

The Imagery of Nature in Thomas Dylan's "The Hunchback in the Park" and "Poem in October"

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyze two brilliant poems by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. In the first stage, the poet's brief historical background and literary career would be pointed out. Then, The Hunchback in the Park would be analyzed in terms of the poetic elements and literary devices. Thomas uses different elements of nature as an aesthetic description in his poetry. He loves nature and mixes social life events with the description of nature together. After that, Poem in October, which some critics believe to be his masterpiece, would be analyzed and interpreted. Finally, a brief comparison is made to show some similarities and differences between the two poems. The concentration would be on the language style that Thomas uses to better understand the initial and potential meaning of the two poems.

Keywords: Poetic Elements, Literary Devices, Nature, Social Life, and Language Style.

الملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل قصيدتين رائعتين للشاعر الويلزي ديلان توماس. في المرحلة الأولى سيتم الإشارة إلى الخلفية التاريخية للشاعر ومسيرته الأدبية. ثم يتم تحليل قصيدة الأحدب في الحديقة من حيث العناصر الشعرية والأدوات الأدبية. يستخدم توماس عناصر مختلفة من الطبيعة كوصف جمالي في شعره. الشاعر يحب الطبيعة ويمزج بين أحداث الحياة الاجتماعية ووصف الطبيعة معًا. وبعد ذلك سيتم تحليل وتفسير قصيدة أكتوبر التي يعتقد بعض النقاد أنها من روائعه. وأخيراً، تم إجراء مقارنة مختصرة لإظهار بعض أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين القصيدتين. سيكون التركيز على أسلوب اللغة التي يستخدمها توماس لفهم المعنى الأولي والمحتمل للقصيدتين بشكل أفضل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العناصر الشعرية، الوسائل الأدبية، الطبيعة، الحياة الاجتماعية، أسلوب اللغة.

پوخته:

نهم توئزینیهومیه نامانجی شیکردنیهوی دوو شیعرێ درهوشاوهی شاعیری ویلزێ دیلان توماسه. له قوناغی یهکهمدایاماره به پاشخانێ میژوویی کورت و ژبانی ئهدهبی شاعیر دهکریت. پاشان، شیعرێ قهیمورهکه له پارکهکهدا له رووی توخمه شیعرییهکان و نامرازه ئهدهبییهکانهوه شی کرانیهوه. توماس له شیعرهکانیدا توخمه جیاوازهکانی سروشت وەک وەسفێکی جوانناسی بهکاردههێنێت و سروشتی خوێشهوهیت و پرووداوهکانی ژبانی کۆمه‌لایهتی لهگه‌ڵ وەسفکردنی سروشت پێکه‌وه تێکه‌ڵ دهکات. دواى ئهوه شیعر له مانگی ئۆکتۆبه‌ردا که هه‌ندێک له رهنه‌گران پێیان وایه شاکارمه‌یه‌تی، شیکاری و لێکدانه‌وه‌یان بۆ دهکریت. له کۆتاییدا به‌راوردێک دهکریت بۆ ئهوهی هه‌ندێک لێکچوون و جیاوازی نێوان ئهوه دوو شیعره ده‌ربه‌که‌ویت. جه‌ختکردنه‌که له‌سه‌ر ئهوه شیوازه زمانه ده‌بیته که توماس بۆ باشت‌ر تێگه‌یه‌شتن له مانای سه‌ره‌تایی و ئه‌گه‌ری دوو شیعره که به‌کاری ده‌هێنێت.

کلیله وشه: توخمه شیعرییهکان، نامرازه ئهدهبییهکان، سروشت، ژبانی کۆمه‌لایهتی و شیوازی زمان.

INTRODUCTION

Dylan Thomas was born on 27th October 1914 in Swansea, South Wales. Thomas left school at sixteen and became a reporter for a local newspaper named “The South Wales Daily Post”. He left just after a year to devote his life to writing poetry and had his first book of poems called *Eighteen Poems* published in 1934 at the age of twenty and that was a great success for his literary life. The other works of Thomas include *Twenty-Five Poems* in 1936 and *Deaths and Entrances* in 1946. Although chiefly renowned for poems, Thomas also wrote his famous play for voices ‘*Under Milk Wood*’. His relatively short life which he lived wildly and characterized by alcoholism eventually killed him. Thomas worked for the BBC as a film scriptwriter during World War II and he was exempted from fighting due to a lung condition, but he continued to struggle financially—unable even to keep up with the taxes that he owed. He lived a controversial life and died at the early age of 39 in New York in 1953, but his body was brought back from New York to Laugharne where he was buried. Dylan Thomas says “I wanted to write poetry in the beginning because I had fallen in love with words. The first poems I knew were nursery rhymes and before I could read them for myself I had come to love the words of them. The words alone.” (Dylan Thomas’ Poetic Manifesto by Turner). According to Nagaraju, and Sessaiah who state that Dylan Thomas was motivated by the 19th-century Romantic Movement as many of the characteristics of the movement were noticed and reflected brightly in his poetry. He creates natural images and symbols from the surrounding nature to show the sentiments for life and death. The religious obligations and commitments are noticed in his poetry. Thomas mostly focuses on the childhood period as a time of merry and joyfulness. This period is compared to the grass as it is green as a small child. (6)

