



Dylan Thomas and Wales

people – places – poetry

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2016-12-08

Many thanks to the class participants for comments and suggestions!

Who was Dylan Thomas?

Who was Dylan Thomas?

- Childhood and teens in Swansea, 20km from Llanelly where I lived in my teens a generation later – a mainly English-speaking area
- One year older than my father, who recalled drinking with Dylan Thomas in Carmarthen
- We used to go fishing for sewin (sea-trout) on the River Taf; Dylan Thomas' famous 'Boathouse' is on the right bank of the Taf estuary in Laugharne



Who was Dylan Thomas?

Born in 1914 into a well-situated middle-class Welsh-speaking household:

- David John ('D.J.') Thomas (B.A. Hons, Aber.)
 - English teacher at Swansea Grammar School
 - poet and intellectual, with famous poet relatives
 - very strict and much disliked by pupils and neighbours
 - prevented Dylan from speaking Welsh
 - read Shakespeare to Dylan as a small child
 - revered by Dylan, who showed him all his poetry
- Florence Hannah Williams
 - seamstress
 - housewife
 - 'give him paper and pencils and he would be happy'

Who was Dylan Thomas?

School:

- magazine: published poems; editor
- left school at 16

Journalist

Poet:

- perhaps the most famous poem at age 19:

And Death shall have no Dominion

- entered leading literary circles in London, met and married Caitlin Macnamara ‘the wicked woman’

Reputed to have collapsed into a coma in New York after drinking 18 double whiskies – but apocryphal: asthma, pneumonia, malpractice

YouTube biographies

An excellent BBC documentary:

[Dylan Thomas Biography](#)

Dylan Thomas – an autobiographical account:

[Dylan Thomas Reminiscences](#)

Timeline

T.S.Eliot

Augustus John
Caitlin Macnamara

A.J.P.Taylor

first poems

Under Milk Wood

school journalist

marriage

USA tours

1914

1931

1934

1937

1938

1944

1950

1952

1953



Swansea

London visits

Laugharne

New Quay

London

Laugharne

People

People



The Enigmas

Sensitive, cultured, polite – yet extrovert, quarrelsome bohemien

Welshness: preferred to live in Wales – but English-speaking

The Anglo-Celtic paradox: – Welsh-Irish-English

- Dylan Thomas claimed he spoke no Welsh
 - his father tried to ensure that he learned no Welsh
 - South Wales is basically English-speaking
 - on recordings no Welsh accent
- Caitlin Macnamara was English-speaking
 - born and bred near London
- Yet:
 - Dylan Thomas' parents and other relatives were Welsh-speaking, and gave him Welsh names: Dylan Marlais (though his sister was called Nancy)
 - Dylan and Caitlin also gave their children Welsh and Irish names: Llewelyn, Aeronwy Bryn, and Colm Garan Hart

Sources and traces of Welsh influence

- Sources:
 - Welsh as a school subject
 - Welsh and Welsh accents all around (friends and relatives)
 - Welsh chapels (Congregationalist), song:
 - Male Voice Choirs
 - Welsh poetry:
 - Eisteddfod
 - relatives were eminent poets
- Traces:
 - Welsh sound pattern techniques in poetry
 - Welsh intonation, incantation, declamation

Poetry: Cynghanedd and incantation

Do not go gentle into that good night (Dylan Thomas)
Do not go gentle into that good night (Richard Burton)

(YouTube)

Writing poetry is hard work

Dylan Thomas' daughter Aeronwy said in an interview that writing poetry was hard work for her father. He would declaim, rewrite, make lists of rhyming words, use thesauri and dictionaries, take days or even weeks to write a single verse.

Dylan Thomas wrote in a very form-oriented tradition, characteristic of the poetic tradition of Welsh language poetry, despite the emotionality of the content.

The poem “Do not go gentle into that good night” shows many intricate features of this tradition.

