

## DYLAN THOMAS AS A POET

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### Abstract:

Dylan Thomas was a school of his own. "He was anti tradition by nature, by place and by inclination", according to Karl Shapiro. Dylan Thomas's poetry was born out of the bankruptcy of the Yeats – Pound – Eliot "tradition" and all it stood for. Thomas has been a protest against the intellectual writing of the Auden School. He has a distinctive poetic genius in him. He started his career as a Surrealist and in opposition to the Intellectual School of Auden. In him, Edwin Muir has seen "the natural magic which Arnold attributed to the Celtic Genius". Edith Sitwell likes Dylan Thomas for his sound, his sensuousness and his rich vocabulary. To others, Dylan Thomas has appealed as "a poet of feelings", as a poet who is engaged in discovering himself. Still, there are others who think him to be in the line of William Wordsworth . . . singing of Nature, Innocence and Childhood. Dylan Thomas has reached lyrical heights in his poetry. Thomas died in his fortieth year, but could write abundant poetry in such a short span of life. He declared once that he has fallen in love with words. He is bewitched by the power of words. Dylan Thomas has a kind of religious devotion towards words and his poetry is a kind of incantation and he himself is a bard.

Keywords: poet, sensuousness, incantation etc

Dylan Thomas was a Welsh man. He inherited Welsh Poetic Tradition with Welsh Myths and Legends. Dylan's rhythms, phrasings and odd matching of words are all Welsh. The major influences on the poetry of Dylan Thomas are those of Hopkins, Hart Crane, Swinburne, Rimbaud and Francis Thompson. Dylan Thomas observes "when I experience anything, I experience it as a thing and a word at the same time, both equally amazing." This is the true passion for words of Dylan Thomas. Wonderfully rich and full of vitality, the words combine together in highly original ways to depict the joyful exhilaration of a child in the poem "Fern Hill".

"And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
About the happy year and singing as the farm was home,  
In the sun that is young once only,

Time let me play and be  
 Golden in the mercy of his means,  
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves  
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,  
 And the sabbath rang slowly  
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.”

With a bag full of golden phrases, images, metaphors and similes Dylan Thomas goes on wandering through the forests of poetry, “drunken with melody”. Dylan Thomas has a double use of language – as means and as sounds. Just consider these lines:

“On field and sand  
 The twelve triangetlets of the cherub wind  
 Engraving going”.

Or consider these lines:

“My busy heart who shudders as she talks  
 Sheds the syllabic blood and drains her words.”

Having read these lines who would deny Thomas’s belief in the potency of words. Dylan Thomas has rich imagery to his credit. An understanding of his poetry is possible only when we understand his images. His intricate images interact with one another. Dylan Thomas himself has observed, “Out of the inevitable conflict of images – inevitable because of the creative, re-creative, destructive and contradictory nature of the motivating centre, the womb of war – I try to make that momentary peace which is a Poem”. Truly, his poems develop through a series of contradictory images of life and death, creation and destruction, sterility and fertility, rationalism and emotionalism, science and religion, modernity and antiquity. His images are paradoxical. In the poem “The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower”, we get an image of explosive force, which is both creative and destructive.

“The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
 Drives my green age that blasts the roots of trees  
 Is my destroyer.  
 And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose  
 My youth is bent by the same wintry fever”.

Hundreds of similar examples can be cited to demonstrate the richness and variety of his images. Tagore said of his poems that his poems without melody were like butterflies without wings. It could be said of Thomas’ poems that his poems without their images are like glow worms without wings. Poems such as “Fern Hill” and “Poem in October” are full of images of childhood. The originality of the poem “Fern Hill” confuses some readers. Striking phrases, such as “happy as the grass was green”, “prince of the apple towns” surprise by their novelty. These unusual images are evocative rather than precise and their purpose is to create a strong emotional response, rather than to define a particular attitude.

Like William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman, Dylan Thomas is a keen and close observer of Nature. Nature to him is a part of human phenomenon. Whereas to Shelley, Nature gives

a revolutionary call, to Dylan Thomas, Nature presents its horrifying aspects. Whereas, William Wordsworth spiritualizes, P. B. Shelley intellectualizes, John Keats beautifies Nature, Dylan Thomas simply describes Nature in relation to the activities of humanity. Wordsworth's head danced with daffodils, Dylan Thomas walks with the trees. Among his major nature poems, mention may be made of "Fern Hill", "Poem in October", "A Refusal to Mourn", "In My Craft or Sullen Art", etc.,. "Poem in October" brings-forth a very lively form of the landscape of his Welsh background where Dylan Thomas spent his childhood and youth.

"It was my thirtieth year to heaven,  
Woke to my hearing from harbor and neighbour wood  
And the mussel pooled and the heron  
Priested shore  
The morning beckon  
With water praying and call of sea gull and rook  
And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall  
Myself to set foot  
That second  
In the still sleeping town and set forth".

When the enthusiasm for interpreting Dylan Thomas's poems through symbols is over, Dylan will be remembered as the Wordsworth of the twentieth century.

As regards symbolism, Dylan Thomas uses symbols extensively because he seeks to convey complex, psychological states to his readers. For example, Thomas uses shade-casting trees as symbols for death. He uses caves to signify the innermost recesses of the self. He associates ladders and climbing with man's spiritual ascent. Thomas's private symbols are unique. Wax refers to mortal flesh, oil to life, sea to the source of life, salt to genesis in the sea. As Elder Olson has stated, "Thomas is a symbolist, but not all of his poems are symbolic indeed, as he developed, he seems to have drawn farther and farther away from the use of symbolism".

Dylan Thomas was hailed by some critics as a womb – tomb poet. His great concern is with the fundamental problems of life. He lays great stress on the body. He calls his body a small bone – bound island. His body is a firmament of flesh and bones. His poetry is a celebration of man which is also a celebration of Nature and God. Dylan Thomas himself is the theme of his poetry. There is in his poetry an obsession with the inter – involvement of creation and destruction, life and death. The strain under which the poet lives childhood, innocence, experience, life, death, adult, reality, "universal analogy", life force ..... are some of his major themes. In his poetry, Dylan Thomas is busy with exploring the inner life, and formulating a private vision of Nature, Man and God. Thomas belongs to the modern age, which is an era of rapid literary change. The poetry of his time is a revolt against tradition resulting largely from the impact of science. The modern poets are more realistic and they rejected the highly ornate and artificial style of an early age. The new poetry is a realistic and

the poet's consciousness of the grim realities of life has shattered all illusions and romantic dreams. The new poetry has many innovations to experiment with Impressionism, Imagism, and Surrealism. We can say that Surrealism tinged Dylan's Imagination, though he cannot be labeled a Surrealist.

Wordsworth feels that a poet possesses an organic sensibility with which he sees, hears and feels more than others do. Dylan has this organic sensibility to an extraordinary measure. Thomas was uncommonly alive to his environment, social, physical and literary – and reacted sensitively to the various influences that operated on him from childhood.

Thomas's poems are imaginative, suggestive, reflexive and systematically uncertain with half the meaning somewhere else. They invite a variety of interpretations, none of which can be final. Such ambiguity is the hall – mark of Great Art.

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