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a) Introduction

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.

[...] And you, my father, there on that 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.

(Thomas 148)

Most people, with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and not a particular interest in English literature, will have no difficulties in defining the author of this poem. They will agree, that the world's most famous Welsh poet Dylan Thomas wrote it. On the one hand, it can be argued that the example reflects the great impact of Thomas' work on the genre of poetry, whereas on the other hand, it has to be understood as an expression of the poet's popularity. Indeed, since his premature death, Thomas' myth, which represents the poet as an "epitome of the self-doomed artist" (Wigginton), has become an integral part of contemporary popular culture: the movies *Dangerous Minds* and *Independence Day* include direct references to Thomas' poetry and in 2008 the first (and possibly not the last) Dylan Thomas movie *The Edge of Love* was released, portraying Dylan's relationship with his wife Caitlin and Vera Phillips. Furthermore, the American folk singer Bob Dylan named himself after the Welshman and the cover of The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* features a picture of the eminent poet. In this respect, one might ask how it is possible that a Welsh poet has been able to gain access to the collective consciousness of so many (famous) people. The answer is quite simple: because Dylan Thomas was the first modern celebrity of literature. Paul Ferris agrees when writing, "[n]o modern poet of any country has generated such a quantity of gossip, reminiscence and criticism" (312). Because of that, it is possible to discuss Dylan

Thomas from the perspective of star studies. In the following analysis it will be explained why the poet has to be defined as a star. Moreover, the study reveals the complex structure of Thomas' star persona. But what produces the fascination about Dylan Thomas and stars in general? It is the notion of realness that constitutes audience's main interest: "How was Dylan Thomas in real life?" The reader of this diploma thesis should know upfront that the study will not provide an answer to this essential question as an investigation in the field of star studies should not be mistaken for the enquiry of the celebrity's "true" self. Theodore Roethke writes that

[h]e [Dylan Thomas] was so rich in what he was that each friend or acquaintance seemed to carry a particular image of him: each had his special Dylan, whom he cherished and preserved intact, or expanded into a figure greater than life. (Roethke 50)

It shows that Thomas' star phenomenon, which can never be fully comprehended, is based on highly subjective and personal interpretations of Thomas' *personality*; those might be true or not. Therefore, the study has to be described as a collection of *images*, constructed identities, which compose the *star* Dylan Thomas.

Basically, the work is divided into three main sections: Section 1 is based on four central questions. What is a "star"-/ image? Thereby, the thesis compares different methodological approaches to the phenomenon and outlines a general model according to which Dylan Thomas' star persona will be examined. The discussion also involves a close consideration of Richard Dyer's vital distinction between private and public self. In this respect, I shall focus on a very specific type of source: the biography. This literary genre claims a deep understanding of the star's "real" personality. Who manufactures the star's image? Here, the thesis will illustrate the main image-makers: media texts, audience, the star and the star's body. How is the star's image produced? This part discusses general and star-specific features, which manufacture an individual star image. Is Dylan Thomas authentic – or when does he create a moment of intimacy? In this respect, one might ask whether Thomas' most famous poem *Do not go gentle into that good night* represents a direct reflection of his "real" self. The discussion will reveal that his poetry, as well as his Welsh origin and experience of suffering, constitute the main authenticators of his celebrity image(s). Moreover, we will examine Thomas' role of the media star from the perspective of authenticity. In section 2, I will turn to the concrete analysis of Dylan

Thomas' star persona. In this context, "the poet" is defined as the core identity of his various constructions. To put it differently, it is always the identity of the writer that is constructed and mediated in public. Hence, the following images can be outlined: the literary genius, the Welsh poet, the religious poet, the academic underdog, the bohemian, the immigrant, the media star and the suffering poet. In section 3, the study will investigate Dylan Thomas' stardom from a fundamentally capitalist point of view. It shall indicate how the poet's star status was and still is generally displayed, which relates to his role as an idol of production and consumption. To conclude, the discussion will consider the relationship between Dylan Thomas and Welsh tourism.

1. Methodology and analysis of the sources

This section shall represent and organise the works that have been consulted for this research and which constitute the theoretical background of the analysis of Dylan Thomas' star image. For this reason the sources are arranged systematically in terms of their historical period (year of publication) and field of investigation. The primary parameter allows us to distinguish between contemporary and historical sources, whereas the second dimension basically refers to the overall structure of this diploma thesis that can be expressed by four essential questions: What is a star/ image? Who or what are the image-makers? What are the main features of a star's image? What are the key constructions that compose the star's persona? Discussing critics' central arguments, it is possible to relate their various approaches to each other, indicating differences and similarities, and to group them according to our key problem areas. Therefore, the basic purpose of this investigation is to outline the various images (or identities) that compose Thomas' public star persona, which has to be described as the result of the accumulation of all his public representations. In this respect, it is of vital importance to provide a definition of the term star image by revealing its complex structure, which is generally analysed in terms of the vital distinction between private and public self. Moreover, the study intends to illustrate the dominant features that manufacture a particular star identity.

1.1. Stars and the image

The first thing to be considered is the star's significant role in contemporary society. Stars, which are the emblematic symbols of the constantly growing mass media industry, have become an indispensable part of our everyday life experience because they embody social values and the vital process of identity construction (Gledhill 214). Erin Meyers stresses the considerable weight of today's celebrity system as it provides its audience with

a space to make meaning of their world by accepting or rejecting the social values embodied by a celebrity image. (Meyers 891)

McArthur even claims that stars represent models of morality and lifestyle; a role traditionally assumed by the church (in Gledhill 214). Therefore, stars have to be understood as a reflection of human existence at a particular moment in time and in a

culturally specific context – they represent the ultimate human being. Gledhill Christine (1991) believes that the main purpose of stars is “condensing and dispersing desires, meanings, values and styles that are current in the culture” (217). Richard Schickel agrees with Gledhill when writing that celebrities serve as ideological symbols that produce meaning within a society that is dominated by capitalist forces (in Meyers 890).

But what is a star in particular? To answer this crucial question we have to refer to general star theories which are fundamentally based on film studies. Therefore I will introduce a profoundly novel perspective on the traditional star system, as familiar concepts will be applied to the field of literature. Furthermore, it has to be pointed out that in this thesis it will not be distinguished between the terms “star” and “celebrity” but they will be used synonymously. On the basis of Barry King’s (1985) terminology the concept of star consists of three basic components: person – image – persona (175). The term “person” refers to the star’s “real and individual” personality, which is reflected in his/her physical presence that is coded with specific, socially recognised, cultural markers (King 175). At this particular moment I will not consider the highly problematic definition of personality within the star context. As our theoretical background is largely based on the analysis of cinema stars, King defines the image as the relationship between the actor’s on- and off-screen “personality” emphasising the technological artificiality of the first (King 175). Thirdly, persona has to be understood as the “real-life” embodiment of the star’s image, which is for the most part expressed in terms of social types and/or individual variations on specific types (Gledhill 215). To put it differently, a star’s persona is the “articulation of person and image” (King 175).

As has been shown, the image represents the central element of stardom and thus requires a more detailed investigation, therefore I want to include a further perspective on this issue by considering Richard Dyer’s (1998) fundamentally semiotic approach in which star images are defined as “constructed personages in media texts” (“Stars” 97) that have to be analysed as “a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs” (qtd. in McDonald 34). In other words, a star’s image is always a mediated identity that provides its audience with a set of different meanings (McDonald 6). Like King, who separates the star’s on- and off-stage personality, Richard Dyer distinguishes between private (real life) and public self (construction) to dissolve the semantic complexity of the celebrity image. Gledhill Christine supports

Dyer's argument when stating that today's understanding of stardom was born when the off-screen/stage life of the actor became as important as his/her performer identity (213). In summary, it can be claimed that it is the image, which is carefully fabricated in relation to the star's "private" self, that turns the actor (the poet, the painter ...) into a star (King 174). It follows that star images have to be examined in terms of the distinction between private (off-stage) and public (on-stage) self. Therefore, King's paradigm (person – image – persona) which is essentially related to Dyer's true self-model (private versus public) constitutes the theoretical background for the analysis of Dylan Thomas' public image. From my point of view King states somewhat unclearly the relationship between image and persona. According to King's approach, different images (or identities) would have to produce different personae because each persona represents the "real life" equivalent of a very specific star image. In my investigation, however, I will use the term "persona" in the sense of the result of all the poet's different but closely related images: the public figure Dylan Thomas.

It has to be emphasised that Dyer's vital separation constitutes the fascination of celebrities as it makes the audience believe in the possible perception of the star's true person. Meyers describes this essential experience as the "illusion of intimacy" (892) – the creation of a "personal" relationship between the audience and the celebrity figure (892). McDonald argues that traditional star discourse has produced this separation through the manufacture of a professional and a private identity for the individual performer (32). Richard de Cordova even claims that the definition of the star is profoundly based on this paradigm – public versus private – in which both representations are considered autonomous spheres (26-27). In this context, stars often claim "an unmediated existential connection between their person and their image" (King 178) which produces the general misconception that there is no difference between the person on-and off-screen. Erin Meyers argues that the image as a direct reflection of the star's inner self is closely related to the question of realness and authenticity (892). Although the image is usually described as a part of the star's "real" self, it has to be clearly pointed out that the public has only access to a textual representation and not to the celebrity's person (McDonald 6; King 174). Therefore, biographies are essentially based on Dyer's vital separation, focussing exclusively on the star's private self. In our case, all the biographical sources

mutually claim a profound understanding of Dylan Thomas' "real" personality; thereby the various authors fashion themselves as reliable sources of truth. This means, those writers consciously operate with the notion of realness. However, it has to be firmly stated that a star's private side is never shown in public and any notion of it is as manufactured as his/her public image. Biographies, nevertheless, constitute an indispensable part of this study as they provide the most common representations of the "person" Dylan Thomas who constitutes their primary object of investigation. Biographers, who generally work under the pretence of objectivity, are able to manufacture a celebrity's life and personality in various ways. Tedlock Ernest (1961), for instance, produced a collection of personal accounts on the "person" Dylan Thomas by friends, family, fellow writers and other professionals. Bill Read (1965), on the other hand, illustrated Thomas' artistic progress by providing a chronological representation of the different stages of his writing career, always in direct reference to his "private" life. Both sources are based on the private-public-paradigm that is supposed to reveal the core personality of the poet. Due to its date of publication (1955), two years after the poet's death, Brinnin's novelistic perspective represents a source of enormous value. Brinnin, who firmly believes to have experienced the "real" Dylan Thomas, offers a wide range of different star identities that he analyses in terms of Dyer's true self model; stressing however the significant weight of Thomas' private self on the manufacture of his public image. Thus, Brinnin clearly fashions Thomas as a celebrity. The novel involves the following constructions: the immigrant, the drinking poet, the suffering hero, the womaniser and the modest genius. Caitlin Thomas also discusses the problematic separation between manufactured and "real" personality in her highly critical introduction to Brinnin's *Dylan Thomas in America*. She writes that

[t]here is no such thing as the one true Dylan Thomas, nor anybody else; but, necessarily, even less so with a kaleidoscopic-faced poet. He is conditioned by the rehearsing need to withhold from the light his private performance till it is ready for showing. (qtd. in Brinnin 1)

It shows that Caitlin constructs Thomas as the exclusive source to his complex personality who has complete control over its accessibility and revelation; hence she is not denying altogether the possibility of gaining an insight into the poet's true self. On the other hand, she describes Brinnin's account as an "one-sided" (1) representation that exclusively promotes "Dylan's public and falsely publicized life

version" (1). Brinnin, in contrast, insists upon his understanding of Thomas' *person* and underlines the destructive impact of the poet's legend that

still grows and changes and threatens altogether to becloud the personality of the man who wrote the poems of Dylan Thomas. (Brinnin 50)

Interestingly, Brinnin often constructs Thomas' presumed personality as the direct opposite of his public image that results in the central representation of the suffering hero. In contrast, John Ackermann (1964) is primarily concerned with the production of Thomas' identity as a poet in relation to his Welsh background (bardic tradition). In this respect, the critic provides a definition of the Welsh poet, which is characterised by discipline, hard work and a strong connection to nature as his main source of inspiration. Moreover, he considers Thomas' poetry an important authenticator of his star image as, so Ackermann argues; the poet's artistic expression derives directly from his inner self. In other words, his real personality is constantly reflected in his poetic work. Above all, Ackermann's representation indicates a continuous growth towards artistic maturity, which produces the image of the ultimate Welsh poet. Therefore, it is of key importance to include a discussion on poetic greatness, not to prove Thomas' superiority over his contemporaries but to specify the theoretical and historical context of Ackermann's assumption. Concerning this matter, historical texts will reveal that Ackermann's and Thomas' personal constructions of the poet-identity are based on a Celtic tradition, deeply rooted in the 18th and 19th century, which provides a fundamentally Romantic definition of art. In this context, the role of the poet is described in terms of (today conventional) star qualities. T.S. Eliot's (1982) approach on tradition and individual talent, which classifies the process of impersonalisation as an essential feature of poetic greatness, represents a strong counterpart to Ackermann's theory on the authenticating quality of Thomas' poetry. Lastly, I will integrate James Nashold's (1997) medical (operating with the notion of objectivity) investigation that tries to convey the "truth" behind the poet's premature death. There is, however, a strong focus on the star's private life; therefore it has to be defined as a predominantly biographical view on Thomas' stardom. Firstly, Nashold constructs the poet's death as the main source of his legend. Secondly, the work represents a defence against the stereotype of the drinking poet. Nashold argues that Dylan's presumed alcoholism has to be understood as a (typically Welsh) form of socialising. In this context, the writer does not only manufacture a specific

concept of “Welshness” but, above all, he fashions himself as an exclusive and reliable source of truth.

To conclude, it has to be stressed that all references to Dylan Thomas, whether they address his private or public self, are fabricated. Nevertheless, the idea of a star’s person will always remain audience’s main concern, as it is believed that the celebrity’s individuality forms an “irreducible core” (Dyer, “Heavenly Bodies” 8) of all his/her public identities.

1.2. Manufacturing a star image: the image-makers

In the previous sections I have discussed in great detail the concept of the star and his/her image, so that I am now turning to the second essential question of my thesis: Who or what produces the celebrity image? On the one hand, a star’s image can be normative, corresponding to social types; whereas on the other hand it might also be individuated which means the individual variation on a specific type (Dyer, “Heavenly Bodies” 3). This implies that in general images have to be made (Dyer, “Heavenly Bodies” 4). In other words, they are consciously produced by different sources such as agencies, media industries, fan clubs or the star him/herself (Dyer, “Heavenly Bodies” 4). The production of the image is based on an enormous machinery involving money, time and energy that is supposed to shape and manipulate the public perception of the star (Dyer, “Stars” 12). Promotion and publicity represent vital processes of image making. The two concepts are distinguished in terms of Dyer’s true self-model – whether they refer to the celebrity’s private or public self – and their deliberate contribution to image construction (Dyer, “Stars” 60-61). According to Richard Dyer, promotion includes all texts that are involved in the process of developing, producing and establishing a clearly defined image. This implies materials directly related to the public *persona* such as studio announcements, press hand-outs, pictures, fan club publications or public appearances (61). McDonald specifies that promotion mainly consists of the production, distribution and selling of the star’s public image to publishers, financial supporters and to the general public (52). In contrast, publicity is supposed to provide an exclusive insight into the star’s private life; the information appears to not be manufactured but accidentally delivered to the press (Dyer, “Stars” 61). Therefore, publicity is perceived as more authentic and “real” although it is as constructed as the promotional material (Dyer, “Stars” 61). McDonald considers scandals the only source of truly genuine publicity as they are

generally considered “the most intimate truths of a star’s identity” (33). As indicated in the following quotation, Dylan Thomas defines his rebel image as the most effective marketing strategy for the promotion of his poetry and prose. In a letter to his friend Vernon Watkins, Thomas reveals an interesting and rare insight into the publication process of his work:

‘I’ve just finished my Portrait . . . Young Dog proofs. Out in March. I’ve kept the flippant title [parody on Joyce’s novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*] for – as the publishers advised – moneymaking reasons.’ (qtd. in Ackermann 105)

On this basis, it might be assumed that the invention of this “flippant title” (105) reflects the poet’s personal and conscious reinforcement of his already familiar image of the enfant terrible; on its basis Thomas’ intention of creating irony is perceived as authentic. In what follows, the various image-makers (media texts, audience, the star, the star’s body) will be discussed in more detail, providing a number of examples to illustrate their functioning within the process of image-production.

Firstly, a star’s image has to be described as the product of the accumulation of different (and even contradictory) media texts (McDonald 5). The category includes the star’s public performances, reviews, critics, profiles, biographies and interviews (McDonald 6). All those sources, especially those ones belonging to the type of gossip, fabricate and elaborate a specific star image (Meyers 899). In this context, it is a matter of particular interest to examine those texts that express a critical view on Thomas’ poetry and more importantly on his star identity. In fact, (critical) discussions on the celebrity’s achievements and his/her image reflect his/her status as a public figure. Media texts have two functions: on the one hand, they express a generally shared attitude towards the star; on the other hand, they are image-makers shaping the public view on the specific star (Dyer, “Stars” 64). This means that criticism does not only produce the star’s image but reveals the way in which the person – which is however mediated in terms of the public persona – deals with the very fact of being a star. In one of his conferences Dylan Thomas refers to his relation to critics:

ANOTHER STUDENT: Do you pay any attention to critics – for instance?

THOMAS: Yes. Sometimes I wake up in the night and wonder about them. I don’t know what they have against me. As far as – goes, it is a personal matter, I’m sure. He just can’t abide me. He can’t stand to read me at all. I don’t know why. I pay attention to the praise too – it’s easier to take, although it

isn't any truer and I don't believe it any more than the other. I mean, I can't be bought with a few sentences. I don't think they will change me. I know what kind of man I am. (Quietly) Thirty-seven years with the same head... (Adix 65)

This representation shows the modest and vulnerable poet who emphasises the stability of his core personality. We can state that this deliberate reference to his inner self, that is also indicated by the change in his voice, talking quietly to himself, is supposed to create a moment of authenticity during his public performance. The poet explicitly denies media's ability to convey realness and thus fashions himself as the only source of truth. When describing criticism as a highly "personal matter" (65) Thomas applies the true self- model constructing his poetry and image as products of his real personality. In fact, he argues that he is truly himself in public. Consequently, Thomas manufactures a melodramatic picture of a star suffering from his own success. Francis Scarfe supports Thomas' argument by stressing the notion of the suffering genius when he writes that Dylan Thomas was

catching the public eye a little too early, which resulted in unfounded criticism by both his supporters and detractors. (96)

Secondly, we have to be aware that different people understand and interpret the star's image differently; a fact which explains the complexity of image making and image-reception. In this process a star's audience assumes a receptive as well as constructive function (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 4). This means that they do not exclusively remain in the passive position of mere consumption – as stars are defined as commodities – but they equally contribute to the production of the image. On the one hand, audience constructs the celebrity's identity through the conscious selection of meanings, inherent in the semantic complexity of the image, which correspond to the dominant meanings and feelings of the person's own life (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 4). Audiences' role as image-producers is almost always accompanied by identificatory processes (Meyers 904). On the other hand, we have to take into consideration their different social and cultural competencies, which certainly have a great impact on their "reading(s)" of the star's image (McDonald 7). It has to be stressed that the intricate meaning of an image is produced by the interaction between star as media text and audience as reader and interpreter in a culturally and historically specific context (McDonald 7). Erin Meyers agrees with McDonald when stating that a star's public image

does not exist in a vacuum but rather is dependent on the context in which it is presented (e.g., a public performance or an article in a tabloid) as well as the audience's prior knowledge of the celebrity persona. (Meyers 894)

Our analysis will not include this group of image-makers as those constructions produced by the poet's audience are hardly available or not at all. Moreover, it would be necessary to examine fan representations from the perspective of reception theory; certainly an interesting undertaking that, however, would go beyond the scope of this diploma thesis.

Thirdly, the star himself represents the most important element in the process of image making. This means that the star holds the force of manipulating audiences' reception of his/her image that reflects how he/she wants to be perceived in public. Moreover, it is believed that stars not involved in the movie industry have more control over the production of their image because their "roles" are not dependent on a fictional narrative but are identities that derive directly from the star's individual invention (Shumway 530). Dylan Thomas' image is largely based on his self-fashioning processes in which he produced the notion of the legendary star poet. As noted by Donald Taylor, Dylan was completely aware of his public image(s) and his position as image-maker (in Read 79). In humorous role-plays Thomas used to perform his most common star identities, for instance the radio star, literary critic and above all the drunken Welsh poet (Read 79). In the following quotation Thomas determines the most dominant features of his public image: Wales, alcohol and sex.

One: I am Welshman; two: I am a drunkard; three: I am a lover of the human race, especially of women. (Qtd. in Ackermann 1)

In terms of image-making, Ackermann points out that the young poet was mainly concerned with the production of a stereotypical bohemian image, characterised by an excessive lifestyle, sexuality and financial problems, which is reflected in numerous, highly detailed self-portrayals of Thomas' adolescent appearance (Ackermann 28; Read 53). Ackermann describes the following account as "a vivid, humorous, and not entirely fanciful picture of his public self" (36):

Above medium height of Wales, I mean, he's five foot six and a half. Thick blubber lips; snub nose; curly mouse brown hair; one front tooth broken after playing a game called Cats and Dogs, in the Mermaid, Mumbles; speaks

rather fancy; truculent; plausible; a bit of a shower-off; plus-fours and no breakfast, you know; used to have poems printed in the *Herald of Wales* . . . lived up the Uplands; a bombastic adolescent provincial Bohemian with a thick-knotted artist's tie made out of his sister's scarf . . . and a cricket-shirt dyed bottle-green; a gabbing, ambitious, mock-tough, pretentious young man. (qtd. in Ackermann 37)

This reference is a clear example of image production operating with the fundamental paradox between star-as-ordinary and star-as-special. Thomas does not only refer to his meticulously manufactured appearance but constructs an individual (or stereotypical) star personality. The underlying irony of his description is primarily expressed by his deliberate use of superlatives creating an exaggerated and pretentious representation of himself as an *enfant terrible* which, however, is immediately followed by Thomas' most humble and innocent voice revealing the "true" nature of his bohemianism. Interestingly, the poet employs his body as a constructing element, defining his most significant physical features (curls, lips, height, voice). Furthermore, he includes two essential components of his stardom: poetry and his Welsh background. Bill Read clearly stresses that Dylan Thomas, in the role of the image-maker, does not automatically constitute a more reliable source as the young poet used to construct his London lifestyle with outrageous exaggerations about his sexuality, drinking and appearance (58). Interestingly, Brinnin, who claims to have gained an insight into Thomas' "true" personality, refers to the mature poet as a person suffering from the artificiality of his public *persona* and the suppression of his real self (57). This is shown in the following quotation when Thomas states that audiences generally

underestimate the sheer pleasant ordinariness of the lives and characters of the dead poets and to overestimate that of the living poets; especially of a poet like himself who, pushed into the limelight ready or not, could say no phrase or make no gesture which was not regarded as part of an endless public performance. (Brinnin 57)

It can be argued that with his constantly growing popularity the notion of authenticity has become a main concern for the star poet. By expressing his desire to be truly himself in public, he authenticates his image by reducing its semantic complexity to one person, the presumed "real" Dylan Thomas.

