat birth-smelling bed and moonlit kitchen of her arms, he'll never forget as he paddles blind home through the weeping end of the world.

Then his tormentors tussle and run to the Cockle Street sweet-shop, their pennies sticky as honey, to buy from Miss Myfanwy Price, who is cocky and neat as a puff-bosomed robin and her small round buttocks tight as ticks,²¹⁶ gobstoppers²¹⁷ big as wens²¹⁸ that rainbow as you suck, humbugs, winegums,²¹⁹ a ??? of brandy balls,²²⁰ hundreds and thousands, liquorish sweet as sick, toothlessly toffee of tar, nuggets to tug and ribbon out like another red rubbery tongue, gum to glue in girls' curls, crimson cough drops to spit blood, stale bags of black-boiled marbles, ice-cream comets, dandelion-and-burdock,²²¹ raspberry and cherry-aid, pop goes the weasel and the wind.

Analysis: In these exchanges between girls and boys Dylan Thomas gives us an innocent parody of prostitution and the kiss-fetching girls who “scream with buttons in their claws” do not come off very well in this piece. I am of the mind that this was an actual incident in Dylan’s childhood, upon which he drew to give us the part of the play.

²¹³ Shacks.

²¹⁴ A traditional Welsh soup.

²¹⁵ Traditional welsh biscuits made with currants or raisins, an allusion to an old rural custom in Wales of using water derived from melted snow in the preparation of cakes and pastries.

²¹⁶ Swollen to the size of ticks.

²¹⁷ Jawbreakers.

²¹⁸ Goiter. A lump or swelling of the throat.

²¹⁹ Gummy bears shaped liked bottles.

²²⁰ A hard brandy-colored candy.

²²¹ A herb-flavored hard candy.

91) SECOND VOICE

Gossamer Beynon high-heels out of school. The sun hums down through the cotton flowers of her dress into the bell of her heart and buzzes in the honey there and couches²²² and kisses, lazy-loving and boozed, in her red-berried breast. Eyes run from the trees and windows of the street, steaming 'Gossamer,' and strip her to the nipples and the bees. She blazes naked past the Sailors Arms, the only woman on the Dai-Adamed earth.²²³ Sinbad Sailors places on her thighs still dew-damp from the first man-growing cockcrow garden²²⁴ his reverent goat-bearded hands.²²⁵

GOSSAMER BEYNON

I don't care if he is common....

SECOND VOICE

...she whispers to her salad-day²²⁶ deep self....

GOSSAMER BEYNON

...I want to gobble him up. I don't care if he does drop his aitches [*H's*]....

SECOND VOICE

...she tells the stripped and mother-of-the-world, big-beamed²²⁷ and Eve-hipped²²⁸ Spring of herself....

GOSSAMER BEYNON

...so long as he's all cucumber and hooves.²²⁹

²²² Slang for "snuggle."

²²³ A play on "diademed" (crowned), or, in context, "Adamed with Dai's (Welshmen).

²²⁴ Descriptive for the Garden of Eden.

²²⁵ Allusion to mythical god "Pan" who was famous for his sexual exploits.

²²⁶ Youthful. See: "My salad days./When I was green in judgment" (Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, I, 5).

²²⁷ Thick-thighed or a woman with "thunder thighs."

²²⁸ Reproductive. Refers to Eve as a child bearer.

²²⁹ Hooves is a figure of speech for Pan or the Devil. Of course, the cucumber is representative of the male sex organ.

SECOND VOICE

Sinbad Sailors watches her go by, demure and proud and schoolmarm in her crisp flower dress and sun-defying hat, with never a look or lilt or wriggle, the butcher's un-melting, ice maiden daughter veiled for ever from the hungry hug of his eyes.

SINBAD SAILORS

Oh, Gossamer Beynon, why are you so proud?

SECOND VOICE

...he grieves to his Guinness.²³⁰

SINBAD SAILORS

Oh, beautiful, beautiful Gossamer B. I wish that you were for me. I wish you were not so educated.

SECOND VOICE

She feels his goat beard tickle²³¹ her in the middle of the world,²³² like a tuft of wiry fire, and she turns in a terror of delight away from his whips and whiskery conflagration, and sits down in the kitchen to a plate heaped high with chips and the kidneys of lambs.

Analysis: Now we are treated to another couple of lovelorn townsfolk, Sinbad Sailors and Gossamer Beynon, both of whom would love to love each other, but don't seem to know how to make it happen. She must be content with her imaginations of his lovemaking and he "he grieves to his Guinness...and sits down in the kitchen to a plate heaped high with chips and the kidneys of lambs." Food and drink will have to do.

²³⁰ An Irish brand of stout or dark beer.

²³¹ Allusion to oral sex of a male on female.

²³² The female genitalia.

92) FIRST VOICE

In the blind-drawn, dark dining room of School House, dusty and echoing as a dining room in a vault, Mr. and Mrs. Pugh are silent over cold, grey cottage pie. Mr. Pugh reads, as he forks the shroud meat in, from *Lives of the Great Poisoners*. He has bound a plain brown-paper cover over the book. Slyly, between slow mouthfuls, he side-spies up at Mrs. Pugh, poisons her with his eye, then goes on reading. He underlines certain passages and smiles in secret.

MRS. PUGH

Persons with manners do not read at table....

FIRST VOICE

...says Mrs. Pugh. She swallows a digestive tablet²³³ as big as a horse-pill, washing it down with clouded pea soup water.

[Pause]

MRS. PUGH

Some persons were brought up in pigsties.

MR. PUGH

Pigs don't read at table, dear.

FIRST VOICE

Bitterly she flicks dust from the broken cruet.²³⁴ It settles on the pie in a thin gnat-rain.

MR. PUGH

Pigs can't read, my dear.

²³³ Laxative.

²³⁴ A small bottle for pouring wine.

MRS. PUGH

I know one who can.

FIRST VOICE

Alone in the hissing laboratory of his wishes, Mr. Pugh minces among bad vats²³⁵ and jeroboams,²³⁶ tiptoes through spinneys²³⁷ of murdering herbs, agony dancing in his crucibles,²³⁸ and mixes, especially for Mrs. Pugh, a venomous porridge unknown to toxicologists, which will scald and viper through her until her ears fall off like figs, her toes grow big and black as balloons and steam comes screaming out of her navel.

MR. PUGH

You know best, dear....

FIRST VOICE

....says Mr. Pugh and quick as a flash he ducks her in rat soup.²³⁹

MRS. PUGH

What's that book by your trough, Mr. Pugh?

MR. PUGH

It's a theological work, my dear. *Lives of the Great Saints*.

FIRST VOICE

Mrs. Pugh smiles. An icicle forms in the cold air of the dining-vault.

MRS. PUGH

I saw you talking to a saint this morning. Saint Polly Garter. She was martyred again last night. Mrs. Organ Morgan saw her with Mr. Waldo.

²³⁵ Large mixing vessels.

²³⁶ A large bowl or wine bottle.

²³⁷ Thorny thickets or hedges.

²³⁸ A heat-resistant bowl for melting metal.

²³⁹ Rat poison.

Analysis: The man who aspires to be one of the Great Poisoners endures sitting with his wife in their icy vault-like kitchen. She nags him and he dreams of her terrible death by poison. She ends by mentioning that she saw him talking to Polly Garter, the sexually loose blonde who beds many of the townsmen and farm boys. The implication is that if he hasn't bedded her yet, he would certainly like to.

93) MRS. ORGAN MORGAN

And when they saw me they pretended they were looking for nests....

SECOND VOICE

....said Mrs. Organ Morgan to her husband, with her mouth full of fish as a pelican's.

MRS. ORGAN MORGAN

But you don't go nesting in long combinations,²⁴⁰ I said to myself, like Mr. Waldo was wearing and your dress nearly over your head like Polly Garter's. Oh, they didn't fool me.

SECOND VOICE

One big bird gulp, and the flounder's gone. She licks her lips and goes stabbing again.

MRS. ORGAN MORGAN

And when you think of all those babies she's got, then all I can say is she'd better give up bird nesting that's all I can say, it isn't the right kind of hobby at all for a woman that can't say 'no' even to midgets.

Remember Bob Spit? He wasn't any bigger than a baby and he gave her two. But they're two nice boys, I will say that, Dai Spit and Arthur. Sometimes I like Dai best and sometimes I like Arthur. Who do you like best, Organ?

ORGAN MORGAN

Oh, Bach without any doubt. Bach every time for me.

²⁴⁰ Laying side by side on the ground (i.e. making love).

MRS. ORGAN MORGAN

Organ Morgan, you haven't been listening to a word I said. It's organ, organ all the time with you.

FIRST VOICE

And she bursts into tears, and in the middle of her salty howling, nimbly spears a small flatfish and pelicans it whole.

ORGAN MORGAN

And then Palestrina...

SECOND VOICE

...says Organ Morgan.

Analysis: Then Mrs. Organ Morgan complains to her husband of Polly's sexual experimentation. Apparently he is not listening to her babbling because when she asks him, after mentioning two boys sired by Miss Garter: "Who do you like best, Organ?" He responds: "Oh, Bach without any doubt. Bach every time for me." This drives her to complain: "Organ Morgan, you haven't been listening to a word I said. It's organ, organ all the time with you." Yet he has not even heard this complaint, for he goes on to mention yet another of his favorite organists, Palestrina. It is marital miscommunication with a musical twist.

