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Dylan Thomas as Neo Romantic Poet

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Abstract

Dylan Thomas is one of the most notable poets of the neo-romantic movement of the twentieth century, his passionate emotions and his personal lyrical writings make him like the romantics, and there are many reasons for calling Dylan Thomas a neo-romantic poet and this paper aims to state the most common ones with reference to two of his most famous poems "Fern Hill" and "Poem in October". Section one revolves around Dylan's life and the major factor shaping his poetry along with a brief description of his poetic style. While, section two is devoted to neo-romanticism, how it appears? Why? , and the most prominent neo-romantic poets, rather than characteristics. Section three on the other hand, illustrates Dylan's relationship with neo-romanticism and the major neo-romantic elements in his poetry. Lastly, section four foreshadows the analysis of two selected poems of Dylan Thomas from neo-romantic perspective, stating the neo-romantic characteristics of them.

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Introduction

Dylan Thomas is one of the twentieth century greatest neo-romantic poets and by far the best _known poet of the neo - movement. He is influenced by the romantic movement from the beginning of nineteenth century which marked most of his poems (Kumar,8).

The neo -romanticism appeared in the twentieth century as a reaction against realism and intellectualism of the political and social poetry of the twentieth century poets. The neo -romantic movement aims to revive the romantic spirit which was for long forgotten, it believed in the internal observation of the world, not just in looking for reality in its superficial view (Nagaraju&Sechiah,6).

According to Singh and Jain ,Dylan Thomas poetry brought in all major elements of neo-romanticism and this paper aims to state the most common and obvious elements of neo -romanticism in his poetry with reference to two of his most known poem; "Fern hill" and "Poem in October", of the three major elements of neo- romanticism in Thomas Poetry is love for nature, Dylan Thomas poetry manifested a romantic vision of nature , his love for nature can't be described in words , many of his poems are about nature , Thomas's both poems" Fern Hill and Poem in October", are full of symbols and images of nature , considering it as a source of beauty and inspiration (26).

Furthermore, the second element of neo -romanticism in Thomas's poetry is Dylan's longing for his old past. Dylan Thomas expresses his deep longing to his old past days and specially childhood joy and happiness. (Rehman,87)

Finally, the last neo-romantic element is the use of myths and ancient stories. Thomas loved old myths and heavily used them in his

poetry not only to create a sense of horror but also to drag the reader's attention. Thomas is a great poet, and his poetry brings a delightful tone the reader's mind. (Suryavnsi, 416)

1. The Factors Shaping Dylan Thomas' Neo-Romantic Poetry.

1.1 His Life and Career

Dylan Marlins Thomas is one of the most notable poets of Wales and one of the giant's literary figures of modern England; he was born on 27th October, 1914. He spent all his childhood and youth in Swansea south of Wales, in early stage of his life, he suffered from weak lungs and frequent hemorrhages, but later, he was healed. However, Dylan enters a private school, then after he was sent to the Grammar school where his father taught English. In the grammar school Dylan studied English language and edit the school magazine. When Dylan became 17 years old, he took up the job of junior press reporter for the "South Wales Daily post". During the time Dylan was also writing poetry, but it was the poetry of his first two notebooks. Soon after, Dylan decided to be a poet; he drifted and nearly completed his best poems in his first volume "18 poems" (Tilak, 1&3).

In 1934, Dylan decided to begin his own independent life; so he left Swansea with his father's blessings and went to London. However, coming to London made Dylan better known to the London poets and editors. In his second visit to London he stayed in apartment where he spent the rest of his life. In 1936, Dylan got married from Caitlin and he had three children, two sons and one daughter. Furthermore, in 1939, The World War outbreak and because of the war and the lack of riches, Dylan stopped from writing poetry and started to search for a job, he worked as a script writer, and it brings fame to him. In February 1950, Dylan went to America to work as a lecturer; his lectures were having a roaring success. His performance as a lecturer was astonishing. Dylan brings to America whole new concepts of poetry reading. His poems were those of

genius audience .Dylan returned to home. Then soon after, he went on second tour to America again. In his second tour to America, Dylan was best welcomed and was widely acclimated where ever he went. Dylan went to America four times as a lecturer, in his last lecture tour to America in 1953. He died in New York because of the excessive drinking (Simpson, 7-15).

