



Fern Hill¹

The horror of war drove Thomas to recollect the remembered happiness of the early years of his adolescence in this poem, named after Carmarthenshire farm where he used to spend all the summers of his childhood. This deepening preoccupation with the past, whether of childhood or adolescence, is remarkable in a man in his late twenties. It is not simply a matter of nostalgia, but a quest for happiness.

Dylan Thomas
Deaths and Entrances
(1946)

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting² house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry³,
Time let me hail and climb⁴
5 Golden in the heydays⁵ of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly⁶ had the trees and leaves
Trail⁷ with daisies and barley⁸
Down the rivers of the windfall light⁹.

10 And as I was green and carefree¹⁰, famous among the barns¹¹
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,
15 And green and golden I was huntsman¹² and herdsman¹³, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
And the sabbath¹⁴ rang slowly
In the pebbles¹⁵ of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay¹⁶
20 Fields high as the house, the tunes¹⁷ 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 owls¹⁸ were bearing the farm away¹⁹,
25 All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars²⁰
Flying with the ricks²¹, 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
30 Shining, it was Adam and maiden²²,
The sky gathered again²³
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place²⁴, the spellbound²⁵ horses walking warm
35 Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants²⁶ by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over²⁷,
40 I ran my heedless ways²⁸,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades²⁹, that time allows

- 1 Fern Hill. Colle delle felci.
- 2 lilting. Piena di canto.
- 3 dingle starry. Valletta stellata.
- 4 Time let ... climb. Il tempo mi lasciava esultare e arrampicarmi.
- 5 heydays. Bei giorni.
- 6 lordly. Sovranamente.
- 7 had ... Trail. Feci trascinare alberi e foglie.
- 8 daisies and barley. Margherite e orzo.
- 9 Down ... light. Lungo i fiumi di luce dei frutti caduti per il vento.
- 10 carefree. Spensierato.
- 11 barns. Granai.
- 12 huntsman. Cacciatore.
- 13 herdsman. Mandriano.
- 14 sabbath. Giorno festivo di riposo.
- 15 pebbles. Ciottoli.
- 16 hay. Fieno.
- 17 tunes. Melodie.
- 18 owls. Gufi.
- 19 were ... away. Si portavano via la fattoria.
- 20 nightjars. Caprimulgi.
- 21 ricks. Mucchi di fieno.
- 22 maiden. Vergine.
- 23 The sky ... again. Il cielo si addensava nuovamente.
- 24 spinning place. Spazio rotante.
- 25 spellbound. Incantati.
- 26 pheasants. Fagiani.
- 27 In the sun ... over. Al sole nato più volte.
- 28 heedless ways. Strade spensierate.
- 29 trades. Traffici.



In all his tuneful turning³⁰ so few and such morning songs
 Before the children green and golden
 45 Follow him out of grace,

 Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
 Up to the swallow thronged loft³¹ by the shadow of my hand,
 In the moon that is always rising,
 Nor that riding to sleep³²
 50 I should hear him fly with the high fields
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land³³.
 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.

- 30 In all ... turning. In tutti i suoi giri melodiosi.
 31 thronged loft. Solaio affollato.
 32 riding to sleep. Cavalcando nel sonno.
 33 childless land. Terra senza bambini.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the poem and match the highlighted words with their Italian translation.

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1 vitelli | 6 rondine |
| 2 mi addormentavo | 7 abbaiano |
| 3 importava | 8 mercé |
| 4 che nutriva | 9 corno |
| 5 strumenti | 10 carri |

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ the poem again and match each caption with the corresponding stanza.

- | |
|---|
| 1 The child's perception of the life existing within nature during the night: stanza |
| 2 The lost world of childhood recreated thanks to the recollection of the farm landscapes, birds and beasts: stanza |
| 3 The child's different perception of time: stanza |
| 4 The world's coming back to its original beauty with the new day: stanza |
| 5 Intimations of mutability and mortality: stanza |
| 6 The poet introduces a tale about his childhood: stanza |

3 FILL in the gaps with the details about the poet's remembrance concerning his childhood.

Thomas's childhood tale is told not 'once upon' but 'once (1) a time'. The child is the only person in the poem: he used to wander all around the (2) perceiving the (3) passing slowly during the happy days. The boy's excited feelings in the fields were created by beasts like the (4) singing to his horn and rural sounds like the tunes from the chimneys. (5) , too, and its natural worlds of owls and nightjars protected the (6) , who went on living in the family farm even while (7) There were, however, indirect suggestions of mutability and mortality, for soon came lengthening (8) and migrating (9) at the end of summer.

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

4 LOOK at the layout and say how the poem is organised.



5 UNDERLINE examples of assonance, alliteration, run-on lines which weave a musical pattern. What is the effect produced by these musical devices? Tick as appropriate.

- ☐ They contribute to create precise images.
- ☐ They create a great ease and rapidity of movement, combined with a precision of form.
- ☐ They create a difficult poetic pattern.

6 FOCUS on the childish images and visions characterised by innocence, immediacy and excitement in the poem. The most important devices employed by the poet to create the boy's ecstatic movement in his 'heydays' are

- the association of images generally belonging to different semantic areas;
- the magic, religious relationship established between the child and the surrounding nature;
- time perceived from the child's point of view.

Complete the table below with all the relevant expressions linked to these devices. What do the image associations point out? Is nature conveyed with realism by the poet? How is time perceived by the child?

Associations of image	Magic relationship with nature	New perception of time

7 CONCENTRATE on the fourth stanza where the farm is turned into an Eden by the poet.

- 1 What is the farm made the symbol of?
- 2 What is the theme of the stanza?

COMPETENCE: CONTRASTING AUTHORS

8 STATE whether Dylan Thomas shared William Blake's (→ 4.9) and William Wordsworth's (→ 4.11) creed about childhood.

9 DISCUSS. Compare *Fern Hill* by Dylan Thomas to *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* by William Butler Yeats (→ 6.13 and Text Bank 77). They share the theme of memory: both poems highlight the importance of the faculty of remembering which allows man both to save his past emotions and sensations and to accept a present, which may be negative. Consider the poet's mood, his imagery and his message.