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Different natural elements have been used by Thomas in ‘*The Hunchback in the Park*’ and ‘*Poem in October*’. Why does the poet use nature and its components in these two poems? This research finds out these elements in both poems and compare the function and denotation of the terms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper seeks to ensure the following related questions:

- 1- What is the purpose of the use of natural elements and what is the semantic impact of nature on both poems?
- 2- What are the similarities and differences between the selected elements in both poems as well as the personality of the characters?

Imagery of Nature in Two Thomas Dylan’s Poems

1- “The Hunchback in the Park” from the lens of natural elements

The Hunchback in the Park consists of seven stanzas each of six lines. It is one of the significant poems of Dylan Thomas which is about a man who is hunchbacked as it is stated in the title. This man is mocked and laughed at by the truant children in the park. The first line of the first stanza is the repetition of the title. Here, the speaker introduces the Hunchback, ‘A solitary mister’, who is in the park from the opening until it is closed. The word ‘dark’ gives a pessimistic impression and it may

refer to the life of the Hunchback which is not comfortable. There are also some other pessimistic words in the first stanza as: solitary, lock, and somber as well as the Hunch back. So, from the very first stanza, the poem does not give a promising future. The first and the last line of this stanza are rhymed with 'park' and 'dark' and the same rhyming words are repeated in the last stanza.

The hunchback in the park
A solitary mister
Propped between trees and water
From the opening of the garden lock
That lets the trees and water enter
Until the Sunday somber bell at dark. (Thomas, 1953)

In the above stanza, the lock has given two different meanings. Firstly, the lock of the gate of the park and secondly, the lock of the canal that goes into the garden. These denotations, that Thomas uses, enrich the power of the meaning of the poem. The Hunchback is portrayed to the reader through his appearance, not by his name or identity. He is just mentioned as a hunchback. This man lives in solitude and does not communicate with others except when it comes to his imagination. He can meet a perfect woman only through his imagination in the night when people are all away and the door of the park is locked which means that there is no one left in the park. The reality that no one mentions his real name neither the speaker nor the children, may be the result of his solitary life that the speaker announces in the first stanza. People do not look at him as a normal person especially truant children torment him and play with his feelings. These truant children seem enjoying the situation of teasing the poor Hunchback. In this way, he is abandoned by society and he perhaps hates all humanity because of the action of a group of children. The speaker shows an image of the poor man's hatred toward these boys. When he hears them, he flees and tries to get away from them and seeks a calmer place to stay.

The park seems an ideal place for this tramp otherwise he would not have visited it every day, but at the same time, he is not comfortable there. Thus, a question raises why does the Hunchback visit the park daily while he is always mocked? It is perhaps because he is displaced and has nowhere else to go to. Parks are visited by people to have some time to rest generally and to spend a peaceful time, but the situation seems completely different concerning the Hunchback. Though he eats bread and drinks water in the park to survive, He does not have any other good activities to enjoy there. Instead, he always suffers from a certain group of truants.

The second stanza shows the hunchback in a low social class. He eats bread and drinks water and then his only shelter is described as a dog kennel. The speaker may criticize society for not respecting such a man who has some disabilities. This man is in the park which is a general place that people often visit to have fun, but here, the image is the opposite for this poor hunchback, he is tormented by the children of the city. The speaker mentions the word 'chained' twice. Firstly, for the cup which is chained in the fountain basin, and secondly for the Hunchback who is declared not chained in the kennel. It shows that the cup is brought to the park, but the Hunchback is free and no one has forced him to go there. By the second 'chained', the speaker may also refer to the Hunchback's thoughts and dreams at night that can travel long distances and imagine whatever he wishes. Sherry believes that One of those frameworks, inadvertently experienced but afterward wryly recognized, was "hormonal

poetics": here was a verse rising just like the chemical involvement of youth - the capable but puzzling sense of cadence and pictures, music of meaning similarly compelling but vague.” (About Time: A Modernist Coda for Thomas, 233)

