

RAGE AGAINST THAN A TOPHOBIA IN DYLAN THOMAS' DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT

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ABSTRACT

Human life is transient with a series of struggles and stigmas on earth. To get along with life, he has to be negligent of worries and stride forward in the path of joy and cheer. The present paper throws light upon the celebration of life despite its fragility by the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas in his poem Do not go gentle into that Good Night, a dark poem concerning itself with the end of life. The in-depth analysis of the themes of the poem delves into the underlying reality of life and the significance of living the life to the full so that the life bestowed upon would be meaningful. Death should not be approached as an inevitable happening instead to rage against it. The passionate intensity of the poem commands entire humanity to hang on to life and defy death as long as possible. The symbols associated with death have been widely used to bring in the morbidity and mortality of death. The poem starts with the tone of universality narrowing down towards the end into the stream of specificity. The analysis ends with a note of optimism promising the spirit and energy prevailing in human life.

Keywords: Human life, Transient, Death, Rage

INTRODUCTION

No man on earth can escape death irrespective of profession, social status or personal history. This sense of mortality associated with human life drives men to the state of madness ending in thanatophobia, the fear of death. This fear keeps mankind inactive beyond his capability to achieve goals. The poem, *Do not go gentle into that Good Night* by Dylan Thomas was written while considering his father David John Thomas' impending death, who breathed his last in 1952, the year after Dylan published the poem. The narrator, though sounds anonymous, has mentioned a 'father' in the final stanza of the poem that makes the readers specifically believe that it is Dylan's father. The poem is a villanelle, a form of poetry conceived in seventeenth century France with six stanzas; first five stanzas as Tercets and final stanza as a quatrain. It has withstood the test of time for the primary reason that it deals with the universality of the human attainment of death.

Thanatophobia: A Background View

Thanatophobia refers to the fear of death or the fear of dying process. The American psychiatric association does not consider Thanatophobia as a disorder, but as a general anxiety. According to the association, the symptoms of thanatophobia may be anxiety, distress and dread. Though the symptoms do not seem to be present all the time, they may be noticed in a person when he/she starts to think about death of him/her or their loved ones. The physical symptoms related to thanatophobia, in due course of time, will lead to several other emotional symptoms such as anger, guilt, persistent worry, agitation, sadness and avoidance of friends or family for a long period of time. Thanatophobia occurs due to age as the person gets older, or by gender especially with women at the age of twenty and a secondary spike at the age of fifty, due to the experience of dying process or failing health or due to higher levels of humility, feeling love and self-importance. Thanatophobia is not a clinically recognized condition where doctors diagnose this phobia, but the mental health providers like the therapists and the psychologists can help the patients recover from the disorder.

Thanatophobia: A Theoretical Survey

Thanatophobia is a uniquely human dilemma and a key therapeutic issue (Martz, 2004) and can be treated through the following ways:

- Talking therapy adopted by a therapist that would help share the thought.
- Cognitive Behavioural therapy changing the pattern of thinking (Lampard et al, 2013).
- Meditation and Breathing techniques that would reduce mental anxiety.
- Medication, for a short period of time.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) categorizes phobia into three groups namely Specific phobias, Social phobias and Agoraphobias where Thanatophobia is a specific phobia (www.verywellmind.com). National Institute of Mental Health shows factors like experiencing traumatic life events, genetics, traits of shyness as a child and other physical health conditions that put people at risk of developing an anxiety disorder. Thanatophobia may lead to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), delusional thinking and panic, anxiety and depressive disorders as per a 2014 study in Clinical Psychology Review (Iverach et al, 2014).

Dylan Thomas, the poet of Romanticism

Dylan Thomas is the most notable Welsh author whose sincere relationship with Wales are mirrored in his poems. Dylan Thomas was born in Swansea, Wales, in 1914 and started working as a journalist in Swansea after being a drop-out from school at the age of sixteen. His marriage with Caitlin MacNamara who gave birth to three children was a failure due to her extra-marital affairs. Dylan started drinking heavily and could not cover the costs anymore. Thus, in 1950, Thomas emigrated to the United States because he thought he would be paid better there than in England. He recited his works in New York where he got settled and was profoundly recognized and admired. On November 9, 1953, he died after a heavy drinking binge in a Manhattan hotel, at the age of 39. He was buried in the churchyard of Laugharne in his hometown Wales. Dylan Thomas was greatly influenced by the Romantic Movement from the beginning of the nineteenth century which can be seen in many of his best works. Dylan Thomas uses symbols and images of nature to express his feelings towards death and childhood. To him, images create a feeling of love towards life. A touch of religious devotion is found in Dylan's poems despite his use of obscure images often. Dylan has used an opaque poetic style to perfection to describe the unusual and day-to-day activities. Dylan Thomas was blessed with tremendous talent that had made him a professional success at a relatively young age. Poet Dylan Thomas was influenced in his writing by the Romantic Movement which can be seen in a number of his best works, including the poems *Fern Hill*, *A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London*, and *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night*. The power of the Romantic style fits well with Thomas's interests and capabilities as a poet. Attitudes and techniques that are typical of Romanticism seem to dominate the collected poems of Dylan Thomas. His use of auditory effects and visual imagery, and his exploration of the nature of the universe are striking among all those and his poetry fits well into the Romantic tradition. Though his poems do not seem to associate much with social concern, they deal with affairs of the world more often than is readily apparent (Nagaraju&Sessaiah, 2012).

