

FERN HILL

by Dylan Thomas

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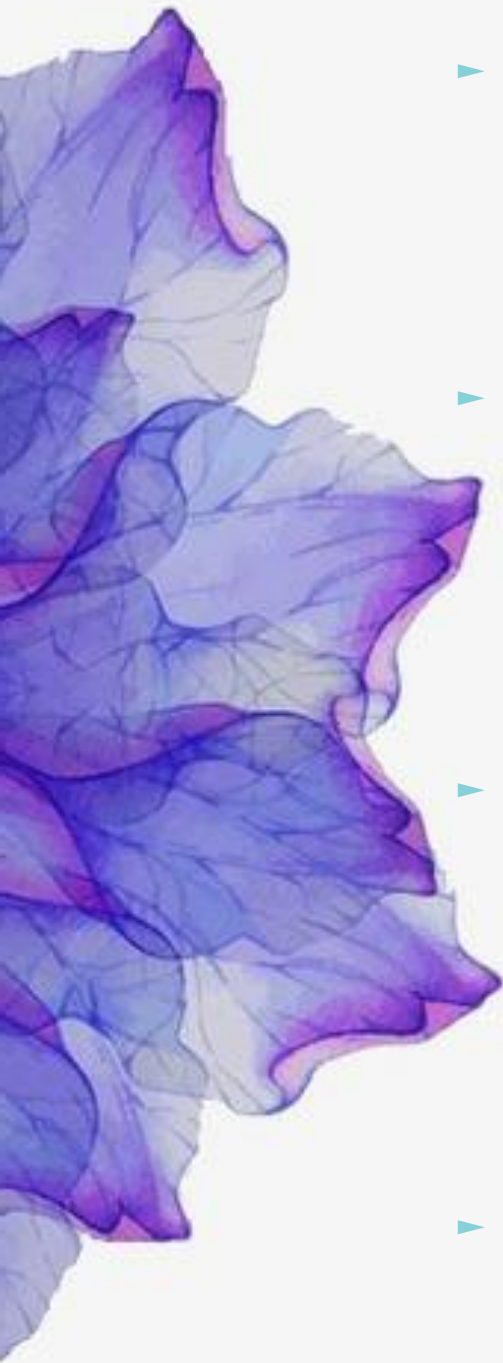
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ABOUT THE POET



- ▶ Welsh poet and prose writer whose work is known for its comic exuberance, rhapsody and pathos.
- ▶ Thomas spent his childhood in southwestern Wales. Because Dylan's mother was a farmer's daughter, he had a country home he could go to when on holiday. His poem "*Fern Hill*" (1946) describes its joys.
- ▶ He had begun writing poems at a very early age. At age 16 he left school to work as a reporter on the *South Wales Evening Post*.
- ▶ Thomas's first book, *18 Poems*, appeared in 1934, and it announced a strikingly new and individual, if not always comprehensible, voice in English poetry.

- His original style was further developed in *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936) and *The Map of Love* (1939).
- Thomas's work owed more to his Welsh background than to the prevailing taste in English literature for grim social commentary, with its emotional impact, importance given to sound and rhythm, its primitivism and tensions between biblical echoes and its sexual imagery.
- The poetry written up to 1939 is concerned with introspective, obsessive, sexual, and religious currents of feeling.
- Thomas seems to be arguing rhetorically with himself on the subjects of sex and death, sin and redemption, the natural processes, creation and decay.
- The poems collected in *Deaths and Entrances* (1946) show a greater lucidity and confirm Thomas as a religious poet.
- He writes generally in a mood of reconciliation and acceptance.
- He often adopts a bardic tone and is a true romantic in claiming a high, almost priest like function for the poet.



- ▶ He also makes extensive use of Christian myth and symbolism and often sounds a note of formal ritual and incantation in his poems.
- ▶ The prose that Thomas wrote is linked with his development as a poet, and his first stories, included in *The Map of Love* and *A Prospect of the Sea* (1955), are a by-product of the early poetry.
- ▶ Unlike his contemporaries, T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden, Thomas was not concerned with exhibiting themes of social and intellectual issues, and his writing, with its intense lyricism and highly charged emotion, has more in common with the Romantic tradition.
- ▶ On November 9, 1953, he died after heavy drinking in a Manhattan hotel, at the age of 39.