Last but not least, Richard Dyer considers the star's body an essential feature within the manufacturing process (5). He explains that

[...] the person is a body, a psychology, a set of skills that have to be mined and worked up into a star image. [...] Stars are examples of the way people live their relation to production in capitalist society. (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 5)

Thus, being a star is based on work as the production of an image includes the creation of a unique and individual appearance (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 1). Hortense Powdermaker defines the body as the star's most profitable commodity as certain physical features such as the face or the voice can be advertised and marketed (in Dyer, "Stars" 10). According to Richard Dyer, a star's appearance is closely related to the notion of realness:

[t]he processes of manufacturing an appearance are often thought to be more real than the appearance itself – appearance is mere illusion, is surface. [...] How we appear is no less real than how we have manufactured that appearance, or than the 'we' that is doing the manufacturing. Appearances are a kind of reality, just as manufacture and individual persons are. However, manufacture and the person [...] are generally thought to be more real than appearance in this culture. Stars are obviously a case of appearance – all we know of them is what we see and hear before us. (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 1-2)

Therefore, stars have to be understood as mere constructions because everything that is available in public is a reflection of a consciously planned process of manufacture. It is impossible to reveal the star's private and real personality. Dylan Thomas' appearance is predominantly represented in terms of contradictions. The ideas of innocence and vulnerability are contrasted to an expression of exhausted ugliness. The writer Pamela Hansford Johnson produces a picture of the nineteen-year-old poet that is based on the features of immaturity and specialness: an intelligent and highly talented child having the slight body of a fourteen-year-old boy who is constantly shepherd by his relatives (in Read 43). The adolescent, in contrast, fashions himself as an artist wearing a huge black hat that he regards as the appropriate headpiece of a poet (Read 43). In this respect, Ackermann claims that Dylan Thomas used the popular image of the bohemian to create his own identity of a poet (28). Furthermore, he describes the Thomas' physical transformation, the conscious production of a bohemian image, as a psychological strategy; a means of defence to conceal his sensitive personality:

I have so far been concerned with the sensitive, self-conscious side of Thomas's youthful personality. Possessing a hypersensitive nature, he soon found the need to acquire an outward assurance, and learned to hide away his vulnerable, private part of himself. He adopted the usual bohemian gestures, drinking, colourful clothes, the role of poet and *enfant terrible*. (Ackermann 28)

In this reference Ackermann aims to reveal his profound knowledge of Thomas' "hypersensitive" (28) personality that he has achieved through the analysis of his poetry. However, it has to be strongly emphasised that Ackermann's reading just reflects his highly subjective view and cannot by any means be defined as a universal source of truth. Interestingly, some of those typical bohemian features – drinking, gestures, smoking and womaniser – have turned into stable and constant manifestations of Thomas' legend. The poet's specialness is also expressed by his fashion style. It is argued that Thomas' reading costume, which consists of a blue suit and polka-dot bow tie, displays most evidently his celebrity status (Brinnin 27). William Jay Smith supports this argument writing that an invitation to a dinner party was regarded as a welcomed occasion to create a glamorous star atmosphere, appearing "in a bright checked suit and rakish pancake cap" (Smith 29) accompanied by his wife Caitlin "all gold and red, completely the dancer, seeming to whirl in her bright skirts even when still" (Smith 29).

1.3. The constructing elements: the dominant features of Thomas' image

According to Richard Dyer's investigations, mainly reflected in his work "Heavenly Bodies" (2004), a star's image is fundamentally composed of recurrent, clearly defined features. This section shall outline the three most dominant and relevant star features (for my discussion on Dylan Thomas' star image) that have been deduced from Dyer's concrete analysis of numerous different star images. The universal quality of those features is predominantly reflected in historical text discussing their role in relation to celebrity culture and Hollywood star system. Moreover, those elements form the underlying principle of almost all processes of image-production. As has been shown in Richard Dyer's discussion ("Heavenly Bodies"), a particular construction can be represented from different perspectives through the application of different features. In other words, the way in which a specific identity is manufactured always depends on the feature(s) as each element generates a change in the star's social meaning. On the other hand, features can be classified according to Bourdieu's approach, which defines the components of a star's public

image as markers of distinction. This essentially sociological point of view plays a major role when it comes to Thomas' cultural identity which is generally constructed as an expression of specialness and superiority (Webb xi).

To begin with, stars are often represented from the perspective of ordinariness. Traditionally, celebrities were perceived as gods and goddesses, whereas today they are constructed as common people embodying the ways in which a human being is supposed to behave in a particular social and cultural context – they have become figures of identification (Dyer, "Stars" 22). In his discussion on celebrity culture and heroism, Daniel J. Boorstin (1963) agrees with Dyer when stating that famous men of the 19th century are usually considered more heroic than today's eminent figures (72). The pre-historic definition of the hero was exclusively used in the sense of demi-gods; today's heroes however belong to celebrity culture, which represents a phenomenon that is fundamentally based on ordinariness (Boorstin 72). Boorstin further specifies "the celebrity is usually nothing greater than a more-publicized version of us" (83). He continues that by imitating the star, "in trying to dress like him, talk like him, look like him, think like him, we are simply imitating ourselves" (Boorstin 83). Therefore, we can assert that the average type has become the ideal (Dyer "Stars" 22-23). According to Walker, the illusion of stars being god-like figures has been strongly violated by one of the most significant technological innovations: the talkies (in Dyer, "Stars" 22). The stars of the silent period were just images produced to be worshipped, with the introduction of spoken dialogues, however, they lost their divinity in aid of their humanity – the picture personalities became as real as the audience (Dyer, "Stars" 22). Robert Brustein (1959) discussed the essential feature of ordinariness in relation to Hollywood's newfound realism in the late 1950ies. Brustein claims that the loss of artificial glamour and the representation of harsh truths produced the construction of the suffering, ordinary hero (23, 25). In this context, I will also take into consideration Enno Patalas' (1963) definition of two historically different hero types according to which Dylan Thomas can be classified. To conclude, Erin Meyers (2009) argues that the development of celebrity media represents a further step in the humanising process of star images: it provides behind-the-scene details of the star's private life, which on the other hand are supposed to reflect the celebrity's profound ordinariness (892). However, she firmly stresses that it "never completely disentangles them from their larger-than-life position as celebrities" (893). By reading and performing his own poetry and

constructing simple, human experience as his main source of inspiration, Dylan Thomas fashioned himself as a modern star: ordinary and publicly accessible.

In the second place, the public image might be analysed as a reflection of the star's ethnic background. This essential feature is frequently expressed in terms of folk culture. In this respect, Richard Dyer argues that the emergence of the star system was conditioned by radical changes within the social and cultural structures of (American and European) modern society, which are often displayed by the decline (or even loss) of local cultures through the process of urbanisation (Dyer, "Stars" 8). Dyer stresses that these changes are more likely to occur

at a time when the rural, peasant experience that is the basis of folk art was becoming increasingly untypical of the population as a whole. (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 78)

Therefore, it can be claimed that tradition and culture are of key importance in the production of a star persona as those features have the function of (reliable and authentic) sources of stableness and truth; thereby forming a strong counterpart to Hollywood culture which is perceived as highly inauthentic and artificial (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 78). In other words, a star's cultural identity can be described as a main authenticator of his/her image. In terms of Thomas' image, the poet serves as an authentic representation of Welsh culture including a very specific literary tradition (the bardic poet) and a profoundly religious (Puritan) perception of the world. At this point, I will include Joseph Schneider's (1945) fundamentally historical – however closely related to Dylan Thomas life period – perspective on fame and social origin. In combination with Ackermann's definition of Welsh poetry, it is claimed that Thomas' cultural origin constitutes an essential precondition of his stardom in Wales because poetry, in the light of bardic tradition, is generally considered a "historic eminence field" (Schneider 59).

Moreover, Richard Dyer believes that stars embody "a central feature of man's existence" (30) in an extraordinary intensity (Dyer, "Stars" 30). Gledhill Christine provides support to Richard Dyer's argument by defining this "central feature" (30) as a star's emotional sensitivity. She argues that

stars represent ordinary people whose ordinary joys and sorrows become extraordinary in the intensity stardom imparts to them. (Gledhill 213)

Thus, the focus is not on the nature of the emotions expressed but on the force of their delivery. Therefore, sensitivity and emotional intensity, which are often understood as a form of suffering, constitute central features of star images. Dyer describes the significant notion of suffering in relation to the traditional dichotomy of strength and weakness:

[a]lthough these are qualities that might be attributed to many stars, it is the particular register of intense, authentic feeling that is important here [analysis of Judy Garland's camp image], a combination of strength and suffering, and precisely the one in the face of the other. (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 145)

In the case of Thomas' star image, the feature is reflected in the poet's intense experience of mental and physical suffering. Especially during his public performances Dylan Thomas assumes the emblematic role of the suffering genius.

1.3.1. Dylan Thomas – the poet and the star

So far we have mutually agreed that Thomas' star status is an undeniable fact. But how did we come to the conclusion that the poet was and still is a star? In other words, it is possible to define Dylan Thomas as an object of critical investigation in the field of contemporary star studies? In this respect, one might argue that extraordinary artistic achievements and the star's personality (private life) constitute the main sources of stardom:

It is generally believed that the industrial town Swansea bred the greatest and best-known poet of the Western world (Brinnin 111): Dylan Marlais Thomas. He was born on the 27th of October 1914 in an "ugly, lovely town" (qtd. in Ackermann 24) that remained his dominant inspirational environment until his tragic, premature death, 39 years later, when he passed away as a legend of poetry in New York on Monday 9th of November 1953. As numerous biographies on the poet illustrate, it is hardly possible to capture the complexity of Thomas' manifold and constantly changing "personality" and to outline the various stages of his writing career. Some people share the romantic picture of the Welsh poet drinking and smoking at the local pub; for others, however, Thomas was the literary genius stressing his memorable performance of his masterpiece *Under Milk Wood*. On the other hand, Thomas might be best known as the BBC radio voice, whereas university students analysing the sexual imagery of his work refer to the poet as a typical bohemian. Thomas' contemporaries might have defined him according to the bardic tradition as a

religious poet of nature; his professional friends may have experienced Dylan Thomas as the comedian, charismatic performer and lecturer. And there are people who only remember his devastated appearance during his American reading tour that is usually related to Thomas' sexual affairs and health problems.

On the basis of Thomas' professional success, there is no doubt that he has achieved a certain status as a literary figure. It has to be pointed out, however, that those achievements are not the essential elements of his stardom. Furthermore, his biographical particularities including cultural origin, physical features or sexuality are not star qualities in themselves. What all those individual and highly subjective references, or more precisely constructions, show is that different groups produce different meanings of Thomas' public persona. It is the process of personalisation, the way how the various identities (poet, actor, radio broadcaster...) and features are manufactured in relation to his presumed person – "who was Dylan Thomas?" –, that turns the poet into a star. Therefore, it is possible to identify the Welsh poet as a celebrity and to analyse him accordingly because he is constructed as a public figure including the essential components: person, image and persona.

1.3.2. The notion of individuality: star-specific features

As already mentioned in 1.1., stars can be classified in terms of social types that have to be understood as stable, unalterable social identities (Dyer, "Stars" 99). On the other hand, celebrities mainly belong to the type of "the individual" (Dyer, "Stars" 99). Dyer clarifies that the fascination about stars lies in the fact that "they articulate the business of being an individual" (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 16). In this respect, a star's individuality is referred to as an "irreducible core" (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 8) which

is coherent in that it is supposed to consist of certain peculiar, unique qualities that remain constant and give sense to the person's actions and reactions. (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 8)

Dyer argues that this strong focus on individuality derives from today's ambiguous definition of a person's person ("Stars" 161). Stars embody this essential human crisis through their socially, culturally and historically specific background of class, gender, religion and sexuality (Dyer, "Stars" 161). The notion of individuality has to be taken into consideration when it comes to the analysis of a star's public image. As

indicated in section 1.3. Dyer provides a set of general features that allows us to organise and explain the separated but closely related identities that compose the complex structure of a star's persona. However, Dyer's "universal" features, the constructing elements of an image, are individualised when being referred to the celebrity's (manufactured) individuality. In this context, biographical sources play a major role because they have been produced with the clear intent to provide an intimate, "private" insight into a public phenomenon. The outcome of this process is a set of star-specific features, which are aimed to authenticate the various representations because they are perceived as being directly inferred from the star's "real" person. Thus, it might be stated that Thomas' individual realisations (or interpretations) of Dyer's universal features produce the idiosyncrasies of his star persona. The following subsections – the three main features of Thomas' image(s) – shall discuss the star-specific features, which have become an efficient tool for the concrete analysis of the poet's image through their adjustment to Thomas' social, cultural and economic background.

First, I shall like to start with an essential paradox of celebrity culture: star-as-special versus star-as-ordinary. James Nashold, for instance, describes Thomas as

a poet who thought himself no better than any other working man, choosing their company rather than his literary peers and looking upon the process of writing as a hard physical vocation. (Nashold 38)

As can be clearly seen in this representation, the writer expresses the feature of ordinariness in terms of the star's social origin. He consciously applies working-class values, the belief in hard physical work, in order to construct Thomas as the poetic and academic underdog. This (constructed) working-class background gained more and more dominance with the constant growth of his popularity because constructions of the adolescent poet portray a socially and economically privileged environment which certainly represented a supportive atmosphere for a young man who wanted to dedicate himself exclusively to poetry and artistic work (Read 42). However, on the basis of Joseph Schneider's studies on English and American eminence, it has to be stressed that the fields of literature and philosophy do not regard a person's social background as an essential precondition of stardom (Schneider, "Social class, historical circumstances and fame: 39). To put it simply, a nobleman does not automatically achieve fame as a great poet due to his upper-

class background; and a boy with ambition and talent will not be hindered by his labour-class origin to gain recognition in the field of art (Schneider, "Fame and social origin": 361). Nevertheless, I believe that the analysis of Thomas' star phenomenon has to be defined as a highly class-conscious matter since writers generally manufacture Dylan's artistic growth, and later the superior quality of his poetry, in direct relation to his social (middle-class) origin. Nashold's and Ackermann's constructions of the poet's upbringing lend support to this argument relating the myth of the literary wunderkind to Thomas' beneficial family environment. In this respect, both authors underline the significant role of his father, David John Thomas, a passionate poetry reader and amateur writer who worked as an English teacher at Swansea Grammar School (Nashold 31). Nashold describes the relationship between father and son as "the tenderest and most remarkable of bonds, one steeped in love, intellect and literary aspiration" (31). He further argues that through his private schooling at home Thomas discovered his interest in literature and the English language and was soon able to acquire a profound knowledge of poetry that turned him, at age fifteen, into a competent literary critic who displayed his "wide grasp of the entire range of current literary opinion" (Nashold 39) in an article published in *Modern Poetry*. Additionally, Ackermann claims that his domestic education and the regular family readings have clearly advanced his growth as a performer. The notion of ordinariness is also conveyed from the perspective of modesty. Traditional star discourse believes that popularity does not necessarily transform a star's personality (Dyer, "Stars" 43); a belief which supports the idea of the realness of the star's private self. In this context, Dylan Thomas is generally represented as a star that is positively affected by his success; or that his star status has even enhanced the development of a profound modesty that is reflected in Thomas' denial of his own stardom (Campbell 41; Meyers 900-901). The image of the modest poet implies that not success in the form of wealth, sex and prestige formed his main motivation for the writing of poetry but the creation of art and the expression of his talent. Bill Read, for instance, fashions the feature of modesty in the most radical manner claiming that Thomas never showed an interest in gaining financial benefit from his art. This lack of business sense brought Thomas to accept offers to read for less than fifty dollars (Read 117; Brinnin 66). What is more, the feature of ordinariness is primarily reflected in Thomas' identity of the poet in which the simplicity of nature and human life constitute the poet's main interest and source

of inspiration. This fundamentally ordinary approach to poetry writing has to be understood as a marker of distinction separating him most notably from fellow writers. It can be argued that within the star context, Thomas' image of the underdog, the "outsider" of the literary community, automatically produces a position of specialness. In reference to Thomas' persona, ordinariness shows strong cultural connotations. To put it differently, the feature is fashioned as an originally Welsh characteristic or Welsh stereotype. On the basis of the central paradigm star-as-ordinary and star-as-special, Thomas is constructed as the literary genius who needed to be embedded in his everyday Welsh environment with his captious working routine to unfold his poetic talent (Ackermann 161). Thomas' wife Caitlin describes the "person" Dylan Thomas as listening

[...] open mouthed, to local gossip and scandal, while drinking slow consecutive pints of disgustingly flat, cold-tea, bitter beer. Muzzily back to late lunch, of one of our rich fatty brews, always eaten alone, apart from the children Then, blown up with muck and somnolence, up to his humble shed, nesting high above the estuary; and bang into intensive scribbling, muttering, whispering, intoning, bellowing and juggling of words; till seven o'clock prompt. Then straight back to one of the alternative dumps. (qtd. in Ackermann 160)

Caitlin's account, whether it is a true representation of the "real" Thomas or not, provides a complex of various constructions including the modest literary genius working in isolation, the poetry performer and actor, the Welshman and the father/husband. The production of all these identities is primarily based on the feature of ordinariness.

This is followed by the notion of ethnicity, which has to be discussed in relation to Thomas' Welsh background. In this respect, Thomas is regarded as an emblematic figure of "Welshness". Roberta Jones (1966) and Terence Hawkes (1960) consider Dylan's cultural origin with its specific implications (religion, Welsh tongue, bardic tradition) as the primary marker of distinction – which results in Thomas' special position among his contemporaries. Furthermore, the feature contains the poet's religious identity that, according to Ackermann, reflects a moral perception of the world, which is significantly shaped by Thomas' reconciliation with the Christian faith (115); thus the critic introduces the image of the religious Welsh poet. However, his Welsh origin is also constructed as a source of suffering. In this respect, the term "otherness" functions as its synonym, which produces the picture of "the immigrant"

and “the crazy Welsh poet”. In reference to his immigrant-image, Thomas emphasises that he does not only assume this (culturally determined) outsider role in England and America, but his Welsh nationality, so he firmly states, was most fiercely criticised (and even denied) by his Welsh-speaking countrymen (Ackermann 32). On the other hand, however, the poet is commonly regarded as a representation of a very specific Welsh literary tradition: a community of Welshmen writing in English whose main concern was to establish a concept of nationality that reflects “the sense of a life being lived that was peculiar to Wales” (Ackermann 3). Moreover, the traditional understanding of the bard in particular, significantly shaped his works as well as his approach to literature and poetry. The feature of ethnicity is also expressed by Thomas’ language, which in general stands for the cultural and literary heritage of a nation. Dylan Thomas, as the majority of the South Wales’ population, grew up in a bilingual environment (Hawkes 345). Though he could not speak Welsh, it is claimed that he was able to internalise its sound and structure through his contact with Welsh-speaking relatives and translations of Welsh literature (Ackermann 3-4). Therefore, it is believed that the poet’s profound knowledge of the Welsh tongue represented a dominant influence on his artistic production; the most prominent example is his play for voices *Under Milk Wood* (Hawkes 346). In the following quotation Hawkes refers to the image of the poetic pioneer, the inventor of a new lyrical genre, when stating that Thomas’ language

is not “orthodox” Welsh but Anglo-Welsh, that is, a South Wales dialect composed of the imposition of a highly idiomatic Welsh lexicon on an English base. (Hawkes 346)

As will be discussed later on in this study, it is often claimed that the poet’s stardom is largely conditioned by his cultural origin. In other words, the simple fact of being Welsh already makes him a star. This assumption forms the centre of Amanshauser’s (2010) tourist-related representation in which Thomas’ Welsh environment is manufactured as a source of truth – an authentic way to discover the true self of the poet.

Finally, in the period of his artistic maturity Dylan Thomas is predominantly depicted as an emblematic symbol of suffering. It is often claimed that the traditional concept of “poetic suffering” influenced significantly Thomas’ individual definition of the poet; sharing an idealised and romantic view on the artist suffering from tuberculosis and

sexually transmitted diseases (Read 49, 57; Nashold 45) Thus, Thomas considered suffering an essential star quality. The reasons for the poet's suffering are commonly described as moral conflicts, alcohol, the loss of his poetic talent and marriage crisis. The central dichotomy of strength and weakness, in which a profound vulnerability is contrasted to physical endurance and willpower, introduces a melodramatic perspective on the suffering theme. In general, this dualism is manufactured as a struggle between Thomas' private and public self. On the basis of Richard Dyer's true self-model, strength constitutes a feature of his public role that composes the image of the tough guy who protects his sensitive and anxious inner self (Durrell 39). Lawrence Durrell supports this claim when writing that

Thomas, under the physical and mental robustness, was quite a sensitive person and rather tended to use his boisterousness as a defence against people who might bore him and make demands on him. (Durrell 39)

In reference to Thomas' identity of the poet, the feature of suffering does not automatically produce an entirely negative construction. It is believed that Thomas even benefited from his suffering, regarding it as a dominant source of inspiration to mature and develop as an artist. Nashold asserts that the poet's

history of sickness gave him a precocious awareness of bodily frailty, and its growth and decay became a central image repeated throughout his writing with visions of death. (Nashold 38)

Ackermann agrees with Nashold stating that Thomas' literary production was dependent on spontaneous and intense emotions that the poet experienced at a particular moment in time (69). Moreover, the critic defines sensitivity as a cultural marker using it as a typically Welsh feature.

[f]or him it was the intensity of the passion of the moment that counted and he believed, like most Welshmen, with the strength of his emotions, rather than his intellect. (Ackermann 69)

Interestingly, Ackermann refers to Thomas' nonconformist background to construct the writing process as a profoundly religious activity ("he believed"), which, on the other hand, emphasises the image of the non-intellectual; the academic underdog. Above all, the feature is understood as an expression of authenticity and originality.

Finally, it can be found a combination of both categories in which the star's emotional intensity is related to the concept of suffering. Under this condition, the poet is fashioned as a destructive force or as Marjorie Adix puts it "a tidal wave of humanity" (66). Thus, it is Thomas himself who is represented as a source of suffering:

Dylan had been both a living delight and a living torment. He was . . . the most lovable human being she had ever known. While she adored him, she knew also that he was a destroyer – that he had an instinct for drawing to him those most capable of being annihilated by him. In the short time in which she had known Dylan, the attention he had demanded, . . . had caused her to lose all sense of her own existence. (Brinnin 260)

1.3.3. Change and consistency: a star's image in the course of time

The complexity (or semantic density) of Thomas' public persona is conditioned by the constant development of novel star identities. In the course of his writing career the Welsh poet extended his core identity "the poet" with various different roles, for example the poetry reader, the university lecturer and the radio broadcaster. Some of those images have become stable manifestations of Dylan Thomas' star personality, whereas others have shown dominance only for a limited period of time. According to Ackermann, Thomas' poetry, in particular his unique style of expression that he had already established in *18 Poems*, constitutes the most consistent element of his public persona (39). The critic defines Thomas' distinctive style in the following way:

his language is vigorous and exciting; his ideas impress because of the intensity and elevation with which they are expressed. From the beginning his genius lay more in the stylistic than intellectual originality. (Ackermann 10)

Ackermann believes that the stability of Thomas' poet-image is mainly achieved through selective publication, which means that only those poems were included in his volumes, which corresponded to his specific and individual writing style (39). On the other hand, it is possible that the meaning of a star's image changes in the course of time. Those shifts are a matter of dominance; in other words at a particular moment in a star's career certain features are more dominant than others. This is clearly illustrated in the following reference when Dylan Thomas refers to the development of his personality:

'Then (aged 15) I was arrogant and lost. Now I am humble and found. I prefer that other.' (qtd. in Ackermann xv)

First and foremost, the quotation has to be defined as a moment of authentication in which Thomas provides a personal construction of his “private” self. In fact, he manufactures two separate identities (of a poet) according to the essential dualism young versus mature. Thereby, Dylan Thomas includes a historical dimension (now and then) so that he is able to indicate his growth towards artistic maturity. The status of the legendary Welsh poet is constructed with central star features: ordinariness and modesty. In addition, it is an instance of image-building in which Thomas explicitly tells his audience how he wants to be seen in public. Consequently, Thomas assumes the role of the image-maker who manipulates people’s perception of his public persona. In this case, he promotes the image of the bohemian and the suffering genius (arrogant and lost). Furthermore, he defines youth and suffering as the most essential elements of a great poet.

