Conclusion

The human psyche is built upon processes fuelled by the energy that emerges from the equilibration of a plethora of opposites. The conscious-unconscious whole that constitutes the psyche hinges on the balance of power, between the spirit and the instinct. This contrariety is integral in the development of the personality, and thus has no moral significance. “Nothing so promotes the growth of consciousness as this inner confrontation of opposites” (Jung, Memories 378). Polar opposites exist side by side as correspondences and no position can be established, much less thought of, without the corresponding negation. It is also impossible to conceive of the existence of a being without opposites. These counter positions form the twin poles of that psychic one-sidedness and therefore are not symptoms of the abnormal. On the contrary, this phenomenon is typical of a normal, modern man.

In Carl Jung’s system, this conflict between polarities becomes the prime motivator of all behaviour. Striving towards wholeness and a more heterogeneous vision of reality involves the integration of the self, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The development of the centre of the personality – the self – leads to the process of individuation. This inevitable process of inner transformation marks a quest for a heightened awareness as well as expression of opposing components of the personality. The undifferentiated functions in the self are characterised by the qualities of
ambivalency and ambitendency. Differentiation consists in separating the individual parts from other parts and also incorporates the separation of selected functions from other functions. Individuation simultaneously allows various bipolar systems to reach the fullest degree of differentiation, development and expression.

Ambivalence permeates and is re-created in the disparate structuring of the world. Zygmunt Bauman’s *Modernity and Ambivalence* is an exhaustive reflection on how modern existence often forces its own culture into opposition to itself. “Ambivalence is arguably the modern era’s most genuine worry and concern, since unlike other enemies, defeated and enslaved, it grows in strength with every success of modern powers” (15). The thesis-antithesis dialectic becomes crucial in the dynamics of human existence.

The ambivalent complex is also relevant in Freud’s system of psychoanalysis and Jung’s ideas on the functioning of the personality. Fluctuating strands also appear in theology e.g. in Pauline theology, especially with reference to the law. It is reflected in the writings of St. Augustine and in the concept of the *deus absconditus*. The nihilism of Nietzsche and the wrought out faith of Kierkegaard are straddled with vacillating elements. The concept of ambivalence also pervades not only the fringes, but also the core of literature. Besides being associated with several literary devices, it emerges as a fundamental structural device in the history of English poetry.
This study discusses the ambivalences evident in the poetry of R. S. Thomas especially in the main themes: the cosmopolitan preoccupations of a post-industrial Wales, the complex tie that bonds humankind to the primal forces in the natural world and the poet’s own long quest for spiritual insights. The poet does not create a consistent “world-view,” nor does he commend a “philosophy.” Rather, the thorny contradictions in his work reveal the integrity with which the poet scrutinizes the impulses, ideas and images that throng him daily. Though rooted in and nurtured by the Welsh socio-cultural milieu, Thomas, in his poetry, spans universal dimensions in keeping alive his consciousness of the ambiguity of human experience.

Thomas’s poetry, finely balanced between sources where the hidden contraries of life strove to maintain an equilibrium, was authenticated by the same. The rich tension that emerged when a thematic analysis of his poetry was effected could be traced to various sources. His traumatic caesarean birth left a deep imprint on the sensitive soul of the poet and the pain associated with it generated a sense of inadequacy. The absence of his beloved father during the early years of his life later blended into the recurring image of the *deus absconditus*. His mother assumed the role of the archetypal female, Eve, and his complex relationship with her had vitally influenced his feelings on the female, religion and sex. The dilemma of a precarious existence between the consciousness of his self and the equally powerful consciousness of his insignificance later culminated in a fervent search for an invisible and mute
God. Thomas’s uncompromising and unimpeded quest for the hidden God inevitably incorporated the annihilation and remaking of the self. Kierkegaard’s vision of the self that strives indefinitely to define itself is relevant here. In the quest for an authentic selfhood, Kierkegaard claimed that there was no rational solution to the enigma of human existence. It could only be resolved by an act of will, in the moment before God. Thomas’s pursuit of the imaginary “Abercuawg” signified his desire for growth and expansion. Maintaining an equilibrium between his vocation as a priest and his career as a poet led to inner vacillations. The anomaly of Thomas’s unique position as a Welsh patriot who chose to serve in an English church also provided seeds for variations. His dissatisfaction with some of the norms of the functioning of the church, especially during the war and his personal preferences with regard to ecclesiastical concerns enabled him to sharpen his critical acumen. The renunciation of the linguistic exuberance that was associated with his earlier poetry signified his anxiety about an adequate linguistic medium to convey religious meaning.

