Under Milk Wood

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DYLAN THOMAS

Dylan Thomas was born on October 27, 1914 in Swansea, Wales. Thomas' father was a professor of English Literature at the Swansea Gramma School who had a habit of reciting Shakespeare at home, which instilled in the young Thomas an early love of poetry. When Dylan Thomas was 16 years old, he dropped out of school and became a reporter for the *South Wales Daily Post*, where he worked for 18 months before deciding to move to London to focus on writing poetry. He wrote more than half of his collected poems during this time, and the 1934 publication of his poem "Light breaks where no sun shines" in *The Listener* received much critical acclaim. That same year, Thomas won the Sunday Referee's Poet's Corner Prize, which sponsored the publication of his first volume of poetry, *18 Poems*, in December 1934. Shortly after the publication of *18 Poems*, Thomas met his wife, dancer Caitlin Macnamara, at a London pub. They were married in 1937 and would have three children together. The couple settled in London in 1940, though they left in 1944 to avoid the air raids. Thomas worked as a professional broadcaster and scriptwriter for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) between 1943 and 1953 and was involved in the creation of over 100 radio broadcasts. One such broadcast, *Quite Early One Morning*, which first aired in August 1945, features characters and ideas that would resurface in *Under Milk Wood*. Thomas and his family split their time between London and Wales until 1949, when they moved to Thomas' final home in Laugharne, Wales, where they lived at the Boat House, a house nestled in the cliffs overlooking the River Tâf. Thomas wrote many of his later works at the Boat House, including parts of *Under Milk Wood*. Thomas traveled to the United States for the first time in 1950, when he was 35 years old. In the last years of his life, he conducted a series of four reading tours across the country, and his engaging poetic delivery, dramatic demeanor, and raucous drinking delighted his American audiences During his last tour, which took place in 1953, Thomas collapsed at the Chelsea Hotel in New York City after a long evening of drinking. He died on November 9, 1953, at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City, and he was buried in Laugharne, Wales.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though Dylan Thomas began to develop the style and ideas he would employ in *Under Milk Wood* as early as 1931, it has been suggested that the play's final form was Thomas' response to the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, which occurred near the end of World War II, on August 6, 1945, and—in combination with the bombing U.S. bombing of Nagasaki, which took place three days later—resulted in an estimated death toll of over 200,000 people. Supposedly, *Under Milk Wood* was Thomas' attempt to show that there was still beauty in the world, despite the immense brutality and destruction of World War II. When *Under Milk Wood* was published in 1954, Great Britain was still recovering from the devastating economic and social consequences of war. In addition to nearly 400,000 British soldiers that died in combat, Great Britain experienced significant inflation and unemployment in the aftermath of World War II and, as a result, much of the literature that emerged over the following decade reflects a cynical perspective on British society. The "angry young men" were a group of working- and middle-class British playwrights and novelists that achieved prominence in the 1950s. These writers published works that expressed a disillusionment with postwar British society and cultural norms. John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) influenced many of the works associated with this movement and explores how the class differences between a working-class man and his middle-class wife lead to troubles in their marriage. Though not associated with the "angry young men" movement, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), which was published the same year as *Under Milk Wood*, reflects a similar cynicism and explores the corruption, immorality, and groupthink that overcome a group of young boys stranded on an island. Published just five years before *Under Milk Wood*, George Orwell's famous dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is a cautionary tale about the consequences of authoritarianism and extreme government surveillance. *Under Milk Wood*'s optimism and lightheartedness, therefore, are somewhat atypical of a literary period whose works were dominated by themes of cynicism, anger, and disillusionment. While the nostalgia and simplicity Thomas evokes in *Under Milk Wood* might cynically mourn the simple, good way of life that World War II destroyed, it also entertains the hopeful possibility that beauty and goodness can still exist in the world.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Dylan Thomas is an important Welsh poet and 20th Century literary figure. Some of his most popular poems are "Do not go gentle into that good night," which is included his poetry collection *In Country Sleep, and Other Poems* (1952), and "And death shall have no dominion," which is included in the poetry collection *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936). His most well-known collection of poetry is *Deaths and Entrances* (1946), which contains many poems that have been anthologized. Thomas enjoyed a productive career as a professional broadcaster for

the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), presenting around 145 broadcasts between 1943 and 1953. Many of these broadcasts are reproduced in *On the Air With Dylan Thomas: The Broadcasts* (1991). Thomas' notable prose publications include *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940), a collection of autobiographical short fiction, and *Adventures in the Skin Trade and Other Stories* (1953). *Under Milk Wood* belongs to the radio play genre, which was popular form of entertainment in the first half of the 20th Century, prior to the advent of television. Some notable radio dramas include Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds* (1938), which is based on the science fiction novel by H. G. Welles, Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall* (1957), and Harold Pinter's *A Slight Ache* (1959).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Under Milk Wood
- **When Written:** Thomas began developing the styles and ideas he would employ in the final version of *Under Milk Wood* as early as the 1930s.
- **Where Written:** Wales
- **When Published:** 1954
- **Literary Period:** 20th Century
- **Genre:** Radio Drama
- **Setting:** Llareggub, a fictitious seaside village in Wales
- **Climax:** *Under Milk Wood* doesn't follow the structure of a conventional narrative and has no climax
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

At the Movies. The first film adaptation of *Under Milk Wood* was released in 1972 and featured performances by Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor, and Peter O'Toole. The filming occurred in Fishguard, Wales, and this choice was criticized by citizens of Laugharne, where Thomas had written some of the play, who felt that filming should have taken place there.

At a Loss for Words. Thomas lost his completed manuscript of *Under Milk Wood* in October 1953, right as he was about to travel to the U.S. to give readings of the play. Douglas Cleverdon, who produced the play for the BBC, possessed copies of the completed work, but Thomas' blunder sent Cleverdon on a wild goose chase to track down the original manuscript, thought he eventually did find it—in a London pub.

PLOT SUMMARY

On a dark Spring night, all the townspeople of Llareggub, a small fishing village, are fast asleep. Two omniscient narrators, First Voice and Second Voice invite the listener to gaze inside the townspeople's dreams. Captain Cat, a blind, retired **sea** captain, is tormented by visions of drowned shipmates and his former lover, Rosie Probert. Mr. Mog Edwards, the draper, and Miss Myfanwy Price, the sweetshop-keeper and dressmaker, have romantic dreams about each other. Mr. Waldo, a notorious drunkard, dreams of his childhood and failed marriages. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, who runs a boarding house and is obsessively clean, dreams about ordering around her deceased husbands. Butcher Beynon dreams of hunting, while Mrs. Beynon dreams her husband is arrested for selling questionable meats. Lily Smalls (Mrs. Beynon's maid) dreams of romance. Dai Bread, the baker with two wives, dreams of "harems." Polly Garter, a single mother with many children, dreams of "babies," and Jack Black, the cobbler, dreams of antagonizing young couples in **Milk Wood**, the small, wooded area on Llareggub Hill where lovers' trysts occur. Mr. Pugh, the schoolmaster, dreams of poisoning his dreadful wife, Mrs. Pugh, and Reverend Eli Jenkins dreams of Eisteddfodau, a Welsh village festival of poetry and music.

The play continues in this manner, with First Voice and Second Voice introducing each character by describing the contents of their dreams. As the sky grows lighter, a Voice of a Guide-Book interrupts First Voice and Second Voice's narrative to provide more background information about Llareggub, describing the small fishing village as "decaying" and unremarkable at first glance, though a "contemplative" outsider might appreciate Llareggub's nostalgic atmosphere and the unique, eccentric personalities of its citizens.

When morning arrives, the townspeople begin their daily routines. Reverend Eli Jenkins opens his door and delivers a poetic sermon on his love of his town. Lily Smalls daydreams about romance and laments her mundane existence. Mr. Pugh daydreams about poisoning Mrs. Pugh, who is busy gossiping about the neighbors. Mrs. Cherry Owen fills Cherry Owen in on his drunken antics. Butcher Beynon teases his wife about the source of the meats they eat. Mary Ann Sailors, an old, religious woman, opens her window and declares her exact age (85 years, three months, one day) to the town. Organ Morgan, the town organist, thinks about music and ignores his wife. Willy Nilly, the postman, heads out to deliver the townspeople's mail, which he and Mrs. Willy Nilly steam open and read in advance. As he makes his rounds, he shares the gossip he's gleaned from his snooping.

Captain Cat sits beside an open window, listening to the sounds of the day unfolding and making observations about people as they walk by. Women flock to Mrs. Organ Morgan's general store to gossip. They complain about Polly Garter, who has affairs (and babies) with many of the town's married men. Mrs. Dai Bread Two, a sultry, exotic woman, tells the plain Mrs. Dai Bread One about a vision she sees in her crystal ball, which features their husband in bed with two women. Polly scrubs the steps of the Welfare Hall in preparation for the dance that will

take place there that evening. She sings a mournful song about Little Willy Weazel, the only man she ever loved, who died many years ago. Reverend Eli Jenkins hears her singing and praises God for music.

In the afternoon, schoolchildren run screaming and singing from the schoolhouse, and Captain Cat sings along with them. A little girl named Gwennie demands that boys kiss her or give her a penny. Men ogle Gossamer Beynon, the young schoolteacher, as she walks down the street in her high heels. Gossamer and Sinbad Sailors, the barkeeper, pine for each other, but they keep their feelings to themselves. Fishermen make their way to Sinbad's bar, Sailors Arms. Captain Cat takes a nap, dreams of Rosie Probert, and cries in his sleep. Reverend Eli Jenkins sits in his poem-room and works on the White Book of Llareggub, a book he's writing to honor the town he loves so deeply

As day turns into evening, women retreat to their rooms to prepare for the night's dance, while the drinkers in Sailors Arms grumble about the sinfulness of dancing. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard retreats to her bedroom, and the ghosts of her dead husbands reluctantly return to her. Mr. Mog Edwards and Miss Myfanwy Price sit in their respective bedrooms on the opposite ends of town and write love letters to each other. Polly Garter and Mr. Waldo head to Milk Wood to conduct their affair. Jack Black prepares for an evening of disrupting lovers' trysts in the wood. First and Second Voice describe what Milk Wood means to different townspeople. To Jack Black, it is place of sin; to lovers, it is a sanctuary; to Mary Ann Sailors, it is the Garden of Eden; and to Reverend Eli Jenkins, it symbolizes "the innocence of men."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

First Voice – First Voice is one of *Under Milk Wood*'s two omniscient narrators. First Voice works with Second Voice to guide the listener through Llareggub, the small seaside village where the play takes place, drawing attention to visual and atmospheric details to set the scene. First Voice and Second Voice's narrative guidance is especially important in light of the limitations that genre imposes on the play: because *Under Milk Wood* is a radio drama, the audience relies completely on sound—on voices—to orient itself within the world of the play. First Voice and Second Voice possess intimate knowledge of Llareggub and its citizens, and they share this knowledge with their audience, moving from house to house and describing the townspeople's dreams in poetic, evocative detail. In this manner, they acquaint the audience with *Under Milk Wood*'s eccentric cast of characters. First Voice and Second Voice's narration gives thematic coherence to an otherwise plotless, meandering play, and the narration also imbues the seemingly mundane, unremarkable existences of the play's characters with psychological complexity. Finally, the narration invites the audience to find beauty and meaning in ordinary life. First Voice and Second Voice take turns narrating. Typically, First Voice introduces a new character or point of focus, and Second Voice interjects, expanding on First Voice's observation with their own insights. Both voices have access to characters' innermost thoughts and desires. First Voice and Second Voice speak in a poetic style that illustrates the power of language and storytelling to transform a normal day in a small town into a meaningful portrait of the beauty of ordinary life.

Second Voice – Second Voice is one of *Under Milk Wood*'s two omniscient narrators. Second Voice works with First Voice to provide details and imagery that establish the play's setting and introduce the audience to the play's eccentric cast of characters. The voices' narrative direction is particularly important because *Under Milk Wood* is a radio drama and, therefore, its audience must rely fully on sound—on voices—to orient itself within the world of the play. First Voice and Second Voice have an intimate knowledge of Llareggub, the small fishing village where the play takes place, as well as full access to the innermost thoughts of Llareggub's townspeople. The play begins at night, with First Voice and Second Voice guiding the audience from house to house, inviting it to observe the townspeople's dreams. In this manner, the voices introduce many of the play's characters. Typically, First Voice will initiate the description of a character or point of focus, and Second Voice will interject—sometimes in the middle of First Voice's sentence—to expand on First Voice's initial observations with their own psychological insights. Both voices employ artful and visually evocative language to transform the mundane day of seemingly unremarkable people into a compelling story about nostalgia and the meaningfulness of ordinary life.

Captain Cat – Captain Cat is a blind, elderly **sea** captain. He can recognize different characters by the sound of their footsteps and spends much of the play sitting beside a window and commenting on the townspeople as they pass by. Cat is one of the play's most important characters, since he often functions as a third narrator, supplementing First Voice's and Second Voice's narrative direction with his insider's perspective. Because Cat has been around for so long, he possesses an intimate knowledge of Llareggub and its people. Captain Cat is tormented by dreams of former shipmates who drowned at sea, as well as his deceased former lover, Rosie Probert. More broadly, Captain Cat is plagued by a mournful nostalgia for the past: for a time when he sailed the sea with "blue and bright" [seeing] eyes, and when he could be with his departed friends and comrades. Cat's dreams pain him because he knows that they reflect a world that only exists in his memories, and that these memories will erode with the passage of time. Cat indirectly guides the listener by functioning as a narrator, but his blindness positions him as a stand-in for the listener, as well:

both Cat and the listener must rely on their sense of sound to orient themselves within Llareggub and become acquainted with its people.

Polly Garter – Polly Garter is a single mother who has many children and dreams of babies. She has affairs with many of Llareggub's married men and is the subject of much gossip: when the chattering women who are gathered around the town pump become instantly silent, for example, Captain Cat knows Polly must be approaching. Polly's current lover is Mr. Waldo, and the two of them meet up for a tryst in **Milk Wood** at the end of the play. Though Polly has many lovers, she's always thinking about Little Willy Weazel, the only man she ever loved, who died many years ago, and she sings mournful songs about him as she completes her daily chores. Most of the town is judgmental of Polly's sexuality, but their gossip and disapproval don't curb Polly's desire. The play doesn't cast Polly (or any of its sexually promiscuous characters) in a negative light; in fact, when the Reverend Eli Jenkins overhears Polly's singing on his way to tend to the sick, he praises God for music.

Reverend Eli Jenkins – Reverend Eli Jenkins is Llareggub's reverend, preacher, and poet. He addresses the town in the poetic daily sermons he delivers from his doorway, and he is constantly writing, thinking about, reciting, and praising poetry. He dreams of "Eisteddfodau," which is a Welsh village festival of poets and bards. Jenkins loves Llareggub, though he knows that there are places more magnificent and exciting than the small village. He's in the process of writing a book the town called the White Book of Llareggub. Though Jenkins knows Llareggub's citizens "are not wholly bad or good," he thinks that God will judge them on their goodness and forgive them their sins, and he sees **Milk Wood** as a symbol of "the innocence of men."

Mr. Mog Edwards – Mr. Mog Edwards is Llareggub's tall, handsome draper. He and Miss Myfanwy Price are in love with each other, though they never meet in person, and their romance is limited to amorous dreams and the exchange of love letters. In his letters to Myfanwy, Mog expresses anxiety over his failing business, though in his dreams he contends that he loves her more than any fabric.

Miss Myfanwy Price – Miss Myfanwy Price is Llareggub's dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper. She is in love with Mr. Mog Edwards, though they never meet in person, and their romance is limited to amorous dreams and the exchange of love letters. At the end of the play, Myfanwy and Mog are sitting "happily" in their bedrooms on the opposite ends of town, thinking about and writing letters to each other.

Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard – Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard runs the Bay House, Llareggub's boarding house. She is obsessed with neatness, so much so that she hesitates to take in any guests, for fear that they'll make too much of a mess. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard is also obsessed with her health, and therefore detests the Spring air and eats only the plainest foods. She dreams about nagging the ghosts of her deceased husbands, Mr. Ogmore and Mr. Pritchard.

Lily Smalls – Lily Smalls is Mrs. Beynon's maid. She bemoans her dull existence as a maid and dreams of having a rich lover and an exciting life. Lily promises Mrs. Beynon that Butcher Beynon is lying when he claims that his meats come from questionable sources like cats and dogs. At the end of the play, Lily fools around with Nogood Boyo in the wash-house.

Gossamer Beynon – Gossamer Beynon is a schoolteacher and the daughter of Butcher Beynon. She has erotic dreams about an animal-like lover. Gossamer is attracted to Sinbad Sailors and doesn't care that he's not as refined or educated as herself—so long as he's sexually satisfying. However, she keeps her thoughts to herself, and Sinbad, who also pines for Gossamer, takes her silence as a sign of her disinterest and pride. Gossamer is attractive, and men ogle her as she walks down the streets of Llareggub in her high-heels.

Mary Ann Sailors – Mary Ann Sailors is the grandmother of Sinbad Sailors. Her disapproval is what prevents Sinbad from pursuing a romance with Gossamer Beynon. Mary Ann Sailors is deeply religious and dreams of the Garden of Eden. She sees **Milk Wood** as itself a Garden of Eden and thinks Llareggub's inhabitants are God's chosen people. When Mary Ann Sailors first wakes up, she opens her window announce to the town her exact age (85 years, three months, and one day).

Mrs. Dai Bread Two – Mrs. Dai Bread Two is Dai Bread's second wife. She is an exotic, sultry "gypsy" woman who tells fortunes in her crystal ball and dresses seductively. Mrs. Dai Bread Two is the subject of one of Nogood Boyo's dirty daydreams. In the afternoon, Mrs. Dai Bread Two sits outside with Mrs. Dai Bread One and describes a vision she sees in her crystal ball, in which Dai Bread is in bed with two women.

Nogood Boyo – Nogood Boyo is a lazy, mischievous fisherman. He dreams of "nothing" and has dirty thoughts about Mrs. Dai Bread Two in a wet corset. He claims that he "want[s] to be good Boyo, but no one'll let [him]." At the end of the novel, he fools around with Lily Smalls in the wash-house.

Voice of a Guide-Book – The Voice of a Guide-Book interrupts First Voice and Second Voice's narration early in the play to give the listener an overview of Llareggub's physical, historical, and social characteristics. Although the Guide-Book admits that Llareggub is modest and somewhat run-down, it suggests that the town possesses a "picturesque sense of the past," and that its people are unique and eccentric.

Mrs. Pugh – Mrs. Pugh is the nagging, insufferable wife of Mr. Pugh, Llareggub's schoolmaster. She repeatedly calls her husband a pig and remains mostly unaware of his fantasies about poisoning her, though Willy Nilly, the postman, does inform her of the contents of the package he delivers to Mr. Pugh: a book called *Lives of the Great Poisoners*.

Sinbad Sailors – Sinbad Sailors operates Sailors Arms, a local

pub. Sinbad is attracted to Gossamer Beynon but the disapproval of his grandmother, Mary Ann Sailors, prevents him from pursuing her. He also fears that his lack of an education makes him unappealing to Gossamer. Though Gossamer is also attracted to Sinbad, they hide their true feelings form each other.

MINOR CHARACTERS

First Drowned – First Drowned is one of the deceased former shipmates who haunts Captain Cat's dreams. First Drowned refers to himself as "Curly Bevan" and pesters Cat with questions about life among the living.

Second Drowned – Second Drowned is one of the deceased former shipmates who haunts Captain Cat's dreams. Second Drowned refers to himself as "Tom-Fred the donkeyman" and reminds Captain Cat that they once shared the same woman, Rosie Probert.

Rosie Probert – Rosie Probert is Captain Cat's deceased former lover who visits him in his dreams. In Cat's dreams, he and Rosie reminisce about their romance until Rosie eventually slips "into the darkness" of "forgetting," which causes Cat to cry in his sleep.

Third Drowned – Third Drowned is one of the deceased former shipmates who haunts Captain Cat's dreams. He refers to himself as "Jonah Jarvis" and pesters Cat with questions about life among the living.

Fourth Drowned – Fourth Drowned is one of the deceased former shipmates who haunts Captain Cat's dreams. He refers to himself as "Alfred Pomeroy Jones" and pesters Cat with questions about life among the living.

Fifth Drowned – Fifth Drowned is one of the deceased former shipmates who haunts Captain Cat's dreams. He pesters Cat with questions about life among the living.

Jack Black – Jack Black is Llareggub's cobbler. He delights in (and dreams about) venturing into **Milk Wood** to break up the sinful lovers' trysts that take place there.

Mr. Waldo – Mr. Waldo is Llareggub's "rabbit catcher, barber, herbalist, cat doctor, quack." He is an adulterous, alcoholic troublemaker who is having an affair with Polly Garter. Mr. Waldo dreams about his childhood and his many failed marriages.

Waldo's Wife – Waldo's wife is Blodwen Waldo. In Mr. Waldo's dreams, his wife bemoans her miserable marriage and frets over what the neighbors will say about her adulterous husband.

