

**A BAD-TEMPERED OLD MAN WRITING FROM THE PERIPHERY:  
THRESHOLDS IN R.S. THOMAS'S POEMS<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

R. S. Thomas relates the story of a person who cannot feel at home in the established institutions of the society. This study starts with a brief explanation of Welsh poetry and Thomas's place in it. Then the study analyses the selected poems of R.S Thomas from his early and later collections in order to trace the emotional breaking points in the poems. The study also attempts to read Thomas's poetry with respect to the nomadic subjectivity and nomadic time sense. Deliberately choosing to be at the margin, the poetic persona walks on the borders of reality and illusion by trying to find an outlet that would let him out of the long-felt restlessness. By discovering the impossibility of such an option, he turns back to the temporality of the order, but he grasps the glimpses of what he yearns for in the flux and reflux.

**Keywords:** Welsh poetry, British poetry, R. S. Thomas, Nomadic Ethics, subject

**KIYIDAN YAZAN HUYSUZ İHTİYAR: R. S. THOMAS'IN ŞİİRLERİNDE  
EŞİKLER**

**Öz**

R. S. Thomas, kendisini toplumun yerleşik kurumları içinde huzursuz hisseden bir kişinin hikayesini anlatır. Bu çalışma, Galler şiiri ve Thomas'ın yeri üzerine kısa bir açıklamayla başlar. Daha sonra, çalışma şiirlerdeki duygusal kırılma noktalarının izini sürebilmek için Thomas'ın ilk ve sonraki derlemelerinden seçilen şiirleri inceler. Çalışma ayrıca Thomas'ın şiirlerini göçer özellik ve göçer zaman kavramı üzerinden okumaya çalışır. Bununla birlikte varacak bir hedefin olmaması hissi yokçu bir deneyime sevk etmez. Aksine birbirine bağlanmışlık düşüncesini ve Thomas'ın şiirini besleyen bir iki bilinçliliği oraya çıkarır. Marjinde olmayı açıkça tercih ederek, şiir kişisi uzun süredir hissettiği huzursuzluktan kendisini çıkaracak sınırlar üzerinde

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yürür. Böyle bir seçeneğin olmadığını keşfederek, düzenin zamansallığına döner. Ancak hasretini çektiği şeyin kırıntılarını devingen akışta yakalar.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Galler şiiri, Britanya şiiri, R. S. Thomas, Göçer Etik, özne

### Introduction

R. S. Thomas poeticizes certain spatial and temporal terrains in his poems to demonstrate his own conflict with the reducing network of the dominant and verbalizes a universalized perception of being isolated from the paradigms of the existing system by deliberately rejecting its main instruments such as media and technology. In his poems, Thomas draws the picture of a lonely person who has to bear the heaviness of being consciousness of a wrongly designated world and his subjectivity or situatedness in it. The term nomadic visualizes the long-term restlessness of the poet and its reflections projected onto the poems through flows and ruptures. The feeling of having no destination to arrive does not lead the poet into a nihilistic experience but a double consciousness which nurtures the poetry of Thomas and the idea of interconnectedness.

This study evaluates Thomas's poems in two parts through selected poems from his early and later collections. After a short introduction of Welsh poetry by means of its major discussions, the study tries to explain Thomas's significance as a poet. The selected poems stand as epitomes for reflecting the poet's concerns of belief, experience and a struggle against hegemonic discourses in his poetic career. The first part analyzes some early poems of Thomas from the respect of perceiving nature and religion. The poems in this early period are harsh but clear-cut criticism of the modern man who has been alienated to his own labour through mechanization. The poems also question the influence of nature by deromanticizing it. The beautiful, the ideal or the heroic are ridiculed in the reality observed by the poetic persona. Moreover, faith is estranged through a transformation from the role of a priest to that of an atheist. The second part starts with the definition of the term 'nomadic' and how it appears in Thomas's later poetry through the selected poems. Similar to the changing tone in the earlier poems, Thomas's later poetry conveys the idea of a continuous flux through emotional and ideological reverberations. Thus, the personal experiences create certain turning points by forming new thresholds for the poetry of Thomas. Whether the poetic personas cross these borders or not is questionable since Thomas aims to represent the false propositions with facets of a hidden truth. However, he also questions the mysticism of such truth.

The study also suggests that Thomas's argument in the selected poems is the signification of a marginal stance. In *Mass for Hard Times* and *No Truce with the Furies*, Thomas relates the story of a person who cannot feel at home in the established institutions of the society. By being aware of his position in the periphery, the persona reevaluates his perception of technology, religion and science. However, Thomas does not suggest any solution for the current problem he experiences since it means turning into another discursive entity. Instead, he creates both radical and acknowledging space, which is one of the main traits in his later poetry. Thus, the study attempts to read Thomas's poetry within the theoretical frames of nomadic subjectivity and nomadic perception of time. The image of a man whose old age always reminding him of what he has lost creates an ontological territory in which he can access to the glimpses of consolation or relief through the freedom of a child's imagination not disrupted by the dominant power yet. So, the study also tries to delineate the importance of memories in a time when every entity has lost its meaning in the continuous flux.

