



Fern Hill by Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas

- Dylan Thomas was born in Wales in 1914 and died in 1953.
- He left school at the age of 16 to pursue a literary career.
- He was famous for lyrical poetry.





Historical context

- The poem speaks of the beauty of an actual place named Fern Hill, where Thomas spent time as a child.
- The poem is a reflection on his happy times at this place.
- Makes it an autobiographical poem.



Summary of the content

- The speaker reflects on the joy he experienced during his childhood at Fern Hill in the countryside.
- The poem captures the pastoral beauty of Fern Hill and the freedom the boy had there.
- The speaker says that when he was young, he did not realise that the days at Fern Hill would be so few. He was not aware of his own innocence and the beauty around him.

Structure

- No definite structure > it mimics how a person recalls the past in small pieces at a time.
- Can be divided into 2 parts:
 1. The first 3 stanzas > the poet's experience as a child on the farm.
 2. The last 3 stanzas > focus on the loss of innocence

- Song-like rhythm due to:

- the regulation of syllables
- repetition of images
- repetition of sounds and syntax
- assonance and alliteration.
- The choice of diction
- word order
- Enjambment
- Half rhymes + internal rhymes



SOUND

Fern Hill

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.



**And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.**





**All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.
And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
Flying with the ricks, and the horses
Flashing into the dark,**

**And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.**





**And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,
I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace,**



Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.



'Fern Hill' as a song



Themes

- The celebration of childhood and innocence.
- The beauty and harmony of nature (Being one with nature).
- The power of time
Time grants periods of happiness.
Nothing lasts forever.
All pleasures comes to an end.
- The end of childhood > growing up



- 1) Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
- 2) About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
- 3) The night above the dingle starry,
- 4) Time let me hail and climb
- 5) Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
- 6) And honoured among wagons I was prince of apple towns
- 7) And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
- 8) Trail with daisies and barley
- 9) Down the rivers of the windfall light.

- Describing his surroundings on a typical day at his Aunt's farm.
- Easy > no cares or worries Boughs = branches
- Lilting = singing > songlike > the house was happy > personified (Almost like the house had magical qualities)
- Simile > grass is green because it is alive, in the same way the house is also alive
- Dingle = forest starry > stars in the night sky
- hail = to call out to someone in greeting heydays = best of times golden < positive connotation
- Time > written with capital letter > Time is personified as a powerful and godlike person
- Time gave him the opportunity to have these good and perfect times (golden times). Time is seen as a playmate.
- He sees himself king / prince of everything he sees.
- And once below = once upon a time lordly = ruler of everything windfall = a stroke of luck
- Gives the impression that it was an idyllic time (Like the Garden of Eden) >> The boy is in harmony with nature.

10) And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
11) About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
12) In the sun that is young once only,
13) Time let me play and be
14) Golden in the mercy of his means,
15) And green and golden I was hunter and herdsman, the calves
16) Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
17) And the sabbath rang slowly
18) In the pebbles of the holy streams

- Green = connotation of young and inexperienced famous = famous ruler
- He was young, inexperienced + no problems > Link between childhood and nature with the word 'green'
- He was a ruler over everything he could see.
- We are young only once
- Time > personified > allowed him to enjoy his childhood.
- Mercy of his means > childhood cannot last forever. Time tries to be merciful as long as possible > to stay a child as long as possible > but eventually we all grow up.
- Green and golden = innocent and perfect hunters = hunter herdsman = looking after cattle
- G-alliteration > emphasises his innocence and the perfection of his childhood.
- In his mind all the creatures obeyed him
- c- alliteration > emphasises the fact that the creatures obeyed him.
- Fernhill is not only seen as a place of childhood adventure, but as a sacred / holy place.
- Pebbles of a holy stream > metaphor: compares the ringing of bells to the sound of the water running across the stones in the stream.