On the other hand, the poet’s body is commonly described as an expression of change and consistency. His distinctive voice, “low and musical, his smile ready” (Durrell 35), constitutes the most stable physical feature; the rest of his body however is subject of Thomas’ dramatic transformation, which clearly supports the image of the self-destructive artist. Roy Campbell agrees with this assumption when stressing the power and immutability of Thomas’ voice: “the same blazing voice which remained unchanged until his death” (Campbell 41). It follows that Thomas’ voice and eyes – “the same blazing eyes” (Campbell 41) – are generally manufactured as stable sources of strength. In other words, they are considered the core features of Dylan’s *personality*. Brinnin believes that Thomas was aware of his physical change as

the derogatory remarks he continually made about his appearance were based on his own painful recognition of how profoundly he had changed. (Brinnin 14)

It clearly shows that Brinnin regards Thomas’ dramatic change from the perspective of suffering (“painful recognition”). In general, however, this physical alteration is represented in terms of the opposite young versus old. In this respect, Lawrence Durrell refers to young poet as a “slim, neat young man with well-trimmed hair and a well-cut suite” (34) that turned into a “sublunary golliwog” (35). The construction of the adolescent is largely based on the notion of innocence that often involves a

divine component describing the juvenile poet as “sylph-like in appearance, with curly golden ginger hair as an angel-like figure” (Campbell 41). In contrast, the mature poet is predominantly described with the features of suffering and vulnerability. The photography that Dylan Thomas has sent for the promotion of his reading session at the Poetry Centre shows a devastated person: felted hair, his teeth speckled with brown stains due to his excessive smoking, an adenomatous face with a fearful and nervous glance (Read 105). James Nashold, on the other hand, constructs the radical change in Thomas’ appearance as a side effect of his medical treatment:

Gone were the sparkling eyes, pug nose, round cheeks and full mouth that made his face so memorable, replaced by fat which stretched and distorted his face. His neck was fuller, too, and the rolls of fat seen in the open collar of his shirt made him look like a hideous distortion of his former self. (Nashold 17)

John Brinnin, however, explains Thomas’ physical deterioration as a result of his excessive drinking. Thereby, the novelist provides a picture of the living dead:

I was so shocked by his appearance I could barely stop myself from gasping aloud. His face was lime-white, his lips loose and twisted, his eyes dulled, gelid, and sunk in his head. (Brinnin 255)

On the basis of the previous constructions, it might be inferred that the young poet is generally considered the embodiment of infantile virtue and purity that got corrupted by an excessive bohemian lifestyle of alcohol, sex and a lack proper nutrition. Interestingly, Roy Campbell provides a positive perspective on the poet’s physical transformation, regarding Thomas’ loss of beauty as a consequence of his artistic growth. The critic argues, “what he [Dylan Thomas] had lost in beauty he made up in character, wit and knowledge” (Campbell 41).

1.4. Authenticity and Thomas’ image

According to David R. Shumway the notion of authenticity represents “an indispensable value” (527) of contemporary society “but one that is historically and culturally relative” (527). Therefore, we also have to consider authenticity in relation to celebrity culture because stars have become an essential part of our everyday life. However, in the field of star studies the feature is of particular interest because stars, as we have learned in the previous sections, are just constructed and mediated identities; the image is therefore an emblem of inauthenticity (Shumway 527). It is the

vital distinction between private and public self, according to which star images are generally analysed, which legitimates the discussion on authenticity. Turner Graeme and Erin Meyers agree that Dyer's true self-model, which makes us believe in the existence of an authentic individual behind the fabricated mask of the public persona, attracts people to celebrities and produces their power as cultural symbols (Meyers 891-894; Shumway 529). This means that the question of authenticity is essentially related to the idea of the star's individuality. Richard Dyer specifies that despite the roles, social types and values that the star embodies in his/her image "our sense of that one person is more vivid and important than all the roles and looks s/he assumes" (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 9). Lawrence Durrell lends support to Dyer's argument when writing that:

[Dylan Thomas'] readers will want to know other things, about the way he looked and talked and wrote – for these are the little things which bring a poet alive to his readers. (Durrell 34)

On the other hand, Dyer points out the critical status of the star's "person", which produces a fundamental crisis of authenticity:

Because stars have an existence in the world independent of their screen/fiction appearance, it is possible to believe that they are more real than characters in stories. This means that they serve to disguise the fact that they are just as much produced images, constructed personalities as 'characters' are. Thus the value embodied by a star is as it were harder to reject as 'impossible' or 'false', because the star's existence guarantees the existence of the values s/he embodies. (Dyer 20)

While defining the star's real existence as the main authenticator, Dyer, at the same time, makes us aware of its complete "constructedness". To put it bluntly, everything that we as the star's audience perceive is the product of a conscious process of manufacture; it is not a reflection of his/her real personality (Dyer in Meyers 894). David Shumway agrees with Dyer when arguing, "to be a star is to be presented in public packaged and mediated" (529). He continues that stars are performers who assume roles that do not correspond with their true personality (350). On this basis, one might ask why stars engage in authenticating processes at all if the artificiality of their image negates the expression of authenticity? First of all, as Shumway firmly states, the question of authenticity gains its legitimacy only in the context of artificiality. This means, we need the artifice in order to define something as natural

and authentic (Shumway 531). Therefore, it is of crucial importance to include the aspect of authenticity in our discussion on Thomas' star image. On the other hand, Meyers claims that the feature has to be considered in terms of the star's social functioning of making meaning within a culturally, socially and historically specific context. She states that

[t]he audience negotiates the image using notions of authenticity and truth to decipher the "real" celebrity. [...] Although we can never really know the truth about a celebrity, as it is a mediated and highly constructed position, the pursuit of that truth allows audiences to organize and understand themselves and the world around them. (Meyers 905)

Richard Dyer agrees with Meyers' argument writing that authenticity becomes relevant when it comes to the star's embodiment of certain values and social norms. In this respect, he believes that authenticity is produced by the relationship

between the values perceived to be embodied by the star and the perceived status of those values (especially if they are felt to be under threat or in crisis, or to be challenging received values, or else to be values that are a key to understanding and coping with contemporary life.) (Dyer, „Authenticity“ 132)

In order to clarify Dyer's assumption I shall like to consider Dylan Thomas' star image, which is authenticated through the application of so-called star-specific features as already indicated in section 1.3.2. Those features have achieved their authenticating quality through their adjustment to Thomas' presumed *person*. Those "individualised" features, such as ethnicity, religion, folk culture, emotional and/or physical suffering, are perceived as natural and real because it is commonly believed that they are beyond the force of artificial construction. The following quotation illustrates an interesting instance of authentication:

[...] I *am* lots of people. I think I am lots of people at any rate. Of course, I know, and the birds know, I'm only a fat little fool ranting on a cliff, but it seems that I am lots of people. (qtd. in Adix 64)

Dylan Thomas authenticates his public image by reducing its complex structure, an impenetrable network of different meanings or more precisely "people", to one person: "only a fat little fool ranting on a cliff" (64). He explicitly refers to his "real" existence as an individual by representing his physical features (fat), cultural origin

(cliff) and state of mind (fool), and defines this identity, his “individuality”, as a matter of fact using the notions of truth and naturalness: “I know and the birds know” (64). Thomas’ personal process of authentication is in line with Dyer’s approach that regards the celebrity’s person – the idea of “a real human being with a continuous existence” (Dyer, “Authenticity” 135) – as the primary authenticator. Barry King, on the other hand, also includes the image as an authenticating element. He claims that the authentic value of a star’s persona depends on the “*degree* of his or her reliance on the apparatus (the image), as opposed to self-located resources (the person)” (178). Shumway supports King’s idea when he states that an image cannot be authenticated merely through the star’s biography but authenticity is predominantly produced by his/her public persona (527). This means the celebrity’s image(s) can be made authentic by providing constructions, which are in accordance with the specific meanings of the star’s persona. Therefore, the audience is more likely to accept ambiguities within the star’s image(s) as long as his/her persona is performed authentically. It follows that the notion of truth, whether the star is true according to his/her persona and/or “private” self, has become the central idea of image construction (Dyer, “Authenticity” 133).

1.4.1. The main authenticators of Thomas’ star image

The first thing to be considered is the poet’s understanding of the writing process, which is commonly manufactured in reference to bardic tradition. According to this typically Welsh literature, poetry writing is defined as an act of self-discovery: a highly emotional and spontaneous process of self-expression (Scarfe 107):

‘Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision’. (*New Verse*, October 1934 qtd. in Scarfe 97).

Furthermore, the poetic expression is described as a process of purification and the returning to a state of profound innocence. Dylan Thomas argues that the

stripping of the individual darkness, must inevitably cast light upon what has been hidden for too long, and, by doing so, make clean the naked exposure. [...] poetry must drag further into the clean nakedness of light. (Ackermann 1)

As can be seen, the Welsh poet approaches poetry from a fundamentally psychoanalytic perspective in which writing is constructed as a purely authentic

process of self-revelation that lies beyond the artist's control and consciousness. The creation of art, which is compared to a therapeutic session in which the "patient" reflects upon his personal life, allows the poet to gain an understanding of himself and the world around him. Therefore, it can be claimed the strong emphasis on subjectivity fashions Thomas' writing process and his poems as direct and authentic (in the sense of true) reflections of his "private" self. Francis Scarfe writes that Thomas' "poems are admittedly subjective, and their structure is remarkably simple" (109). Scarfe continues that the poet "seeks the world in himself, and consequently his work is entirely autobiographical" (111).

In terms of performance, Richard Dyer distinguishes between three essential markers of authentication: lack of control, lack of premeditation and privacy (Dyer, "Authenticity" 137). On this basis, the star is able to construct his/her performance as "real" or as a moment of intimacy that shall provide an insight into his/her "true" personality. This clearly shows that the idea of authenticity is closely related to the question of truth and the star's individuality. Regarding Thomas' public performances, we have to define his voice, suffering, humour and emotional intensity as the central authenticators. On the basis of bardic literature, which stresses the vital role of reading aloud, Thomas constructs his performances as an

"authentic revelation, [...] the communication, the *sharing*, at its highest level, of personal experience". (qtd. in Maud 59)

In other words, his poetry is represented as an exclusive source of truth and authenticity. Moreover, the poet's literary ancestry is used to manufacture his public performances as a natural and indispensable element of the writing process. It follows that his readings are represented as a typically Welsh tradition and therefore serve as a cultural marker. In fact, performance represents a general principle of literature. Barry King, for instance, claims that the full realisation of a text is achieved through its performance (169). Consequently, Thomas' public readings constitute the final stage of the authenticating process of his poet self: the "real" person, that shows a "real" human existence, constructs with his body – his voice reading his "subjective" and "authentic" poems while his gestures visualise his "real" and intense emotions – an idea of truth that cannot be questioned as the whole process takes places within a frame that is supposed to be authentic: the "real" world. Or as Shumway states: "Live performance thus becomes a testament to the star's authenticity" (529). Shumway,

however, points out that authenticity is not automatically produced by the performance itself but by the meaning that is expressed through the performance – in our case Thomas’ “Welshness” and craziness – which I will discuss in more detail later on in this study. This would suggest that Thomas’ poetry and his performance of them have to be understood as manifestations of truth revealing the “real” personality of the Welsh poet. At this point, we have to be aware that the subjective and authentic quality of his poems is as constructed as his performances which Richard Dyer defines as the immediate “acting out” (137) of the star’s image in public where only the organised and controlled surface, worked out in advance, is visible and shown to the audience (Dyer, “Authenticity” 137). Moreover, King emphasises that especially live performances, as it was the case with Dylan Thomas, require excellent acting skills that are based on “the conscious mastery of the actor over verbal, gestural and postural behaviour” (168). Although Thomas’ public readings are usually considered moments of intimacy, as illustrated by Marjorie Adix who documented Thomas’ conference at the University of Utah:

I was uneasy at first because I felt that in either one position or the other he was only acting, but I found no trace of insincerity every. (Adix 66),

The poet’s authenticity is as mediated as the one produced by a magazine (Meyers 897). As already mentioned, Thomas’ Welsh background also plays a major role in the authenticating process of his star image and public performances. Richard Dyer also includes the notion of folk culture, which he defines as “those cultures produced on rural, peasant societies” (“Heavenly Bodies” 77), in his discussion on authenticity. He states that

[t]he very idea of folk culture or consciousness is a construct, though one that gets its force and appeal from appearing not to be, from notions of naturalness and spontaneity. (Dyer, “Heavenly Bodies” 76)

According to Shumway, historic preservation represents an archaic and thus more authentic way of life (528). Consequently, Thomas’ role as the bardic poet, which is fundamentally based on his Welsh origin, automatically carries implications of authenticity. Generally speaking, the image-maker includes folk elements such as nationality, religion, ethnicity and culture to represent the star’s “personality” as something natural and true. As has been clearly stated, Thomas’ public appearances

have to be analysed as instances of conscious image-construction. Barry King, however, refers to the natural and highly subjective process of semiotisation in which the star is read and interpreted as an individual and cultural sign (170-173):

[t]he actor as a member of the host culture – with a given hair colour, body shape, repertoire of gestures, registers of speech, accent, dialect, and so on – always pre-signifies meaning. (King 173)

This suggests that a star's individuality always shines through his/her image and performance and cannot be completely negated. In other words, the star's mere existence also produces meaning that cannot be controlled or influenced by his/her process of image making. Based on this assumption, it can be claimed that Dylan Thomas deliberately activated his cultural markers, which are intrinsically tied to his person, to construct an "authentic" Welsh identity (King 173). It follows that the exaggerated representation of his Welsh features produces the image of the ultimate Welshman.

Moreover, it is believed that mental and physical suffering lies beyond a person's control, something that is caused by environmental, genetic and/or psychological circumstances. Therefore, this fundamental human experience is applied to construct and authenticate the stereotypical image of the suffering genius. While at first the suffering theme just reflected the young bohemian's romantic idealisations of the classic poet, later on the feature became a major authenticating force within his star image, as soon as it was publicly known that Dylan Thomas was suffering from a "real" disease, diabetes. As will be indicated in this thesis, the construction of the suffering poet is not exclusively restricted to physical weakness but also includes the concept of melodrama that I will analyse as an element of the suffering theme. Gledhill Christine defines melodrama as the personalisation of social and ideological conflicts, which implies a strong emphasis on "private feelings and interiorised (puritan, pietist) codes of morality and conscience" (207-208). In other words, the melodramatic character creates a moment of authenticity by revealing a very specific moral identity (Gledhill 212). Therefore, it might be claimed that Dylan Thomas' religious self, characterised by a profound moral crisis, is primarily constructed from the perspective of melodrama. In this context, his nonconformist background is manufactured as the opposing counterpart to his excessive (sexual) lifestyle:

[t]he melodramatic persona is totally committed to living out his or her dominant desires, despite moral and social taboo or inter-personal conflict. (Gledhill 212)

However, the production of a melodramatic identity necessitates a strong physical involvement: the star's body constructs and authenticates the suffering. Gledhill specifies that it is "the star's attachment to a living, historical person [that] provides authentication" (213). It follows that the construction of melodrama is fundamentally based on the role of the performer, which usually expresses "hyperbolic emotions, extravagant gestures, high-flown sentiments" (Gledhill 212). Gledhill further states that the conscious selection and accentuation of those physical features produce an emblematic effect (211). The detailed analysis of Thomas' public performances, which will follow later on in this study, shall reveal that the poet is generally fashioned as an emblematic figure of suffering.

Lastly, I shall like to consider the feature of authenticity in relation to Thomas' role of the performer and media star. In this respect, David R. Shumway stresses that media represents a crucial precondition of stardom (529). On the one hand, star images are manufactured by different media forms; on the other hand media is supposed to produce a close and intimate bond between the audience and the celebrity – a relationship that should go beyond the star's public appearances and publications (Shumway 529). There is no doubt that Dylan Thomas has to be defined as a media star because the production of recordings of his poetry and lectures, transformed his primarily literary achievements into products of the entertainment industry. In other words, the public figure, Dylan Thomas, has become a profitable commodity. In his work *Heavenly Bodies*, Richard Dyer discusses the question of authenticity by analysing the nature of mass media in which today's understanding of the star was born:

[...] all these assertions of the reality of the inner self or of public life take place in one of the aspects of modern life that is most associated with the invasion and destruction of the inner self and the corruptibility of public life, namely the mass media. [...] they are supreme instances of manipulation, insincerity, inauthenticity, mass public means that the whole star phenomenon is profoundly unstable. ("Heavenly Bodies" 14)

Dyer further argues that this essential paradox between authenticity and media results from the star's function to embody an idea of individuality and naturalness

within a context, the capitalist industry of mass media, which is “technological elaborated, aesthetically sophisticated” (“Heavenly Bodies” 16). In brief, it is impossible to gain an insight into the star’s authentic, private self as the audience has only access to an image, a constructed identity, which is supposed to be consumed within a completely artificial framework, the mass media. Therefore, the star’s public image, including a number of different “identities”, constitutes the primary subject of star studies. Section 2 will illustrate and discuss the key constructions that compose Dylan Thomas’ star persona.

1.4.2. Audience and the star: a phenomenon of identification

According to David Shumway, the process of identification has to be discussed in relation to authenticity (528). The star is able to achieve identification by creating an “illusion of intimacy” (Meyers 892), which produces a close relationship between the celebrity and his/her audience. In this context, Jackie Stacey stresses the significance of identification that shows the potential of actually transforming a person’s personality (Gledhill 149). It has to be pointed out that the production of this star-audience relationship is primarily based on information on the star’s “private” self, constructing the idea of an authentic and “real person”.

In other words, the illusion of intimacy strips away the mask of the public performance through the revelation of personal and private details about the celebrity as an average person that resonate with the audience’s own experiences. (Meyers 893)

The following discussion will be based on Jackie Stacey’s essay on female identification and Richard Dyer’s theory on social types. In addition, we will consider specific social and political conditions (within an American context) that produced a new perception of the Hollywood star. This study will only consider those types of identification that might be relevant for the analysis of Thomas’ star phenomenon. It will not include a detailed examination of Dylan Thomas’ audience and its identification processes as this would probably go beyond the scope of this diploma thesis. Nevertheless, it represents a highly interesting issue for further investigation. In terms of Thomas’ “extraordinary” poetic talent, we are confronted with Stacey’s first category of identification: devotion and worship (Gledhill 149). This type emphasises a marked difference between the star and his/her audience; this distance provides the main “source of fascination” (Stacey 149). In this respect, the star’s

superior and unattainable status is often expressed by superlatives and religious signifiers (Stacey 150). In particular the image of “the bard” fashions Thomas as a divine figure who assumes, in the process of poetry writing, the role of a prophet (Ackermann 4). Dylan Thomas used the term “ardents” to refer to his most passionate devotees who approached the poet in an idealising manner (Read 106). Secondly, the celebrity represents a source of desires and fantasies (Stacey 150). In this case, the audience aims to overcome the distance in order to become like the star (Stacey 150). This type might have been relevant for Thomas’ literature students and admirers. Interestingly, Brinnin fashions the Welsh poet as an object of sexual desire by including the modern concept of groupies: a “harem of college girls in blue jeans and Bermuda shorts sprawl on the floor about the feet of the visiting celebrity” (42). Thirdly, the imitation of behaviour and the copying of appearance, which Stacey defines as extra-cinematic identificatory practices, are related to the descriptions of the young poet who fabricated a public identity (including sexuality, gestures and clothes) according to the stereotypical picture of the bohemian (Stacey 154-155; Ackermann 28).

On the other hand, Richard Dyer believes that the star’s embodiment of social types results in audience’s identification (“Stars” 47). The relation between the star and his/her type can be analysed in terms of transcendence, maximisation, inflection and resistance (Dyer, “Stars” 99). “Transcendence” refers to the state of absolute individuality in which the celebrity has liberated him/herself completely from his/her type (Dyer, “Stars” 99). The comparison between the young bohemian and the middle-aged genius reveals that in the period of Dylan’s artistic maturity he has become utterly individual, reflected in his individualised and highly complex star image. Thomas’ individuality is mainly produced by his personal variations on social types, relating them for instance to his cultural background. This phenomenon is known as “inflection”. In contrast, Dylan’s identity of the ultimate Welsh poet is an example of “maximisation”. In the following paragraphs, the study will briefly outline the most significant social types of Thomas’ star persona.

Firstly, I would like to discuss the rebel and the tough guy; as the two types share striking similarities I will combine them to one group. Sheila Whitaker distinguishes between various forms of rebellion: the immigrant, the class-conscious rebel and the generation gap rebel (in Dyer, “Stars” 52-53). In his novelistic representation Brinnin introduces Thomas’ image of the immigrant, which is fundamentally shaped by the

feature of (cultural) otherness. Secondly, Thomas' identity of the academic underdog, which implies the feature of otherness, is commonly constructed as a fierce criticism of (elitist) intellectualism (Brinnin 71). As noted by Whitaker, the rebel, especially the generation gap rebel, implies a strong focus on youth; therefore this type has to be understood as a natural process of human development (in Dyer, "Stars" 52-53). In this respect, we mainly have to consider representations of Thomas' childhood and adolescence – which fashion him as a boy constantly "getting into troubles" (Ackermann 24). In addition, the picture of the adolescent is characterised by the young poet's bohemianism including an excessive (sexual) lifestyle and offensive behaviour (Read 44). Interestingly, Ackermann shows an individual variation on the conventional rebel type: the religious rebel whose revolt is directed against the severe restrictions imposed by orthodox Nonconformity (33). In relation to the rebel, we have to discuss another closely related social type: the tough guy. This identity, which is traditionally sympathising with working-class values, is based on strength and willpower resulting in the image of the one who cannot be beaten. (Dyer, "Stars" 49-50). John Ackermann provides a social interpretation of Dylan's star persona: thereby the Welsh belief in hard work and discipline produces the notion of the working-class hero (Ackermann 5). In relation to Thomas' suffering, the feature of strength provides a melodramatic perspective in which the poet's willpower is contrasted to his physical weakness (diabetes).

In contrast, the "good fellow" type emphasises the star's socialising competences; in other words his/her ability to establish and maintain personal relationships (Dyer, "Stars" 48). The social behaviour of this type is fundamentally based on equality and fairness, expressed by a rejection of bullies, snobs and authoritarians who generally show an antisocial and dismissive conduct (Dyer, "Stars" 48). In fact, "the good Joe" is characterised by its sympathy and identification with the underdog ("Stars" 48). As will be discussed later on in this thesis, the notion of the underdog plays a significant role in Thomas' star persona, especially when it comes to his role of the Welsh poet and his various academic selves. John Brinnin even claims that the poet had a

promiscuous affection for humanity and of his need for emotional identification with the lowest stratum of society. (Brinnin 32)

In addition, Brinnin uses the "good fellow" type, commonly regarded as the central feature of the American ethos, to construct Thomas' identity of the immigrant – a

purely American identity of the poet. John Ackermann lends to support to this argument by providing an American interpretation of Thomas' star-image based on the parameters of this social type. In this context, the poet is referred to as "a gregarious, entertaining, entirely professional companion they [colleagues, friends, students] loved to join in the pub afterwards" (Ackermann xii). Thus, it might be inferred that the success of Dylan's American reading tours was mainly conditioned by his precise embodiment of this social type. Bill Read also stresses Thomas' socialising skills, arguing that the poet was able to create an illusion of intimacy in the swiftest of acquaintances (108). Brinnin agrees with Read when writing that Thomas' humanity has to be defined as "the greatest of his gifts" (29):

One of the most beguiling things about Dylan's social character was the spell-like illusion of intimacy he would cast upon anyone who came near. [...] and exercise of sympathy so natural, effortless and constant that his life seemed sometimes to be the furious denial of saintliness he could not hide. (Brinnin 29)

As will be illustrated in the following quotation, Thomas' "good Joe" image is fundamentally based on modesty and ordinariness. Once, being asked about the relevance of further studies, except from literature, Dylan Thomas answered:

There is never any satisfaction – that's why I write another poem. Do I study other things? Yes, people. (*Long pause, the questioner nodding thoughtfully*) then: Me! (Adix 62)

In this context, the poet fashions himself as a profoundly social *person* as he describes humanity as his main academic concern. His final statement has to be considered a moment of authentication in which he stresses the autobiographical quality of his work, making a clear reference to his "private" self (me). Roy Campbell's account serves as a further example of Thomas' social image in which he is manufactured as a good-hearted, modest, open-minded and not class-conscious person:

[i]f he ever was wrong about anything, his conscientiousness and humility were such that he would apologise to the humblest person whom he thought he had hurt. He had no fear of opinion. (Campbell 45)

On the other hand, Ackermann regards the “good fellow” type as a vital element of Thomas’ poet self in which he is represented as an emotional and highly sensitive person “both to his own feelings and to the feelings of others” (Ackermann 106). Furthermore, the critic constructs “the good Joe” as a creative tool essential for Thomas’ writing process in which conversations and ordinary experiences at the pub are regarded as rich sources of inspiration (Ackermann 30). According to Ackermann, Thomas perfected the type by becoming a remarkable, albeit selective, listener (30):

He listened with attention to what one has to say but gave the impression of knowing exactly what interested him, and being unwilling to waste energies outside his chosen field. I imagine true poets must be like that, shielding their sensibilities against distracting intrusions from the world of ideas. (Tedlock 36)

Thomas’ (selective) listening skills reveal that the image of “the good Joe” was subject of a clearly defined purpose – the recognition of “good” ideas. This means, ideas that have a certain artistic value. It follows that Ackermann’s construction has to be understood as an individual variation on the “good fellow” type which is aimed to support Thomas’ identity of the great poet.