Mr. Ogmore – Mr. Ogmore is one of Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's deceased former husbands. He was a linoleum salesman when he was alive. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard dreams about nagging Mr. Ogmore and Mr. Pritchard, her other deceased husband.

Mr. Pritchard – Mr. Pritchard is one of Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's deceased former husbands. A "failed bookmaker," Pritchard committed suicide "ironically" by ingesting cleaning solution. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard dreams about nagging Mr. Pritchard and Mr. Ogmore, her other deceased husband.

Organ Morgan – Organ Morgan is Llareggub's organist. He's constantly practicing the organ, thinking about music, and admiring the classical masters, such as Bach and Palestrina. He prioritizes music over his wife, Mrs. Organ Morgan, whom he often ignores.

Mrs. Organ Morgan – Mrs. Organ Morgan is Organ Morgan's wife. She works at the town's general store and feels ignored by her husband, who is too busy practicing the organ and thinking about music to listen to her.

Utah Watkins – Utah Watkins operates Salt Lake Farm, which is located on Llareggub Hill. He dreams of counting sheep that resemble his wife, Mrs. Utah Watkins.

Mrs. Utah Watkins – Mrs. Utah Watkins is the wife of Utah Watkins. Her husband dreams of sheep that resemble her.

Ocky Milkman – Ocky Milkman is Llareggub's milkman. He dilutes his milk so much that Captain Cat humorously calls it "fresh as dew," alluding to the milk's watery consistency. Ocky dreams of pouring his milk into the river, regardless of the cost.

Mae Rose Cottage – Mae Rose Cottage is Mrs. Rose Cottage's oldest child. She is 17 years old and dreams of fanciful romances. She spends the day lying on Llareggub Hill, caressing herself and vowing to sin until she explodes, though, according to Captain Cat, she hasn't had her first kiss.

Butcher Beynon – Butcher Beynon is Llareggub's butcher. He dreams of hunting "wild giblets." He teases his wife, Mrs. Beynon, about the meats he sells, claiming they come from questionable sources like cats and dogs.

Mrs. Beynon – Mrs. Beynon is the wife of Butcher Beynon. She believes her husband when he teases her about the questionable source of the meats they eat, and she dreams that he is arrested for selling things like "owlmeat, dogs' eyes, [and] manchop."

Dai Bread – Dai Bread is Llareggub's baker. He has two wives, Mrs. Dai Bread One and Mrs. Dai Bread Two, but still dreams of "harems."

Mrs. Dai Bread One – Mrs. Dai Bread One is Dai Bread's plain and simple first wife. Mrs. Dai Bread Two relays to her a vision she sees in her crystal ball, in which Dai Bread is in bed with two women.

Little Willy Weazel – Little Willy Weazel is Polly Garter's lover who died many years ago. Polly mourns his death and sings songs about him as she completes her daily chores.

Lord Cut-Glass – Lord Cut-Glass is a paranoid, elderly man who may be mentally ill. He dreams of ticking clocks, and his kitchen walls are adorned with 66 clocks, all set to a different

time, in order to be alert enough to fend off potential intruders.

Mr. Pugh – Mr. Pugh is Llareggub's schoolmaster. He dreams about poisoning his unpleasant wife, Mrs. Pugh. Mr. Pugh fantasizes about killing Mrs. Pugh during the day as well, reading and taking notes on a book about famous poisoners.

Willy Nilly – Willy Nilly is Llareggub's postman. He and his wife, Mrs. Willy Nilly, steam open and read the townspeople's correspondence, and he shares the information he gleans from their snooping with the townspeople as he delivers the mail.

Mrs. Willy Nilly – Mrs. Willy Nilly is the wife of Willy Nilly, Llareggub's postman. She and Willy Nilly steam open and read the townspeople's mail before Willy Nilly delivers it.

Cherry Owen – Cherry Owen is a drunkard and troublemaker who frequents Sailors Arms. He is married to Mrs. Cherry Owen, who eagerly informs him of the drunken antics he's invariably too inebriated to remember himself.

Mrs. Cherry Owen – Mrs. Cherry Owen is the wife of Cherry Owen. The Owens have a happy marriage, and Mrs. Cherry Owen takes pleasure in telling her husband all about the drunken antics he can't recall on his own.

Evans the Death – Evans the Death is Llareggub's undertaker. He dreams of a childhood memory of stealing currants from his mother and is afraid of his own mortality.

Bessie Bighead – Bessie Bighead is a homely woman who works for Mr. Utah Watkins at Salt Lake Farm. She dreams of the deceased Gomer Owen, who was her only kiss, though he only kissed her on a dare. Bessie was conceived in **Milk Wood** and born in a barn.

Gwennie – Gwennie is a young schoolgirl who orders the schoolboys to kiss her "where she says" or give her a penny. When a boy named Dicky refuses to kiss Gwennie in **Milk Wood** and doesn't have a penny to offer her instead, the children chase him down the hill.

Dicky – Dicky is a schoolboy who refuses Gwennie's order to kiss her in **Milk Wood**, citing his mother's disapproval. When Dicky doesn't have a penny to offer Gwennie instead, the children chase him down the hill.

PC Attila Rees – PC (Police Constable) Attila Rees is a local policeman. He dreams of relieving himself in his helmet and knows he'll regret it in the morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Floyd – Mr. and Mrs. Floyd, the cocklers, are an elderly couple who don't dream and sleep "like two old kippers in a box."

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

NOSTALGIA

Llareggub, the quaint Welsh fishing village where *Under Milk Wood* takes place, is steeped in nostalgia. This is true of many of the play's characters, who are filled with nostalgia for their own pasts. Captain Cat, the blind, elderly **sea** captain, dreams of former shipmates who perished at sea and of his deceased former lover. Polly Garter cannot shake her memories of the man she was in love with who died many years ago. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, who runs a boarding house, is visited each night by the ghosts of her dead husbands. And it's not just the dead that characters mourn: the town's undertaker dreams about a childhood memory of stealing currants from his mother. For all of these characters, the pleasures of the past have slipped away, but they persist in dreams and reveries, becoming almost as real as the present—and even influencing their day-to-day lives.

In addition to the characters' nostalgia, the town of Llareggub itself evokes "that picturesque sense of the past," which an increasingly modern world has rendered nearly extinct. This is a town of cobblestone streets lit by gaslight, already evoking a bygone era when the play was published in 1954. But the play has few references that would explicitly place it in a particular time period: there are no nods to technology or culture that can be used to locate the play's setting in time. As a result, Llareggub assumes an air of timelessness, in which the past melds indistinguishably with the present, imbuing the town with an inherent nostalgia. When this play first appeared, Europe was still sifting through the wreckage of the Second World War—and Dylan Thomas himself reportedly said he wrote it as a response to the bombing of Hiroshima. In this light, the play's focus on nostalgia seems to articulate a collective midcentury sense that something good and beautiful about prewar life had been lost.

STORYTELLING AND ORDINARY LIFE

Under Milk Wood lacks the features of a typical plot: there is no central conflict, no rising action, no climax, and no resolution to provide the play with a sense of meaning and purpose. And, notably, nothing happens that's out of the ordinary: *Under Milk Wood* simply offers a slice-of-life representation of the mundane experience of a typical day in Llareggub, in which characters have dreams, write letters, go to the bar, or cook for their families. The play's lack of traditional narrative structure and its emphasis on ordinary events draws attention to the role of storytelling in imposing meaning on human existence: it's the play's narrators (First Voice, Second Voice, and Captain Cat) who reflect on the goings-on of the people of Llareggub, telling their stories and revealing their hopes and fears and desires. Without the

narrators' commentary, the lives of the people of Llareggub would likely seem ordinary and meaningless, but it's the narrators' beautiful, evocative language and their way of drawing out each character's psychological complexity that gives the play meaning and narrative charge. Their storytelling is especially important since this is a radio play: the audience cannot see what the characters are doing or what the town looks like, so they must rely on the storytelling alone to bring this world to life. That this play is so captivating without a traditional plot and without any extraordinary happenings points to the power of storytelling—simply describing human experience can be enough to make it feel meaningful and special, no matter how ordinary it is.

INTIMACY

While many of the relationships between the play's characters are intimate or romantic, *Under Milk Wood* does not depict idealized love. Instead, it finds delight and poignancy in flawed or thwarted love: cheating spouses, unfulfilling encounters, unrequited feelings, or even emotionless sex. One example of the play finding tenderness in flawed love is the marriage of Cherry Owen, a notorious drunk, and his wife, Mrs. Cherry Owen, who takes care of him. While her marriage is by no means ideal, Mrs. Cherry Owen genuinely loves her husband and she takes immense pleasure in reminding him of his drunken escapades, which he's often too inebriated to remember for himself. Their love isn't perfect, but it works. By contrast, Mr. Pugh and Mrs. Pugh's marriage is comically bitter and cruel: while Mrs. Pugh torments her husband with an insufferable personality and constant nagging, Mr. Pugh fantasizes about poisoning her. The very lack of tenderness in their marriage is meant to seem exaggerated—it's played for laughs. One of the play's tragic storylines is about miscommunication: Sinbad Sailors and Gossamer Beynon are attracted to each other, but Gossamer fails to act on this attraction, which Sinbad interprets as lack of interest, so they never connect. The play is shot through with a sense of longing for intimacy that can never be fulfilled. Rather than framing this as tragic, though, the play seems to suggest that it's ordinary: all love is flawed and no intimacy is perfect, but there's still beauty and meaning in striving for connection.

The play is also notably up-front and nonjudgmental about sex. In place of emotional connection, many of the characters turn to physical intimacy to feel close to others. Polly Garter, for instance, longs for her true love who died, and since she can't have him, she engages in numerous affairs with married men in town. And the baker, Dai Bread, has two wives while simultaneously dreaming about harems. All kinds of young lovers flock to the titular **Milk Wood** (which borders the town of Llareggub) to engage in their trysts. The open sexuality of *Under Milk Wood*'s characters, in combination with their complex and flawed romantic relationships, suggests the universality of longing—and failing—to connect with others.

RESILIENCE AND REDEMPTION

The sleepy fishing village of Llareggub isn't a particularly happening town: it's inhabited by fewer than 500 people and consists of little more than three streets and some surrounding farmland. By the admission of the Voice of a Guide-Book that provides background information about the town at the start of the play, Llareggub is a "decaying watering place" lacking in excitement and cultural relevance. Yet the Voice of a Guide-Book contends that a "contemplative" person might look beneath the town's crumbling exterior and discover "curious customs" and "some of that picturesque sense of the past so frequently lacking in towns and villages that have kept more abreast of the times." Indeed, there is a beautiful, redemptive quality to Llareggub's resistance to change.

In the daily "sermons" he delivers from his doorway, Reverend Eli Jenkins, the town's preacher and poet, declares his admiration for this resilience. And at the end of the play, First Voice describes how Jenkins perceives **Llareggub Hill** and the milk wood trees that grow there, as "a greenleaved sermon on the innocence of men." To Jenkins, Llareggub's somewhat battered appearance and resistance to change aren't signs of a weakness or rejection of progress; on the contrary, they suggest the town's resilience in the face of corruption: its inherent ability to maintain a sense of "innocence" in a rapidly changing, depraved world. Mary Ann Sailors, an eccentric and religious old woman who lives in town, shares Jenkins' perspective; she sees Llareggub Hill as a "Garden of Eden," or a place untouched by the original sin that incited humanity's fall from biblical grace. Jenkins' and Sailors' views don't suggest that Llareggub's people are purer or more righteous than people who live in places that have kept up with the times. After all, Llareggub's people are hardly saints: they drink, dance, lie, scheme, and have lots of sex on the very hill that Jenkins associates with their supposed "innocence." Instead, Jenkins' and Sailors' faith in Llareggub's eternal innocence seems to reflect the play's counterargument to the cynical perspective that the violent, cruel, and alienating characteristics of modernity are indicative of humanity's inherent sinfulness or are the consequence of a legitimate or imagined fall from grace. The play rejects the idea that time, sin, or evil have degraded humanity beyond the point of redemption. Instead, *Under Milk Wood* optimistically suggests that humanity possesses an inherent and resilient goodness that overshadows our flaws and renders us deserving of redemption.

NATURE VS. SOCIETY

Under Milk Wood takes place within the town of Llareggub and in the **water** or **woods** that

surround it. As the action of the play unfolds, it becomes clear that there is a difference between the types of behaviors that occur within the town of Llareggub and those that unfold beyond the town's confines: in the surrounding sea, in the residents' dreams, or in the milk wood trees that grow on Llareggub Hill. While characters mostly adhere to conventional social norms while they are in town, their behavior loosens when they venture into nature. Milk Wood is the place lovers go to be together: the woods are a frequent destination for Polly Garter, who engages in numerous affairs with the men in town, and Bessie Bighead was conceived in Milk Wood. The sea offers its own type of freedom, as well. While aboard the safe haven of his boat, the lazy fisherman Nogood Boyo entertains salacious thoughts about Mrs. Dai Bread Two, Dai Bread's sensual second wife. In a bittersweet example of the freedom that nature offers, Captain Cat, a retired, blind sea captain, dives into the sea of his dreams to remember his deceased lover Rosie Probert and his shipmates who perished at sea long ago, the watery atmosphere of his dreams offering an alternate existence that's not governed by rules and reality. *Under Milk Wood* construes nature and the unconscious as a sanctuary where the townspeople of Llareggub can go to indulge the behaviors and dreams that are otherwise stifled by the confines of society and reality.

GOSSIP AND COMMUNITY

In a small town like Llareggub, news travels fast, and everyone knows everyone else's business. Women flock to Mrs. Organ Morgan's general store or the town pump to trade bits of gossip. Before heading to work, Llareggub's postman, Willy Nilly, and his wife, Mrs. Willy Nilly, steam open and read all the townspeople's mail, and Willy Nilly passes along the information he gleans from their snooping to people he encounters on the street as he makes his deliveries. Captain Cat spends his days perched beside an open window, employing his acute sense of hearing to keep track of the day's happenings, identifying the people who walk past him by the sound their feet make as they touch the cobblestoned streets. And most of the wives have an opinion on Polly Garter, a single mother who has affairs with many of their husbands. Yet there isn't an inherent cruelty in Llareggub's gossip. On the contrary, the rumors that make their way around town are lighthearted, humorous, and ultimately unite the townspeople in a shared experience of the ups and downs of life. *Under Milk Wood* depicts Llareggub as a thriving community of engaged citizens who benefit from their participation in the experience of public life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MILK WOOD/LLAREGGUB HILL

Milk Wood and Llareggub Hill, symbolize the freedom of nature. Many of Llareggub's lovers flock to Milk Wood to engage in their trysts—particularly ones that are less acceptable within their society. While the play doesn't overtly condemn physical intimacy, a number of townspeople criticize sexual promiscuity. For example, the wives gossip incessantly about Polly Garter, the young, single mother who engages in numerous affairs with married men in town, and the drinkers who gather in Sailors Arms the night of the Mothers' Union Dance grumble about the supposedly sinful nature of dancing. Still, a desire for intimacy and human connection persuades many characters to disregard such criticisms, and they go to Milk Wood—a sanctuary that lies just beyond the metaphorical border that separates the judgmental world of the town from the free, nonjudgmental atmosphere of nature—to act on their impulses.

Milk Wood and Llareggub Hill also embody Llareggub's timeless nature. The play makes frequent allusions to the old age of the geographic features that border Llareggub. First Voice describes Llareggub Hill as "old as the hills." In one of his morning sermons, Reverend Eli Jenkins describes the hill as "eternal." Near the end of the play, as Jenkins sits in his poem-room and writes about Llareggub, he proclaims Llareggub Hill to be a "mystic tumulus," or ancient burial ground, and "the memorial of peoples that dwelt in the region of Llareggub before the Celts left the Land of Summer and where the old wizards made themselves a wife out of flowers." His poetic depiction of Llareggub Hill as ancient and "eternal" situates the hill within the larger context of history. It suggests that because Llareggub Hill has been around since before "the Celts," it will continue to exist, "eternal[ly]," for years to come, resilient enough to weather the passage of time. Jenkins emphasizes humanity's accompanying resilience when he depicts the hill as a "mystic tumulus," a "memorial of peoples" who have long since passed. The ancient peoples who made a home here centuries before Llareggub existed are rendered immortal in the memorials they left behind, and these memorials, in Jenkins' mind, symbolize humanity's ability to weather the scourge of time as adeptly as nature itself. Jenkins' observation about Llareggub Hill's "eternal" quality extends to the town of Llareggub, which is itself characterized by its longevity and resilience: by its ability to resist change and hang onto "that picturesque sense of the past" in a perpetually changing world. Llareggub Hill and Milk Wood, therefore, evoke Llareggub's resilience, and the inherent goodness of its people that allows that resilience to thrive. Llareggub Hill symbolizes the townspeople's participation in the shared history of humanity, and the inherent goodness that is reflected in the "memorial[s]" they left behind on Llareggub Hill.

WATER

Water symbolizes nostalgia and the freedom of nature. In the beginning of *Under Milk Wood*, First Voice invites the audience to "hear and see" the "big seas of [the townspeople's] dreams." Because the townspeople's dreams often convey their nostalgic longing for the past—ghosts and childhood are recurrent themes—First Voice's decision to describe the townspeople's dreams as "big seas" establishes a link between water and nostalgia. Captain Cat's dreams expand on this link, as they explicitly involve water. The elderly, blind sea-captain's dreams transport him to the bottom of the ocean, where the ghosts of former shipmates who drowned at sea overwhelm him with questions about life among the living, and where he also sees the ghost of his former lover, Rosie Probert. Cat's watery dreams reflect the guilt and responsibility he feels for the deaths of the men who drowned under his leadership, but they also symbolize the broader nostalgia Cat feels for his former life and the people who populated it. Cat's unconscious journey into the "big seas of [his] dreams" is also a journey into the sea of nostalgia, and the same is true for other townspeople, for whom the "big seas of their dreams" also offer the opportunity to reminisce about the past.

Water also symbolizes the freedom of nature. When townspeople venture into the sea that borders Llareggub, their thoughts and actions are no longer constrained by social norms. For example, the play suggests a literal connection between water and promiscuity: Nogood Boyo has dirty thoughts about Mrs. Dai Bread Two wearing a wet corset while he's fishing on his boat, and Second Voice describes Captain Cat's former "sea-life" as "sardined with women."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the New Directions edition of *Under Milk Wood* published in 2019.

Under Milk Wood Quotes

[*Silence*]

FIRST VOICE (*Very softly*)

To begin at the beginning: It is Spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible–black, the cobblestreets silent and the hunched, courters'–and–rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing sea. The houses are blind as moles (though moles see fine to–night in the snouting, velvet dingles) or blind as Captain Cat there in the muffled middle by the pump and the town clock, the shops in mourning, the Welfare Hall in widows' weeds. And all the people of the lulled and dumbfound town are sleeping now.

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Captain Cat, Second Voice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

These are the opening lines of the play. Out of darkness and silence, the voice of First Voice appears and begins to tell a story that brings Llareggub and the people who live there to life for the audience. Since this is a radio play, the audience must rely entirely on the narrators and the sound of characters' voices to orient itself within the world of the play. This passage is important because it is the audience's first impression of the town. It also draws attention to the ways in which storytelling and narrative shape and give meaning to ordinary life, which is formless and essentially meaningless without human culture's conscious decision to make it meaningful through creative storytelling and interpretation.

One way the opening passage establishes the creative power of storytelling is by mimicking a creation myth. For example, First Voice's first words ("to begin at the beginning") use language to manifest something—the town, its people, the play's setting—from nothing, as a God or Creator would. In the book of Genesis in the Bible, for example, God creates light from darkness on his first day of creation. In constructing an opening passage that parallels a creation myth, the play emphasizes the power that storytelling has to create meaning and shape reality. Beginning with these opening lines, First Voice and Second Voice create an entire world out of nothing, using their lush, poetic language to convince the audience of the existence of a world it cannot see.

Another important element at play here is the presence of the sea and water imagery imbedded within it. First Voice immediately draws the audience's attention to "the sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboatbobbing sea" that lies beside Llareggub. First Voice's decision to establish Llareggub as a seaside village so early on implies that water is a central aspect of the town's visual appearance and way of life. The play subsequently uses water imagery to describe many of the townspeople's dreams and nostalgic longings for the past, which are other important themes in the play. In immediately establishing the obvious, unavoidable presence of water in the town, First Voice is establishing symbolically the nostalgia that pervades the

town at the figurative level, as well.

"Time passes. Listen. Time passes.

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Second Voice

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the beginning of the play. First Voice, the only voice the audience has heard thus far, guides them through the sleeping town of Llareggub, using lush, poetic language to give an idea of the layout of the small seaside town and establish the setting's ambiance. One particular element that First Voice stresses in their opening remarks is the still, silence of the nighttime air. First Voice emphasizes this silence in this quote, suggesting that the scene is so quiet that, if the audience "listen[s]" closely enough, they can hear as "time passes."