94) FIRST VOICE

Lord Cut-Glass²⁴¹ in his kitchen full of time, squats down alone to a dog dish marked Fido, of peppery fish scraps and listens to the voices of his sixty-six clocks, one for each year of his loony age, and watches, with love, their black-and-white moony, loud-lipped faces tocking the earth away: slow clocks, quick clocks, pendulumed heart-knocks, china, alarm, grandfather, cuckoo; clocks shaped like Noah's whirring Ark, clocks that bicker in marble

²⁴¹ Biting term for an upper-class accent.

ships, clocks in the wombs of glass women, hourglass chimers, tu-wit-tuwoo clocks, clocks that pluck tunes, Vesuvius clocks all black bells and lava, Niagara clocks that cataract their ticks, old time-weeping clocks with ebony beards, clocks with no hands forever drumming out time without ever knowing what time it is.

His sixty-six singers are all set at different hours. Lord Cut-Glass lives in a house and a life at siege. Any minute or dark day now, the unknown enemy will loot and savage downhill, but they will not catch him napping. Sixty-six different times in his fish-slimy kitchen ping, strike, tick, chime and tock.

SECOND VOICE

The lust and lilt and lather and emerald breeze and crackle of the bird-praise and body of Spring with its breasts full of rivering May-milk, means, to that lordly fish-head nibbler, nothing but another nearness to the tribes and navies of the Last Black Day²⁴² who'll sear and pillage down Armageddon Hill to his double-locked rusty-shuttered tick-tock dust-scrabbled shack at the bottom of the town that has fallen head over bells in love.

Analysis: We visit Lord Cut-Glass (upper class English-speakers in Britain are said to have voice sharp as cut-glass), a compulsive man who sees his death coming and so is obsessed with time. He has 66 clocks set to different times, perhaps hoping to confuse the Grim Reaper when his time comes.

95) POLLY GARTER

And I'll never have such loving again....

SECOND VOICE

.....pretty Polly hums and longs.

²⁴² Armageddon, the place where the battle of the end of the world, according to some interpretations of the book of Revelations in the New Testament.

POLLY GARTER (Sings)

*Now when farmers' boys on the first fair day;
Come down from the hills to drink and be gay;
Before the sun sinks I'll lie there in their arms;
For they're good bad boys from the lonely farms;
But I always think as we tumble into bed;
Of little Willy Wee who is dead, dead, dead...*

[A silence]

Analysis: Again, we hear Polly Garter singing of her true love, little Willy Wee, who is dead and so her ample lust and reproductive capacity (that is, life *par excellence*) is contrasted to the previously mentioned Lord Cut-Glass's pessimism and fear of death. In a dissimilar manner, Polly actually embraces a dead man over the "good bad boys from the lonely farms." Another way to view this distinction, in anthropological algebra, is Spring:Winter :: Life:Death.

96) FIRST VOICE

The sunny, slow lulling afternoon yawns and moons through the dozy town. The sea lolls, laps and idles in, with fishes sleeping in its lap. The meadows still as Sunday, the shut-eye tasseled bulls,²⁴³ the goat-and daisy dingles,²⁴⁴ nap happy and lazy. The dumb duck-ponds snooze. Clouds sag and pillow on Llaregub Hill. A pride of pigs grunt in a wet wallow-bath, and smile as they snort and dream. They dream of the acorned swill²⁴⁵ of the world, the rooting for pig-fruit,²⁴⁶ the bagpipe dugs²⁴⁷ of the mother sow, the squeal and snuffle of yesses of the women pigs in rut. They mud-bask and snout in the pig-loving sun; their tails curl; they rollick and slobber and snore to deep, smug, after-swill sleep. Donkeys angelically drowse on Donkey Down.

²⁴³ Tassels in the noses of bulls kept for breeding.

²⁴⁴ Small glades where goats graze and daisies grow.

²⁴⁵ Scraps of excess food mixed with water for feeding to pigs.

²⁴⁶ Roots.

²⁴⁷ Female nipple, with a special reference to the pigs.

Analysis: Dylan Thomas writes of the pigs of Llaregub, but read with a different eye, he is talking of the town's residents.

97) MRS. PUGH

Persons with manners....

SECOND VOICE

....snaps Mrs. cold Pugh....

MRS. PUGH

....do not nod at table.

FIRST VOICE

Mr. Pugh cringes awake. He puts on a soft-soaping smile: it is sad and grey under his nicotine-egg-yellow weeping walrus Victorian moustache worn thick and long in memory of Doctor Crippen.²⁴⁸

MRS. PUGH

You should wait until you retire to your sty....

SECOND VOICE

....says Mrs. Pugh, sweet as a razor. His fawning measly quarter-smile freezes. Sly and silent, he foxes into his chemist's den and there, in a hiss and prussic²⁴⁹ circle of cauldrons and phials brimful with pox and the Black Death, cooks up a fricassee²⁵⁰ of deadly nightshade,²⁵¹ nicotine, hot frog, cyanide and bat-spit for his needling stalactite hag and bed-nag of a poker-backed nutcracker wife.

²⁴⁸ The American doctor Hawley Harvey Crippen (1862-1910), executed in London for poisoning his wife.

²⁴⁹ Poisonous acid.

²⁵⁰ Meat stewed and served with sauce.

²⁵¹ Poisonous herb.

MR. PUGH

I beg your pardon, my dear....

SECOND VOICE

....he murmurs with a wheedle.

Analysis: This segment reinforces the “people as pigs” approach of Thomas. Poor Mr. Pugh – he wants to kill his wife so much that he wears a “nicotine-egg-yellow weeping walrus Victorian moustache worn thick and long in memory of Doctor Crippen,” who was the infamous American doctor convicted of poisoning his wife in London. Perhaps Mr. Pugh is tired of being called a pig by his sow “of a poker-backed nutcracker wife.”

98) FIRST VOICE

Captain Cat, at his wide window slumbers and voyages tattooed and ear-ringed and rolling on the old clippered seas, brawls with broken bottles in the fug and babel²⁵² of the dark dock bars, had a herd of short and good time cows in every naughty port tattooed with Union Jacks and little women who hulas shimmy and ripple and ‘I love you Rosy Probert’ on his belly. He roves those Dead Sea days and the drowned and cutthroat hair-dyed high-breasted schooner and rubber-tongued dead go with him dancing and slashing and making ghosts’ love and the tears run down his grog-blossomed nose.²⁵³

SECOND VOICE

One voice of all he remembers most dearly as his dream buckets down. Lazy early Rosie with the flaxen thatch, whom he shared with Tom-Fred the Donkey-Man²⁵⁴ and many another seaman, clearly and near to him, speaks from the bedroom of her dust. In that gulf and haven, fleets by the dozen have anchored for the little heaven of the night; but she speaks to Captain napping Cat alone. Mrs. Probert...

²⁵² A thick, close, stuffy atmosphere (as in a bar). Babel refers to a conflagration of talk.

²⁵³ The typical reddish veined nose thought to be associated with one who drinks lots of grog or booze.

²⁵⁴ Given the fewness of surnames in small communities in Wales, it became useful to identify individuals by the addition of a parent's Christian name (hence, Tom-Fred), the person's job (hence donkey man) the name of the home (hence (Mae Rose-Cottage), or the work-place (Mary-Ann the Sailors). The term "donkey man" is probably not a reference to the animal, but to the "donkey-engine," a small auxiliary engine for hauling or hoisting freight on board ship, or for pumping water from the boilers of a steamship

ROSIE PROBERT

...from Duck Lane, Jack. Quack twice and ask for Rosie.

SECOND VOICE ...is the one love of his sea-life that was sardined with women.

ROSIE PROBERT (Softly)

What seas did you see, Tom Cat, Tom Cat, in your sailing days long, long ago? What sea beasts were in the wavery green when you were my master?

CAPTAIN CAT

I'll tell you the truth. Seas barking like seals – blue seas and green, seas covered with eels and mermen and whales.

ROSIE PROBERT

What seas did you sail old whaler when on the blubbery waves between Frisco and Wales you were my bosun?²⁵⁵

CAPTAIN CAT

As true as I'm here dear you, Tom Cat's tart, you landlubber Rosie, you cozy love, my easy as easy, my true sweetheart – seas green as a bean, seas gliding with swans in the seal-barking moon.

ROSIE PROBERT

What seas were rocking my little deck hand, my favorite husband in your sea boots and hunger, my duck, my whaler, my honey, my daddy, my pretty sugar sailor with my name on your belly, when you were a boy long, long ago?

²⁵⁵ A.k.a. Boatswain i.e., the ship's officer in charge of equipment & the crew.

CAPTAIN CAT

I'll tell you no lies. The only sea I saw was the seesaw sea with you riding on it. Lie down, lie easy. Let me shipwreck in your thighs.

ROSIE PROBERT

Knock twice, Jack, at the door of my grave and ask for Rosie.

CAPTAIN CAT

Rosie Probert.

ROSIE PROBERT

Remember her. She is forgetting. The earth, which filled her mouth is vanishing from her. Remember me. I have forgotten you. I am going into the darkness of the darkness forever. I have forgotten that I was ever born.

