

In Love With Words [C1]

Il prolifico poeta e drammaturgo gallese Dylan Thomas continua ad affascinare il pubblico di tutto il mondo con la sua ricca eredità letteraria. Approfondiamo la sua opera letteraria e la sua avvincente personalità con il curatore del Dylan Thomas Centre.

During his short but intense life, the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas wrote poems, plays and radio dramas that still [resonate with](#) people across the world. After his death in 1953, Thomas's body was taken back to Wales, where it was buried in St. Martin's [churchyard](#) in Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, about thirty miles from Swansea, where he was born. Swansea is now home to the Dylan Thomas Centre, a permanent exhibition space dedicated to the poet, housed in Tŷ Llên or 'House of Literature'. To find out more, Speak Up contacted Jo Furber, the Swansea [Council](#) Literature Officer and [curator](#) at the Dylan Thomas Centre. We began by asking her what makes Dylan Thomas's poetry so accessible. **Jo Furber (Welsh accent):** Ultimately it's the quality of the work. Because with Dylan Thomas people talk about the amazing life he had and all the different events that he [packed into](#) thirty-nine years. But no one would remember that if he wasn't an absolute master of words. And he said that he wanted to write poetry in the beginning because he fell in love with words. And you can see that [joy](#) in language throughout his work. But beyond the poetry, he was an incredible prose writer, and he wrote in all the genres available to him. He also wrote film scripts, he wrote a lot of radio broadcasts at a time when so many people here were listening to the radio and that was one of their main sources of information and [enjoyment](#). And he was a huge letter writer as well. His collected letters run to about nine hundred pages.

FORM AND EMOTION

Thomas's poems are both highly emotive and extremely complex, as Furber explains. **Jo Furber:** I think that's where he's interesting as a writer as well, because he uses quite intricate poetic forms in his poems. And in a sense,

you've got the form containing the emotion. His most famous poem is probably the villanelle *Do not go gentle into that good night*, which is an incredibly difficult form to write, but absolutely perfect for a poem full of so many different emotions, really.

FONDNESS FOR WALES

Thomas's poems are rooted in the Welsh landscape and the Welsh people, but his themes are universal. **Jo Furber:** He wrote so much about the landscape and the people that he knew in Wales. He wrote so much about Swansea. It's very easy for a visitor today to follow their way around Swansea through his words and to look at different places, whether it's the beach or his favourite parks, through Dylan's words. He wrote so much about place and with such fondness about Wales and about the people he knew, and the stories and the myths and things that went on here. It's really quite resonant, I think. And the themes he covers in his poetry are universal ones, really. He talks about love and death, birth and nature. A lot of young people respond to the ecological themes in his poetry as well; his writing about the landscape and his concern for the natural world.

THE WELSH LANGUAGE

While Thomas did not write poems in Welsh, the language influenced the way he wrote, Furber says. **Jo Furber:** He spoke some Welsh. He grew up in a Welsh speaking household, with both his parents speaking the language. But during the 1910s and 1920s in Wales, English was seen as the language of progression, so he didn't really pursue that. However, his knowledge of Welsh and of Welsh metrical forms, poetic forms I think certainly influenced the way he wrote poetry and partly explains what a unique voice he has.

MAN AND MYTH

Thomas had a reputation for heavy drinking and larking around. However, there is some evidence to show that he cultivated this image. **Jo Furber:** He was an incredibly complex person, he had an idea of what he thought being

a poet was to [some extent](#), and sometimes [he lived up to](#) that ideal. He often [acted up](#) to the idea that he thought people expected of him. Certainly when he was on tour in the US, he was miles away from home and out of his comfort zone [to a large extent](#). And I think possibly someone who [lacked](#) confidence in particular social situations as well. And particularly as someone who left school at sixteen with just one [qualification](#) and he didn't go on to university like a lot of his [peers](#). His first girlfriend said that they'd often go to the pub together and maybe just have a pint all evening and they'd be sat doing the crossword and chatting. But then when he left the pub, if he saw one of his friends, he would act as if he was drunk because he thought that's what people expected of him. So I think there are a lot of stories about him that were actually exaggerated by Dylan Thomas himself. And that's where some of the stories around him come from. We often think of writers as being people existing in isolation, in some kind of [ivory](#) tower or whatever. But Dylan Thomas was certainly not like that. So much of his work was [informed by](#) conversations with other people and also interactions with a lot of his friends who were writers, artists, musicians and into politics. He sounds like a really interesting and [engaged](#) person. One of the things we're looking at the moment was his engagement with the peace movements at the time as well. He signed various peace [pledges](#) during his lifetime, and in the 1930s he campaigned against the fascists coming to Swansea.