Beyond its emphasis on the literal silence that characterizes the opening scene of *Under Milk Wood*, this passage also introduces a couple of the play's main themes, namely the ability of storytelling to elevate and make meaningful the experiences of ordinary life, as well as the theme of nostalgia. When First Voice addresses the audience directly in this passage, they explicitly draw attention to the fact that they are actively telling the audience the story. This prevents the audience from taking for granted the narrators' words and forces them to be explicitly, consciously aware that the information they receive from First Voice and Second Voice about the town of Llareggub and its people is being shaped, refined, and articulated in a particular way, transforming the mundane reality of life in a decaying seaside village into something that illuminates the rich meaningfulness of ordinary life.

"Come closer now. Only you can hear the houses sleeping in the streets in the slow deep salt and silent black, bandaged night. Only you can see, in the blinded bedrooms, the combs and petticoats over the chairs, the jugs and basins, the glasses of teeth, Thou Shalt Not on the wall, and the yellowing dickybird–watching pictures of the dead. Only you can hear and see, behind the eyes of the sleepers, the movements and countries and mazes and colours and dismays and rainbows and tunes and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and big seas of their dreams.

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Second Voice

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the beginning of the play, First Voice, who is still the only voice the audience has heard thus far, urges their listeners to venture deeper into the sleeping town of Llareggub. This passage occurs just before First Voice and Second Voice direct the audience into the bedrooms of the sleeping townspeople to bear witness to their dreams. It's an important moment in the play's narrative development because it denotes a shift from the impersonal to the personal. Before this, First Voice has only guided the audience around the streets of Llareggub to provide contextual information about the town's layout and general atmosphere to orient the audience within the world of the play.

This moment, however, beginning with First Voice's direct instruction to "come closer now," marks the audience's entry into the innermost thoughts of the townspeople. First Voice addresses the audience directly and personally, using the second-person pronoun "you" to achieve the closeness and familiarity in which they have just instructed their audience to take part. The effect of First Voice's direct address of the audience is that the audience becomes part of the play's world, privy to the most personal, intimate details of the townspeople's lives: the "big seas of their dreams." First Voice's repeated use of the phrase "only you" to preface their detailed descriptions of the audience's perspective deepens this sense of intimacy, almost insinuating that bearing witness to the townspeople's dreams is akin to being entrusted with a highly confidential secret—the sort of classified information one shares only with one's closest friends.

Another important element of this passage is the contrast it establishes between the townspeople's inner and outer lives. Something that becomes a recurrent motif as the play unfolds is the repeated plea for the audience to look beyond Llareggub's flawed, decaying exterior and discover what is charming and unique about the town and its people at a second glance. On the surface, Llareggub's people live boring, unremarkable lives, which this passage illustrates when it describes the banal objects, like "petticoats over the chairs," and "jugs and basins," and "glasses of teeth," that fill their rooms. The townspeople's walls contain not high art,

but pedestrian reminders of their faith—images that bear the text of the Ten Commandments ("Thou Shalt Not"), or else old, weathered "watching pictures of the dead" to invoke the presence of their deceased loved ones.

On the inside, however, the townspeople's lives are full of intrigue and meaning: their dreams are saturated with "movements and countries and mazes and colours and dismays and rainbows and tunes and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and big seas." In illustrating this stark contrast between the mundane appearance of the townspeople's homes and the expansive worlds they inhabit in their dreams, First Voice prompts the audience not to judge the townspeople based on outward appearances or first impressions alone. Even though Llareggub might appear sleepy and boring on the outside, its people have rich, expansive inner lives that are meaningful and worthy of the audience's time, appreciation, and respect.

FIRST VOICE. From where you are, you can hear in Cockle Row in the spring, moonless night, Miss Price, dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper, dream of

SECOND VOICE. Her lover, tall as the town clock tower, Samson-syrup-gold-maned, whacking thighed and piping hot, thunderbolt-bass'd and barnacle-breasted, flailing up the cockles with his eyes like blowlamps and scooping low over her lonely loving hotwaterbottled body.

Related Characters: First Voice, Second Voice (speaker), Miss Myfanwy Price, Mr. Mog Edwards

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in the beginning of the play, at night, as First Voice and Second Voice guide the audience through Llareggub, introducing them to many of the play's characters by inviting them to bear witness to the sleeping townspeople's dreams.

Here, First Voice and Second Voice bring the reader to the home of Miss Myfanwy Price, Llareggub's "dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper," as she dreams about "her lover," Mr. Mog Edwards, the town draper, who is "tall as the town clock tower, Samson-syrup-gold-maned, whacking thighed and piping hot, thunderbolt-bass'd and barnacle breasted." The language Second Voice uses here doesn't hold back in its full, graphic depiction of Mog Edwards' physically attractive features. Second Voice puts himself in the mind of Myfanwy Price in his description, portraying Mog as he appears to Myfanwy, who is engaged in a romance with him.

When Second Voice continues, describing the way Mog's eyes, "like blowlamps," are "scooping low over [Myfanwy's] loving hotwaterbottled body," they make clear that Myfanwy's interest in Mog isn't exclusively romantic: she desires him sexually, and desires for him to find her desirable, as well. Second Voice's frank depiction of Myfanwy's sexual interest in Mog is comical—"lonely" and tucked into her bed beside a hot water bottle, Myfanwy hardly appears like the sexually desirable creature she wants Mog to see her as. In addition to its humor, this passage also introduces the audience to the play's frank, open treatment of physical intimacy and human sexuality. Many of the characters in *Under Milk Wood* engage in or desire to have sex and be seen as sexual creatures, and the play approaches these desires honestly and without judgment.

Another important aspect of the play's treatment of intimacy is the way it shows how complex and nuanced relationships with others can be. Though Myfanwy loves and desires Mog, her interactions with him at this point in the play are limited to dreams and fantasy alone: she has yet to act on her romantic feelings in person and, as the audience ultimately learns, never manages to do so, nor has any plans to do so in the future, despite the fact that Mog, too, desires Myfanwy. Myfanwy and Mog's unrealized romance shows how difficult it is to make oneself vulnerable and connect with others, perhaps, and how often opportunities to connect pass people by when they fail to act on them.

SECOND VOICE. Mrs. Rose Cottage's eldest, Mae, peals off her pink–and–white skin in a furnace in a tower in a cave in a waterfall in a wood and waits there raw as an onion for Mister Right to leap up the burning tall hollow splashes of leaves like a brilliantined trout.

MAE ROSE COTTAGE. (*Very close and softly, drawing out the words*)
Call me Dolores
Like they do in the stories.

Related Characters: Second Voice, Mae Rose Cottage (speaker), First Voice, Captain Cat, Rosie Probert, Lily Smalls, Miss Myfanwy Price, Mr. Mog Edwards

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in the beginning of the play, as First Voice and Second Voice introduce the audience to the play's characters by leading them through the various townspeople's dreams. Mae Rose Cottage, the 17-year-old daughter of Mrs. Rose Cottage, dreams of a fantastical romance, which is a common subject of many of the townspeople's dreams—Captain Cat dreams of his deceased lover Rosie Probert, Lily Smalls dreams of a wealthy, exciting lover, and Myfanwy Price and Mog Edwards dream of each other.

One notable element of Mae Rose Cottage's dream is its sensuality: the teenager on the verge of adulthood isn't just dreaming of romantic love—she's dreaming of sexual intimacy. Mae so desires for her dream-lover to see her body that she removes not only her clothing, but "her pink-and-white skin," as well. The sensual undercurrent of her dream is magnified by certain elements of its setting: it takes place in a hot "furnace," which symbolically alludes to the flame of Mae's desire. Mae seems uncertain about which scenic backdrop she prefers for her romantic rendezvous, but she eventually settles on a natural setting, "in a waterfall in a wood," which symbolically evokes a free space, set apart from the constricting social norms she must adhere to when she is in town. Notably, the forested setting seems to resemble Milk Wood, where townspeople go to engage in lovers trysts, so Mae Rose's dream reflects her longing to make a sexual encounter a reality and meet up with her own lover in Milk Wood.

In another example of nature imagery, Second Voice describes Mae Rose as she waits for her imagined lover "to leap up the burning tall hollow splashes of leaves like a brilliantined trout." The description combines water and forest imagery, establishing that Mae Rose's lover is a being of the freer, natural world. Humorously, it also shows how in Llareggub, a fishing village, nobody can truly escape the presence of the sea: it bleeds into every aspect of their life, dominating both their economy and their sex dreams.

Though Mae's dream draws on places that exist in her reality, such as Milk Wood, it's also highly fantastical: the series of settings she lists as possible backdrops for her sexual encounter—"in a tower in a cave in a waterfall in a wood"—evoke archetypal, idyllic places for a tryst to occur, places that Mae seems to have gotten from romance novels or love poems. Second Voice refers to Mae Rose's imagined lover as "Mister Right," implying that the man is an idealized, fantastical imagined person who fulfills all of Mae Rose's physical and romantic desires, rather than a rendering of an actual lover Mae Rose might find in her real life, in Llareggub.

Mae more explicitly admits to having taken inspiration from fiction when she softly instructs her lover to "call [her] Dolores/Like they do in the stories." Mae derives her fantastical idea of what romance should be from stories, which illustrates one of the play's larger themes of how storytelling and narrative have the power to shape reality. Mae's instruction for her lover to call her Dolores also seems to allude to a poem by Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Dolores (Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs)," which addresses Dolores, "Our Lady of Pain," who represents the mother goddess figure that appears across many pagan religions. Swinburne's sensual poem is told from the perspective of a lover addressing Dolores and draws provocative similarities between Christianity and paganism, likening the pagan goddess to the Virgin Mary figure by employing Christian imagery in its description of Dolores, to whom the poet also attributes sadomasochistic tendencies. There are some sadomasochistic characteristics in Mae Rose's dream, too, such as the rather violent description of her "peal[ing] off her pink-and-white skin in a furnace."

Mae's dream as it is represented in this passage is important in establishing the play's frank treatment of sexuality, as well as nature's function as a place that can embody the free, pagan world of prehistory that existed before Christianity's influence shaped the social norms adhered to in town. It also shows how instrumental stories are in shaping characters' perceptions of reality and their desires.

FIRST VOICE. […] And in Coronation Street, which you alone can see it is so dark under the chapel in the skies, the Reverend Eli Jenkins, poet, preacher, turns in his deep towards– dawn sleep and dreams of

REVEREND ELI JENKINS. Eisteddfodau.

SECOND VOICE. He intricately rhymes, to the music of crwth and pibgorn, all night long in his druid's seedy nightie in a beer–tent black with parchs.

Related Characters: First Voice, Reverend Eli Jenkins, Second Voice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in the beginning of the play, as First Voice and Second Voice introduce the play's characters by guiding the audience through the sleeping townspeople's dreams. Here, the audience first meets the Reverend Eli Jenkins, who is the town's "poet, preacher," and central bardic figure. Jenkins obsessively composes poetry and greets the town from his doorway with a poetic sermon each morning. His role as a character is to celebrate the bardic tradition and storytelling more broadly. Here, the audience gets a taste for how heavily ancient Welsh culture factors into Jenkins's philosophies.

Eisteddfodau (the plural form of *Eisteddfod*), the subject of Jenkins's dream (dreams being an integral component of the Welsh bardic tradition), is a Welsh festival of poetry and the arts. According to legend, the first Eisteddfod was held by request of Maelgwn Gwynedd of Conway in the 6th Century and was a competition of bards and minstrels. The first documented Eisteddfod occurred in 1176 in Cardigan Castle, Cardigan West Wales, by the Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd. Though Eisteddfod has Druidic influences, its 18th Century revival is credited to nonconformist Christian clergy and is recognized as contributing to the survival of the Welsh language, despite centuries of colonialism. That the Reverend Eli Jenkins dreams of Eisteddfodau—and spends every waking moment composing and honoring poetry—shows that he is deeply admiring of Welsh culture, language, and tradition.

Second Voice underscores Jenkins' associations with Welsh paganism when he describes the poet as constructing "intricate[] rhymes, to the music of crwth and pibgorn, all night long in his druid's seedy nightie in a beer-tent black with parchs." A "crwth" is the Welsh word for an ancient Celtic stringed instrument, similar to the modern violin. "Pibgorn," another Welsh term, translates literally to "pipe-horn," and refers to an ancient wooden wind instrument somewhat similar to a bagpipe. A "druid" refers to a member of the learned upper-class in ancient Celtic culture, the earliest records of whom date back to the fourth century BCE. The description of Jenkins as dressed "in his druid's seedy nightie" implies that Jenkins acts as one of these figures.

The main difference between Jenkins and druids is that the learnings of druids were notoriously secret, supposedly taking place in caves and in forests, and they famously did not leave behind written accounts, though they are believed to have been literate. That Jenkins tasks himself with writing down Llareggub's history—something the druids did not do—suggests that he feels obligated to Wales and to the Welsh people to write down his language and document his people's traditions, so that they are not made casualties to time and forgetting.

The numerous allusions to Celtic paganism establish the Reverend as a character who actively keeps alive traditions of the past by creating new poetry that celebrates an earlier way of life, and an earlier weight placed on the oral tradition. The productivity of Jenkins's character—evidenced in the book of history he is writing, in all the poetry he creates—frames his preoccupation with the past as a fruitful, worthy endeavor, rather than a stagnant, counterproductive task. The Reverend's projects almost become a metaphor for Thomas' project in *Under Milk Wood*: revitalizing the oral storytelling traditions of the ancient past, breathing new life into an older, forgotten way of Welsh life.

> Stand on this hill. This is Llareggub Hill, old as the hills, high, cool, and green, and from this small circle of stones, made not by druids but by Mrs. Beynon's Billy, you can see all the town below you sleeping in the first of the dawn.

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Mrs. Beynon, Second Voice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after First Voice and Second Voice have concluded their tour of the townspeople's dreams. As the sky grows lighter and night becomes dawn, First Voice directs the audience's attention toward Llareggub Hill, which stands immediately next to the town of Llareggub. The passage is important because it introduces the audience to Llareggub Hill, upon which the titular Milk Wood is located. Both Llareggub Hill and Milk Wood (the townspeople's name for the small grove of milk wood trees that grows on the hill) become important symbols in the play, representing the freeing quality of nature, as well as humanity's resilience in the face of strife, our innate goodness, and our unceasing capacity for redemption.

This passage, with its description of Llareggub Hill as ancient, "old as the hills," briefly alludes to Llareggub's unchanged nature, emphasizing the hill's ability to stand the

test of time. The hill's oldness is also evoked in First Voice's mention of "druids," which refers to members of the high-ranking class in ancient Celtic culture. Druids were important figures in ancient Celtic culture, typically serving as doctors, religious leaders, and legal authorities. The earliest known record of the druids dates back to the third century BCE, so First Voice's mention of druids here implicitly suggests that Llareggub Hill is at least as old as this.

And yet, First Voice contends that it wasn't druids who created the "small circle of stones" (a type of prehistoric monument, like Stonehenge in England, for example) at which they invite the audience to stand and observe the town of Llareggub nestled below them, but "Mrs. Beynon's Billy," who is, presumably Mrs. Beynon's son, though he isn't mentioned elsewhere in the play. In specifying that the stone circle was created by a contemporary citizen of Llareggub rather than by the prehistoric culture to which the druids belonged, First Voice implicitly establishes that Llareggub and its people as an active part of a longstanding tradition of human culture and the human experience.

It's been theorized that *Under Milk Wood* is Thomas's hopeful response to the atrocities the world had to reckon with in the aftermath of the particularly brutal World War II: his way of articulating the idea that humanity can still possess some of the goodness of the past and rebuild itself to its former glory and his affirmation that the alienation and destruction of modernity hadn't destroyed everything good that humanity had to offer the world. In placing "Mrs. Beynon's Billy" within the prehistoric tradition of the creation of stone monuments, First Voice illustrates this claim, suggesting that the people of Llareggub are keeping age old traditions alive and actively contributing to the human story. The fact that this story continues is proof that war and the suffering of modern living haven't irreparably damaged humanity's upward, forward path toward progress and goodness.

> Less than five hundred souls inhabit the three quaint streets and the few narrow by-lanes and scattered farmsteads that constitute this small, decaying watering-place which may, indeed, be called a 'back-water of life' without disrespect to its natives who possess, to this day, a salty individuality of their own. The main street, Coronation Street, consists, for the most part, of humble, two-storied houses many of which attempt to achieve some measure of gaiety by prinking themselves out in crude colours and by the liberal use of pinkwash, though there are remaining a few eighteenth-century houses of more pretension, if, on the whole, in a sad state of disrepair. Though there is little to attract the hillclimber, the healthseeker, the sportsman, or the weekending motorist, the contemplative may, if sufficiently attracted to spare it some leisurely hours, find, in its cobbled streets and its little fishing harbour, in its several curious customs, and in the conversation of its local 'characters,' some of that picturesque sense of the past so frequently lacking in towns and villages which have kept more abreast of the times.

Related Characters: Voice of a Guide-Book (speaker), First Voice, Second Voice, Reverend Eli Jenkins

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in the beginning of the play, after First Voice and Second Voice have finished guiding the audience through the dreams of the sleeping townspeople. As the night becomes dawn and the sky over Llareggub grows lighter, a "Voice of a Guide-Book" interjects to offer contextual information about Llareggub. The Guide-Book's monologue is important because it establishes some of the play's main themes, such as nostalgia, resilience, and the value of ordinary life.

The main point that the Guide-Book makes here is that the audience should suspend any judgment they might direct toward the "humble" and "decaying" seaside town in which the play is set, since, despite its lackluster appearance and seemingly outdated ways, the town of Llareggub offers a particular set of charms, namely "that picturesque sense of the past so frequently lacking in towns and villages which have kept more abreast of the times." The Guide-Book proposes that Llareggub's unassuming, dilapidated appearance and lack of tourist attractions, which "the hillclimber, the healthseeker, the sportsman, or the weekending motorist" might regard as deficiencies, might actually be what gives it value and meaning.

When investigated by a "contemplative" outsider (the type

of outsider that the Guide-Book implicitly invites the audience to become) who is willing to look beyond the town's unassuming, "quaint" appearance, Llareggub becomes a special place where a person can meditate on the simple things that make life meaningful. Devoid of the distractions of cultural excitement and visual intrigue, Llareggub offers the outsider the unique opportunity to regain a sense of balance and simplicity that is "so frequently lacking in towns and villages which have kept more abreast of the times." The Guide-Book implies that the modernization of culture and industry has forced many people to become out of touch with a purer, simpler way of life that existed in the past. Llareggub's resilience in the face of massive social change has allowed it to maintain this sense of the past, which the Guide-Book seems to suggest is preferable to—or at least just as important as—the cultural practices that have been adopted by more modernized villages.

The Guide-Book gives the audience instructions for how to regard the people and customs in Llareggub, encouraging them to see Llareggub's townspeople as a resilient folk characterized by their "salty individuality" and "curious customs" rather than civilization of backward, cultureless people too stubborn to keep up with the times. To the Guide-Book, Llareggub's quaintness is a blessing rather than a curse, and its ordinariness something to be celebrated rather than mocked. One of the play's most dominant features is in its objective, neutral presentation of its subjects. Llareggub is full of people with "curious"–and not always in a good way—personalities and opinions.

Yet the play refuses to place judgment on any of them, presenting their flaws alongside their virtues, accepting them both, and leaving it to the audience to form its own opinion on the town and its people. The Guide-Book reaffirms this stance in the background information it supplies in this passage, inviting the audience to assume the role of the "contemplative" onlooker rather than the "hillclimber" or the "weekending motorist." The Guide-Book's stance also parallels the thoughts of Reverend Eli Jenkins, who loves his town and believes that, though its people aren't flawless, God will be able to see through their flaws to their innately good, well-intentioned cores.

> A tiny dingle is Milk Wood
> By Golden Grove 'neath Grongar,
> But let me choose and oh! I should
> Love all my life and longer
>
> To stroll among our trees and stray
> In Goosegog Lane, on Donkey Down,
> And hear the Dewi sing all day,
> And never, never leave the town.

Related Characters: Reverend Eli Jenkins (speaker), Voice of a Guide-Book

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from Reverend Eli Jenkins' morning sermon, in which he stands in his doorway and addresses his fellow townspeople, performing original poetry that praises Llareggub and the people who live there. This passage is important because it's the audience's first real exposure to the Reverend and, and it sufficiently illustrates Jenkins' greatest loves: poetry, his town, and his people.

Though Llareggub is a fictitious town, Jenkins' sermon alludes to real places located in Wales. "Grongar" refers to Grongar Hill, which is located in the. Welsh county of Carmarthenshire and is also the subject of a poem by the Welsh poet, John Dyer. Alluding to Dyer's poem is another way in which Jenkins celebrates creativity and poetry in his sermon, including his own poetic musings within a broader poetic tradition. Additionally, "Golden Grove" refers to an actual estate in Carmarthenshire. Naming real Welsh locations establishes Llareggub as an unmistakably Welsh place that practices Welsh traditions. Under Milk Wood, therefore, may be seen, too, as Thomas's celebration of Welshness.