Analysis: The exchange between the old Captain Cat and the dead whore, Rosie Probert is one of the most poignant of the play. Here Dylan Thomas deals rather boldly for the 1950s with sex and prostitution (“fleets by the dozen have anchored for the little heaven of the night”). In his old age and blindness he sits and remembers Rosie and his salad days “making ghosts’ love” and with tears running “down his grog-blossomed nose.” Although she shared her “flaxen thatch” with other sailors, for Captain Cat she remains “the one love of his sea-life that was sardined with women.” In their ghostly conversation they reminisce about their lovey-dovey days and in one beautifully sad and heartrending phrase the frail seaman says to Rosie’s specter: “Lie down, lie easy. Let me shipwreck in your thighs.” Thomas is juxtaposing sex and emotion and life itself on one hand; with death on the other. He ends the exchange with one of the most moving soliloquies of the play. He utters her name and in his mind ear she murmurs: “Remember her. She is forgetting. The earth, which filled her mouth is vanishing from her. Remember me. I have forgotten you. I am going into the darkness of the darkness forever. I have forgotten that I was ever born.” This tells

us something about the poet himself. In Dylan's boozy existence he lusted for life in the beds of women and pubs, but death was always on his mind, always a bed-partner, always the barkeep of the boneyard.

99) CHILD

Captain Cat is crying.

FIRST VOICE

Captain Cat is crying....

CAPTAIN CAT

Come back, come back....

FIRST VOICE

....up the silences and echoes of the passages of the eternal night.

CHILD

He's crying all over his nose....

FIRST VOICE

....says the child. Mother and child move on down the street.

CHILD

He's got a nose like strawberries....

FIRST VOICE

....the child says; and then she forgets him too. She sees in the still middle of the blue-bagged bay²⁵⁶ Nogoood Boyo fishing from the Zanzibar.

CHILD

²⁵⁶ Frothy or soapy sea, as in one made so by a blue bag containing laundry soap.

Nogood Boyo gave me three pennies yesterday but I wouldn't....

FIRST VOICE

...the child tells her mother.

SECOND VOICE

Boyo catches a whalebone corset.²⁵⁷ It is all he has caught all day.

NOGOOD BOYO

Bloody funny fish!

Analysis: Thomas lightens the mood with a child's view of the world and then takes us to observe the shiftless Nogood Boyo pulling a "whalebone corset" from the sea and exclaiming: "Bloody funny fish!" In this short section, Thomas takes us from facing death's inexorableness to the mundane misadventures of reeling in one's fishing line, but there is one sinister part. The town has some evil, a dark side, which may be taken to be "under" milk wood. We see this is the seemingly innocent remark by the little girl to her mother. She says: "Nogood Boyo gave me three pennies yesterday but I wouldn't." This is a clear reference to Nogood Boyo's attempt to kiss a little girl, if not more. This is placed in juxtaposition to the innocent play of the children's kissing game.

100) SECOND VOICE

Mrs. Dai Bread Two gypsies up his mind's slow eye, dressed only in a bangle.²⁵⁸

NOGOOD BOYO

She's wearing her nightgown. (pleadingly) Would you like this nice wet corset, Mrs. Dai Bread Two?

²⁵⁷ A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened by whalebone (elastic bone from the upper jaw of a whale).

²⁵⁸ A ringed bracelet or anklet.

MRS. DAI BREAD TWO

No, I won't!

NOGOOD BO YO

And a bite of my little apple?

SECOND VOICE

...he offers with no hope.

FIRST VOICE

She shakes her brass nightgown, and he chases her out of his mind; and when he comes gusting back, there in the bloodshot center of his eye, a geisha girl grins and bows in a kimono of rice paper.

NOGOOD BOYO

I want to be good Boyo, but nobody'll let me....

FIRST VOICE

...he sighs as she writhes politely. The land fades, the sea flocks silently away; and through the warm white cloud where he lies, silky, tingling, uneasy, Eastern music undoes him in a Japanese minute.

Analysis: Here the poet has the lazy and somewhat slow daydreamer, Nogood Boyo, visited in his imagination by the naked gipsy image of Mrs. Dai Bread Two. He makes sexual advances on her, asking in a reversal of the Garden of Eden myth: Will you take “a bite of my little apple?” In a frigid response, “She shakes her brass nightgown” and he must look for another erotic image and finds it by calling up “a geisha girl” who “grins and bows in a kimono of rice paper,” – a nice juxtaposing of the inviolable “brass nightgown” with a more penetrable “kimono of rice paper.” Faced with a more willing image, Nogood Boyo makes love to the Asian girl in his thoughts, all the while proclaiming: “I want to be good Boyo, but

nobody'll let me” but alone in his head he remains “silky, tingling, uneasy” and “Eastern music undoes him in a Japanese minute.” Of course, Dylan Thomas grew up in the hindmost fade of the British Empire, where stories abounded of the Queen’s men being bedazzled by the imagined exoticism of the East, ruining their lives, honor and careers by chasing after such envisaged fabrications.

101) SECOND VOICE

The afternoon buzzes like lazy bees round the flowers round Mae Rose-Cottage. Nearly asleep in the field of nanny goats who hum and gently butt the sun, she blows love on a puffball.²⁵⁹

MAE ROSE-COTTAGE (Lazily)

He loves me; He loves me not; He loves me; He loves me not; He loves me! – the dirty old fool.

SECOND VOICE

Lazy, she lies alone in clover and sweet-grass, seventeen and never been sweet in the grass – ho-ho.

Analysis: Mae Rose-Cottage is a seventeen year old who dreams in anticipation of adult passion. Here, with her goats in the field, she imagines sex with a “dirty old fool.” This scene is a prime example of how Thomas contrasts the romanticized travel book image of a young girl lying in the green clover of a field full of goats blowing the winged seeds off a puffball with her “Under Wood” dark side, her lusty thoughts of being ravaged, even by a much older man.

102) FIRST VOICE

The Reverend Eli Jenkins, inky in his cool front parlor or poem-room, tells only the truth in his lifework– the Population, Main Industry, Shipping, History, Topography, Flora and Fauna of the town he worships in – the *White Book of Llaregub*. Portraits of famous bards

²⁵⁹ Fungus so called for the ball-like shape of the spore case, and its emission of the spores in a cloud of fine powder when broken.

and preachers, all fur and wool from the squint to the kneecaps,²⁶⁰ hang over him heavy as sheep, next to faint lady watercolors of pale green Milk Wood like a lettuce salad dying. His mother, propped against a pot in a palm, with her wedding-ring waist²⁶¹ and bust like a black-clothed dining table, suffers in her stays.²⁶²

REV. ELI JENKINS

Oh angels, be careful there with your knives and forks....

FIRST VOICE

....he prays. There is no known likeness of his father Esau, who, un-dog-collared²⁶³ because of his little weakness,²⁶⁴ was then scythed to the bone one harvest by mistake when sleeping with his weakness in the corn. He lost all ambition and died with one leg.

REV. ELI JENKINS

Poor dad....

SECOND VOICE

....grieves the Reverend Eli.....

REV. ELI JENKINS

....to die of drink and agriculture.

²⁶⁰ Eyes to the knees, i.e. head to toe.

²⁶¹ Slang for a slim waist on a woman or girl.

²⁶² Stiff elastic used to shape a garment.

²⁶³ Removed from the priesthood; dog collar is the slang term for the white neckband worn by Anglican priests of the Church of England.

²⁶⁴ Victorian euphemism for alcoholism.

Analysis: This section got one of the biggest laughs out of the live audience. Apparently the reverend's father was a drunkard who was unfrocked because of his "little weakness" and then, while sleeping in the cornfield was scythed to death. Thomas has the Rev. Eli Jenkins bemoan: "Poor dad, to die of drink and agriculture."

103) SECOND VOICE

Farmer Watkins in Salt Lake Farm hates his cattle on the hill as he ho's them in to milking.

UTAH WATKINS (In a fury)

Damn you, you damned dairies!

SECOND VOICE

A cow kisses him.

UTAH WATKINS

Bite her to death!...

SECOND VOICE

...he shouts to his deaf dog, who smiles and licks his hands.

UTAH WATKINS

Gore him, sit on him Daisy!...

SECOND VOICE

...he bawls to the cow who barbed him with her tongue, and she moos gentle words as he raves and dances among his summer-breathed slaves walking delicately to the farm. The coming of the end of the Spring day is already reflected in the lakes of their great eyes. Bessie Bighead greets them by the names she gave them when they were maidens.

BESSIE BIGHEAD

Peg, Meg, Buttercup, Moll, Fan from the Castle, Theodosia and Daisy.

SECOND VOICE

They bow their heads.

FIRST VOICE

Look up Bessie Bighead in the *White Book of Llaregub*²⁶⁵ and you will find the few haggard rags and the one poor glittering thread of her history laid out in pages there with as much love and care as the lock of hair of a first lost love.

Conceived in Milk Wood, born in a barn, wrapped in paper, left on a doorstep, bigheaded and bass-voiced, she grew in the dark until long-dead Gomer Owen kissed her when she wasn't looking because he was dared. Now in the light she'll work, sing, milk, say the cows' sweet names and sleep until the night sucks out her soul and spits it into the sky. In her life-long low light, holily Bessie milks the fond lake-eyed cows as dusk showers slowly down over byre, sea and town. Utah Watkins curses through the farmyard on a carthorse.

UTAH WATKINS

Gallop, you bleeding cripple!...

FIRST VOICE

...and the huge horse neighs softly as though he had given it a lump of sugar.

