
SEASONS COME TO PASS

MEN IN CHAINS - 198

MBUYISENI OSWALD MTSHALI

- 1 The train stopped
2 At a country station.
- 3 Through sleep curtained eyes
4 I peered through the frost window,
5 And saw six men:
6 Men shorn stripping of human honour compared to the shearing of sheep
7 Of all human honour - dehumanizing them
8 Like sheep after shearing, - leaving them vulnerable, naked, humiliated, like shaven sheep
9 Bleating at the blistering wind, - reference to sheep, sound, bleat
10 'Go away! Cold wind! Go away!
11 Can't you see we are naked?'
- 12 They hobbled into the train
13 On bare feet
14 Wrists handcuffed
15 Ankles manacled - chained
16 With steel rings like cattle at the abattoirs - dehumanizing them, comparing them to cattle
17 Shying away from the trapdoor. - sense of impending doom, fate sealed
- 'abattoirs' 'trapdoor' 'shying away' – ashamed?
- dehumanizing them again, almost comical image
- 18 One man with a head
19 Shaven clean as a potato
20 Whispered to the rising sun, - dawn of a new day, appeal for hope, forgiveness
21 A red eye wiped by a tattered
22 Handkerchief of clouds, - image of the 'higher' 'divine' 'dreams' 'hope'
23 'Oh! Dear Sun! - personification of the sun
24 Won't you warm my heart
25 With hope?' - a final plea to the sun/higher being of power for
hope or mercy
26 The train went on its way to nowhere. - FINALITY, answer to his pleas, no hope

In 'Men in Chains' Mbuyiseni Mtshali captures a fleeting glimpse of six chained and handcuffed prisoners being herded like animals onto a train at a country station. He does not suggest why they are there, instead he notices how they have been "shorn of all human honour like sheep after shearing". The imagery he uses captures a powerful sense of utter hopelessness as the men hobble onto the train as it leaves "on its way to nowhere".

ON HIS BLINDNESS – 37

JOHN MILTON

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| 1 | When I consider how my <u>light</u> is <u>spent</u> , a | - light/ dark contrast sight/ blindness |
| 2 | Ere half my days, in this <u>dark</u> world and wide, b | - faith/ faithless society |
| 3 | And that <u>one talent</u> which is death to hide b | - writing poetry to serve God |
| 4 | <u>Lodged with me useless</u> , though my soul more bent a | - cannot use his talent when he's going blind |
| 5 | <u>To serve therewith my Maker</u> , and present a | - QUESTIONS GOD, how is he to serve him now? |
| 6 | My true account, lest He returning chide; b | |
| 7 | 'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?' b | - Questions what God is doing. |
| 8 | I <u>fondly</u> ask. <u>But Patience, to prevent</u> a | - doesn't ask in anger, he respects God, ends |
| 9 | <u>That murmur, soon replies</u> , 'God doth not need c | - Personification of patience/ Metaphor for God |
| 10 | <u>Either man's work or his own gifts</u> . Who best d | - highlights Gods nature; almighty, wise, patient |
| 11 | <u>Bear his mild yoke</u> , they serve him best. <u>His state</u> e | - yoke - burdens |
| 12 | <u>Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed</u> c | - ANSWER to his question , God does not need his |
| 13 | <u>And post o'er land and ocean without rest;</u> d | talents, God just wants him to 'bear' his 'yoke' |
| 14 | <u>They also serve who only stand and wait.'</u> E | - SERVE BY BARING HIS BLINDNESS, WAITING |

PETRARCHIAN SONNET – 14 LINES

octave - intro to idea/problem

sestet - solution/ question/ answer / idea

no rhyming couplet

John Milton's eyesight began to fail in 1644. By 1652, he was totally blind. Oddly, he wrote his greatest works, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained,

IN MY CRAFT OR SULLEN ART – 142

DYLAN THOMAS

In my craft or sullen art
Exercised in the still night
When only the moon rages
And the lovers lie abed
With all their griefs in their arms,
I labour by singing light
Not for the ambition or bread
Or the strut and the trade of charms
On the ivory stages
But for the common wages
Of their most secret heart.

Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Nor for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art.

Dylan Thomas offers a rather non-traditional answer to this question, but one which (on reflection) seems much truer than the usual ones. As he himself said, "My poems are written for the love of Man and in praise of God". This poem puts those words into practice.

Notice the very interesting rhyme scheme - 'abcde bd ecca abcde ecca' - not quite regular, but strong enough to lend a degree of structure to the poem. Indeed, Dylan Thomas' verse is almost always meticulously structured, each word chosen with painstaking care and attention to detail. It's not by accident that he refers to the practice of poetry as a 'craft'...

The wonderful thing is that despite this degree of construction, his poetry remains natural and spontaneous. This in itself is the highest possible testimony to his mastery of the language; perhaps no other poet since Yeats could craft words with such consummate ease while retaining such depth and power of meaning.

In this poem the speaker seem to be expressing a measure of frustration about the fact that the very people he wishes to reach through his poetry, the lovers who lie in bed 'with all their griefs in their arms', are sadly the ones who are the least aware of his existence and who 'pay no praise or wages' for the poetry he writes. Instead, the people for whom he has the most contempt - the socialites and the celebrities who 'strut and trade' their charms - these are the folk who pay him attention.

Dylan was a favourite at dinner parties and poetry readings; he rubbed shoulders with many of the socialites of the day and was himself considered a celebrity. He was well known for his drunken outbursts at such occasions and it was almost as if he was invited to these functions to see what he would get up to next. He found these people very superficial, these people who had no real understanding of what it was to bare 'the griefs of ages' or to earn 'common wages'. Ironically, this rich and famous sector of society, the people he had no interest in writing for, were the only ones who paid him any notice and even embraced him as one of their own - turning him into a celebrity of his time (no wonder he drank so heavily!). There seems to be real sadness in the last two lines of this poem as he admits that although his greatest desire is to write for the 'most secret heart' of the common people, they are the ones who in all likelihood will never know or appreciate his work.

(Notice the typical Thomas compounds - 'raging moon', 'spindrift pages', 'towering dead', and 'singing light'. They each contain more meaning than whole stanzas of a less concentrated poet's output; yet they tend to go unnoticed on a first reading. Perhaps spend some time thinking about the significance of the images created by these compounds). It is said that Dylan would often spend days pondering single words and turns of phrase. His work is perhaps best summarised by the word 'balance' - his poetry is highly orchestrated, yet remains graceful and natural.