In this excerpt, which is the final two stanzas of Jenkins' nine stanza address, Jenkins acknowledges Llareggub's humble stature. He admits that "A tiny dingle is Milk Wood," drawing on the town's small, unremarkable appearance, as well as, in the broader sense, the insignificance of any small town in the grander scheme of the entire world. Still, despite the insignificance of his unremarkable town, there's no place Jenkins would rather live; in fact, given the choice, he'd "never, never leave the town." Jenkins' sermon expands on the Voice of a Guide-Book's earlier observation that there is charm and value to be found beneath Llareggub's modest, decaying exterior. Like the Guide-Book, Jenkins' sermon also invites the reader not to overlook Llareggub on account

of its humble exterior, and to appreciate the humanity that exists in the ordinary activity of its streets and the beautiful geographic features that surround it.

Lastly, the Reverend's sermon emphasizes the power of the voice. As Llareggub's resident bard, Jenkins pays homage to the Celtic bardic tradition more broadly. A bard is a professional storyteller, musician, and poet. In the ancient Celtic tradition, bards were minstrel-poets who wrote music and verse to celebrate the victories of warriors. In medieval Wales, bards were employed to write music for their lords. In modern usage, a bard might simply refer to any poet or minstrel. Jenkins's recitations of his poetry celebrates the bardic tradition and the importance of poetry and oral storytelling to Welsh culture.

In a way, Jenkins's sermon mimics Thomas' project in *Under Milk Wood*—it becomes a play within a play, almost. As Jenkins composes and performs poetic verse that celebrates the voice, the oral tradition, and the innate goodness of ordinary life, Thomas composes a play that celebrates the voice, storytelling, and ordinary life.

> Oh, isn't life a terrible thing, thank God?

Related Characters: Polly Garter (speaker), First Voice, Second Voice, Reverend Eli Jenkins

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after First Voice and Second Voice have run through the dreams of the sleeping townspeople, night has given way to dawn, and the townspeople go about their morning routines. Polly Garter, a single mother in town who has many children out of wedlock, stands beneath a clothesline, feeding her newest baby, and laments the state of her life. She wonders where the fathers of her children are these days and imagines that the baby she holds in her arms lightly chastises for her promiscuous lifestyle, though the baby ultimately contends that she's a good enough mother.

Polly follows up this imagined exchanged by exclaiming to herself, "oh, isn't life a terrible thing, thank God?" The sentiment behind Polly's somewhat ironic statement—people typically thank God when life is good—is that it's perspective that makes one appreciate the good things in life. Because life is often such "a terrible thing," it allows Polly to recognize more adequately the rare moments of goodness she is afforded in her hard, stressful life of work, chores, and childrearing.

The sentiment Polly expresses here parallels Reverend Eli Jenkins's belief that God will see through Llareggub's townspeople's flaws to the goodness that exists in their cores. Just as God is able to see through the bad and recognize the good, Polly can look past her misfortunes and see the good things God has blessed her with, such as her children. This reflects the play's broader theme that there remains a goodness and redemptive possibility in people, despite their propensity to also commit acts of cruelty, violence, and destruction.

Lastly, Polly's optimism here is important because it illustrates the broader attitude shared by many of Llareggub's townspeople, who find happiness and purpose in their lives despite their often banal, boring existences. At their cores, Polly and her fellow townsfolk are hearty, resilient folk who will weather the trials life will throw at them, sustained by hope for the future and reassurance in their larger place within the story of humanity.

> Up the street, in the Sailors Arms, Sinbad Sailors, grandson of Mary Ann Sailors, draws a pint in the sunlit bar. The ship's clock in the bar says half past eleven. Half past eleven is opening time. The hands of the clock have stayed still at half past eleven for fifty years. It is always opening time in the Sailors Arms.

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Sinbad Sailors, Mary Ann Sailors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40-41

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in the morning, as the citizens of Llareggub go about their morning routines. Sinbad Sailors, who manages Sailors Arms, the local pub, pours himself a beer as he waits for the arrival of the new day's patrons.

One important element of this passage is its emphasis on time and stasis. The bar's clock "says half past eleven," though this isn't actually the time, since the clock is broken, and its hands "have stayed still at half past eleven for fifty years." First Voice's explanation that "half past eleven is opening time" humorously insinuates that Llareggub has enough heavy drinkers to keep a bar open at all hours of the

day. Additionally, the broken clock becomes a metaphor for the town of Llareggub itself, which also hasn't changed much, if at all, in over half a century. Both Llareggub and Sailors Arms are frozen in time and resistant to change.

Using the broken clock as a metaphor for Llareggub's old-fashioned atmosphere complicates the audience's impression of Llareggub. The play's ultimate stance on Llareggub's quaint appearance and traditional customs is that such characteristics make the town charming and reminiscent of a simpler, better time that no longer exists in more modernized, urbanized towns. But the idea presented in this passage, that Llareggub and Sinbad's clock can't change because they are "broken," casts their resistance to progress in a negative light, insinuating that there is something lost when a town or group of people is too caught up in the past to make the most of the present or future.

Still, there's also something comforting in the fact that "it is always opening time in Sailors Arms." Sailors Arms serves as a meeting place for many of Llareggub's people: it's where fishermen go after work to lament the lacking quality of the day's catch, for example. The very name of the pub, Sailors Arms, implies the comfort and connection of a shared embrace. That the pub is always open, therefore, means that Llareggub's people always have a place to go to feel the comfort and assurance of shared experience.

So, just as Sailors Arms' broken clock freezes it in a state of being perpetually open to people who need to air their grievances and connect with others, Llareggub's metaphorical broken clock—the way its customs and characteristics evoke an earlier way of life—means its citizens are free to engage in a more community-oriented, shared experience of life that no longer exists in an increasingly modernized, alienating world. The broken clock shows that there are two ways of looking at Llareggub. On the one hand, the perpetually-open pub and its broken clock are visual markers of a decaying town and a population who drowns the sorrows that arise from this decay with too much drinking. On the other hand, though, the broken clock represents the willingness of the town to always maintain a sense of community and togetherness, resisting the pull of the modernized world whose fast-paced, urbanized environment drives people apart and discourages shared, interconnected living.

SECOND VOICE. Fishermen grumble to their nets. Nogood Boyo goes out in the dinghy *Zanzibar*, ships the oars, drifts slowly in the dab–filled bay, and, lying on his back in the unbaled water, among crabs' legs and tangled lines, looks up at the spring sky.

NOGOOD BOYO. (*Softly, lazily*) I don't know who's up there and I don't care.

Related Characters: Second Voice, Nogood Boyo (speaker), First Voice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after First Voice and Second Voice have finished guiding the audience through the townspeople's dreams and the townspeople begin their respective morning routines. The fishermen, including Nogood Boyo, "grumble" as they head to the bay to work. The fishermen's grumbling reflects the tediousness of their work and establishes this morning during which the play occurs as being like any other ordinary morning in Llareggub.

The passage is also important because it gives the audience additional insight into Nogood Boyo's character. From his name alone, one can predict that he's likely not a wholly upstanding citizen of the town—that he gets into mischief or doesn't live up to certain social expectations—but this passage also depicts him as someone who is subdued and unaffected. When Nogood Boyo gazes at the sky and proclaims, "I don't know what's up there and I don't care," he suggests that he doesn't subscribe to a particular set of spiritual beliefs or moral principles to give his life meaning and purpose, nor does he particularly feel guilty or anxious about his lack of a guiding purpose.

On the contrary, Nogood Boyo approaches life with an attitude of casual indifference. It matters little to him what his life and accomplishments add up to in a greater, cosmic sense. It's enough for him to "drift[] slowly in the dab-filled bay," not worrying about past, present, or future. His relaxed posture as he "[lies] on his back," combined with the similarly calm appearance of "the unbaled water" that surrounds his boat emphasizes Nogood Boyo's contentment. That the stage directions specify for Nogood Boyo to deliver his line "softly, lazily" reinforces Nogood Boyo's peaceful acceptance of the mystery of life, and his commitment to meandering aimlessly through it, as well.

This passage establishes Nogood Boyo as a lazy character, but the play doesn't adopt a judgmental attitude toward his lack of a work ethic. Instead, it romanticizes Nogood Boyo's inaction and rejection of introspection. The image of Nogood Boyo floating peacefully on his boat in the bay's calm waters, gazing upward at the fresh, spring sky is idyllic in its simplicity. The play almost seems to admire Nogood Boyo for his refusal to give into the agonizing anxiety of existential dread, suggesting that life really can be as simple as Nogood Boyo makes it out to be, and perhaps this is a good thing: something to aspire to.

Lastly, this scene reinforces the freedom from social pressures that nature represents. Floating in the bay, Nogood Boyo is undistracted by the economic, romantic social anxieties that creep up in life in town.

❝ You can tell it's Spring.

Related Characters: Captain Cat (speaker), Organ Morgan, First Voice, Second Voice

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Cat sits beside his open window, listening to Llareggub's townspeople go about their daily morning activities. The first time Cat proclaims "you can tell it's Spring" is when he hears all the women out on the town square, but he repeats the phrase once more, when he hears the distant sound of Organ Morgan commencing an early practice session. Conventionally, Spring is associated with life: with rebirth, redemption, and renewal. When Cat remarks on the palpable essence of "Spring" in the air, he is referring to the lively atmosphere of Llareggub on this particular morning, and to the general zest for life the fresh, hopeful Spring air seems to have inspired in Llareggub's townspeople.

The sentiment Cat expresses in his phrase—that there is a palpable sense of hopefulness and an embrace of life among Llareggub's people—is echoed in the observations of First Voice and Second Voice, too, who encourage the audience to note the palpable essence of Spring that wafts through the air, as well as the revitalizing effects that the Spring day has on the various townspeople. That the Spring day so stirs the townspeople is a testament to their appreciation for the simple things in life: for the promise of a new day, the scent of freshness in the air, the pleasure of feeling the sun warm them as they go about their daily chores.

❝ Can't hear what the women are gabbing round the pump. Same as ever. Who's having a baby, who blacked whose eye, seen Polly Garter giving her belly an airing, there should be a law, seen Mrs. Beynon's new mauve jumper, it's her old grey jumper dyed, who's dead, who's dying, there's a lovely day, oh the cost of soapflakes!

Related Characters: Captain Cat (speaker), Polly Garter, Mrs. Beynon, First Voice

Related Themes:      

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Captain Cat sits beside a window and listens to the daily goings on of Llareggub. Though he can't make out everything the women who gossip "round the town pump" are saying to one another, life in Llareggub is so predictable, and its people so committed to their ordinary habits, that he can essentially predict the kinds of things they might be talking about, such as "who's having a baby, who blacked whose eye," Polly Garter's latest child, and "the cost of soapflakes!"

In this synopsis of the women's discussion, Cat essentially becomes one of the women, assuming the tone and demeanor they would adopt in the delivery of their speech and using the type of language they would. When he says "there should be a law," he evokes the harshly judgmental attitude the women direct toward Polly, claiming that "there should be a law" that prevents the sort of shamelessly promiscuous behavior Polly engages in. In becoming one of the women, Cat conveys to the audience his deep, nuanced understanding of the inner-workings of the town and its people. This speaks to the sense of community and interconnectedness the town has, despite its people's tendency to gossip about each other. Everyone knows everyone's business—and talks about this business to everyone they can—and yet, this knowing allows them to have an intimate familiarity with many other people, which is often difficult to achieve in an increasingly modern, alienated (and alienating) world.

Cat's observations of the women are also important because they help to establish him as something of a third narrator—and an additional perspective the audience can

rely on (in addition to the voices of First Voice and Second Voice) to familiarize them with the town and be their eyes and ears, filling them in on the world they can't see or experience for themselves.

Lastly, the vast array of topics Cat assumes that the women cover in their gossip speaks to the ultimately lighthearted nature of such gossip. The women talk about pregnancy and violence in the same breath as they do "the cost of soapflakes!" The juxtaposition of important and banal subjects suggests that the women don't really take any of the gossip to heart—it's just a natural thing they do, an instinctual way to connect with one another. Gossip in *Under Milk Wood* is a way for the community to share experiences with others—to have an interconnected life and a share sense of empathy—not a vehicle for violence or destruction.

CAPTAIN CAT. *That's* Polly Garter. (*Softly*) Hullo, Polly my love, can you hear the dumb goose–hiss of the wives as they huddle and peck or flounce at a waddle away? Who cuddled you when? Which of their gandering hubbies moaned in Milk Wood for your naughty mothering arms and body like a wardrobe, love? Scrub the floors of the Welfare Hall for the Mothers' Union Social Dance, you're one mother won't wriggle her roly poly bum or pat her fat little buttery feet in that wedding–ringed holy to–night though the waltzing breadwinners snatched from the cosy smoke of the Sailors Arms will grizzle and mope.

Related Characters: Captain Cat (speaker), Polly Garter, First Voice, Second Voice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Captain Cat sits beside his open window and listens to the town go about their day. When he hears the gossiping women that have gathered around the pump grow suddenly silent, he knows Polly Garter—a frequent subject of town gossip—must be approaching.

Cat meditates on Polly's reputation as a promiscuous woman but regards her sympathetically. He dismisses the wives' gossip as "dumb goose-hiss" and likens the wives to dumb geese themselves, using bird-like language to describe the way the gossiping women "huddle and peck or flounce at a waddle away." In reducing the wives' gossip to "dumb goose-hiss" and the wives to a flock of geese (whose feathers have been decidedly ruffled by Polly's unabashed sexuality), Cat defends Polly against the bickering wives, emphasizing the trivial nature of their complaints against her.

Cat poses a series of hypothetical questions for Polly: "Who cuddled you when? Which of their gandering hubbies moaned in Milk Wood for your naughty mothering arms and body like a wardrobe, love?" These questions further discredit the wives' gossip, recasting their moral outrage as petty irritation at being made fools by their cheating husbands who "moaned in Milk Wood" for Polly. Cat's defense of Polly is refreshing in its framing of the wives' cheating husbands as just as culpable as Polly for the trysts they engaged in in Milk Wood. Further, his sympathetic treatment of Polly exemplifies the play's attitude toward sexuality in that Cat—like the play itself—depicts sex frankly and without judgment, neither valorizing nor condemning the sexuality of any of its characters.

When Cat claims that Polly is "one mother won't wriggle her roly poly bum or pat her fat little buttery feet in that wedding–ringed holy to–night," he means that Polly—unlike the other, more chaste "wedding-ringed" wives in town—won't attend the dance that night, which metaphorically places Polly outside of the town's established social norms and customs, making her something of a nonconformist. His remark about "the waltzing breadwinners snatched from the cosy smoke of the Sailors Arms [who] will grizzle and mope" refers to the dissatisfied husbands who've been dragged into attending the dance by their wives.

Cat seems to suggest that the married couples are mutually unhappy but trapped in a system that perpetuates their unhappiness, whereas Polly is a free spirit who chooses to reject and live beyond these constrictive social norms. Cat's observation is less an affirmation of one method of coping with society than it is an amused observation about the social patterns people get into and the odd habits they can't manage to break.

Lastly, this moment is an apt illustration of the way Cat serves as a third narrator for the play: like First Voice and Second Voice, he provides the audience with colorful details about Llareggub and its people but ultimately refrains from placing judgment, leaving it to the audience to decide for itself what to think. Cat clearly comes to Polly's defense here when he urges her not to pay the wives' "dumb goose-hiss" any mind, but he stops short of explicitly calling Polly

empowered or superior; on the contrary, he responds with as much amusement to Polly's sexual and social freedom as he does the wives cattiness.

Praise the Lord! We are a musical nation.

Related Characters: Reverend Eli Jenkins (speaker), Polly Garter, Cherry Owen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as the Reverend Eli Jenkins walks past Polly Garter on his way to tend to the sick and hears her singing a song about her former lovers as she scrubs the steps of the Welfare Hall. Even though the Reverend is a pious man of God, he disregards the elements of Polly's song that the church might regard as scandalous (sexual promiscuity and premarital sex, for example) to comment on the beauty of her singing and the fortuitousness that God has made Wales "a musical nation." The Reverend's exclamation is important because it illustrates the play's frank, accepting attitude toward sex. It's particularly telling that the only religious authority in the play—the person one might expect to be most critical of Polly and her past—turns out to be accepting and compassionate rather than judgmental of the play's archetypal promiscuous woman.

The Reverend's kind response to Polly also reveals a few key ideas about his character. For starters, his instinct to notice and commend Polly's musicality reinforces what the audience already knows to be true about the Reverend: that he values poetry, performance, and human creativity and sees them as essential to making one's time on earth meaningful. Another thing is that it shows that he actually lives by the spiritual principles he espouses: he lives in God's image, which is untrue of some of the other characters, such as Cherry Owen, who is harshly judgmental of the townspeople who attend a local dance, regarding it as sinful, while he himself engages in all kinds of raucous behavior, such as drinking to excess on a nightly basis. In contrast, the Reverend honors his word and lives by the values he espouses.

Lastly, the Reverend's comment, with its evaluation of Wales as "a musical nation," pays homage to the Welsh traditions and culture of Dylan Thomas' home country. The audience already knows that the Reverend's worldview is influenced by Welsh culture—he dreams of Eisteddfodau, a Welsh celebration of poetry and the arts, he perpetuates the bardic tradition himself, reciting poetry to the townspeople each morning from his doorway, and he repeatedly invokes the lineage of Welsh culture by making references to Celtic culture and ancient traditions. In praising Wales for being "a musical nation," the Reverend alludes to Wales' long history of poetry, performance, and oral storytelling to memorialize and make meaningful its rich history and culture.

MRS ORGAN MORGAN. And when you think of all those babies she's got, then all I can say is she'd better give up bird nesting that's all I can say, it isn't the right kind of hobby at all for a woman that can't say No even to midgets. Remember Bob Spit? He wasn't any bigger than a baby and he gave her two. But they're two nice boys, I will say that, Fred Spit and Arthur. Sometimes I like Fred best and sometimes I like Arthur. Who do you like best, Organ?

ORGAN MORGAN. Oh, Bach without any doubt. Bach every time for me.

MRS ORGAN MORGAN. Organ Morgan, you haven't been listening to a word I said. It's organ organ all the time with you…

FIRST VOICE. And she bursts into tears, and, in the middle of her salty howling, nimbly spears a small flatfish and pelicans it whole.

ORGAN MORGAN. And then Palestrina,

SECOND VOICE. says Organ Morgan.

Related Characters: First Voice, Second Voice, Mrs. Organ Morgan, Organ Morgan (speaker), Polly Garter, Mr. Waldo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71-72

Explanation and Analysis

This humorous passage comes from a conversation that occurs between Mrs. Organ Morgan and her husband as they sit down to a meal together. Mrs. Organ Morgan tries to relay her exciting experience of catching Polly Garter and Mr. Waldo in the compromising situation of being together and mostly undressed in Milk Wood, the local spot for hookups. Mrs. Organ Morgan's almost girlish excitement to gossip with her husband is immediately squashed by Organ

Morgan's complete disinterest in what she has to say.

The passage conveys Organ Morgan's disinterest in two ways. First, there is a noticeable asymmetry between the amount of talking Mrs. Organ Morgan does relative to her husband. The passage begins with Mrs. Organ Morgan rambling on about Polly Garter's dating history, children, and her opinions about all of it. Mrs. Organ Morgan's energized excitement is conveyed in the rambling quality of her speech. She repeats the phrase "all I can say" a couple times, for example. The repetitive, disorganized quality of her speech suggests that it is unrehearsed: she's so eager to share a secret with her husband that she rushes into her story without putting much thought into what she says or how she says it.

In contrast to Mrs. Organ Morgan's wordy, scattered speech, Organ Morgan's responses are short and to the point: he replies to her rambling with a short sentence or two, which implies that he's less enthusiastic or invested in the conversation.

The second way the passage conveys Organ Morgan's disinterest in his wife is in the content of his answers, which do not correspond to his wife's questions. Organ's reply of "Oh Bach, without a doubt," is his answer to Mrs. Organ Morgan's question "Who do you like best, Organ?" and Organ is referring to which classic composer he likes best, not which of Polly Garter's children he likes best, which was the question Mrs. Organ Morgan was asking. Mrs. Organ Morgan's actual question is obvious in the context of her earlier speech, so Organ's misunderstanding of her question proves that he hasn't been listening to his wife talk.

That he assumes the question refers to classical composers also shows that Organ Morgan is too absorbed in his own interest—classical music—to pay attention to his wife. Organ Morgan's misunderstanding of the question shows that his interests take priority over having a successful relationship with his wife. His unfazed demeanor in the face of Mrs. Organ Morgan's sudden tears, followed by his subsequent answer of "Palestrina" (another composer), shows that his ability to ignore his wife and prioritize his personal pursuits knows no bounds.