19) All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
 20) Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
 21) And playing, lovely and watery
 22) And fire green as grass.
 23) And nightly under the simple stars
 24) As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
 25) All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
 26) Flying with the ricks, and the horses
 27) Flashing into the dark,

- It was long summer days that were beautiful and seemed to never end.
- Fields high as a house > Simile + hyperbole: The height of the hay is compared to the height of the house
- the tunes from the chimneys: Everything is so magical and perfect that even the chimneys 'sing' > personification
- The air seemed like a kind of water – full of wonderful things > playing was easy and magical
- Simile: The fire is as vivid as the green colour of grass > this shows how vivid his childhood memories are.
- As the speaker fell asleep he imagined that the entire farm was being carried away by owls into dreamland with him.
- All the moon long = All night long nightjars= birds that sing at night and are messengers of change ricks = stacks of hay
blessed = religious tone
- The whole night long the speaker hears the night sounds
- The sound of the nightjars signals the beginning of change / maturity and the loss of innocence.
- The horses move around in the dark and the shadows > looks like they are flashes of light > symbolic meaning > this flash is the light of awareness and signals the loss of paradise, freedom and innocence > the boy is growing up.

28) And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
29) With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
30) Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
31) The sky gathered again
32) And the sun grew round that very day.
33) So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
34) In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
35) Out of the whinnying green stable
36) On to the fields of praise.

- dew = early morning wanderer = traveller
- And then to awake > This is the turning point. He is no longer young and carefree.
- The farm is personified as a traveller returning with the dew and a rooster, announcing that it is morning **BUT!** It could also mean that when the child wakes up, the farm looks different to him. He is like a wanderer on the farm and feels disconnected.
- Cock = rooster > is an allusion to the betrayal of Jesus in the Christian Faith. A rooster crowed when Jesus was betrayed. (We get the idea that Time is betraying the boy...how? Time is causing the boy to grow up.
- ...was Adam and maiden > Biblical allusion > Refers to the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible > The speaker implies that Fern Hill is like the Garden of Eden – a paradise where a child feels at one with nature.
- He watches as the sun was rising and the day was being 'created' > Alluding to the creation story: The separation of light and darkness
- First spinning place > The Garden of Eden. The speaker says that the new awareness of the world that a maturing child feels must be similar to the awareness that Adam and Eve had after they were dismissed from the Garden.
- Spellbound horses= they are mesmerised by the beauty surrounding them > Fern Hill

37) And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
38) Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
39) In the sun born over and over,
40) I ran my heedless ways,
41) My wishes raced through the house high hay
42) And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
43) In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
44) Before the children green and golden
45) Follow him out of grace,

- gay house = happy house > it is his happy place
- This shows that the speaker is moving towards acceptance of the loss of his childhood's freedom.
- heedless = not paying attention
- In endless summer days he ran freely without any concerns.
- His dreams and imaginations are running wild
- H-alliteration > to emphasise his excitement
- Trades = skilled work
- He did not realise at the time that this happy situation would not be forever.
- As we grow older we lose the wonder and innocence of childhood and the ability to feel the excitement that children feel.
- Children are depicted as green and golden to represent their youth, their tenderness and their golden innocence.

46) Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
47) Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
48) In the moon that is always rising,
49) Nor that riding to sleep
50) I should hear him fly with the high fields
51) And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
52) Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
53) Time held me green and dying
54) Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

- lamb + white = connotations of innocence
- Time...by the shadow of my hand > time will take my hand and change me > As a child the speaker did not think that life would ever be any different.
- Swallow thronged loft = an attic full of birds
- Swallows > symbolic of experiences that changes a child's innocence.
- ...lamb white daysswallow thronged loft > suggests the transition of the speaker into the world of adulthood.
- Looking back on his life, it felt like his childhood suddenly ended. Maybe he feels that Time betrayed him??
- The poet is mourning the end of his childhood. He feels that although he is an adult, he still feels 'green', inexperienced. This suggests that people do not necessarily become wiser when they grow older.
- Chains = adulthood
- The speaker has made peace with his loss of freedom and accepts that it is the natural way of life.

TONE

(How the poet feels)

- The tone in the first 5 stanzas illustrate joy and happiness
- In the last stanza it shifts dramatically from joy to lamentation,

MOOD

(How we feel when we read the poem)

- Nostalgic mood / longing