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Surrealism in Dylan Thomas's Poetry: Dreams, Death, and the Subconscious

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Abstract

Dylan Thomas, a Welsh poet by origin is undoubtedly one of the best lyric poets of modern English literature. He was not merely a genius poet, he has shown his versatility in prose, drama, short story, script writing also. He was gifted with a rare eloquence that could easily get thundurus applause and acclamation of a large audience. During his period he was considered as a legend who could easily mesmerize people through his poetry. Dylan's poetry contains themes that are concerned with the fundamental problems of life- birth, death, body, life, subconscious, decay, time etc. All these topics are characteristics of surrealist poetry also. Dylan was keenly interested in the human psyche, especially the subconscious and unconscious. His uncanny insight to dig deep into the psyche reflects in his poetry; a reflection of true surrealist poetry.

Keywords - Subconscious, death, life, body, time

Introduction

Dylan Thomas was a Wales poet of imminent recognition. He is known as one of the most versatile poets of 20th century English literature. He belongs to Wales but is considered as one of the most prominent writers of 20th century English literature. He was a bit different from other contemporary writers of the age as while others were writing on the issues concerned to that period, Dylan was simply following his own emotions. Dylan's name is associated with different groups like the new romantics, the apocalypse movement and sometimes with symbolism also. Dylan Thomas is well known for using different literary techniques in his poetry like metaphysical, surrealist and Imagistic etc. Surrealist elements can be seen in his poetry very frequently. Surrealist imagery as well as the philosophical approach of surrealism is found deeply in his poetry.

Surrealism was a movement that was started in the early 20th century. This movement clearly exhibits a revolt against conventional thought processes shown in art. The main motive of surrealism was to show the exact nature or thought process of a human being. Though it seems somewhat like realism, it's totally different from it. We can call it super realism also as through this way artist, writers were trying to convey their emotions that were totally impossible through the conventional way of expression in all the arts. Dylan was also preoccupied with his subconscious and imagination and seemed like always trying to represent his dreams and imagination with the help of words, because his ideas were not somewhat real that's why his poetry most

of the time seems abstruse and very hard to comprehend. His poetry is full of dreamlike sequences. He was a great artist who was using striking juxtapositions to convey his ideas and impressions. That is also a reason that his poetry is full of irrational elements. Most of his poetry is preoccupied with death and birth. Thomas uses surrealist techniques to show the abstruse relations of death, birth and subconscious mind.

Major characteristics of surrealist poetry are free flow of writing, unconditional imageries, irrational beliefs and unreasonable comparison. Dylan's poetry is full of all such characteristics and shows a greater impression of surrealism movement. His poetry is always felt like a representation of the subconscious mind. Many of his poems clearly show the memory as a fluid which acts like a dream and it's very hard to believe on comparison as time spaces are eradicated and past and present seems like in the same time zone. Freud and Jung like psychoanalysts were quite famous at that moment and Surrealism movement was largely influenced by these psychoanalysts. Dylan was also influenced by these psychoanalysts. Freud gave different theories like father fixation, mother fixation, sexual repression and repression of other unexpressed emotions. Dylan never denied this influence and himself said, "My only acquaintance with the theories and discoveries of Dr Freud has been through the work of novelists who have been excited by his case book histories, of popular newspaper scientific potboilers who have I imagine, vulgarised his work beyond imagination, and of a few modern poets, including Auden, who have attempted to use psycho-analytical phraseology and theory in some of their poems. I have read only one book of Freud's, *The Interpretation of Dreams* and do not recall having been influenced by it in any way. Again, no honest writer today can possibly avoid being influenced by it through his pioneering work into the unconscious and by the influence of those discoveries on the scientific, philosophic and the artistic work of his contemporaries: but not, by any means, necessarily through Freud's own writings." He was so influenced by such psychological insights that in his own poetry he tries to dig deeper into the psychology of the adolescent.

**" The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever."**

Here the same power that is responsible to bloom a flower is also going through the poet's body and finally becomes the reason for his destruction. Birth and death are part of life, it is a continuous process happening in this world but is beyond human's understanding. Dylan is trying to convey here by "**A process in the weather of a heart**" that there is a natural process that man is connected to all that surrounds him. Things inside are connected to outside while things above are connected to below ones. Dylan's poems are always full of ambiguities, binary opposites, oxymoron, and paradoxes that always give a feeling of duality and unity at the same time. Things covered or exposed should never startle a man about the anatomy of the world. Man is like nature in many ways but certain qualities like rationality, reason and intellect are only found in Man. That's why keeps an urge of expression but he is not able to express all his desires".....**And I am dumb to tell....**" Just like **Fern Hill** and **Poem in October** are kind of poems that are a clear expression of subconsciousness that is a major characteristic of surrealist poetry.