Mrs. Organ Morgan's resultant tears are an overreaction to her husband's misunderstanding, but they show how out of touch the Morgans are with each other: how much of a failure their relationship is interpersonally. When First Voice describes how Mrs. Organ Morgan "bursts into tears, and, in the middle of her salty howling, nimbly spears a small flatfish and pelicans it whole," they introduce water imagery into the scene. Since water is associated with longing and nostalgia, depicting Mrs. Organ Morgan as a waterbird suggests that she longs for open communication and reciprocated conversation with her husband, which, if this conversation is indicative of the way their interactions typically unfold, is something she rarely (if ever) receives.

The Organ Morgans' dysfunctional, uncommunicative marriage highlights the difficulties of establishing successful interpersonal relationships. Its hyperbolic depiction of marital conflict and miscommunication is clearly intended to be funny, but, at the same time, it sheds light on the loneliness of being misunderstood, unheard, and having one's natural desires for intimacy with others unmet.

❝ Captain Cat, at his window thrown wide to the sun and the clippered seas he sailed long ago when his eyes were blue and bright, slumbers and voyages; ear–ringed and rolling, I Love You Rosie Probert tattooed on his belly, he brawls with broken bottles in the fug and babel of the dark dock bars, roves with a herd of short and good time cows in every naughty port and twines and souses with the drowned and blowzy–breasted dead. He weeps as he sleeps and sails.

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Captain Cat, Rosie Probert, Second Voice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in the afternoon, as Captain Cat settles down for a nap and is again consumed by dreams of his past life. Once more, First Voice and Second Voice invite the reader to enter Cat's dreams and accompany him on the "slumbers and voyages" he undertakes in them. This dream appears quite similar to the dream Cat has in the beginning of the play: both focus on Cat's life before he retired to Llareggub, in which he sailed across "clippered seas," and "his eyes were blue and bright" and still capable of seeing.

In Cat's dream, he recalls the debauched, titillating experiences he regularly engaged in throughout his seafaring days, recalls the "brawls with broken bottle in the fug and babel of the dark dock bars," as well as the sexual affairs he engaged in with the "herd of short and good time cows in every naughty port." Reminiscing about old times initially appears to be a sufficient coping strategy for the retired sea captain, instantly transporting him back to a past

which no longer exists and enabling him to relive the experiences that his old age and blindness would prevent him from engaging in in his waking life.

But Cat's dreams are only a temporary distraction from his grief, and even in his unconscious mind, he maintains an awareness that the past is irrevocably lost to him in such a way that cannot be restored. Cat might take temporary comfort in reliving moments of a more carefree past, but his dreams ultimately remain incapable of restoring the element of Cat's past he pines for most: the dead. When Cat's dreams drift toward thoughts of "the blowzy-breasted dead" he used to drink and sail with, his grief overcomes him, and "he weeps as he sleeps and sails." Cat cries because the space the dead occupy in his dreams only amplifies the empty space in his waking life that is left in their absence.

Cat's relationship to his dreams is complex. On the one hand, it's painful for him when each dream forces him to reinternalize the truth that his deceased companions will only ever exist in his dreams. Still, it's this painful fact that compels Cat to dream, for the dead cannot memorialize themselves and must rely solely on the living to ensure that their presence is not forgotten and, therefore, he has an obligation to dream these painful, nostalgic dreams of his seafaring days and the people who populated them: to honor his deceased friends and lovers, no matter how painful this task might be.

Remember her.
She is forgetting.
The earth which filled her mouth
Is vanishing from her.
Remember me.
I have forgotten you.
I am going into the darkness of the
darkness for ever.
I have forgotten that I was ever born.

Related Characters: Rosie Probert (speaker), Captain Cat

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in one of Captain Cat's dreams about Rosie Probert, his deceased former lover. After conversing back and forth with Rosie in an exchange of rhymed verse that began romantically and nostalgically and ended in innuendo, Rosie departs Cat's dream, leaving him alone as she fades away, "going into the darkness of the/darkness for ever." Rosie's disappearance illustrates the inadequacy of dreams and memories to recapture the essence of the past: of past realities, past lives, people who are no longer among the living. Cat's repeated dives into his unconscious are simply a coping mechanism for him to work through his grief over people who are no longer in his life, but they do little to forge a path forward for him.

And yet, grieving and remembering the departed is essential, because those who are no longer living cannot keep their memory alive themselves, which is what Rosie's disappearance represents metaphorically. When "the earth which filled her mouth [...] vanish[es] from her," it means time and forgetting have taken their toll, and the world no longer has a space for her. When Rosie instructs Cat to "remember" her, for she has "forgotten" him, she means that Cat—as a living person—bears the entire responsibility for keeping her memory alive. The dead have no memories and no power to memorialize themselves or comfort the living, so it is entirely up to the living to decide how to honor the past in the present and into the future.

Rosie's descent into oblivion also illustrates the pit of Cat's grief. His nostalgia is made painful by his knowledge that his memories of the past are inadequate renderings of all he has lost throughout his life, and that even these inadequate memories will grow fainter and murkier as time continues to pass him by. Memories of the past are all Cat has to hold onto, and the passage of time threatens to destroy them and make them uncertain. Time, which the play repeatedly urges its audience to take notice of, can be cruel and indifferent to humanity's nostalgic preoccupations with the past. Time continues on, unruffled by Cat's suffering, and forces "forgetting" onto him.

I want to be a *good* Boyo, but nobody'll let me.

Related Characters: Nogood Boyo (speaker), Mrs. Dai Bread Two

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Nogood Boyo is aboard his schooner, the *Zanzibar*, fishing in the bay. He has just reeled in his only catch of the day—a wet corset—which conjures in his mind dirty thoughts of Mrs. Dai Bread Two wearing it. Nogood Boyo immediately becomes ashamed of his dirty thoughts and proclaims, "I want to be a good Boyo, but nobody'll let me." His humorous frustration implicitly articulates the way social norms cause him to feel guilty about having natural thoughts about physical intimacy: he associates being bad with having carnal desires and being "good" with the absence of such desires.

When Nogood Boyo claims that "nobody'll let [him]" be good, he means that the appearance of unwanted, sudden thoughts, like the one he's just had about Mrs. Dai Bread Two, prevent him from being the "good" socially acceptable "Boyo" he wants to be. Were it not for the emergence of such thoughts—which, he implies, are no fault of his own—he could live up to his full, morally-sound potential.

Also present in Nogood Boyo's statement is the insinuation that his dirty thoughts are the fault of the people featured in them—here, Mrs. Dai Bread Two—rather than the unconscious manifestation of his own desires. Nogood Boyo's formulation is a clever way for him to relish in his inner desire for physical intimacy while also maintaining the socially upstanding stance that it's immoral to have such thoughts in the first place: he wants to be "good," but other people create obstacles that stand in the way of him achieving this goodness.

Nogood Boyo's explanation for his thoughts also illustrates the power of storytelling to create and manipulate the meaning of an event. Here, Nogood Boyo recasts his dirty thoughts, essentially telling himself a story that absolves himself of responsibility for them, maintaining that he is a victim of his thoughts and powerless to them, in order to entertain his daydreams of pleasure while also adhering to his town's social norms by maintaining that such impure thoughts come to him unwillingly and reluctantly.

Nogood Boyo's humorous hypocrisy—the clever way he's arranged for himself to have dirty thoughts and condemn them at the same time—parallels the hypocrisy of other townspeople, as well. For instance, the men who spend their days getting drunk in Sailors Arms condemn dancing as sinful, when, by their own logic (that its bad to be sinful, in the biblical sense) their own actions (succumbing to the vice of drinking, which might be seen as the deadly sin of sloth) are just as sinful as the supposed lustfulness of dancing.

> We are not wholly bad or good
> Who live our lives under Milk Wood,
> And Thou, I know, wilt be the first
> To see our best side, not our worst.

Related Characters: Reverend Eli Jenkins (speaker), Voice of a Guide-Book, First Voice, Second Voice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs near the end of the play, as the day draws to a close, and Reverend Eli Jenkins stands in his doorway to recite his sunset poem for the people of Llareggub. This excerpt comes near the end of the Reverend's poem and it articulates his belief that God will judge the citizens of Llareggub—as imperfect as they are—by their innate goodness rather than their flaws. The Reverend's main functions as a character are to celebrate the Welsh bardic tradition and honor his town, and this passage illustrates both of these functions.

Another important thing to note about this passage is how it expresses a common theme articulated by numerous characters throughout the play, which is a directive for the audience to judge Llareggub and its people on their redeeming qualities rather than their flaws or ordinariness. This sentiment is expressed implicitly throughout the play by First Voice and Second Voice in their objective, fair depiction of the townspeople, and explicitly by the Voice of a Guide-Book in the beginning of the play, when it invites the audience to look beyond Llareggub's weathered, unremarkable exterior to see its charming evocation of an earlier, simpler way of life, and the eccentric personalities of its townspeople. Reverend Eli Jenkins expresses the same sentiment here, when he states his belief that God will judge Llareggub's people by their goodness rather than their mistakes.

Jenkins's belief in God's magnanimity reflects his own beliefs as well: Jenkins loves his town because he loves the people in it and sees them as valuable and worthy of redemption, despite their ordinariness and their flaws. The Reverend later expresses his belief that Milk Wood and Llareggub Hill are symbolic of humanity's innocence. By describing Llareggub's citizens as those "Who live under Milk Wood," he metaphorically expresses his belief in the citizens' innocence and innate goodness.

❝ Llareggub Hill, that mystic tumulus, the memorial of peoples that dwelt in the region of Llareggub before the Celts left the Land of Summer and where the old wizards made themselves a wife out of flowers.

Related Characters: Reverend Eli Jenkins (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs at the end of the play. Reverend Eli Jenkins sits in his poem-room and writes a history of Llareggub. In this passage, he writes about Llareggub Hill, which stands next to the town of Llareggub, and which in the play symbolizes the town's and the townspeople's resilience in the face of change.

The Reverend refers to Llareggub Hill as "that mystic tumulus," or burial mound, which refers to a mound of earth that sits over a gravesite. The existence of burial mounds in the United Kingdom dates back to the Neolithic age, which spanned from approximately 4000 to 2500 BCE, so regardless of whether Jenkins' decision to call Llareggub Hill a "mystic tumulus" is figurative or literal, his choice of language situates the hill within the larger context of history and traces its origin to an era that predates the Celts.

"The Land of Summer" might allude to the Celtic notion of the Otherworld—a land of the dead or of deities, so when Jenkins states that Llareggub Hill is "a memorial of peoples that dwelt in the region of Llareggub before the Celts left the Land of Summer," he is implying that Llareggub Hill predates the emergence of the Celts as a people: not only was the hill present before the Celts arrived in Wales, it was also present before the Celts existed in the first place: in a prehistoric time when "the old wizards made themselves a wife out of flowers," which is an allusion to Blodeuwedd, the wife of Lleu Llaw Gyffes, a hero in Welsh mythology. According to Welsh mythological tradition, Lleu Llaw Gyffes was cursed by his mother, Arianrhod, to never have a human wife. To work around Arianrhod's curse, the wizards Math and Gwydion fashioned him a wife out of flowers.

Jenkins' allusions to Celtic prehistory and Welsh mythology situates Llareggub Hill, Llareggub, and the townspeople within a broader, eternal timeline of humanity. Jenkins sees Llareggub's people as a continuation of this timeline, and he sees the stories of their lives as just as meaningful and worthy of memorialization as the tales of Welsh mythology, and the graves of prehistoric people who inhabited the land before the Celts.

❝ Blind Captain Cat climbs into his bunk. Like a cat, he sees in the dark. Through the voyages of his tears, he sails to see the dead.

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Captain Cat, Rosie Probert, Second Voice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs near the end of the play, as evening turns to night, the sky above Llareggub grows dark, and First Voice and Second Voice guide the audience around the town to witness the townspeople settle in for the night. Captain Cat retires to his bed and prepares to embark on another journey through haunted, nostalgic dreams of his seafaring past.

When First Voice states that "like a cat, he sees in the dark," they are referring to Cat's ability to see and relive episodes from his seafaring days, "in the dark" of night, as he descends into unconsciousness and begins to dream. Cat's dreams allow him not only to regain his sense of sight, but also to see things he wouldn't be able to see in reality even if he weren't blind: the friends from his seafaring days (and his former lover, Rosie Probert) whom he has outlived. In the "dark[ness]" of his dreams, Cat can "see the dead."

Seeing his deceased former shipmates displayed so convincingly and tangibly before him overwhelms Cat with feelings of grief and guilt over the reality that he had lived while others died. At the same time, Cat knows that his dreams and memories are the only places in which the dead still exist, so he feels an obligation to continue to dream, to grieve, to remember, and to memorialize his dead friends. When First Voice states, "through the voyages of his tears, he sails to see the dead," they are describing the way Cat's grief, guilt, and sense of obligation to keep alive the memories of the dead motivate him to continue to dream, to see, and to remember.

Cat's dreams transport him backward in time to the seafaring, sea-seeing days of his former life, but it's not just a nostalgic preoccupation with the past that motivates him

to continue dreaming. Ultimately, Cat "sails to see the dead" to ensure that their memories have a place in the future, as well. In a way, Cat's project of memorializing his dead companions parallels the project of *Under Milk Wood*: to bring ordinary places and people to life through storytelling and memory.

FIRST VOICE. [...] And Mr. Waldo drunk in the dusky wood hugs his lovely Polly Garter under the eyes and rattling tongues of the neighbours and the birds, and he does not care. He smacks his live red lips. But it is not *his* name that Polly Garter whispers as she lies under the oak and loves him back. Six feet deep that name sings in the cold earth.

POLLY GARTER. (*Sings*)
But I always think as we tumble into bed
Of little Willy Wee who is dead, dead, dead.

Related Characters: First Voice, Polly Garter (speaker), Mr. Waldo , Little Willy Weazel, Second Voice, Captain Cat, Rosie Probert, Miss Myfanwy Price, Mr. Mog Edwards

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs near the end of the play. As day turns to night, First Voice and Second Voice guide the audience around town to observe how the various townspeople spend their evenings. In Milk Wood, Polly Garter and the married Mr. Waldo engage in an affair. The starkly different amount of pleasure the sexual encounter brings Mr. Waldo and Polly illuminates the complex nature of human intimacy.

Mr. Waldo and Polly's frolic in Milk Wood is sufficiently pleasing to Mr. Waldo, who "smacks his live red lips" in an action that suggests a raw, unnuanced urge to consume Polly. For Mr. Waldo, the affair is a means to an end, and he engages in it readily, concerned only with satisfying his desires. Mr. Waldo's ability to enjoy his tryst with Polly and disregard "the eyes and rattling tongues of the neighbours and the birds" is made possible by the location in which the affair take place, in Milk Wood, where the freedom of nature absolves Llareggub's citizens of the need to adhere to the stricter social norms enforced in town.

Even so, Mr. Waldo readily admits that "he does not care" whose "rattling tongues" speak of his affair. Interestingly, a lack of caring directed at their affair is something that unites Polly and Mr. Waldo, who otherwise seem to have no interest in each other beyond the purely physical. While Mr. Waldo's decision not to care about the gossiping neighbors comes from a place of self-abandonment and, likely, the theory that with his already-disgraced reputation preceding him, he has nothing left to lose, Polly's detachment comes from a place of disinterest in Waldo altogether.

For Polly, the affair isn't nearly as satisfying as it is for Waldo. Though she "lies under the oak and loves him back," Polly is too caught up in the past, mourning her long-dead lover, Willy, to be present in her current affair with Mr. Waldo. Like Mr. Waldo, Polly uses the sexual affair as a means to an end. For Polly, however, that end isn't pleasure, but a temporary respite from her grief and suffering. She appears to pursue Waldo (and many of her other lovers) in an effort to distract herself from thoughts of Willy Wee, the only man she ever loved. Polly's efforts are ultimately unsuccessful, though, as is evidenced by the fact that she whispers Willy Wee's name in the midst of her tryst, rather than that of her current lover.

Still, the play stops short of depicting Polly as a tragic figure, opting instead to frame her disappointing love affairs and unsatisfied longing as universal to the human quest for intimacy, connection, and mutual understanding. In the end, Polly will never recover her lost Willy Weazel, but neither will Captain Cat restore his Rosie Probert, nor will Myfanwy Price and Mog Edwards gather the courage to pursue their romance beyond the exchange of love letters. *Under Milk Wood* characterizes unfulfilled longing and imperfect exercises in intimacy, like the tryst Polly Garter halfheartedly participates in with Mr. Waldo in this passage, as part of a universal human struggle to connect with others.

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

Related Characters: First Voice (speaker), Second Voice, Mary Ann Sailors, Reverend Eli Jenkins, Jack Black

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 94-5

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final lines of the play, as the one day in Llareggub that the audience has born witness to draws to a close. As "the thin night darkens" over Llareggub, the atmosphere returns to the way it was at the beginning of the play, when First Voice and Second Voice first invited the audience to listen to the silent, sleeping town. In bookending the play with the darkness of night, the play achieves a coherent, symmetrical form, despite the fact that it is otherwise lacking the elements of a conventional narrative.

First Voice describes the different meanings Milk Wood (and Llareggub Hill, on which the grove of trees grows) has for different townspeople. To the "hunters of lovers," which alludes to Jack Black, whose hobby is breaking up the lovers' trysts that go on in the wood, "every tree-foot's cloven." This means that every inch of the wood, down to the last tree-foot, is symbolic of humanity's sinful nature. Jack Black's religious fervor makes him particularly judgmental of sexual promiscuity, so to him, the wood where Llareggub's citizens go to engage in sexual acts, has evil, sinful associations. To Mary Ann Sailors, in contrast, the wood is "a God–built garden" that implies the existence of "Heaven on earth," and that Llareggub's citizens are God's "chosen people." To promiscuous farmhands, the wood is an "ignorant chapel of bridesbeds," a place of opportunity, where they can go for hookups. And lastly, to Reverend Eli Jenkins, the wood is "a greenleaved sermon on the innocence of men," whose oldness and resilience in the face of centuries of change are a testament to Llareggub's innate goodness, and the goodness—the "innocence"—of humanity on a broader scale.

When First Voice says that "the suddenly wind–shaken wood springs awake for the second dark time this one Spring day," they mean that it's the presence of people in the wood, and people's visions of what the wood mean, that breathes life into them and gives them meaning. Humanity's creative memorialization of the human experience through personal perspective, storytelling, and a simple zest for life, imbues everything it touches with meaning, significance, and vitality.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

UNDER MILK WOOD

First Voice invites the listener "to begin at the beginning" before setting the scene. It's the middle of the night in a small, quaint fishing village. Everyone in the town is sound asleep. The darkness of night renders the houses as "blind as Captain Cat," and it's quiet enough to "hear the dew falling." First Voice addresses the listener directly, explaining that only they are awake to see the ships bobbing up and down in the **sea**, and to experience the townspeople's dreams. The stillness of night pervades everything in town from the chapel to the pub, to Dai Bread's bakery.

First Voice's narrative instruction "to begin at the beginning" addresses the listener directly, drawing them into the play and explicitly highlighting the active storytelling involved in bringing to life the play's setting, characters, and plot. In establishing where "the beginning," starts, First Voice imposes a narrative structure onto an otherwise formless setting. The peaceful quietness First Voice emphasizes in this opening scene suggests that the play's setting is a quaint, simple place—the very opposite of a bustling, crowded city.

First Voice urges the listener to listen as "time passes." He describes Captain Cat, the blind **sea**-captain, asleep in his bunk on his ship, the *S. S. Kidwelly*. Second Voice interjects to describe Captain Cat's dreams, in which he plummets deep into the sea and is greeted by his deceased shipmates First Drowned, Second Drowned, Third Drowned, Fourth Drowned, and Rosie Probert, who all recount the circumstances of their death. Second Drowned recalls how he and Captain Cat both had sexual relations with Rosie Probert. The drowned ask Captain Cat to fill them in on the goings on of the town they left behind. First Drowned asks if there is "washing on the line," Second Drowned asks about "rum and laverbread," and Fourth Drowned asks about "Concertinas" and "Ebenezer's bell." Captain Cat quickly becomes overwhelmed by all the voices.

First Voice's advice to listen as "time passes" suggests that one can clearly discern the effects of time on the town in which the play takes place: perhaps the town is worn down and has seen better days, or perhaps its people are preoccupied with the past. Captain Cat's dreams of his deceased shipmates certainly supports the latter speculation: the retired sea captain's dreams are haunted by the ghosts of the shipmates he has outlived. Cat's frazzled response the ghosts' many questions suggests that memory often overwhelms his present existence—that he is living in the past. Cat's dream also establishes a connection between nostalgia and water, with water being the subject and setting of Cat's nostalgia, as well as a metaphor the dream uses to convey the heavy, overpowering quality of Cat's feelings of longing and grief. Lastly, the appearance of Rosie Probert, Cat's former lover, introduces an element of physical intimacy into the play.

First Voice directs the listener to listen to the sound of the town's dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper, Miss Myfanwy Price, dream of her tall, handsome lover, Mr. Mog Edwards. Second Voice interjects, describing Edwards as "whacking thighed and piping hot," and with "eyes like blowlamps" that take in Myfanwy's body. In the dream, Edwards effusively declares his love for her and vows to whisk her away to his "Emporium on the hill" for a sensual evening together. Miss Price says, "Yes, Mog, yes, Mog, yes, yes, yes."

