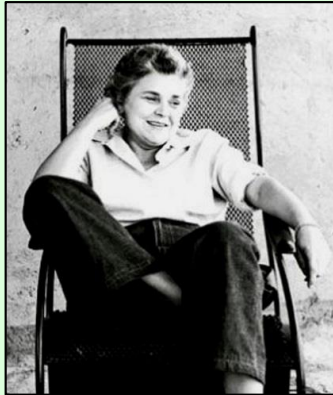


We have just passed the mid-point of our course. Time perhaps for some reflection. Vuillard's painting shows the reflections of a vase of flowers in a mirror. Some of the flowers are losing their petals. The glass of the mirror reflects the outside world seen through the window's glass. The outside dark blue of what might be a jacaranda tree complements the lighter blue inside the room. The pale blue area near the window may represent an empty canvas upon an easel. Vuillard was a member of a group who called themselves *Les Nabis* (from the Hebrew word for prophet). He was considered the secular one.

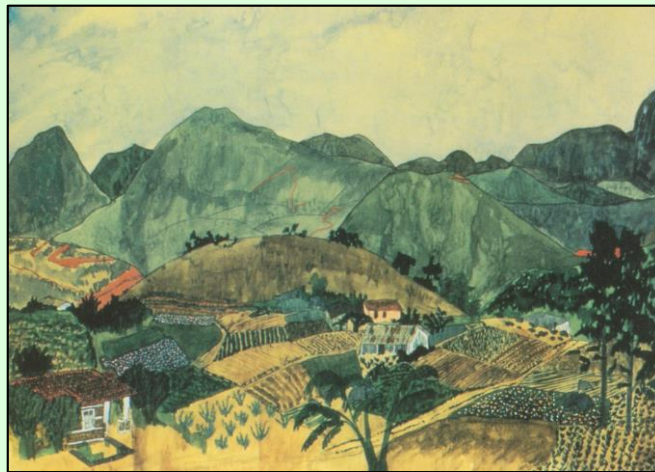
This session deals with four poets: two American and two Welsh. These poets, who came to prominence in the years following World War II, do not fit easily into the main currents of 20<sup>th</sup> Century poetry. The title comes from Elizabeth Bishop's first book *North and South* (1946). The idea is lightly related to the poets. Elizabeth spent much of her life in South America, whereas Lowell was a quintessential New Englander. The exuberant Dylan Thomas lived in South Wales and the austere R. S. Thomas in the North.

**Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979)**

at Samambaia, 1954

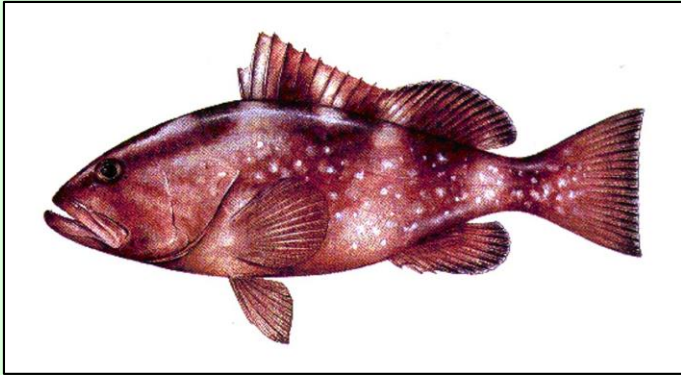
Bishop's father died before she was one-year old and her mother was institutionalized for mental disorder four years later. Elizabeth was taken care of by her maternal grandparents in Nova Scotia and then by her father's family in Boston. She attended Vassar College where she met Marianne Moore, who became a lifelong friend and mentor. She was able to live on a legacy from her grandfather, splitting her time between New York and Key West. Her first book of poetry *North and South* came out in 1946. In 1951 she traveled to Brazil where she met Lota de Macedo Soares, and stayed with her for the next 16 years.

Elizabeth Bishop finally became herself when she decided to settle in Brazil with her lover. She worked hard on her poetry but she did not depend upon it for a living. At Vassar, Bishop knew Mary McCarthy, who portrayed Lota as the Lesbian lover of one of the characters in *The Group* (1963). Lota was involved in the politics of Rio de Janeiro. The 2014 movie *Reaching for the Moon* tells their story.