DYLAN THOMAS CENTRE

So, what can visitors experience at the Dylan Thomas Centre? **Jo Furber:** We've got a permanent exhibition, which is about Dylan's life and work and also about his cultural connections as well. And we've got such a range of artifacts ranging from [worksheets](#), original manuscripts to his poems. We've got the doors to his writing [shed](#) from Laugharne, so you can actually see the doors that he used to open every day when he was going into his [shed](#) to write or to struggle with his writing. And of course, we've got a range of audio recordings and first editions of his books, different bits of film of other people reading his work as well. So there's plenty to just [dive into](#) and explore.

SELF-TAUGHT

Thomas's father, David Thomas, had won a [scholarship](#) to attend Aberystwyth University, where he gained a first in English. He then went into teaching, but regretted it as he had always wanted to be a poet. Although clearly guided by his father, Dylan Thomas was a [self-taught](#) writer who did not go to university. Furber believes that he can be an example for young people today. **Jo Furber:** He started writing poems at the age of seven and showed them to his dad. Went on to edit the [grammar school](#) magazine. Because we do a lot of work with young people, there's a lot that we can show them about Dylan's schooldays, about saying, "Well, you may not be totally [engaged](#) with school, but it doesn't have to stop you [achieving](#)." There are a lot of messages from his work which [resonate with](#) a lot of the young people we work with as well.

A DAY TO CELEBRATE

International Dylan Thomas Day is celebrated every 14 May. We asked Furber to tell us more about the day and the choice of date. **Jo Furber:** I think it's a great way of celebrating his work, not just his life, but celebrating his work by [anchoring](#) it to a date that's really resonant with one of his most famous pieces of work. And the story of that first performance on stage is an amazing one anyway, because he was apparently still finishing the last bits of the play and [handing](#) them to the cast on stage as they were about to perform. It was a completely unknown thing. There were a [thousand-odd](#) people in the audience. They were all waiting to see what was going to happen. And the cast were mostly people who worked at the Poetry Center in New York. So we had this all-American cast and Dylan Thomas for this play about the day in the life of a village in Wales. So that idea of a day in the life of the village, which was something that he got from James Joyce because he said he wanted to write a Welsh Ulysses. So I think the 14th of May is a great date as far as that goes, because we're celebrating the work, we're celebrating his achievements, his international appeal and the translations of his work and the way it's continually reinterpreted.

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Glossary

- **resonate with** = persistere
- **some extent** = in parte
- **packed into** = compattare
- **fondness** = affetto
- **dive into** = immergersi
- **scholarship** = borsa di studio
- **lacked** = mancare
- **grammar school** = liceo
- **engaged** = impegnato, intraprendente
- **achieving** = realizzare
- **churchyard** = cimitero
- **joy** = gioia
- **he lived up to** = essere all'altezza di
- **acted up** = attenersi a un comportamento
- **informed by** = influenzata da
- **Council** = comune
- **larking around** = divertirsi
- **to a large extent** = in gran parte
- **ivory** = avorio
- **self-taught** = autodidatta
- **curator** = curatrice
- **rooted in** = radicato
- **pledges** = promesse
- **shed** = capanno
- **concern** = preoccupazione
- **qualification** = titolo
- **worksheets** = fogli per appunti
- **anchoring** = ancorare
- **thousand-odd** = mille e passa
- **household** = intorno domestico
- **pursue** = dedicarsi a
- **peers** = colleghi
- **handing** = consegnare