Dylan Thomas, the Creator of Death-Myth

The poetry of Dylan Thomas highlights a voice inflected by the presence and insertion of death and the death-image. While the concept of the death-poet was consciously fostered by Sylvia Plath, the American poet in poems, such as *Lady Lazarus*, but also irreversibly solidified by the nature of her death by suicide, it had added the weight of a macabre authenticity to some readers as well. But Dylan Thomas' poems are signified by a powerful death-myth that has emanated from the poet himself. The poems were originally drafted by Thomas with the presence of death always lurking in his mind. But his death amidst controversy has stamped a seal of authenticity to his writings revolving around the theme of death thus keeping Dylan as a spectral figure of death. Thomas' career proved to be a longer and more prodigious one than Plath in terms of its reception. Not only his poems, but also his stories, play and film-scripts had more opportunities to find intriguing avenues for discovery. Thomas is read as a character in his own drama due to the mysterious nature of his death just like that of Sylvia Plath despite his being a well-established writer.

Not only was Thomas engaged in the crafting and living of his own myth, he also upheld the truth value of that myth by dying in tragic circumstances at age 39, thus stamping himself as a true poet. Like Sylvia Plath's suicide, the mystery around his death causes spectral images to ponder heavily upon the struggle of life versus death. Dylan Thomas has been tied to death in his poems by their words and the nature of their images. He strove to foster and craft his own death-myth in his poems, and also fulfilled it by dying far away in America by a baffling assortment of alcohol, sex, and some strange circumstances. Having known exactly how he would be received and perceived by layman to the university scholars, he was highly conscious in using images he wanted to present to the world. Dylan Thomas was actually living it by crafting the mythology of death in his poems. Being cognizant of his poetic death-image, Dylan Thomas wrote his poems specifically with his death. Thomas's poems are extensions of the myth he was treating, where his sincere impulses are linked. Thomas' perception of his myth is manually linked to the observations of nature, the earth, and of life and death. It is evident that Dylan Thomas like Plath, has stressed the importance of the presence of death within the world. Thomas, like Plath, has actually celebrated life and believed in the power of humanity to persevere, and continue to accomplish everything it desires and deserves (Nagaraju&Sessaiah, 2012). Despite criticism by certain sections of academia, Thomas' work has been embraced by readers more so than many of his contemporaries, and is recognized as one of the renowned modern poets by the general public. It is to be noted with pride that several of his poems have passed into the cultural mainstream, and his work has been used by authors, musicians, film and television writers.

Dylan Thomas, the Poet of Imagery

Dylan Thomas is widely regarded as one of the 20th Century's most influential and the most finest of all lyrical poets. This is due to his acclaim partly with the force and vitality of his verbal imagery that is uniquely brilliant and inspirational. His vivid and often fantastic imagery was a rejection of the trends in the 20th Century poetics. Thomas devoted and pinned himself to his passionately felt emotions while his contemporaries gradually diverted their writing to serious topical verses. Thomas was more in alignment with the Romantics, in many ways, than he was with the poets of his era. He was claimed the Shelley of the 20th century for his lyricistic nature. His poems remained the perfect embodiments of 'new-romanticism' with their violent natural imagery, sexual and Christian symbolism and emotional subject matter expressed in a singing rhythmical verse. As Dylan Thomas attached great importance to the use of imagery, it is essential that his imagery should be properly comprehended to understand his poetry as a whole. Thomas' poetic imagery is the vivid epitome of a mixture of several techniques, the most prominent being the surrealistic,

imagistic, and metaphysical as it involves fragmented syntax, word play and personal symbolism. His acquaintance with the bible, his study of Shakespeare and other English poets also laid contribution to him to become a resourceful language-changer, like Shakespeare, Dickens, Hopkins and Joyce. He gave shape to the English language as a richly original mélange of rhythm, imagery and literary allusion (Nagaraju & Sessaiah, 2012).