View from Samambaia

As well as writing poetry, Bishop painted – mainly watercolours. The illustration shows the view from the home of Lota's home *Samambaia*, near Petropolis, the city about 70 km north of Rio de Janeiro that served as the summer residence for the Brazilian Emperors in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Their relationship was not tranquil. Bishop returned occasionally to the US and has affairs with younger women there. Lota had several nervous breakdowns, some in relation to Bishop, and others because of political problems in Brazil. She committed suicide in New York in 1967, dying in St. Vincent's Hospital.




I caught a tremendous fish  
and held him beside the boat  
half out of water, with my hook  
fast in a corner of its mouth.

Red Grouper

Bishop grew up as a child in Nova Scotia and was familiar with fishing. Her most famous poem *The Fish* documents an experience while fishing in Key West. The poem is striking in its detailed description of the fish – likely a large old Grouper. The poem's other subject is the fisher – the one who sees the fish, and feels a fellowship with the battered creature. The poem ends in a rainbow epiphany. The colors may come from the simple fact of oil upon the bilge-water near the rusty engine in the old boat, but the result is overwhelmingly beautiful.

### Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore



Marianne Moore was Elizabeth's mentor. Her poetry was characterized by its precise detail and strict form. Her personal style was esoteric, combining capes and hats and baseball.

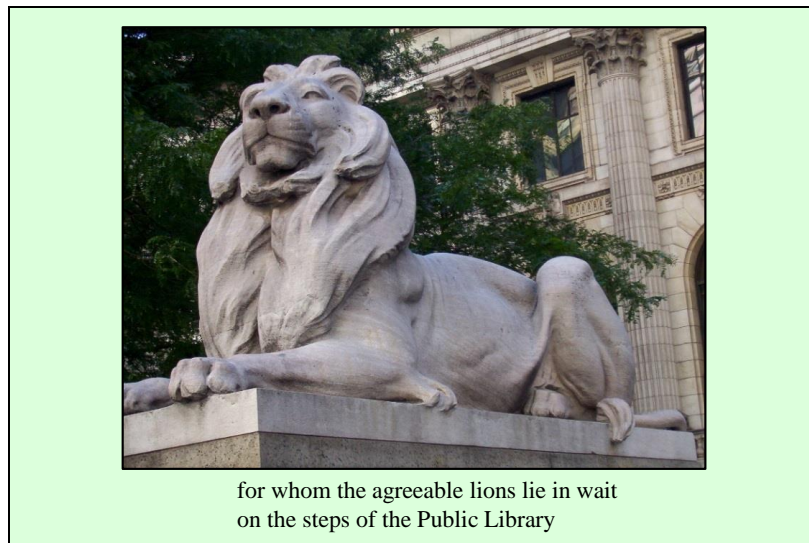
At the time that this poem was written, Marianne Moore was living in seclusion in Brooklyn, mourning the death of her mother.

Richard Avedon, 1958


The precise detail of Bishop's poetry owed much to her mentor Marianne Moore. Moore was famous outside her poetry for her tricorne hat and cape, and for her love of baseball. Moore had lived with her mother ever since the death of her father.




*Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore* contains many lovely images:  
countless little pellucid jellies  
in cut-glass epergnes dragging with silver chains.



The main building at the New York Public Library was opened in 1911 on Fifth Avenue between 40<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Streets. The New York library system (with a catalogue of 53 million items) is the fourth largest in the world. Toronto Public Library has a catalogue of over 10 million items, but has the largest circulation per capita of any library in the world.



 Come like a light in the white mackerel sky,  
come like a daytime comet  
with a long unnebulous train of words,  
from Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,  
please come flying.

The Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883, has long been lauded in poetry. The following is from Hart Crane's *To Brooklyn Bridge*, the opening poem of his 1930 book *The Bridge*:

O Sleepless as the river under thee,  
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,  
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend  
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

Marianne Moore later described the bridge in her 1966 poem *Granite and Steel*:

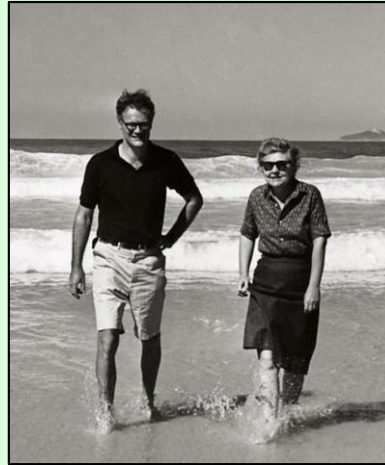
Enfranchising cable, silvered by the sea,  
of woven wire, grayed by the mist,  
and Liberty dominate the Bay-  
her feet as one on shattered chains,  
once whole links wrought by Tyranny.

