

Within his head revolved a little world*

Dylan Thomas

1933

Within his head revolved a little world
Where wheels, confusing music, confused doubts,
Rolled down all images into the pits
Where half dead vanities were sleeping curled
Like cats, and lusts lay half hot in the cold.

Within his head the engines made their hell,
The veins at either temple whipped him mad,
And, mad, he called his curses upon God,
Spied moon-mad beasts carousing on the hill,
Mad birds in trees, and mad fish in a pool.
Across the sun was spread a crazy smile.
The moon leered down the valley like a fool.

Now did the softest sound of foot or voice
Echo a hundred times, the flight of birds
Drum harshly on the air, the lightning swords
Tear with a great sound through the skies,
And there was thunder in an opening rose.

All reason broke, and horror walked the roads.
A smile let loose a devil, a bell struck.
He could see women breathing in the dark,
See women's faces under living snoods,
With serpents' mouths and scolecophidian voids
Where eyes should be, and nostrils full of toads.

Taxis and lilies to tinned music stept
A measure on the lawn where cupids blew
Water through every hole, a Sanger's show
Paraded up the aisles and in the crypt
Of churches made from abstract and concrete.
Pole-sitting girls descended for a meal,
Stopping non-stop dancing to let hot feet cool,
Or all-in wrestling for torn limbs to heal,
The moon leered down the valley like a fool.

Where, what's my God among this crazy rattling
Of knives on forks, he cried, of nerve on nerve,
Man's ribs on woman's, straight line on a curve,

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And hand to buttock, man to engine, battling,
Bruising, where's God's my Shepherd, God is Love?
No loving shepherd in this upside life.

So crying, he was dragged into the sewer,
Voles at his armpits, down the sad canal
Where floated a dead dog who made him ill,
Plunged in black waters, under hail and fire,
Knee-deep in vomit. I saw him there,
And thus I saw him searching for his soul.

And swimming down the gutters he looks up
At cotton worlds revolving on a hip,
Riding on girders of the air, looks down
On garages and clinics in the town.

Where, what's my God among this taxi stepping,
This lily crawling round the local pubs?
It was November there were whizzbangs hopping,
But now there are the butt-ends of spent squibs.

So crying, he was pushed into the Jordan.
He, too, has known the agony in the Garden,
And felt a skewer enter at his side.
He, too, has seen the world as bottom rotten,
Kicked, with a clatter, ash-bins marked verboten,
And heard the teeth of weasels drawing blood.

And thus I saw him. He was poised like this,
One hand at head, the other at a loss,
Between the street-lamps and the ill-lit sky,
And thus, between the seasons, heard him cry:

Where, what's my God? I have been mad, am mad,
Have searched for shells and signs on the sea shore,
Stuck straw and seven stars upon my hair,
And leant on stiles and on the golden bar,
I have ridden on gutter dung and cloud.
Under a hideous sea where coral men
Feed in the armpits of drowned girls. I've swum
And sunk; waved flags to every fife and drum;
Said all the usual things over and again;
Lain with parched things; loved dogs and women;
I have desired the circle of the sun.
Tested by fire, double thumb to nose,
I've mocked the moving of the universe.
Where, what? There was commotion in the skies,
But no god rose. I have seen bad and worse,
Gibed the coitus of the stars. No god
Comes from my evil or my good. Mad, mad,
Feeling the pinpricks of the blood, I've said
The novel things. But it has been no good.

Crying such words, he left the crying crowds,
Unshackled the weights of words from tired limbs,
And took to feeding birds with broken crumbs
Of old divinities, split bits of names.
Very alone, he ploughed the only way.
And thus I saw him in a square of fields,
Knocking off turnip tops, with trees for friends,
And thus, some time later, I heard him say:

Out of the building of the day I've stept
To hermits' huts, and talked to ancient men.
Out of the noise into quiet I ran.
My God's a shepherd, God's the love I hoped.

The moon peers down the valley like a saint.
Taxis and lilies, noise and no noise,
Pair off, make harmonies, harmonious chord,
For he has found his soul in loneliness,
Now he is one with many, one with all,
Fire and Jordan and the sad canal.

Now he has heard and read the happy word.
Still, in his hut, he broods among his birds.
I see him in the crowds, not shut
From you or me or wind or rat
Or this and that.[‡]

[‡]Goodby, J. (Ed.), *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas: The Centenary Edition*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London (2016). ISBN 978-1-780-22723-8