

Dylan Thomas

An encyclopaedic introduction

Dylan Thomas was born in Swansea in 1914 and died in New York in 1953. He was one of the most significant writers of the twentieth century, and his work continues to resonate in the popular imagination: fans today include Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, Pierce Brosnan, Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas, and Mick Jagger, whose Jagged Films is currently working on a feature film of the writer's life. Best known for his poetry and for the 'play for voices', *Under Milk Wood*, Thomas also wrote fiction (including short stories and novels), film-scripts and various radio broadcasts. He was also a prolific letter writer and performer of other people's work.

His early writing shows an interest in the experimental artistic movements of the early twentieth century, with much of his poetry and prose of the 1930s manifesting surrealist and gothic elements. His middle period work of the late 1930s and early 1940s was directly influenced by crises of the Second World War, during which Thomas worked for the propaganda machine of the BBC in London. His late work engages with both the politics of the post-war period and the environment and geography of West Wales. An interest in the processes of the natural world is recurrent (if changing) throughout Thomas's poetry and prose.



Dylan Thomas in the writing shed, Laugharne.
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Familiar with, and in a sense, 'at home' in, West Wales from early childhood (his father's family were from Carmarthenshire), Thomas first moved to Laugharne in 1937, living in a fisherman's cottage before moving to 'Sea View', and finally returning to live in 'The Boat House' at Laugharne in 1949. He lived there with his wife, Caitlin, and children, Colm, Aeronwy and Llewelyn until the time of his death.

From the moment of his death, Thomas has been thought of as epitome of the self-doomed artist (an association linking with other radical figures in the arts such as Percy Shelley, Arthur Rimbaud, James Dean and Kurt Cobain) and the popularity of his work has expanded to the extent that he is now one of the most-translated English language poets of all time. From the moment he featured as John Lennon's choice on the cover of the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Thomas has made regular re-appearances in popular culture. Recent films to have used his work include *Dangerous Minds* and *Independence Day*, and his early poem 'The force that through the green fuse' may have influenced George Lucas's *Star Wars* series. Often Thomas the myth obscures the work of Thomas the writer.

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