Both poets thought that the bridge portrayed a state of mind that was essentially American.



### Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell

Bishop met Robert Lowell in 1947 at a dinner party hosted by Randall Jarrell. They had both just published their first books - *North and South* and *Lord Weary's Castle*. They became good friends and lifelong correspondents. Lowell went on to write very openly about his life and his relationships - "confessional poetry," but Bishop never relinquished her privacy.



Lowell and Bishop, Brazil, 1962

Bishop was a long-time friend of Robert Lowell. Bishop was 6 years older, but they both began publishing at about the same time. Lowell once thought he might ask her to marry him, but he never did and they remained friends.

Both poets are similar in the intensity and precision of their images. However, Bishop remains focused whereas Lowell often digresses. And most importantly, Bishop was far more private than Lowell. Lowell was the prime poet of the Confessional Movement in Poetry. This poetry focused on the personal life and psychic traumas of the poet. Bishop called it the "poetry of anguish." Other confessional poets were Sylvia Plath, and John Berryman.



**Robert Lowell**  
(1917-1977)

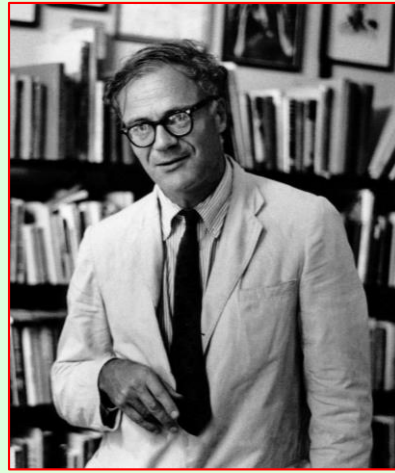
San Francisco  
1957

Lowell was born to a Boston Brahmin family. Among his ancestors were the poets, James Russell Lowell and Amy Lowell, and the astronomer, Percival Lowell. In school he was a rebellious student until he had the poet Richard Eberhart as a teacher and decided to become himself a poet. He was jailed for being a conscientious objector in World War II. He suffered from a bipolar disorder and was hospitalized several times during manic episodes.

Many have suggested that creativity may be related to madness. Perhaps an attenuated version of madness might lead the mind to new ways of thinking. Perhaps the use of alcohol and drugs by artists is a way that they have found to treat their disorder. Nancy Andreasen studied the writers

who attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop. The only significant associations with creativity (and those only just significant) are bipolar disorder and alcohol abuse.

... I ran about the streets of  
Bloomington Indiana crying out  
against devils and homosexuals. I  
believed I could stop cars and  
paralyze their forces merely by  
standing in the middle of the  
highway with my arms outspread.  
.... Bloomington stood for Joyce's  
hero and Christian regeneration.  
Indiana stood for the evil,  
unexorcized, aboriginal Indians.  
I suspected I was a reincarnation of  
the Holy Ghost, and had become  
homicidally hallucinated. To have  
known the glory, violence and  
banality of such an experience is  
corrupting ....



Robert Lowell (1967)

Here Robert Lowell describes one of his manic episodes when he was visiting Indiana university. He has a flight of ideas – from Bloomington to Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, from Indiana to Indians. Though one feels glorious during the manic phase, the actions are actually quite banal. You were not the genius or hero that you thought you were.

### Skunk Hour

The poem was written in the summer of 1957 when Lowell was staying in Castine, Maine, on Penobscot Bay. Nautilus Island is a privately owned island facing the town, and North Haven a much larger island further south in the bay. Lowell was going through a dark period, not having written much, and suffering from his bipolar disorder.



Robert Lowell's most anthologized poem is *Skunk Hour*. The poem recounts several stories about his summer stay in Maine. The first are satirical. Then he considers himself and his problems – "my mind's not right." He is looking for lovers in parked cars. Finally he ends with a skunk family. The way the skunks strut down the street and enjoy the taste of garbage gives the poet a sense of identity.