2. Analysis of Dylan Thomas' star image

Before I start to analyse Dylan Thomas' persona in more detail, by illustrating his various star constructions, I want to recall Barry King's concept of the "star" that is essentially based on the separation between person – image – persona. Given this, it may be inferred that "the poet" constitutes the overall representation. In other words, Thomas' identity as the Welsh poet forms the centre, the reference point in the real world, for the production of his different images. Therefore, they have to be understood as variations on his "poet self". With regard to King's theory, we might further claim that Thomas' poet self is a reflection of his person. This means that "the poet" will not be treated as a construction of its own, but I will examine the ways in which this central identity is manufactured. Although it has been clearly stressed that the idea of the star's true personality is mere illusion, we can, without a doubt, assert that Dylan Thomas really was a poet because his poetry is still visible and, more importantly, publicly accessible, serves as evidence of the realness of his "being a poet". However, his poetry shall not be considered a source to his "true" personality but as a reflection of Thomas' real existence as a poet. The title of this diploma thesis also indicates it is his authentic – in the sense of true – identity as a poet that constitutes the main object of investigation. The research question might therefore be: how was the *poet* turned into an image?

For that reason, I shall like to consider briefly the concept of stardom in relation to the field of literature. Traditionally, discussions on a writer's popularity have usually taken place in the context of the legend and myth but seldom has been analysed the profession of the poet from the perspective of celebrity culture. For this reason, we have to take a closer look at the social role of the poet and its potential for fame. In this respect, we will mainly refer to Joseph Schneider's investigations on eminence in which he introduces the significant term "heredity genius". Schneider argues that the "[a]ccess to opportunity for the achievement of fame is everywhere the result of prerogative and special privilege" (Schneider, "Social Class, Historical Circumstances and Fame" 50). As will be shown in more detail, it is stated that Thomas' star status as a poet was fundamentally produced by his family and cultural background: the poet "inherited" his poetic gift from his father, an amateur writer, and belonged to a typically Welsh tradition, "the bards", which already assigned to the poet a socially and culturally superior position. Consequently, Dylan Thomas' success was not a divine coincidence but resulted from the social significance of literature within Welsh

society. Referring to Schneider's terminology, Thomas was able to gain eminence as a writer because poetry constitutes a historic eminence field – a traditional profession in which people most commonly achieve distinction – in Wales (Schneider 59). However, we have to be aware that our knowledge on Wales is also based on stereotypical representations. Ackermann constructs the Welsh surrounding, in particular Swansea, which is conventionally known for producing popular Welsh writers, as a highly inspirational and beneficial environment for Thomas' development and growth as an artist (138). In fact, Ackermann's description reflects a general Welsh stereotype: the nation of poets. As far as bardic tradition is concerned, the poet is obliged to assume the role of a prophet who is supposed to mediate, "in his art, between man and God" (Ackermann 4) as he is endowed with "extraordinary spiritual power" (4). This privileged perception of the poet is not exclusively restricted to the Welsh context. Other Romantic definitions on poetry, such as Hunt Hazlitt's essays on literature describe poets as inventors with a special and socially highly valuable function. According to Hazlitt, writers are

creators of truth, of love and beauty: and while they speak to us from the shrine of their own hearts, while they pour out the pure treasures of thought to the world, they cannot be too much admired and applauded. (Hazlitt, Vol. II 233)

Like Hollywood stars that create a glamorous world, also poets produce an utopia, a world of illusion (Hazlitt, Vol. II 234). Hazlitt refers to poetry as a literary genre predestined to produce eminence:

The object of poetry is to please: this art naturally gives pleasure, and excites admiration. Poets, therefore, cannot do well without sympathy and flattery. It is accordingly very much against the grain that they remain long on the unpopular side of the question. (Hazlitt, Vol. II 234)

Therefore, it might be concluded that Thomas' poet self was manufactured according to a bardic and profoundly Romantic understanding of the poet, which operate with today's conventional star qualities, which represent Dylan Thomas not only as a great poet but as an extraordinary, special person of divine status, namely a star.

2.1. The ordinary poet: Dylan Thomas' view on art

First and foremost, we have to examine how this central identity of "the poet" is generally constructed therefore the discussion starts with Thomas' personal definition of poetry and art in general:

What's more, a poet is a poet for such a very tiny bit of his life; for the rest, he is a human being, one whose responsibilities is to know and feel, as much as he can, all that is moving around and within him, so that his poetry, when he comes to write it, can be his attempt at an expression of the summit of man's experience on this very peculiar and, in 1946, this apparently hell-bent earth. (qtd. in Maud 62)

The quotation explicitly shows that Thomas' approach to literature is fundamentally based on the features of ordinariness and modesty. He constructs ordinary human life as his chief source of inspiration. To be more precise, to live life to its full extent represents a necessary requirement for poetry writing. According to Thomas, poetry is produced with "a great deal of trouble by human beings" (qtd. in Maud 129). Thus, he defines the creation of art as an essentially human experience in which not "the poet" but the human being captures the world of intense emotions. Therefore, poetry is understood as a direct reflection of human life at a particular point in time. This reference to contemporary life fashions Dylan Thomas as a modern poet. In this respect, he clearly detaches himself from the traditional concept of art and philosophy, which expresses an absolute or alternative idea of life, but shares a fundamentally modern perception of art which aims for the reproduction of the world ("Stars", Dyer 13). Thomas emphasises his identification with "the legendary creature" (qtd. in Maud 132) – "the common man" (132). Ackermann, in contrast, defines Thomas as a classic poet who embodies a traditional idea of literature in his

great, simple images and symbols of life such as birth, death, sex and sin together with his celebration of some of the greatest human virtues like love and faith. (Ackermann xiv)

On the other hand, John Ackermann, who discusses the cultural and ideological background of Thomas' life and work, constructs ordinariness in terms of discipline. The feature is reflected in Nashold's description of Thomas' highly disciplined working process, which was based on a regular and immutable time schedule from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. that he complied with accuracy and determination (38). Thus, the critic

portrays the everyday life of the common working-class man. Nashold even claims that this daily routine was essential for Thomas' productivity, without it the poet was unable to write (39). Ackermann, however, fashions discipline as a typically Welsh characteristic, producing a poet-image that focuses on Thomas' close relationship with bardic tradition. He stresses that "the discipline of Welsh bardic poetry is among the strictest in any known literature" (5) as its primary aim is the construction of complex and sophisticated metres (Ackermann 5). Thomas' belief in hard work is also represented in his understanding of poetry-writing which he considers an exhausting and laborious process:

ANOTHER STUDENT: Why do you write poetry, Mr. Thomas?

THOMAS: Because I have the time. Because I have to live, too; (*mumbled*) I don't know why. It is very slow work, however. Only five poems published in the last six years. It is slow, but sometimes there is just nothing better to do. Sometimes it feels very good to have a blank piece of paper in front of you, and you put down the first line. Then you look at all the paper and think, 'Now I've got to rhyme this'. And it's work! Oh God, it's awful! ... I write some very bad poems. (qtd. in Adix 62)

It is argued that the hardship involved in writing results from Dylan's obsession with words and sounds which in consequence explains the slow pace of his literary production (Ackermann xx, Durrell 35-38). As indicated in the previous reference, Thomas constructs poetry writing as a natural process – "there is just nothing better to do" (Adix 62). This perception contrasts significantly with the concluding line in which the poet's ironic voice describes him as the suffering genius that regards his poetic gift as both a blessing and a curse. Alternatively, Thomas manufactures the writing process as the combination of an intense mental and physical experience:

The writing of a poem is, to me, the physical and mental task of constructing a formally watertight compartment of words . . . To me, the poetical 'impulse' or 'inspiration' is only the sudden, and generally physical, coming of energy of the constructional, craftsman ability. The laziest workman receives the fewest impulses. (qtd. in Ackermann 123)

The quotation evidently shows that Thomas consciously operates with an essential working-class value, the belief in hard work, to construct his identity as a poet. To be more precise, he equates the art of poetry writing to a craft and thus fashions himself as the common man. Ackermann also discusses the labour notion from a purely physical perspective when referring to Thomas' working mode, which consisted of

constant revisions and the re-copying of each poem after every minor modification and/or extension (Ackermann 123, Nashold 38). Because of this, it is possible to find over two hundred manuscript versions of the poem *Fern Hill* (Ackermann 123). John Brinnin, however, stresses that Thomas' discipline was just restricted to his literary production, business demands he approached in a profoundly unprofessional manner:

[he] left people waiting at appointed places and sometimes disappeared altogether, he almost invariably got to the scenes of his readings at the right time and was seldom far off the schedule in his sometimes highly complicated travels. (Brinnin 41)

In conclusion, it has to be pointed out that the feature of simplicity gained more dominance in the period of Thomas' artistic maturity. According to Adix, Dylan's poetry, described by a student as opening "little doors in quite ordinary and common events" (Adix 64), has undergone a considerable change concerning the clarity of his ideas and poetic expression. The mature poet argues that

[I]t is impossible to be too clear. I am trying for more clarity now. At first I thought it enough to leave an impression of sound and feeling and let the meaning seep in later, but since I've been giving these broadcasts and reading other men's poetry as well as my own, I find it better to have more meaning at first reading. (qtd. in Adix 62)

Hence, it might be asserted that Thomas' seemingly creative development, which he describes as a conscious departure from his literary origin – as bardic tradition shows a strong emphasis on sound and structure –, is mainly conditioned by his success as a performer and media star. This radical change in his perception of poetry might be considered a marketing strategy with the clear intention to address a socially and intellectually more diverse audience and/or readership. The following reference might serve as evidence for the assumption that Thomas' poetic transformation implies an extension and reinforcement of his stardom. In a radio discussion Dylan Thomas argues that every artist strives for eminence and popularity:

I think there's an inverted snobbery – and a suggestion of bad logic – in being proud of the fact that one's poems sell very badly. *Of course*, nearly every poet wants his poems to be read by as many people as possible. (qtd. in Maud 62)

2.1.1. The bardic poet

As the sources of this study reveal, there is no doubt that the poet's Welsh origin constitutes the most dominant element of his star images which fashion Dylan Thomas as THE Welsh poet of contemporary literature. This means that Thomas' identity of the poet is commonly manufactured in terms of his cultural background. Roberta Jones serves as an example of this assumption as she writes that

[t]o the true listener, good poetry does communicate; it shares, elucidates, enlarges moments of human experience and offers valid insights, unique answers to what is life? What is love? And even what is logos? Dylan Thomas voices his Welsh response to these questions. (Jones 78)

Firstly, Jones agrees with Thomas' personal definition of poetry as I have outlined in the previous section. Consequently, she also defines the sharing of human experience as the key function of this literary genre. Secondly, the critic applies Thomas' Welsh identity as a marker of distinction. In this respect, she constructs the poet's greatness and originality as a direct result of his cultural origin. In other words, Thomas' poetry reflects a culturally determined artistic expression that provides a truly Welsh interpretation of life. Jones stresses that "[t]he echo of Wales resounds in Dylan's poetry just as it does in his musical reading voice" (79). Moreover, his poems are considered an authentic representation of an originally Welsh literature: in the period between 1914 and 1918 a new generation of young Welsh writers emerged whose primary concern was the expression of Welsh traditions and beliefs (Ackermann 14). Their style was characterised by "fierce enthusiasm, energy and flexibility" (Ackermann 14-15). This means that those writers believed in an existential connection between the artist and his/her cultural background. Therefore, Ackermann argues that the analysis of Thomas' poetry requires a profound understanding of bardic tradition and provides a clear definition of Anglo-Welsh writing:

[...] a richness of metaphor, often not as precise or consistent as it might be; a dominantly sensuous, often sensual imagination; a delight in fantasy and the irrational; and a deep, pervading pathos. They begin with the word or phrase rather than the idea: their approach, even in prose, is that of the poet, and they tend to convey their meaning through the medium of senses. [...] a robust sense of humour and a liking for strict formal control [...] it tends to be subjective, and consequently introspective. It is characterized by permanent romantic attitudes: a posited belief in intuition, in the vitality of strong and passionate emotions, and in the influence of external nature. Its favourite themes are the exploration of childhood, death, and the sexual nature of man.

[...] a strong vein of comedy, based on observation of the more humorous aspects of Welsh life. The Anglo-Welsh writer, both in poetry and prose, moved away from interest in the sophisticated and intellectual. (Ackermann 15)

On this basis, it can be asserted that Ackermann outlines vital features of this very specific literary tradition – for instances sensitivity, comic talent and entertaining qualities, subjectivity, emotional intensity, discipline and naturalness – to represent Thomas as the ultimate bardic poet. Moreover, Ackermann firmly believes that the central role of the poetry performer was also significantly shaped by traditional Welsh writing that generated

his gift of comedy, his actor's self-dramatisation, and his unique skills as reader of poetry – both his own and others. A reader of poetry should 'use *his* voice in the place of *your* eyes' (*Broadcasts* p. 52) was the advice of the bardic poet who returned the importance of sound and rhythm to poetry. (Ackermann xii)

Likewise, Francis Scarfe stresses Dylan's historical sense, which is reflected in his awareness and celebration of his literary past. On the one hand, Thomas' Welsh origin and its peculiar literary tradition fashion the poet as an anachronism among his contemporaries but, on the other hand, Dylan is often described as the salvation of modern poetry (Scarfe 111). As indicated in the previous section, the identity of "the poet" is fundamentally based on the feature of ordinariness. In this context, Thomas' "Welshness" assumes a highly ambiguous position because it is employed as an expression of ordinariness and of specialness. Indeed, the simplicity and naturalness of the Welsh landscape is generally represented as a necessary precondition for the activation and realisation of Thomas' poetic gift:

[t]his quiet, remote, rural corner of West Wales was a place for poetry, undisturbed by his London's busy film world and work at this time. His writing-shed above the Boat House home that he called his 'water and tree room on the cliff', bird-haunted and from its window vistas of Sir John's hill, the estuary, and on the opposite shore, of the hill farms and fields recalling his childhood visits, is now famous and fabled. (Ackermann x)

The relationship between Thomas' artistic production and his geographical surroundings is often understood as a form of dependence. It might even be

concluded that the poet's Welsh identity is represented as a star quality in itself. To put it bluntly, being Welsh already turns you into a star poet.

2.1.2. The religious poet

As noted by John Ackermann, Thomas' poet-self has to be examined in terms of his religious identity. In this respect, the critic believes that in general the feature assumes a rather inferior position in the representations of Dylan's star image, or is ignored at all, although, as Ackermann is convinced, religion constituted an essential element of the poet's "personality". Ackermann claims that

[t]he picture of Thomas as a lost Nonconformist, 'bible-blest and chapel-haunted', wrestling with an inherited religion, is certainly closer to the truth than many others that have been offered of him. (Ackermann 13)

Again, it has to be firmly stressed that in his production of an essentially Welsh image of Dylan Thomas, including bardic poetry and Puritanism, Ackermann explicitly operates with the notion of truth, claiming thereby an extensive knowledge on the poet's inner self. Furthermore, Ackermann argues that Thomas' Puritanism represents the key to the correct understanding of his poetry (3). Nashold agrees with Ackermann's assumption when writing that the two (contradictory) strands of his family background – his father's education on classic and progressive literature and his mother's religious up-bringing introducing the young poet to "the rolling rhythms of the Bible and the great hymns of Wales" (32) – contributed equally to the development of Thomas' identity as the Nonconformist Welsh poet. It follows that ethnicity and religion have to be considered in relation to each other, composing simultaneously Dylan's identity as a poet. It has to be pointed out that Thomas, as it was typical of the Welsh poet, approached religion in a very distinctive and contradictory manner: on the one hand, he represented the feature from the innocent and nostalgic perspective of the child (Scarfe 99), whereas, on the other hand, Thomas also provided a religious interpretation of sexuality exploring the "relationship between divine and sexual love" (Ackermann 19). Interestingly, Thomas' Nonconformist belief is often understood as a source of suffering and moral tensions in relation to "the poet". Ackermann lends support to this argument stating that Thomas' mature poetry was mainly characterised by his "deep sense of sin and separation from God" (20). As the purpose of this thesis is not to investigate Thomas'

poetry in great detail, I will consider religion as a main authenticator of Dylan's image. This means I will separate religion from "the poet" identity. In general, Thomas' religious voice is described as a direct reflection of his inner self. Roy Campbell, for instances, constructs Dylan Thomas as "a deeply religious and great-hearted man who puts love and friendship before everything else" (45). In this reference the authenticating quality of religion is even emphasised by its combination with the features of ordinariness and modesty. Furthermore, it is widely believed that a person's religious belief is something natural, which cannot be produced but either exists or not. However, as soon as religion is used to manufacture a star's image, it has to be analysed in terms of its functioning as a constructing element and consequently in terms of its own artificiality.

2.1.3. The poetic genius

Finally, the poet is constructed in the light of the genius that is reflected in the great number of sources that refer to Thomas' "extraordinary" poetic talent. The discussion will be mainly based on Benjamin Robert Haydon's approach to genius and literature in which the author investigates critically the term "talent". According to Haydon, talent has to be understood as an innate (human) feature that cannot be synthetically produced (128). The full realisation of one's talent necessitates beneficial and aiding circumstances such as Thomas' private education on literature (128). It follows that Haydon's essentially Romantic definition, describing the genius as an individual "singled out by God for the performance of a great task" (129), shows striking parallels to the bardic understanding of the poet who is represented as a God-like figure of enormous social and cultural importance (Ackermann 4). Therefore, it might be suggested that in terms of Dylan Thomas' poet self the notions of "the genius" and "the bard" can be used synonymously.

Sheila McLeod, for instance, provides a romantic and highly idealised representation of the genius Dylan Thomas in which she compares her first encounter with the young poet to a profoundly spiritual experience: the epiphany of a God-sent person. McLeod's account shows strong religious connotations, such as the metaphor of the cherub to refer to Thomas' bronze-coloured curls, which are supposed to emphasise the poet's star quality (in Read 47). In the second place, Thomas' special status as the genius is constructed on the basis of his artistic achievements. On the one hand, the illustration of his, as literary critics would claim, "outstanding and exceptional"

work creates the myth of the Welsh wunderkind of poetry (Jones 81): at age 12 his poem *His Requiem* was printed and published at the *Western Mail*, from age 17 to 19 Thomas wrote at least 212 poems, and in just one year (from age 18 to 19) the young poet completed the volume *18 Poems* (Read 28). The notion of the genius is also manufactured from the perspective of the poetic pioneer. Those representations consider Dylan Thomas the inventor of a novel genre (Read 69). Henry Wells stresses the poet's creative supremacy by the deliberate use of superlatives when he writes that

[Under Milkwood's] form is a new type of drama for voices; its style, a new type of dramatic lyricism based on rhythms stronger than most poetic prose, freer than most accepted verse; a unique creation of Thomas' extraordinary lyrical powers intricately adjusted to the requirements of poetic drama. In short, we have a new species of drama for voices, and a new variety of lyrical drama. Thomas makes his own adjustments to both drama and poetry. [...] Furthermore, it presents a new kind of lyric drama, by which is means that the entire work is a series of lyric episodes where the form and intensity of the short lyric poem is perfectly assimilated into the form and scope of the long and serious dramatic poem. (Wells 439-440)

It has been argued by Wells that Dylan Thomas has created a completely new and highly innovative poetic expression through the reinvention and combination of traditional and well-established literary genres: the "phonographic poetic drama" (440) includes elements of opera and music drama (441). According to Wells, Thomas has achieved a new interpretation of each genre by reversing their typical features making his prose "more rhythmical, more strongly accented, more highly alliterated, and more powerfully addressed to ear" (443) than the parts written in verse (443). Interestingly, Henry Wells manufactures the identity of the literary pioneer from the perspective of Thomas' rebel image, arguing that the development of Dylan's original poetry was primarily caused by his rebellious "power to transcend otherwise disruptive forces" (443). In addition, Wells points out the considerable influence of Thomas' bardic roots in the creation of his dramatic poem, which is composed of thirty-six Welsh folk songs (442). This means the originality of his genre derives from the strong emphasis on sound which, however, represents a typically feature of Welsh literature. It can be inferred that in relation to contemporary literature "the bard" automatically implies the notions of the genius and the pioneer.

2.1.4. The poet Dylan Thomas: a phenomenon of ultimate greatness

This section focuses on John Ackermann's biographical account that provides a fundamentally poetic interpretation of Thomas' star phenomenon. Furthermore, Ackermann indicates a constant growth, a maturing process, of the artist Dylan Thomas towards ultimate poetic greatness. The basic purpose of this analysis is not to evidence the superior quality of Thomas' literary achievements but to outline the theoretical background that represents the basis of Ackermann's assumption. In the following, it will be illustrated that Thomas' poet-self is generally composed of features which, according to essentially Romantic definitions of poetry, are regarded as vital qualities of great poets. Consequently, this investigation will be primarily based on historical texts including T.S. Eliot's approach to tradition and individual talent, Hunt Hazlitt's definition of great poetry and genius and last but not least Robert Fletcher's discussion on the creative development of the poet.

It is widely accepted that great poetry is the product of imitation. In general, the feature is defined as the writer's acknowledgement of his literary ancestry. This means that the best and richest achievements of the past are used for the creation of a poet's own work; thereby the artist provides a contemporary perspective on a well-established tradition (Fletcher 121). Eliot agrees with Fletcher when writing that

not only the best, but the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. (Eliot 37)

According to Henry Wells, Thomas' play *Under Milk Wood* has to be understood as a modern interpretation of an originally Welsh tradition: "it is folk art in a modern key" (439). Likewise, the second feature, historical sense, describes the poet's awareness of tradition which "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (Eliot 37). In other words, traditional poetry celebrates the co-existence of past and presence (Eliot 37). However, as noted by Hazlitt, the acquisition of a historical sense is based on a laborious learning process, the "discipline of humanity" (Hazlitt Vol. I 26). This reminds us of Thomas' private education on literature and his identity as "the bard" in which life and death constitute the major themes of his mature work. In addition, T.S. Eliot points out that the respect for and appreciation of the dead poets enables the artist to produce significant art that modifies the existing

order and shapes future generations (37). Eliot clarifies that “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (37). As already mentioned, Dylan Thomas’ literary production was strongly influenced by bardic poetry and other poets such as Auden, Hardy or Lawrence (Adix 63). The following review makes unmistakably clear that Thomas’ poetry reflects (a Romantic understanding of) poetic greatness:

The form of these poems is superb. [...] [they give] the impression that here, alone among the poets of the younger generation, is one who could produce sonnets worthy of our great heritage ... I could not name one poet of this, the young generation, who shows so great a promise, and even so great an achievement. (Nashold 60)

There is no doubt that a considerable number of critics agreed upon Thomas’ “extraordinary” talent and artistic expression constructing his work as “a strong influence on poetic and dramatic literature of the next few years” (Wells 439). Thirdly, Robert Fletcher stresses that the writing of poetry represents hard work as it is always preceded by a process of deep and intense reflection (122). Eliot lends support to this assumption when stating that the greatness of a poet is not exclusively expressed by the intensity of emotions but by “the intensity of the artistic process” (40). Fletcher emphasises that

[t]he poet must discover what form of meter will best enable him to clothe his thoughts. He will probably make many experiments before he satisfies himself. (Fletcher 125-126)

Thomas embodies this essential quality in his image of the highly disciplined, hard-working Welsh poet. Interestingly, Fletcher analyses poetic greatness in terms of features which today are considered as conventional star qualities. In his fundamentally Romantic definition, the critic involves the features of sensitivity, ordinariness and emotional intensity which are commonly applied to manufacture Thomas’ poet self and public star image.

The poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and in a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as they are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. [...] The poet thinks and feels in

the spirit of human passions, for all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. (qtd. in Fletcher 122)

In addition, Fletcher's approach implies the highly significant element of nature: the poet must be "a man of science"(124) to describe all sorts of natural phenomena (Fletcher 124). Hazlitt claims that nature provides the writer with strong and intense emotions that are essential for poetic expression (Hazlitt Vol. I, 66). Above all, nature is regarded as a universal and eternal source of feelings as the attachment to nature is "indissoluble" (Hazlitt Vol. I, 66). Fletcher adds that the poet's primary concern is represented by "the central figure of this world – man" (126). This argument evidently relates to Thomas' ordinary and simple view on art in which "the bard" defines his Welsh surrounding and human experience as his chief sources of inspiration (Maud 62, 132; Ackermann x). Lastly and most importantly, the true poet considers writing as an essentially impersonal process. According to Eliot, the poet has to be understood as a medium that expresses ordinary human experiences and emotions in an extraordinary and artistic manner (41). He further argues that the writer's maturity is reflected in his "continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (39). This means that great poetry aims for universality instead of subjectivity. With regard to our discussion on bardic poetry, the feature of impersonality stands in sharp contrast to Thomas' poetry that is generally constructed as a highly autobiographical and introspective form of art (Ackermann 15). Ackermann claims that Dylan Thomas

refers all experiences, all time, all resolutions to his own personal condition, for he is himself the universe of his poems. (Ackermann 87)

On this basis, it might be inferred that Thomas' expression of strong emotions and a very distinctive (star-) personality disqualifies him as a great Romantic poet but turns him into a celebrity. Nevertheless, Ackermann represents Thomas' identity as a poet in the light of a dramatic shift. In this respect, the critic argues that the poet was abandoning the method of subjective introspection and assumed the role of the bardic prophet characterised by religious objectivity and a sense of reconciliation with the world (115-116, 159). *Twenty-Five Poems* represents the significant turning point in Thomas' maturing process:

The dominant mood is still of impassioned introspection, showing and obsessive concern with death, sex, sin, and the isolation of feelings as the poet begins to cast off his more adolescent emotional attitudes. His mind, turning outward, creates more objective patterns of feeling, and there is a deepening of his religious attitude to experience. (Ackermann 62)

Therefore, it might be concluded that Ackermann uses Thomas' Welsh origin – mainly his bardic background in which the line between subjectivity and objectivity seems to be dissolved – to construct him as the ultimate (Romantic) poet and above all as the ultimate star.

2.2. The academic star: Dylan Thomas as scholar, lecturer and literary critic

As already discussed in section 1.3.1., Dylan Thomas was able to gain star status as a writer by having constructed his real-life identity as a poet in terms of a star persona. Richard Koszarski claims that in the field of literature the person's individual talent decides whether she/he becomes eminent or not (267). In contrast, the success of the movie star largely depends on the "illusion of depth, of a rich, complicated personality that exists beyond film roles" (Shumway 87). Traditionally, a writer's personality was regarded as the direct expression of her/his literary production (Shumway 88). Today it is widely believed that the author's personality shows a significant impact on his/her work (Shumway 88). The same is true for Dylan Thomas who describes the writing of poetry as an act of self-discovery: a fundamentally subjective, highly autobiographical and intimate form of art, which is born out of his "true" personality (Scarfe 107). Thus, it is the idea of a "core" personality, the star's private self, which produces stardom and consequently transforms a poet into a celebrity. Similarly, Thomas' star-image as the academic underdog was primarily based on an originally cinematic process of personalisation (Shumway 879). As noted by Shumway, the academic star represents a rather recent phenomenon (89). Nevertheless, as it will be shown in the following discussion, Dylan Thomas has to be classified according to this specific category. In his investigations on academic literary studies, David R. Shumway argues that scholars commonly lacked the visual representation of their "personality"; thus they were considered impersonal and faceless, not having an identity of their own (86). This perception changed dramatically when "famous figures were increasingly personalized as the public increasingly responded to them as fans" (Shumway 87). Furthermore, the development of (star) personalities within the academic context was

conditioned by a change in the practice of theorising: the discipline of literary criticism was also subject of a personalising process so that critics started to express their views with their individual voice (Shumway 90). Shumway even argues that the value of a theorist's work is now determined by the personal quality of his/her criticism (96). It follows that the success of Thomas' public identity of the academic, which includes the roles of the literary critic and university lecturer, was predominantly based on his simple, ordinary and fundamentally subjective approach to poetry (Adix 63; Maud 62). What is more, Shumway describes conferences and lecture circuits as an ideal and aiding framework for the manufacture of an academic star personality:

In repeated appearances at invited lectures the famous do not merely present arguments but also make available a personality exhibited in the performance of the lecture or paper, in response to questions and comments, and perhaps most significant, in informal conversations before and after the performance. (Shumway 92)

Therefore, Thomas' American reading tour, which in the first place stands for the poet's involvement in the academic world, represents in fact the final and most vital step towards international stardom. As the analysis of Thomas' performance style in 2.3.1. will reveal, the poet used the lecture room as a medium of self-expression and image-construction (Shumway 92). In this respect, Thomas' performance style is generally constructed in terms of his distinctive voice, humour and socialising skills and are generally regarded as key qualities of the academic star (92).

Furthermore, Thomas' academic roles are significantly shaped by his underdog image. In this respect, intellectualism and ordinariness stand in sharp contrast to each other. The construction of the literary critic is inevitably related to Thomas' personal approach to literature, characterised by simplicity and naturalness, consequently this essential identity has to be examined from the perspective of ordinariness:

THOMAS: The nice thing about poetry is that it isn't a competitive field. There isn't any *best*; but I do like Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, W.H. Auden [...]
STUDENT: How do you tell whether a poem is good or not?
THOMAS: If I like it. (Adix 63)

In this interview Dylan Thomas fashions subjectivity, "If I like it" (63), as his main criterion for determining the value, or quality of a poem. By constructing the academic practice of criticising as a highly individual and emotional process in which his

“personality” is directly involved, he in fact authenticates his critic-identity. Moreover, his non-intellectual perception of art suggests that poetry is not exclusively restricted to the field of academic investigation but represents a vital part of ordinary human experience. On this basis, Thomas makes the genre of poetry accessible to a much broader and intellectually more heterogeneous audience. While the poet is aware of his individual preferences, he consciously avoids the use of superlatives that are usually considered a significant marker of stardom – “there isn’t any *best*” (63). This means, he negates a possible star system, or hierarchy, within the poetry community, which in consequence questions his own star phenomenon. Therefore, the reference has to be understood as an instance of image-construction in which he produces a critic-image that is fundamentally based on the notion of modesty. Regarding Ackermann’s account, we might interpret the public identity of the literary critic in relation to Thomas’ social background, describing his private education as the chief source of his proficiency and substantial knowledge on literature. William Jay Smith, for instance, fashions Thomas as a harsh critic highly knowledgeable about contemporary and classic writers:

[h]e could be devastating, too, with quick thrusts at certain contemporaries, at the bumbling, the pretentious, and the boring. (Smith 30)

Above all, “the critic” is manufactured in terms of fairness and sincerity emphasising Thomas’ academic expertise and reliability. According to Lawrence Durrell, Thomas was an open-minded, sincere and direct critic who showed only “few preconceived views about what poetry should or shouldn’t be” (Durrell 38). John Brinnin, in contrast, involves in his biographical representation of Thomas’ academic “identities” the feature of suffering. Brinnin argues that Thomas regarded his profession of the poetry-expert as an artificial and constructed role which he had to play (71). Furthermore, Brinnin represents the poet’s suffering as a fierce criticism of intellectualism, describing “the critic” as a betrayal to Thomas’ natural approach to literature, where poetry was not “something to meet upon, to debate, or to fix into hierarchical tables” (71). In consequence, Dylan Thomas is fashioned as the non-academic who describes the English literary scene as boring and unexciting and who considers ordinary life as superior over academic discourse (Durrell 35):

[...] when the conversation had turned to literary topics, he broke in. 'There's nothing so beautiful', he said, and his hand shot up, 'as a lark rising from a field. That's what we ... we ...' He left the sentence for us to complete. (Smith 30)

Or sometimes he rejects intellectualism at all:

[...] there was something more important than literature, and that was life. [...] life was to be lived. It was life that counted (Smith 29).

Ackermann agrees with Brinnin when referring to Thomas' profound "distrust in intellectualism and jargon" (xx) as the poet feared the destructive "influence of intellectual upon emotional and sensory experience" (43). In reality, the three biographers authenticate Dylan's identity of the literary critic, including the notions of naturalness and realness, by contrasting it to a fundamentally abstract and artificial concept of academia. They produce an academic image representing the scholar Dylan Thomas as the underdog of the literary community. What is more, this essentially "non-intellectual" identity serves as a marker of distinction and specialness.

2.3. Dylan Thomas as media star and performer

I shall begin with Thomas' image of the actor and public performer. In this respect, it is of vital importance to provide a clear definition of the term "performance". According to Richard Dyer, performance represents the interplay between the star's private and public self ("Stars" 21). As we have learned in the theoretical introduction, images are commonly described in terms of this essential paradigm. Therefore, it might be inferred that performances are always the public representation of an image. This means, Thomas' public readings are not an authentic expression of his "real" personality but essentially belong to processes of image making and authentication. The actor's performance is therefore as constructed and manipulated as his/her image. During the performance the actor, by interpreting a clearly defined role, develops and creates a specific character (Dyer, "Stars" 21). In this process the performer shifts between different levels of his/her self: the actor's "real" existence, his/her personal history and the life of the character (Dyer, "Stars" 21). To understand Dylan Thomas' performances we have to use a different but closely related terminology on acting. In his readings, or public appearances, the poet performs and/or constructs not a character but a specific image, or a combination of different

roles, of his star persona. Thereby, the actor Dylan Thomas applies a variety of different features that might be related to his “true” personality, to produce a very specific performer identity. On the other hand, Dylan Thomas’ role of the radio broadcaster introduces a further definition of the poet: the media star. I will not include Thomas’ contributions to the film industry as they played only a minor role in his career, therefore the thesis will primarily focus on his radio work. Nevertheless, I would like to mention his greatest achievements in this particular field: he was working as a script writer for propaganda movies, for instance *Our Country*, and gained permanent employment at Donald Taylor’s company *Strand Films of Golden Square* (Read 77-78). The following sections will analyse Thomas’ public performances in more detail by outlining the main composing elements of his acting “personality”. In this context, the poet’s voice is not just a feature that constructs Thomas’ readings but has achieved a star status of its own. Humour, the voice of the comedian, constitutes another fundamental feature of Dylan’s performances. Moreover, we will investigate Thomas’ performance style in relation to his various performer identities: radio broadcaster, poetry reader, university lecturer and entertainer.

2.3.1. The manufacture of Thomas’ performer-identity

William Jay Smith on the actor Dylan Thomas:

Dylan Thomas told me once that he found it difficult to converse with actors because they had only one subject of conversation – themselves. The Welsh writer was, of course, himself an actor, inspired reader, superb mimic, irresistible comedian, soulful clown; words rolled and danced on his tongue; but more than an actor, he was a poet, and of himself he rarely spoke. When he did, it was in asides, quick, bubbly, embarrassed, as if he wanted to get on with something more important – the story to be told, the joke to be brought to the proper roaring conclusion. (Smith 29)

Firstly, the critic regards “the actor” as a complex of closely related identities, such as the Welsh writer, reader, mimic, comedian and clown, which explains the flexibility of his multi-faceted performing self. Furthermore, Smith defines Thomas’ (singing) reading voice as the central element of his performances. Secondly, he authenticates Dylan’s identity of the Welsh poet, constructing it as his “true” personality: “but more than an actor, he was a poet, and of himself he rarely spoke” (29). In other words, “the poet” is a direct expression of Thomas’ *person* which is constructed from the

perspective of modesty. This essential feature is also used to separate “the poet” from the common actor, who has “only one subject of conversation” (29) – himself, and to produce an underdog image also within the acting community. “When he did, it was in asides [...] as if he wanted to get on with something more important” (29) – as we have learned in section 2.2.4., the greatness of a poet, and an artist in general, is primarily achieved through the process of impersonalisation in which the work of art (the poem, the performance, the joke) is superior over the artist’s personality. It can be argued that Thomas is represented as the ultimate artist who, by shifting the focus from his private self to his public performance, considers the creation of art his primary concern. With regard to Thomas’ performances, the feature of modesty is also expressed by the notion of the “practising interpreter” (Ackermann xx). According to the Welsh poet, reading represents a skill that has to be developed and refined through constant practice (Ackermann xx). Thus, Thomas’ personal definition of the poetry-reader implies the Welsh stereotype of discipline and its belief in hard work. Secondly, Thomas’ performing skills are often related to his culture background. In this respect, we will mainly consider the poet’s Welsh voice. According to Ackermann, Thomas’ profound sensitivity, his obsession with the phonological quality of words and his resonant voice, which plays a significant role in the composition and reading of his poems, are direct products of his Welsh origin (xvi). Moreover, Ackermann constructs Thomas’ identities of the actor and reader as a fundamentally bardic interpretation of “the poet” who realises his poetic vision as a singer and performer (xvi). Lastly, the representation of “the actor” involves the notion of the suffering genius. In this context, Thomas’ role of the performer is characterised by inhibition and insecurity. Those features, however, are generally expressed in self-mocking remarks as illustrated in the concluding lines of a lecture:

'I brought all these books in case I would be too frightened to answer your questions. I haven't answered them, but I wasn't frightened. Thank you for asking me'. (qtd. in Adix 65)

Alternatively, the suffering theme is conveyed in terms of a profound vulnerability that is supposed to create an authentic moment of intimacy in which Thomas’ “true” personality is revealed. In addition, the construction of the pathetic poet is based on a child motif, which turns the performer into an emblematic symbol of suffering:

Very long pause. Dylan Thomas sips at his glass of water like a kitten bobbing its nose in a saucer. The glass is still full at the end of the session after at least a dozen embarrassed sips. (Adix 64)

The reference might also suggest that Thomas' suffering derives from the very fact of being perceived and interpreted as a public figure. Consequently, stardom is represented as an embarrassing side effect of his success and popularity as a writer. In terms of performance, Lawrence Durrell introduces the image of "the crazy Welsh poet" (36) that is fundamentally based on the star-specific feature of otherness. In this context, Dylan Thomas is fashioned as the literary genius living in his own world of thoughts and emotions:

Here Thomas laughed to himself and seemed lost in very amusing word combinations – while everyone sat petrified, until somebody brought him back to us. (Durrell 61)

Caitlin Thomas agrees with Durrell's argument when writing that her husband "lived in a world of his own: 'out of this world', as they so succinctly put in America" (qtd. in Ackermann 160). To conclude, I shall like to consider Thomas' personal view on his performances:

People come to have a look at me. Here's a little fat man come to make a fool of himself, they think, and since they don't listen to what I read, it doesn't matter whether I make sense or not ... But that isn't quite fair of me – I am enjoying myself. (Adix 60)

According to the poet, the basic purpose of his public appearances is to satisfy the voyeuristic pleasure of the audience – "People come to have a look at me. Here's a little fat man" (60). This reference shows an interesting implication in terms of authentication and image making. Thomas manufactures his performance as a moment of self-expression, which suggests the audience experiences the "true" Dylan Thomas. Furthermore, he authenticates his identity of the actor by relating it to his presumed *person* that is constructed in terms of his physical features (height, weight, sex). Thomas' "real" existence as a human being serves as a further medium of naturalness. Besides, Thomas outlines the function of his performer role: "to make a fool of himself" (60). On this basis, it might be argued that Thomas primarily regards his identity of the performer, including the university lecturer and poetry-reader, as a pure form of entertainment: "since they don't listen to what I read, it

doesn't matter whether I make sense or not" (60). Thomas' conclusion, that he is enjoying himself during his performance, stands in sharp contrast to those representations, which generally share a melodramatic picture of the performer.

As already indicated, Thomas' voice constitutes a central element of his stardom as a performer. The following reference clearly illustrates its particular star quality; it relates to the poet's first radio appearance:

Whilst listening to the news bulletin we conjectured on what would really happen at the crucial moment. Suddenly Dylan's glorious voice boomed out of the loudspeaker. It was an unforgettable experience – hearing him on the radio that first time. The living room was filled with the presence of Dylan. (Maud x)

In fact, the poet's Welsh voice cannot be described as a mere physical feature constructing his public performances. More than that it shows its own identity separate from Thomas' public image; there are numerous representations of Dylan's voice. Therefore, his voice might be analysed as a star in itself. Those constructions are mainly based on his Welsh background. John Ackermann claims that Thomas' readings are strongly influenced by an originally Welsh tradition of preaching, namely *hywl*, which is characterised by strong emphasis on sound and rhythm (116). According to this religious tradition, the poet's voice is regarded as a sign of greatness, or star quality (116). Furthermore, Thomas describes the reading of poetry in "a forceful and chanting manner" (Ackermann 21) as a typical feature of bardic poetry. The bard Dylan Thomas believes that poetry is "always better when read aloud than when read silently with the eyes. Always." (qtd. in Ackermann xx). On this basis, it might be inferred that Thomas authenticates his role of the reader by manufacturing it as a natural and essential part of poetry writing. In the second place, his performances have to be understood as instances of image-production in which Thomas' voice serves as a cultural marker that constructs and authenticates his identity of the Welsh poet. Therefore, it might be concluded that "the art of Dylan Thomas" (John 27) is fundamentally based on the Welsh quality of Dylan's voice that turns the performer into a star:

I cannot speak of Dylan Thomas's poetry, never having been able to remember a word of it, though I did enjoy his recitations delivered in that rich sonorous voice. Some hold, and I am inclined to do so myself, that the best

English in this island is to be heard in Carmarthen County, a largely Welsh-speaking area. [...] I found Dylan's English irreproachable. (John 27)

The star quality of Thomas' voice is reflected in Augustus John's conscious use of superlatives, referring to the poet's Welsh as "the best English in the island" (27). In addition, the poet's voice is used as a structuring element in his performances that indicates the transition between different performer identities:

He smiled and sat down again, and began to talk in a soft voice about his father [...] And all at once the little poet began to read, and his voice raged and surged with power and anger and a terrible desolation. He read 'Do not go gentle into that good night'. It was slow and rhythmic and deep. His eyes were bent down on the book, but he was not reading, for they were fixed for a long time and the wander over both pages for a moment and then freeze again. I can't express how startling the change was in him, from the shy, humble, apologetic, patiently eager man, to this tidal wave of humanity. (Adix 66)

Here, Marjorie Adix interprets Thomas' different voices according to Richard Dyer's private versus public paradigm. On this basis, the poet's two selves are separated in terms of weakness and strength. Dylan's "soft voice" (66) and his humble gestures (smiling and sitting down) have the function to create a moment of intimacy in which the star reveals his "true" personality (talking about his father). In fact, the critic provides a precise representation of Thomas' private self, which is fundamentally based on the feature of modesty: "the shy, humble, apologetic, patiently eager man" (66). This perception stands in sharp contrast to the public identity of the Welsh poet Dylan introduces with a raging and powerful voice. It is the dramatic and intense performance of the suffering genius: "anger and a terrible desolation" (66). Emotional intensity and lack of control are supposed to authenticate the poet and his performance that is manufactured as an expression of Thomas' inner self. Describing "the poet" as a "tidal wave of humanity" (66), Adix obviously constructs a (Romantic) notion of poetic greatness, as discussed in section 2.2.4., in which Thomas is represented as the ultimate human being, and thus the ultimate poet (Fletcher 122). On the other hand, Thomas' voice is constructed from a further perspective: the entertainer and comedian. In this respect, Augustus John states that

Dylan Thomas was 'possessed' by no ordinary devil, but by the most ancient spirit of them all [...] – the Lord of Laughter, the Elemental *Clown*.... (John 28)

The poet's humorous voice does not only resound in his satirical autobiography *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* but it represents an essential element of the actor Dylan Thomas. John Ackermann, for instance, constructs Thomas as the born entertainer who mastered the role of the pub raconteur in every single detail; his charm and humour are considered the most vital features of this identity (Ackermann xxiv). Jack Lindsay supports this argument describing Thomas' public performances as "delightful flights of fantasy" which reveal "his remarkable power as a mimic, a parodist, a pricker of all pomposities and falsities" (qtd. in Ackermann xxiv). In general, the role of the comedian is regarded as an integral part of Thomas' private self. Consequently, humour is often applied as a marker of authentication. This is shown in the following quotation:

[...] and then asked why a poet went around on a reading tour. Thomas looking down at the table, facing no one, said softly: 'My God, that's a hard question! I'm afraid I shall have to answer this straight: it's a way of seeing the country and I haven't any money. It's a matter of ego as well.' (Adix 60)

Of course, we cannot be sure about the real intentions of Dylan Thomas whether he wanted to be truly honest or whether it was just his humorous voice that was speaking to the audience. Nevertheless, there are a number of consciously selected performance signs – the neglect of keeping eye contact and the soft voice – that explicitly reveal that we are confronted with an instance of authentication and public self-construction. In fact, the underlying irony is supposed to create an intimate moment of truth in which the artist provides an exclusive insight into his "true" personality. In this case, Thomas fashions himself as the financially suffering poet and larger-than-life bohemian. In addition, he emphasises the image of the academic underdog, as Thomas shows no intellectual ambitions at all. On the other hand, the role of the entertainer is also manufactured from a melodramatic point of view in which Dylan represents his comic talent as a mask to hide his vulnerable and insecure side:

'You know', he once said, 'when I'm in company which contains admirers or fans of fellow-writers, I begin to feel I'm under false pretence. That is why I act the clown.' (Durrell 39)

Interestingly, Lawrence Durrell relates Thomas' humour to his cultural background, constructing "the comedian" as a typically Welsh identity: "the traditional Welsh easy

flow of speech” (Scarfe 111). In this context, the critic argues that Thomas’ entertaining qualities are just restricted to everyday life, in his literary production however his wittiness is fundamentally shaped by his (mental and physical) suffering (Scarfe 111). He specifies that “[t]he characteristic tone of his [Thomas’] poems is grave and depressing. There is sorrow in his wit, which is grim” (Scarfe 111). Consequently, the poet’s suffering becomes even more tragic and emblematic as it is represented from a humorous perspective.