### Welsh Poetry and R.S. Thomas

Wales is one of the four countries that form the United Kingdom or Great Britain. England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have witnessed many conflicts and bloody wars throughout history especially by the invasion of the Roman Empire. The conflict between two tribes, Celtic Britons and Anglo-Saxons has been kept with minor alterations since then. Even etymologically the word 'Welsh' means 'foreigner' or 'foreign land' and linguistically retells the great cultural gap with the mainstream authority of England. Thus, as a land of opposite poles, a political voice overwhelms the whole poetry of Wales. 'Welsh poetry' as being the poetry produced in the Welsh language, "to apply it to the poetry of Wales composed in English is confusing and to some Welsh-language writers and readers, offensive" (Garlick and Mathias, 1984, p. 27). But offering the word 'Anglo-Welsh' instead creates another controversy among Welsh poets since some of them believe in the Britishness as the unifying factor and some others are ardent supporters of separation.

Welsh nationalism can be defined from two opposite perspectives. One advocates violence such as civil disobedience, clearing the English existence in Wales, and illegal acts realized in the crimes like the bombing of English residences. The other form of nationalism acknowledges the pressure historically predominant in Wales but also seeks the ways of a peaceful integration by keeping the origins such as culture and language in mind. The arguments of the first group have been institutionalized with the establishment of a separatist

party, 'Plaid Cymru' or Welsh Nationalist Party. While the first impetus for the rising nationalism in Wales is political, the second reason is cultural. As Ree points out the nationalism develops through a cultural "reawakening of Welsh and Anglo-Welsh artistic sensibilities" (1973, p. 99). Some basic initiatives taken in resolving the political and cultural problems can be summarized as follows,

The establishment of the University of Wales, new Welsh programs in the primary and secondary schools, and the Welsh Language Act of 1967; in broadcasting (Harlech TV and BBC Wales-with 14 hours of Welsh language broadcasting per week); in the disestablishment of the Church in Wales; in the establishment of the office of Secretary of State of Wales; in a Welsh Arts Council, licensed to fund and support the arts; in the establishment in 1956 of Cardiff as a capital city [as a part of Welsh Assembly]. (Ree, 1973, p. 101)

Three figures are prominent in Welsh poetry: Dylan Thomas, David Jones and R. S. Thomas. For the first one, the identity of being Welsh is not strongly felt as it happens in the case of R. S. Thomas. Wales is only a nostalgic place which keeps the memories of boyhood: "his portrayal of Welsh rural folk as God-fearing fools and bigots" (Ree, 1973, p. 102). The attempts of shaping a life outside Wales, and no knowledge of Welsh nor any willingness to learn it deliberately show Dylan Thomas's problematic Welsh identity. Painter, poet and essayist David Jones who lived all his life in London does not believe in the political action and his concerns are more philosophical. His Welshness is based upon the centre of Britishness. He likens Welsh identity to "a homemade basket" which is entirely woven with "British wickers" and a blend of Christian and Roman cultures (Ree, 1973, p. 102-103). When compared to the above-mentioned poets, R. S. Thomas represents a radically different pole. Although he learnt Welsh at the age of 30, he always emphasized the importance of the preservation of language for cultural reasons. He wrote *Neb: Golygwyd gan Gwenno Hywyn*, an autobiography in Welsh and always concerned himself with the daily political issues of Wales where he was committed to his entire lifetime.

In the early Welsh poetry until the 1960s, the landscape of Wales plays a great role in the conveyance of Welsh nationalism as concretized in famine, poverty, economic crisis, lands owned by English companies and loneliness. The untouched nature and its being replaced by industrial buildings and large farmlands demonstrate not only a physically changing world but a different attitude from the previous era. In other words, because of the industrial elements such as coal, copper and lead, Wales has endured the destructive influence of Industrial revolution before England did. Being bordered by high hills, instantly changing

cold weather and a rough sea, Wales consolidates the marginalized voice of the poets such as R. S. Thomas.

The later Welsh poetry cherishes the cultural difference and conflicts in a more cosmopolitan way. Poets diverting from the major discourse of Welsh nationalism gain a universal vantage point for the human suffering or conflicts and as Wynn Thomas points out, “with their preference for travelling light, without the baggage of national culture, and their interest in the casual kaleidoscope of human experience, they were the forerunners of the postmodernism” (2007, p. 169). In the case of R. S. Thomas, this mobility is sustained by a change from the political to the spiritual as it can be observed in his later poetry.

Born in Cardiff, Ronald Stuart Thomas is an Anglo-Welsh poet and clergyman in the Anglican Church in Wales. As Lloyd states Thomas's poetry can be classified by three major periods. In the early period between 1946-55, the poet observes the natural ambiance of Wales. In the middle period between 1955-72, “his interest in the Welsh landscape and ‘peasant’ farmers merges with expressions of his developing nationalist convictions” (1996, p. 438). In other words, the observant eye begins to change its focus from the landscape to politics and in the later poetic period of R.S. Thomas, politics evolves into the criticism of the modern world. The corporeality of Wales and Welsh nationalism leaves its place to a more spiritual subject matter: his problematic relation to God. Moreover, the poet honestly declares that “I became rather tired of the themes about nationalism and the decay of the rural structure of Wales” (qtd. in Ewing 1987, p. 121). The poet returns to his inner self through the rejection of unprecedented materialistic and scientific world in a globalizing world.