## Armadillo



Bishop wrote the *Armadillo* as a reply to Lowell's *Skunk Hour*. It describes a summer event in Brazil wherein candle-lit balloons are sent aloft. Ultimately Bishop appears to identify with the animals whose lives have been disrupted by the falling balloons: the rabbit with its frightened fiery eye, but most importantly the armadillo, defiant like a clenched fist.

## North Haven



*Maine Islands*, watercolor, John Marin, 1922

When Lowell died, Bishop wrote an elegy. She is in North Haven and surveys the land- and sea- scape that were so much a part of Lowell's youth. At the end of the poem she remarks about how Lowell used to revise his poems over and over again. Now the poems and the poet have become fixed and cannot change any further.

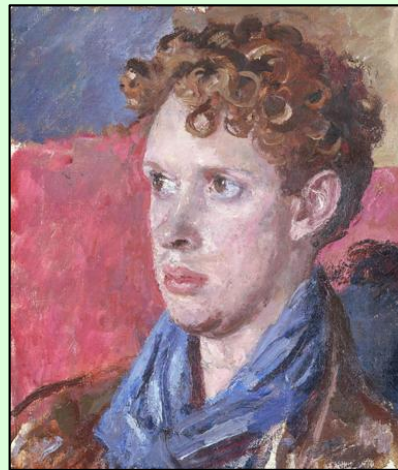


You left North Haven, anchored in its rock,  
afloat in mystic blue...And now—you've left  
for good. You can't derange, or rearrange,  
your poems again. (But the sparrows can their song.)  
The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change.

The word derange refers both to the alterations of the poem and to Lowell's transient attacks of madness.

**Dylan Thomas**  
**(1914-1953)**

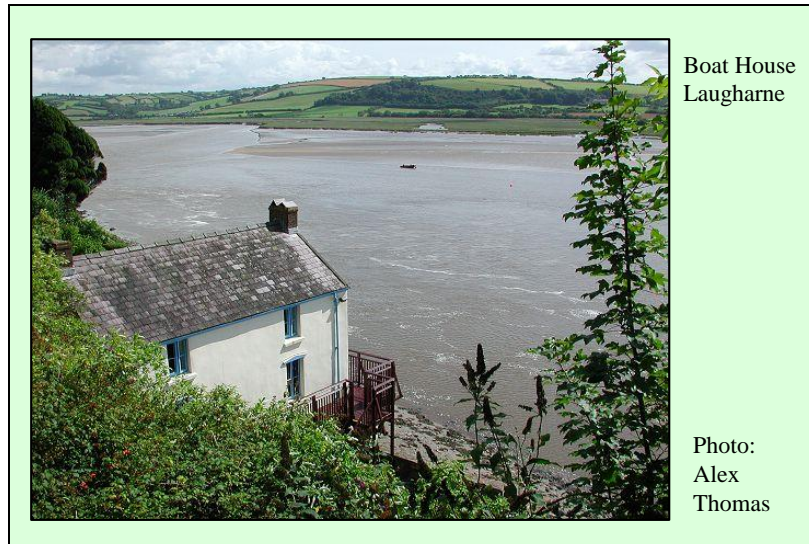
Dylan was born in Swansea in the south of Wales, where his father taught English at the grammar school. Dylan left school in 1931 and worked briefly as a reporter before devoting his life to poetry. After publishing his first two books of poems, in 1937 he met and married Caitlin MacNamara, an Irish dancer and mistress of the painter Augustus John. They settled down in Laugharne, a small sea-side village in South Wales