Lastly, I shall like to include Thomas’ role as a media star which was mainly produced by his regular involvement at the radio; it stands for the development of his national stardom and celebrity status. Ralph Maud provides a comprehensive catalogue of Thomas’ contributions to the BBC radio programme:

Thomas participated in about forty programmes for John Arlott, about fifteen each with Roy Campbell, Aneurin Talfan Davies, and Douglas Cleverdon. He made eight appearances as reader for Patric Dickson, and fifteen miscellaneous productions for R.D. Smith, and did eight dramatic roles for Louis McNeice. Add to these another twenty-eight broadcasts of various sorts, and one gets an approximate total of 145 separate engagements, and average of more than one a month over the ten-year period 1943-53. (Maud xii)

It might be claimed that Thomas’ popularity as the radio star was primarily conditioned by the commercial success of the medium which was developed in America between 1919 and 1922 (Dyer, “Stars” 139). Taking a closer look at the social and technical particularities of the radio, it will be revealed that Dylan’s well-established role of the poetry reader, his acting skills and non-intellectual approach to literature construct him as the born radio performer (Maud xvi). First of all, the medium creates the impression of domestic immediacy; the speaker is thereby perceived as a family member. Furthermore, radio is characterised by easily identifiable characters, social types, and an ordinary performance style similar to everyday communication (Dyer, “Stars” 139). Wells further argues that the positive response to Thomas’ radio plays was mainly owed to audience’s “new sensibility to imaginative language as aurally apprehended” (440). However, it has to be clearly pointed out that Thomas’ role of the radio broadcaster was exclusively restricted to England where a great number of prestigious and eminent British poets were already employed as free-lance workers for the national radio system (Wells 440-441). In the United States, on the other hand, the genre of the radio drama has fallen from favour due to its propaganda implications. In general, almost all constructions of the radio

star are based on Thomas' "organ voice" (Maud xvi) and a highly professional and disciplined working method. Douglas Cleverdon states that

during B.B.C. rehearsals his [Thomas'] standards were thoroughly professional. He had a wonderful ear for rhythms and inflexions and accents, and could apprehend immediately the subtlest points of interpretation. He was, moreover, sober, hard-working, punctilious. So conscientious was he that I have known him leave a pub at lunch-time earlier than was necessary in order to return to the studio and con his script before the afternoon rehearsal. (qtd. in Maud xii)

2.3.2. Dylan Thomas' performance style

In general, performance is defined as the verbal representation of a text (Dyer, "Stars" 134). To understand the specificities of an actor's performance and to outline an individual performance style, it is of key importance to consider performance signs which might include facial expressions, voice, gestures of hands and arms, body posture and body movement (Dyer, "Stars" 134). Furthermore, it has to be pointed out that the reading of a performance sign is always culturally and historically specific (Dyer, "Stars" 134-135). The analysis of Thomas' performance will be based on Richard Dyer who distinguishes between two acting styles: the first category privileges "stillness, a small number of gestures, intensification of the voice" ("Heavenly Bodies" 123), whereas its counterpart contains "movement, elaborated gestures and vocal gymnastics" (123). Mannerisms, on the other hand, are repeated gestures of a star's performance and have the function to authenticate the performer role and produce immediate recognition (Dyer "Stars", 139):

[...] the style consists in the repeated use, within films and through the films of a star's career, of certain mannerisms, which do the job of personalising the type the performer plays. These may be relatively 'naturalistic' mannerisms, but they are different and repeated enough to constitute idiosyncrasies. These form the basis of the individual star's performance style. (Dyer "Stars", 139)

First of all, the study will discuss Thomas' studio performances demonstrating a strong emphasis on gestures and mimic expression. The second part, however, will deal with a performance setting, which is usually constructed in terms of the poet's private self, the pub. John Arlott manufactures the performer Dylan Thomas according to Dyer's first category of acting, which implies a limited however intense physical involvement:

Round, with the roundness of a Tintoretto urchin – cherub, and in a large loose tweed jacket, he would stand, feet apart and head thrown back, a dead cigarette frequently adhering wispily to his lower lip, curls a little tousled and eyes half-closed, barely reading the poetry by eye, but rather understanding his way through it, one arm beating out a sympathetic double rhythm as he read. (qtd. in Ackermann xiii)

Thomas' body movement, which contains the precise gesture of his "arm beating out a sympathetic double rhythm" (xiii), has the clearly defined purpose of visualising the significant role of sound and rhythm of his bardic poetry. In fact, the restricted use of his body, the rest remains in complete stillness, intensifies the expressive power of this performance sign. His body posture – "feet apart and head thrown back" – might be interpreted as a defensive position as if the poet is facing his greatest rival. Indeed, his reading is constructed in terms of a conquest. Interestingly, Arlott also includes a detailed description of Dylan's physical appearance addressing various different identities of Thomas's star persona. In this respect, the producer of Thomas' radio programmes applies the dominant child motif in a slightly varied form; the "urchin-cherub" (xiii), in which the features of innocence and vulnerability contradict Dylan's devastated appearance of self-destruction. The poet's hair, "curls a little tousled" (xiii), might indicate his rebel image, whereas the tweed jacket serves as a sign of his academic self – however "loose" (xiii), as if the roles of the literary critic and university lecturer do not entirely fit. Thus, Arlott reinforces the picture of the intellectual underdog. Thomas' intense performance style – not reading but "understanding" his poetry – implies a strong emotional commitment which manufactures also the reading of his poetry as an act of self-discovery and consequently authenticates Dylan's identity of the public performer. In addition, authenticity is achieved through the most individual performance sign: his cigarette "adhering wispily to his lower lip" (xiii) symbolises in general Thomas' bohemianism. In the second place, the biographer John Ackermann provides the construction of the ordinary Welsh poet drinking and smoking in the pub:

It was Thomas habit to note down phrases, even whole sentences, that occurred to him while drinking in a pub or talking to friends. Often, in the middle of a witty story or a literary argument, he would drag a cigarette packet from his pocket, tear off the end, write a few words, and thrust the piece into another piece. Some phrase, or metaphor, or joke had jostled its way through tobacco haze in the crowded bar-parlour. This note-making seldom caused a

break in the discourse: he continued his drinking, smoking, talking, his pockets crammed with hastily written notes and observations. (Ackermann 109-110)

Though the critic defines the account as a representation of the artist's "true" personality, in reality it has to be considered an example of Thomas' public performances because the lack of naturalness and spontaneity and the poet's theatrical gestures have to be understood as performance features based on artificiality, command and conscious production. In this respect, the cigarette constitutes the central performance sign. First and foremost, Ackermann includes the romantically idealised representation of the drunkard in which Thomas' drinking habit is manufactured as a form of socialising essential for his poetic expression. Furthermore, the critic stresses Dylan's simple approach to literature describing ordinary human life – "drinking in a pub or talking with friends" (109-110) – as the poet's chief source of inspiration. In contrast to Arlott, Ackermann constructs Thomas' identities of the entertainer and literary critic – "in the middle of a witty story or a literary argument" (109-110) – as indispensable components of his "real" self. Above all, Dylan Thomas performs the role of the legendary poet who lives in his own world of sounds, words and images.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the complexity of Thomas' performance style results from the interrelationship of his various star identities which intensify and/or contradict each other. Moreover, it might be argued that the actor Dylan Thomas is representing himself, in so far as his real identity of "the poet" always stands at the centre of his performances. However, as Richard Dyer states

[s]tars, after all, are always inescapable people in public. If the magic, with many stars, is that they seem to be their private selves in public, still they can also be about the business of being in public, the way in which the public self is endlessly produced and remade in presentation. Those stars that seem to emphasise this are often considered 'mannered' [...] When such stars are affirmative of manners and public life they are often, significantly enough, European or with strong European connections [...] These are people who have mastered the public world, in the sense not so much of being authentically themselves in it or even being sincere, as of performing in the world precisely, with poise and correctness. ("Heavenly Bodies" 12)

2.3.3. Popular versus elite culture

So far in this thesis, it has been illustrated that Thomas' star persona is composed of highly contradictory identities: the media star (radio broadcaster) in contrast to the academic star (university lecturer). Because of that, we have to ask ourselves the following question: to which culture – elite or popular culture – does Dylan Thomas belong? Before we can answer this essential question, I shall like to outline briefly the opposing concepts of mass and elite culture. In this respect, I will compare Dwight Macdonald's fundamentally elitist approach to Browne's and Harmon's liberal perspective that will serve as our primary theoretical background to analyse Thomas' star phenomenon.

Traditionally, Western culture distinguishes between High and Mass Culture, whereas the latter is considered anti-art (Macdonald 9). According to Dwight Macdonald, Masscult has to be described as mere distraction as it does not provide "an emotional catharsis nor an aesthetic experience" (9) nor does it entertain. In contrast, High Culture is defined as "an expression of feelings, ideas, tastes, visions that are idiosyncratic and the audience similarly responds to them as individuals" (9). Furthermore, High Art implies a deep understanding of past achievements; therefore it is based on clearly defined standards (Macdonald 9). Masscult, however, reinforces a homogenisation process in which popularity has become the main criterion of success (Macdonald 10). Macdonald believes that the consumption of High Culture shall be restricted to the intellectual elite in order to maintain its quality and status as High Art. On the other hand, Ray B. Browne separates four categories: elite, popular, mass and folk culture. He claims that all four levels are closely related to each other:

[t]he Mass area, being largely imitative, draws from the others without altering much. Elite art draws heavily from both folk and, perhaps to a slightly lesser degree, popular art. Popular art draws from Elite and Mass, and Folk. (Browne 17)

Browne further argues that especially folk and elite art show a strong connection as both forms emphasise individualism and personal expression (20-21). There is no doubt that Thomas' identity of the bard constructs his literary production as folk art. However, his role of the scholar, in which his poetry and prose were used as a subject of academic enquiry, represents his work as a product of elite culture. As the primary concern of this diploma thesis is to analyse the *star* Dylan Thomas, we have to consider the poet as a representation of popular culture. In fact, popular culture

and stardom are closely related ideas as both shed light on people in a specific social and cultural environment. As already mentioned, star studies discuss how people are supposed to behave in contemporary society, whereas the study of popular art reveals the “nature” of people and their cultural consumption (Harmon in Hinds 62).

Ray Browne provides the following definition of popular culture:

Popular Culture is all those elements of life which are not narrowly intellectual or creatively elitist and which are generally though not necessarily disseminated through the mass media. Popular Culture consists of the spoken and printed word, sounds, pictures, objects and artefacts. “Popular Culture” thus embraces all levels of our society and culture other than the Elite – the “popular”, “mass” and “folk”. (Browne 21)

On this basis, Dylan Thomas has to be considered a “popular” artist. Firstly, his public identity of the radio broadcaster signifies his involvement in the mass media. Furthermore, his numerous readings for the BBC, “notable for their controlled and exact enunciation of word and phrase” (xx), resulted in a notable extension of his reader- and listenership addressing not an entirely academic but a mass audience (Ackermann xx). Ackermann argues that

it was Dylan Thomas’s readings that rescued poetry from the lecture room and élite gathering, for he often drew wide audiences, particularly in America, as had Dickens and Wilde on their tours. (Ackermann xx)

Secondly, Thomas might be defined as a crossover celebrity who contributed to various media forms and literary genres. In addition, as an artist of popular culture he was able to overcome “class lines to become part of the lifestyle of all classes or subcultures in a particular society” (Harmon 67). On the one hand, the academic images – the scholar, the literary critic and poetic pioneer – represent Dylan Thomas as an integral part of the intellectual elite characterised by high educational standards and professionalism (Harmon 66-67). On the other hand, Thomas’ performer identities (actor, radio broadcaster, university lecturer, poetry reader) show typical features of popular culture: commercial, popular, entertaining, professional, highly diverse and a large number of participants who “enjoy the cultural experience at different levels of sophistication” (Harmon 67). According to Harmon, both (popular and elite) cultures share the same basic purpose: “they help people to enjoy life and refine it” (68). In addition, popular art fulfils a therapeutic function in which “[p]ersonal

and social tensions and misunderstandings [...] can often be resolved” (71). This clearly reminds us of Thomas’ personal definition of poetry writing which is generally manufactured as an act of self-discovery (Scarfe 107). In conclusion, we can state that Dylan Thomas belongs to all four categories: elite (the academic), popular (the performer), mass (the radio broadcaster) and folk (the Welsh poet).

2.4. The Welsh bohemian: city versus country

A close examination of Dylan Thomas’ star *persona* reveals that certain public identities are constructed in relation to a very specific geographical environment. It is possible to outline the general dichotomy city versus country. In our case, London (and later America) is contrasted to Wales. Interestingly, the opposition is generally constructed in terms of Dyer’s essential separation between the public and private self. As already discussed in section 1.4., Thomas’ roles of the poet and the Welshman represent the main authenticators of his public image(s). They are also predominantly located in Wales, more specifically in Laugharne. It follows that the Welsh countryside, which provides the artist with a cultural and literary tradition, constitutes an authentic framework to construct the “real” Dylan Thomas. All the other identities are manufactured outside this Welsh setting. In this respect, London is described as the main context for the production of Thomas’ bohemian image, characterised by sex and alcohol (Read 51, 56). With regard to the adolescent poet, London is constructed as an artistic exile in which Thomas hoped to find the necessary and beneficial atmosphere for his development as a “modern man” (Read 51). According to Bill Read, the young poet regarded his bohemianism as a means of provocation, which however, to the poet’s dislike, did not achieve the desired effect within the urban environment of London (51). Moreover, the London period, in which the poet also worked as a script writer, is significantly shaped by the feature of suffering; so that later on John Brinnin refers to Thomas’ devastated appearance as the “London look” (179):

bloodshot and yellowed eyes, blotched complexion, inextricably tangled locks,
an air of having slept in his bulky clothes for nights on end. (Brinnin 179)

Ackermann, on the other hand, manufactures the idea of the “London suffering” in terms of Thomas’ first artistic crisis, mainly produced by his social conditions –

finances and family – that hindered the disciplined Welsh poet to dedicate himself to the creative process of poetry writing:

He complained 'this little bungalow is no place to work in when there's a bawling child [the baby Aeronwy] ... the rooms are tiny, the walls bum-paper thin'. But he then cheerily announces that "Now, however, I have just taken a room in a nearby house: a very quiet room where I know I can work till I bleed. (qtd. in Ackermann xi)

In contrast to Thomas' "London" self, the poet's Welsh surrounding is usually constructed as an authentic access to his "true" personality. John Brinnin supports this argument when describing Laugharne as

a private sanctum, where for once he was not compelled, by himself admittedly, to put on an act, to be amusing, to perpetuate the myth of the *Enfant Terrible*: one of the most damaging of myths, and a curse to grow out of. (qtd. In Ackermann 161)

In other words, Wales provides Dylan Thomas with an intimate and personal environment in which "the poet" can be truly himself, whereas his public roles of the entertainer and bohemian are represented as constant sources of suffering as they do not correspond with his "real" self. What is more, the Welsh landscape is constructed as Thomas' most dominant inspirational background for his literary production (Ackermann 159). In comparison, Ackermann believes that the urban experience of London and the United States impeded Dylan's creative expression and growth as an artist (159). James Nashold agrees with Ackermann when stressing the importance of ordinary Welsh life for Thomas' physical and mental well-being:

Here, he kept regular hours, ate and slept properly and drank beer in moderation. Away from these roots, he drank too much, talked too much, did no serious work and ate and slept like a man on the run. His poetry and his health were as intimately tied to his landscape as a baby to his mother's breast. (Nashold 34)

In her novel *Leftover Life to Kill*, Caitlin Thomas emphasises the vital relationship between Dylan Thomas and his cultural background. She argues that her husband needed the isolated and remote environment of Laugharne in order to assume his identity of the poet (Ackermann 159). In contrast, Caitlin describes America as a

“poisonous atmosphere” (qtd. in Ackermann 160); a period of distractions and, more dramatically, the repression of his poet self (160). Ackermann specifies: “London has entertained and distracted him, but America was to kill him” (161). In this respect, Brinnin fashions Thomas as the “mendicant poet” (6) who travelled “to America in a fear that he might lose everything, including his identity” (6). As indicated in this reference, John Brinnin explicitly refers to Thomas’ “real” self, however the critic does not clarify his personal understanding of the term “identity”. Therefore, we cannot be sure whether he agrees with Dylan Thomas who defines the identity of the poet as his core personality:

[t]hen I went to the States with my luggage of dismays and was loudly lost for months, peddling and bawling to adolescents the romantic agonies of the dead ... About another visit to the States, I don’t know. Though I can only play a poet there, and not make poetry. (qtd. in Ackermann 160)

First of all, the quotation is constructed as a moment of authenticity in which Thomas reveals the “truth” about his American reading tour. It might be argued that the basic purpose of this description is to provide a modest and deglamourizing perspective on his American (international) stardom. In fact, the feature of modesty is manufactured in terms of a derogatory remark on his most dominant public roles, metaphorically indicated by his “loudly absence”, of the poetry reader, entertainer and university lecturer: “peddling and bawling to adolescents” (160). As already mentioned, Thomas’ American period is significantly shaped by the suffering theme. In this respect, the poet constructs his reading tour as an essentially professional responsibility. On the other hand, suffering is also reflected in his readings primarily dealing with “the romantic agonies of the dead” (160). Moreover, Dylan Thomas stresses the artificiality of his American self; he only imitates a poet. Thus, the identity of the poet, Dylan’s true and authentic personality, is fabricated in direct relation to his Welsh background and, more importantly, to the writing process. Consequently, Thomas fashions himself as a great poet.

2.5. The immigrant: Dylan Thomas in America

This section explains Thomas' relationship with the United States where the Welsh poet achieved the status of an international celebrity. Firstly, we will take into consideration general social conditions and Hollywood star system that might have been relevant for the development of Thomas' (American) stardom. This will be followed by a detailed analysis of Dylan's immigrant image, involving the roles of the scholar and Welshman, which are generally represented from the perspective of otherness. This study is fundamentally based on Brinnin's novel *Dylan Thomas in America*; focussing on Dylan's first and last reading tour in the years 1950 and 1953 (Brinnin 31).

To begin with, I shall like to indicate possible reasons for Thomas' success (as a Welsh poet) in the United States. According to Joseph Schneider's investigations on social origin and fame, literature was traditionally not regarded as a primary field of distinction in America (55). In the time period between 1600 and 1900 the United Kingdom (25.55%) showed a considerably higher number of famous people in the field of literature and art than the United States (18.64%) (Schneider 55). This evidence might explain Thomas' immediate success in Great Britain, especially Wales, in which poets already assumed a prestigious (social) position. In order to clarify Thomas' American stardom as a writer, it has to be concluded that from 1900 onwards there must have been a major redistribution of those activities worthy of eminent recognition. Schneider believes that since the introduction of democracy political achievements were no longer considered as fame producing. Consequently, the practical arts, including poetry, gained dominance and soon became the essential source of distinction (60). On the other hand, the success of "the immigrant" might have been conditioned by vital developments within the Hollywood star system in which "otherness" has become a major star quality. In this respect, Macnab points out that from the early 1920's onwards the American film industry showed a strong interest in foreign stars that served as an authentic representation of a very specific cultural and ethnical background (143-144). Those exotic outsiders had the primary function to disrupt "the social, political and sexual equilibrium" (143) of contemporary American society. In our discussion, the feature of otherness is primarily expressed by Thomas' Welsh background. Thirdly, Thomas' international success has to be analysed in relation to certain economic and political circumstances in the United

States that conditioned the development of different hero types. In this context, Enno Patalas claims that in the period after the economic crisis, in which America regained its confidence as a superior nation, the American audience demanded a novel concept of the (cinematic) hero as they were no longer able to identify with the former prestigious image of the tough guy (154). There was a considerable gap between the hero's life portrayed in the movie and the real-life experience of the audience (Brustein 25). This situation caused the rise of the ordinary star that looks, talks and behaves like the common, middle-class guy (154). The Second World War, however, induced a further change in the definition of the cinema hero. Melancholy and resignation shaped the "lost" hero's face and general appearance. (Patalas 173, 202) Robert Brustein writes that the 1950's introduced a dramatic shift from artificial glamour to a reality of harsh truths (23, 25). This new realism was predominantly reflected in the actor's ordinary appearance and acting style that was characterised by the use of accents and original speech. In the case of Dylan Thomas "reality" is mainly produced by his Welsh tongue. Brustein points out that those innovative actors "attract[ed] attention by their intensity of feeling, rather by physical attractiveness" (26) and have developed a unique and individual acting style that was shown in movies dealing with the "real questions of existence" (26). This might be related to Thomas' poetry performances, which are generally constructed in terms of his delivery of strong and intense emotions. The feature of suffering also plays a vital role within the genre of the domestic drama. The realistic movie discusses the psychological history of the character: neurosis, isolation and drug addiction represent the dominant themes of this anti-hero. (Brustein 28-29) Robert Brustein states that

[t]he realistic hero is more often victimized by the confining world in which he lives. And he is trapped not only in the interior of his world but in the interior of his soul. (Brustein 28)

Dylan Thomas' (American) star personages – the performer, the immigrant and the suffering genius – are manufactured on the basis of both hero types. The post-depression definition promotes Dylan's "good Joe" image, the social type with its strong emphasis on ordinariness and modesty. In this regard, the Welsh poet expresses an anachronistic concept of stardom. On the other hand, the post-war classification with its realistic hero privileges Thomas' construction of the suffering

genius. Therefore, we might conclude that Dylan Thomas represents the ultimate American star, as he was able to embody two completely distinctive and historically specific hero types.

Above all, Dylan Thomas' identity of the immigrant has to be understood as a phenomenon of otherness. Brinnin refers to the poet arriving for the first time in the United States:

Bundled like an immigrant in a shapeless rough woollen parka, his hair as tangled as a nest from which the bird has flown, his eyes wide, scared, as if they sought the whole dreadful truth of America at once, he came into the zero cold of a frosty bright morning at Idlewild Airport. The date was February 21, 1950. [...] When I waved, he lifted a tentative hand and showed a quick uncertain smile that seemed at once a greeting and an apology. (Brinnin 3)

First and foremost, the critic constructs the immigrant image according to the vital dualism city versus country. In this respect, Dylan Thomas serves as an authentic representation of the Welsh countryside. He is manufactured as the uncivilised, wild poet of nature: "a nest from which the bird has flown" (3). As outlined in the previous discussion, the urban context implies essentially negative connotations because it generally stands for Thomas' premature death – "the whole dreadful truth of America" (3). It has to be pointed out that Brinnin's "intimate" account on the Welsh poet is essentially based on Dyer's true self-model. The critic claims a profound understanding of Thomas' public and private self; by identifying the underlying processes of image construction he was able to gain an insight into Thomas' "real" self. Consequently, Brinnin's main concern refers to the description of Thomas' private personality. The identity of the immigrant is characterised by insecurity and vulnerability; those features are reflected in Thomas' mimic and gestures: "his eyes wide, scared" (3) and "a quick uncertain smile" (3). Furthermore, the image includes the element of immaturity, which represents the Welsh poet in terms of a pathetic, helpless child. This fundamentally sensitive and insecure side of Thomas' public self is promoted by the poet himself, stating in a letter to Brinnin: "I hand the baby over, with bewildered gratitude" (Brinnin 31). On the other hand, the child motif is reinforced by Brinnin's personal constructions in which he fashions himself as Dylan's manager and, more importantly, as his (moral and medical) guardian primarily concerned "to take care of him [...] to protect him from himself" (40) (Brinnin 17,40; Read 104). John Brinnin writes:

I had in a rather naïve confidence prepared for Dylan a diary which told him how he would travel, how long it would take to get from one place to another, who would meet him, where he would stay, and what to do if anything went amiss. (Brinnin 41)

In contrast, the public side of “the immigrant” is generally constructed in terms of Thomas’ bohemian image that represents the poet as the larger-than-life drunkard:

As Dylan, by a loud and awkward entrance, seemed to demand considerably more attention than the party was disposed to grant him, becoming again the very figure of the wine-soaked poet. (Brinnin 18)

This construction has to be considered the clear opposite of Thomas’ American image of “the good Joe” which explicitly emphasises the star’s socialising qualities. Above all, the identity of the immigrant is manufactured from the perspective of otherness. The feature mainly refers to Thomas’ cultural otherness in which his Welsh origin is understood as a star quality and marker of distinction. To be more precise, his “Welshness” produced the poet’s special (star) status among his literary contemporaries. In addition, Thomas’ cultural identity, which is primarily expressed by his Welsh voice and his bardic poetry, also serves as a sign of authentication. In his nostalgic and idealising descriptions Thomas becomes the ultimate Welshman; an authentic representation of Welsh culture. Moreover, he assumes the role of a mediator between two distinctive cultures and thereby provides his American audience with a very specific image of Wales:

I was born in a large Welsh industrial town at the beginning of the Great War: an ugly, lovely town (or so it was, and is, to me) crawling, sprawling, slummed, unplanned, jerry-villa’d, and smug-suburbed, by the side of a long and splendid-curving shore... (qtd. in Ackermann 24)

As already indicated, Thomas’ cultural background is generally constructed in terms of ordinariness. This vital star feature, however, produces an interesting contradiction when it comes to his image of the immigrant, which is considered a profoundly Welsh identity: the celebrity versus the Welshman. Richard Dyer, on the other hand, argues that ordinariness constitutes the “ultimate moral attitude of the American way of life” (“Heavenly Bodies” 152). Indeed, Thomas’ public images are composed of

essentially American values such his belief in hard work that is supposed to emphasise Dylan's constant growth as an artist.