In the poetry of R.S. Thomas, it is possible to find certain recurrent themes and images triggered by the structural change Wales underwent in the last century. In this respect, R. S. Thomas's poetry is a reaction to the results of capitalism. As Ree summarizes, Wales is on the verge of a complete change with

The green valleys in the south turned into industrial wastelands, remote valleys in mid and North Wales flooded to provide water for the English midlands, open spaces turned into bombing ranges, beaches and roads becoming ever more crowded by English holiday travellers, farms being bought up as mere weekend homes for the English, mining in the Snowdonia district, the economy being directed and managed by outsiders. (1973, p. 102)

R. S. Thomas enriches his poetry by nurturing from the basic obsessions in his life. Firstly, he is obsessed with the sense of space consolidated in the depiction of landscape. His unending efforts to find a stable centre make him develop a rather pessimistic tone with the

glimpses of hope in the end. Secondly, his relation to his mother leads him to a bitter self-criticism as well as the criticism of others by being knowledgeable, interrogating and scorning priest. His both apparent and hidden obsession with God in his poetry forms another conflicting voice as being an Anglican priest questioning the existence of God and criticizing not only his omnipotence but also his impotence. The poet's 'Romantic' vision also wavers between two contrasting notions. On the one hand, he regards himself in the tradition of Shelley and Blake, but on the other hand, he cannot idealize nature nor can he catch a healing breath from it although he is in the middle of wildlife and away from the industrial lodgings of southern Wales.

Thomas's self-deprecating attitude can be traced back to the mother-son relation. "Biographical sources confirm that Thomas's mother did experience a complicated birth and that his father (a sailor) was away from the family for long periods" (Lloyd, 1996, p. 440). Similar to Eugene O'Neill whose mother was addicted to morphine used during delivering, Thomas is obsessed by the notion of "prideful sense of unworthiness" (McGill, 2004, p. 100). Thus, he also destroys the Romantic reception of the 'child.' As Knapp argues, "the child is 'dropped,' like an animal, into this hostile environment, and the only suggestion of cause lies in that word 'luckless' - the endless suffering of which he will become a part seems very often to be a kind of joke" (1971, p. 2).

He became a priest at the request of his mother. After completing the university, he travelled around the remote Welsh villages and since then he was actively engaged in the ecclesiastical circle over thirty years. As Ewing points out, "throughout R. S. Thomas's poetry, there is clear evidence of a struggle between vocation and avocation, between preacher and poet. In his early poems, the voice of the preacher is held in check" (1987, p. 121). But Thomas himself opposes to such a divergence as follows,

A lot of people seem to be worried about how I combine my work as a poet and my work as a priest. This is something that never worries me at all . . . any form of orthodoxy is just not part of a poet's province . . . A poet must be able to claim . . . freedom to follow the vision of poetry, the imaginative vision of poetry . . . And, in any case, poetry is religion, religion is poetry. The message of the New Testament is poetry. Christ was a poet, the New Testament is a metaphor, the Resurrection is a metaphor. (qtd. in Davis, 2007, p. 7)

While clarifying his opinions about religion and poetry, Thomas also expresses the influence of Romantics on him. As Brown states, especially in his early poetry "R. S. Thomas adopts an idealistic, indeed Romantic notion of the poet's calling and his social role" (2000, p.

454). Thomas regards poet as prophet similar to the Romantics. For instance, in “Taliesin 1952” Thomas employs Taliesin, an ancient Welsh bard to define the role and mission of the poet in the modern world “and for Thomas he becomes a symbol of the poet’s long struggle to learn the truth, and finally to communicate that truth to men who continue to suffer in darkness, to heal them, if he can, by showing them what he has seen” (Knapp, 1971, p. 8). The process of creation through imagination becomes a religious act. In other words, “He invokes Coleridge’s conception of Imagination, and stresses the role of the primary imagination as the agency for the perception of truth- the ultimate reality that is seen to govern existence” (Herman, 1978, p. 712). But his yearning towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantics does not necessarily mean that he is a representative of them in the modern world. During the Second World War years, Thomas acknowledges that “we are poets, sharing the trade, if not always the talent of Blake, Shelley and Keats . . . Let the war end that we may see again the light on the hill where the poet is busy with his book of dreams” (qtd. in Brown, 2000, p. 455).

### Poetization of Early Ruptures

Thomas’s use of language demonstrates his psychic dividedness between the mainstream English and the marginalized Welsh. As Wynn Thomas suggests, “Thomas attempted to use complex assonantal and alliterative patterns approximate to Welsh *barddas* in order to render English ‘foreign’ to its ordinary self, bent out of ‘true’ by the invisible gravitational pull of another language” (2007, p. 161). Although he is not a member of ‘The Movement,’ he had a considerable influence on other poets from the Movement with his simple and economical language. Similar to the Movement poets, Thomas regarded the social function of the poet as the adversary voice of the age by writing “about peasants who have let themselves become blind to all things of the mind and spirit, about an inhumanly metallic modern world, and about a Wales which has sold its heritage in exchange for English factories” (Knapp, 1971, p. 1).