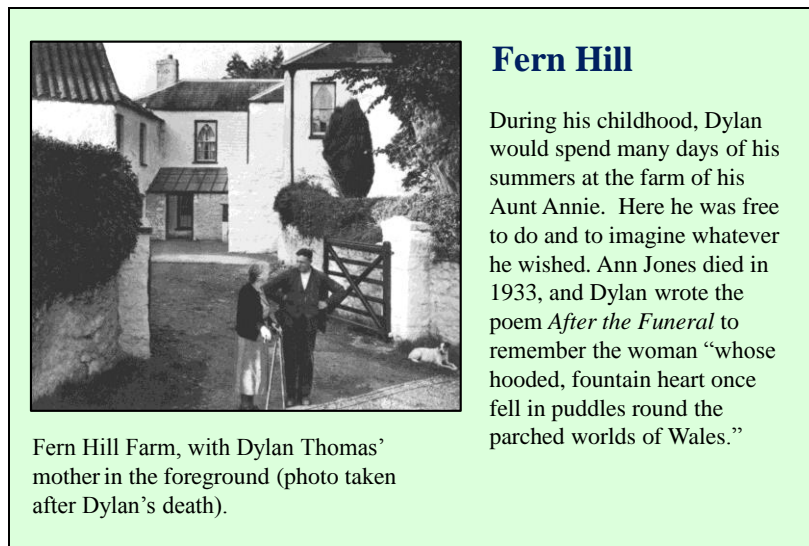
Portrait by Augustus John, 1938

Dylan Thomas was a Welsh poet who was as famous for his drinking as for his poetry. Dylan's great uncle was a Welsh poet who assumed the bardic name of Gwilym Marlais – Dylan was given the middle name Marlais in his honor. Although his parents and grandparents spoke Welsh, Dylan never learned the language. Nevertheless, the Welsh love of music and poetry and the ebullient Celtic imagination permeate his poems.

Dylan Thomas' voice is instantly recognizable. Its highly resonant baritone has a lilt to it but it does not really sound either like the Welsh language or like the Welsh accent. It is more like declaimed theatrical English. Richard Burton had some of the same quality.



This is where Thomas retreated to write his poetry. The small village of Laugharne had all the necessities he needed – a beautiful prospect of the sea and comfortable pub.



One of Dylan's recurrent themes was the innocence and joy of childhood. His memories of his visits to the farm Fern Hill are a little like those of Wordsworth in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1807):

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
 The earth, and every common sight,  
 To me did seem  
 Apparell'd in celestial light,  
 The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore;—  
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
 By night or day,  
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

*Fern Hill* also considers the joyful innocence of childhood. Thomas' poem uses a 9-line format which is similar to that of Wordsworth. However, Thomas had no fixed rhyming scheme. His poem uses many different tricks of sound to give the poem a tremendous musical quality:

alliteration such as “green and golden, and huntsman and herdsman”

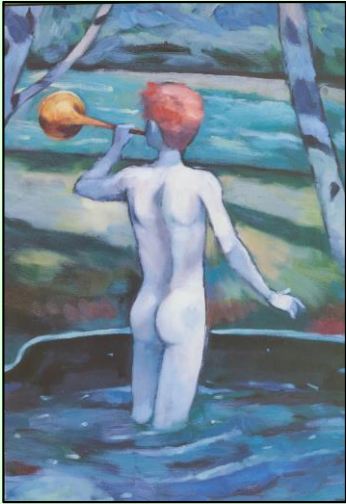
internal rhymes such as “all the sun long it was running”

assonance such as “and the sabbath rang slowly”

Some of these techniques are similar to those used in Medieval Welsh poetry – which follows complex rules of *cynghanedd* (harmony) – though Thomas was not consciously aware to this, and had never studied Welsh poetry.

And green and golden I was huntsman  
 and herdsman, the calves  
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills  
 barked clear and cold,  
 And the sabbath rang slowly  
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.

Illustrations by  
Murray Kimber, 1997



Thomas' poems are striking in both their rhythm and their imagery.

The rhythm is highly stressed and quite irregular. It is a little like the “sprung rhythm” of Gerald Manley Hopkins. Hopkins described his rhythm as having feet of 1 to 4 syllables with the stress on the first. Those with 1- 3 syllables would correspond to the spondee, trochee, dactyl but these terms (from Greek poetry) were based on vowel length rather than stress.

/ | / o | / o | / o | / o | /

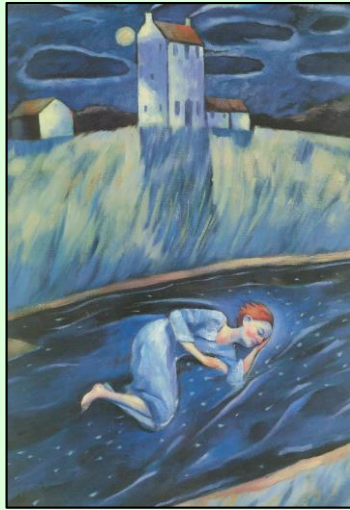
I caught this morning morning's minion, king

/ o | / / | / o | / o | / / | / o o o | / o

dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn falcon in his riding

However, analyzing Hopkin's rhythms is difficult and controversial. Much of his poetry may perhaps be best considered as highly stressed free verse. And this is a reasonable description of the rhythms in Thomas' poetry.