2.6. The suffering genius

As will be outlined in this discussion, the suffering theme can be analysed from various perspectives. It is possible to identify different "sources" that produce Thomas' mental and physical suffering: sexuality, alcohol, diabetes, alienation and his poetic talent. Generally speaking, the feature is described in relation to the essential paradigm private versus public. In fact, the relationship of Thomas' two selves is often considered a dominant source of his suffering; an inherent conflict within the poet's "true" personality. In this respect, his private self is mainly constructed in terms of modesty, insecurity and vulnerability. This stands in sharp contrast to Thomas' public persona that supports the perception of the legendary star poet:

[...] he kept us waiting hours and we were on the point of giving him up for lost when the telephone rang. He said in hollow, muffled tones: "I can't find the flat, so I'm not coming." He wasn't tipsy. He just sounded terribly nervous and ill at ease. 'Where are you now?' I said, 'because I'll get a taxi and fetch you'. That startled him. 'As a matter of fact', he said, 'I'm just too afraid to come. You'll have to excuse me.' He then told me that he was telephoning from the pub immediately opposite the house. [...] Once we left the pub he completely changed, became absolutely himself, and took the whole thing with complete assurance and sang-froid. Within ten minutes the nervous man was teasing Miller and enjoying Hugo Guyler's good wine – and indeed offering to read his latest poems, which he did there and then. (Durrell 37)

In this particular reference, a professional meeting with fellow writers constitutes Thomas' source of suffering which fashions him as "the nervous man" (37). This representation, however, might be interpreted as a sign of modesty and ordinariness. Interestingly, Durrell's description of Thomas' private self – he "became absolutely himself" (37) – is fundamentally shaped by the image of the "good Joe" which is primarily mediated through the roles of the entertainer (teasing Miller and reading poetry) and the drunkard (enjoying good wine). Thus, Lawrence Durrell fashions Dylan Thomas as a highly contradictory person: from the sensitive, anxious child to the flamboyant bohemian. On the other hand, John Brinnin constructs the poet as an emblematic figure of suffering; providing a melodramatic perspective on Thomas' stardom. In this context, the critic regards Dylan's poetic gift and consequently his

star status as a writer and performer as psychological burden. Brinnin describes the poet's suffering in terms of isolation and emotional indifference:

Ovations greeting him as he came on and as he went off were tremendous, but it was his sweat on his brow flowed no less copiously either time. It was my first full and striking knowledge of the fact that Dylan was alone, that he had been born into loneliness beyond the comprehension of those of us who feel we live in loneliness, and that those recognitions of success or failure by which we can survive meant nothing to him. (Brinnin 24)

2.6.1. The sexually obsessed poet: sex versus virtue

Traditionally, sexuality is defined as a vital element for the development of the Romantic poet. Francis Galton, for instance, states that

[t]he poet and artist in general are men of high aspirations, but, for all that, they are sensuous, erotic race, exceedingly irregular in their way of life. [...] Their talents are usually displayed early in youth, when they are first shaken by the tempestuous passion of love. (Galton 225)

The bard Dylan Thomas agrees with Galton's fundamentally Romantic theory when distinguishing between two types of writers: "those who believed in the wisdom of the mind and those who preferred the flesh" (Nashold 45). The Welsh poet classifies himself according to the second category; thereby he regards his body as an essential medium to perceive and process life experiences (Nashold 45). It follows that sexuality also plays a major role within the process of poetry writing, generally understood as an act of self-discovery (Scarfe 107). According to Francis Scarfe, Dylan provides a sexual interpretation of life and death (105). The poet believes in the "sexual basis of life" (105) and argues that the horror of death derives from the fact that it is sexless (Scarfe 105). Ackermann lends support to Scarfe's investigations when stressing Thomas' sexual and sensual imagery which has to be considered the main distinguishing element separating the Welsh poet from his contemporaries (19). This means that Ackermann constructs Thomas as a classic poet as only few poets, such as Dylan Thomas or Donne, wrote so passionately and explicitly on sexuality (19). It might be inferred that those "sexual" readings of Thomas' poetry primarily produce the myth of the sexually obsessed poet who was kept away "from inflammatory contact with the delectable students in blue jeans" (Brinnin 55). This strong focus on Thomas' sexual poetry, and consequently his

personal sexuality, might be related to significant developments in the history of sexuality (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 25). Discussing the social role of sex in fifties America, a time period and geographical environment in which Dylan Thomas gained the status of an international celebrity, we have to include the Kinsey report, describing the nature of male and female sexuality, and the first publication of *Confidential* and *Playboy*, which constructed sex as the most important aspect of human life (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 22). Because of that, sexuality was no longer regarded as a taboo but entered the public sphere as an essential subject of conversation. Interestingly, those dramatic changes in the perception of sexuality coincided with the first performance of Thomas' most successful work, the "play for voices" *Under Milk Wood* in which the poet reveals the secret desires of a Welsh town (Brinnin 257).

The feature of sexuality is not just restricted to the interpretation of Thomas' poetry but has to be taken into consideration when it comes to the analysis of his star persona. Indeed, Thomas' sexual identity constitutes a central component of his legend (Brinnin 75). In this respect, Bill Read points out that especially the young poet manufactured sexuality as a dominant feature of his public image. In a letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, Dylan criticises Wales' obsolescent legislation on the issue, forcing young adults to abstinence, at a stage of human development in which sexuality represents the most significant experience (Read 42). John Brinnin, on the other hand, provides a paradoxical representation of Thomas' mature sexuality, which focuses on his "lurching" approach towards women and his numerous affairs (18). This sexually explicit behaviour, "not without crudity" (Brinnin 18), is then compared to a profoundly innocent and immature approach – "a puppy-dog appreciation for the physical attractions" (Brinnin 76). However, there are references in which the feature of sexuality is represented from a completely different angle: suffering. Richard Dyer argues that

[s]tars matter because they act out aspects of life that matter to us; [...] things that are deep and constant features of human existence. (Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies" 17)

In the case of Dylan Thomas, those essential "features of human existence" are sexuality, suffering and religion. The combination of those three elements generates a melodramatic perspective on Thomas' star persona. This means that Thomas'

suffering is manufactured on the basis of a moral conflict produced by two opposing concepts of sexuality. On the one hand, Thomas' Nonconformist background deals with the issue in terms of guilt, whereas the poet's bardic identity considers life as sexually dynamic, where everything living derives from the same sexual source (Scarfe 99). Ackermann also addresses Thomas' moral dilemma, a struggle between "sexual revulsion and sexual ecstasy" (48), when writing that

[l]ike so many of his contemporary Anglo-Welsh writers and friends, he was becoming critical of the way in which Nonconformity was maintaining its restrictive influence on Welsh life. It was, indeed, inevitable that he should cross swords with Welsh Puritanism whose code he both mocked and feared. His intense nature, enjoying all the pleasure of life, was alien to its repressive doctrines. (Ackermann 31)

As a result of those contradictory ideological strands, Ackermann constructs Thomas' sexual identity in terms of the fundamental paradox: religion versus folk culture. Both features are considered integral parts of Dylan's personality. Because of that, the critic compares the highly sexual man to the deeply guilty and obedient Puritan praying for redemption:

On one occasion, after three days of riotous celebration, 'Dylan said, "To be able to tear off my flesh – to get rid of this awful, horrifying skin we have – to get at the bone and then to get rid of that! What a wonderful thing!" (Ackermann 49)

2.6.2. Dylan Thomas and his gift

As shown in the following reference, Lawrence Durrell manufactures Thomas' poetic talent, and consequently the writing process, as a dominant source of suffering. The critic states:

But under the clowning and the planned appearance of this wild and woolly public figure there was a somebody quieter, somebody very much harassed by a gift. (Durrell 40)

Here, Durrell constructs the identity of the poet according to the fundamental distinction between private and public: the disciplined Welsh poet compared to the larger-than-life bohemian. This means, Thomas' suffering is mainly produced by the sharp contrast between his persona (the rebel poet) and his person (the poetic genius). It implies that Durrell claims a deep understanding of Dylan's personal

process of image production; thereby he reveals the artificiality of the poet's public image. The feature of suffering is clearly related to Thomas' "real" personality. John Brinnin, in contrast, fabricates the image of the suffering genius from a different point of view: the loss of Thomas' poetic gift (175). According to Brinnin, Dylan's mental suffering primarily derives from the constant exploitation of his creative and inspirational forces, struggling with the awareness that "his great work was finished" (175). John Ackermann determinedly disagrees with Brinnin's assumption when stressing Thomas' extraordinary production of his final years:

In his last three years Dylan Thomas completed four major poems 'Poem on his Birthday', 'Do not go gentle into that good night', 'In the White Giant's Thigh', and 'Prologue' as well as 'Lament'. His prose work included *Under Milk Wood* and short stories, nearly forty broadcasts, including several new talks like 'A Visit to America' and 'Laugharne', his thirty-fourth and last BBC script, his recording broadcasts in Wales on 5 November 1953, the day he collapsed at the Chelsea Hotel, New York, and was taken to St. Vincent's Hospital. (Ackermann xi)

The critic argues that Thomas' slow pace of composition was a direct result of his role of the literary critic; as a consequence he became more critical of his own production (145). Furthermore, Ackermann believes that Thomas' living and working conditions – the stressful life during his American readings tours, his incapacity of writing when far away from his inspirational Welsh background, the increasing involvement in radio and the deterioration of his health condition – made it impossible to pursue his main profession, the writing of poetry and prose (159). However, the biographer points out that the identity of the poet has to be defined as the core element of Thomas' person as

the need and drive to write poetry was always with him despite the demands of films, broadcasting and lecturing. (Ackermann xi)

In other words, Thomas' constantly growing popularity as a multi-media star and performer forced "the bard" into a subordinated position which is compared to the suppression of his "true" self. Thus, Ackermann fashions Dylan Thomas as the ultimate poet and, more importantly, as a victim of his own success.

2.6.3. The poet's death

The basic purpose of this section is to outline the different representations of Dylan Thomas' death. Moreover, it discusses the significant role of death in the poet's artistic production. However, it has to be pointed out that the analysis will mainly focus on death as an essential element of Thomas' legend.

I shall like to start with Thomas' poetry in which the feature of death is primarily expressed from the perspective of nostalgia, which is generally considered a component of the poet's cultural (especially literary) background. According to Ackermann, who provides a fundamentally Welsh interpretation of Thomas' star phenomenon, Anglo-Welsh writers show a strong "interest in childhood as a state of innocence and grace" (19). Their emphasis on youth indicates a sentimental yearning to recreate a lost happiness (Ackermann 20). Ackermann believes that Welsh writers gain their inspiration from this perpetual search, as the writing process is traditionally defined as an act of self-discovery:

I am the kind of human dredger that digs up the wordy mud of his own Dead Sea, a kind of pig that roots for unconsidered truffles in the reeky wood of his own past. (qtd. in Ackermann xiii)

As shown in the reference, poetry writing is constructed as a highly emotional experience in which the artist's "intense consciousness of death" (Ackermann 19) constitutes the main creative force (Ackermann 70). It might be argued that Thomas' image of the star poet is intrinsically tied to the construction of his poetry combining emotional intensity (as an essential star feature) and death as a "central feature of human existence" (Dyer, "Stars" 30).

Now, we are turning to the Thomas' death that plays a major role in the production of his legend. The very fact that we find numerous sources which deal exclusively with the poet's passing, such as James Nashold's medical investigation, reflects the great importance of the feature. Firstly, death is manufactured in terms of the crucial dualism strength versus weakness. This essential paradox, which compares an enormous willpower to an inescapable heritage of suffering, shapes Thomas' melodramatic star image. Or as James Nashold puts it: "a sickly child with an iron will" (29). It implies that Thomas was already born as the suffering genius. Consequently, suffering had become an indispensable part of his star persona and artistic production. Biographers generally assume that Thomas' suffering started

early on in his childhood which was characterised by recurrent phases of diseases (Ackermann 24). Interestingly, Ackermann represents the poet's physical weakness from a positive perspective. The critic constructs Thomas' suffering as an essential precondition for his artistic growth (24). He claims that the periods of convalescence, in which the child spent most of the time in bed reading poetry, advanced his development as a writer (24). On the other hand, death is represented as a destructive force, which impeded the full expression of Dylan's "extraordinary" poetic talent. Henry W. Wells states

[w]hen Dylan Thomas died last year, it was generally recognized that a lyric poet of exceptional power had been lost at a critical stage in the development of our imaginative literature. (Wells 438)

The tragedy of Thomas' death is mainly produced by the notion of prematurity, which is based on the strong belief that his death could have been prevented. Nashold supports this argument when he accuses Thomas' American doctor Feltenstein of not having considered the patient's history (19). In this respect, Nashold argues that Feltenstein would have been able to diagnose diabetes, which was not compatible with the prescribed cortisone, if he had carried out basic laboratory tests (19). In the concluding part of his journal, John Brinnin fashions Thomas as an emblematic symbol of suffering. Brinnin creates the tragic picture of a star struggling with the constant deterioration of his health condition in face of a growing number of professional demands and artistic responsibilities:

"I can't do anything any more", he said, "I'm too tired to do anything. I can't –, I can't eat, I can't drink – I'm even too tired to sleep." He lay down on the couch. 'I have seen the gates of hell tonight", he said, "Oh, but I do want to go on – for another ten years anyway. But not as a bloody invalid – not as a bloody invalid." (Brinnin 252)

Last but not least Thomas' physical suffering, described as phases of delirium and diabetic shocks which passed the poet into a coma, has to be discussed in terms of alcoholism which involves the dominant image of the drunkard (Brinnin 274 - 275). Bill Read argues that the stereotype of the drinking Welsh poet was mainly produced by the poet himself who, being asked from which disease he might be suffering, named cirrhosis as the cause of his indisposition (Read 106, 131). Therefore, this study will take a closer look at Thomas' image of the drunken poet:

I liked the taste of beer, its live, white lather, its brass-bright depths, the sudden world through the wet-brown wall of the glass, the tilted rush to the lips and the slow swallowing down to the lapping belly, the salt on the tongue, the foam at the corners. (qtd. in Ackermann 110)

This brief examination of Thomas' drinking image will consider the following two questions: Is Thomas' drinking manufactured from an idealised perspective or is it produced in rather negative terms? And which of those representations is more dominant? In general, the notion of drinking serves as a marker of authenticity. It is believed that Thomas' alcohol consumption provides an exclusive insight into his "real" personality. In this respect, the pub is described as a place where the poet was able to be truly himself. The authenticating quality of this feature is emphasised by the concept of ordinariness which is reflected in Thomas' drinking routines (Durrell 38). Moreover, it has to be pointed out that Dylan's alcohol consumption is generally constructed as a typically Welsh feature. James Nashold, for example, describes it as a central element of the "boyo" culture of South Wales where excessive drinking is traditionally regarded as a sign of manhood (52). The critic argues that those accounts, which praise the poet's impressive drinking ability, have to be considered mere exaggerations and an attempt to be "one of the lads" (52). In that way, Nashold de-mystifies the legend of the drunken poet writing that

there is no firm evidence that he drank much more than anyone else, only that he consumed more than his body could process – which was not much at all. (Nashold 54)

Interestingly, Nashold provides a representation that firmly disagrees with the general assumption of the alcoholic; on the contrary, it represents Dylan Thomas as its complete opposite. Nashold further claims that the popular image of the drunkard has to be understood as a product of American publicity machinery that generated the myth of the "famous Welsh beer hog" (109). Again, the context of the United States is used as an equivalent of Thomas' destruction. In the second place, Nashold manufactures Thomas' drinking as an inspirational source for his creative production (54). In this respect, the role of the drunkard is closely related to the "good Joe" image describing Dylan's drinking habit as an integral part of his social identity. According to Nashold, the Welsh poet regarded drinking as an essential quality or even necessity of his poet self (54). It follows that James Nashold promotes a

fundamentally romantic view on Thomas' alcohol consumption. John Brinnin, however, assumes an ambiguous position in this discussion. On the one hand, the novelist lends support to Nashold's argument stressing the vital relationship between Thomas' drinking and his socialising skills; thereby Brinnin manufactures Thomas' alcohol consumption as a way of appreciating life with an extraordinary intensity and full consciousness (49). In this respect, the critic points out that it is necessary to make a

careful discrimination between Dylan and the conventional alcoholic. His drinking was not a means of denying or fleeing life, not a way of making it tolerable, but of fiercely embracing it. When he was creatively alive, his genius was his whole stimulant. (Brinnin 49)

Furthermore, the feature is defined as a strategy to get into good humour and to calm down after a spasm of coughing and vomiting, caused by his diabetes (Brinnin 44). On the other hand, Brinnin also relates Thomas' drinking to the image of the suffering genius. Here, the critic manufactures the poet's alcohol consumption as a means of defence and isolation: "a barrier between his guilt and his laughter, between himself and the world around him" (48). The analysis has shown that negative representations are clearly outnumbered. Roy Campbell once wrote that only under the influence of whiskey the Welsh poet, accustomed to beer, adopted the manners of a "prima donna" (43).

According to McDonald, gossip plays a vital role in the construction of a public image, especially when it comes to the star's death (7). The critic stresses that gossip is not a truthful representation of a celebrity's life; through the processes circulation and repetition however those rumours might become the "truth" of a star's image (7). In the case of Dylan Thomas, the assumption that the poet's death was mainly caused by his alcoholism gained such dominance that it has now manifested itself as the "true" version in Dylan's star persona. Although James Nashold, like a great number of other critics, provides medical evidence that Thomas' premature death did not result from his drinking habit, quoting locals who confirm that Dylan was never a heavy drinker, the notion of the drunkard still remains the most dominant feature of the poet's death myth (Nashold 24, 81). Interestingly, Nashold's account on the patient Dylan Thomas strongly contradicts his assumption of the poet's moderate alcohol consumption. In this context, Nashold represents Thomas in terms of an

addict who refuses the proper medical treatment for the sake of his excessive celebrity lifestyle, including drinking (44, 46).

It shows that Thomas' passing is generally constructed as the tragic death of a star. After his admission to hospital, rumours immediately started to spread, the waiting room was constantly overcrowded and newspapers reported on (and speculated about) the poet's suffering (Brinnin 279 - 280). Some people argued that Thomas struck his head after he had fallen at a party; others however believed that an overdose of morphine was the "real" cause of the poet's death (Ferris 310). On Monday the 9th of November Dylan Thomas died. As soon as Thomas' death was publicly confirmed hundreds of people gathered at St. Vincent Hospital to pay their last respect to the Welsh poet (Nashold 177). The fabrication of a death mask, a plaster cast of the poet's head and torso and the removal of his brain are further indicators of Thomas' stardom (Nashold 181-182). In addition, Paul Ferris points out that Thomas' unexpected death implied a considerable market value; it followed a constant increase in the poet's popularity and, more importantly, his wealth. Ferris writes:

Collected Poems was a best-seller. So was the text of *Under Milk Wood*, the British edition of which sold twenty-five thousand copies within six months of Thomas's death. A year later, in May 1955, the book was in its seventh British impression. [...] The copyrights of the Caedmon records and tapes became the most lucrative of all properties. Material from Thomas's two formal sessions in 1952 and 1953 was supplemented by poems and prose recorded at the Poetry Centre and elsewhere, the first stage production of *Milk Wood*, and a number of B.B.C. recordings. (Ferris 311-312)

Ferris' argument gives evidence that Thomas' death represents the central element of his myth: the Welsh poet who drank himself to death at age 39. It promotes the stereotypical picture of the suffering, self-destructive genius; a profoundly modern understanding of the celebrity. In a letter to Vernon Watkins, Berryman refers to Dylan's premature death as the tragic loss of a great poet:

He did not have to die, as so many other poets have had to die, under the impression that what they had done was not worth doing. But this will not help so much. It doesn't help me. (qtd. in Nashold 177)

3. A capitalist perspective on Dylan Thomas' star image

In this concluding section I shall like to outline the various ways in which Thomas' star status was and still is displayed in public. This investigation is fundamentally based on the distinction between phenomenon of production and consumption. As will be shown in the following discussion, it is possible to classify Dylan Thomas according to both categories. This means that the study will describe Thomas' star persona from a profoundly capitalist point of view. In this respect, it will include a close analysis of the relationship between the poet's stardom and Welsh tourism. In that way, the thesis shall illustrate which aspects of Dylan's star image(s) are sold to a clearly defined audience (tourists). Thus, we will examine tourist-related representations of the Welsh poet.

In this respect, celebrities have to be defined as "image, labour and capital"; or in other words as "sources of meaning, work and money" (McDonald 6). Consequently, we have to separate the star as a labour force, the working person, and the star as an image, the profit-making persona (McDonald 13). Richard Dyer points out that a star's achievements that might be exemplified by an exact number of publications or a sales figure reflect his/her popularity but does not reveal the causes of his/her stardom. So, why has Dylan Thomas become a star? Or to put it differently, why have so many people read Thomas' poetry and not the works of his contemporaries? It is the significant process of image making and promotion that decide whether a person becomes a star or not. Thereby, a star's image, which involves his/her work, appearance, name and voice, is understood as a commodity that has to be sold to a particular target group (McDonald 13). However, the celebrity image is "always liable to escape the individual control of the star" (McDonald 14) which might explain the dominance of certain features; those are more profitable than others. Thus, stars have an economic function and become in the process of profit-making "a form of capital" (McDonald 5). It follows that stars belong to an essentially capitalist system, which represents them as idols of production and/or consumption. According to Leo Lowenthal, in the time period between 1901 and 1941 there was a considerable shift in the perception of stars (in Dyer, "Stars" 39). In the early star system public figures, artists, politicians or businessmen, were commonly regarded as symbols of production because their success was a clear result of hard work; whereas today stars (entertainers or sportsmen) mainly serve as idols of consumption who are in the

position to shape the consumption pattern of a whole (consumer) society (Dyer, “Stars” 39).

3.1. A phenomenon of production: Dylan Thomas and his poetic gift

There is no doubt that Thomas’ star persona involves a number of public roles (the poet, the university lecturer, the literary critic, the poetic pioneer), which manufacture Dylan as an idol of production. It means that the identity is fundamentally based on some kind of work. Thomas also contributed to the process of commodity production because his performances, during his four American tours some of his lectures and readings were recorded, and his literary works were sold to a specifically defined and highly diverse audience (Read 117). It is commonly believed that Thomas’ success is intrinsically tied to his “extraordinary” talent. Those critics share the construction of the literary genius. Others, however, describe the poet’s star status as a result of labour. John Ackermann considers the Welsh feature of discipline to construct Thomas as a symbol of production. In this respect, the biographer describes Dylan Thomas as “the most disciplined and dedicated of poets” (x). As an example, Ackermann refers to the poet’s production in the period between 1934 and 1953 when Thomas completed four American tours including 107 lectures and readings (Ackermann xii). In terms of Thomas’ theatre play *Under Milk Wood*, Bill Read manufactures the Welsh poet as an idol of production who worked on the manuscript until the final day, so that twenty minutes before entering the stage the actors still received new versions of the text (127). In the process of literary production, Thomas fashions himself as the dominant force of control who decides which of his poems should be published or not:

STUDENT: Who decides whether your poems are good or bad?

THOMAS: I do. Nobody reads the bad ones.

STUDENT: Then you don’t ask a publisher for an opinion?

THOMAS: Oh, no. If he didn’t like one that I thought was good, it would be too terrible. (Adix 63)

In contrast, in his novel *Dylan Thomas in America* John Brinnin defines himself as the organiser of Thomas’ American reading tour, depriving the poet from any responsibilities (Brinnin 17, 40). According to Paul McDonald, Brinnin’s account represents Thomas as a true star. He argues that the Hollywood star system is traditionally based on a “structural principle of specialisation and hierarchical power”

(9). This means that the star is regarded as a performance specialist who is required to accomplish tasks exclusively related to the field of performance (McDonald 9). On the other hand, it might be claimed that Brinnin establishes his personal star status: he made it possible that Dylan Thomas also achieved eminence in the United States.

