
CHAPTER-I: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF DYLAN THOMAS

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Dylan Marlais Thomas was born in Swansea in 1914. Dylan is a Mythological name, found in Mabinogion. It is retold by John Ackerman in his book, Dylan Thomas: His Life And Work. Math, son of Mathony got a rich yellow haired boy from a maiden. He baptised the boy as 'Dylan'. "And as soon as the boy came to sea he received sea's nature, and swam as well as a best fish. And for that reason he was called as DYLAN EIL TAN (Sea Son of Wave)".¹

Dylan was the youngest child of his parents. He had an elder sister (eight years his senior) Nancy. His father was a school master, a teacher of English, in Swansea Grammar School, who himself had poetic ambitions.

Naughty in his childhood, Dylan Thomas was never a strong boy. His parents were often worried about him. In an interview reported in Everybody's 21st April, 1953, his mother told how he fell off a builder's plank and was brought home unconscious.²

But he was a venturesome happy-go-lucky boy, full of life and high spirits. Due to ill health he could not go to school until he was seven. He was devoted to art and poetry. In her interview his mother told, "Due to recurrent illness ... he spent many months in bed. This gave him more time for reading, and he was from childhood a voracious reader. He began writing verses when he was eight years old."³

Dylan's father taught English in Swansea Grammar School. He was famous for his enthusiastic and impassioned love for literature. Dylan Thomas was aware of the debt of his father. J.M. Brinnin writes in his book, Dylan Thomas in America, "I had learned from Dylan Thomas that much of his own early education had been more the result of his father's tutelage than of informed schooling."⁴

He loved to read books, classics of English literature. Much of his time was spent in his father's library which was rich in collections of English poetry. The evenings were spent in the family readings of Shakespeare's plays and English poems.

Though not brilliant, he was very good at English. His grasping was very acute. He took an enthusiastic part at amateur dramatics and wrote poems for his school magazines. For a short while he became an editor of a school magazine. He had remarkable knowledge of contemporary and early English poetry. His article on contemporary poetry was published in his school magazine, which shows us his grasp of English literature, particularly of English poetry.

"The most important element that characterises our poetical modernity is freedom -- essential and unlimited -- freedom of form, of structure, of imagery and of ideas. It has its roots in the obscurity of Gerard Manely Hopkins's lyrics, where ... the language was violated and estranged by efforts of compressing the already unfamiliar imagery ...

"It is the more recent poetry of today that shows the clearest influence of war.

"... Today is the transitional period. D.H. Lawrence, the body-worshipper who fears the soul. Edmand Blunden, who was immersed himself in English countryside; ... Ezra Pound, the experimental, mystic are only laying the foundations of a new art."⁵

When he wrote this article he was fifteen. But in this article we can see his intellect and grasp of the subject. He wrote about Hopkin's lyrics "Where ... the language was violated and estranged by efforts of compressing the already unfamiliar imagery." This is, as a matter of fact, an accurate description of his own poetry.

His father wished him to work hard and obtain a scholarship to a university but he did not do so. His father also wanted him to be a good poet. This second dream was fulfilled by Dylan Thomas.

Dylan Thomas spent his childhood holidays on the farm in North Carmarthanshire which belonged to his Aunt, Ann Jones. It is the peculiar characteristic of the Welsh, that they have a strong family sense. In his later years memories of these holidays meant a great deal for Dylan Thomas. He became so attached to the place that the childhood experiences on the farm became one of the main sources of inspiration for his poetry and

even for prose.

Dylan Thomas left school when he was seventeen. For a short time he accepted a job as a reporter in the South Wales Evening Post. This job was useful for him and it was here that he was introduced to bohemianism, with the outer verges of literature. "It was a time for rapid development, for as reporter his knowledge of life was greatly extended, and during this period he started drinking. ..." ⁶

Though Dylan Thomas was thoroughly Welsh he never spoke or understood Welsh language. But the influence of Wales on Thomas was an important thing in his making up. "He disliked Welsh Nationalism, indeed all types of nationalism, but Welsh remained to him home. His knowledge of the Bible, and his fundamentally and emotionally religious attitude to life were typically Welsh." ⁷

There were other social conditions also against which Thomas, like his contemporaries, was beginning to react. One of these social conditions was the Welsh Nonconformity. Thomas and his contemporary Welsh writers rebelled against the severely critical way of life that orthodox Non-conformity sought to maintain. His bohemianism was partly a reaction against the severe puritanism of much of middle class Welsh.