Second Voice's description of Mog Edwards as "whacking thighed and piping hot" suggests an explicitly sexual dynamic to Myfanwy and Mog's dreams of each other. Second Voice draws attention to Edwards's "eyes like blowlamps," which illustrates the eagerness with which Mog takes in Myfanwy's physical appearance. Between Mog and Myfanwy's steamy dreams and Captain Cat's dream of his former lover Rosie Probert, it's clear that the play is frank and unbarred in its display of characters' sexuality. Along these lines, Myfanwy's exclamation of "Yes, Mog, yes, Mog, yes, yes, yes" signifies her affirmative response to Mog's declaration of love. It also might imitate a cry of sexual ecstasy.

First Voice draws the listener's attention up the street to the attic above the cobbler's shop, where the cobbler, Jack Black, lies fast asleep. Second Voice describes Black's dreams of brashly breaking up lovers' rendezvous in the **woods**.

Second Voice's comment about Jack Black's dreams of breaking up lovers' rendezvous in the woods establishes the woods that surround the town as a place where the usual social norms don't apply— where townspeople are free to act on the physical impulses that society (here, represented by the violent, order-enforcing Jack Black) might otherwise condemn.

Next, Second Voice describes how Evans the Death, the town's undertaker, laughs as he dreams about being a child and stealing a handful of his mother's currants on snowy day.

Evans the Death's dreams of childhood reflect his nostalgia for the past. His desire to be young again might also reflect a repressed death anxiety, which is rather ironic in light of the fact that one would expect an undertaker to have accepted (or at least grown numb to) the reality of mortality.

First Voice moves the scene next door, where Mister Waldo, a plump man who sleeps with bread pudding and a milk stout under his pillow, and the town's "rabbitcatcher, barber, herbalist, catdoctor, [and] quack," dreams about playing "this little piggy" with his mother. In the same dream, Mr. Waldo's wife screams at him, anguishing over what their nosy neighbors will say about their marriage, and First Neighbour, Second Neighbour, Third Neighbour, and Fourth Neighbour begin to gossip about Mr. Waldo being a drunk and having an affair with Beattie Morris, who has apparently given birth to his child. The neighbors think Mr. Waldo is just like his father, who ended up in an asylum. Waldo's wife's voice returns, and she tearfully refers to herself as "Widower Waldo."

Waldo's dreams of childhood reflect his nostalgic longing for simpler times. The neighbors' gossip about Mr. Waldo's drinking and adultery suggest that his life has only gotten more complicated and unsavory as he grows older, which explains his desire to regress to a time when he had fewer problems. It's not clear why Waldo's wife calls herself "Widower Waldo" in the dream, but it might suggest that Waldo, like Evans the Death, fears mortality, or feels apprehensive about the passage of time, and the death and decay that unavoidably accompany it.

Waldo's wife's screeching is replaced by the screeching of his mother, who also anguishes over gossiping neighbors. Waldo regresses into his childhood self, and the neighbors complain that he is dirty and mischievous. One neighbor claims he stole some currants, while another mother demands to know what Waldo has done to Matti. Waldo orders Matti to give him a kiss, and Matti asks for a penny in return. A preacher asks if Waldo will take Matti Richards to be his "awful wedded wife," and four other women chime in to ask the same question. Waldo screams.

That Waldo's wife's screeching replaces his mother's suggests that while time might pass, the human experience remains basically the same, and history ultimately repeats itself. Here, Waldo is an unsatisfactory husband, just as his father was before him, and his wife yells at him, just as his mother did before her. Lastly, Walter's wife's and Walter's mother's anguish over their gossiping neighbors depicts the play's setting as a gossipy small town where everyone knows everyone else's business.

First Voice redirects the listener's attention toward the clean and immaculately dressed Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, who is asleep in bed "under virtuous polar sheets" in her room at the Bay House, a boarding house. Her two husbands, Mr. Ogmore and Mr. Pritchard, are both dead. Mrs. Ogmore is pathologically tidy and dreams of instructing her deceased husbands to relay their daily routines to her. Ogmore and Pritchard run through their chores, such as taking "salts which are nature's friend," making herbal tea, and boiling drinking water.

Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's "virtuous polar sheets" are a visual representation of her obsession with tidiness. Metaphorically, they suggest a certain moral purity, as well. That Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard dreams of her dead husbands suggests that she, like so many of the other townspeople, is preoccupied with the past.

First Voice draws the listener's attention toward Gossamer Beynon—the butcher's daughter, and a schoolteacher—who sleeps "under a fluttering hummock of chicken's feathers in a slaughterhouse that has chintz curtains and a three-pieced suite." Gossamer dreams of a lover, who is described as "a small rough ready man with a bushy tail winking in a paper carrier."

The animalistic traits of Gossamer's lover, with his "bushy tail" and "rough ready" appearance illustrates the carnal, physical aspect of Gossamer's desires. Like many other characters, she dreams specifically of physical intimacy.

Organ Morgan, the town organist, cries for help in his sleep. He dreams of the "music" of Coronation Street: the "spouses [...] honking like geese and the babies singing opera." Across town, the cocklers, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd, are sound asleep, "like two old kippers in a box."

Organ Morgan's dreams of "spouses [...] honking like geese" emphasizes how involved in everyone else's business the townspeople are: the town is small, so everyone hears everything else that goes on, such as the "honking" squabbles of bickering spouses. The description of the Floyds asleep "like two old kippers in a box" is an example of the play's abundant use of water imagery. Here, the two old cocklers are depicted as kippers, small canned fish that are similar to sardines.

In Salt Lake Farm, Utah Watkins counts sheep that look like his wife. Elsewhere, Ocky Milkman dreams of crying as he empties his milk churns into the Dewi River. Next door, Cherry Owen's empty mug turns into a fish, which he drinks. Elsewhere, P.C. Attila Rees drags himself out of bed and starts to pee into his helmet before deciding he'll regret it in the morning and returning to bed.

Watkins's first name (Utah) and the name of his farm, Salt Lake Farm, evoke more water imagery: Salt Lake refers to the Great Salt Lake, which is located in northern Utah, near Salt Lake City, which Dylan Thomas visited in 1952 while on one of his U.S. reading tours. That Cherry Owen's empty mug turns into a fish comically suggests a nostalgia or longing for the drinks he's already drunk.

Willy Nilly, the postman, dreams of delivering the mail, which causes him to knock on his wife's back in his sleep. Willy Nilly's knocking leads Mrs. Willy Nilly to dream of being spanked by her teacher for being late to school, which is the dream she's had every night since marrying Willy Nilly. Sinbad Sailors, who runs the taproom, "hugs his damp pillow," which he calls Gossamer Beynon. Lily Smalls dreams of being caught by a mogul in the washroom.

Mrs. Willy Nilly's dream might reflect her inner desires for the sexual intimacy that aren't being fulfilled in her marriage. Sinbad Sailors's and Lily Smalls's dreams also reflect repressed sexual desires: Sinbad Sailors lusts after "his damp pillow" in place of Gossamer, whom he truly loves. Lily Smalls's dreams of engaging in an illicit affair in the wash-room suggests a desire for a more titillating life, since the exciting act of being ravished by a mogul (an important and powerful person, especially within a particular industry) stands in stark contrast to the drab, mundane setting (a wash-room) in which it takes place.

Mae, Mrs. Rose Cottage's oldest child, "peals off her pink-and-white skin" and stands waiting "in a furnace in a tower in a cave in a **waterfall** in a wood," for "Mister Right" to arrive. She asks him to call her "Dolores, like they do in the stories."

Mae Rose's dream is also richly sensual: she undresses herself completely, taking off "her pink-and-white-skin" in addition to her clothes. The removal of her skin suggests that Mae Rose desires to be seen physically and *metaphorically: she wants someone to observe and desire her naked body, and she also wants to "peal[] off" the exterior layers of manner, social niceties, and artifice and let the world see her in a natural, unfiltered state. Mae Rose's desire for a romance like something out of "the stories" underscores the power storytelling has to shape people's desires. Lastly, Mae Rose's desire to be called "Dolores," and the violent imagery of her removing her skin, might be an allusion to the Algernon Charles Swinburne poem "Dolores* (Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs)*," a sensual, provocative poem that uses Christian imagery to describe the beauty, cruelty, and sensuality of a pagan mother goddess.*

Bessie Bighead, a poor, perpetually single woman who works at Salt Lake Farm, picks daisies to place on the grave of Gomer Owen, who kissed her just once, as they were standing next to the pigsty. In Mrs. Butcher Beynon's dream, Mr. Beynon is arrested for selling illicit meats, such as "dogs' eyes" and "manchop." In his own dream, Butcher Beynon shoots wild giblets.

Bessie Bighead longs nostalgically for the deceased Gomer Owen, whom she associates with love and intimacy, even though the one kiss they shared occurred in such an undesirable place as a pigsty. Mrs. Beynon's dream seems to reflect a broader paranoia of community gossip: she's worried community gossip about the apparently disreputable sources of her husband's meats will lead to his arrest.

First Voice redirects the listener's attention to the owls hunting over the cemetery. In the chapel on Coronation Street, Reverend Eli Jenkins dreams of Eisteddfodau. Second Voice elaborates, explaining how the Reverend crafts rhymes in his sleep.

Eisteddfod *is an annual Welsh community festival that celebrates Welsh arts and culture, as well as the bardic tradition. The first recorded Eisteddfod took place 1176 and was as a competition among bards and minstrels. That the Reverend dreams of Eisteddfodau and crafts rhythms in his sleep suggests that he values storytelling, the arts, and a sense of community. It also places the play's setting in a broader historical context, establishing that it and its people value and carry on centuries' old Welsh traditions.*

Elsewhere, Mr. Pugh, the schoolmaster, dreams of murder. Elsewhere still, Mrs. Organ Morgan holds her hands over her ears and tries to sleep as her husband snores loudly beside her.

Mrs. Organ Morgan's dreams of silence contrast sharply with her husband's dreams of music. The asymmetrical, opposing desires displayed in their dreams is a metaphor for their failure to connect as a couple, and the complicated nature of intimacy more broadly.

Mary Ann Sailors dreams herself away from her clean kitchen, which has "Sunday-school pictures" hanging from its walls, and into the Garden of Eden, which she envisions as a "kitchen garden" full of vegetables. She sits in the garden and shells peas.

Mary Ann Sailors's dreams of the Garden of Eden suggest a longing for purity and redemption: she's dreaming of a time before humanity's biblical descent into sin and violence. The fact that Mary Ann's Eden is a mundane "kitchen garden," though, reveals her belief that retuning to this earlier state of purity that humanity had before its banishment from the Garden of Eden is an achievable task rather than a lofty, wishful goal. In short, Mary Ann's dream suggests her faith in humanity's resilience and innate goodness.

Meanwhile, in Donkey Street, Dai Bread dreams of harems, Polly Garter dreams of babies, Nogood Boyo dreams of nothing, and Lord Cut-Glass dreams of a ticking clock.

Dai Bread's dreams of harems and Polly Garter's dreams of babies are additional examples of the play's open, honest attitude toward sexuality and physical intimacy. Nogood Boyo's dream of nothing suggests that he's an uncomplicated person: he wants for nothing because his mundane life in a quaint fishing village gives him all he really needs. Lord Cut-Glass's dreams of a ticking clock suggests a heightened awareness of humanity's inability to halt the passage of time. Perhaps Lord Cut-Glass, like Captain Cat and many of the play's other characters, longs for the past and is apprehensive about his inability to exercise control over a world that is perpetually moving forward.

First Voice describes the sun slowly rising in the sky as "time passes." They urge the listener to stand atop **Llareggub Hill**, on which sits a circle of stones made by "Mrs. Beynon's Billy," rather than by "druids," and listen to the sounds of the waking town below.

First Voice explicitly emphasizes the steady, forward motion of time when he urges the listener to observe how "time passes" as night gives way to morning.

The Voice of a Guide-Book describes the town of Llareggub, which is home to less than 500 people, and which contains only three, narrow streets and some farmland. The Guide-Book describes Llareggub as "decaying," and the townspeople as having "a salty individuality of their own." On Coronation Street, the town's main road, there are "humble" houses painted garish colors, as well as a few crumbling 18th-century houses. There's not any interesting architecture, nature, or general excitement in Llareggub to attract outsiders, but a "contemplative" person might find a "picturesque sense of the past" in the town's eccentric people and odd traditions.

Though "Llareggub" looks like a Welsh term, it's not a real word and, when spelled backward, reads "bugger all," which is a British slang term that means "nothing." This supports the Guide-Book's claims about Llareggub being a rather dull, unremarkable place. Still, the Guide-Book's observation that a "contemplative" person might see a "picturesque sense of the past" in Llareggub's eccentric citizens recasts Llareggub's simplicity and dullness in a positive light, suggesting that the simpler way of life Llareggub offers is actually a positive way to exist.

A cock crows, the sky grows lighter, and First Voice directs the listener's attention to Captain Cat, who rings the townhall bell to awaken the sleeping citizens, which he does every day. Second Voice shifts the focus to Reverend Eli Jenkins, who dresses in his preacher's robe and walks downstairs, opening the front door to greet the new day. The Reverend looks upon "**the eternal hill**" before him and exclaims "Dear Gwalia!" before expressing gratitude for his town. Though the Reverend knows that there are places worthier and more beautiful than Llareggub, he would stay in the town forever if he could. The Reverend closes his door, ending what Second Voice calls the "morning service."

The Reverend's description of Llareggub Hill as "eternal" situates the hill—and the adjacent town of Llareggub—within the larger context of the area's natural and cultural history, which suggests that both the hill and its neighboring town are resilient against the forces of change and deterioration that wear down so many other places. The Reverend's use of the world "Gwalia," which is an archaic Welsh term for Wales often used in poetic settings, expands on this point while also reinforcing the Reverend's important relationship to poetry, the arts, and Welsh culture and history. The Reverend's comments here build upon the Guide-Book's earlier observation about Llareggub possessing certain charms one might associate with the past. In calling Llareggub Hill "eternal" and expressing his admiration for the town, Jenkins suggests that there is strength and worth inherent in Llareggub and its ability to maintain its traditions and identity in the face of a changing, increasingly modernized world. That Jenkins delivers his praise in such a poetic, performative fashion conveys the power of storytelling to transform an ordinary town like Llareggub into a place that is interesting and worthy of praise.

Lily Smalls, "Mrs. Beynon's treasure," wakes up from her dreams of fooling around with "royalty" in **Milk Wood** and goes downstairs to Mrs. Beynon's kitchen to boil water on the stove. She looks at her reflection in Mr. Beynon's shaving glass and bemoans her appearance. She talks to her reflection, inaudibly whispering the name of the person she loves into her face in the glass. From upstairs, the voice of Mrs. Beynon demanding her morning tea interrupts Lily's daydreaming.

In referring to Lily as "Mrs. Beynon's treasure," the play reduces the young girl to an object devoid of identity and desire. Lily Smalls's dreams of being romanced by "royalty" are the opposite of the mundane, predictable life she lives as Mrs. Beynon's maid. Her fantastical dreams reflect an inner dissatisfaction with her boring life and serve as a coping mechanism she uses to bring more excitement to an otherwise uneventful existence: Lily tells herself stories to entertain herself and pass the long, mundane days she spends doing housework for Mrs. Beynon. That Lily's fantasies take place in Milk Wood further establishes nature as a free, magical place that is unbeholden to the social norms that govern life in town.

In the School House across the street, Mr. Pugh brings Mrs. Pugh her morning tea and imagines slipping poison into the cup. He opens the bedroom door and hands the tea to his wife, who complains about the taste before she's taken one sip. Mrs. Pugh asks if the Reverend has recited his poetry yet, and when Mr. Pugh confirms that he has, she rises from bed.

The Pughs' disastrous and hateful marriage is intentionally exaggerated for comic effect. At the same time, however, their strained relationship expresses the ordinary struggle of married couples to connect, particularly after they've grown tired and impatient with each other over the years.

Second Voice draws the listener's attention to Lily Smalls as she scrubs the front steps of the Beynons' house. Mrs. Pugh looks on and scoffs at Lily, whose skirt is tucked into her undergarments. Mrs. Pugh watches P.C. Attila Rees angrily trudge out of Handcuff House and predicts that he's on his way to arrest Polly Garter "for having babies." Mary Ann Sailors opens her bedroom window and announces to the world her exact age: "eighty-five years three months and a day!" Meanwhile, Organ Morgan sits beside his bedroom window playing music.

Mrs. Pugh observes the goings on about the town, pettily mocking Lily Smalls for accidentally tucking her skirt into her underwear for the entire town to see. Lily Smalls's visible undergarments may also be seen as a metaphor for the way living in such a small, close-knit town inherently puts one's secrets—one's dirty linens, so to speak—on display for all to see. Mrs. Pugh's scornful comment about Polly Garter needing to be arrested "for having babies" suggests that while the pay's narrators might maintain a neutral position on their subjects, the townspeople themselves have strong opinions about their neighbors.

Dai Bread hurriedly makes his way down Donkey Street toward the bakery, muttering to himself about his useless wives, who failed to make him breakfast that morning. Mrs. Dai Bread One, who is rather old and frumpy, tries to "stir up" her neighbor Mrs. Sarah by asking for a loaf of bread and inquiring about her boils. In contrast, Mrs. Dai Bread Two is "gypsied to kill," dressed in broken high heels and a "silky scarlet petticoat" that displays her "dirty pretty knees" and body. She has "black slinky hair," wears perfume, and talks about using tea leaves to predict the future as she lights her pipe.

Having two wives might satisfy Dai Bread's sensual desires, but he still finds petty reasons to be irritated at them. His anger is played for comic effect, since he's a baker and presumably should be able to fix himself breakfast. Mrs. Dai Bread Two is a hyper-sexualized caricature of a sultry, exotic "gypsy" woman. The play depicts her as a "dirty," exotic temptress who smokes and bares her knees. In short, she's the opposite of the ordinary, homely Mrs. Dai Bread One.

Lord Cut-Glass wears mismatched, secondhand clothing to go door to door emptying slops. Meanwhile, Nogood Boyo gets into trouble at the wash-house, and Miss Myfanwy Price, dressed in a prim housecoat, looks forward to a scrumptious homemade breakfast.

Not much is known about Lord Cut-Glass at this point in the play, but his disheveled appearance and the menial labor tasks he performs suggests that he's down on his luck. Perhaps, like many other townspeople, Lord Cut-Glass's best days are behind him. The prim appearance Miss Myfanwy assumes in the light of day contrasts starkly with the sensual being she became in her dreams, which suggests that rigid social norms inhibit people from acting on the inner animalistic desires that surface in their dreams.

Polly Garter stands under the clothesline and feeds her baby. She complains about nothing growing in her garden besides "washing" and "babies." She thinks about the babies' fathers, who live far away, and imagines her baby chastising her for living a dishonorable life before ultimately deciding that she is a good enough mother.

Polly imagines her baby as a stand-in for the townspeople who judge her for having children out of wedlock, and for engaging in numerous sexual affairs. When Polly imagines that her baby ultimately decides she is good enough just the way she is, it implies that Polly doesn't take townspeople's gossip to heart, nor does she feel that her promiscuous behavior makes her unworthy of love and compassion.

First Voice redirects the listener's attention to Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, who dines on tea and "starchless bread." Elsewhere, Mr. Waldo eats kippers, and Marry Ann Sailors praises God. Mr. Pugh continues to imagine ways to kill Mrs. Pugh, who continues to nag him. Willy Nilly finishes his tea as Mrs. Willy Nilly tends to the boiling water on the stove, which she'll use to steam open the townspeople's mail. Reverend Eli Jenkins continues to compose poetry, and Lord Cut-Glass tends to the clocks. Captain Cat sits in the galley of his schooner and eats fried fish.

Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard is obsessed with cleanliness and physical health: she only allows herself to consume clean and comically tasteless foods, such as "starchless bread." Whereas many townspeople seem preoccupied with the past, Mrs. Ogmore seems more anxious about the future and her longevity. The Willy Nillys' shameless invasion of the townspeople's' privacy by steaming open their mail underscores the role gossip and nosiness plays in bringing together the people of Llareggub to take part in a shared experience of community life.

Mr. Cherry Owen and Mrs. Cherry Owen sit in their small, one-room home and eat last night's meal of boiled onions for breakfast. They laugh together as Mrs. Cherry Owen recounts to her husband the drunken antics he got into the night before, since he has no memory of them. She points to a smudge on the wall, which she explains is from her husband throwing the sago. He also sang "Bread of Heaven," danced around, and cried until Mrs. Cherry Owen put him to bed.

The Owens' harmonious relationship is rather counterintuitive—one would expect Cherry Owen's alcoholism would destroy the possibility of a happy marriage—and played for comedic effect. Their unlikely marital bliss shows how there is value in striving for connection, even if it's imperfect or comes from unexpected sources. "Sago" refers to a starchy substance similar to tapioca.

