



INFORMATION ABOUT DYLAN THOMAS FOR I HAVE LONGED TO MOVE AWAY

Did religion affect Dylan Thomas's work?

- In 1904, Wales had experienced the religious fervour of the Welsh Revival.
- Religion, the role of ministers, the presence of church and chapel in everyday life, the power of a devout Christian life – these all became a very strong influence in Welsh life.
- His father was an atheist, but his mother was a church-goer and his Aunt Dosie was married to a minister called Reverend David Rees, who was well-known for his ability to get into the 'hwyl' or fervour in his sermons, and work the congregation up to a fever pitch of holy conviction and belief. Dylan went to church with his mother, and learnt about the strict beliefs and absorbed the effects of religious language.
- The language of religion could be heard in social life – for examples, hymns would be sung by large congregations of people, such as at the start of a football match.
- Dylan Thomas grew up absorbing elements of this language due to his experience of the mood of Christian revival, and they became part of his technique of writing and influenced his famous oratorical style of delivering his poetry. He wrote:

Let me say that the things that first made me love language and want to work in it and for it were nursery rhymes and folk tales, the Scottish Ballads, a few lines of hymns, the most famous Bible stories and the rhythms of the Bible, Blake's Songs of Innocence, and the quite incomprehensible magical majesty and nonsense of Shakespeare . . .

The Bible . . . its great stories of Noah, Jonah, Lot, Moses, Jacob, David, Solomon and a thousand more, I had, of course, known from very early youth; the great rhythms had rolled over me from the Welsh pulpits; and I read for myself, from Job and Ecclesiastes; and the story of the New Testament...



- Dylan Thomas was influenced by the 'hwyl', or fervour of the sermons – a powerful style of preaching, making use of repetition and emotive language, as well as rhythmic sentence patterns. He was also familiar with the vocabulary and the imagery of religious texts from the Bible to well-known hymns.
- The effect of the fervent Christian revival of 1904-5, led by the charismatic leader Evan Roberts, was profound. From one perspective it was the last gasp of a Nonconformism that had defined Wales for a century. From another it was a vivid cultural and spiritual movement. Dylan Thomas tended to view the social and moral values as stifling, but nevertheless used to the images and ideas of Welsh religious conventions to great effect in his writings. During the revival drinking, concerts and enjoyable social gathering such as eisteddfodau were frowned upon and sporting events declined. Immoral behaviour was not tolerated and crime numbers decreased. Thomas was born 10 years after the revival into the increasingly secular milieu of middle class Swansea. But the legacy of Nonconformity was passed on by his mother, and was felt strongly among his Welsh speaking relatives in Carmarthenshire.
- Dylan Thomas gained from his experience of religion, its power and rhetorical style. He also experienced it as a stifling element in society, creating expectations and delivering a message with which he didn't agree.