In “Cynddylan on a Tractor” Thomas exemplifies his attitude towards the changing world as well as the changing Welsh landscape. In the poetry of Thomas ‘peasant’ turns into a symbol for the evolution from tradition to technology. His Welsh nationalism does not idealize Welsh farmer as the resident of lands. On the contrary, the peasant’s position is despicable since he has missed the opportunity of ‘Salvation’ offered by nature. According to Thomas, when the organic link between man and nature breaks, man also loses the meaning of life and turns into a ‘monster’ as poeticized as below,

Ah, you should see Cynddylan on a tractor.  
Gone the old look that yoked him to the soil,  
He's a new man now, part of the machine,  
His nerves of metal and his blood oil.  
The clutch curses, but the gears obey  
His least bidding, and lo, he's away  
Out of the farmyard, scattering hens. (Thomas, 1989, p. 307)

'Iago Prytherch' in "A Peasant" and 'Cynddylan' in "Cynddylan on a Tractor" represent the two archetypes in the Welsh landscape. In other words, Thomas employs special names but these names do not refer to any individuality. Similar to such characters as Henry and Mr Bones from *Dream Songs* by John Berryman, these two Welsh farmers speak for the dissatisfaction and conflicts in the poet. In Iago, for instance, "There is something frightening in the vacancy of his mind. / His clothes, sour with years of sweat/ And animal contact, shock the refined, / But affected, sense with their stark naturalness" (Thomas, 1984, p. 178). Now this man and his conventional farming are transformed into another pole, Cynddylan, "Ah, you should see Cynddylan on a tractor. / Gone the old look that yoked him to the soil" (Thomas, 1989, p. 307) clarifies that the man on the tractor has lost the close touch with the soil. By being not a part of nature but a machine, he also loses his humane feelings and Cynddylan as a robot or to be more precise, an android represents the mechanization of man.

"The clutch curses, but the gears obey/ His least bidding, and lo, he's away/ Out of the farmyard, scattering hens" (Thomas, 1989, p. 307) visualize both the struggle of having dominance over the other and the destructive effect of man over nature. The noise of tractor terrorizes the whole natural world and harmonic melodies of wood and fields are silenced by the monotonous mechanical sound of the engine,

Riding to work now as a great man should,  
He is the knight at arms breaking the fields'  
Mirror of silence, emptying the wood  
Of foxes and squirrels and bright jays. (Thomas, 1989, p. 308)

"The men like Cynddylan, proud on their tractors, do not think to ask about the spirit any longer" (Knapp, 1971, p. 4). Although he is alienated from his environment, Cynddylan does not feel any emotion since "he is the knight at arms" (Thomas, 1989, p. 307) on the tractor. As being a tragic figure he regards himself as powerful as nature. As Wynn Thomas suggests, "Iago is often construed, and constructed, as a geological outcrop, or viewed as

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embodying ‘the land’s patience and a tree’s/ Knotted endurance’” (2007, p. 160) but Cynddylan signifies the hastiness and insensibility of the new world.

The last lines of “Cynddylan on a Tractor” convey the great gap between the man and his surroundings since the sun as the source of life has no influence over the man “who runs his engine on a different fuel” (Thomas, 1989, p. 307). He is given one more chance to reestablish the broken bond and to recover from the ‘unnatural’ state through auditory images. Birds call for him and their beaks are fully open as if they are shouting at the top of their voice, but they cannot make him turn aside from his course. In other words, the centre is replaced with the “proudly” metallic world,

The sun comes over the tall trees  
Kindling all the hedges, but not for him  
Who runs his engine on a different fuel.  
And all the birds are singing, bills wide in vain,  
As Cynddylan passes proudly up the lane. (Thomas, 1989, p. 308)

Another centre, religion cannot hold its old place too. As Davis points out “R. S. Thomas, as poet and priest, is ideally suited for confronting the apocalyptic moment of recent history” (1987, p. 92). The god apparent in his poems is an “elusive” one in Wynn Thomas’s words (2007, p. 167). Although he is a priest, the experience of religion has negative connotations in the poetry of Thomas. As an ardent reader of Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and subatomic physics made popular by Paul Davies, Thomas offers a rather postmodern exploration of God-space (2007, p. 168). In other words, the interrogating voice in R.S. Thomas’s early poems leaves its place to the questioning of God-space. To exemplify, in the poem “H’m,” the preacher’s stiffness or his inability to speak of God’s love illustrates the readers’ perspective on Thomas as a religious poet (Herman, 1978, p. 710). The missing ‘i’ denotes detachment of God and the broken link between man and God. “He is not a rationalist God- a God of enlightened justice and beauty- but a Dark God, basically unknowable, distanced, silent” (Herman, 1978, p. 711). In the post-Darwinian world, Thomas suggests a reevaluation of Christianity but he also criticizes the secularization of the church with the rising Welsh nationalism.

