

Biblical Elements in the Select Poems of Dylan Thomas

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Abstract: - The central theme of the paper is life, his contemporaries, a little bit about his works, the impact of Bible on his poetry. The paper also highlights the movements he was associated. The paper is about the elements of Bible in his poetry. His poetry is religious, obscure. He was greatly influenced by surrealist and apocalyptic movement. Dylan Thomas's poetry is about procreation, birth and death, that is why he is called a womb tomb poet. Dylan Thomas composed a Sonnet sequence 'Alterwise by Owl-light'. This paper is about the brief introduction of his sonnet sequence. The references of the Bible which have come in the poetry of Dylan Thomas have been given. The short introduction of the poem i.e. 'fern Hill', 'Vision and Prayer', 'if I were Tickled by the Rub of Love', 'Light Breaks where no Sun shines', and 'Holy spring' has been given.

Keywords: Bible, symbol, imagery, Genesis, night, flood.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born at 5 cmwdonkin Drive uplands Swansea and Wales on 27 October 1914. His father David John Thomas was an English master at Swansea Grammar School. His father had poetic ambitions. David introduced his son to poetry. His mother's name was Florence. Thomas learned native Welsh from his mother. Dylan's mother on the other hand was a staunch Christian Chapelgoer. She imposed some of her religious influence on her gifted son. Florence gave Dylan her totally unformulated love of God, in complete contrast to his father explicit atheism. He worked as a trainee reporter and wrote for local newspaper in 1931-32. He married Caitlin Mechanmara the daughter of his old friend Augustus John. He had three children Llewellyn, Aeron and Colm. During World War II he worked as a documentary film script writer in 1940-44. Thomas worked for the BBC during the war. His voice had an exceptionally mellifluous quality that survives in many recordings. He was the broadcaster also. He died in November 9 1953 at the age of 39 after heavy drinking in New York. Dylan was Fraudian, neo-romantic, surrealist and apocalyptic. Apocalyptic movement believed that European civilization was destined to collapse. It was a reaction against political commitment of such 1930's oxford University verse writers as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis Macneice and C.D Lewis and further rejected adherence to all social literary tenets. Dylan Thomas kathleen Raine, David Gascoyne, George Barker, Henry Treece, G.S. Fraser, Vernon Watkins and Herbert Read. Developing the movement during 1940's, Surrealist movement was founded by the French poet and critic Andre Breton began in 1920's. It was based on unconscious dreams, sleep, drug etc. Legouis and Cazamian remarks:

"Nurtured on Joyce, the Bible and Freud, Dylan Thomas derived his original strength from that threefold source obscure incantatory a foreigner to the logic and cohesion of reasoning, he produced from Alchemy of words and structured combinations a strange poetry that acts in the manner of a sonorous spell". 1 His poems are obscure and ambiguous packed with metaphor and symbolic poetic imagery. One of the reasons of obscurity may be impact of Welsh origin. His poems were published in the volumes of poetry like Eighteen Poems, Deaths and Entrances, Twenty Five Poems and Map of Love. Bible's Old Testament is a collection of thirty nine books. New Testament consists of twenty seven books. The Old Testament writings tell about the great things God did for the people of Israel and his plan for them as his chosen people to bring his blessings to the whole world. There are three types of writings in the New Testament; Gospels, History and Letters. The accounts of the life and the teaching of Jesus together with the help of teaching the life in early church. As it sought to live faithfully as the followers of Jesus are collected in the New Testament. 'The Alterwise by Owl light' is a sonnet sequence of ten sonnets. The subject matter of these sonnets is Jesus, Hercules, the stars, zodiac etc. These sonnets are about the struggle of the poet with his God. The Sonnet is about the mystery suspense and imminent disaster. One of the lyrics is 'Light Breaks where no Sun Shines'. The lyric was published in Eighteen Poems, 1934. This lyric is one of the obscure poems of Dylan Thomas. The poem is a reflection of genesis. There is biblical myth of genesis in it along with myths of resurrection and rebirth. There is a combination of Darkness and light in the first stanza. There was darkness and chaos. God produced the light. Then creation took place so the light broke even before the sun was created. "Light break where no sun shines; where no