Do not go gentle into that good night – a villanelle

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.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

A villanelle (also known as villanesque) is a nineteen-line poetic form consisting of five tercets followed by a quatrain. There are two refrains and two repeating rhymes, with the first and third line of the first tercet repeated alternately until the last stanza, which includes both repeated lines.

Do not go gentle into that good night – cynghanedd (a complex alliteration)

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.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
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Dylan Thomas and the tradition of Welsh sound artistry – very strict attention to form and sound:

- **Cynghanedd**
- **Alliteration**
- **Assonance**

A villanelle.

Do not go gentle into that good night – cynghanedd and alliteration

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.

d-n-t
ou-ei

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning **they**
Do not go gentle into that good night.

th-n
k-th

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
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Cynghanedd (harmony):

1. two-part line
2. consonants in first part repeated in order in second part

(and alliteration)

Bold: cynhanedd
Underlined: alliteration

Do not go gentle into that good night – assonance

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**.

Though **wise** men at their end know dark is **right**,
Because their words had forked no **lightning** they
Do not go gentle into that good **night**.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how **bright**
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the **light**.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in **flight**,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good **night**.

Grave men, near death, who see with **blinding sight**
Blind eyes could blaze **like** meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the **dying** of the **light**.

And you, my father, there on the sad **height**,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good **night**.
Rage, rage against the **dying** of the **light**.

Assonance:

/ai/

Do not go gentle into that good night – assonance

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.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning **they**
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last **wave** by, crying how bright
Their **frail** deeds might have danced in a green **bay**,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too **late**, they grieved it on its **way**,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could **blaze** like meteors and be **gay**,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I **pray**.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Assonance:

/ai/

/ei/

Do not go gentle into that good night – assonance

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.

Though wise men at their end **know** dark is right,
Because their words had forked **no** lightning they
Do not **go** gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not **go** gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not **go** gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Assonance:

/ai/

/ei/

/ou/

Do not go gentle into that good night – performance

Oral performance is more important than the written form

Dylan Thomas' performance style is in the Welsh tradition of poetry intoning, incantation, declamation, preaching:

Dylan Thomas: Do not go gentle into that good night

Note

- precise, full articulation of all consonants to emphasise cyghanedd and alliteration
- lengthening of vowels to emphasise rhyme and assonance

Do not go gentle into that good night – semantic patterning

The poem was written for Dylan Thomas' dying father. Resist the temptation to “rage, rage” literally when reciting the poem – note a breath of irony, perhaps helplessness in his own reading:

wise men ... good men ... wild men ... grave men

... and then:

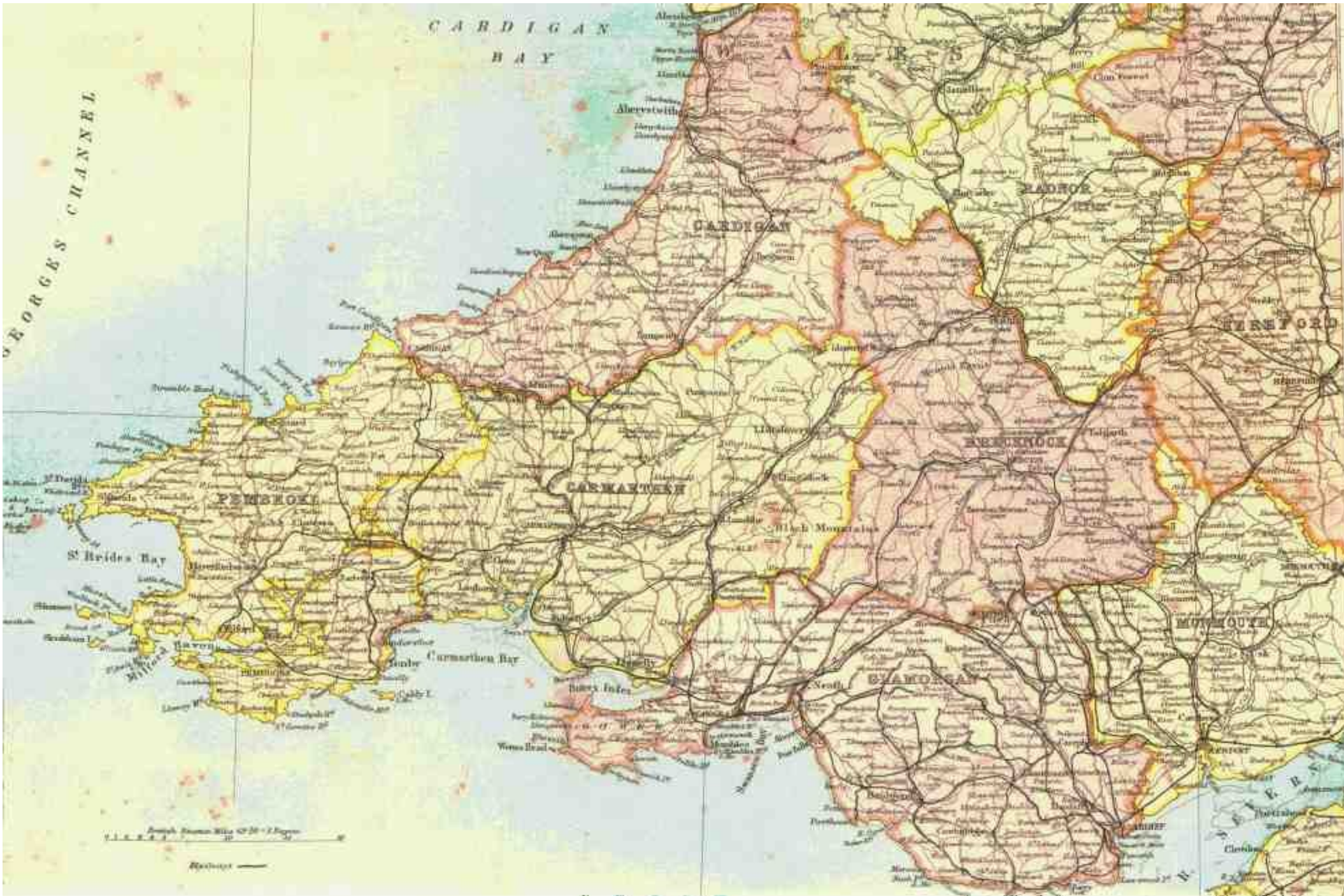
And you, my father

When reading this line, hear Dylan Thomas appealing to his father, a very strict father and teacher, who would have scolded him many times – though he revered him and always showed his father his work first:

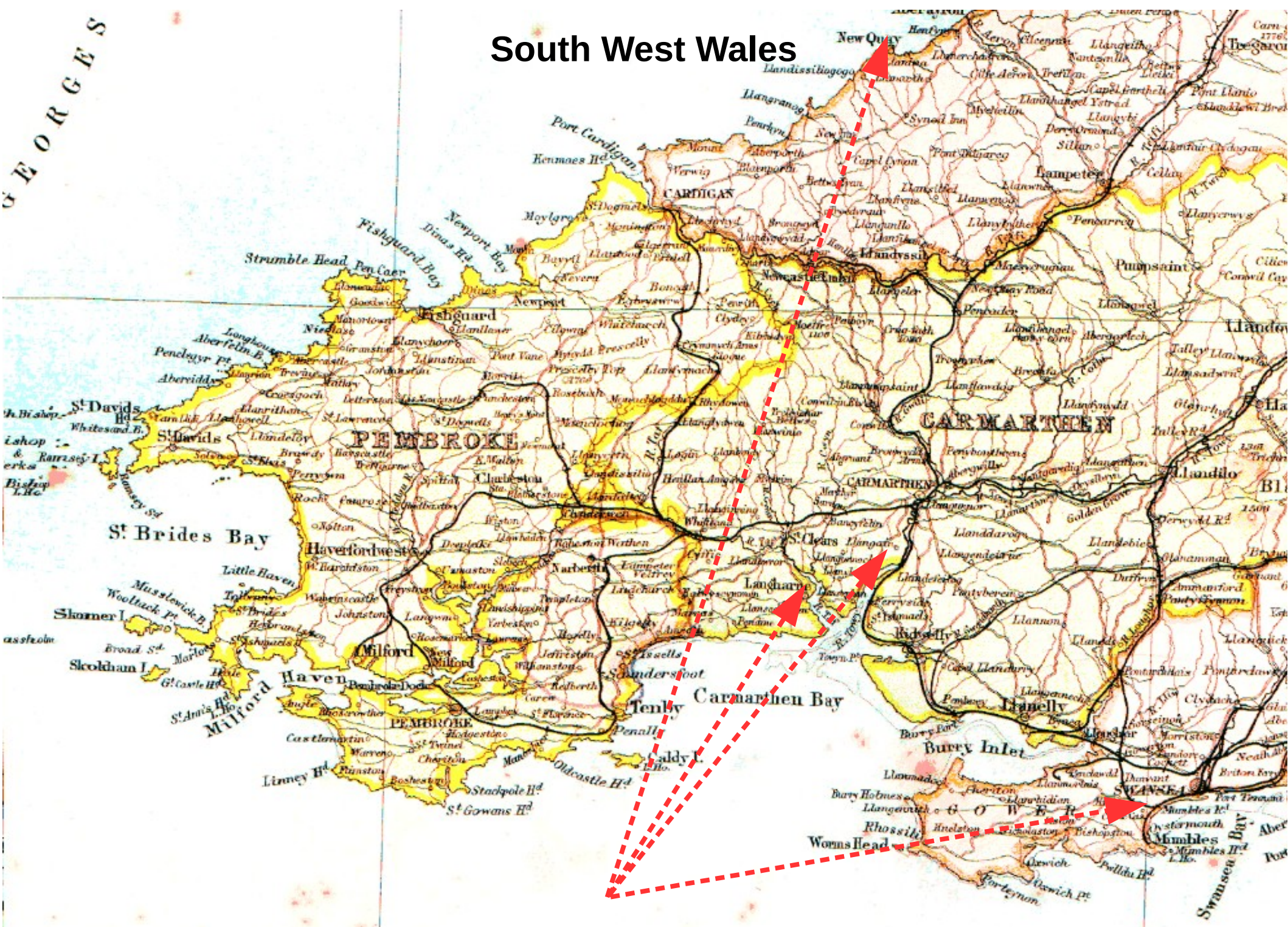
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.

Places

South Wales



South West Wales



Carmarthenshire

Birthplace and home for 19 years:

- 5 Cwmdonkin Terrace, Swansea

Aunt Ann Williams, Fernhill Farm, Llangain



Places: Fern Hill Farm

Fern Hill (Dylan Thomas)
Fern Hill (Richard Burton)

Location

After the Funeral (In Memory of Ann Jones)

In the front parlour of Fernhill, a place
traditionally used only for special occasions:

In a room with a stuffed fox and a stale fern I stand,
for this memorial's sake, alone