Thomas' imagery is vivid. The sound of the streams is like church bells. An underlying image relates human life to the passage of the day – “in the sun that is young once only” Thus childhood is in the morning and death comes at night. Time also comes from the passage of the seasons. Green and golden are the colors of youth and adolescence.



All the sun long it was running, it was  
lovely, the hay  
Fields high as the house, the tunes from  
the chimneys, it was air  
And playing, lovely and watery  
And fire green as grass.  
And nightly under the simple stars  
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing  
the farm away



In the sun born over and over,  
I ran my heedless ways,  
My wishes raced through the  
house high hay  
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue  
trades, that time allows  
In all his tuneful turning so few and  
such morning songs  
Before the children green and golden  
Follow him out of grace.



At its end the poem changes its mood: childhood and its innocence must necessarily pass.

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me  
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,  
In the moon that is always rising,

Nor that riding to sleep  
I should hear him fly with the high fields  
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.  
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
Time held me green and dying  
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

### In My Craft or Sullen Art

In my craft or sullen art  
Exercised in the still night  
When only the moon rages  
And the lovers lie abed  
With all their griefs in their arms,  
I labor by singing light  
Not for ambition or bread  
Or the strut and trade of charms  
On the ivory stages  
But for the common wages  
Of their most secret heart.



Caitlin, Augustus John, 1930

As well as childhood, Dylan Thomas was also concerned with the love between man and woman. *In My Craft or Sullen Art* describes his reason for writing poetry. The poetry is directed to the lovers,

Who pay no praise or wages  
Nor heed my craft or art.  
He therefore writes just because he has to.

He also describes this in a prefatory note to his *Collected Poems*:

I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: "I'd be a damn' fool if I didn't!" These 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 damn' fool if they weren't.



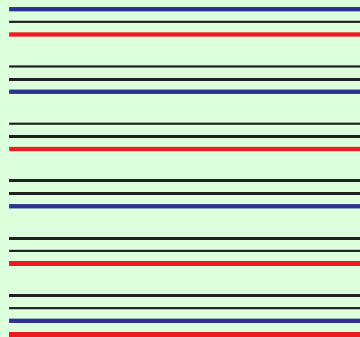


On November 4, 1953, Dylan was admitted in coma to St. Vincent's Hospital in New York. He had been drinking the night before but probably not as much as he boasted ("I've had 18 straight whiskies. I think that's a record."). He never regained consciousness and died on November 9. The legend is that he drank himself to death. The truth is probably that he died in diabetic coma, exacerbated by injections of cortisone and morphine from a physician who was treating him for alcoholism, without having made a proper diagnosis.

Dylan in a New York bar  
a few days before his death

St Vincent's Hospital was founded in 1849 in Greenwich Village as a Catholic Charity Hospital. It served the community for 160 years, gave its name to Edna St Vincent Millay, was a major care and treatment center during the HIV epidemic of the 1980s (and is the setting for many scenes in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* of 1993). The hospital, which cared for the victims of the Titanic sinking and the destruction of the World Trade Center, was closed in 2010 and demolished in 2013.

### The Villanelle



A poem of six stanzas. The first five stanzas have three lines and the last has four. The rhyme scheme is aba (with the last stanza abaa).

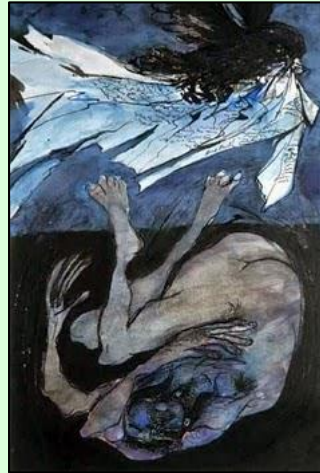
The essential characteristic of the villanelle is the repetition of the first and third lines. The first line is repeated at the end of the second and fourth stanzas, and the third line is repeated at the end of the third and fifth. Both lines then conclude the last stanza. The lines may or may not be perfectly repeated.

