Dylan Thomas Essay, Research Paper

Thomas Dying Light

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born in Swansea, Wales on October 27, 1914. After leaving school, he worked briefly as a junior reporter on the South Wales Evening Post. In November of 1923 he moved to London and in December of that he published his first book, Eighteen Poems. In April 1936 he met his future wife, Caitlin Macnamara. In September 1936, his second volume of poetry, Twenty-five Poems, was released. In July 1937 Dylan and Caitlin were married and in the following year they moved to Laugharne, Wales. Their first child, Llewlyn Edouard Thomas was born in January 1939. The Map of Love, soon to be the title of a major film, was published in August and The World I Breathe was released in December.(Bookshelf 98)

In April of 1940 Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog was published and in September Dylan began working for Strand Films, Inc. He remained with Strand through the conclusion of the Second World War. His second child Aeronwy, Byrn Thomas was born in March of 1943. Deaths and Entrances was released in 1946. Three years later his child, Colm Garan Hart Thomas, was born. In 1952 his final volume, Collected Poems, was published. In addition to the work previously mentioned, he also published many short stories, wrote filmscripts, broadcast stories, did a series lecture tours in the United States and wrote Under Milkwood, his famous play for voices.(Bookshelf 98)

During his fourth lecture tour of the United States in 1953, he collapsed in his New York hotel. He was but a few days past his 39th birthday. He died on Noovenber 9th, 1953 at St. Vincents Hospital, New York. His alcoholism was legendary and no doubt played a significant role in his demise. His Body was sent back to Laugharne, Wales, where his grave is marked by a simple wooden cross- the way he would have seen fit. In July 1994 his wife, Caitlin, died in Italy. She had spent most of her years there since his death.(Bookshelf 98)

Thomas, one of the best known poets of the mid-twentieth century, is remembered for his highly original, obscure poems, his amusing prose tales and plays, and his turbulent, highly-publicized personal life. He was widely recognized for his powerful poetry readings of BBC radio. He became a very popular public figure. Thomas was a man with a very Keatsian style and manner. He was both energetic and vivid when it came to his imagery. He was welsh and his voice brought many to enjoy poetry through his readings, he also used words not for just denotation and imagery, but also for the sound of the word. He was interested in the subtle meanings within the rhythm and phonic qualities of the words and their order. The key to Dylan Thomas is reading him aloud, slowly, hitting every vowel and consonant, and worrying about what it all means later. (His Craft, His life)

For the purpose of examining thematic consistency through multiple works let us consider two of his most famous poems: Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night and A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London. Both of these works deal with the close of our preciously, mysterious life force. One pleads that we rage, rage against the dying of the light, (Do Not) while the other hits on the possibility of reincarnation, a recycling of the life force, and thus the lack of mourning when a life comes to its close. These two themes seem to conflict, but upon further analysis they come together to present us with a complete picture of Dylan Thomas feelings on the seldom understood subject of death.

Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night is Thomas demands of his father to fight the approach of death when it can be seen on the horizon. The light obviously symbolizes his life force and the famous quote, rage, rage against the dying of the light, is certainly the author s plea to his father. The general, overall imagery of this poem is simple and straightforward. Careful analysis can, however, pose an interesting question when one tries to fit the message of this poem with that of A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a child in London.

Line sixteen of Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night, And you, my father, there on that sad height, gives us the mysteriously mournful phrase, sad height . This phrase is of particular interest. What does Thomas mean, sad height ? Is he acknowledging that death is a sad time worthy of lament? No. The sad height is the metaphorical perch we find ourselves resting upon in the moments leading up to death. It is not a place, but rather it is a time and a condition wrapped together to form a unique state of existence. In this poem he is advocating that his father actively resist his own death. Is death then a negative, lamentable event according to Thomas? No. This resistance is to Thomas the way in which his father will separate himself, his unique life force, from its unfavorable position. Thomas knows the flesh will die. He just doesn t want his father to slide off into oblivion as well. Thomas seems to believe that the separation is necessary to the perpetuation of his father s life force.

That interpretation leads one directly to the first sentence of A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London. The poem opens with a magnificent, thirteen-line sentence. It s momentum and tone set the table for the entire piece. The period at the end of the thirteenth sentence is the poem s first punctuation. The meaning of the first sentence is reasonably clear: The speaker has resolved not to mourn the child s death until Doomsday. By balancing the promise of eventual mourning with present restraint Thomas has constructed an ambiguity that is crucial to the poems message. He wants his reader to contemplate this decision- this bold statement. Thomas has proclaimed Doomsday as the event at which all life will cease to exist and recycle. He sounds cruel, however, that is part of the point. The child s horrible death is a fact of life. It is part of the cycle; A cycle that must be appreciated from all sides if we are to value life at all. Thomas would ask, How can you appreciate the sun if there is no rain? and vice versa. One is essential. He has deemed the point at which the cycle stops as the only truly lamentable moment with regard to life and death.

Thomas often wrote about life and death and issues concerning the nature of our living, breathing planet. He displayed wonderful thematic consistence and evolution throughout hi works. Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night and A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a child in London appear thematically opposed on the surface. The present their reader with a microcosm of Dylan Thomas life and works.