Thomas' role as an idol production is not entirely compatible with his position of an international celebrity. This conclusion is achieved when considering Boorstin's investigations on celebrity culture and the traditional hero. In this context, the critic argues that the star has become a substitute of the classic hero who is generally defined as

a human figure – real or imaginary or both – who has shown greatness in some achievements. He is a man or women of great deeds. (Boorstin 59)

Interestingly, Boorstin's definition of the hero is fundamentally based on the feature of production. Therefore, it might be claimed that an idol of production shows essential hero qualities. In contrast, celebrities are understood as a sheer phenomenon of well knownness, which means that the image, an artificial and synthetically manufactured product, has become the primary parameter for success (Boorstin 70, 58). The star is also described as an expression of average ordinariness because "[t]hey are nothing but ourselves seen in a magnifying mirror" (Boorstin 70). According to Boorstin, the construction of a distinctive (public) personality, including sexuality, habits and tastes, transforms a person into a celebrity (74). The social critics Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer agree with Boorstin's view when stating: "the celebrity is not a real person, but merely a commodity, an image without substance" (qtd. in Meyers 891). Since the emergence of the mass media industry in 1900 extraordinary and great achievements were no longer regarded as a precondition of stardom (Boorstin 57). Boorstin points out that heroes are always self-made (58). This belief is closely related to folk artists whose cultural production is mainly based on an oral tradition (including songs, gestures and spoken words); hence they developed a voice of their own (Boorstin 66). The mass, however, just assumes a consuming identity: "While the folk created heroes, the mass can only look and listen to them" (Boorstin 66). In the case of Dylan Thomas, it might be argued that his Welsh origin and consequently his identity of the bard manufacture him as an idol of production and as a hero of contemporary literature. Thus, the Welsh poet combines traditional hero qualities

(production and folk culture) and typical star features (ordinariness and distinctiveness) to fashion himself a legend.

3.2. The financially suffering poet: a phenomenon of consumption

According to Richard Dyer, a person's star status is most visibly represented by his/her consumption pattern. Consequently, the term conspicuous consumption is defined as the process in which the rich display their wealth (Dyer, "Stars" 38-39). Paul McDonald specifies, "consumption takes on the appearance of an act of individual self-expression" (32); it therefore has to be understood as a part of image making. In this respect, Dyer considers clothes a significant marker of privilege because their luxurious materials and exclusive designs are in fact "debilitating for the wearer, as they squeeze, shape, misshape and constrict her [his] body" (39) and thus make hard (physical) work impossible. Bill Read, for instance, refers to Thomas' fashion style to construct the poet as a symbol of consumption. Thereby, the critic regards fashion as a vital feature of Thomas' private self. He argues that the Thomases were always dressed in colourful and eye-catching clothes when going out in a near-by pub, creating an illusion of glamour and specialness (97). In general, Dylan Thomas is represented according to the conventional concept of consumption in which wealth is described as the most important indicator of a person's stardom. This construction, however, is shaped by an essential paradox inherent to Thomas' star persona: city versus country. John Brinnin, who provides an American perspective on this issue, fashions Thomas as an example of excessive consumption: the poet spent 75 dollars daily; every day he bought new shirts instead of sending them to the laundry and got upset when not being offered the best hotel room (Read 116, Brinnin 80, 248). Moreover, the Welsh poet was highly paid for his four reading tours in the United States, approximately 100.000 to 120.000 pounds a year (Brinnin 248, Nashold 22). The poet's Welsh life, in contrast, serves as a counterpart to Thomas' celebrity lifestyle in America. It is argued that Thomas' success as a writer did not affect his social position within Welsh society. On the contrary, it is believed that it was Thomas' (and Caitlin's) improvidence and firm rejection of middle-class life that impeded his social and financial climb (Read 92, Brinnin 174). As already mentioned in section 2.4., the Welsh countryside is understood as a reflection of Thomas "real self" based on ordinariness and simplicity. Again, this opposition (city versus country) underlines the distinction between public

and private self; or in other words between Thomas' glamorous star life and his ordinary, working-class routine.

In the second place, Thomas' role as an idol of consumption is interpreted in a very specific way, producing the popular construction of the financially suffering poet. In this context, Dylan's consumption-image is usually characterised by the paradox wealth versus poverty. Bill Read writes that during the years in Sea View Caitlin and Dylan Thomas lived on the edge of poverty as both did not have a regular income (97). Despite this financial crisis, however, the young couple employed domestic help, which commonly reflects a superior social position, or at least is not expected when having severe financial problems (Read 97). James Nashold lends support to Read's construction when stating that the Thomas family

managed to maintain both The Boat House in Laugharne and a flat in Camden Town, North London, paid the rent for Thomas's mother's home in Laugharne, sent their two eldest children to private, fee-paying boarding schools, always employed domestic help in the home and enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle on their frequent visits to London. Thomas bought expensive clothes and shoes [...], spent large sums of money on expensive dentistry [...], belonged to two London gentlemen's clubs and enjoyed visiting the theatre, going to nightclubs, dining out at expensive restaurants and ending up at private drinking clubs. [...] His life was a tapestry of petty lies and deceits, with money – or, rather, overexpenditure – it's one constant thread. (Nashold 22)

Thus, Thomas is generally fashioned as a highly indebted *person* incapable of dealing with money in a rational and sensible manner (Ackermann xi, Read 75). Ackermann claims that throughout his life Thomas was economically dependent on friends and generous patrons that provided him with houses for his growing family and a working place where he found the necessary privacy to dedicate himself entirely to the writing of poetry (xi). In addition, the image is often related to Thomas' social role of the "good Joe", emphasising the poet's profound generosity (Campbell 43, Brinnin 63). It therefore produces a consumer identity which is fundamentally based on the feature of modesty. According to Read, Thomas as a symbol of consumption, has to be considered in terms of the poet's emotional suffering, reflected in recurrent phases of anxiety and pessimism which mainly results from Thomas' ambiguous personality in which anarchism is compared to a conservative longing for a regular income (79, 100). In contrast, Caitlin Thomas used to construct their financial crisis as a beneficial condition for Dylan's writing process (Read 79).

3.3. Symbol of success: Dylan Thomas' literary production

Firstly, it might be argued that Thomas' production, the writing and performance of poetry and prose, constitutes the basis of his popularity because it is the core identity of "the poet", constructed and mediated in various different ways, that has transformed the person Dylan Thomas into a public figure. In this respect, the image of the literary genius primarily manufactures Thomas as a symbol of success. Consequently, John Brinnin concludes his novel in the following way:

Dylan Thomas has come to America. The meaning of his voyage was incalculable for those of us who had come to know him intimately, and for those thousands who had been electrified by his gifts and the sense of genius rampant he had recovered for an age disposed to assign genius only to the past or to the psychiatric casebook. (Brinnin 83)

Overwhelmed by the poet's performance style characterised by his delivery of intense emotions, the *Vancouver News-Herald* writes that

[w]ithin this generation, there has been no equally impressive and delightful poetry recital in Vancouver and audiences were scarcely prepared for the powerful emotional experience with which they were presented. (qtd. in Brinnin 51)

Furthermore, Thomas' contributions as a journalist and literary critic (both identities intrinsically tied to his poet self) have to be included in this discussion as they provide clear evidence of the poet's artistic variety. In the period between 1931 and 1934 Thomas was working as a reporter for the *Swansea Post*, due to his growing reputation as a writer he soon became responsible for the poetry section at the weekly newspaper *Herald* in which he also published three of his early poems (Read 19-24). The young poet participated regularly at poetry competitions; with his poems *That Sanity Be Kept* and *The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower* Dylan Thomas won the prize of a half guinea at London's *Sunday Referee's* "Poet's Corner" (Read 35). Moreover, Thomas' poetry volumes, which are characterised by their extravagant design and the use of exclusive materials, also illustrate his status of a star poet (Read 109). Bill Read points out that Dylan's *Twenty-Six Poems*, was released in an elegant and highly aesthetic cover which was fabricated in the hand press Officina Bodoni in Verona which uses only high-class materials such as vellum paper and mould-made vat paper (109, 117). The notion of specialness (or

superiority) is reflected in the limited number of volumes available; an exclusive circulation consisted of only 150 hand-signed exemplars and was immediately sold out at the very first day of its publication (Read 109, 117). Read argues that due to the poet's constantly increasing popularity, his volumes were usually published in two different accoutrements: a regular and a more exclusive version (117).

Secondly, criticism, which represents the acknowledgement of a star's achievements, constitutes a further indicator of stardom. In this respect, I would like to consider those sources especially affirmative of Thomas' work as they display most evidently his success as a poet. Specialness is conveyed by the rhetorical device of superlatives. As Richard Dyer points out, stars are usually manufactured as "the most-something"; thus they become an expression of superiority (Dyer, "Stars" 43). In the case of Dylan Thomas, success is represented in terms of the poet's artistic superiority. In his review on *18 Poems*, Rayner Heppenstall refers to Dylan Thomas' work as the white hope of English poetry, stating that

his unmatched and unrefined imagination, the prodigality and massiveness of his sensual symbolism which would make a whole school of fleshly poets look like minnows. (qtd. in Ackermann xxi)

John Ackermann, on the other hand, describes the poet's play *Under Milk Wood* as "the most popular and performed play of our time" (xiii) which "leaves both its readers and hearers deeply moved and seriously impressed" (Wells 438). Wells describes the recorded version of *Under Milk Wood* as "the best speech record as yet to be produced in English" (442); whereas Brinnin's account on Thomas' last performance of his play for voices has to be considered an ultimate expression of stardom in which the star poet is represented as a legend:

A thousand people were left hushed by its lyrical harmonies and its grandeur, among them Robert Shaw, the eminent choral director, who came backstage and, moved to tears, expressed his admiration. (Brinnin 257)

Edith Sitwell, who was one of Thomas' earliest supporters and admirers, believes that Dylan's poetry "is of the greatest beauty, both visually and orally" (150). What is more, she defines Dylan's work according to bardic tradition which regards poetry as a divine expression of universal truth; or in other words a reflection of nature's beauty created by the hands of God:

The sound is like that of the heavenly music over the sand, like the sea-air. Sometimes it changes like the wind, moves with the beauty of the waves. It is of an unsurpassable technical achievement. [...] I do not know any short poem of our time which has more greatness. (Sitwell 150)

In contrast, Thomas' personal view on success is constructed from the perspective of melodrama. This means that Dylan's popularity as a writer and performer is understood as a dominant source of suffering. John Brinnin, for example, describes Thomas' suffering – the poet has become a victim of his own success – in terms of isolation and emotional indifference:

Ovations greeting him as he came on and as he went off were tremendous, but it was his sweat on his brow flowed no less copiously either time. It was my first full and striking knowledge of the fact that Dylan was alone, that he had been born into loneliness beyond the comprehension of those of us who feel we live in loneliness, and that those recognitions of success or failure by which we can survive meant nothing to him. (Brinnin 24)

In addition, Brinnin includes the feature of nostalgia to emphasise the picture of the modest star poet. The critic writes that for more than twenty years the poet was carrying with him a newspaper article showing the young Dylan Thomas who had won the 220-yard dash at the grammar school competition (Brinnin 46-47). Brinnin argues that this triumph of his childhood was the only success that really mattered to Thomas (46-47).

3.4. Dylan Thomas and Welsh tourism

The following discussion outlines the close relationship between tourism and Dylan Thomas who is described as the most eminent son of Swansea (Amanshauser 25). In this respect, I shall like to indicate the most dominant sources (images) of Thomas' star persona, which are used to construct a very specific image of Wales. Consequently, we will mainly focus on the poet's cultural identity generally understood as an authentic representation of a whole nation. This means that Thomas is regarded as the ultimate Welshman. Therefore, tourism represents a further, fundamentally capitalist, perspective that displays Thomas' status of an international celebrity. Furthermore, it belongs to the process of image-production, promoting the most profitable image(s) of Dylan Thomas. The investigation will be based on information provided by the Welsh tourist board and the Dylan Thomas

Centre at Swansea. Above all, the public figure Dylan Thomas, including his poetry and public identities, has to be considered the most significant source of a tourist-related construction of Wales as the poet was producing an individual, very precise definition of what it means to be Welsh.

Firstly, Thomas' identity of the poet, in particular "the bard", has to be considered a central element in the manufacture of Wales' image. According to James Nashold, Thomas' representation of his homeland is fundamentally shaped by a sense of superiority. On the one hand, it refers to Wales' superior position as a nation of poets; on the other hand, it clearly indicates Dylan's special (star) status as a legend:

Posters, pamphlets, guides and bus time tables decorated with the poet's image are distributed far and wide, but despite all the tourism trade's tomfoolery they have a point. [...] The poet may be gone, but you can feel his presence, for Thomas lifted the imagery of his surrounding landscape, and there they are around you. (Nashold 29)

John Ackermann believes that Dylan's writing process is intrinsically tied to his cultural background, which is mainly reflected in the poet's nostalgic and retrospective representations of his Welsh childhood (121). They also include the description of specific landscapes and typically Welsh traditions (Ackermann 121). In his play for voices *Under Milk Wood* Dylan Thomas focuses on the production of a Welsh spirit, providing a fundamentally social identity of his country. In its essence, the typical Welshman has to be defined as an audacious, uptight and warm-hearted person (Amanshauser 26). It shows that almost all constructions of Wales are expressed in terms of contradictions and ambiguities; Dylan Thomas, for example, calls his hometown Swansea an "ugly, lovely town" (Swansea). Interestingly, the Welsh tourist board defines literature (poetry), being an essential element of its cultural heritage, as the main tourist attraction, stressing that the world's most famous literary festivals takes place in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government). Consequently, it promotes a very particular type of tourism showing a strong focus on cultural and intellectual activities. "We have a lot of poetry and stories for such a small country" (Swansea) – it represents Wales as a fundamentally poetic country with its own literary past and traditions. Thus, "Welshness" is compared to the notion of greatness. In addition, the authors of visitwales.co.uk refer to Wales as "a proud and passionate nation" (Welsh Assembly Government) – a construction composed of two essential features usually related to poetic greatness: historical consciousness (folk

culture) and emotional intensity. As the profession of the poet traditionally assumes a privileged position within Welsh society, Dylan Thomas therefore represents the most effective emblem of Welsh culture; in other words he is the most profitable Welsh product. Secondly, tourist-related constructions also involve the picture of the Welsh bohemian. Describing the poet as “the famous or infamous Dylan Thomas” (Welsh Assembly Government), the Welsh tourist board explicitly relates to his popular rebel image. The identity of the drunken poet, however, is not just restricted to Welsh tourism but also refers to his American period. Here, it is possible to participate at a tour through Greenwich Village where the tourist gets the opportunity to experience “the colourful character” (Welsh Assembly Government) of the Welsh poet, visiting Thomas’ most important (and personal) places including hotels, restaurants and, most importantly, bars. As indicated on the homepage dylanthomas.com, the tour is supposed to reveal “the real facts behind his premature death”. It follows the concept of tourism is fundamentally based on the notion of authenticity and realness. Its primary aim is therefore to express an idea of truth; it shall provide an exclusive insight into the “real” personality of Dylan Thomas who is constructed as the last authentic genius of the 20th century (Amanshauser 25-26). Tourist-related representations have the function to authenticate Dylan Thomas’ public image because they refer to objects (landscapes, buildings...) that show a real existence in the real world; for example the original door of Thomas’ working place in Laugharne is displayed at the Dylan Thomas Centre (City and County of Swansea). Guided tours to the Boat House or to Thomas’ working shed, called “the shack”, are supposed to create an illusion of intimacy, exposing the “private” side of Dylan’s star persona (Ackermann 138). Interestingly, Ackermann’s detailed description of “the shack” reflects the poet’s most dominant identities such as the ordinary guy, the religious man celebrating the natural world, the crazy Welsh poet, the bohemian, the academic and, above all, the literary genius:

It looks from the outside like a garage perched precariously on the cliff, exposed to the storms and sea-noises, winds and weathers of the bay. Furnished with bare wooden table, chair and anthracite stove, it was apt to become itself a sea of manuscript, discarded drafts of poems, empty cigarette packets, literary periodicals, and books. (Ackermann 139)

Renting Thomas’ birthplace for several days or weeks is represented as the most authentic approach towards the “true” personality of the legendary poet

(Amanshauser 26). It is described as a nostalgic journey into the ordinary, everyday-life of the poet who, looking out of the window of the front bedroom, got inspired by the sparkling colours of Cwmdonkin Park (Amanshauser 26). Thus, the constructions of places, whether they are accessible in written form or as a real-life experience, contribute significantly to the manufacture of a specific image, which is then sold as Thomas' "real" identity. On the other hand, the exhibition "Dylan Thomas: Man and Myth" at the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea is fundamentally based on Richard Dyer's true self-model, stressing the distinction between private and public self. In this case, realness is produced by the poet's death mask, newsreel footage from Thomas' funeral and audio-visuals and photographs of Dylan Thomas, family and friends (The City and County of Swansea). However, the Dylan Thomas Centre is not just a place dedicated to "the world's famous poet" but has developed into Swansea's main tourist attraction, including a restaurant, "a cosy café and bookshop" which is "stuffed with books, posters and memorabilia" (The City and County of Swansea). In addition, worldwide shipping allows Dylan Thomas fans all over the world to gain access to a wide range of products, for example recordings, DVDs and videos (The City and County of Swansea). It shows that Thomas' popularity is no longer exclusively restricted to his poetry and prose, but his status as an international celebrity has turned the name "Dylan Thomas" into the most profitable commodity.

b) Conclusion

57 years after his tragic death people are still fascinated by the myth of Dylan Thomas. Consequently, one might ask what makes the Welsh poet so special. First of all, it has to be pointed out that not the person but the poet Dylan Thomas is manufactured as a star. So, it is argued that “the poet” corresponds to Thomas’ true personality; he really was a poet. Consequently, the various images are still an approach towards the “real” Dylan Thomas, who will always remain beyond public comprehension. On this basis, Thomas’ poetry is characterised by a fundamental paradox: on the one hand, it defines the person Dylan Thomas as a poet, who represents the core of his star persona because he is always perceived as a poet in public. On the other hand, the meaning of his poetry does not constitute the most essential element of Thomas’ stardom. As Nicholas Lezard aptly points out, “Dylan Thomas is a poet for people who don’t really like poetry”. He further writes that “[a]ll you have to do is murmur “Do not go gentle into that good night” and you can feel that you have the essence of the man”. It is the emotional intensity and the sense of profoundness that constructs the poet as a star with substance (Lezard). It is the very fact that Thomas was writing poetry, which is generally regarded as a superior form of artistic expression, which emphasises the significance of his stardom. Lezard believes that “Dylan Thomas was probably the last poet to be famous as a rock star; he gives fame a certain class.” Moreover, Thomas’ identity of the Welsh poet manufactures him as a truly authentic star. Thereby, the poet’s cultural origin assumes the role of an intensifier. Thomas’ Welsh background transforms the poet into “the bard” who is constructed as the emblem of the Romantic genius whereas his fundamentally Welsh poetry becomes an expression of universal truth. Furthermore, the feature represents the poet in the most ordinary and humble manner that gains his inspiration from the simplicity of the Welsh landscape. Wales is generally described as Thomas’ private sanctuary where he could be truly himself. What is more, Thomas’ Welsh origin is regarded as the dominant source of his sensitivity and emotional suffering, constructing him as the prototype of the self-destructive artist. Furthermore, the image of the romantic drunkard is commonly defined as a profoundly Welsh identity. It follows that Thomas’ images consist of features which have been individualised through the reference to his person; the Welshman. Hence, Thomas’ star identities are composed of elements, which are constantly

authenticating his star persona. Thus, being Welsh represents the most essential star quality which manufactures Dylan Thomas as the ultimate poet and Welshman, and consequently as a true legend.

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Zusammenfassung

Die Diplomarbeit „The Rage against the Dying of the Light. Analysing the Poet Dylan Thomas as a Star“ beschäftigt sich mit dem Starphänomen des walisischen Dichters Dylan Thomas, der als erste literarische Figur dem modernen Konzept des „celebrity“ entspricht. In diesem Zusammenhang soll zunächst geklärt werden warum es überhaupt möglich ist Thomas als Star darzustellen und zu analysieren. Laut Barry King ist das Konzept des Stars aus drei wesentlichen Komponenten zusammengesetzt: die Person (das „reale“ Ich) – das Image (die konstruierte Identität) – die Starfigur (die Gesamtheit aller in der Öffentlichkeit vermittelten Rollen). Es ist dabei nicht nur entscheidend, wer diese Identitäten schafft, dies kann der Star selbst sein, mediale Texte (Rezensionen, Biografien, Zeitungsartikel) oder das Publikum (Fans), sondern mit welchen Bausteinen jene Rollen (images) konstruiert werden. Somit versucht jene wissenschaftliche Arbeit die Struktur der einzelnen Identitäten des Stars Dylan Thomas zu entschlüsseln. Es zeigt sich, dass der Aufbau auf drei essentielle Elemente (features) reduziert werden kann: ethnische Zugehörigkeit, das Gewöhnliche und Intensität. Ersteres bezieht sich auf Thomas kulturellen Hintergrund, der im Wesentlichen durch Religion (Puritaner), die romantisch-keltischen Auffassung des Dichters (der Barden) und Wales (im speziellen Swansea) charakterisiert ist. Das zweite Merkmal wird durch die Konstruktion des bescheidenen, einfachen Menschen, der Natur als seine primäre Inspirationsquelle für sein künstlerisches Schaffen definiert, ergänzt. Im Allgemeinen sind die Rollen des walisischen Dichters durch emotionale Intensität und Sensibilität gekennzeichnet, die zumeist im (psychischen und physischen) Leiden ihre emblematische Bedeutung verwirklichen. Zudem ist ersichtlich, dass der Dichter als zentrale Identität, gleichzusetzen mit der Person Dylan Thomas, fungiert, die auf verschiedenste Weise medial vermittelt wird. Dadurch lassen sich im Groben folgende Identitäten ableiten und zusammenfassen: der ultimative (moderne und romantische) Dichter, das leidende Genie, das literarische Wunderkind, der Bohemien, der (soziale, kulturelle und intellektuelle) Außenseiter, der Akademiker, der Immigrant, der Säufer, der Waliser, der Literaturkritiker, der Radiosprecher, der Dramaturg, der Schauspieler. Die Starfigur Dylan Thomas kann somit als komplexes Gefüge aus verschiedenen, jedoch eng miteinander verbundenen, Identitäten beschrieben werden. Anders ausgedrückt, jene Konstruktionen stellen stets eine subjektive Interpretation Thomas „wahrer“ Persönlichkeit dar und sollen die zentrale

Frage beantworten: wer war Dylan Thomas wirklich? Nach der Ansicht nach von Richard Dyer führt jene Überlegung dazu, dass ein Stars erst durch die Differenzierung zwischen privat und öffentlich – reales Ich versus konstruiertes Ich – geboren wird. Somit begibt sich jede Beschreibung Dylan Thomas auf die Suche nach der Wahrheit, dem alles zugrundeliegenden Kern seiner Persönlichkeit, der jedoch immer nur unvollständig erfasst oder gar völlig verborgen bleiben wird. So muss an dieser Stelle ausdrücklich betont werden, dass die Darstellung eines Stars mit reinen Konstruktionen operiert, die nie den Anspruch auf absolute Wahrheit erheben können. Jedoch macht erst das Konzept des Realen, dass das „wahre“ Selbst durch die konstruierte Maske des Stars durchscheint, die Faszination des modernen celebrity aus und spielt eine wichtige Rolle in der Konstruktion authentischer Identitäten, welche die Glaubwürdigkeit und Echtheit des Stars unterstreichen. Abschließend wird erläutert wie Dylan Thomas Status als moderner Star und literarische Legende den walisischen Tourismus maßgeblich bestimmt.

Die Tatsache, dass Dylan Thomas als Dichter Weltruhm erzielte, eine Profession, die bis heute noch als eine erhabene Form des künstlerischen Schaffens betrachtet wird, macht ihm erst zu der unsterblichen Legende. Interessanterweise stellt seine Dichtkunst nicht die Essenz seines Ruhms dar, denn so reicht es nur eine Zeile seines berühmtesten Gedichtes „Do not go gentle into that good night“ zu rezitieren, um die Leidenschaft, Intensität und Tiefe wahrzunehmen, die Dylan Thomas zu einem Star mit „Substanz“ und einer gewissen Klasse machen. Darüber hinaus konstruiert Thomas walisische Herkunft ihn als absolut authentischen Star. Das bedeutet, dass sein „Walisischsein“ die essentielle Starqualität darstellt, durch die erst alle Identitäten an Authentizität und Ausdruckstärke gewinnen. Zusammenfassend lässt sich hiermit behaupten, dass Dylan Thomas zum Star wurde, gerade weil er Dichter und Waliser war.

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