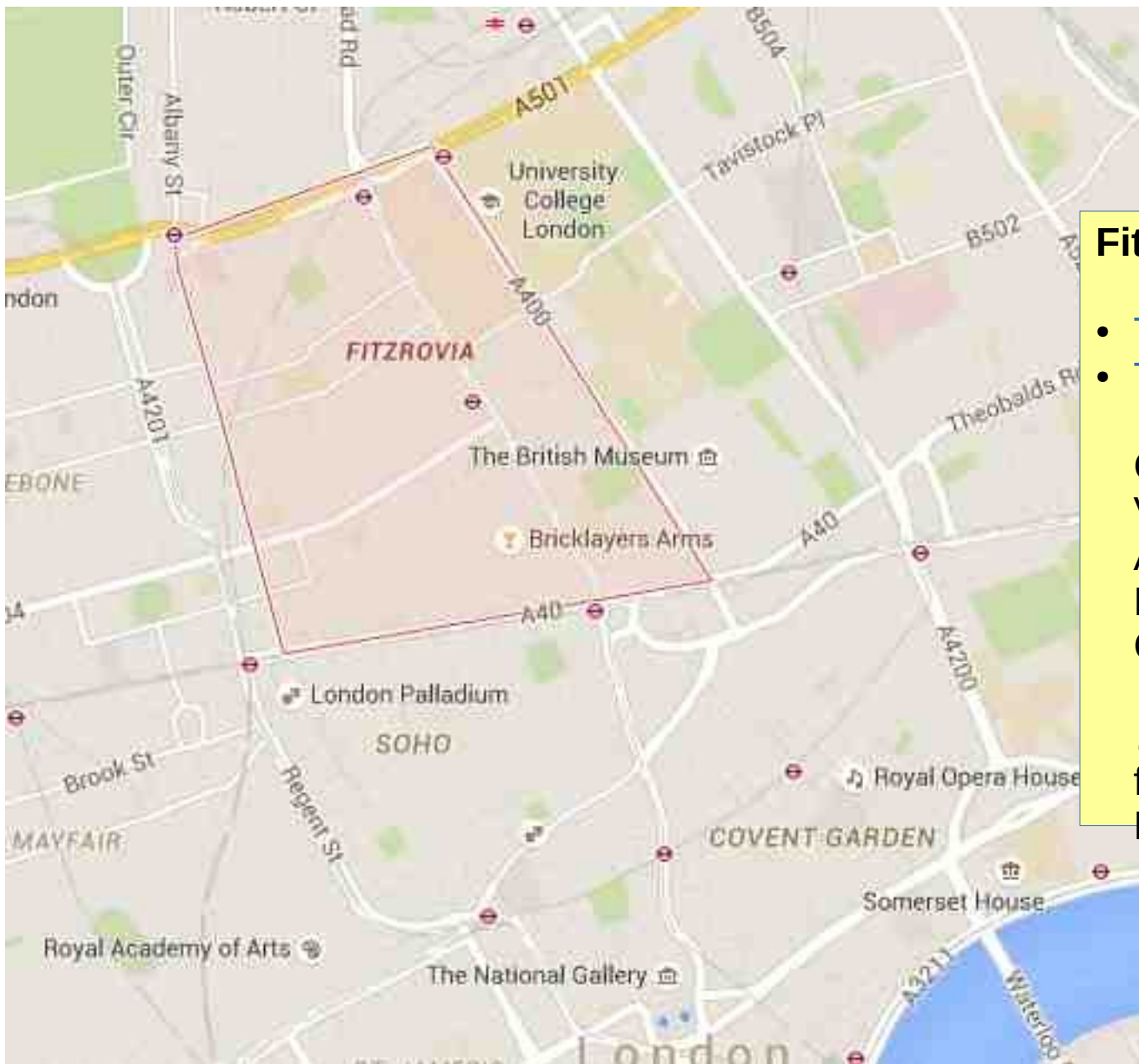
In the snivelling hours with dead, humped Ann.”.



- Fern Hill Farm, Llangain

- <https://www.google.de/maps/@51.8158758,-4.361851,3a,75y,11h,90t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1smu4mgOzT-LH6-lhsvuJf6w!2e0!7i13312!8i6656!6m1!1e1>

Visits to London: Fitzrovia – met literati (and Caitleen)



Fitzrovia

- The Fitzroy Tavern
- The Wheatsheaf

George Bernard Shaw
Virginia Woolf
Augustus John
Dylan Thomas
George Orwell

... and lots of others
from Karl Marx to Jimi
Hendrix ...