By birth, a Welshman, by education and upbringing, an Englishman, Thomas had nevertheless always been sufficiently close to the Welsh language to be aware of his position as an outsider inside the Welsh nation. His journey along the English-Welsh border and his romanticised concept of the Welsh landscape and history instilled in him a desire to learn more about Wales. This developed into a deeper passion with his initiation into politics.
During the 1930s, many poets including Auden, Spender, MacNeice and Day Lewis reacted against traditional norms by incorporating political agenda in their poetry. Encouraged by Saunders Lewis, Thomas conceived of the possibility of deployment of art to serve a political vision.

Thomas succumbed to the myth of the “golden” Celtic society. Nationalism was manifested in the erudite references in his poetry to the rich Welsh cultural heritage, corroded by the invading English culture. Envisaging his role as a public one, involving the responsibility of curing a sick culture, Thomas sought to expose the decay and degeneration in the Welsh fabric. Poems like “Welsh History” (AL) and “Welsh Landscape” (AL), characterised by muted hope and uneasy tension, described the brave Welsh warriors who defended their nation, and the legends and anecdotes of the great that sustained them. Thomas seemed to be split between a reverence for the old traditions and the realization of the need for a new start. The pathetic condition of the farmers struggling to survive called for new reforms and the better standard of living associated with the process of anglicisation was a fact that could not be ignored. Through an ambivalent point of view that oscillated from fierce love, bordering on aggressive Welsh nationalism, to contemptuous hatred towards the Welsh race, Thomas attempted to recover Wales’s sense of pride in itself and in its vital position in the world. Unable to escape the tensions of a minority culture threatened by anglicisation and urbanisation, Thomas advocated a process of purification. He believed that
the Welsh must preserve and protect Welsh history and myth and was adamant about promoting the cause of the Welsh language. The presence of the English tourist in Wales diluting the shy, native culture was a sore that festered over the years. The apathy of the Welsh people in preserving their culture and their hypocritical acquiescence to the alien English culture, their avarice for money and consumer goods, the dominance of the machine which reduced man to the position of being part of a machine and the stultifying norms of nonconformist traditions became subjects of scrutiny. Thomas advocated a revaluation of the present situation founded on insights gleaned from past experience.

The profile of Wales that emerged in R. S. Thomas’s work was overwhelmingly rural and the Welsh peasant occupied a major part of it. Genuinely moved by the plight of the ignorant parishioners and ardently desiring to uplift the “animal” in the peasant, the priest gradually came to the baffling conclusion that there was no question of identification between them. The daily struggle of the hardworking farmers left them indifferent to the mysteries of the church and the niceties of art. Iago Prytherch became the prototype of man in nature and the poet was coerced to confront the superficiality of his accumulated knowledge. The tone of Thomas’s poems on the peasants ranged from a mocking disapproval to a grudging admiration, as the richness of the practical wisdom of the farmer stood in stark contrast to the hollow superiority of the poet. The peasant embodied an atavistic
courage, and his stamina in the wake of unfavourable seasons and circumstances represented an integrity of purpose in flesh and blood. The inarticulate, existential toughness of the peasant, struggling to endure in his little universe enabled the poet to shape his vision of how life went on.

