The volume *H’m* (1972) marks a major step forward in R. S. Thomas’s poetic pilgrimage. Referring to this volume, and the further two volumes of the seventies, A. E. Dyson says, rightly, ‘If we had Thomas’s poetry to this point alone, he would still rank among the truly important moderns. But it is the three volumes of the 1970s... which take him into a still rarer class of excellence.’ Gone is all trace of a romanticism about the countryside, the bland philosophy which assumes that a mediation of sense is unnecessary, that natural surroundings will automatically convey meaning. The most forceful dismissal of such romanticism is delivered, in fact, in *Young and Old* (1972), which contains poems which feature startlingly, to say the least, in the Chatto Poets for the Young series.

About living in the country?
I yawn; that step, for instance –
No need to look up – Evans
On his way to the fields, where he hoes
Up one row of mangolds and down
The next one. You needn’t wonder
What goes on in his mind, there is nothing
Going on there; the unemployment
Of the lobes is established. His small dole
Is kindness of the passers-by
Who mister him, who read an answer
To problems in the way his speech
Comes haltingly, and his eyes reflect
Stillness. I would say to them
About living in the country, peace
Can deafen one, beauty surprise
No longer. There is only the thud
Of the slow foot up the long lane
At morning and back at night.

(‘The Country’²)
As we saw in the last chapter, the poet is struggling with a language which will allow talk of God to come in at the right place. But what kind of God is to come? The answers we want to give to this question are still the main source of the tensions we find in *H'm*. On the one hand, there is a desire for the God of theodicies, the God of explanation and justification; the God who has reasons for the way things go. R. S. Thomas shows what such a conception of God has to answer for. If God is to be thought of as an agent among agents, only infinitely more powerful than his fellow agents, what are we to make of him? No religious syntax can be satisfactory which depends on such a falsification of the facts. Above all, the facts he does not want to avoid are those of the sufferings to which human beings are subject. There can be no contrast of such sufferings with a benign world of nature. Against any attempt to find a neat optimistic picture of order in nature we have the eloquently expressed protest of Hume's Philo:

Look around this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the only beings worth regarding. How hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them for their own happiness! How contemptible or odious to the spectator! The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children.³

But is there any more reason to speak of discernment or parental care if we try to attribute such qualities to God based on inferences from what happens to men? R. S. Thomas provides a savage rejection of such hopes. He shows us what kind of god would emerge from such arguments:

And God said, I will build a church here
And cause this people to worship me,
And afflict them with poverty and sickness
In return for centuries of hard work
And patience. And its walls shall be hard as