

DYLAN THOMAS • THE FORCE THAT THROUGH THE GREEN FUSE DRIVES THE FLOWER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DYLAN THOMAS (1914-1953)

Dylan Thomas is a lyrical poet **endowed** with an extremely personal style. He is particularly acclaimed for the rhythmic, musical sound of his poetry and his vivid imagery, and he is often considered one of the greatest modern poets.

When dealing with his poetry, one must bear in mind the different elements of his biography. Firstly, he was born in Swansea, South Wales in 1914. In the 20s and 30s, Wales was a depressed area with **widespread** unemployment and poverty, and at the same time suffering from the consequences of an unplanned industrialisation. Wales meant open emotionalism, pleasure in the excesses of imagination and a passion for singing and music almost alien to the average English mentality.

Secondly, whereas Dylan Thomas was not influenced by the poets of the Thirties and was **unaffected** by the political debates of those days, World War Two struck him as the presence of horror coexisting with the delight of the world.

Thirdly, his personal life-style and weaknesses shaped his life according to very unconventional criteria. He seldom had a regular job and, although he had a wife and three children, he provided for them in a very inadequate and discontinuous way. He drank heavily, **ruining** his health and his working capacity; he allowed himself to be **lionised** in four successive tours in the USA, where people went to listen to his poems as well as to see him a **prey** to alcohol. These poetry-reading tours literally destroyed him. He died in the course of the last one, in a New York hospital, at the age of thirty-nine.



D. Thomas

ABOUT HIS WORK

Many of his most famous works were published when he was only a teenager. At the age of twenty-one he had already **drafted** the **bulk** of his poems: *Eighteen Poems* (1934), *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936), *The Map of Love* (1939). They shared thematic and stylistic unity. Nature is seen as a macro- and microcosm. Man and natural elements are a unique reality moving through a dynamic cycle of birth, copulation and death. Death and corporal **decay** are almost an obsession for Thomas, yet at this early stage the accent is mostly on sex as the vital element, the “life force” in the process of nature.

His poetry shows an unusual complexity of structure, images and versification. From an initial image or a complex of images, he develops intricate patterns of repetitions, correspondences, contrasts. Then there is his special way of playing on words, on their ambiguity, on verbal transference.

Thomas' early production came to an end about 1940. The poems of his second period, from 1940 to his death, were the collections *Death and Entrance* (1946) and *In Country Sleep* (1953). Here the poet's involvement with human beings is deeper. People, concrete facts and places from the poet's youth are added to the usual themes of nature and the life process.

THE POEM

The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower

The poem, published in the first collection *Eighteen poems* (1934), expresses the themes and style of Thomas' early work. A philosophical poem, it aims at rendering the concept of dynamism in Nature, that process of creation and decay, of birth and death, linking man to natural elements. The four **stanzas** and the closing **couplet** propose the theme in four parallel ways, with **slight** variations. Auditory elements, words and images create a careful pattern of correspondences and contrasts, while the changing sounds suggest a sense of movement and energy, just as in Nature.

On its most basic level, however, the poem describes the cycle of life and death, noting that creation and destruction are part of the same process, both for man and for nature. Each stanza presents the **flow** of time moving to its inexorable conclusion.

The poem **surveys** five different scenes illustrating the destructive and creative power of time. Beginning with the force of a **fuse**, it continues with the force powering water, the hand **whirling**, the lips **leeching**, and the “**crooked** worm.” In just five stanzas, Thomas addresses wide-reaching themes such as life, death, and the passage of time. Key to the poem is the inextricable link between nature and humans, which is explored through continuous references comparing the life the poet feels in himself, to the life which he sees running through the natural world.



bulk: *la maggior parte di*

couplet: *distico*

crooked: *contorto*

decay: *decomposizione*

to draft: *abbozzare*

endowed: *dotato*

flow: *flusso*

fuse: *stelo*

to leech: *risucchiare*

to lionise: *esaltare*

prey: *preda*

slight: *leggero*

to ruin: *rovinare*

stanza: *strofa*

to survey: *esaminare*

unaffected: *non interessato*

to whirl: *vorticare*

widespread: *diffuso*

The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.

And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.

And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

The hand that whirls the water in the pool
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Hauls my shroud sail.

And I am dumb to tell the hanging man
How of my clay is made the hangman's lime.

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.

And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

*La forza che attraverso il verde stelo sospinge il fiore
Sospinge la mia verde età; quella che spacca le radici degli alberi
È la mia distruttrice.*

*E sono muto per dire alla rosa contorta
Come la mia giovinezza è piegata dalla stessa febbre invernale.*

*La forza che spinge l'acqua attraverso le rocce
Spinge il mio rosso sangue; quella che prosciuga i ruscelli alla foce
Le mie trasforma in cera*

*E io sono muto per gridare alle mie vene
Come alla fonte montana la stessa bocca succhia.*

*La mano che vortica l'acqua nello stagno
mescola le sabbie mobili; quella che lega il vento che soffia
Tende la vela del mio sudario.*

*E io non ho parole per dire all'impiccato
che della mia creta è fatta la calce del boia.*

*Dal capo della fonte le labbra del tempo risucchiano;
Amore stilla e si raccoglie, ma il sangue versato
Allevierà le piaghe del mio amore.*

*E io non ho parole per dire a un vento di stagione
Come attorno alle stelle il tempo abbia scandito un cielo.*

*E io non ho parole per dire alla tomba dell'amante
Come lo stesso verme contorto s'avvia al mio sudario.*

COMPREHENSION

- 1** The first stanza sets the fundamental theme: the same force works on Nature and Man through a process of creation and destruction, birth and decay. The concept is expressed through a statement, a counterstatement and a refrain. Can you trace them? Complete the scheme below.

STATEMENT	COUNTERSTATEMENT	REFRAIN

2 Answer the questions.

1. Consider the refrain, which keeps stressing the same idea. How does the poet feel about the process of Nature?
2. What does the image of the tree and the rose suggest?
3. What is the theme introduced by the poet in the second stanza?
4. In the third stanza the water emerges like a destructive element. Can you support this statement?
5. What does the phrase "The lips of time leech to the fountain head" in the fourth stanza suggest?
6. How does the poem represent the creative process itself?

ANALYSIS

3 Answer the questions.

1. Can you trace the structure of the poem?
2. Which perspective is the poem written from?
3. What is the poem's metre?
4. Analyse the rhyme scheme and say if there is any alliterative pattern.
5. What aspects of nature appear in the poem?
6. Give an example of personification.
7. How do the exceptions to the poem's structure reflect and strengthen its subject matter?

FURTHER ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

- 4** "The Force" is one of many poems by Dylan Thomas relating to nature, which is one of the most characteristic themes of his work. Take into consideration the poem "This bread I break" and analyse the theme of Nature and the rhyme scheme, making a comparison with "The Force".