In a poem written in 1978, “The Empty Church,” Thomas describes an enigmatic God and religion. The poem in *Frequencies* does not only reflect the changing style of Thomas from Welshness to a more universal concern but also offers reconciliation with the unknown through a rationalized belief in God. Thomas criticizes the institutionalized religion and the

displacement of God in it through visual images. He calls "the empty church" as a "stone trap" (Thomas, 1978, p. 35) which has been built to preserve the essence of God. For Thomas "garden" can be the binary opposite of church since although both places are arranged by man, the first one provides a space "where man can go for solitude, for regaining his spiritual bearings, and for a temporary release from his cares (Knapp, 1971, p. 6). But the second place represents the fear of an entrapped animal,

They laid this stone trap  
for him, enticing him with candles,  
as though he would come like some huge moth  
out of the darkness to beat there.  
Ah, he had burned himself  
before in the human flame  
and escaped, leaving the reason  
torn. He will not come any more (Thomas, 1978, p. 35)

Similar to the insects hovering around the fire in darkness, God as a "huge moth" (p. 35) is called to the church by "enticing him with candles," (p.35) or the regular rituals of the established church. But Thomas implies that these rituals do not revive God's presence, on the contrary, they threaten his existence. The lines "Ah, he had burned himself before/ and escaped, leaving the reason/ torn" (p.35) refer to the theological crisis in the twentieth century: the uprooted God. "Man, in this late poetry, seems frequently to be double-crossed by a God who had, after all, been crucified on a cross" (Thomas, 2007, p. 168). As stated before, the notion of God is either ignored or agnostically perceived by always being absent in one way or another in this post-Darwinian world. Thus, Thomas does not wait for a revelation that would enlighten and purify him in the end. The escaping God image again underlines his detachment, and 'emptiness' of the church actually signifies a spiritual void. A God that "will not come any more,"

to our lure. Why, then, do I kneel still  
striking my prayers on a stone  
heart? Is it in hope one  
of them will ignite yet and throw  
on its illuminated walls the shadow  
of someone greater than I can understand? (Thomas, 1978, p. 35)

As Davis suggests “one cannot help but think that Thomas’s poems are, if not like churches, ‘stone traps,’ perhaps they are verbal traps for such a ‘fast/ God’” (2007, p. 94). In other words, through a multi-referential language, Thomas tries to consolidate certain spiritual experiences. Thomas reveals what he means through “the process of reconstruction of meaning . . . out of the drifting bits of faith and doubt, from fleeting and unauthorized moments of intensity, in neutral fragments of language” (Herman, 1978, p. 711).

The persona wavers between the pessimism and hope. He questions the meaning of rituals or prayers with “do I knell still/ striking my prayers on a stone/ heart?” (Thomas, 1978, p. 35). Thomas draws the picture of a man trying to start a fire in his spiritual world with a flint stone in hand. The sparks from the flint are likened to prayers that would illuminate the darkness of empty church. The persona ends with a doubtful or agnostic question with “shadow of someone greater than I can understand” (p.35) by referring to a spiritual gap between man and God, which annuls the hope of finding a possible answer. Paradoxically, Thomas finds the answer in fluidity.

#### **Nomadic Ruptures in *Mass for Hard Times* and *No Truce with the Furies***

For Thomas, memories are standing points in the flux and a reference point to begin with. But they sprinkle into a temporality emphasizing the stance of a lonely and retired man.

We are the lost people.  
Tracing us by our language  
you will not arrive where we are  
which is nowhere. The wind  
blows through our castles; the chair  
of poetry is without a tenant. (Thomas, 2004, p. 218)

In a poem from *No Truce with the Furies*, “The Lost,” the meaning of nomadic is underlined. As the first line of the poem precisely describes, the persona knows his position in the order with which he cannot comply with. On the one hand, since he does not identify himself with the suggested ways of the system, he is doomed to be displaced and since there is no grand narrative, he finds himself in flux, which makes him a nomad. On the other hand, when the word ‘lost’ is reconsidered within the complementary opposition of the acts ‘earn’ and ‘lose,’ he is named as the lost one by reason of that the system cannot include him into its own regulations.

As Rosi Braidotti points out, “the nomad knows that language is not only and not even, the instrument of communication, but a site of symbolic exchange that links us together in a tenuous and yet workable web of mediated misunderstandings, which we call civilization” (2011, p. 40). For Thomas, this conflicting existence of language between a powerful means and a weak connection is a reference point to demonstrate his situatedness and the attempts of the poet to demystify it. The universalizing and polarizing tone of “we” creates the opposition of ‘we-others’ and the lines “tracing us by our language/ you will not arrive where we are/ which is nowhere,” (Thomas, 2004, p. 218) stress on the dysfunction of language. Since it is not configured within the paradigms of stability and desire for a certain meaning, the nomadic language is inaccessible to the other or “you,” thus remains impossible to decipher it with the methods of the reason-based epistemology.