Analysis: Farmer Watkins seems to hate animals and in his anger at his cows and dog, misses the beauty of the Spring day in his Salt Lake Farm. While he rages great irritation toward his animals, trying to turn one on the other, they are immune to his ire and respond with tranquil adoration e.g., the horse “neighs softly as though he had given it a lump of sugar” when the farmer shouts: “you bleeding cripple!” Bessie Bighead is placed among the animals, also tranquil, but saddened by the lack of love, which she ever so briefly

²⁶⁵ An allusion to the White Book of Rhydderch (*Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*), a Welsh medieval manuscript containing the cycle of ancient Welsh myths call the Mabinogion.

experienced so long ago when “Gomer Owen kissed her when she wasn't looking because he was dared.”

104) SECOND VOICE

Down in the dusking town, Mae Rose-Cottage, still lying in clover, and listening to the nanny goats chew, draws circles of lipstick round her nipples.

MAE ROSE-COTTAGE

I'm fast. I'm a bad lot. God will strike me dead. I'm seventeen. I'll go to hell....

SECOND VOICE

....she tells the goats.

MAE ROSE-COTTAGE

You just wait. I'll sin till I blow up!

SECOND VOICE

She lies deep, waiting for the worst to happen; the goats champ and sneer.

Analysis: Next Thomas gives us Mae Rose-Cottage who is lying in clover but “draws circles of lipstick round her nipples” while her dumb goats look on. She is down on herself because of her feelings of lust, saying to no one but the goats as she paints herself: “I'm fast. I'm a bad lot. God will strike me dead. I'm seventeen. I'll go to hell. You just wait. I'll sin till I blow up!” If we could sit in the pub with Dylan Thomas and as him if he meant to contrast her fear of sin and hell with the dumbness of the goats, I am sure he would simply recite what response to her he has the goats make, when they simply “champ and sneer.”

105) FIRST VOICE

Jack Black prepares once more to meet his Satan in the Wood. He grinds his night-teeth, closes his eyes, climbs into his religious trousers, their flies sewn up with cobbler's thread, and pads out, torched and Bibled, grimly, joyfully, into the already sinning dusk.

JACK BLACK

Off to Gomorrah!

Analysis: Single and aggressively sexually repressed, Jack Black is highly religious, but Thomas likens his excess with Satanism and in this scene has him going off into the woods at dusk preparing “once more to meet his Satan in the Wood.” I suspect the Dylan Thomas means that he is going to break a commandment there in the “already sinning dusk,” this being the time when lovers slip off into the woods to enjoy carnal pleasures, though perhaps the repressed Jack Black only goes to watch. However, whatever he plans to do there he sees it as sinful for he says: “Off to Gomorrah!”²⁶⁶

106) FIRST VOICE

And Cherry Owen, sober as Sunday as he is every day of the week, goes off happy as Saturday to get drunk as a deacon as he does every night.

Analysis: Dylan Thomas comments on drinking in a Welsh village and most certainly on his own behavior.

107) CHERRY OWEN

I always say she's got two husbands....

FIRST VOICE

....says Cherry Owen....

CHERRY OWEN

....one drunk and one sober.

²⁶⁶ A sinful town in the Bible.

FIRST VOICE

And Mrs. Cherry simply says:

MRS. CHERRY OWEN

And aren't I a lucky woman? Because I love them both.

Analysis: Then Thomas has Cherry Owen comment that his wife has two husbands, one sober and one drunk (which is of course only him in the daytime and again boozed at night).

108) FIRST VOICE

Mr. Mog Edwards and Miss Myfanwy Price happily apart from one another at the top and the sea end of the town write their every-night letters of love and desire. In the warm *White Book of Llaregub* you will find the little maps of the islands of their contentment.

MYFANWY PRICE

Oh, my Mog. I am yours forever.

FIRST VOICE

And she looks around with pleasure at her own neat never dull room, which Mr. Mog Edwards will never enter.

MOG EDWARDS

Come to my arms, Myfanwy.

FIRST VOICE

And he hugs his lovely money to his own heart.

Analysis: The poet takes us again to view the sterile lovers Myfanwy Price and Mog Edwards who are “happily apart from one another at the top and the sea end of the town.” While they profess to love one another, they do not know any love other than the love of money and commerce. Thomas has Mog say, “Come to my arms, Myfanwy,” but the narrator says, “And he hugs his lovely money to his own heart.”

109) FIRST VOICE

And Mr. Waldo drunk in the dusky wood hugs his lovely Polly Garter under the eyes and rattling tongues of the neighbors and the birds, and he does not care. He smacks his live red lips. But it is not his name that Polly Garter whispers as she lies under the oak and loves him back. Six feet deep that name sings in the cold earth.

POLLY GARTER (Sings)

*But I always think as we tumble into bed;
Of little Willy Wee who is dead, dead, dead.*

Analysis: The author contrasts this opposite-ends-of-the-town couple of lip-synching lovebirds with Mr. Waldo making love in the woods to his lovely Polly Garter, but while he loves her, she is dreaming of her dead “little Willy Wee.”

110) FIRST VOICE

The thin dusk thickens. A breeze from the creased water sighs the streets close Under Milk Waking Wood. The Wood, whose every tree-foot's cloven²⁶⁷ in the black glad sight of the hunters of lovers,²⁶⁸ that is a God-built garden²⁶⁹ to Mary Ann the Sailors who knows there is Heaven on Earth and the chosen people of His kind fire in Llaregub's land, that is the fair day farmhands' wantoning²⁷⁰ ignorant chapel of brides' beds;²⁷¹ and, to the Reverend Eli Jenkins,

²⁶⁷ Jack Black sees the base of the tree as a cloven hoof (i.e. the Devil).

²⁶⁸ Reference to the attitude of Jack Black the cobbler.

²⁶⁹ Mary Ann Sailor's idea of Milk Wood as The Garden of Eden on earth.

²⁷⁰ Artistic form of wanton.

a green leaved sermon on the innocence of men, the suddenly wind-shaken wood springs
awake for the second dark time this one Spring day.

²⁷¹ A place where local couples go "necking" or making love.

Analysis: Dylan Thomas ends the play for voices with dusk turning to night and then has the “wind-shaken wood” spring “awake for the second dark time this one Spring day.” Life is renewed with each dawn, with each Springtime and with each new birth. What happens in between, in the chaos humans create, is fractious, humorous, sad, lovely, dark, messy and – apparently – the stuff of true art.

THE END

3. MY CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The Great Poet – Dylan Thomas

In 1914 the world received a great poet in with the birth of Dylan Thomas in Wales. A sickly child, he was an avid reader and preferred to pursue education by reading on his own, rather than through formal schooling. He dropped out of school at the age of 16. He was impressed by poet’s views on Nature and the cycles of birth, life and death. But more than content, he was fascinated by the activities of wordsmiths, by their expert manipulation of the English language in their poetry. He once said that at times he felt almost to be a slave of words, but, of course, he was just especially enamored with them. In fact, he is quoted as saying that as a young reader “...I cared for the colors of words cast on my eyes...I fell in love – that is the only expression I can think of – at once, and am still at the mercy of words.” Of course, love is an especially delicious kind of lockup and I don’t think Dylan minded being in the poetry pokey, but he did dream of a freedom beyond words being able “to feel November air/And be no words’ prisoner.”

He achieved great acclaim when he was twenty with the publication of his first book of *Eighteen Poems* (1934). He was a romantic, given to forceful lyricism and powerful emotion and a poet who shied away from the social commentary in some other well-known poets of the day e.g., T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden.

Dylan Thomas was a passionate and intense person, drunk or sober. Some have called him neurotic. He loved words, both spoken and written. With a sonorous voice and a genius for writing, he could produce both. He wrote that he became a poet because "I had fallen in love with words." That he was a genius on par with Shakespeare in the use and treatment of

the English language shines through in all of his writings.

Dylan Thomas was passionately dedicated to his "sullen art." He was a genius and occasionally a complex craftsman, his meanings obscurely buried under his love of words. Like Hemmingway, he could spend hours pondering which word to use. Also, he crafted more than two hundred versions of "Fern Hill" before he was satisfied with it. Longtime friend, Vernon Watkins, in the introduction to *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, wrote of Dylan Thomas:

“...the composition of his poetry, for which he used separate work sheets and would spend sometimes several days on a single line, while the poem was built up phrase by phrase, at glacier-like speed.”

As his work progressed, his earlier simplicity in sense gave way to a complexity in sounds and a cacophony of words.

His tragic early death in New York City in 1953 brought to an end the boozy life of a legendary poet, known both for his work and the rowdiness of his life. He was 39 years old.

The Play's Origin & Development

Before conceiving of or writing *Under Milk Wood*, Dylan Thomas visited New Quay in Wales, going out one morning into the still quiet town. He said verses came to his mind and he began to imagine stories about the inhabitants. For reference to this visit, see his poem, *Quite Early One Morning* (1944), which goes:

*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, where I had come to stay for a cold unseasonable
holiday, to see if it was raining still, if the outhouse had been
blown away –potatoes, shears, rat-killer, shrimp-nets, and*

tins of rusty nails aloft on the wind – and if all the cliffs were left.

It had been such a ferocious night that someone in a smoky ship-pictured bar had said he could feel his tombstone shaking even though he was not dead, or at least was moving; but the morning shone as clear and calm as one always imagines tomorrow will shine.

The sun lit the sea-town, not as a whole, from topmost downer-proving zinc-roofed chapel to empty-but-for-rats-and-whispers grey warehouse on the harbor, but in separate bright pieces. There, the quay shouldering out, nobody on it now but the gulls and the capstans, like small men in tubular trousers. Here, the roof of the police station, black as a helmet, dry as a summons, sober as Sunday. There, the splashed church, with a cloud in the shape of a bell poised above it, ready to drift and ring. Here the chimneys of the pink-washed pub, the pub that was waiting for Saturday night, as an over-jolly girl waits for sailors.