1.2 Factors Shaping Dylan Thomas Neo-Romantic Poetry:

1.2.1 The Physical Environment:

Dylan was born in Swansea, in south of Wales, near the sea coast and surrounded by valleys' and woods. These Outskirts, and the scene, were the best part of Dylan's education. Dylan is the poet both of the sea, the wood and graphic nature peas. His imagery is drawn from common everyday objects and forces of nature that met his eyes from childhood onwards (Ibid, 37).

1.2.2 The Welsh Poetic Traditions:

Dylan didn't like welsh, instead he acquired mastery over English language, but he couldn't escape being influenced by the Bardic traditions of Wales. However, this influence is seen clearly in the choice of words, syntax and in the construction of the sentences, which are often welsh and not English. This influence is also seen in the technical disciplines controlling sound and rhythm of his poems (Ibid, 38).

1.2.3 Dylan and the Surrealism:

Dylan was influenced by the various current that marked the English literary scene of his time; on such important element was 'surrealism'. Surrealism simply is" a cultural movement that began in the

early 1920s in France, and is best known for its visual artworks and writings. Artists painted unnerving, illogical scenes with photographic precision, created strange creatures from everyday objects, and developed painting techniques that allowed the unconscious to express itself. However, surrealism was in the air when Dylan came to London. The obscurity of his earlier poems, the strange and intense juxtaposition of adjective and noun, the violence of the imagery, have made many critics confuse Dylan youthful work with surrealist themes. Many critics considered Dylan second book “Twenty- five poems “to hold the principles of surrealist movement, but Dylan denied this, since many of the poems in this book were originated in his first poetic career before he knows anything about surrealism. In fact, Dylan had very little idea about surrealism and he had never read a page of surrealist literature (Shires, 27).

1.2.4 Dylan and William Blake:

According to Grant, Dylan Thomas and William Blake share a number of superficial points ,both poets came from the lower middle class , and their works were considered to be difficult and obscure .Furthermore, both poets began writing poetry early in their lives and both were preoccupied with early childhood .Dylan Thomas wrote many imitations of Blake songs of innocent and songs of experience in his early notebooks .Both poets are known as romantic in sense and theme and they share the same imaginative qualities .For them , the imagination included all of one's facilities of perception and it was through the imagination that the artist reached out and ordered throws the world around him (14) .

1.3 Poetic Style:

Goodby demonstrates that, Dylan Thomas is considered to be the creator of one of the most distinctive, important and exciting poetic style, which is characterized to be sensuous, playful, forceful and subtly musical. His writings are distinguished from other kinds by its unique qualities , it`s a group of everything on the power of its linguistic invention This makes his works stand out from the most twentieth century English poetry (7).

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. He read only the poems he likes, discarding poems that don't meet his chosen criteria. For Dylan Thomas, all what matters about poetry is eternal movement behind it and the enjoyment of it (Tilak: 53).

Akerman, shows that Dylan was the best judge of his own work ,he recognized what was original and distinctive in his own verse , he reads only the poems he likes , discarding poems , that didn't meet his chosen criteria .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 , also 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 .Relatively , 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 (58).

Thomas' work has been embraced by readers so more than many of his contemporaries, and he is one of the few modern poets whose name is recognized by the general public. Several of his poems have passed into the cultural mainstream, and his work has been used by authors, musicians and film and television writers (Nagaraju & Seshaiiah, 9)

2.1 Neo-Romanticism

Romanticism mainly is an art movement that started around 1880 and continued to the present day. The term neo-romanticism has been recently used with reference to very late 19th century and early 20th century composers who uses it as synonymous with late romanticism. The 1920s, artists like Dylan Thomas, George Barker, W.S.Graham and Kathleen Raine had begun to re-evaluate and re-discover the works of their romantic forebears; from the visionary work of William Blake of high romanticism, to the neo-romanticism that flowered between 1880 and 1910 (Shires,40).