Since language inscribes the subjects into the symbolic and constructs an origin for them with the linear time (according to Kristeva there is a direct interaction between language, “considered as the enunciation of sentences” and history, both are constructed within the frame of “departure and arrival” (1986, p. 192)), it is impossible to “trace” (Thomas, 2004, p. 218) the nomad because his temporality is cyclical in Deleuzian terms and he deliberately refuses to be positioned in the spatial perception of the Enlightenment. The feeling of isolation is consolidated with a deserted castle through which wind is storming in a similar way to the appearance of the wind image in “The Empty Church.” The wind image also connotes the soul’s loneliness in circular movements. Poetry as the expression of solitude cannot function either since the lost do not speak the same language of the others. Thus, Thomas’s evaluation of the Welsh language gains another meaning with its more universal concern. In other words, his Welshness becomes abstract with a vague perception of the landscape.

Accordingly, the lines “we are exiles within/ our own country; we eat our bread/ at pre-empted table” (p. 218) refer to the sense of incompleteness and dissatisfaction underlined with the following lines,

. . . ‘Show us,  
we supplicate, ‘the way home,’  
and they laughing hiss at us:  
‘But you are home.’ Come in  
and endure it.’ Will nobody  
explain what it is like

to be born lost? We have our signposts

but they are in another tongue. (Thomas, 2004, p. 218)

The opposition of two epistemologically different groups is given through the dialogue between the persona and “they laughing” (p. 218). When the persona expresses his not feeling at home, it is not understood by the others. Thus, his desire to find a certain destination is not fulfilled by “they” (p. 218). What is expected from the persona is to take a stoic stance. Stoics' reception of causality can shed light on the relation between causality and language. In this respect, Stoics differentiate between two types of causality. One is the “all-encompassing system of interactions causes” and this system is “beyond our grasp” (Due, 2007, p. 54). As Due maintains, “by contrast, the predicates that we ascribe to things in ordinary language use and the causes we perceive in experience do not correspond to this all-encompassing order” (p. 54). Accordingly, Deleuze develops his idea of destiny from this distinction. For him, “the life we actualize, is a variation and repetition of the composition of causes that we virtually are” and “this is how we represent our lives to ourselves” (Due, 2007, p. 55). In this respect, the empirical language cannot convey the persona's perception. He is aware of the necessity of another language but he also knows that his chances to reach that language in this world are almost impossible.

The ironic lines, “‘And a little child,’ the Book tells us/ ‘shall lead them.’ But this one/ has a linguistic club/ in his hand with which, old as we are,/ he trounces and bludgeons us senseless” (Thomas, 2004, p. 218) create the antagonism of an innocent child and a tyrant. Braidotti asserts that in nomadic perception “there are no mother tongues, only linguistic sites from which one takes one's departure” (2002, p. 94-95). In the allusion to Isaiah 11:6, peace and harmony of the opposite entities are signified. But these lines also subvert the possibility of such a peace. The hegemonic and discursive power of language is consolidated with the image of “linguistic club,” (Thomas, 2004, p. 218) which entraps the persona with its own linearity, causality and corporeality.

In another poem, “The Lost” in *Mass for Hard Times*, the nomadic movement is developed through the dead. In nomadism, death is “not entropy or the return to inert lifeless matter, but rather the opening of new intensities and possibilities of the inhuman or non-human kind” and should be “freed from the double burden of mechanism and finalism in order to be experienced as merging with the endless generative energy of a cosmos that is supremely indifferent to humans” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 248). In his poems, R. S. Thomas relates how a human being can negotiate with death while he is alive and emphasizes it as the

nurturing power rather than regarding it as the obstruction of time and productivity. Death offers another spatial and temporal network in which intersubjectivity stops. It also promises a space in which “socio-political mechanisms” cannot “mark, police, sustain and repress the subject’s inner freedom defined as *potential* or *conatus*” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 150). In the lines “Speak to them/ they will not/ hear. Write them letters,/ they will not receive them” (Thomas, 2004, p. 202), the persona acknowledges the indefinable or impenetrable realm of death since it is “beyond” the control of grand narratives of this world, as poeticized in “They are beyond the reach/ even of an Amen. The Grand Inquisitor’s countenance// is averted” (p. 202).

The following lines signify the importance of threshold in nomadic subjectivity,

. . . Jesus

too? The bread of the one

and freedom of the other

offer no more light

to the nameless than does

the mildew forming upon both. (Thomas, 2004, p. 202)

Reaching a threshold is made obvious by the bodily indications or transformations in appearance. Braidotti argues that although psychoanalysis regards such anomalies as fear or anxiety as the symptoms waiting to be detected, she “see[s] them as corporeal warning signals or boundary markers that express a clear message: ‘too much!’” (2006, p. 159). She also adds that that is why Deleuze and Guattari study such “self-destructive” disorders such as masochism and anorexia “in order to explore their function as markers of threshold” (p. 159). Similarly, R. S. Thomas projects the sense of threshold in his advancing age into his later poems such as “Afon Rhiw” in which the persona likens himself to a tree, roots and thoughts since “their best place/ was among the shadows rather/ than being drawn into the light’s/ dryness to perish of too much air” (2004, p. 203).

