

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born on October 27, 1914, in Swansea, South Wales. His father was an English Literature professor. From his early childhood, Thomas showed love for the rhythmic ballads of Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. B. Yeats, and Edgar Allan Poe. After he dropped out of school at sixteen, he worked as a junior reporter which he soon left to concentrate on his poetry full-time. As a teenager, Thomas wrote more than half of his collected poems. He left for London when he was twenty and there he won the Poet's Corner book prize, and published his first book in 1934, *18 Poems* to great acclaim. His other works include: *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936), *The Map of Love* (1939), *The World I Breath* (1939), *New Poems* (1943), *Deaths and Entrances* (1946), *In Country Sleep*, *And Other Poems* (1952).

His Poetical Style

There are many features that distinguish Dylan Thomas's Poetry:

1. **Lyricism:** Thomas was different from other modernist poets such as Eliot and Auden in that he was not concerned with discussing social, political or intellectual themes. Instead, he was more interested in intense lyricism and highly charged emotion, had more in common with the Romantic tradition.
2. **His Imagery:** Thomas talks about his poetic imagery in that he makes one image and charges that image with emotion. After that, he would add to the image intellectual and critical or philosophical powers in the hope that this image would produce another image that contradicts the first until he creates many images that conflict with each other. So he builds his imagery on an antithetical basis.

3. Elegiac & Nostalgic

Since his poems arise out of personality, they carry his own experiences, conflicts, fears and anxieties. His poetry has an elegiac tone to it that flows with sorrow. Likewise, his poetry often includes reminiscences that turn the light on his childhood memories.

4. New Apocalypse

Dylan Thomas was associated with the new apocalyptic movement during the 1940s. New apocalypse is led by a group of writers who flourished briefly as a movement in the 1940s, united by a romantic reaction against what they saw as the 'classicism' of Auden; it expressed itself in wild, turbulent, and at times surreal imagery. Their work appeared in three anthologies. They described themselves as 'anticerebral', claimed a 'large, accepting attitude to life', invoked the name of D. H. Lawrence, and approved of Dylan Thomas; G. Barker and V. Watkins were also associated with the movement.

FERN HILL

Dylan Thomas's poem "Fern Hill" was first published in 1946 in his collection *Deaths and Entrances*. It consists of six stanzas and is written in free verse. Each stanza consists of nine lines. The poem is based on Thomas's own summer vacations spent at Fernhill, a farm owned by his mother's oldest sister, Ann Jones, and her husband. Thomas treasured his memories of these holidays and spoke about these visits with great joy and nostalgia.

In "Fern Hill," Thomas presents an idyllic view of childhood on a farm, filled with vivid imagery which presents a child's view of the world. This is contrasted in the final stanzas with the regret of the adult as he recalls the loss of the innocence and splendour of childhood. The poem can be divided into two parts: the first three stanzas are related to the poet's experience as a child when he used to spend his summer holidays at his uncle's farm (Fern Hill in Wales). In this first half of the poem, a young child describes his carefree and enjoyable life. The world of innocence (child) as described in the first three stanzas is like the Garden of Eden. This is a world in which the child is in complete union with the nature.

The poem begins with the speaker happily recounting spending time outside in a picturesque landscape with green grass, apple trees, and a starry sky where he felt like a "prince." He recalls how he enjoyed living in the arms of wild nature, playing under the apple trees in view of Fern House which stood on the hill "lilting", that is singing merrily in clear Welsh lilt. He felt as happy and free as the green grass. With "green" associated with youth, innocence, inexperience

and naivety, the child had no worries and no cares, hence the freedom he felt. When he talks about "dingle starry", the influence of the Welsh culture is strong.

Fern Hill

Now as I was young and easy under
the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as
the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was
prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the
trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light..

The dingle or valley is studded with stars after nightfall and the child gushes on its beauty and is captured by its charm.

The reason of this freedom and happiness is that the child was not yet worried about TIME. Time is personified as the friend and ally of a child, unlike adults who are constantly pressed and tormented by time. So these precious childhood days are the golden times during which TIME was merciful and kind.

The speaker continues to detail his adventures and their landscape. He rules his natural dominion, referring to himself as "prince of the apple towns" and the lord of trees and leaves. It seems he alone is present in this natural world along with the animals. The landscape around him is rich with flowers, fields of barley and rivers of light. It is indeed a paradise and he felt like he was a prince and a lord ruling this paradise.

In the **second stanza**, the speaker continues to revisit his happy childhood in a series of flashbacks. He recalls how naïve, innocent and inexperienced he was then, but also how he lived without any worries or cares. As an adult, he thinks he was "green" as a child. Being naïve or green is a small cost of being happy and carefree. Unlike children, adults are care-worn, unhappy and struggle daily to make ends meet. The speaker remembers how he felt famous, but among the barns that shelter the

farm's animals. If we think of the fame Dylan Thomas achieved as a poet, we will discover how much he treasured his Fern Farm memories. In stead of being famous world-wide, the child was famous among the barns where animals are kept and rural festivities were held.

He is famous among country people and he is master of the animal world. And as he was young, he felt everything around him just as young including the sun under which he played freely and merrily. These times are a golden and precious gift that Time gave him out of its kindness and mercy. The child spins stories in which he was the hero. Sometimes he was a huntsman in his imagination

Fern Hill

And as I was green and carefree, famous
among the barns
About the happy yard 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.

blowing his horn, going after wild animals and foxes and hunting them the way first human beings did; other times he was a herdsman/ shepherd tending his cattle. He felt like worshipping in the temple of nature and the holy alter was the water stream whose pebbles noise felt like hymns in his ears.