Neo-romanticism is considered in opposition to naturalism, neo-classicism and the new poets who were interested in social and political themes. The neo-romantic poets add feeling and internal observation. These artists tend to draw their inspiration from artists of the age of high romanticism, and from the sense of place they perceive in historic rural landscapes; and in this they react in general to the ugly modern world of machines and new cities (Ibid).

Characteristic themes include longing for perfect love, utopian landscapes, nature reclaiming ruins, romantic death, and history-in-landscape. The authors focused on mood and the state of mind. 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 was also a reaction against the new society, the breakthrough of the great capitalism, industrialization and development of the cities. The literature became more individualized and lyrical, and they wrote more about young love. The neo-romantic poetry shows a new faith in man

with all his feelings, senses and all the sides of his experiences. 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. Neo -romantic poets were heavily preoccupied by their past and express that in their poetry. The nature is also important. This can be interpreted as a reaction to the civilization and the chaos of the material thing. The nature is fresh, original and genuine. In the nature, fantasies and true feeling are allowed to come out and the suppressed instincts can spread (Burch, 3).

Romanticism like its rivals will always be a fruitful influence on poetry because its strengths are its emphasis on beauty and its acceptance of the role of imagination in creating poetry. There have always been fashionable and unfashionable styles but ultimately what matters is the end product, in that respect Romanticism has given us some of the greatest works of world literature (Marshall, 2).

2.2Dylan Thomas as 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, he is the best-known poet of the neo -romantic poets mentioned in the previous section. 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 (Ismael, 2).

AS Nagaraju & Seshaiyah, illustrates, 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. Also despite Dylan Thomas' often ambiguous images, he expresses a clear message of nature sacredness (600).

Tindal emphasizes that, 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 a romantic hol.ss. In his poem "Fern Hill", Dylan Thomas describes nature as it appeals to his boyish imagination; the depiction of nature reveals the process of growth in the company of nature.

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 (Suryavanshi, 409).

Nostalgia for the past is a significant characteristic of neo-romanticism. Thomas was a 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 (Shabanirad & Omran, 7, 8).

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 (Boilermaker, 104).

Thomas is an outstanding romantic poet with all the attributes of romanticism such as absolute creative freedom, nostalgia for old past, myth-making, love of nature, spontaneity, sincerity, a logical or magical view of poetry, these characteristics are abundantly found in most of his poems (Nagaraju & Seshaiyah, 610).

3. "Fern Hill"

"Fern Hill" is one of Dylan Thomas' best-known poems, a nostalgic and melancholic poem in which he looks back at the time that passed by him, this poem was published in 1946, and it's the last poem to be included in Thomas' book of anthology: "Deaths and Entrances", "Fern Hill" is about childhood, being "yoting" and "easy" and represents the definite-movement of human life from childhood to adulthood until the realization of his mortality, which represented by the symbols of nature.

The first stanza describes the speaker's joy and happiness while spending time at his uncle farm "Fern Hill". While, in the second stanza, the speaker moves to describe the beautiful nature at the farm, using symbols and images of nature such as "green" and "gold". The third stanza foreshadows death and aging, as the boy now become older and realized that death is coming. In the fourth stanza, Dylan mentions a biblical reference to a myth (Adam and Eve) which signifies the loss of innocence. In the fifth stanza, the sun is being born again and again, which represents the passage of time and cycles of life. The boy is carefree and un aware of his eventual death. Finally, the poet laments his childhood happy days which, he spent in his uncle farm, because the speaker is now is older now and, realizes throughout his childhood that, he was actually dying, but blissfully unaware of his mortality. the poem is about the journey from childhood to manhood when the manhood comes, the man suffers from an agony. The poet clearly says now I am not what I was in the past (Anselmo, 35- 36).

According to Fajar, various types of poetic devices are used in the poem. Firstly, "Fern Hill", is a complex allegory in which the details may

have more than one meaning, but these meanings tend to be definite. Meanings do not ray out from allegory as they do from a symbol. Though less rich than a symbol, allegory is an effective way of making the meaning clearer. Throughout the poem, the poet tells the readers about the journey of his life from one period to the other period when he was a child, then a young man, and until he being an old man (34).