In another poem, “Geriatric” the threshold is poeticized with the lines as “Despite withered/ petals, I recognize/ the species: Charcot, Ménière, Alzheimer . . .” (Thomas, 2004, p. 213). Likewise, in “The Lost” of *Mass for Hard Times*, neither “the Grand Inquisitor” nor “Jesus” can provide an access to the “nameless” (p. 202) or the nomadic due to the fact both Inquisitor and Jesus are formulated within the structure of a reason-based anthropocentric system.

“Grand Inquisitor” is a direct reference to a parable told in *The Brothers Karamazov*. “The bread of the one” (Thomas, 2004, p. 202) refers to the three temptations rejected by

Jesus, one of which is turning all stones into bread, but he refuses them in favour of freedom. “Grand Inquisitor” can be interpreted as the institutionalized form of faith and “Jesus” as the sincere and intuitive one within the frame of the parable told in *The Brother Karamazov*. However, according to the persona “the mildew” (Thomas, 2004, p. 202) coating of the two narratives as the image of threshold is far more promising for giving voice to the “nameless” (p. 202) by the reason of that the fungi image heralds the closeness to the boundary. Contrary to the ones feeling safe and at home in the centre, the persona of “The Lost” cherishes the darkness to the light, moisture and the rottenness to the dryness.

According to Braidotti, “the enfleshed intensive or nomadic subject is rather a transversal entity: a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding-outwards of affects” (2006, p. 156). For R. S. Thomas, this “enfleshed” (Braidotti, 2006) nomadic subject is described with ‘the poet’ in “Circles” of *Mass for Hard Times*. The opening lines, “Old men looked back, the young/ forward. What did it matter/ in a round world? Love/ and truth keep their place//on the horizon” (Thomas, 2004, p. 173) spatialize the linear temporality by stressing on the flux. The poet as the nomad cannot securely establish an intersubjective relation with “the men” (p. 173) because they only rely on the royal sciences in Deleuze’s words and disregard the poet’s words “as though their main/ hope was the electron” (p. 173).

men crowded a glass  
waiting for it to break  
out into new orbit,  
ignoring the poet  
who, from the rope-trick  
of the language, called down  
like an angel stranded  
somewhere between earth and heaven. (Thomas, 2004, p. 173)

“The rope-trick/ of the language” (p. 173) visualizes how the poet moves towards a cross direction from the one accepted by the settlers of “a glass” (p. 173). The poet as “transversal entity” (p. 173) is positioned in a grey line between earth and heaven by calling into mind the pagan poet Virgil staying in limbo in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Since Virgil is not judged within the paradigms of the Christian doctrine, he is left out of punishment. In a similar way, since the nomad cannot be evaluated within the settled norms of the dominant or centred, he is just “ignor[ed]” (p. 173). ‘Cut and restore rope-trick’ spell also signifies the working mechanism of the language of royal science or enunciation. Basically, it refers to the

illusionary connection of language, of which the poet is aware. Instead of circles, it deliberately demonstrates ruptures as holistic entities. As "Circles" delineates, the nomadic persona tries to understand his situatedness within the boundaries of corporeality and reason. Similarly, in "Legend" from *Residues*, 'poet' is described through the persona who retells the stories of Mohammad or Moses who are 'enlightened' in the solitude of the mountain and presents his madness as a favor rather than an impediment. By climbing to the "holy mountain/ thinking to be at dawn/a poet or a dead man, but not mad, not mad: I was that already" (Thomas, 2004, p. 304) he comes across with "the tempter" on the way to home and he offers him "the kingdom of this world" (p. 304) for his poetry and only his "insanity" (p. 304) saves him. Poet as nomad has two options to cope with the symbolic order: either to be dead or mad. In both situations, the imposing order is disrupted and reformulated.

In another poem "Aside," in *Mass for Hard Times*, Thomas sets his argument of cyclical time on the double meaning of 'aside.' The title suggests a literary device, 'aside,' intended only for being heard by us as readers, the universal history of man. 'Aside,' as the adverb of place, also proposes the difference between the royal and nomad sciences with their opposing perception of progression. As Pickering points out, "the royal sciences are integral to the established state, while the nomad sciences sweep in from the steppes to undermine and destabilize any settled order" (2010, p. 155). The opening lines,

Cold beach, solitary  
sea with its monotone  
on the shingle; the ring  
in the rock prohibiting  
the conviction that no one

has been here before. (Thomas, 2004, p. 158)

poeticize the "stumbling block" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 192) of the narratives or language that hinder any access to the memories or plurality by creating its sense of a definite and unique origin. Conversely, the nomadic subject is "a mobile unit in space and time and therefore an enfleshed kind of memory, this subject is not only in process, but is also capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 156). But the nomad never denies his intersubjectivity (even if Thomas speaks with death in order to get away from intersubjectivity) and "the ring in the rock" (p. 158) image visualizes such a bond between a mountaineer and the mountain he climbs or a shipman binding his boat to the ring on the rock.