The dilemma of the Anglo-Welsh writer who was an Englishman in his craft and a Welshman by instinct formed part of the literary problem of the poet. Even though he recommended the works of typical Welsh writers to younger poets, he confessed that he preferred reading English poetry because of his inability to grasp the subtleties of the Welsh language. The Welsh consciousness that throbbed within him, as he wrote in the alien English language led to frustration. Thomas conceded that English was a rich language, flexible and adaptable to the demands made upon it. He realized that the Welsh language could not hope to compete with the English language in a bilingual framework. Writers in a minority culture took a risk when they devoted their talents to promoting the culture of their native land. However, Thomas was adamant about preserving the native dialect and insisted that Welsh should be spoken everywhere. When he moved to Aberdaron, he could speak the Welsh language everyday with the villagers there and thus he found a personal resolution to his inner vacillations by speaking and living as a typical Welshman – a real Cymro – in Aberdaron.

Resplendent with the sights, sounds, scenes and sensual perceptions of the natural surroundings in Wales, Thomas’s poetry bespoke a powerful
empathy with ecological issues. In the green renaissance that enveloped his poetic output, nature not only served as a background, but was also the propagator of philosophical enquiry. The connectedness between human and nonhuman nature and the continuous dynamics of a creative-destructive universe evolved into focal concerns.

Many poems reaffirmed his belief in the pride and contentment derived from a close attachment with the earth. The regenerative and recuperative properties of the earth were extolled in poems like “A Day in Autumn” (PS), “The Evacuee” (AL), “Memories” (SYT), “Night Sky” (F), The Minister, etc. In “A Year in Lleyn” and The Minister, Thomas opined that an openness to nature enabled one to broaden one’s mind and spirit. Nature was grounded in evolution and “A Blackbird Singing” (PS) embodied universal overtones. In poems like “Fugue for Ann Griffiths” (WA), “Somewhere” (LS), “Evening” (BHN) and “Moth” (MHT) Thomas implied that freedom of thought emanated from an untainted countryside, which also enabled man to regain his spiritual bearings. This was why he deplored the depopulation of the countryside and the growth of industrialisation that usurped and destroyed the innocence of the green surroundings, where men used to live peacefully, in harmony with the laws of nature. Birds and the sea held a special fascination for the poet, who often endorsed the wisdom of observing them.

Thomas also conceived of a close connection between the divine and natural phenomena. In his autobiography, he claimed that God chose to
reveal Himself to him through nature (106). Allusions to biblical texts and sacramental references permeated his poems and the flooding of grace that he experienced in the moor, the woods, and the wild spaces became indispensable to his faith. Thomas postulated the need of turning aside and getting into a posture of attendant stillness, if one was to sense the presence of the “Infinite I.” Contemplation presupposed periods of emptiness and paradoxical experiences. This period of waiting was one, rife with the possibility of delving into deeper insights. Thomas believed that the intense spiritual integration of the multiple layers of the individual soul with the wider, natural cosmos was one capable of enervating mankind and enabling him to redefine himself.

The indifference, unfairness and even malevolence coursing through nature also became a source for his poetry. The paradox inherent in the instinctive predatory nature of the universe (that life should be obliterated for perpetuation of life) remained a riddle. The malevolence in nature, as depicted by Tennyson in *In Memoriam*, the drudgery of the daily routine of the farmer in the fields and the blank silence maintained by nature who jealously preserved her secrets became the mainsprings of many poems. Thomas made no attempt to enforce a point of intersection between the contradictory aspects of pitilessness and beauty found in nature, but preferred preserve the tensions evident in nature as twin sides of the same coin and as revelatory of the paradoxical nature of existence itself. Jung states that:
The conflict between the opposites can strain our psyche to the breaking point, if we take them seriously, or if they take us seriously. . . . If all goes well, the solution, seemingly of its own accord, appears out of nature. . . . it is usually an unfathomable mixture of conscious and unconscious factors . . . and attains the likeness of the God-image in the form of the mandala . . . . The clash, which is at first of a purely personal nature, is soon followed by the insight that the subjective conflict is only a single instance of the universal conflict of opposites. (Memories 367-368)