Analysis of Mortality and Thanatophobia

“Poetry for Dylan Thomas is a great pleasure; he glorifies words and their meanings. He conveys that his poetry is an expression of his individual struggle from darkness towards light. He read only the poems he likes, discarding poems that don't meet his chosen criteria. For Dylan Thomas, all that matters about poetry is eternal movement behind it and the enjoyment of it”, expresses Tilak (Tilak, 2005, p.58) about the immortal effect of the use of imagery by the poet.

Dylan Thomas first published the poem *Do not go gentle into that Good night* in 1951. This poem was actually dedicated to Thomas' father but it appeals universally to every human being. The poem instils courage in the minds of the dying to fight fiercely and bravely against death. Death is inevitable in the lives of every human on earth, sooner or later. This does never mean that everyone has to die and give in to death. Life is fragile and ephemeral, which still has to be celebrated relishing its vibrancy and energy.

Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

The poet appeals to the readers to defy death and rage against it. The narrator being the poet himself refers to his father's illness during the creation of this poem. Though men who are wise enough to understand that their end is unavoidable and just, they should not lose hope that their words do not throw any light and welcome death.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right, Because their words had forked no lightning they Do not go gentle into that good night.

The elders might be anchoring frail thoughts and unnecessary fears about death with the sinking mind that their deeds were in lime light have not come to their rescue eventually. Still, they must be devoid of thanatophobia and get along with life with their brave deeds.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay, Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Men who have been achieving in their life under sun even fear the coming of death. They believe that death is the last call in their life which according to the poet, can be braved with the lesson to learn that death can be resisted until the last moment.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight, And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way, Do not go gentle into that good night.

The poet instructs the old people not to accept death as it is coming and relent to it deliberately. They need not get into it peacefully and calmly because death anxiety can impact everyday life domains and functioning (Hayes et al, 2010). Good and brave people even though with their failing health would encounter death turning their blind eyes into meteors and be happy thus raging against their last moments of life.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay, Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

In the final stanza, the poet pleads to his father who was in his death bed not to fall a prey to the evil hands of death and to either curse or bless him, his son with his fierce tears thereby his father can be kept alive and active. He encourages his father to rage with his full strength against his dying life.

And you, my father, there on the sad height, Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray. Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Treatment of Death and Defiance

Dylan Thomas was adept in using images of pain, death, decay and the beautiful scenes of nature particularly landscape and seascape. Such images help in making his poetic style more expressive. Furthermore, Dylan's poems are concerned with erotic themes, whether romantic or directly sexual, they are presented with adolescents' ironic romanticism. There is also a concern with the seven fundamental problems of life, with God, devil, birth, death, love and the process of creation and destruction in man and nature. Relatively, meaning in Dylan's verse is to greater extent than in usual poetry, in terms of effective and sensory perception. Thomas was obsessed with words and their possibilities for multiple meanings (Ackerman, 1991, p. 58).

Dylan Thomas stresses his thematic treatment of Death and Defiance in the poem by using symbols like light, meteors and lightning. Dylan usually compares Lightning with God. Here, he relates the spark of hope with that of the Lord which never fails men. Light symbolizes the positive aspects of human life and everything that is worth fighting for. The symbol of Light has been employed in the phrase “the dying of the light” as refrain in the poem to attest the will to live and a desire to change the world for the better living. When the human beings in general, and readers in particular shun their fear for death and fight against it, they are helping themselves march towards the light or the illuminating part of life and away from the darkness or the diminishing part of life.

The poet has used the symbol of meteor in the fourteenth line “Blind eyes could blaze like meteors” asserting the power of the eyes of the old men. Though the elders have certain bodily ailments, they can still experience the joy of life with their mental strength. Their blind eyes would act as bright as meteors flashing across the sky and fill with joy. The meteor symbolizes hope and the immortal effect on earth.

The word 'Lightning' has been symbolized for power and inspiration expressed in the following line "words had forked no lightning." Men has the thanatophobia throughout their lives agonizing that they have not accomplished what they have truly aimed for. But, they have the ray of hope that they can fight for the betterment of their lives with the flash of lightning that symbolizes power.

CONCLUSION

It is normal to worry about the future of oneself or the loved ones. If the worry turns to panic, or hard to be handled on one's own, the condition would be attended upon seriously. To avoid succumbing to thanatophobia, it is wise to handle feelings in a healthy way without harbouring the fears of dying deep in heart and avoiding getting a full-blown phobia.

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