The villanelle derives from Italian country songs and was made popular in France in the 16th century. The strictness of the form and the multiple repetitions are particularly well suited to poetry of transience and regret.

Thomas wrote the poem *Do not go gentle into that dark night* for his father who ultimately died in 1952 after a prolonged and painful course of heart failure. Dylan was to die a year later. In a way, the poem was addressed to himself as well as to his father.

The format of the poem is a villanelle. Two of the lines repeat intermittently through the poem according a set sequence.

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.



Ceri Richards, 1965

The illustration shows a lithograph by the Welsh artist Ceri Richards. Like Dylan Thomas, Richards was also born in Swansea, but he only met the poet once – just before his death. The lithograph perhaps shows the black bird of death bowling over the man into the ground and flying away with his raging poetry.



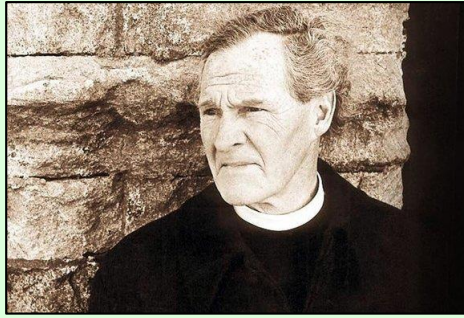
Do not go gentle into that good night



The photograph shows Blaen Cym, a small Welsh village, with night approaching. *Cym* means “valley.” *Cymru* (country of the valleys) is the Welsh name for Wales.

**Ronald Stuart  
Thomas  
(1913-2000)**

1960s



Though born in Cardiff, Thomas grew up in Holyhead in North Wales. He was ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church in Wales. He spent his life ministering to the poor in various isolated parishes. He learned to speak Welsh but was never completely fluent. He rejected all trappings of modern life, preferring austerity and spirituality to refrigerators and televisions.

R. S. Thomas was born at about the same time as Dylan, but he lived more than twice as long and wrote more than twice as many poems. His is a completely different sort of Welshness – that of the monk rather than the bard. A famous Welsh poem by Daffyd ap Gwilym (14<sup>th</sup>-Century) called *The Poet Addresses the Friar* considers this distinction.

Though his poems are passionately Welsh, his voice is that of a cultured Englishman.



Thomas was vicar of St Hywyn's Church in Aberdaron (on the Western tip of Llyn peninsula) from 1967-1978. The church was founded in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century as a monastery. The present double-naved building was erected in 1137.

Aberdaron is a small fishing village in Northwest Wales. Its name means “mouth of the River Daron.” The village church was a place of sanctuary for defeated kings and princes of Wales. In 1115, the monks at Aberdaron famously beat back the soldiers who tried to capture a prince who had sought sanctuary with them.

R. S. Thomas ministered to the poor of Aberdaron and other parishes in Western Wales. He had great difficulty understanding how they lived from day today without thought of the morrow or of things beyond their direct experience. His parishioners often did not take kindly to his ministrations.

One of Thomas great early poems is. *The Airy Tomb*. This describes the lonely and insignificant life of Twm, a shepherd in the Welsh mountains. Despite its limitations, Twm's life has a simple grandeur and his death is in harmony with the hills he lived in.

The poem has some similarities to Wordsworth's *Michael* (1800). Michael is also a shepherd. His son leaves him and becomes corrupted by the city. When he and his wife die, the land on which he grazed his sheep is turned over to the plough, and the old way of life is no more. Thomas poem tells of someone who maintains that old way of life. It has its simple nobility but it seems much less splendid than the life that Wordsworth describes for Michael

And grossly that man errs, who should suppose  
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,  
Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.  
Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed  
The common air; hills, which with vigorous step  
He had so often climbed; which had impressed  
So many incidents upon his mind  
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;  
Which, like a book, preserved the memory  
Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,  
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts  
The certainty of honourable gain;

Thomas poem does not follow the usual iambic pentameter rhythm. The rhyme scheme is completely irregular. The poem begins mainly in rhyming couplets. As the poem goes on the rhymes often become slant rather than perfect, and they occur at differing intervals. It is as though the effects of civilization are vanishing from the life of Twm. The format is as idiosyncratic as the shepherd. The poem ends

