

# Poem in October by Dylan Thomas

'*Poem in October*' by Dylan Thomas is a seven stanza poem that is separated into sets of ten lines. As was his custom, Thomas chose not to use one particular rhyme scheme. But there are a few moments in which end sounds are unified through the use of half rhyme. There is a consonant rhyme in stanza three with the words "rolling" and "whistling." The same kind of rhyme occurs in stanza five with the end words "summer" and "mother." These words depend on their consonants to rhyme, there are also moments of assonance, or rhymes that depend on vowel sounds. One such example is with the words "heron" and "beckon" in the first stanza.

While the poem's stanzas are not unified by a rhyme or rhythm scheme, the lines are undeniably similar in length and indentation. This is a feature that clearly stands out when one observes the lines on the page. There are three longer lines, then two very short ones. These are followed by two more long lines, two more short, and one final long line in each stanza. They force the reader's eye to move back and forth over the page, perhaps mimicking the rise and fall of waves, the "wringing" of rain, or the [speaker's](#) climb up the hill. You can read the full poem [here](#).

## Summary of *Poem in October*

'*Poem in October*' by [Dylan Thomas](#) tells of a speaker's journey out of autumn and up a hill to reclaim childhood joy, the summer season and his spirituality.

The poem begins with the speaker stating that he was thirty years old when he wrote this. It was his birthday and he chose to go on a walk. He left his home, traveled alongside the water's edge, listened to the seabirds and the woods.

The speaker left the town behind and began a climb up a nearby hill. As he rose the town shrank. At the same time the season began to change. Autumn, and its cool air, faded away and the summer returned. The rain continued as he climbed, as did the presence of birds. These two images are crucial to the speaker's understanding of happiness and childhood.

When he finally got to the top of the hill it was like he had reached heaven. He was far above the coolness of autumn and he became absorbed with memories of his childhood. The speaker recalled coming to his place with his mother and what it meant to him then. He hoped while on the hill that the joy he experienced will last throughout the year. Perhaps he will return to reclaim it when he turns thirty-one.

## Analysis of *Poem in October*

In the first stanza of '*Poem in October*' the speaker begins by stating that he was thirty years old. He describes his age in years of progress towards death, or heaven. Now that he's thirty, he's thirty years closer to death than he was when he was born. The next lines are perfect examples of the creative way that Thomas utilized nouns and adjectives. He described the shore as being "Priested" by herons. They are everywhere, lording over a land that is given a spiritual quality through Thomas' choice to use "Priested" rather than another word such as "ruled."

This is one of the many sights and sounds that Thomas' speaker woke up to on this particular morning. There was also the harbour to hear and the "neighbour wood." From there he might hear the sounds of the leaves rustling, or small animals running and walking.

These sounds are pleasing to the speaker's ear. They "beckon" or call him from his bed out into the world. Just like the morning, the water is [personified](#) in the next lines. It is said to be "praying." The waves dip and rise, as if kneeling in prayer. The scene, like many of those to follow, is overwhelming. There are sights and sounds, all of which the speaker wants to take in. These include the sounds of seabirds calling and the sound of boats knocking against the "webbed wall" of the dock.

It is at the end of these lines that the speaker declares he “set foot” in that “moment.” The town was “still sleeping” but as has been made abundantly clear, the rest of the world is not. What one is not sure of at this point is where the speaker is going.

In the Stanza Two, the speaker reminds the reader that it was his birthday. He turned thirty years old and he is going on a kind of celebratory walk. He takes note of the “water-/Birds” again and those which fly into and around the trees. They all seem to be centred around him, “flying” his “name” around the surrounding “farms and the white horses.” It is interesting that the speaker chose to introduce the farmland and the horses at this point. The setting is somewhat jumbled, as if the speaker is actually recalling a number of landscapes and weaving them together. Alternatively, the “white horses” could refer to the waves themselves.

The speaker is ready to pursue this walk for a while longer and rises in the “rainy autumn” to “walk...abroad.” He also explains how his movements impact the world around him. Just as he is getting up the waves crash and the heron “dived” into the sea.