International Journal of Science, Engineering and Management (IJSEM)
Vol 3, Issue 3, March 2018

sea suns waters of the heart push in their tides” (2) God first created light (day) and darkness (night) then sky, earth, sea plants, the sun, the moon, birds, animals and in the last human being. So the whole universe was completed. By the seventh day god finished what he had been doing and stopped working, then God commanded: “Let there be light”- and light appeared, God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness and he named the light “day” and the darkness “night”. (3) Genesis 1:3-4-5 ‘If I were Tickled by the Rub of Love’ is a womb tomb period Poem. The basic image in the poem ‘rub’ is of course, Shakespearian and carries echoes of hamlet's soliloquy, with its theme of death and sexual disgust “I would not fear the Apple nor the flood” the speaker says, which means that he would not fear the loss of Innocence nor the subsequent punishment. Both “apple” and “flood” refer to the book of genesis, the sin in Eden and the punishment.

"If I were tickled by the rub of love.

A rooking girl who stole me for her side
 Broke through he straws, breaking my bandaged string
 If the red tickle the as the cattle calve
 Still said to scratch laughter from my lung,
 I would not fear the Apple or the flood
 Nor the bad blood of spring". (4)

It must be stressed though that according to "genesis" the flood was not the punishment for the sin committed in Eden namely the eating of the forbidden fruit the Apple. The punishment for this sin was the expulsion from Paradise whereas the flood was God's punishment for the corruption of the earth not for the sin but for wickedness and corruption.

"When the lord saw how wicked everyone on earth was and how evil their thoughts all the time". Genesis 6:5 (5)

The poem ‘Fern Hill’ is about his childhood holidays spent in farm of ann Jones. In the lamb white days means in the happy and innocent days of childhood or boyhood. The lamb suggests innocent and purity the word white also suggest purity. Lamb is symbol of sacrifice and Jesus.

“And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, behold the Lamb of God”. John 1:36 (6)

White is a symbol of purity, righteousness and holiness.

"Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days that time would take me

Upon shallow thronged left by the shadow of my hand" (7)

The poem ‘Vision and Prayer’ consists of two parts of each six stanzas. In the poem ‘Vision and Prayer’ if there was any doubt left about the references being biblical and include to Christ, The stanzas of the first part are shaped like diamonds, while those of the second part are shaped like either hourglasses or wings, dove's wings perhaps like the symbol of Christ. Diamonds reflect light, thus they represent the vision of the title, while the wings (or hourglasses represent the prayer. Or so it seems at least, for at a closer

look, the two parts say the same. Chriastinity serves here as metaphor for something secular, yet holi. As elsewhere in Dylan's works, religious metaphor is used for holy security. In the poem, ‘Vision and Prayer’

“In the birth bloody room unknown
 to the burn and turn of time
 And the heart print of man
 Bows no baptism
 But dark alone
 Blessing on
 The wild

The child.” 8The Christ-like infant, then, is born on the other side of the "wren's bone" wall. A wren is a domestic bird, thus, the wing shape of the stanzas in part two is suggested, and in stanza two, it is even a "winged wall." The poem "Holy spring" is motivated by one German nightly air raid during World War II. It is not a poem about war. Instead, it celebrates holy life, the joy of waking after a night of air raids to see the holy sun's, or holy nature s creating of a new, and holi day. Holy metaphor is necessary for this purpose. The poem consists of two twelve- line stanzas each of which is a 17th century conceit. The first is the conceit of the hospital; the second is that of the sun. In the poem 'Holy Spring’

“Out of a bed of love

When that immortal hospital made one more move to soothe
 The cureless counted body,
 And ruin and his causes...

To glow after the god stoning night

And I am struck as lonely as a holy maker by the sun." 9

The “bed of love” is like a "hospital" that is eternal, or "immortal," a word that also applies to the "bed of love" because of the creative qualities of this. Further, bed is the hospital for the "cureless" whose days, dust, or "body" are "counted" meaning that whoever is in this hospital bed is mortal, even dying. Although this body is incurable, "one more moves to soothe" it may be carried out.

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Vol 3, Issue 3, March 2018

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(8) Ibid. 96.

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