Simile on the other hand are found in abundance the poem, the poet tries to describe his life when he was child as same as the color of "green", which are happy, fresh and natural. This comparative-similarity appears in some lines of the poem such as "*And happy as the grass was green*" (l. 2), and "*Singing as the farm was home*" (l.11). Moreover, in the last stanza when the poet says "*though sang in my chains like the sea*" (l.:54) he realized that the immortality he felt as a child was merely a stage in the definite-movement of life toward death.

Regarding symbols, In the poem, there are many symbols used by the poet to increase the depth of his message to the readers, such as: "prince", "green", "white", "gold", "fire", and "time". Symbol in the poem begins when poet symbolized his young age as a "prince". As we know that princes are those who have a lot of political and social power. What separates them from kings is that princes are generally young, at least younger than their fathers. This symbol appears as in l. The symbol of young age of the speaker uses is the colors representation. The speaker symbolizes his happiness as a child as being as "*Happy as the grass is green*" (l.: 2), which means that the poet feels alive and healthy. Moreover, "White" symbolizes the purity and innocence. The poet describes himself as an innocent shepherd who does nothing but followings his sheep. The third symbol is "Gold" usually used with youthful objects, and represents brightness and freshness, therefore its

usually associated with the youthful age. The last symbol Thomas uses is "Time", which symbolizes an authority figure that has a strict control on his life, He associates time with an adult who is supervising the poet and his life (Ibid :37)

"Fern Hill" is an autobiographical poem in which Thomas uses the memories of his childhood days in order to explore the Theme of a journey from innocence to experience .The poem can be divided into two parts ; the first three stanzas are related to the poet experience when he was a child and spent happy time at his aunt farm .but , the last three stanzas are about the loss of innocence , as the speaker is now a grown man .Dylan Thomas efficiently employs the myth of the fall of the first human beings (Adam and Eve). The myth works as a reinforcement for the idea of the loss of innocence, then the speaker moves to describe the world of experience, he is now old and has realized that death is coming, the poem shifts from describing happy memories of childhood into lamenting them. The poem is a journey from happy childhood to miserable manhood in Dylan Thomas `s life.

Dylan's description of nature is seen clearly in the poem; Idealistic description of nature is one of the most prominent subjects of the neo - romantic poetry. Dylan Thomas was truly a nature poet as he derives his motivation from the beauty of nature. The poem is full of natural imagery which Thomas constantly used to beautify his poems, Thomas retains efficiently his childhood intimacy with the natural world. The poet employs natural imagery to describe his childhood as the same as the color "green", which is happy and fresh. This comparative appears in (1. 2), "And happy as the grass was green ". Moreover, the last also involves

natural imagery when the poet says "Thou I sang in my chains like the sea"(l.54). However, Dylan Thomas uses symbols that refer to nature such as "green" which means youth, innocence and young age. The expression of nature comes from Dylan's subconscious mind. Thomas frequent observation of immaculate beauty in nature reflects the impact of the neo- romantic movement on him (Singh & Jain,6).

Dylan as neo- romantic poet is very fond of myths ,most of the neo -romantic poets used myths in their poetry ,not just to create horror and awe but rather to bring pleasure to the reader .In "Fern hill", Dylan Thomas employs the myth of the fall of the first man (Adam and Eve).However, this myth signifies the loss of innocence , in the first three stanzas the farm is described as an Edenic paradise while the last three stanzas describes how this Edenic landscape turns into hellish one as the boy (the poet) grow up and realized that death is near (Sumathi & Suresh,47).

Furthermore, a sense of longing for the past can be perceived in "Fern Hill". Dylan Thomas is yearning to his childhood happy days which he spent in his uncle farm, He recalls these happy days and laments the loss of these days. (Shabanirad & Omrani ,107)

To sum up, the writer concludes that both of imagery and figurative language are used in this poem to give good effect in building a romantic atmosphere, and also emphasize and reinforce the meaning of the theme. The poem is a wonderful sketch of the neo -romantic style of Dylan Thomas.

