

Under Milk Wood Dramaturg's Note by Dan Smith

Dylan Thomas considered writing a radio play about a small Welsh town in 1939 while living in Laugharne, which he called "the strangest town in Wales." For a fictional name, he coined "Llareggub," humorous when read backwards. Broadcast in 1944, *Quite Early One Morning* was modeled on New Quay; some text from this piece appears in *Under Milk Wood*. A 1950 draft entitled *The Village of the Mad* saw the citizens of Llareggub put on trial for insanity.

"Land of my fathers? My fathers can have it!"—Dylan Thomas

Despite Thomas' playful comment on the Welsh national anthem, *Under Milk Wood* offers a loving portrait of Welsh culture. Evans the Death and Dai Bread take part in a long Welsh tradition of being named for their occupation. Reverend Eli Jenkins dreams of winning the Eisteddfod: a bardic poetry competition accompanied by music from the crwth and pibgorn. Rev. Jenkins' sacred invocation of Welsh place names becomes a prayer for Llareggub, described by Mary Ann Sailors as both Garden of Eden and Promised Land.

While many dreamers in Llareggub dream bawdy dreams, their daily lives consist of deferred desires. Mog Edwards and Myfanwy Price write passionate letters to each other, but spend no time together because they run shops at opposite ends of town. Sinbad Sailors pines for prim schoolteacher Gossamer Beynon, who secretly lusts after him. Cherry Owen's wife informs him over breakfast that his drunkenness impeded the fulfillment of their fantasies of Biblical lovers.

"Do not go gentle into that good night..."—Dylan Thomas

The beloved dead are present in Llareggub. Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard rules the ghosts of her dead husbands much as she ruled their living bodies. Polly Garter sings of her drowned lover, while Bessie Bighead lays flowers on the grave of the man who kissed her. Captain Cat remembers dead Rosie Probert. Dylan Thomas' father died in 1951; death was surely much on Dylan's mind as he completed his manuscript for a projected 1953 broadcast. Thomas continually misplaced the manuscript, once leaving it at a London pub. In October 1953, he traveled to New York for readings at the Poetry Center. Dylan Thomas died on 9 November 1953, purportedly after having drunk eighteen whiskies. *Under Milk Wood* aired on the BBC in January 1954.