No, no, you must face the fact  
Of his long life alone in that crumbling house  
With winds rending the joints, and the grey rain's claws  
Sharp in the thatch; of his work up on the moors  
With the moon for candle, and the shrill rabble of stars  
Crowding his shoulders. For Twm was true to his fate,  
That wound solitary as a brook through the crimson heather,  
Trodden only by sheep, where youth and age  
Met in the circle of a buzzard's flight  
Round the blue axle of heaven; and a fortnight gone  
Was the shy soul from the festering flesh and bone  
When they found him there, entombed in the lucid weather.

We may think that Twm's life was of no significance, but we cannot but be awed by the simple fact that he was "true to his fate." Thomas understands far more than Wordsworth the nature of

the life that is lived beyond the bounds of modern civilization. It may not be noble but it is genuine.

### Bright Field

I have seen the sun break through  
to illuminate a small field  
for a while, and gone my way  
and forgotten it. But that was the  
pearl of great price, the one field that had  
treasure in it. I realise now  
that I must give all that I have  
to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after  
an imagined past. It is the turning  
aside like Moses to the miracle  
of the lit bush, to a brightness  
that seemed as transitory as your youth  
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

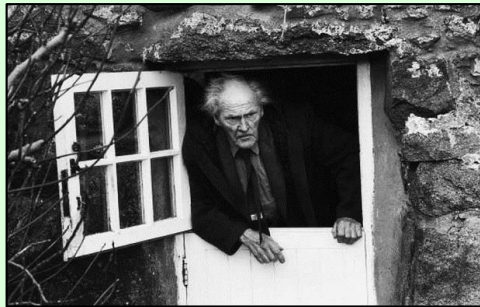


Dru Marland



R. S. Thomas was a minister and his poems often talk in parables. We must always notice the world – it has miracles to show us. The epiphany of Thomas' bright field is like that of Bishop's rainbow bilge-water.

### Emerging

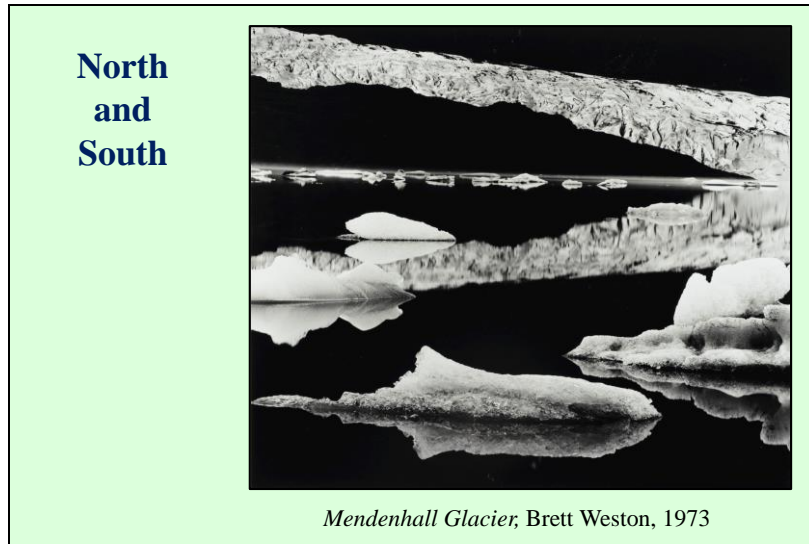


There are questions we are the solution  
to, others whose echoes we must expand  
to contain. Circular as our way  
is, it leads not back to that snake-haunted  
garden, but onward to the tall city  
of glass that is the laboratory of the spirit.

Howard Barlow, 1993



Some of the religious poems of R. S. Thomas have a great depth of insight into human spirituality. This particular poem considers how prayer is not asking for things but rather a communion between the mortal and the eternal – an “annihilation of the difference.”



This session has been one of reflection. We have considered the similarities and differences between two pairs of poets.

The illustration shows a photograph of Brett Weston of Mendenhall Glacier in Alaska. The photograph plays with what is real and what is reflected, what is light and what is shadow, what is air and what is water. The world is very difficult to understand. Many different poets are needed to help us see it right.