POETIC STYLE

- Dylan Thomas is considered to be the creator of one of the most distinctive, important and exciting poetic style.
- His style is characterized to be sensuous, playful, forceful and subtly musical.
- Poetry for Dylan Thomas is a great pleasure; he glorifies words and their meanings.
- He conveys that his poetry is an expression of his individual struggle from darkness towards light.
- For Dylan Thomas, all what matters about poetry is eternal movement behind it and the enjoyment of it.
- Dylan was the best judge of his own work ,he recognized what was original and distinctive in his own verse.

- Thomas poetic style was characterized by the development of the image of the various objects and phenomena of nature.
- The common scene and sights of the country side , are the most influential source of his imagery.
- His reading of Shakespeare's works and other English poets formulate a second source for his imagery.
- Thomas uses images of pain, death, decay and the beautiful scenes of nature particularly land scape and seascape. Such images contribute to make his poetic style more expressive.
- Furthermore , Dylan's poems were concerned with erotic themes , wither romantic or directly sexual , they are presented with adolescents ironic romanticism.

- There is also a concern with the fundamental problems of life, with God ,devil, birth, death, love and the process of creation and destruction in man and nature.
- Meaning in Dylan's verse is to greater extent than in usual poetry , in terms of effective and sensory perception .Thomas was obsessed with words and their possibilities for multiple meanings.
- Thomas describes his technique in a letter: "I make one image—though 'make' is not the right word; I let, perhaps, an image be 'made' emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual & critical forces I possess—let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict.“
- About Thomas's work, Michael Schmidt writes: "There is a kind of authority to the word magic of the early poems; in the famous and popular later poems, the magic is all show. If they have a secret it is the one we all share, partly erotic, partly elegiac. The later poems arise out of personality."

NEO- ROMANTICISM

- ❑ Romanticism mainly is a movement that started around 1880 .
- ❑ The term neo- romanticism has been used with reference to very late 19th century and early 20th century composers who uses it as synonymous with late romanticism.
- ❑ The neo-romantic poets add feeling and internal observation.
- ❑ Characteristic themes include longing for perfect love, utopian landscapes, nature reclaiming ruins, romantic death, and history-in-landscape.
- ❑ They distanced themselves from social problems, and went back to write about the untouched nature, they wrote about the grey, problem that filled world.
- ❑ It rejects rational intellect as the only source of poetry and stressed imagination and intuition as the supreme faculties of the poet.
- ❑ Another predominant feature of the neo -romantic poetry is the sense of nostalgia for the past.

DYLAN THOMAS AS A NEO- ROMANTIC POET

Dylan Thomas was influenced in his writing by the romantic movement, and this can be seen in most of his best works.

- Poetry for him should not be primarily concerned with man in society, but with the celebration of spiritual truth.
- It should bring to light the hidden causes because his personal interest is to explore the beauty of nature, and to do this he uses variety of images.
- His poetry depends on romantic spontaneity, suggestiveness of the liberation of the unconsciousness and the emotional involvement in dynamic life.
- Dylan Thomas uses symbols and images of nature to express how he feels towards nature, death and childhood. He expresses that, images and symbols are used to create a feeling of love towards life.
- Despite Dylan Thomas's often ambiguous images, he expresses a clear message of nature sacredness.
- Dylan Thomas like the romantics tries to make nature paradise by using nature symbols; his imagery and imagination are influenced by the natural surroundings of his mother country; specially, the beautiful nature, where he spent the early stages of his life.

- Nature for Dylan Thomas is holy, he finds all nature holy, when he speaks about God or Christ, he has nature in mind or himself, and his holiness is romantic.
- Unlike most of the contemporary poets, who were interested in social and impersonal themes, Thomas dealt with Permanent human themes subjectively, which express his romantic views.
- Characteristically, a romantic poet responds to experiences more with heart than with head.
- Neo -romantic poetry expresses the intensity of emotion, inspiration, imagination and acute sense of perception; Thomas's poems possess all these characteristics.
- He expresses his emotional being in his poem "Fern Hill" to share his ideas of imagination that creates 'a sequence of romantic scenes.
- Nostalgia for the past is a significant characteristic of neo-romanticism. Thomas was greatly preoccupied by his past; he conveys that loudly in his poems.
- He is a great celebrator of the theme of childhood which has made his works visionary and mystical. In his poem "Fern hill", he expresses his yearning to his childhood in a holy romantic scene.
- Furthermore, neo -romantic poets used ancient stories as symbols of deep-lying aspects of human existence. They shaped their feelings and experiences into keys of myth. "Fern Hill", well illustrates Thomas use of myth.

FERN HILL

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilted 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.

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.

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.

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.

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,

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.

ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

- ✓ 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 details his adventures as a youth, recalling how he acted as both a “hunter and herdsman” and saying that time allowed him to play in the sun “once only”—the first hint that this happiness won’t last.
- ✓ Personifying the “lilting” house at the start of the poem sets the stage for the landscape the speaker describes: it is so lively and vivid that it is almost a character itself. Time is similarly personified, becoming almost like a playmate to the young boy. Thomas’s use of the phrase “once below a time” emphasizes the power of time—the speaker is merely a guest in time’s domain.
- ✓ In the second stanza, he expands on his adventures as a “green and carefree” boy, his greenness (or youth) matching that of the landscape. He repeats the phrases “time let me ___” and “golden in the ___ of his ___,” beginning lines with them just as he did in the first stanza.
- ✓ The line “in the sun that is young once only” in the second stanza is the first hint that the speaker’s joyful innocence won’t last. Though time “lets” him play, it remains in control.

- ✓ In the third stanza, he continues to elaborate on the landscape, getting caught up in his descriptions as he lists thing after magical thing, beginning several lines with "and..." The speaker recalls the beauty of both days and nights at Fern Hill.
- ✓ His simple recollection of Fern Hill—"it was air"—is telling. Air is, of course, necessary for life, but also invisible and easy to take for granted, just as the young narrator doesn't fully appreciate Fern Hill.
- ✓ In the fourth stanza, he compares witnessing the coming of the day to Adam and Eve in Eden and God creating the universe. Invoking "Adam and maiden," the speaker conjures the image of the Biblical paradise of Eden—a comparison that becomes explicit in the fourth stanza. This comparison adds to the earlier hint that the speaker's happiness at Fern Hill will end—after all, Adam and Eve are eventually exiled from Eden.
- ✓ He also mentions the Creation and its aftermath—"the birth of the simple light." The fields themselves seem to "praise" God, and the stable is personified, "whinnying." Notably, he mentions the color "white," often associated with purity. This is Adam and Eve before the Fall.
- ✓ The next stanza begins the poem's ending tone of regret, alluding to the Pied Piper as the speaker begins, with the phrase "nothing I cared," to characterize himself as "heedless," indicating his later regret.

- ✓ Thomas continues to rely on personification, as the speaker describes the “gay house” and his “wishes” that “raced,” again emphasizing how alive the landscape of Fern Hill feels. But all of this must end, as the children follow time.
- ✓ The image also alludes to children following the Pied Piper, a figure from a German legend who led a town’s children away with his magical pipe. The sun, previously described as young “only once,” is now “born over and over,” and the clouds are “new made.” But the renewal the natural landscape experiences is inaccessible to the child.
- ✓ The speaker ends the poem lamenting his carelessness and mourning the loss of his childhood and innocence, beginning the stanza by repeating the phrase “nothing I cared” from the previous stanza.
- ✓ The speaker is forever cast out of Eden, waking up to remember what he has lost and realizing that he is “dying.” Again, his previous days are described as “white,” characterized as a time of innocence and purity.

“Not how it feels to be young, the theme of ‘Fern Hill’ is how it feels to have been young”.

- William York Tindall

SYMBOLS AND IMAGERY IN THE POEM

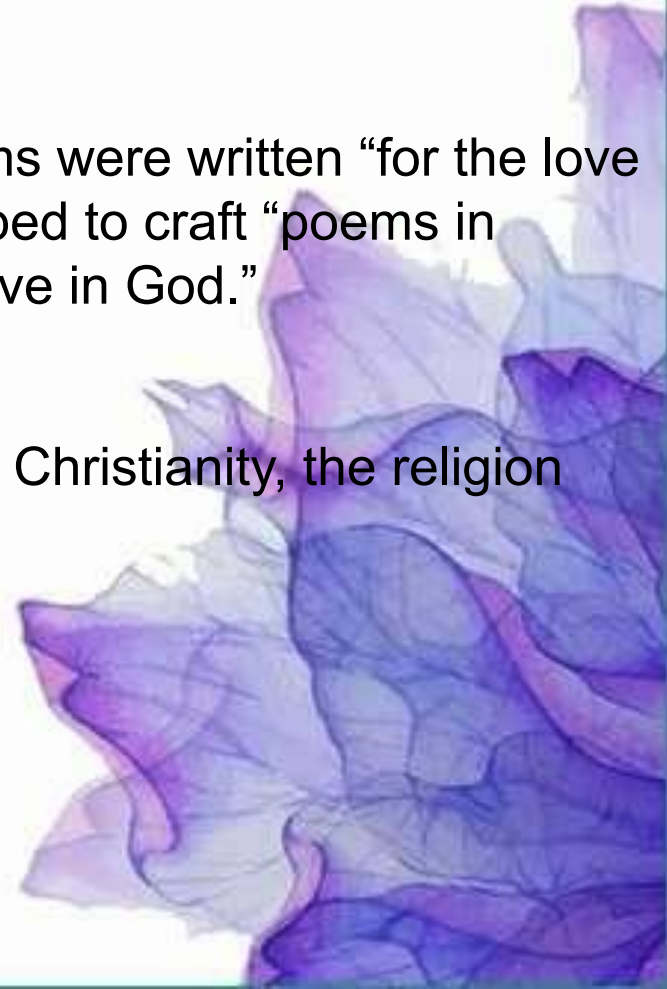
- **Green:** Throughout the poem, the color green symbolizes youth, innocence, and naiveté. In line 2, the speaker is "happy as the grass was green", possessing a simple, innocent cheerfulness." He repeatedly describes himself and his landscape as green. The word appears seven times in the poem, and at least once in each stanza. Late in the poem, children are "green and golden," but led "out of grace," altering the association of "green" to naiveté rather than sweet childhood innocence. Finally, time holds the speaker "green and dying," associating the color that once represented youth and life with death instead.