The town was not yet awake. The milkman lay still lost in the clangor²⁷² 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.

The town was not yet awake. Babies in upper bedrooms of salt-white houses dangling over water, or of bow-windowed villas squatting prim in neatly treed, but unsteady hill streets, worried the light with their half in sleep cries. Miscellaneous retired sea captains emerged for a second from deeper waves than ever tossed their boats, then drowned again, going down, down into a perhaps

²⁷² A medley of bell clangs.

*Mediterranean-blue cabin of sleep, rocked to the sea-beat of
their ears.*

*Landladies, shawled and bloused and aproned with
sleep in the curtained, bombazine-black of their once spare
rooms, remembered their loves, their bills, their visitors,
dead, decamped, or buried in English deserts until the
trumpet of next expensive August²⁷³ roused them again to the
world of holiday rain, dismal cliff and sand seen through the
weeping windows of front parlors, tasseled table-cloths,
stuffed pheasants, ferns in pots, fading photographs of the
bearded and censorious dead, autograph albums with a lock
of limp and colorless be-ribboned hair lolling out between
the thick black boards.*

*The town was not yet awake. Birds sang in eaves,
bushes, trees, on telegraph wires, rails, fences, spars, and
wet masts, not for love or joy, but to keep other birds away.
The landlords in feathers disputed the right of even the dying
light to descend and perch.*

*The town was not yet awake, and I walked through
the streets like a stranger come out of the sea, shrugging off
weed and wave and darkness with each step; or like an
inquisitive shadow, determined to miss nothing – not the
preliminary tremor in the throat of the dawn-saying cock or
the first whirring nudge of arranged time in the belly of the
alarm clock on the trinketed chest of drawers under the
knitted text and the done-by-hand watercolors of Porthcawl
or Trinidad.*

*I walked past the small sea-spying windows, behind
whose trim curtains lay mild-mannered men and women not
yet awake and, for all I could know, terrible and violent in*

²⁷³ The holiday month in Europe.

their dreams. In the head of Miss Hughes, 'The Cozy',²⁷⁴ clashed the cymbals of an Eastern court. Eunuchs struck gongs the size of Bethesda Chapel. Sultans with voices fiercer than visiting preachers demanded a most un-Welsh dance. Everywhere there glowed and rayed the colors of the small, slate grey woman's dreams, purple, magenta, ruby, sapphire, emerald, vermilion, honey. But I could not believe it. She knitted in her tidy sleep-world a beige woolen shroud with 'Thou Shalt Not' on the bosom.

I could not imagine Cadwallader Davies the grocer in his near-to-waking dream, riding on horseback, two-gunned and Cody-bold, through the cactus prairies. He added, he subtracted, he receipted, he filed a prodigious account with a candle dipped in dried egg.

What big seas of dreams ran in the Captain's sleep? Over what blue-whaled waves did he sail through a rainbow hail of flying fishes to the music of Circe's swinish island. Do not let him be dreaming of dividends and bottled beer and onions.

Someone was snoring in one house. I counted ten savage and indignant grunts and groans, like those of a pig in a model and mud-less farm, which ended with a window rattler, a wash-basin shaker, a trembler of tooth glasses, a waker of dormice. It thundered with me to the chapel railings, then brassily vanished.

The chapel stood grim and grey, telling the day there was to be no nonsense. The chapel was not asleep, it never cat-napped nor nodded nor closed its long cold eye. I left it telling the morning off and the seagull hung rebuked above it.

²⁷⁴ A girl who sleeps with many men.

*And climbing down again and up out of the town I
heard the cocks crow from hidden farmyards, from old
roosts above waves where fabulous sea-birds might sit and
cry: 'Neptune!' And a far-away clock struck from another
church in another village in another universe, though the
wind blew the time away.*

*And I walked in the timeless morning past a row of
white cottages almost expecting that an ancient man with a
great beard and an hourglass and a scythe under his night-
dressed arm might lean from the window and ask me the
time. I would have told him: 'Arise old counter of the
heartbeats of albatrosses, and wake the cavernous sleepers
of the town to a dazzling new morning.' I would have told
him: 'You unbelievable Father of Eva and Dai Adam, come
out, old chicken, and stir up the winter morning with your
spoon of a scythe.' I would have told him – I would have
scampered like a scalded ghost over the cliffs and down to
the bilingual sea.*

*Who lived in these cottages? I was a stranger to the
sea town, fresh or stale from the city where I worked for my
bread and butter wishing it were laver-bread and country
salty butter yolk-yellow Fishermen certainly; no painters but
of boats: no man-dressed women with shooting-sticks and
sketch-books and voices like macaws to paint the reluctant
heads of critical and sturdy natives who posed by the pint
against the chapel-dark sea which would be made more blue
than the bay of Naples, though shallower.*

*I walked on to the cliff path again, the town behind
and below waking up now so very slowly. I stopped and
turned and looked. Smoke from one chimney – the cobbler's,
I thought, but from that distance it may have been the*

chimney of the retired male nurse who had come to live in Wales after many years' successful wrestling with the mad rich of Southern England (he was not liked). He measured you for a straitjacket carefully with his eye. He saw you bounce from rubber walls like a sorbo ball.²⁷⁵ No behavior surprised him. Many people of the town found it hard to resist leering at him suddenly around the corner, or convulsively dancing, or pointing with laughter and devilish good humor at invisible dog-fights merely to prove to him that they were normal.

Smoke from another chimney now. They were burning their last night's dreams. Up from a chimney came a longhaired wraith²⁷⁶ like an old politician. Someone had been dreaming of the Liberal Party. But no, the smoky figure wove, attenuated, into a refined and precise grey comma. Someone had been dreaming of reading Charles Morgan. Oh! the town was waking now and I heard distinctly, insistent over the slow-speaking sea, the voices of the town blown up to me. And some of the voices said:

*I am Miss May Hughes 'The Cozy'; a lonely lady;
Waiting in her house by the nasty sea;
Waiting for her husband and pretty baby;
To come home at last from wherever they may be.*

*I am Captain Tiny Evans; my ship was the 'Kidwelly';
And Mrs. Tiny Evans has been dead for many a year.
'Poor Captain Tiny all alone'; the neighbors whisper;
But I like it all alone; and I hated her.*

²⁷⁵ Soft sponge ball.

²⁷⁶ Ghost.

*Clara Tawe Jenkins; 'Madam' they call me;
An old contralto with her dressing-gown on;
And I sit at the window and I sing to the sea;
For the sea does not notice that my voice has gone.*

*Parchedig Thomas Evans making morning tea;
Very weak tea, too, you mustn't waste a leaf;
Every morning making tea in my house by the sea;
I am troubled by one thing only, and that; belief.*

*Open the curtains; light the fire, what are servants for?
I am Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard and I want another snooze.
Dust the china; feed the canary, sweep the drawing-room
door;
And before you let the sun in, mind he wipes his shoes.*

*I am only Mr. Griffiths, very short-sighted; B.A.; Aber.²⁷⁷ □
As soon as I finish my egg I must shuffle off to school.
O patron saint of teachers, teach me to keep order;
And forget those words on the blackboard - 'Griffiths Bat is
a fool.'*

*Do you hear that whistling? It's me. I am Phoebe;
The maid at the King's Head, and I am whistling like a bird.
Someone spilt a tin of pepper in the tea.
There's twenty for breakfast and I'm not going to say a word.*

*I can see the Atlantic from my bed where I always lie;
Night and day; night and day, eating my bread and slops.*

²⁷⁷ An indication of where he received his Bachelors Degree.

*The quiet cripple staring at the sea and the sky.
I shall lie here till the sky goes out and the sea
stops.*

*Thus some of the voices of a cliff-perched town at the
far end of Wales moved out of sleep and darkness into the
newborn, ancient and ageless morning, moved and were
lost.*

See: <http://www.wesjones.com/dylan.htm>

Dylan Thomas first conceived of writing a play called *The Town Was Mad*, according to Douglas Cleverdon in *The Growth of Milk Wood*. The villagers were to appear before a tribunal to defend the sanity and morality of the town and its inhabitants.

The Play's Structure

Dylan Thomas created a structure that highlights the repetitive, circular nature of life in a rural village. He begins (“at the beginning”) with peoples’ dreams, then moves into scenes from their activities in the daytime and moves again to their bedtime, where some dreams are analyzed and Thomas hints that they too are repetitive.

Rather than tell a story, Thomas presents various sub-plots in which peoples’ lives go on in a recurring humdrum. Sex was a taboo subject in 1953 when the play was first performed. Yet, Thomas has many allusions to sex as a “spice” in their daily lives, either through their participation in the activity, dreaming about it or gossiping about the carnal actions of others.

Even Llaregub is “Bugger all” spelled backwards and in early versions the spelling was changed to Llaregyb to mask this offensive image. Perhaps if nothing changes in Llaregub, then nothing changes in a “Bugger All” world, a rather pessimistic allusion and the play does have a dark underpinning.

The poet succeeded grandly in balancing a daredevil Neo-Romantic carnality against the more tranquil and repressed Puritanism of his time and culture in Wales. Although

villagers' lives seem to follow a cyclical pattern, day after day, with little changing, yet death always lurks nearby. He also contrasts springtime and the joys of nature with many hints of inevitable death, the end of the repetitive daily cycle his characters experience – though rebirth and renewal are everywhere in the play.