Ring image consolidates or miniaturizes the circles the persona finds as the glimpses of the imaginary resources. He believes “yet wisdom,”

is at our elbow, whispering,  
as at his once: Progress  
is not with machine;  
it is a turning aside,  
a bending over a still pool,  
where the bubbles arise  
from unseen depths, as from truth  
breathing, showing us their roundness  
the roundness of our world. (Thomas, 2004, p. 158)

The above lines suggest the ontological separation between the royal and the nomad sciences. The royal science regards the world as a “knowable place” and its working mechanism can be grasped through a “cognitive” process (Pickering, 2010, p. 157). On the contrary, cybernetics as a nomad science perceives the world as an “unknowable” place and we can only “adapt performatively” (p. 157). Because the royal sciences are reason-based with the assumption of that every entity can be explained within the frame of cause and effect relation, the nomad science is marginalized with the paradigms of the established one. But R. S. Thomas, criticizes the progressive idea of the royal science embodied with ‘machine’ or technology moving on a definite line (beginning from his early poems such as “Cynddylan on a Tractor”), and suggests another progress, the destination of which is not an outward voyage but an inner one, not from predetermined origins but from “unseen depths” (p. 158) and not from the centre but from the threshold. In *Mass for Hard Times*, another poem, “Retired” signifies the alternative notion of progress in “Aside” with the lines “Not to worry myself anymore/ if I am out of step, fallen behind./ Let the space probes continue; I have a different distance to travel” (Thomas, 2004, p. 147).

As Braidotti clarifies, “this sense of limits is extremely important to ensure productive synchronizations [in the poem, roundness of bubble with that of the world] and prevent nihilistic self-destruction. To be active, intensive or nomadic, does not mean that one is limitless” (2006, p. 156). In “Circles” from *No Truce with the Furies*, “astronauts” take the place of the poet in order to experience the sense of the limitless (since “limitless space took them to itself; weightlessness possessed them”) within the limited nature of the body (Thomas, 2004, p. 243). But this feeling of boundlessness does not last long due to the fact

that man is dependent on the machine and the order from which it is nurtured, "their instruments were alerted; a forgotten gravity/ began drawing them down to/ where they had set forth" (p. 243). Their experience enables them to understand that even "infinity" (p. 243) or the limitless is "was round" (p. 243) and destabilizes the teachings of the royal science for a moment. However, the ones waiting for them in the world are not their "wives" or "children" as the symbols of peace and domestic relief, but "the old senators,/ statesmen were lined up in their funereal clothing, ready/ as ever to declare war," (p. 243) as the "Grand Inquisitors" of the existing epistemology. "Funereal clothing" (p. 243) of the administrators visualize the loss of freedom sensed in the infinite.

"Journeys" and "Stations" from *Mass for Hard Times*, subvert the existence of a real starting or ending point. Accordingly, the nomadic subject of "Journeys" is aware of "the deception of platforms/ where the arrivals and departures/ coincide," which are defended through the hidden "knowledge that destinations are the familiarities/ from which the traveller must set out" (Thomas, 2004, p. 152). Since "nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections," in Braidotti's words (2011, p. 42), the nomadic persona's awareness of the delusions does not draw him into pessimism but into an existential stance in which he reconciles with "Illusory Arrivals," due to "the only way I had come by going on and on (Thomas, 2004, p. 234). In "Stations," the persona cannot make sense why we keep the hegemony of an illusion with the lines, "there is no hill beyond this one/ we roll our mind to the top/ of, not to take off into/ empty space, nor to be cast back down/ where we began, but to hold the role assigned to us" (Thomas, 2004, p. 140). But Thomas balances this ambivalence in another poem "Bleak Liturgies" by asking "Where to turn," "To whom to appeal" and "Are we our own answer" (p. 184).

### Conclusion

Consequently, "Cynddylan on a Tractor" and "The Empty Church" signify the poet's vacillation between hope and despair. The peasant and church images do not provide relief for the observant eye, which creates a fluidity shattering the stereotyped judgments. But the same images clarify the poet's political stance. Then a new phase starts for the poet. By rejecting its conformity, he takes a radical position against the order imposed by the society. The search for a different voice through the question of man's place in nature and religion leads the poet to the borders of loneliness in which he finds both glimpses of optimism and a poetic voice peculiar to Thomas.

**Altunsoy, Ş (2019). A bad-tempered old man writing from the periphery: thresholds in R.S. Thomas's poems. *Humanitas*, 7(13), 1-21**

R. S. Thomas depicts a nomadic persona in his early poems and the poems from *Mass for Hard Times* and *No Truce with the Furies*. As the titles of the poetry collections suggest, the poet tries to find a mass that would provide relief as the religious ceremonies promise to do for the believers. Since he does not feel himself at home with religion, politics and science, these Furies do not stop haunting him by reminding the indispensable intersubjectivity. Deliberately choosing to be at the margin, the persona walks on the borders trying to find an outlet that would let him out of the stabilized. By discovering the impossibility of such an option, he turns back to the temporality of the order, but he grasps the glimpses of what he yearns for in the “Boundaries” through the flux and reflux,

The country has ebbed over  
the centuries, taking the town with it,  
and now the town welcomes itself back,  
time's castaway floundering amid the jetsam. (Thomas, 2004, p. 258)

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