Dylan Thomas is well known for his amazing and bizarre imagery which most of the time disrupts the conventional way of expression. There is a great abundance of hallucination and dream-like visions, unexpected comparison and juxtapositions that give vibes of surreal poetry. Thomas' poetry is full of surprising metaphors along with a fine blend of organic with cosmic. He has always presented the time as fluid that makes his poetry a fine example of surrealist poetry. Imagery in his poetry is a reflection of a non-linear thought process that is one of the most important characteristics of surrealist poetry. He has frequently used Bizarre imagery in his poetry to convey his ideas about different aspects of life; that's the frequently used method of surrealist poetry. Most of the imagery used by him seems hallucinatory. He is so dextrous in the

method that he can easily blend life and nature with decay and gives a clear surreal vision and reader is awestruck to differentiate between human body and world around him.

**Light breaks where no sun shines;
Where no sea runs, the water of the heart
Push in their tides;
And , broken ghosts with glow - worms in their heads,
The things of light
File through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones.**

Dylan has written a lot on death also that is a recurrent motif in surrealistic poetry . He has written about death in a totally different way that is sometimes very inspiring and at the same time very mysterious. In of his best poem " Death shall have no dominion" he has given one of the best insights on death that how death is not just an end instead it's a driving force to create something great-

**"And death shall have no Dominion
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily
Twisting on racks when sinews give way
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break
Faith in their hands shall snap in two
And the unicorn evils run them through ;**

Here Dylan is trying to convey that Death has no great power on humans, it can only destroy the human body, while more powerful than death is the spirit of action that makes a human being immortal so that's why instead of fearing death, man should focus on his actions. This representation of death is just like a transcendence or surreal transformation. These lines clearly show a protest against the conventional idea that death is the final step of living beings. Instead it's a beginning, a transformation where a power is merging itself with the great celestial power . Notions about identity and matter are not fixed instead they are fluid.

Dylan has used the theme of eroticism also in his poetry that is also one of the most common motifs of surrealist poetry. Dylan has used eroticism in an intense way as well as coated it with a different meaning that makes reading his poetry totally a mystic Dylan's surrealistic poetic is often deeply felt when he fuses the eroticism and the grotesque in his poetry. It creates upfront an unsettling atmosphere while in core it has a deeper evocative poetic feeling. Representation of birth, death and sexuality in his poetry leaves a nightmarish impression. He exhibits body and process of transformation as fragmented , that's a hallmark of surrealist poetry.

"Though they go mad they shall be sane, Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again."

The surrealists frequently used unassumed contrasts to disturb conventional understanding. Thomas employed a similar technique by blending the ordinary into the extraordinary. In "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," the blunt, energetic resistance to looming death is juxtaposed with images of brightness, darkness, and cosmic forces, to create a mythical fight between life and death.

**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.**

**Because 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.**

Surrealist artists often try to reveal hidden truths that are beyond human perception. That's why they use a kind of language that makes it seem that reality is being transformed. This work is done not only by mere use of language; instead all major surrealist writers used sound, unconventional metaphors, automatic writing, rhythms etc to express their ideas.

Many poems of Thomas exhibit that in the mind of a poet, past and present exist but in the unconscious. Dylan always has a great fascination with his childhood. His poem Fern Hill is a great example of his fascination. In this poem the poet's shows how the boundaries of time framed in a poetic vision - resemble a surrealist revelation.

**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.**

Here Dylan is telling about his boyhood that he was pure and innocent but as a youth now all the glory and the dreams of his boyish imagination have departed from the farm forever. Dylan doesn't feel that time is his enemy but he realises time was merciful but at the same time he was always in full control of time. This poem is written in a way where strange and bizarre imagery is used in the way that it changes an ordinary childhood to a fantastic feeling. This fine blend of past and present in the poem gives vibes of surrealist poetry. Time is not linear instead fluid and reality is full of nostalgia and fantasy. These unconventional logics puts the readers in a state of uncertainty and surprise them. That is also a characteristic of surrealistic poetry.

Conclusion

Dylan Thomas was not associated with surrealist movement but his poetry and themes always evokes feelings of surrealist aesthetics. Thomas creates a poetic landscape using dreamlike visions, subconscious explorations and unconventional logics that matches with the surrealism motto to uncover the hidden. His poetry focuses on the notion of fluidity where there is a parallel existence of life and death, past and present. His poetry exhibits consciousness and dreams as one, making him one of the voices of surrealist poetry. His dreamlike landscapes, hallucinatory depictions of birth and death, and fluid merging of the human body with nature align closely with surrealist techniques. Through his startling metaphors and juxtapositions, Thomas challenges the limits of perception, immersing the reader in a world that is both strange and deeply profound. His poetry, like surrealist art, seeks to unveil the hidden truths beneath reality, making him one of the most fascinatingly surreal poets of the modern era.

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