Yet, Dylan Thomas is reported to have commented that *Under Milk Wood* was developed in response to the USA dropping an atomic bomb on Japan. He stated that the play was a way of reasserting the evidence of beauty in the world, present in his references to springtime, flowers and nature. One might also assume that Polly Garter's bedding of local farm boys and townsmen was seen as natural in the author's mind. This "natural sensuality" is set off against the small, puritanical minds of some townsfolk, especially the gossipy women.

Notice also that when Captain Cat encounters dead seamen, they ask about little things in life, like the smell of parsley. Dylan Thomas is saying that life is good in its natural details, if not always in the thoughts and behavior of Humankind. Contrast this with the gossiping wives of the town, who miss such wonderful aspects of life as they focus on the behavior of those they deem to be deviants.

Under Milk Wood, a radio play commissioned by the BBC (published 1954), was Thomas's last completed work. This "play for voices" is not a drama, but rather a parade of odd, outrageous, and delightful Welsh villagers. During the twenty-four hour day chronicled in the poem-play, the townsfolk remember and contemplate the casual and central moments of their lives and in so writing, Thomas asks us to do the same.

Color Symbolism in the Play

Black is used as a negative color in *Under Milk Wood*. Here are some examples:

- ✚ Bible-black – the poet's biting comment on organized religion.
- ✚ Black with parchs²⁷⁸ – ditto.
- ✚ Black gloves – worn by Evans the Death, the undertaker, a symbol of death.

²⁷⁸ Reverends. From the Welsh *parchedig*, a title for a minister.

✚ Black bells – those that toll for the dead at the base of Mt. Vesuvius’s eruption i.e., death.

✚ Last Black Day²⁷⁹ – Armageddon, the war between good and evil at the end of the world foretold in the Bible.

✚ Black Death – the plague that ravaged Europe, another symbol of death.

✚ Jack Black – an uptight Freudian character who is single and sexually repressed. He epitomizes the opposite of gayer colors associated with Springtime, reproduction and rebirth.

Green is the symbol of Nature:

✚ As in the phrase: “...grass-green goose-berried²⁸⁰ double bed of the wood...”

White is the symbol of cleanliness, cold &, at times,

Puritanism:

✚ As in the phrase: “...white clothes, while his mother dances in the snow kitchen crying out for her lost currants. The “snow kitchen” means a sterile-whiteness that comes from over-cleaning, one of Dylan Thomas’s special complaints with regard to the scrubblings and moppings of the town’s “tidy wives.” Again we see this white/cold symbolism in his description of Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard in this caustic line: “Now, in her iceberg-white, holily laundered crinoline²⁸¹ nightgown, under virtuous polar sheets...” i.e., the “polar sheets” are both white and iceberg-cold and will never see the warmth of lovemaking, with its fiery warmth and colors of the rainbow.

²⁷⁹ Armageddon, the place where the battle of the end of the world, according to some interpretations of the book of Revelations in the New Testament.

²⁸⁰ A wild berry that grows on the sides of hills in Britain. Apart from the tale that babies are found under gooseberry bushes, to “play gooseberry” was to act as a chaperon, or be an unwanted third presence when lovers wanted to be alone.

²⁸¹ A stiff fabric made of horse hair and cotton or linen thread.

The Play's Misogyny

Dylan Thomas could be criticized in modern times as being a misogynist. Women do not come off quite as well as the men in *Under Milk Wood*. They are uptight gossips, hags who rag their husbands and generally act unnaturally, when compared to the one woman, Gossamer Beynon, who sleeps with a variety of the townsmen, an accusation hot on the lips of the townswomen. If we take Gossamer Beynon as a symbol of Nature; the “tidy wives” represent Society or the Human Norms created within the bosom of Nature.

One biographer, Andrew Lycett, in *Dylan Thomas: A new Life*, says of Thomas: “Women appear to him as distant monsters with ‘serpents. Mouths and scolecophidian voids.’” Not in the dictionary, scolecophidian was a word Dylan made up, meaning “worm-like.”

Most of the poet’s pique is directed to married women, the “tidy wives.” He seems to look more favorably on “young girls,” e.g., he writes of them as being closer to Nature: “Young girls lie bedded soft or glide in their dreams, with rings and trousseaux, bridesmaided by glowworms down the aisles of the organ–playing wood,” though, of course, here they are dreaming of marriage, which will make them unnatural in Thomas’s perspective.

Humanity vs. Nature

As a child, an avid reader, Thomas read all of D. H. Lawrence's poetry and was impressed by his descriptions of a vivid natural world. This affected his poems, including *Under Milk Wood*. In this radio play for voices Dylan Thomas contrasts the actions of Humankind against that of Nature. This is especially true of female behavior, as in this passage: “Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard belches in a teeny hanky and chases the sunlight with a flywhisk, but even she cannot drive out the spring: from one of the finger-bowls a primrose grows.” While human behavior dampens the beauty and eternal presence of the cycles of Nature, the latter is seen as triumphing over such trifling actions.

In his poem, “Written in the Classroom,” Thomas compares Nature to Humankind and the latter come up with the short stick. As the teacher drones on, the protagonist realizes that:

Shaft of winter morning light
Is realer than your faces boys.

Thomas uses “spring” as a symbol of Eternal Nature and though it is only one segment of the natural cycle making up a year, it is *the* crucial and symbolic time period covered by the radio play. This is not a literary accident, but rather Dylan Thomas wants to focus on the rebirth associated with this season and relate that to the one character in the play that has a strong link to Nature – that person being Gossamer Beynon. She is the one lusty woman in the village, though other women dream of vigorous sexual adventures and yearning male eyes are on her every move and from time to time a man beds her, often in the meadow or woods, completing the linkage to Nature.

In one passage, Thomas calls the organ-linking place in the woods where “naughty couples” bed down “the grass-green, goose-berried,²⁸² double bed of the wood.” Gossamer Beynon is the “naughtiest” of the naughties and, in contrast to his normal misogynous portrayal of the village women, Dylan Thomas is fascinated with the hearty behavior of Gossamer Beynon.

In addition, the author has the man named “Sinbad Sailors” yearning for Gossamer Beynon, even naming “his damp pillow” (a masturbatory symbol) after her. Thomas is saying that sex is natural and boldly links the loose Gossamer Beynon to Nature with lines like: “Spring stirs Gossamer Beynon;” but also he makes more subtle allusions to the linkage throughout the radio play. For example, he has her tearfully lament: “Oh, what can I do? I’ll never be refined if I twitch.” We can assuredly take “twitching” to refer to female orgasm, an experience he denies to most village women who are portrayed as being “tidy wives” or “tight as ticks.”

In short, Gossamer Beynon is the quintessential Nature Nymph. Dylan Thomas writes that: “She blazes naked past the Sailors Arms, the only woman on the Dai-Adamed earth” i.e., an earth covered with men who desire her. And she is the “only woman” in the sense that she is the only natural woman in his play.

²⁸² A wild berry that grows on the sides of hills in Britain. Apart from the tale that babies are found under gooseberry bushes, to “play gooseberry” was to act as a chaperon, or be an unwanted third presence when lovers wanted to be alone.

Remember that Dylan Thomas is writing in 1953, before the sexual revolution, so when he has the narrator say: “Sinbad Sailors places on her thighs still dew-damp from the first man-growing cockcrow garden his reverent goat-bearded hands,” and then has her saying: “I don’t care if he is common, I want to gobble him up” he is being rather bold for that tense era. And then continuing, he notes that Gossamer Beynon in saying that she wants to take his member into her mouth, is speaking from “the stripped and mother-of-the-world, big-beamed and Eve-hipped spring of her self,” again making the association with springtime’s reproduction rather obvious.

And continuing with an oblique focus on oral sex, Dylan Thomas write of Gossamer Beynon: “She feels his goat beard tickle her in the middle of the world, like a tuft of wiry fire.” This must have been bold stuff in that first 1954 production of the play before a live audience, some of whom undoubtedly were shocked at the author’s audacity.

Most of Thomas’ village women are uptight sexually and can only dream of a more natural approach to coitus. For example, at the beginning of the play the author has Myfanwy Price, a spinster “dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper” dream of lusty nights with “her lover, tall as the town clock tower, Samson-syrup-gold-maned,²⁸³ whacking-thighed and piping hot, thunderbolt-bass'd and barnacle-breasted, flailing up the cockles with his eyes like blowlamps²⁸⁴ and scooping low over her lonely, loving, hot-water-bottled body.”

She, along with the man who pines for her, Mog Edwards, is a symbol of a sexless humanity, both of the would-be lovers being involved in materialistic commerce, which also does not rank high in the mental universe of Dylan Thomas.

The lonely Myfanwy Price, one destined never to marry, is not “natural” according to Dylan Thomas and is trapped in a “hot-water-bottled, body.” Gossamer Beynon does not need a hot water bottle to stay warm, as she has a steady stream of body-warming men who bed her in the woods. It is no accident of writing that she makes love to these robust seekers of sex in the pastures, woods or meadows of the fictitious village in Wales.