First Voice describes the smell of fried liver emanating from the Beynons' house. Mrs. Beynon gives the cat pieces of liver, which Mr. Beynon claims belonged to the cat's brother. Mrs. Beynon shrieks, and Beynon continues to tease her about the questionable sources of all the meats they eat, though Lily Smalls insists that he's lying.

In yet another instance of odd marital dynamics, there are the Beynons, whose marriage seems to be based on a bizarre balancing act in which Mr. Beynon mercilessly teases his wife about the source of his meats, and Mrs. Beynon believes (or at least, pretends to believe) him. Their relationship is similar to the Pughs, in that it lacks intimacy and honesty and is highly, humorously contrived.

First Voice redirects the scene up the street. Sinbad Sailors, who is Mary Ann Sailors's grandson, opens his bar, Sailors Arms, where "it is always opening time." First Voice describes the sounds of babies crying and children being sent to school. Second Voice comments on the cranky fishermen tending to their nets. One of these fishermen, Nogood Boyo takes his dinghy, the *Zanzibar*, out on the **bay**. He looks up at the sky and wonders "who's up there," though he doesn't much care about the answer. Nogood Boyo looks at **Llareggub Hill**, which is covered in trees, white houses, and farmland.

Llareggub might be a charmingly nostalgic old town, but it's not devoid of its fair share of troubles: the fact that its local pub, Sailors Arms, has the clientele to support its being open at nearly all hours of the day is proof of these troubles: there's always someone in town who needs to drown their sorrows in pints of beer. Nogood Boyo's indifference about "who's up there" in the sky—about an afterlife or the existence of a higher being—is followed by his intentional gaze toward Llareggub Hill. It's as though he chooses Llareggub Hill over God, which suggests a certain faith in the shared experience of life in Llareggub over faith in God. In other words, Nogood Boyo might not believe in God, but he believes in his town. Of course, the other side of the coin is that Nogood Boyo is simply a lazy, indifferent young man who can't be bothered to muse philosophically.

In town, Mr. Mog Edwards stands outside Manchester House and thinks about his love for Miss Myfanwy Price. Meanwhile, the town teems with the sounds of daily business: of syrup being sold, farmers driving animals to market. Captain Cat sits at his window and listens to the sounds of children running to school; he can recognize them by the sound their feet make against the cobblestone street. He hears the sound of Willy Nilly knocking on the door of the Bay View and thinks that the mailman should watch his step, since every step at Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's boarding house is slippery from her constant cleaning.

Captain Cat becomes something of a third narrator, making observations similar to First Voice's and Second Voice's, which allow the audience to gain more insight into daily life in Llareggub. The major presence of these three narrators—Captain Cat, First Voice, and Second Voice—reaffirms the active role that storytelling plays in bringing to life the town of Llareggub for the audience, which must rely on their voices alone to orient itself within the town, since the radio drama genre doesn't allow for extraneous visual elements that could otherwise simply show the reader the town directly.

Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard opens the door of the Bay View and greets Willy Nilly, who hands her a letter, which he explains is from a man in Builth Wells who wants to stay at the Bay View for two weeks while he studies birds. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard thinks about all the feathers the letter-writer would drag inside the boarding house and immediately declines his request. She slams the door in Willy Nilly's face.

It's ridiculous for the postman to tell the people on his route about the contents of their mail before they open it for themselves. Willy Nilly's extreme nosiness is played for comedic effect and parodies the cliched idea that everyone who lives in a small town knows everyone else's business. Adding to this comedic situation is the absurd premise that not one of the townspeople appear annoyed that their mailman is opening, reading, and sharing the contents of their mail with the entire town. In fact, Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard simply accepts it as a part of daily life, which suggests that she and the other townspeople find comfort in living this shared, non-secretive life. One final example of comedic absurdity in this scene is the idea that Mrs. Ogmore Pritchard's obsessive commitment to neatness prevents her from allowing guests to stay in her boarding house.

Captain Cat hears Willy Nilly arrive at the School House, where he relays to Mrs. Pugh all the gossip he's gleaned from that day's letters. Willy Nilly gives Mrs. Pugh a package for Mr. Pugh, informing her that it contains a book entitled *Lives of the Great Poisoners*. Willy Nilly continues on to Manchester House, where he relays the day's news to Mr. Mog Edwards, who eagerly asks the mailman if he's been sent "a letter from *her*." Willy Nilly describes the contents of Miss Price's love letter before handing Edwards the envelope to read himself.

Mr. Pugh's package might imply that his dreams and daydreams of poisoning his wife are more than dreams—perhaps he has plans to go through with nefarious fantasy. That Mrs. Pugh's postman is the person to inform her of Mr. Pugh's nefarious scheme comically shows how mysterious the miserable husband and wife are to each other: their postman knows more about them than they do about each other. The love letter Willy Nilly delivers to Mog sheds some light on the nature of Mog and Myfanwy's relationship, revealing that their romance isn't just a fantasy they live out in their dreams: they're actually engaged in a romance, though whether or not the romance extends beyond mere letter writing remains to be seen.

After leaving Manchester House, Willy Nilly intercepts Mr. Waldo, who is on his way to the Sailors Arms. Willy Nilly hands Mr. Waldo an envelope containing "another paternity summons," which prompts Mr. Waldo to order a pint the second he arrives at the Sailors Arms.

It was already rather clear that Mr. Waldo is Llareggub's resident scoundrel, and Willy Nilly's delivery of "another paternity summons" only reinforces this. Willy Nilly specifies that he has "another" summons for Waldo, which humorously implies that this isn't the first summons he's delivered to Waldo. Given the very public status of everyone's mail, (courtesy of Willy Nilly) it's guaranteed that Mr. Waldo's adultery and resultant, illegitimate children are common knowledge across town.

Captain Cat continues to listen to the townspeople. He overhears Mrs. Floyd and Nogood Boyo talking about fish. He discerns the sound of the overweight Mrs. Dai Bread One making her way down the street, and the clicking of high heels as Mae, Rose Cottage's oldest child, passes by his window. Women stand around the town pump and trade gossip about the usual subjects, such as who's expecting a baby, who's been beaten, and the cost of soap. Polly Garter is visibly pregnant, and they scoff that "there should be a law" against such a thing.

The town pump is a central meeting place where the town's women can gather to spread gossip. The subjects the women broach—from the weighty subject of domestic abuse to trivial updates about the current cost of soap—vary hyperbolically in their degree of seriousness, which implies that no topic is off-limits to this network of gossiping women.

Captain Cat hears organ music in the distance. He notes the early start to Organ Morgan's practice session and considers it to be a sign that Spring is in the air. When he hears the clamber of milk-cans approaching, Captain Cat laughs to himself about how watered down Ocky Milkman's milk is.

Cat implies that Spring itself has reinvigorated Organ Morgan's desire to make music, which illustrates how discerning and appreciative Llareggub's citizens are of ordinary bouts of good fortune: for Organ Morgan, the warmth of the air on the first proper Spring day is enough to give him a renewed outlook on life and reinvigorate his idea to create and perform music. Cat's observation seems to point to the way Llareggub's simplicity allows its citizens to feel more grateful and fulfilled in their lives.

When the gossiping women around the pump fall silent, Captain Cat knows that Polly Garter is near, and he wonders which of the women's husbands had sex with Polly in **Milk Wood** and fathered the child that grows in her belly.

Unlike the women, who gossip judgmentally about Polly, Captain Cat assumes a more objective opinion of the young, single mother. He also comes to Polly's defense in this scene when he insinuates that the women are mostly gossiping about Polly not out of moral outrage, but out of spite, since it's almost certain that one of their cheating husbands fathered her latest child-in-progress.

Captain Cat hears a cock crow, which means that the morning is already half over. The organ music stops, and First Voice describes more of the town's sounds: horses walking down the town's cobblestone streets, pigs grunting, and the smell of baking bread. Women stroll into Mrs. Organ Morgan's general store, which sells all kinds of goods, from whistles to rat traps. Three women (First Woman, Second Woman, and Third Woman) talk about Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's new man, who apparently studies birds through a telescope. They wryly observe that Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's first husband didn't need a telescope, since he simply watched them "undressing through the key-hole."

That Captain Cat uses the cock's crow to tell time shows how, even though the play established a clear divide between nature and society, the natural world is still very much imbedded in the experience of daily life in Llareggub, which nostalgically harkens back to an earlier, pre-industrial era, perhaps. The women's gossip about Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's new boarder shows that news of the letter Willy Nilly delivered to her earlier that day has already spread across town. The women's gossip about the way Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's first husband would watch guests "undressing through the key-hole" reinforces a gendered stereotype about men's natural state of hypersexuality. The women aren't poking fun of Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's poor taste in men so much as they are bonding over their shared experiences with misbehaving husbands. It's a way for all of them to connect and sympathize over a shared cause of emotional anguish.

The women continue to gossip, poking fun at Mrs. Beynon for believing all Mr. Beynon's talk of questionable meats. Fourth Woman calls the people who live in Llareggub "a nasty lot," and First Woman gestures toward "lazy" Nogood Boyo as an example. The women talk about Ocky Milkman's wife, who never ventures outside the house, and Dai Bread, who has two wives. Fourth Woman says that all men are "brutes," citing as an additional example Organ Morgan, whose practicing keeps his wife up all night.

Airing their grievances about the various men in their lives and the lives of other townswomen allows the women to take comfort in their shared experiences of having to deal with disappointing men, all of whom are supposedly "brutes."

First Voice redirects the listener's attention to the sun beating down on Llareggub and the adjacent **sea**. Second Voice interjects to describe Evans the Death "press[ing] hard with black gloves on the coffin of his breast in case his heart jumps out."

First Voice's instruction for the audience to focus on the sea reinforces the unavoidable presence of water in Llareggub—and, by extension, the nostalgia that water symbolizes. Evans the Death's figurative attempt to keep his heart from leaping out of his chest implies a fear of mortality: he sees life as fleeting, unpredictable, and perpetually in danger of escaping without a moment's notice. Death anxiety is a humorous trait for an undertaker to possess, since one would expect him to be desensitized to matters of life and death.

Next, Second Voice notes how the Spring day has incited feelings of anger in Jack Black, who takes out his frustrations on a shoe he's cobbling for Mrs. Dai Bread Two. Jack Black grumbles to himself that *nobody* should be wearing such a shoe, no matter how nice their legs are. Second Voice observes how Spring has an opposite effect on Captain Cat, who is overcome with a sense of nostalgia. Meanwhile, Mary Ann Sailors looks out the window at **Llareggub Hill** and thinks it must be "the Chosen Land."

The play has already established that Jack Black loathes the promiscuity of Llareggub's young lovers, so one can logically speculate that his anger at the Spring day is motivated by Spring's associations with fertility, growth, and rebirth. Jack Black's decision to take out his anger on the shoe he's cobbling for Mrs. Dai Bread Two—an unladylike high heel that symbolizes and contributes to her hypersexual—supports this point. Spring's associations with renewal and rebirth have a quite different effect on Captain Cat, for whom the presence of life and newness in the air is a reminder of all those who are no longer around to enjoy the fresh air with him. Mary Ann Sailors's observation that Llareggub Hill is "the Chosen Land" also connects to Spring's associations with rebirth and renewal, since the Chosen Land, or "Promised Land," in the biblical tradition, refers to the land God promised Abraham and his descendants, and, more broadly, to the idea that God's chosen people will be granted salvation. In describing Llareggub Hill as "the Chosen Land," Sailors implies that Llareggub's people are God's chosen people and, subsequently, worthy of salvation.

First Voice redirects the listener's attention to Willy Nilly, who has returned home to steam open more mail with his wife. They open a letter from Mr. Mog Edwards to Miss Myfanwy Price, which opens with what reads as an advertisement for his Tailor's shop before moving into a declaration of his love for her. Edwards describes a dream in which Miss Price sits "dripping wet" in his lap, which inspires Reverend Jenkins to call her a "mermaid." Edwards thinks that Jenkins "a proper Christian," unlike Cherry Owen, who tells Edwards he should have tossed the mermaid-Myfanwy back into the **sea**. Edwards closes his letter by voicing his anxieties about his failing business. The letter ends with the stamped message "Shop at Mog's."

Willy Nilly and his wife bond over their snooping, which is yet another example of an imperfect (and immoral) attempt at intimacy that is nonetheless valuable in its ability to form a connection between two people. The steamy dream that Mog recounts in his letter to Myfanwy suggests that sexuality is an important part of their romance, though such a form of intimacy isn't accepted by all the townspeople: Owen's remark that Mog should've tossed Myfanwy back into the sea metaphorically implies that Owen sees this "dripping wet," sexual version of Myfanwy as debauched by virtue of her sexuality. Interestingly, in Mog's dream, it's Reverend Eli Jenkins (the town's only religious authority figure) who sees the sexualized Myfanwy as a beautiful, worthy "mermaid" and Owen (the town mischief-maker and drunk) who rejects Myfanwy's worth. Jenkins's acceptance reflects his broader view of the townspeople, which is that they are worthy of being judged by their goodness over their vices or mistakes. Lastly, that Mog's love letter is punctuated by his tedious anxieties about his personal financial woes suggests a certain reluctance on Mog's part to be fully honest and intimate with Myfanwy. The fact that he interrupts his own declarations of love to go off on tangents about fabrics and finances suggests that the ordinary stresses of life can become obstacles that stand in the way of genuine human connection.

Willy Nilly leaves his home and heads to the House of Commons, which is located near the harbor. There, he sees herring gulls in the sky and fishermen at work. The fishermen look in the **water** and see all the goods their catch will allow them to buy, however, they quickly become discouraged and decide it's time to quit for the day and head to the Sailors Arms.

There's a discrepancy between what the fishermen want their lives to become—the type of living they wish to earn, and the improved life they will create with their earnings—and the reality of their poor day's catch. That the fishermen realize this discrepancy as they look in the sea and see their unrealized dreams of wealth in the form of watery images of the goods the poor day's catch doesn't allow them to afford reinforces water's function as a symbol of dreams and longing.

A bell rings, and children pour out of the School House, singing as they run. Captain Cat listens to the children and sings a song about "Johnnie Crack and Flossie Snail," who "kept their baby in a milking pail." After a long pause, First Voice remarks on the "music of the spheres" that echoes over **Milk Wood**, on which he bestows the title "The Rustle of Spring." Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard blows her nose into a handkerchief and curses the sun, but she can do little to cleanse the intense feeling of Spring from the air. Meanwhile, Mrs. Dai Bread One and Mrs. Dai Bread Two sit outside their house. Mrs. Dai Bread Two gazes into her crystal ball and antagonizes Mrs. Dai Bread One by claiming to see Dai Bread in bed with two women.

First Voice's comment about Llareggub's "music of the spheres" is a reference to the metaphysical philosophical principle of musica universalis, *which holds that the balanced, proportional movement of celestial bodies (planets and stars) are a form of music. The Renaissance astronomer Johannes Kepler would later suggest that this music could be felt in the soul of all humans. First Voice's decision to refer to the townspeople's music as "music of the spheres," therefore, suggests that the creative experience of music-making not only connects the townspeople with one another, but with the collective existence of humanity, as well. Mrs. Dai Bread's vision is another instance of the play's frank treatment of sexuality. It's not clear whether she actually sees her husband in bed with two unknow women, or if she's only pretending she has to antagonize Mrs. Dai Bread One.*

Reverend Eli Jenkins walks outside the chapel and listens to Polly Garter sing as she scrubs the floors of the Welfare Hall for the Mothers' Union Dance that will take place that evening. Polly sings about her past lovers, whom she calls Tom, Dick, and Harry, and whom were all big and handsome men. Her song turns melancholy as she mourns the death of Willy Wee, the only man she ever loved. Though Polly has no shortage of lovers, whenever she's with a new man, she can't stop thinking about Willy Wee.

"Tom, Dick, and Harry" is an expression that refers to ordinary people. When Polly calls her past lovers Tom, Dick, and Harry, she means that these lovers were unremarkable and meaningless in comparison to Willy Wee, whom she genuinely loved. Polly's grief over Willy Wee—despite no shortage of lovers in the years that followed his death—shows how rare it is to form genuine intimate connections with others. This moment humanizes Polly, as well, revealing that the promiscuous behavior for which she many townspeople judge her is actually a coping mechanism she employs to work through unresolved grief. This moment is an apt example of the play's more nuanced, sympathetic depiction of human sexuality, and women's sexuality, in particular.

Reverend Eli Jenkins praises God for Polly's heartfelt song and continues on his way to care for the sick with his poems. He passes by Mr. Waldo, who is on his way to Sailors Arms. Mr. Waldo arrives at the pub, which is full of dejected fishermen. Sinbad Sailors greets Mr. Waldo and confesses his love for Gossamer Beynon, whom he calls "a lady all over." Sinbad wishes he could marry Gossamer, but his disapproving grandmother, Mary Ann Sailors, prevents him from doing so. Mr. Waldo can only think lustfully of women and disagrees that Gossamer—or any woman—is "a lady all over."

Just as the Reverend saw the beauty in the sexual Myfanwy of Mog Edwards's dream, he sees the beauty and virtue in Polly's music, despite the fact that she's singing about earthly pains and pleasures, which are subjects of which one might expect a Reverend to disapprove. Jenkins doesn't judge Polly because he sees music and creativity as evidence of humanity's innate goodness: in his eyes, Polly's singing is enough to redeem her. Once more, the play juxtaposes Jenkins's nuanced, sympathetic stance on sexuality to the hypocritical and judgmental stance of a morally dubious townsperson. Here, Waldo—a well-established drunk and mischief-maker—righteously scoffs that no woman is "a lady all over," which implies that all women are promiscuous and debased to some degree. Waldo's view is unfairly critical of women's sexuality, particularly in light of the fact that Waldo is himself a serial adulterer.

Captain Cat sits by his window and listens to the schoolchildren play. The girls tease the boys, ordering them to kiss Gwennie "where she says," or be forced to give her a penny. Gwennie lists different places to kiss her, such as Goosegog Lane, **Llareggub Hill**, and Milk Wood. Two boys give in to Gwennie's demands, but when she asks Dicky to kiss her in Milk Wood, he tells her he can't, since his mother forbade it. When Dicky doesn't have a penny to give Gwennie instead of a kiss, the girls threaten to throw him in the river.

Llareggub's youngest citizens, too, desire intimacy—even if in their embarrassment they treat the act of striving for connection like a schoolyard game. Gwennie's order for the boys to kiss her "where she says" seems to be intentionally vague. When Gwennie says "where," she is referring to a geographic location, but "where" could also refer to a location on her body, which is suggestive of a premature curiosity with physical intimacy, even more so than the simple request of a kiss.The play's depiction of children's early experimentations with sexuality is further evidence of its frank, open attitude toward sex. That Gwennie demands that the boys kiss her in different natural settings—in Milk Wood and on Llareggub Hill, for example—reinforces nature as a symbol of freedom from social norms and cultural constraints.

First Voice describes the way the shrieking children form a mob around Dicky, who eventually breaks away and runs downhill, blushing, crying, and clutching at his pants, which have had the buttons ripped off them. Dicky cries for his mother, whom the children insinuate is a loose woman. But this "means nothing at all" to Dicky, who loves his mother, even though she sleeps in a "fat birth-smelling bed" and has "cowbreath." After the children are finished tormenting Dicky, they run to Myfanwy Price's shop to exchange their new, "sticky" pennies for sweets.

The play generally assumes a positive stance about humanity's innate goodness, but this moment subtly complicates this when it shows how even children are capable of senseless cruelty. This senselessness is underscored by the ease with which the children transition from cruelty to running to the sweetshop to buy candies with their "sticky," dishonorable money, as though their ruthless teasing of Dicky were nothing at all. First Voice's observation that the children's teasing "means nothing at all" to Dicky, who loves his mother ins spite of her "fat birth-smelling bed" and "cowbreath" mirrors Polly Garter's imagined conversation with her baby in the beginning of the play, in which the baby contends that despite Polly's flaws, she's good enough as she is. Both scenes point to the broader idea that people are innately good and ought to be judged on their goodness rather than their flaws or mistakes.

Second Voice shifts focus toward Gossamer Beynon leaving the school in her high heels. As she walks down the street, people, including Sinbad Sailors, undress her with their eyes. Gossamer sees Sinbad as she passes Sailors Arms and mutters to herself about being attracted to a "common" man, though this isn't a problem for her, so long as he's sexually appealing. Sinbad watches Gossamer walk, drinks, and bemoans her pride. He describes Gossamer as "the butcher's unmalting icemaiden daughter" who will be forever oblivious to his interest in her. Gossamer senses Sailors's thoughts and "turns in a terror of delight away from" him before going to the kitchen for a meal of kidney and chips.

