

## Fern Hill: Dylan Thomas - Summary and Critical Analysis

Fern Hill by Dylan Thomas is an autobiographical poem in which Thomas uses the memories of childhood days in order to explore the theme of a journey from innocence to experience. The theme is based on William Blake's division the world of experience and it is reinforced through the use of Wordsworthian double consciousness.

The poem can be divided into two parts: the first three stanzas are related to the poet's experience as a child when he used to spend his summer holidays at his uncle's farm (Fern Hill, it is in Swansea in Wales) but the last three stanzas are about an awakening in the child which signifies the loss of the world of innocence. At the center of this loss of the innocence are the myths of fall of the first human beings (Adam and Eve). The world of innocence (child) as described in the first three stanzas is like the Garden of Eden. This is a world in which the child is in complete union with the nature.

This world of fantasy offers the child an Edenic bliss. The way Thomas describes this world; it appears to be a timeless world without a sense of loss and decay. In the third stanza the poet slowly moves towards the transition between the world of innocence and the world of experience. In the fourth stanza the speaker's sleeping is a symbolic sleeping which ends a flashing in the dark. This flashing is a kind of awakening as hinted by the first line of the fourth stanza. In this awakening the child (speaker) initiates into the world of maturity. "Sleeping" in the poem is symbolic that refers to the loss of innocence that equates the Adam and Eve who had slept after a fall from the Grace of God. This initiation of the world of maturity entails the loss of Edenic bliss, innocence, grace and freedom. Moreover poet loses creative imagination and fantasies in which a union with nature was possible.

In the last stanza the poet once again contemplates on the memoirs of his childhood but this time the awareness, becomes dominant. In the last line the poet refers to his chained situation in the world of experience. Now he is in chain, green color is withered now.

So, this poem is the journey from childhood to manhood when the manhood comes, the man suffers from agony. Now I am not what I was in the past. The use of verb "song" hints that the losses can be captured through art in the last line stanza.

The poet looks back in retrospection at his childhood in the poem "Fern-Hill". "Fern-Hill" was the farm of Thomas' aunt Ann Jones. The poet recalls this place as he used to spend his holidays here, away from his native Swansea.

The poet gives a picturesque description of the idyllic farm. At a time, when he was happy and carefree under the apple boughs. He is overcome with joy and it appears that the house is lilting or singing. The grass was green, green being a symbol of prosperity and freshness. The night above the wooded valley was starry. Time is personified here. The poet asserts that Time welcomed him to the heydays of his eyes, helped him climb/progress in its vision. And he was prince of the apple towns. His experience is a regal one; the noun 'prince' also signifies that he also owned all of this property as their legitimate inheritor. The phrase "once below a time" exemplifies his typical distortion of syntax for poetic effect. The phrase also points to a fairy-tale existence.

His relation with the barn is so intricate that he is “famous among the barns.” The farmyard is referred to as “happy yard.” It is the child that is really happy here. Therefore, the figure of speech utilized by the poet is a ‘transferred epithet’. It is the human mortal that is young only once. Therefore, when the poet says that the sun was young only once, it is as visualized through the young eyes of the child. Time showered his mercy on him and let him be ‘golden’ and ‘green’ at the same time. In short, his life was colourful. Further, Time also helped him assume multiple roles: he was huntsman and herdsman. The calves sang to his horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold. Just as the church bells beckoned people to worship the lord, the sound of the water flowing over the pebbles seemed to summon the little Thomas for the worship of Nature.//All the day (sun) long the water kept running smoothly reflecting the pace of his life. He goes onto elaborate on the heavenly farm. The hay grew taller than the house. Smoke went up the chimneys appearing like abstract concretizations of tunes. And the fire held a brightness as fiery as the green of the grass. He dreamt in his sleep of horses flashing away into the dark. In his sleep, he dreamt that the owls were carrying the farm way as if on a magic carpet ride. The line could also signify that the conspicuous cries of the owls seemed to divert his attention away from the farm. All the night (moon) long, he heard the harsh cries of the nocturnal birds as they flew with the haystacks(ricks) when the wind passed through.//As the morning approaches, the farm is so wet with dew as though it had been wandering the whole night. The image was as fresh and innocent and pure as that of Adam and Eve before the Fall. The sky turned bright yet again, and the sun resumed its roundness as though it was temporarily deflated. So it must have been after the birth of the simple light

This is an allusion to the Story of Creation in the Genesis 1:3.”And God said: Let there be light: and there was light.” The horses, neighing gently, walked as if in a trance, awakened from their slumber. From the warmth of their stable, they moved towards the fields that were filled with praises for their Edenic beauty.

He was honoured among the impulsive creatures-the foxes and pheasants by the gay house. Note how the poet keeps on making use of transferred epithets. The clouds were fresh as ever as though newly manufactured. The heart was so heavy with emotion that it seemed to stretch itself. The sun seemed to be born again and again, as each day passed. He ran heedless, his aspirations competing with the haystacks in their heights. As he traversed the farm under the blue sky, he lived his childhood green and golden as long as Time permitted him to.

In the final stanza, the speaker expresses that all the liberty was transitory. The pure instinctive rapport he shared with the farm is now polluted by the logic of reason, and the refinement of adulthood. The unconscious awe and imaginative ruminations are no longer there. He did not comprehend the same when once Time held him in the ‘lamb-white’ purity of its days. The poet realizes this as a mature adult. He claims that time held him green and dying. These are the two sides of Time(life): though it made him green, endowing him with the gift of youth; it also gave him death, a full stop to that phase. Change is inevitable, and as he is caught in this cycle of Time, in its chains, he is forced to sing, for the gift of life is infinite in the depth it has to offer, just like the sea. It takes, yet it gives.