The theme of all of Thomas's work is the celebration of the divine purpose he saw in

²⁸³ Samson's mane occurs in the biblical story of Samson, which of course also includes a lion (Judges V, 5-9). However, in this rather James Joycean piece of word-play, this refers also to the lion trade-mark for Tate and Lyle' famous "Golden Syrup," which incorporates the sentence "Out of the strong came forth sweetness" from the Samson story. Myfanwy Price is a "sweet-shop keeper," and the same conjunction of ideas is picked up again on p.42: "MR EDWARDS: I love Miss Price. FIRST VOICE: Syrup is sold in the Post Office..."

²⁸⁴ A metaphor for 'bright-eyed'. Blowlamps (or kerosine lamps) were used by the cockle-fisherman to see their work at night; cockle are a type of edible shell-fish found along the South Wales coast.

all human and natural processes, which he portrayed as cyclical. He celebrated life in the fields, seas, hills and villages of his native land. He asks us to see the world afresh, as a child first encounters it.

Time, Cycles & Death in the Play

The cyclical nature of dawn-to-dusk-sleep-to-waking life in the village is contrasted to the fact that linear time is also evilly and mysteriously at work. Note the narrator's call for you to listen:

“Time passes. Listen. Time passes.”

And Dylan Thomas indicates that after death the lineal flow of time continues, perhaps into a second death. Writing of the late Rosie Probert, he says: “Remember her. She is forgetting. The earth which filled her mouth is vanishing from her.” In other words, she was all consumed with things of this world but now as she is dead, they are of little consequence and furthermore he has her plead: “Remember me. I have forgotten you. I am going into the darkness of the darkness forever. I have forgotten that I was ever born.” This is a hint of an eternal darkness, which awaits us all.

The play is, at some fundamental level, about the march from birth to death. Note this passage where Dylan Thomas has babies and old men together:

“FIRST VOICE

All over the town, babies and old men are cleaned and
put into their broken prams and wheeled on to the sunlit
cockled cobbles or out into the backyards under the
dancing underclothes, and left. A baby cries.

OLD MAN

I want my pipe and he wants his bottle.”

In section 10, Thomas also deals with time,
mentioning photographs:

Time passes. Listen. Time passes. Come closer now.
Only you can hear the houses sleeping in the streets in
the slow deep salt and silent black, bandaged night.
Only you can see, in the blinded bedrooms, the combs
and petticoats over the chairs, the jugs and basins, the
glasses of teeth, Thou Shalt Not on the wall,²⁸⁵ and the
yellowing dickybird-watching pictures of the dead.²⁸⁶

Here, Thomas is showing us by focusing on these old pictures that nothing changes and life goes on in much the same way every repeating day in Llareggub.

Dylan's major theme was the unity of all life, the continuing process of life and death and new life that linked the generations. Thomas saw Nature as a magical transformation, reproductively manufacturing unity out of diversity. Poetically he sought an elegiac ritual to celebrate this unity. Through many contrasting images, he presents the townsfolk as being locked in cycles of growth, love, reproduction, new life, decay or aging, death and new life again.

Love & Materialism in the Play

Dylan Thomas contrasts true love with the love of things. He has Mr. Mog Edwards, a draper, declaring his love to Miss Myfanwy Price by saying: "I am a draper mad with love. I love you more than all the flannelette and calico, candlewick, dimity, crash and merino, tussore, cretonne, crepon, muslin, poplin, ticking and twill in the whole Cloth Hall²⁸⁷ of the world." This passage declares love, but focuses on the dry goods of "the whole Cloth Hall of the world." He cannot even declare his love directly without noting: "I am a draper." And to where does he want to carry her off? The draper says: "I have come to take you away to my

²⁸⁵ In many British homes, framed placards with quotes from the Bible grace the walls.

²⁸⁶ Old and yellowing pictures of dead relatives. They are dickybird pictures because in the olden days, the photographer held up a dick-bird for those being photographed to watch while the picture was being taken.

²⁸⁷ The central market for trading cloth in London.

emporium²⁸⁸ on the hill, where the change hums on wires.²⁸⁹” Of course, emporium is a synonym for a clothes shop.

Again, when Mog Edwards gets a “Yes, Mog, yes, Mog, yes, yes, yes” to his marriage proposal, he says: “And all the bells of the tills of the town shall ring for our wedding.” Not simply wedding bells but rather the bells of the town’s cash registers will herald their union. He is a dyed-in-the-wool (pun intended) materialist incapable of true love, though he declares is over and over again, almost as if he needed to hear himself say it to believe it.

Sex in the Play

As we have already discussed somewhat above, this was a racy text for the 1950s. In fact, some words and phrases were edited out by the BBC, but on the other hand, at the first live performance of *Under Milk Wood* the audience showed their profound appreciation of the play, sexual references and all, with fourteen curtain calls and loud kudos for Dylan Thomas, who took bows alone after the curtain calls. Sheepishly, he mumbled, “Thank you, thank you.”

Dylan Thomas succeeded in balancing a reckless Neo-Romantic sensuality against the more sedate and repressed Puritanism of his time and culture. The poet portrays an uptight community with regard to sex, except for an undercurrent of hopes, dreams and aberrant behavior by the more “natural” members of the town. One of the dreamers is Jack Black, who tries to resist masturbation by arranging his bedclothes in an odd fashion. The author writes: “savagely Jack Black sleeps in a nightshirt tied to his ankles with elastic and dreams of chasing the naughty couples down the grass-green goose-berried²⁹⁰ double bed of the wood...”

There are some enjoying themselves in the woods and some who fight such natural tendencies. Rather than participating in sex, Jack Black, like many others who frequent the

²⁸⁸ A clothes shop.

²⁸⁹ In some large town shops (hence Mog Edwards's ambition), well beyond the Second World War, payment and change for purchased goods were sped between shop-attendant and cashier along a system of sprung pulleys and wires. Thomas would have remembered the device from the Ben Evans Department Store in Castle Bailey Street in Swansea, destroyed by German bombs in 1941.

²⁹⁰ A wild berry that grows on the sides of hills in Britain. Apart from the tale that babies are found under gooseberry bushes, to "play gooseberry" was to act as a chaperon, or be an unwanted third presence when lovers wanted to be alone.

publishers, takes to drink. Dylan Thomas makes two allusions to such in this passage where he has Jack Black dreaming and chasing “naughty couples” through the woods “flogging the tosspots²⁹¹ in the spit-and-sawdust,²⁹² driving out the bare bold girls from the sixpenny hops²⁹³ of his nightmares.” Tossspots “in the spit-and-sawdust,” that is the pubs, are those who drink to excess, perhaps to drive out the thoughts of “bare bold girls” from “the sixpenny hops²⁹⁴ of his nightmares.”

In another passage, the poet raises Jack Black out of his sleep and has him trot off to the woods with the words, “Off to Gomorrah!”²⁹⁵ Note that he dons trousers that had the fly sewn shut to prevent him playing with himself, as he is going off into the “already sinning dusk” to watch the lovers cavort in the grass. Here is the passage:

Jack Black prepares once more to meet his Satan
in the Wood. He grinds his night-teeth, closes his eyes,
climbs into his religious trousers, their flies sewn up with
cobbler's thread, and pads out, torched and Bibled,
grimly, joyfully, into the already sinning dusk.

Poor Jack, he is one of the tense and uptight townfolk who wants love, but doesn't know how to achieve it. His opposite in the play would be Mr. Waldo.

Dylan Thomas makes a similar contrast between the long distance lovers of Myfanwy Price and Mog Edwards and the scandalous lustiness of Mr. Waldo. Dreaming of her paramour, Myfanwy Price murmurs to herself: “Oh, my Mog. I am yours forever.” Elsewhere, Mog Edwards says: “Come to my arms, Myfanwy,” but the First Voice notes that as he says this “he hugs his lovely money to his own heart.” Dylan Thomas compares this long distance, sterile love affair with a carnal coupling, when Thomas writes: “And Mr. Waldo, drunk in the dusky wood, hugs his lovely Polly Garter under the eyes and rattling tongues of the neighbors and the birds and he does not care.” Some might care what the neighbors and God think, but not Mr. Waldo or Polly Garter. This carefree attitude is set off

²⁹¹ Slang term for those who drink a great deal.

²⁹² Reference to cheap pubs or taverns where the only floor-covering was sawdust.

²⁹³ Slang for cheap village-hall dances.

²⁹⁴ Slang for cheap village-hall dances.

²⁹⁵ A sinful town in the Bible.

against those lovelorn townfolk like Myfanwy Price, Mog Edwards and Jack Black. It is a Nature vs. Society contrast, with religion being the vehicle of transmitting society's norms to folks e.g., when Jack Black sets out to spy on those making love in the woods he "pads out, torched and Bibled, grimly," that is conflicted between the sexual passion he feels (torched) and his religious upbringing.

Marital Conflict

Dylan Thomas grew up in a household that was marked by marital conflict, so much so, that both he and his sister often fled their home to escape the harping and fighting that went on between their parents. Dylan seems harsher in his private writings on his mother than on his father.

The poet, as I have noted, does not seem overly fond of the opposite sex – the female gender. At best *Under Milk Wood* is misogynous and at worst, its author could be said to hate women. This comes out in his focus on marital conflict. Mr. & Mrs. Pugh serve as a case in point. Thomas has a scene where they are eating "cold grey cottage pie" in a "blind-drawn, dark dining room of School House, dusty and echoing as a dining room in a vault." Mrs. Pugh accuses Mr. Pugh of being pig-like and he moves on with his plan to poison her, though this is probably merely a fantasy that helps him survive the icily, sterile marriage: "“You should wait until you retire to your sty” says Mrs. Pugh, sweet as a razor. His fawning measly quarter-smile freezes. Sly and silent, he foxes into his chemist's den and there, in a hiss and prussic²⁹⁶ circle of cauldrons and phials brimful with pox and the Black Death, cooks up a fricassee of deadly nightshade, nicotine, hot frog, cyanide and bat-spit for his needling stalactite hag and bed-nag of a poker-backed nutcracker wife.”