THE THIRD STANZA continues the same bright, happy mood of the second stanza. The child is still speaking, gushing on his past memories. He is still that playing, innocent child who has no cares and no worries. The lovely sun is now

running as autumn days are shorter. The harvest is done as clear in the hay stacks which stand in piles as high as house. The chimneys sent not smoke out in the air, but music that he liked. His playing is never interrupted even when he was all drenched in rain and the days are cold. Even the fire looked green his eyes, like the green grass. The night had its charms when he rode back home on his horseback looking at the shining stars, seeing the

Fern Hill

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
 And playing, lovely and watery
 And fire green as grass.
 And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
 Flying with the ricks, and the horses
 Flashing into the dark.

owls flying as if carrying the farm on their wings. And in the moonlit nights, he could hear the singing of birds like the nightjars which made of the stable their homes. In the darkness, the farm is no less noisy than in the day and no less bright as he can see the eyes of horses flashing in the darkness and hear the singing and noises of night life. In short, he felt blessed, happy and free.

In the third stanza, the poet was admiring the beauty of night life in Fern Hill farm. He could see the night birds flying and the owls circling the sky above him as he was going back home after nightfall. Now in the **Fourth stanza**, the poet describes daybreak and the first light at dawn. The dew has settled on the leaves and ground and the cock or rooster was crowing announcing the beginning of the day. It looks to the child as if the cock was carrying the farm on its shoulder. The farm itself looks like a wanderer who has just come home after being out all night.

The poet continues to admire the primitive beauty of the farm, the wild nature untrained by civilization. He feels like this place the Garden of Eden and there must be Adam and Eve, the first two human, living in the farm. The farm felt magical and ancient to the point he could imagine how Adam and the first humans lived in the simplicity and purity of nature.

Then the sun rises up in the sky and it feels as if the entire landscape is a temple in which nature is worshipped. As the sun shines, all creatures wake up to glorify nature and praise its beauty and abundance. The farm horses leave their stable with the birth of light and go to the fields to join the rest of the natural world in a prayer or hymn addressed to the farm.

Fern Hill

And then to awake, and the farm,
like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock
on his shoulder: it was all
Shining, it was Adam and
maiden,

The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that
very day.

So it must have been after the
birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the
spellbound horses walking warm

Out of the whinnying green
stable

On to the fields of praise!

In the **fifth stanza**, the voice of the child- speaker is heard as he turns the light on how he feels. He was carefree and innocent, enjoying a life of no worry and no fear. He felt as if the foxes , the pheasants (birds) and other animals were his friends and they loved him and honoured him as they wandered around the happy and merry house of Fern Hill. The house is personified to reflect how the child felt about the house. It was lively and happy and filled with merriment and joys.

He continues to recall how “heedless” he was as a child and how the farm gave him all that he needed and made him feel complete. So his wishes seems to be fulfilled as quickly as the stacks of hay grew high in the house. The sun bathed him with its warmth and light and he felt free looking at the blue sky. There again he felt time is kind and loving and he could hear its morning music and singing. The child felt as if time stopped and children all green and naive followed time. They did not have any worry and were in complete harmony with time. The child-speaker talks proudly and happily about his adventures in Fern Hill farm. He was carefree and "heedless" as he describes himself in the poem. Time is kind and gentle and all his wishes seem to be answered. Moreover, the entire landscape is bright, pleasing and colourful with green, blue and golden.

Fern Hill

And honoured among foxes and
pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and
happy as the heart was long,
 In the sun born over and over,
 I ran my heedless ways,
 My wishes raced through the
house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue
trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and
such morning songs
 Before the children green and
golden
 Follow him out of grace,

Now in **Sixth Stanza** which closes the poem, the voice of the child-speaker is heard at first. He tells emphatically over and over again of his carefree attitude. To support his child attitude, he calls these days "the lamb white", introducing another colour in addition to green, blue and golden. These are the days of purity and innocence, hence the use of the word "lamb" that emphasizes innocence and purity. Though the speaker describes time in kind terms, still time is casting its shadows over the entire poem

and the speaker is never really free of it. He is aware of Time even though he is unaware of anything else. Time is guiding him and leading him until he loses the carefree attitude of the child.

Ignoring time, the speaker gushes about the birds (swallows) that made their nests in the loft. He felt that all nights are bright with moon, which is always rising. Even when he rides home after nightfall, he could hear the swallows flying high over the fields which are also high as they sit on the hill. This is how the child goes to sleep without worries and without cares. All he thinks of is to wait for the morning so that he would have another playful and joyful day.

Fern Hill

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white
days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by
the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the
high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled
from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the
mercy of his means,
Time held me green and
dying
Though I sang in my chains like
the sea.

But Alas! When he wakes up, he is no longer that carefree child he went to sleep as!! This is the turning point at which the child-speaker disappears and adult steps in to tell about the experience of waking up from the dream of childhood memories. So the farm is longer crowded with the laughter and noise of playing children. It becomes "childless"; that is, barren and fallow.

He starts to feel the sting of time and now time is longer kind or gentle, but is leading him to the end which the child was unaware of. Deep inside, he feels he is still that green, naive child, yearning to relive his childhood's pleasures. But he is no longer that child as he lost his freedom and is now burdened with worries and cares. Time and experience has put him in bonds and he is their prisoner. The simile "like the sea" shows the vastness of his feelings, but also the depth of his despair.

The lightness, ease and joys of the days of innocence are gone for ever, and never to return. In their place, the speaker, now an adult, is living through the harshness and hardships of the days of experience and awakening