Places: New Quay, Cardiganshire

New Quay - Llaregub

Cnwc y LiLi, NewQuay (MaJoDa)

Majoda, Cnwc y Lili, New Quay

(near the house of Major Philips & Vera)

Why 'Under Milk Wood'?

A family legend: Grandfather's farm 'Dan-y-coed' - Under the Wood



We found my grandfather's farm sign, broken and almost lost in the hedge, many years ago (photo thanks to Doris).

Milk Wood – romance, eros, fertility

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 Llaregyb Hill, dewfall, starfall, the sleep of birds in Milk Wood.

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

Lily Smalls, Mrs Beynon's treasure, comes downstairs from a dream of royalty who all night long went larking with her full of sauce in the Milk Wood dark

Hullo, Polly my love, can you hear the dumb goose-hiss 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?

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

New Quay - Llaregub

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.

Portraits of famous bards and preachers, all fur and
wool from the squint to the kneecaps, hang over
him heavy as sheep, next to faint lady watercolours
of pale green Milk Wood like a lettuce salad dying.

Look up Bessie Bighead in the White Book of
Llaregyb 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.

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.

New Quay - Llaregub

The thin night darkens. A breeze from the creased water sighs the streets close under Milk waking Wood. The Wood, whose every tree-foot's cloven in the black glad sight of the hunters of lovers, that is a God-built garden to Mary Ann Sailors who knows there is Heaven on earth and the chosen people of His kind fire in Llaregyb's land, that is the fairday farmhands' wantoning ignorant chapel of bridesbeds, and, to the Reverend Eli Jenkins, a greenleaved sermon on the innocence of men, the suddenly wind-shaken wood springs awake for the second dark time this one Spring day.

Places: Laugharne, Carmarthenshire

eating – drinking

Brown's Hotel, Laugharne, Carmarthenshire

home

links

contact



'Go to the Brown's, buy
a Felinfoel and ask for
me, they know where I
live...'

Dylan Thomas

BROWN'S  **HOTEL**
Bar with Rooms



Food



Rooms



Deals



Events

Brown's Hotel, built in 1752, is an iconic literary address, the social hub of Laugharne and the favourite watering hole of poet and writer Dylan Thomas, who famously left the bar's phone number as his own.

Brown's has 15 en-suite rooms refurbished to a superb standard ('Cool factor 9/10' - The Times), home-cooked pub grub, local ales, Penderyn Whisky (check out their new '[Dylan Icons Of Wales](#) Special Edition single malt), wi-fi, car-parking, [meeting room](#), library and the 'dartboard' story. Fans of literature and whisky might want to check out our special [Lower Literature & Laugharne 2 night deal](#) (For

Laugharne, Browns Hotel and Felinfoel Ales

Laugharne

- The Boat House
- Browns Hotel – Felinfoel Ales

[Laugharne Map](#)

[Laugharne Street View](#)



'Go to the Brown's, buy
a Felinfoel and ask for
me, they know where I
live...'

Dylan Thomas



Under Milk Wood: Laverbread (bara lawr)

Laverbread is an ancient Welsh delicacy made from seaweed (laver).

The main type of seaweed used is purple laver (*Porphyra umbilicalis*), actually a brownish colour, which becomes a dark green paste after washing (to remove sand) and boiling for several hours.

A common method of serving laverbread is to mix it with oatmeal before frying it in cakes. Richard Burton once described it as “Welshman’s caviar.”



Dylan Thomas' favourite breakfast

Bangers



Gammon

Cockles

Laverbread
(bara lawr)

Under Milk Wood: Welsh National Costume



My great great great great great aunt
Jemima Nicholas, 'the Welsh
heroine', who saved Great Britain
from the French in Fishguard,
Pembrokeshire, in 1797!



From a distance she and her
girlfriends looked like a battalion of
British Redcoats and the French
surrendered.

Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi!

