

“Rage, Rage against the dying of the light”

[Ada Cheong](#) looks back on the life of the man who “did not go gentle into that good night”

Tuesday 4 November 2014

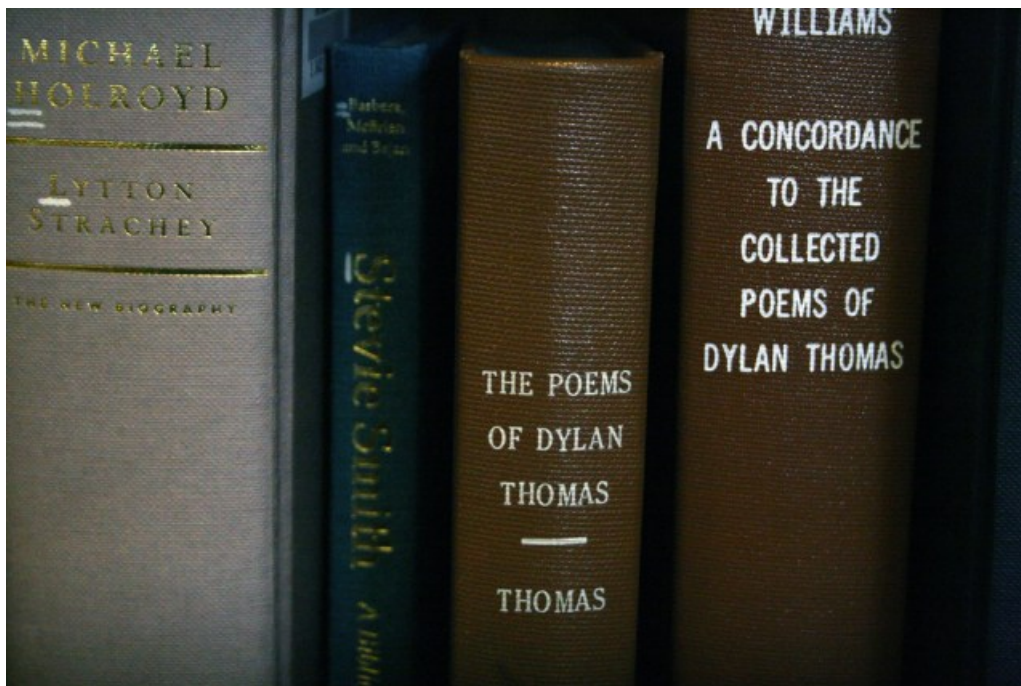


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With a blazing trail of alcohol and words in his legacy, Dylan Marlais Thomas would have turned a hundred years old on the 27th of October.

Of course, as with every commemorative piece, it is quintessential to start with Thomas’ birth. He was born in 1914 in Swansea, Wales – but strongly denounced any stamp of nationality that his birthplace has to claim on his identity as a poet. He once wrote, “Land of my fathers, and my fathers can keep it.” Indeed, Thomas became a popular poet in his lifetime and was widely appreciated until his death, which, unlike his birth, is more difficult to write about, and everything in between even more so.

Thomas wrote a great number of poems and short pieces of prose in his lifetime. The Muse in him was already stirring in school, where Thomas began writing his poems in notebooks. The first poem, entitled *Osiris, come to Isis*, was dated 27 April 1930. He was only a teenager when poems such as *And death shall have no dominion* were published, poems which became (and remain) the sources of his enduring fame.

It was also during this time of his life that he met Caitlin Macnamara (1913-1994), whom he later married and had children with. Their first meeting which took place in a pub (most commonly thought to be the Wheatsheaf pub on Rathbone Place in London’s West End) set the stage for their relationship. Fuelled by alcohol and fraught with infidelity, Thomas described it as “raw, bleeding meat” while Caitlin wrote in her autobiographies, “But ours was a drink story, not a love story, just like millions of others. Our one and

only true love was drink”; “the bar was our altar”.

Surviving the Second World War after being classified Grade III due to his his problematic lung, Thomas began recording broadcasts for the BBC. He bloomed into a familiar radio voice and achieved status equivalent to a celebrity. Between 1950 and 1953, he made three tours to America, between which he wrote his emblematic *Do not go gentle into that good night*.

The villanelle is a case in point as to how Thomas’ poetry evades easy classification. Filled with verbal density and tightly constructed image sequences, his work cannot be easily dismissed as belonging to any particular movement. His unique style is claimed to spring from the *Mother Goose* rhymes he learnt as a child. The reverence for words which the rhymes have instilled in him echo throughout his works.

Thomas’ long trail of works ended in 1953 due to pneumonia, brain swelling and a fatty liver. Rumours surrounding the death of the “doomed poet” abounded, speculating a range of reasons from brain haemorrhage and drugs to diabetes.

One of my favourite poems from Dylan is *This is Remembered*:

This is remembered when the hairs drop out:
Love, like a stone, that struck and hurt;
And promise in the night.
When strewn around the eyes blinds sight

What is now remembered of Thomas is in equal parts alcoholic, philanderer and poet. Nevertheless, his poems display indelible insight into love, life and death. His voice is certainly one that will continue to “Rage, rage against the dying of the light”.



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