Dylan Thomas's mother, Florence Williams, was a housewife who may, partially, serve as a model for the "tidy wives" of *Under Milk Wood*. She doted on him, in a smothering way, but he confessed to an early girlfriend that he longed to get away from his parental home and "out of the pettiness of a mother I don't care for." Later Caitlin, Dylan's wife, said that his mother could not pass a sideboard without wanting to dust it. Florrie, as she was known to some, was also described by at least one biographer of Dylan Thomas as an "overweening mother" and was a local gossip, not unlike the wife in Llaregub who

²⁹⁶ Poisonous acid.

gathered round to pump to gab. Furthermore, his parents had a very cool relationship, with the father working and reading and drinking in the pub most of the time, while the mother was obsessed with housework. In *Under Milk Wood*, we see an exaggerated version of such a marriage in that of Mr. & Mrs. Pugh.

Additionally, Dylan Thomas has Captain Cat and other sailors sleeping with whores in faraway ports and these relationships seem more harmonious than the marriages of *Under Milk Wood*, perhaps because they are less socially sanctioned and more natural. For example, when Rosie Probert, a now deceased prostitute who is speaking to Captain Cat's dreaming mind, asks how he is feeling and what he is remembering, he replies: "I'll tell you no lies. The only sea I saw was the seesaw sea with you riding on it. Lie down, lie easy. Let me shipwreck in your thighs." She replies: "Knock twice, Jack, at the door of my grave and ask for Rosie."

Llaregub's Dark Side

The title of this play for voices, *Under Milk Wood* is Dylan Thomas' way saying that "underneath" the quaintness of the fictitious Welsh village, there is a dark side of life. It lies hidden, but we are invited to "see" not only the inhabitants' fads, fun and foibles, of which there are many; but also the chilling core that underlies the town's thin veneer pastoral eccentricity, some would say lovability. Llaregub comes off as a town populated by necrophiles, bigamists, nymphomaniacs, pedophiles, cannibals and satanists, among other eccentrics. At the very least, many of the residents are presented as extremely anal. It is a village where abnormalities, ranging from alcoholism to racial intolerance are a "normal" part of the daily round. We are expected by the poet to see in the name of Llaregub ("buggerall" spelled backwards) that as with anal sex, things in the town are less than normal. Thomas gives us hints to this e.g., when one woman exclaims, "There's a nasty lot live here when you come to think." These hints reveal the subtext of the play e.g., when another woman comments, "Men are brutes on the quiet." We are presented with a town of sociopaths within an attractive old fashioned Welsh village.

On one hand, we see a quaint little Welsh village common to a travelogue, but the subtext reveals a shadowy side to human behavior, which thankfully Thomas reduces the hidden darkness of the inhabitants with his humor and his wonderful use of words.

Why is this an important play? Because Thomas has given us something to laugh at and a quaint view of his part of the world, but more importantly he is saying that life has both light and dark – Spring and Winter – birth and death. The poet urges us, with his art, to realize that many people walk through life asleep to the insights of art and intellectual ponderings. He does this by contrasting the squeaky-clean complaisance of most townsfolk in their “surface” behavior with their flaws and foibles. In asking us to accept and forgive these people, Dylan Thomas is also asking for the same in his case. Thomas has the Reverend Eli Jenkins pray to the Heavens with this plea:

*We are not wholly bad or good
Who live our lives under Milk Wood;
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first
To see our best side, not our worst.*

The poet is asking us to not only forgive the villagers, but also him and even more so, those around us and ourselves, for human beings, he says, are both good and bad. He asks us to laugh at this, more than cry about it.

Religion in the Play

In spite of his distaste for an uncle, the Reverend David Rees, who, for Thomas, epitomized the worst of organized religion, the poet claimed that his works were "the record of my individual struggle from darkness toward some measure of light....to strip darkness is to make clean." Thomas also said that his poems "with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of man and in praise of God and I'd be a damned fool if they weren't."

But Dylan Thomas was not a religious man and pokes fun at religion in his writings. He spent way more time in the pub than in the chapel. Religion, or what he once referred to as “fairy tales by heart” was partly responsible, in his mind, for the fact that human beings had lost their capacity to see the wonder and mystery of the world as a child sees it. Again, he said that the church had personified religion as “the fallacy of fancies/That gave god whiskers to his navel/A tail and two horns to the devil.” His view of heaven was less

anthropomorphic, more in line with Nirvana, as perceived by Buddhism.

Nirvana or what he called his “inner splendor” was similar to that joy a child experiences upon first encountering the world and that which poets and artists can have “sometimes.” He was critical of the common folk for not having this capacity, although he is clearly a humanist in his depiction of the fads and foibles of Humankind.

In *Under Milk Wood* the Rev. Eli Jenkins is painted as an oddball. There are hints throughout the play that carnality was more attractive to the poet than sermons and rosaries, and in *Quite Early One Morning* he has a character, Parchedig Thomas Evans say, while his making morning tea: “I am troubled by one thing only, and that, belief.” It couldn't be much clearer than that, coming off the pen of the great poet.

We have already seen Jack Black set off to “Gomorrah” to spy on the lovers in the glen and his split personality about his lust, on the other hand; and his Bible upbringing on the other. Dylan Thomas sees religion as a central institution of society, the dispenser of social norms that create tension in those folks unable to find sexual release through natural means, as well as creating fodder for the cannon-mouthed gossips of the town.

Time & Death in Under Milk Wood

In his own life, Dylan Thomas was somewhat obsessed with the passage of time and death. This comes across in his delight in the public reading of this Robert Graves' poem:

"COUNTING THE BEATS"

*You, love, and I,
(He whispers) you and I,
And if no more than only you and I,
What care you or I?*

*Counting the beats,
Counting the slow heart beats,
The bleeding to death of time in slow heart beats,
Wakeful they lie.*

*Cloudless day,
Night, and a cloudless day,
Yet the huge storm will burst upon their heads one day
From a bitter sky.*

*Where shall we be,
(She whispers) where shall we be,
When death strikes home, O where then shall we be
Who were you and I?*

*Not there but here,
(He whispers) only here,
As we are, here, together, now and here,
Always you and I.*

*Counting the beats,
Counting the slow heart beats,
The bleeding to death of time in slow heart beats,
Wakeful they lie.*

Dylan was especially enamored with the line, “The bleeding to death of time in slow heart beats...”

The mania for death and the passage of time can be seen in the poet’s oft used phrase” “Time passes.” In *Under Milk Wood* it is also noticeable in the mixed up life of the fanatical Lord Cut-Glass, a compulsive man with a room full of clocks set to different times so as to fool the Grim Reaper. Note the section:

Lord Cut-Glass in his kitchen full of time, squats down
alone to a dog dish marked Fido, of peppery fish scraps and
listens to the voices of his sixty-six clocks, one for each

year of his loony age, and watches, with love, their black-and-white moony, loud-lipped faces tocking the earth away: slow clocks, quick clocks, pendulumed heart-knocks, china, alarm, grandfather, cuckoo; clocks shaped like Noah's whirring Ark, clocks that bicker in marble ships, clocks in the wombs of glass women, hourglass chimers, tu-wit-tuwoo clocks, clocks that pluck tunes, Vesuvius clocks all black bells and lava, Niagara clocks that cataract their ticks, old time-weeping clocks with ebony beards, clocks with no hands forever drumming out time without ever knowing what time it is.

The last reference to “clocks with no hands forever drumming out time without ever knowing what time it is” can be taken to mean that in spite of all his differently timed clocks, neither Lord Cut-Glass nor any man can know the time of his death.

We may also conclude that for Dylan Thomas, a heavy drinker and frequenter of pubs, alcohol helped to take his mind off of the passage of time and his impending demise. Note this passage in *Under Milk Wood* where he discusses the clock in the pub named The Sailors Arms:

The ship's clock in the bar says half past eleven. Half past eleven is opening time. The hands of the clock have stayed still at half past eleven for fifty years. It is always opening time in the Sailors Arms.

Perhaps, with pint in hand, the pub-crawler is attempting to hold back time and the arrival of the black clad skeleton holding a scythe. Anthropologically speaking, I can say that pub-crawling, as a ritual, is no different from many rites in the primitive world i.e., they all attempt to find that liminality, that “time of no-time,” or that “in between time/space,” which temporarily takes the human being out of his or her mortality. A ritual in an African village,

for example, stops time just as the ship's clock in the Sailors Arms is stopped in *Under Milk Wood*.

It seems that the poet was also aware that people may become obsessive (as he was with words and drink) to give some semblance of permanence to life i.e., to ward off death and halt the passage of time. In the play, this is apparent in Organ Morgan's fixation with playing the organ. Organ Morgan's wife screams at her husband, "It's organ, organ all the time with you."

Again, this concern with time and death is rather obvious in the poet's rendition of the town's undertaker Evans the Death who "presses hard with black gloves on the coffin of his breast in case his hearts jumps out."

Dylan Thomas also notes the similarity between death and sleep. Here, in the sea-end of town, "Mr. and Mrs. Floyd, the cocklers, are sleeping as quiet as death."

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