

## LONDON MAGAZINE 1 SEPTEMBER 1957

### Recollections of Dylan Thomas By Geoffrey Grigson

Ditch, Dirty Dylan, the Changeling, the Ugly Suckling, the Disembodied Gland—these early private names were still not invented. The rumour which was to increase to the legend of the purest genius had scarcely begun, at this moment, in the Thirties, when, in a tea-room, an awkward *Mr* Thomas faced an awkward, also an unconvinced, *Mr* Myself across a corner table. The tea-room was in a courtyard between the dull quiet of the Temple and the dull mumble of Fleet Street

Young *Mr* Thomas was up from Cwmdonkin Drive, Swansea, in big London, where poets existed. He was uncertain of his part. He might, sitting there in the corner below the grey panes, have been acting a new Rimbaud. In features, still unpoached at this time, he looked rather like the Rimbaud portrayed in a group by Fantin Latour. But he had not heard of Rimbaud, in Swansea; he wore a different poetic uniform, imitated, I rather think, from a frontispiece of Rossetti when young. Curls thatched his head, a Bohemian poetry tie flowed down and out below his soft collar. He talked poetry, his biographers might be surprised to learn. Young but not quite so young *Mr* Myself suspiciously regarded this tie, and suspiciously heard a proffer of names he had not expected. Rossetti was one of them, Francis Thompson was another, James Thomson (B.V.) was a third. Stephen Spender, though, was a fourth.

Names, as I say, were proffered: were held out, withdrawn, held out again, much as one might offer bits of food to a beast of uncertain nature and temper with whom one found oneself unexpectedly but ineluctably roomed or cabined or boxed.

Our presence with each other was Stephen Spender's indirect doing. Odd poems above the name Dylan Thomas had appeared in the *Sunday Referee*, in the Poet's Corner conducted by the odd Victor Neuburg, a little man who for a while had been changed and enlarged into a camel by Aleister Crowley (a story invented, perhaps, by Thomas). I think Stephen Spender must have been one of the first unloony persons to remark on these poems and to enquire about their author, so fixing a label to him as 'someone to be watched'. I recall Spender assuring

me at any rate that I ought to ask Dylan Thomas for contributions to *New Verse*. He may have given my Dylan's address. Letters had gone to Wales, letters and poems in pale blue ink in that slow, leftward-sloping, pre-adolescent, unpersuasive hand from which Dylan never freed himself, had returned from 5 Cwmdonkin Drive and perhaps another Swansea address; and at this encounter we now *mistered* each other and investigated each other and *mistered* each other again, in the grey tea-room.

Dylan had not yet succeeded enough, or sloughed off enough . . .