In the final lines of this section the speaker leaves behind the town. He speaks of a “border” he has to cross and “gates” he has to open. Whether these are real or not, they were previously an impediment to his leaving the enclosed area. Now they are not. Just his place in the town closes behind him, the town begins to wake up.

In the Stanza Three, the area is completely alive and more like summer of spring than autumn. He expands this idea by referring to the “sun of October” as “Summery,” or like summer. It sits on the “hill’s shoulder,” another instance of personification. Now that one has progressed this far into the piece the reasoning behind Thomas’ constant use of personification makes sense. He wanted to make the entire world seem alive and relatable to the reader.

He describes the area as playing host to “fond climates and sweet singers.” The speaker mentions the birds again in these lines, as well as the “rain.” These are two of the main images of the poem which crop up again and again. The birds, just as they have in the previous stanzas, “Come in the morning.” They turn up in the same area the speaker walked in and wandered in. He takes note of the wind that wrings the rain and blows “cold / In the wood faraway” underneath him.

The use of the word “faraway” is interesting in these lines. The wind and rain are present, under him, but are also far from him. This can be understood in an alternative, more ephemeral way. The rain is far, in that it is “dreamlike” or mentally distant. This is more suitable to Thomas’ language and the setting he has created.

In the Stanza Four, the speaker returns again to the rain. It is now described as “Pale” and hanging over the “dwindling harbour.” He continues his progress up the hill. He gets farther and farther from the boats and dock where he began. The next lines are a pleasing jumble of images that are characteristic of Dylan Thomas

He is far beyond the boundaries of the town now and has stepped into his own nature inspired dream. It is a place in which he can “marvel” over the gardens of spring and summer. They are blooming “in the tall tales.” This gives the reader a hint about the reality of this world the speaker is describing. It is a “tall tale,” or a lie, not a real place he can actually explore.

The last lines of stanza five speak on how on the hill he could “marvel” at the “weather” but, as soon as he got up there it began to move off.

In Stanza Five is another reference in ‘*Poem in October*’ to the autumn turning into the summer. The speaker is consumed by the joy of the day, which is only enhanced by the beauty of the landscape. When he looks around him he can see all the wonders of summer. He remembers all the times he’s been here

before, as a child. His memories are coming back to him of a time when the world was made of color. There are “red currants” and “green chapels.” Everything was vivid and pure.

He remembers the mornings he came to the same hill with his “mother.” The speaker walked “through parables.” These are stories that have an underlying moral or spiritual lesson. They appear throughout the Bible and connected immediate to the “green chapels” in line ten. It is not clear why the speaker remembers the chapel as being green, perhaps because of the green landscape they were situated in.

As the poem nears its end in Stanza Six, the speaker dives deeper into his memories. He sees himself as being so different from the boy that they are separate people. He remembers the “his tears burned [his] cheeks.” The speaker feels the young boy’s heart as distant from his own. Through these lines the speaker is making clear that although he has returned to this place and is again experiencing joy, it is nothing compared to the “truth of...joy” he knew during the “Summertime” of his youth.

The “dead” of his past, the days of summer he can no longer reach, remind him of what his life used to be and the relationship he had with the world.

The world sang with “the mystery.” This is a kind of spiritual connection that the speaker stopped valuing as he aged. He remembers it now and sees it being contained specifically within the “water and singingbirds.” While meditating on the changes that have come over the man since his youth, the lines are not at all depressing in tone. They are as uplifting and celebratory as all those which preceded them.

Stanza Seven consists the last ten lines of ‘*Poem in October*’ which depict how the “joy” of his childhood returned to him on this thirtieth birthday and what that meant to the speaker. He was able on his birthday to go to this place. As it did previously, the weather turns around. He is under the sun and experiencing how the,

Joy of the long dead child sang burning.

He addresses the fact that this was again his “thirtieth / Year to heaven.” He has risen as close to heaven as he’s going to get at this point in his life. The speaker has left behind the autumn weather that surrounds and contains the “town below” and for his birthday has gone elsewhere, to a dreamland of warmth, joy and childhood. He asks in the last lines that his happiness remain on the hill, and be sung “in a year’s turning.”

**NB: Students are asked not to write Summary part in their Answer if not asked. This is also for their understanding and have a glimpse of the poem.**