Eating bread from a newspaper
Drinking water from the chained cup
That the children filled with gravel
In the fountain basin where I sailed my ship
Slept at night in a dog kennel
But nobody chained him up. (Thomas, 1953)

The status of Hunchback while he is eating and drinking is described as a captive who loses his freedom. Here, Thomas uses many things which are man-made like a newspaper, a chained cup, and a ship or a paper ship. Brand says that “The lines” Eating bread from.../Drinking water from... are grammatical rhymes. Repetition of form lends a unifying chant effect” (Structure Signals in “The Hunchback in the Park, 198). In contrast, in the third stanza, He comes back to nature while describing the hunchback’s arrival to the park as early as birds arrive and his sitting as still as water. Comparing him to the birds perhaps shows the poor man as innocent. These truant boys try to tease him by calling him ‘hey mister’ and when he hears them, he flees away. It shows his hatred towards these disturbing children. Society has made him a savage person who cannot deal with others normally. The speaker calls the hunchback’s shelter a dog kennel. This description shows the unfair treatment of all people towards this poor man who is extremely dehumanized.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker continues to describe the torture that the man receives whatever he does even for a little movement or a little action like shaking his paper, the children laugh at him and make fun of him. He further describes the park as bushy with trees of willow which are the best protection and the best guard for the Hunchback to prevent himself from being seen not only by the disturbing children but also by the park keeper who seemingly does not like him. Here, nature is shown in a beautiful way that becomes the only friend of man. It protects and hides him from the park keeper and the children. In the sixth line, the speaker shows the man when he holds a stick and perhaps he takes it to protect himself and uses it as a gun or shield against the surrounding people who all seem as his enemy.

The Hunchback finally finds a refuge in the natural world to stay alone and the speaker uses two different metaphors here. Firstly, he describes him as the old dog sleeper. The use of the definite article ‘the’ in front of ‘old dog sleeper’, perhaps shows the Hunchback as to be known by this name by the others and the use of the adjective ‘old’, mostly shows him as an aged person, while ‘dog sleeper’ may be used because of his kennel which is for sure must not be big and that is why he is described as a dog. Secondly, Thomas uses an interesting image to describe the imagination of the speaker, the bay, as he imagines the boys’ actions as tigers.

In the sixth stanza, the tone of the situation changes from a noisy and chaotic park to a calmer one when night comes and all the children leave the park, and the status of the Hunchback also changes. While he is busy most of the daytime seeking refuge to get away from the truant boys of the city, the Hunchback is now free at night and he is given a chance to think and imagine. When he cannot have

perfect people to deal with in the daytime, he resorts to his imagination and finds a perfect woman whom he needs to live within reality.

Made all day until bell time
A woman figure without fault
Straight as a young elm
Straight and tall from his crooked bones
That she might stand in the night
After the locks and chains. (Thomas, 1953)

Here, Thomas shows the power of imagination which can transcend all the realities in the poem when the hunchback imagines and creates a perfect woman figure who does not mock him and this woman stays with him at night after the park has been locked. This illustrates that this man may not like isolation and separation while he is isolated by others. He needs to be talked to or to be looked after at least emotionally. When everyone abandons him in the daytime, through his imagination, he can bring his ideal woman into his life. According to Freud who states that: "the writer's choice of subject matter then seems to be dictated by unfulfilled childhood wishes as well as by a "recent provoking occasion"; past and present are projected toward the future through the medium of art. The artist dreams aloud and in public. But what is it that makes for the special pleasure we derive from the artist's depiction of painful or unpleasant events?" (420) The Hunchback lives in solitude life not because he wants it, but because the others treat him this way. Everyone is rude to him and he is not respected at all. Therefore, to create a perfect world to live in, he resorts to his world of fantasy and, there, he can easily find the perfect woman that he needs.

The last stanza shows the continuation of the Hunchback's ailing life by the children who do not let him have a rest until he is back in his kennel. At the same time, Thomas continues to portray the beauty of nature by using words such as birds, grass, trees, and the lake.