4: "Poem in October"

"Poem in October" is a celebration of Thomas' thirtieth birthday. Dylan Thomas was born on 27th October, 1914. On his birthday early in the morning when the fishing village of Langhorne was still sleeping, he woke up and walked along the silent sea shore. As he thinks of his birthday, he is overcome by sentiments of the sacredness of nature. Though the season is autumn, he imagines that it is summer and that he is back in his childhood days. He climbs up the Fern Hill where he spent his holidays in the farm of his aunt Ann Jones. October reminds the poet of the autumn of his life and then he turns away from it to bring to his mind the wonderful summer mornings of his childhood at Swansea or Fern Hill. Similarly, October stands between summer and winter; thirty is poised between childhood and maturity. The poise between childish glory and the sadness of maturity, summer and winter, past and future is maintained to the end. (Jorgensen, 62)

Now the man of thirty and the boy he remembers are one. Past and present and Swansea and Langhorne are united. The poem is memorable for the demonstration of the poet's dramatic self-discovery. It is as if Dylan Thomas, now an older man has two dimensions to move between – childhood and maturity. Beautiful images are introduced in the poem to make it more beautiful the poet brings musicality to the poem through alliteration, which appears in several lines throughout the poem. For example, "my birthday began with water" (l. 11) and "To the trees and stones and the fish in the tide" (l. 57). Alliteration adds a sense of beauty and musicality to the poem (Hingu, 3-4).

The poem also, contains various types of symbols. In the beginning of the poem "the heron" symbolizes the sacredness of nature, its regarded

as a priest sitting on the sea shore while the waves are praying to him. Moreover, Thomas uses another symbol "winged trees" which symbolizes the nature happiness of Dylan's birthday. The third symbol is "tall tales" which signifies the poet's extreme imagination and fantasy. Finally, the last symbol Thomas uses is the "gardens of spring" and summer ". This symbol stands for the beautiful world as recreated by the imagination of the poet. Dylan Thomas symbols are complex and many sided, mostly referring to natural objects (Islam,2).

This poem holds many references to nature; Thomas demonstrates nature delightfully vibrant through day-to-day sounds and sights. When he comes out of the town on his thirtieth birthday, he realizes that he is welcomed by the entire nature. The complete view appears holy to him and he perceives himself on his way to heaven. He is in absolute accord with nature. In order to revere their creator, the waves of the ocean rise high, the forest appears to him as his neighbor and the herons to be the priests. The gardens are blossoming and the birds are singing. The poem portrays the vibrant natural pictures with the normal atmosphere of delight. Thomas glorifies nature and, this illustrates his romantic vision and spirit (Singh & Jain ,2).

Nostalgia for the past, is a common theme of the neo -romantics, this poem like the one before, Thomas expresses his deep longing to his beautiful early days, Thomas as neo- romantic poet was in love with his old past, and he convey this clearly in the poem (Shabanirad and Omrani,107).

"Poem in October" is one of the masterpieces in the field of modern poetry. It presents a sensational picture of nature which the poet enjoyed in his infancy his small town. Poet has indirectly presented the urban civilization in which man is living static and hectic life. The poem can be compared with his another poem 'Fern Hill' because both poems reveal poet's Loglines and predicament toward village life. This poem is totally neo-romantic poem, in terms of theme and figurative language as illustrated in section two.

Conclusion

Dylan Thomas is an archetype of modern romanticism, he revolted against the intellectualism and realism of his era of his era and moves to write in the romantic vein of the eighteenth century, with his poetry a new romantic was ushered in, his poetry manifested all the major qualities of neo-romanticism, no words can express his love for nature, most of his poems are deeply attached with nature, specially his famous poem "Fern Hill". Furthermore, Thomas's own feelings about his childhood past memories are reflected in "Fern Hill" in which, he celebrates the innocence, freedom and sense of wonder which he had experienced in childhood. Dylan's poetry expresses the unconscious myth-making ability, which is for long attached with the romantic style, all these three elements are clarified and expressed in this paper.

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