The other social condition was the depression and unemployment. Thomas left school in 1931, it was the year of post-war

period, in Wales. The tin-plate factories, which were so typical in Wales, were shut. Unemployment and poverty had increased greatly. But Dylan Thomas did not write particularly about these industrial activities and unemployment in Wales. Suzanne Roussillat, in an article says: "It shows probably his attitude of complete detachment from any economical, social or political problems ... ^hunsatisfied ... he thought of leaving Wales, as if seeing Swansea with the eyes of a grown-up, he could no longer bear the new face of the town of his childhood."⁸ He himself said somewhere, "The Land of My Fathers, My Fathers can keep it."⁹ It was true because soon he left Wales after he left the job as a reporter. Now he wished to go to London, a place for Thomas to meet contemporary English writers and poets. He went to London in 1933 when he was nineteen.

At that time he was not an established poet, but a provincial bohemian. Hence he mixed himself in the London Literary world, particularly its bohemian side. Soon he became known as poet with his poems published in the Sunday Refree edited by Victor Neubery. He won some prizes from it. These early years in London were financially very bad. Mostly he had no money. He depended a great deal on the generosity of his friends. It is fascinating that he was getting friends who not only loved him but also helped him through out. He already had written some poems which he published in 1934 as 18 Poems. In 1936 he published his second book of Twenty-Five Poems. This book attracted attention of many poets

and critics. It was reviewed (previously) in New Verse, John O London's Weekly, Contemporary Prose and Poetry. Now he established himself as a poet of originality. He was successful in showing his own peculiarities. Miss Edith Sitwell wrote in Sunday Times: "Here, among the poets of younger generation, is one who could produce sonnets worthy of our heritage."¹⁰

In 1937 he married Caitlin Macnamara an Irish girl, who was a dancer. In 1937, just before the outbreak of the war, his next book The Map of Love was published. In this book some of his stories were published along with poems.

As he was declared unfit for military services [during the war,] he started working in London. He himself had no desire to join the army. He worked on the staff of the B.B.C. After the war he worked for the "Third Programme". He wrote some documentary film scripts for the Ministry of Information. Meanwhile [his two] books were published in America The world Breathe (1937) and New Poems. He even wrote several film scripts such as Three Weird Sisters, These Are the Men and The Doctor and The Devils. His secondary gifts as a broadcaster, a writer of sketches, of short stories and of film scripts were now bringing him a considerable income.

His next book Deaths and Entrances was published in 1946 and was made him known to a wider public and was highly praised by critics. He now became popular on the B.B.C. with his musical

voice. He often participated in poetry readings or talks about modern poetry.

he lost
In later years his interest in the social life of London. >
He spent much of his time with his family at Laugharne. He visited Paris, Prague, Persia, Italy, and America. Because of monetary pressures he was tempted to go to America for poetry readings. > (60) (300)
These tours brought much strain on Thomas. Caitlin Thomas in her book Left Over Life to Kill, writes: "For Dylan, more than anybody, this (America) was poisonous atmosphere. He needed opposition, gentle but firm, constant curbing, and a steady dull, homely bed to breed his fantasies in ... He gave to those wide open beaked reading the concentrated artillery of his flesh and blood, and above all his breath I used to come in late and hear, through the mikes the breath straining, panting." ¹¹ } (some) (100)

Dylan Thomas's Collected Poems was published in November 1952. Nearly 10,000 copies of the book were sold. The book won for him the William Foyle Poetry Prize. In a "Note" to his volume he wrote, "I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his folks, replied, "I'd be damn fool if I didn't!" These poems with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of the man and in praise of God and I'd be damn fool if they weren't!"

During his tours to America Thomas became very famous. But

these tours proved very dangerous to his health. Mr John Brinnin writes in Dylan Thomas in America, "In America Thomas tempted to drink whisky rather than beer which he took in England, not for its own sake but as a necessary adjunct to conversation as his friend Vernon Watkins called it. He knew that spirits were bad for his health, but it was not of use. He died in New York in November 1953, while on a poetry reading tour."

John Ackerman says, "London had entertained as distracted him, but America was to kill him."¹²

The charm of his rambling, vivid, extravagantly anecdotal conversation comes out in "The Portrait of Artist As A Young Dog", and in many of his broadcast sketches. The warmth of his personality, his gest in every kind of human oddity, his love for his fellow-men, comes out in his last complete work Under Milk Wood.

The death of Dylan Thomas shook the people not only of England but also of America. He was praised and acclaimed highly.

When he died he had nothing left for his wife and three children.

But after his death he became very famous. His books were sold immediately. His famous book Collected Poems was the best seller.

In his book Dylan Thomas Paul Ferris says, "By the modest standard of modern poetry, Thomas came to be recognised as a star-name throughout the world. He seemed to fill a need whether as a rebel against machine society or a romantic figure that all could recognise in Spain and Italy (for example), as in Britain and

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source?

link?

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where does this part begin?

?

what is the force of 'but'?

Inconsistent

↑

America. No modern poet of any country has generated such a quantity of gossip reminiscence and criticism with America in lead: ¹⁴ where does the quote end that began in line 5 from the end of p. 14?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1
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- 8
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14

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