2- Nature and its function in 'Poem in October'

Dylan Thomas wrote Poem in October on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday in 1944. The title, to some extent, reveals the main theme of the poem because the poet himself was born in October. It is made up of seven stanzas of free verse. Each of the stanzas regularly is made up of ten lines. Daiches says that "Thomas was a remarkably conscientious craftsman for whom meaning was bound up with pattern and order. No modern poet in English has had a keener sense of form or has handled stanzas and verse paragraphs". (350) The main theme of the poem is concerned with the poet himself and the natural environment of his home town Swansea. The poem reveals the poet's personal feelings and emotions toward his native town. States that "He is one of the few modern poets who can be read aloud to a large, mixed audience, with a confidence in his 'going down'. There is a massive emotional directness in his poems that at once comes across". (Fraser,4) that The first stanza describes the moment when Thomas wakes up in his native town of Swansea on his thirtieth birthday. He wakes up so early in the morning and walks through the town describing the weather beautifully and it is clear that he is admired by nature especially because it is his hometown where he spends his childhood. The significance of nature and its impact on the speaker's feelings is seen as he portrays the surroundings of the town. The water is personified by the human quality of praying. There is also

personification of the town as the poet states in the last line of the second stanza that it awoke and what he means by the town is its inhabitants. The water is also characterized religiously when Thomas describes it as praying in the first stanza. It perhaps shows the importance of water or the beauty of the scene for him. It is too early in the morning because he states that people are still asleep. The poem is a symbol of his thoughts and feelings toward his present life which is quite opposite to his joyful childhood in the small town of Swansea.

Thomas, in the second stanza, refers to the environment of the town wonderfully and beautifully and mentions some birds like water – birds and the heron. Through this poem, Thomas refers to different types of environments which indicate different seasons. While the man leaves the town, it is raining. Here, the speaker tells us that it seems to be autumn, but in the third stanza, he imagines and thinks of the weather as if it is summer when the sun shines on the hills around Swansea.

In the third stanza, the poet introduces a completely different environment on the same morning. The weather of the hills, as he thinks, is different compared to the weather of the woods that he has just passed. Now, the sky is clear and there is not any cloud as compared to the previous scene which was a heavy rain. The only cloud that is seen by the poet is composed only of a large number of larks flying altogether in the sky. Then, the power of nature overwhelms Thomas and makes him even wonder about the situation that he experiences when the sweet singers come in the morning. In the fifth stanza, Thomas finds himself in a different weather and as the weather seems different to him, the situation also changes for him. He moves from his present to the past. He suddenly remembers his childhood days with his mother. He uses the word ‘the other’ for the air outside the town as it is completely something different.

In the sixth stanza, Thomas uses the sense of sight. He remembers the tears he shed when he was a child and imagines how it burned his cheeks. This situation shows how Thomas longings and wishes to go back to those past days when he was, as a child, experiencing real joy. Meanwhile, He experiences an emotion that he had in his childhood. Korg thinks that Thomas’s poetry is derived from his instant imagination when he is concerned with nature and time as well as the mystery of life and death (59). It is the impact of time that forces the poet to think about the past. Perhaps, Dylan is afraid of the process of aging while he thinks of his childhood as a wonderful time. The last stanza shows how the poet describes the real joy of his childhood and remembers his birthday pleasantly and in the last lines, he hopes for the “turning year” to be in the same hill around Swansea. The poet’s thoughts are ambivalent. By now, it has become noon and he still thinks that it is summer, though he clearly states in the title that it is October. He wishes for the same experience for his next birthday. It illustrates that he has passed a joyful day that he wishes to come across again. This situation also implies Thomas’s optimistic view of the future.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, nature and its elements are dominant tools in both poems. Different objects of nature such as clouds, water, trees, wind, birds and et cetera are the raw material of Thomas's poetry. And there is also a great role of his imagination as the main source of his creative power. If we take a close look at the poem 'The Hunchback in the Park', there is a pessimistic tone from the start of the poem. It is concerned with moral issues and some social illnesses are unconsciously revealed. There is only one hope for this man to feel comfortable and that is through the capacity of his imagination. Our sympathy grows, throughout the poem, towards the hunchback when the torture continues from the opening of the day until night falls. Here, Thomas is concerned with the present issue which is the life of the Hunchback. In contrast, In 'Poem in October', the speaker 'in his present time, remembers his past days of childhood and wishes to go back to those days which he declares that they were periods of true pleasure and enjoyment. At the same time, the speaker hopes to relive this particular moment of life. What shines through these two poems is Thomas's imaginative use of imagery and the fundamental importance he placed on the rich sounds of the words themselves. The main similarity between the two poems that can be seen is the use of the same elements of nature like water, trees as well as some different kinds of birds. In both poems, Thomas uses the early morning image to start the events of the poems and then the actions develop and pass through the other times of the day. Both of the poems are concerned generally with the individuals' lives and the speaker of the two poems is first person point of view. Finally, one of the main differences between the two poems is that the main theme of Poem in October is concerned with the life of the poet himself, while in 'The Hunchback in the Park', the main theme is concerned with the life and issues of the others as part of his past or childhood. However, both poems are concerned with the ties of men with nature.

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