Gossamer and Sinbad could have a relationship, but a romance likely won't develop between them since they're mutually unwilling to let the other know their true feelings. This shows how heavily misunderstanding and a socially constructed fear of shame or rejection stands in the way of humanity's natural urge to connect with others: Sinbad withholds his feelings because of his grandmother's disapproval, and Gossamer keeps her feelings to herself, too torn between "terror" and "delight" at the uncertain, unpredictable nature of intimacy to act on her desires. As a result of their combined inaction, Sinbad sees Gossamer as "the butcher's unmalting icemaiden daughter," who is too educated to be interested in him. Gossamer and Sinbad's story of unrequited love is particularly tragic, though: it's presented as a quite typical example of social anxiety and misunderstanding preventing people from seizing opportunities and connecting with others.

In the School House, the Pughs dine in silence. Mr. Pugh reads his book about famous poisoners and takes notes, careful to conceal the book's cover from his wife. Mrs. Pugh calls her husband a "pig" for being rude and reading at the table, prompting Pugh to imagine himself concocting a potion of toxic herbs in a laboratory. When Mrs. Pugh asks what he's reading, he claims the book's title is *Lives of the Great Saints*. Mrs. Pugh smirks and tells Mr. Pugh she saw him talking with "Saint Polly Garter," who Mrs. Organ Morgan claims was "martyred" by Mr. Waldo last night.

The irony of Mr. Pugh's careful efforts to conceal the name of his book from Mrs. Pugh is that she already knows *what the book is, since Willy Nilly told her earlier that day when he delivered it. Mr. Pugh should know this, since it's common knowledge that Willy Nilly broadcasts everyone's private business to the rest of the town, so there's a comical element of absurdity to his not knowing that Mrs. Pugh is well aware that he's reading about poisoners, not saints. Mrs. Pugh's wry remark about "Saint Polly Garter" being "martyred" by Mr. Waldo is another example of the play's ample use of playful innuendo. It also shows that, while many of the townspeople subscribe to Christian beliefs, they aren't above committing minor sins, such as making a blasphemous comment for the sake of wordplay-based comedy. In realty, most characters compromise their personal or religious morals in one way or another, but this is what makes them entertaining, relatable, and refreshingly ordinary.*

Mrs. Organ Morgan, who caught the lovers together, discusses her discovery with Organ Morgan. Apparently, Polly and Mr. Waldo claimed to be "looking for nests." Mrs. Organ Morgan scowls at Polly's promiscuous behavior and suggests that the single mother ought to give up her supposed hobby of "looking for nests," since she already has so many children. Still, Mrs. Organ Morgan admits, Polly's children are nice. When Mrs. Organ Morgan asks her husband which of Polly's children he likes best, he replies "Bach," which causes Mrs. Organ Morgan to cry and accuse him of not paying attention to her.

The Morgans' relationship is fairly typical among Llareggub's married couples in that it lacks intimacy and honesty. Mrs. Organ Morgan's eagerness to share with her husband her titillating discovery of Polly and Waldo in the woods together shows how eager and starved she is to connect with him about anything at all, which is why she cries when his response of "Bach" (a Baroque composer, and one of Morgan's musical heroes—not one of Polly's children) shows that he hasn't been listening to a word she's said. Lastly, Mrs. Organ Morgan's remark about how Polly and Waldo had pretended to be "looking for nests" when Mrs. Organ Morgan discovered them in the wood reaffirms nature's association with freedom, and sexual freedom, in particular.

First Voice shifts the scene to Lord Cut-Glass, who is in his kitchen, feeding fish scraps to a dog. The walls of Lord Cut-Glass's kitchen are adorned with 66 ticking clocks of various shapes and sizes, all set to a different hour. First Voice explains that Lord Cut-Glass "lives in [...] a life of siege" and keeps all the clocks to stay alert in the event that an outsider tries to rob him. Second Voice interjects to explain how "the lust and lilt and lather [...] of the bird-praise and body of Spring" are lost on Lord Cut-Glass, who associates Spring with "nearness to the tribes" that will charge down "Armageddon Hill" to attack him.

First Voice's description of Lord Cut-Glass as a man who "lives in [...] a life of siege" suggests that he has paranoid tendencies and is perhaps not of sound mind—hanging 66 ticking clocks on the wall seems an extreme (and not particularly effective) defense against enemies who may not even exist in the first place. Lord Cut-Glass's suspicions about Spring are similar to Jack Black's: both men see something uncivilized, pagan, and unvirtuous about the way the Spring air inspires Llareggub's townspeople to sing, be intimate, and let down their guard. When Second Voice describes Llareggub Hill as it exists to Lord Cut-Glass's mind as "Armageddon Hill," they suggest that Lord Cut-Glass sees Llareggub Hill and all the supposedly uncivilized activities that take place there as indicative of humanity's evil, debauched nature.

As the afternoon draws on, and "the **sea** lolls, laps and idles." Clouds float over **Llareggub Hill**, and donkeys and pigs dream. Mr. Pugh has fallen asleep at the table, and an irritated Mrs. Pugh calls him a pig. Mr. Pugh continues to daydream about poisoning Mrs. Pugh.

The sleepiness of Llareggub in the waning afternoon is reflected in the lazy movement of the sea, which "lolls, laps and idles." The narrators draw attention to the water to reestablish the dreamy, contemplative mood they created in the play's opening scene, in which the town was still, cloaked in darkness, and all its people were fast asleep.

First Voice redirects the listener's attention to Captain Cat, who is sleeping beside his window, which faces the **sea** he traversed long ago, before he was blind. Cat dreams about rowdy times at dock bars with fellow seamen who've since died, and he cries in his sleep.

Since water symbolizes dreams and nostalgia, Cat's position beside the sea symbolizes his inability to detach himself from feelings of nostalgia for his seafaring past, and grief over the fellow seaman he has outlived.

Second Voice interjects to describe one voice Cat remembers most clearly: young Rosie Probert, whose name is tattooed on his stomach, and who was the only woman the formerly promiscuous seafarer had ever loved. Rosie was seeing many other men while she was with Cat, but in his dream, she is his alone, and the lovers talk back and forth in rhyming verse. Rosie asks "Tom Cat" about the **seas** he traversed as a sailor, and Cat speaks poetically of "Seas barking with seals,/ Blue seas and green,/ Seas covered with eels/ And mermen and whales." Cat and Rosie's exchanges gradually become more explicit, and Cat proposes that Rosie let him "shipwreck in [her] thighs." Rosie tells Cat to call for her twice at grave. Cat calls once, but before he can say her name again, Rosie disappears into the darkness.

This scene between Rosie and Cat, spoken in an exchange of rhymed verse, establishes a connection between poetry, nostalgia, and the sea. Cat's emphasis on the "Blue seas and green," evokes his longing for his seafaring days and the past more broadly. To Cat, the sea is a metaphor everything he's lost. This is why he uses nautical imagery to convey is longing for his former lover, expressing his desire to "shipwreck in [her] thighs." Rosie's sudden disappearance into the darkness proves that Cat's time spent in memory is an inadequate and temporary relief for his grief, though. Ultimately, the past is gone, and, like Rosie, his memories of it will only fade with time.

A child passing by Captain Cat's window with her mother sees the captain crying, but she becomes distracted by the sight of Nogood Boyo fishing in the bay. She tells her mother how Nogood Boyo "gave [her] three pennies yesterday but [she] wouldn't," without finishing the thought. Meanwhile, Nogood Boyo makes his first catch of the day: a whalebone corset, which conjures in his mind the image of Mrs. Dai Bread Two wearing nothing but a bangle. He imagines offering Mrs. Dai Bread Two the corset, but she immediately rejects it. Nogood Boyo wills himself to stop thinking dirty thoughts about Mrs. Dai Bread Two, insisting that he "want[s] to be a *good* Boyo, but nobody'll let [him]." The image of Mrs. Dai Bread Two is replaced by that of a geisha girl dancing to Eastern music, and Nogood Boyo to lose control of himself.

It's unclear what the little girl is trying to tell her mother about her interaction with Nogood Boyo, but her mention of his offer to give her "three pennies" is reminiscent of Gwennie's arrangement with the schoolboys to give her a kiss or a penny, which has some disturbing connotations, depending on how much older Nogood Boyo is than the girl. Meanwhile, on the water, Nogood Boyo continues to live up his name, conjuring dirty images of Mrs. Dai Bread Two in his head, though he seems ashamed and reluctant to do so. That Nogood Boyo's dirty thoughts take place while he's on the water reinforces the idea that nature—whether it be Milk Wood or the sea—allows people to behave more freely than society would otherwise allow. When Nogood Boyo insists that he "want[s] to be a good Boyo, but nobody'll let [him]," he seems to identify implicitly the asymmetry between humans' natural desires and the society that stifles those desires and makes them shameful. When he says "nobody'll let [him]" be good, he refers to the dirty image of Mrs. Dai Bread Two that pops into his head without his consent, implying that it's this instinctive and unwanted image won't let him be good. In reality, Nogood Boyo's thoughts are natural, and it's society that makes him feel bad about them. At any rate, Nogood Boyo manages to construct a logic that allows him to condemn his dirty thoughts while taking pleasure in them anyway, on the grounds that he has no control over them.

Second Voice redirects the listener's attention to Mae Rose Cottage, who lounges lazily in a field on **Llareggub Hill**. She blows on a dandelion and daydreams of "the dirty old fool" who loves her. First Voice shifts the focus to Reverend Eli Jenkins, who sits in his parlor—his "poem-room"—and writes his "Lifework," a detailed account of Llareggub and its history. Jenkins calls the book "the White Book of Llareggub." The walls of Jenkins's poem-room are adorned with portraits of bards and preachers, as well as watercolor paintings that depict Milk Wood as "a lettuce salad dying." The poem-room also features a portrait of Jenkins's mother, though nothing depicts his father, Esau, who was too sick to be ordained, who was "scythed" while lying asleep in a cornfield and died sometime later, "of drink and agriculture."

Mae Rose Cottage uses Llareggub Hill in the same way everyone else does: as an escape where she can go to let loose and give in to her natural desire without fear of judgment. Her action of blowing on a dandelion while fantasizing about "the dirty old fool" she wants for a lover underscores the connection between nature and sexuality. That Jenkins's poem-room is decorated with images of bards and preachers reinforces his dedication to the artistic, performative pursuits that are central to the bardic tradition. The painting of Milk Wood depicted as "a lettuce salad dying" represents the decaying, antiquated town of Llareggub. Lastly, Jenkins's comment about his father dying "of drink and agriculture," seems to underscore how vastly different his life is than his father's. Whereas his father suffered and died of self-destruction—of drinking and working his body into the grave—Jenkins's life is characterized by contentment and creation: by his resolute journey to find beauty in his humble town, to document the history of its people, and to compose and perform poetry that celebrates and memorializes the meaningfulness of the town and people he so admires.

Meanwhile, at Salt Lake Farm, Utah Watkins curses his dairy cows, which refuse to give milk. He orders a deaf dog named Daisy to attack the cows, but Daisy only licks Watkins in response. As the Spring day begins to wane, Bessie Bighead calls the cows by name: "Peg, Meg, Buttercup, Moll, Fan from the Castle, Theodosia and Daisy." First Voice interjects some background information about Bessie Bighead's dismal past, which is contained in the White Book of Llareggub. According to First Voice, Bessie was "conceived in **Milk Wood**, born in a barn," and ultimately abandoned. She was kissed just once, by the late Gomer Owen, who was dared to do it. These days, Bessie milks the cows, sings, and sleeps in daylight, "until the night sucks out her soul and spits it into the sky."

Daisy's refusal to hurt the cows suggests that the natural state of living beings is to be peaceful rather than violent. The vitriol that Utah Watkins directs at the cows is a learned thing—it's his desire to make a profit from their milk that fuels his anger, not a natural desire to harm them. Bessie Bighead's close connection to the cows, evidenced by her decision to call them by their names, suggests that she's more in touch with peaceful nature than with cruel society; after all, society hasn't been good to Bessie or given her the intimacy she needs. The only person who ever showed her any intimacy was Gomer Owen, and he only kissed her on a dare. Bessie's desire to mourn Gomer's death anyway suggests her desperation to connect with someone—anyone. The idea that "the night sucks of her soul and spits it into the sky" suggests that the nighttime—when all of Llareggub's people are asleep and not around to treat her cruelly—is a freeing time for Bessie: a time that allows her normally constrained, muted soul to soar high into the heavens.

First Voice carries the listener's attention back to town, where dusk has settled over the cobblestoned streets. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard has already closed all her doors and blinds and retreated to her bedroom for the night, and the ghosts of Mr. Pritchard and Mr. Ogmore emerge to roam freely about the house. In her sleep, Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard tells both her husbands she loves them, causing both of them to recoil in terror. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard summons the ghosts to her room, and they reluctantly talk through their routines with Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, just as they did the night before.

Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard's evening will be almost identical to the one the listener bore witness to in the very beginning of the play. The parallels between last night emphasizes the fact that the day in Llareggub that the audience has just witnessed is no different than any other day in the quaint, ordinary village, and that what made it meaningful and unique was the narrators' keen observational skills and lush, poetic use of language, and the audience's willingness to find significance and beauty in the mundane lives of Llareggub's ordinary people.

Mae Rose Cottage is still lying in the field. She "draws circles of lipstick around her nipples" as she tells the nannygoats that she's "bad" and destined for "hell." Mae waits for God to "strike" her, though nothing happens.

Mae Rose Cottage's longing to be so "bad" that she forces God to "strike" her conveys her inner desire for erotic pain. Her disappointment when nothing happens reflects the play's larger theme of the universality of longing and failing to connect with others and have one's desires met.

At the Bethsesda House, Reverend Eli Jenkins stands in the doorway and recites a "sunset poem" to **Llareggub Hill**. In the poem, Jenkins professes that while nobody who lives under Milk Wood is "wholly bad or good," God will be able to see their goodness.

The Reverend's point about God being able to see Llareggub's townspeople's goodness in spite of their flaws speaks to the play's broader, optimistic stance on humanity, which is that despite the atrocities it is capable of committing (and has committed) there is no point at which humanity ventures past the point of redemption or forgiveness. To the Reverend, humanity—even in the aftermath of the biblical fall of man—is always deserving of goodness and improvement. That the Reverend looks to Llareggub Hill as he contemplates humanity's goodness reinforces Llareggub Hill's function as a symbol of humanity's resilience in the face of change, and the innate goodness that fuels this capacity ofr resilence.

Jack Black prepares to intercept lovers in the **woods**. He dons a pair of "religious trousers," grabs a torch and bible, and ventures into the darkening night. "Off to Gomorrah!" he cries. Meanwhile, Lily Smalls is with Nogood Boyo in the wash-house, and Cherry Owen ventures out to get drunk as his wife cheerfully waves him off. Sinbad Sailors greets Cherry Owen, though he inwardly pines for Gossamer Beynon.

Gomorrah is a biblical city that God destroyed for its wickedness. Jack Black's declaration that he's "off to Gomorrah!" to break up the lovers is played for comedic effect to convey his critical, condemning attitude toward sexual promiscuity. The goings on of the other characters in this scene—Nogood Boyo getting into trouble at the wash-house, Cherry Owen and the other drunkards returning to the bar, Sinbad Sailors continuing to pine silently for Gossamer—illustrates the continuation of ordinary life in Llareggub. Everyone settles back into their habits, and life goes on. If the listener were to have access to whatever tomorrow might bring for Llareggub, chances are, it'd be not much different than what they bore witness to today.

It's finally night, and Llareggub becomes "a hill of windows," which "call back the day and the dead that have run away to **sea**." Women sing babies and old men to sleep.

"A hill of windows" refers to the distinct appearance of the many lit windows of the townspeople's houses against the contrasting darkness of night. When the narrative explains that these windows "call back [...] the dead that have run away to sea," it refers to the way the return of night will inspire the people who sleep behind those windows to dream, once more, of the "dead" and the "lost" that they can only encounter in the "sea" of their dreams. The reemergence of night gives the play a symmetry that provides a feeling of closure: things are back to the way they began, with the town quiet, peaceful, and cloaked in the darkness of night.

Meanwhile, single women retreat to their rooms to get ready for tonight's dance, and accordion music begins to play. In the Sailors Arms, men drink and condemn the dance. Cherry Owen, who has just finished his 17th pint of beer, "righteously" insists that dancing is sinful.

Cherry Owen's "righteously" judgmental remarks about dancing are rather humorously hypocritical, given the fact that he's not a particularly upstanding citizen himself, already on his 17th beer while the night is still young.

Second Voice calls the listener's attention to the **Llareggub hillside**, and the accordion music stops. First Voice describes Reverend Eli Jenkins at work in his poem-room, where he writes about Llareggub Hill, calling it a "mystic tumulus," and a "memorial" to those who have lived there since before the arrival of the Celts.

A "tumulus" is an ancient burial mound. By referring to Llareggub Hill as a "mystic tumulus" that has existed since before the arrival of the Celts, Jenkins places Llareggub within the larger context of history. His observation is hopeful and speaks to the resilience of humanity in the face of great change. Jenkins sees Llareggub's people as part of the collective history of humanity, and he believes that their voices and lives are as worthy and as capable of withstanding the ravages of time as the ancient peoples who buried their dead beneath Llareggub Hill.

Mr. Waldo drinks in the Sailors Arms and sings a song about being a poor, young chimney sweep in Pembroke City who suffers until a married woman propositions him for sex. Meanwhile, Captain Cat crawls into bed and commences another night of troubled dreams about the dead and drowned, who begin to speak to him once more.

Waldo's song about suffering until he is propositioned for sex in Pembroke, a town in West Wales, expresses his longing for connection, and his belief that intimacy—no matter how imperfect—will provide temporary relief from suffering. Captain Cat's story ends as it begins: haunted by nostalgia for the life and people no longer with him, tortured by the grief of remembering the dead, yet simultaneously obligated to remember them in order to keep their memories alive and their voices heard.

Organ Morgan heads to the chapel to practice the organ and thinks he sees Johann Sebastian Bach lying on a tombstone, but it's only Cherry Owen, who is drunk and barely conscious.

This absurd, drunken confrontation between Cherry Owen and Organ Morgan is undoubtably a story that Mrs. Cherry Owen will delightedly recount to her husband the following morning, in keeping with their established routine. Again, the play establishes that ordinary, routine life in Llareggub will continue business as usual after the audience is no longer around to bear witness to its goings on.

Mog Edwards and Myfanwy Price sit contentedly in their respective homes at the opposite ends of town and write love letter to each other. Mog thinks of Myfanwy and embraces his money.

There's something tragic about the fact that Myfanwy and Mog would rather maintain the safe, predictability of a letters-exclusive romance than dive in headfirst, meet in person, and risk heartbreak or disappointment. Mog and Myfanwy's learned insecurities—their fear of social embarrassment and shame—interfere with their natural, inner desire for each other. Still, it's comical, as well, that they are simultaneously so in love and yet so content to avoid each other in perpetuity.

Meanwhile, Mr. Waldo and Polly Garter canoodle in the woods. Mr. Waldo "smacks his live red lips" greedily, but Polly Garter can only think of Willy Wee.

That Mr. Waldo and Polly Garter meet up in Milk Wood emphasizes the wood's function as a symbol freedom from social norms. Mr. Waldo "smacks his live red lips" and temporarily quells his hunger, but their physical intimacy is ultimately unfulfilling for Polly, since Willy Wee is the only man with whom she truly desires a connection.

First Voice implores the listener to observe the darkening night and the breeze that blows over the **sea**. First Voice describes what **Milk Wood** is to different people. To "the hunters of lovers," Milk Wood is a breeding ground for sin. To Mary Ann Sailors, who believes that the townspeople of Llareggub are God's "chosen people," Milk Wood is "a God-built garden." To promiscuous farmhands, the Wood is an "ignorant chapel of bridesbeds." And to Reverend Eli Jenkins, for whom The Woods are indicative of "the innocence of men," the woods come alive "for the second dark time this one Spring day."

First Voice ends their narration as they began it: with an invitation for the listener to be present and listen to the night that surrounds them. This symmetry shapes the play, imbuing it with a sense of closure and coherence. First Voice's description of Milk Wood as a place of sin in the eyes of "the hunters of lovers" refers to Jack Black, who actively breaks up the lovers who go to the wood to engage in their trysts. In contrast, Mary Ann Sailors's and Reverend Eli Jenkins's views of the wood are more positive and hopeful, depicting the ancient wood as a sigh of humanity's resilience in the face of change, and a sign that the people of Llareggub, in particular, have an "innocence" and inner goodness that won't be diminished by the wrath of time. Jenkins's observation about the woods coming alive "for the second dark time this one Spring day" refers to the way the wood comes alive tonight just as they did at the beginning of the play. It implies a permanence or predictability: the wood will come alive again and again, into eternity, because the wood—and the innocence and virtue it represents—are powerful forces that will withstand the ravages of time.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Charles, Carly. "*Under Milk Wood*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 5 Jan 2022. Web. 5 Jan 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Charles, Carly. "*Under Milk Wood*." LitCharts LLC, January 5, 2022. Retrieved January 5, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/under-milk-wood.

To cite any of the quotes from *Under Milk Wood* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Thomas, Dylan. Under Milk Wood. New Directions. 2019.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Thomas, Dylan. Under Milk Wood. New York: New Directions. 2019.