- **Gold/golden:** The word "golden" appears in the poem four times, second only in frequency to "green." Early in the poem, the speaker describes himself as "golden" when he is in time's favor and mercy. Yet eventually, the "green and golden" children are but led "out of grace" and out of Eden, and, like green, golden becomes a color of corruption and loss of innocence.

- **Sun and Moon:** Thomas repeatedly refers to the sun and moon. Imagery of the sun, including "the sun long it was running" and "the sun born over and over" conveys the idea of endless day, contributing to the theme of youth untouched by time. References to the moon are in opposition to this idea. "All the moon long I heard ..." and "the moon that is always rising" conjure images of night and the sense that darkness -- as in the final darkness or end of time -- is always present even in an idyllic world.
- **Youth:** The narrator in "Fern Hill" is young, existing in a world he views as untouched by time. Thomas uses imagery of youth to convey this idea. "I was young and easy" and the "children green and golden" create a picture of the carefree days of childhood. Even the sun itself is subject to this imagery. "... The sun that is young once only" conjures the idea of the sun as something born or created, and that it ages as humans do. In the the final line of the poem, the narrator uses the imagery again, stating that he is "green and dying" -- young but mortal.

Dylan Thomas and Christianity

- ❑ Thomas wasn't particularly religious, but nonetheless sprinkled Christian imagery and allusions throughout his work.
- ❑ Indeed, Thomas himself once wrote that his poems were written "for the love of Man and in praise of God" and said that he hoped to craft "poems in praise of God's world by a man who doesn't believe in God."
- ❑ Despite his conflicted personal feelings regarding Christianity, the religion remained a major influence on Thomas's work.




the religious imagery and symbolism in the poem *Fern Hill* tells the youthful innocence Adam and Eve must have experienced in Eden is a lot like the carefree joy the speaker felt as a kid at Fern Hill. And unfortunately, neither Eden nor Fern Hill lasts forever.

*And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams*

The speaker is assigning a religious importance to the setting. He'll do that throughout the poem, giving us the impression that his youth and where he spent it share a sacred meaning to him. Sabbath is a day of rest, and, for Christians, a holy day for praising God. Although the speaker isn't directly praising God here, he is describing the landscape as if it's a holy place worthy of praise.

Shining, it was Adam and maiden

This reference to Adam and Eve suggests innocence, as if the speaker is frolicking in Eden. The speaker's descriptions of the landscape are intertwined with his feelings about being young, so when he says "it was Adam and maiden," we can hear him saying being young on the farm was like being in the garden of Eden. Except instead of the snake tempting him away, it's time that will take him out of his childhood paradise.



*Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace,*

A reference to the Christian concept of God's grace, the love and mercy that allows for salvation despite one's sins. In the poem time is leading children out of "grace." Youth has been associated with innocence, and yet, it's time not guilt or sin that leads children out of youth. Whereas the speaker felt like he was in an Eden while he was young on the farm, he's beginning to realize that time has taken him away from there, and he can't return.

*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,*

Here, Thomas uses a metaphor to describe the days as "lamb white." This could be an allusion to Jesus as the "Lamb of God," but the speaker is talking about time and not necessarily anything that aligns with Jesus' life. He's definitely sticking with his theme of youth as an innocent, glorious time.



THANK YOU