The existential angst, ontological perplexities and spiritual ambivalence that marked the struggle of the believer in maintaining his faith became crucial in the theological odyssey that manifested itself later in Thomas’s poetic career. Jung maintained that a harmonious balance between extroversion and introversion was imperative in the development of the self. The growth of Thomas’s poetic acumen was marked by transcendence from the outer physical landscape of Wales, its people and natural surroundings to the inner mental landscape of spiritual development, riddled with intriguing contradictions. The pursuit of the deus absconditus was mapped by a dialectic of absence and presence, silence and speech and faith and doubt. The existential loneliness experienced by the soul, poised for the “leap of faith” that Kierkegaard described in his works, Bishop Robinson’s proposal of
a shift from an “impersonal” to a “personal” concept of divinity and Tillich’s concept of “waiting” for divine revelation were manifested in diverse patterns in Thomas’s poetry.

His pursuit of the vanishing God liberated his imagination. The anthropomorphic projections in the early mythic poems were built on the Old Testament stories in innovative patterns. The sadistic, heartless deity who delighted in toying with creation, according to his whims and caprices, became a representative of the brutish world that has appeared in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Book of Job and in some of the Psalms of David. Other mythic poems gave the traditional account of the charitable Creator, who, moved by the plight of his suffering people, sent his Son to rescue them. By contemplating on the kindness and cruelty of God, Thomas broadened his approach to understanding the deity and this enabled him to transcend from a deistic approach to a theistic approach to God. Jung reiterates that:

The Christian God-image cannot become incarnate in empirical man without contradictions. . . . symbols, by their very nature, can so unite the opposites that these no longer diverge or clash, but mutually supplement one another and give meaningful shape to life. . . . the essence of the Christian message can then be understood as man’s creative confrontation with the opposites and their synthesis in the self, the wholeness of his personality. (Memories 370)
The way of negation to a personal relationship with God was an offshoot of Christian mystical theology. Both eastern and western philosophical traditions recognised the ineffability of God and the discernment of one's insignificance in the order of things led to spiritual insight. The apophatic theology postulated that God could be known through obscurity. Many of Thomas’s poems presented the priest on his knees, praying to a mute God and in his anguished attempts to grapple with the silent God, the priest gradually realized that absence, darkness, doubt and emptiness were concomitants of faith.

The poet gradually became conscious of a ubiquitous Presence that had been close by all the time, though not conspicuous. Poems like “The Bright Field” (LS), offered evidence of an eternal “now,” related to his staunch belief that by incorporating spiritual dimensions, a person could reintegrate the fragmented divisions in his self. “Kneeling” (NBF) depicts the simple but profound revelation that the poet arrived at: “The meaning is in the waiting” (16). The period of waiting in darkness for divine revelation was characterised by tension and ambivalence. It became a necessary prelude to true faith, which could only be built on a foundation of doubt. Tillich remarks:

Waiting means not having and having at the same time. . . . The fact that we wait for something shows that in some way we already possess it. . . . If we wait in hope and patience, the
power of that for which we wait is already effective within us. . .

We are stronger when we wait than when we possess. . . . Let us
not forget, however, that waiting is a tremendous tension. . . .

Waiting is not despair. It is the acceptance of our not having, in
the power of that which we already have. (The Shaking 151-153)

Life is a process of discovery and reality is revealed to those who have
the greatest depth of awareness. The paradigmatic inconclusiveness
associated with the malleable condition of modern life espouses the need for
facing these challenges by evolving new patterns of behaviour. Recognition
and acknowledgement of the ambivalent element that moulds life becomes
crucial and the ability of each person to face this challenge determines the
growth of his personality. Some people experience this more deeply than
others. Thomas’s acumen lay in his ability to confront, accept and develop the
bipolar, fragmentary dimensions (as postulated by Jung in his theory of
individuation) that provided depth to his “self.” The conflicting tendencies
were not always resolved, but were integrated, synthesised and
metamorphosised into constructive paradigms that defined a more genuine
acceptance of the riddle of existence. Ambivalence consequently became the
crux of this inner drive towards achieving wholeness.