

Assignment 2: 3 Poems & Analysis

When I Consider How My Light is Spent

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

John Milton

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/on-his-blindness/>

ANALYSIS

The initial impression for modern readers upon encountering this poem and its opening lines would be that Milton writes with an atmosphere thick like Jupiter's, his sentences complex and shifting focus, begging you to have a complex web of understanding built before encountering "the point". By opening the poem with a question statement ("when...") the reader begins to cultivate curiosity as to the author's response, feeling immediately the linguistic momentum brought by such an opening. The following metaphor and juxtaposition between "light" and "spent" invites the reader to begin thinking beyond the mere words of the poem, and demands flexibility and critical thinking as we seek to discover where on earth this verbose poet is taking us.

The first major clue as to possible understandings for the imagery of light being spent comes from line 3, the allusion to the parable of the talents from Matthew 25 in the New Testament. Milton's audience

would have been deeply familiar with the writings of the New Testament, and so they would through the invocation of this parable very quickly assemble an increasingly complex understanding of the opening line. The allusion brings to mind for readers that “gifts” from God are to be used, employed, acted upon rather than hidden away and buried. This would be a very familiar passage for readers during Milton’s time, and the crystallized concept of that moral tale would not be not totally foreign to twenty first century readers either, regardless of their familiarity with the Bible.

The question the author worries God will ask him is can he produce results despite not being given the conditions required for obtaining said results. This line invites the reader to assess Milton’s experience with encroaching and eventual complete blindness and the effect this condition would have had on his work as a writer. The tension the author feels around seeking to serve God despite his hardship is relieved as the poem turns, beginning with a common Christian practice, the personification of virtues, here seen through Patience. This can be seen in another famous Christian work of literature produced during the same period, Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan. Here however, Patience seeks to instruct the author and provide wisdom, reassuring him that God is complete and perfect, requiring nothing of man to maintain His perfection. Here Milton slightly steers away from the parable from Matthew in which the lord chastises the servant who did not set his talent to “work”, and almost seems to invoke the story of Job by having Patience proclaim that those who serve him best simply bear his mild yoke, that is, walk with God through whichever circumstances are presented. This steadfast faith/fortitude countered by the insane chaos of the conditions of our lives lays at the heart of many stories of suffering, though Milton’s audience would be more familiar with the story of Job in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Milton’s personal battle with loss of sight is an obvious and meaningful interpretation of this poem, but similar to others of his works it also serves to critically appraise, challenge, and reinterpret biblical traditions and ways of understanding.

Mathew 25 from the English Standard Version @ www.biblegateway.com
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25%3A14-30&version=ESV>

12.

During a conversation at a party full of comedy improvers, which you thought were going to be improovers, which was to be a positive step in the emotional reconstruction of Derrick Brown, but every conversation is powered by the improv rule “don’t deny.” So yes, I WILL have another drink with dumb fruit in it; and everyone will yes, wear their church pants into the above ground pool; and everyone will yes, write about this night and capture Derrick Brown in an unflattering light, but yes, who cares, you are great material; and yes, everyone agrees that it’s getting too late for acid and edibles; and yes, that caramel is delicious; and yes... my hand...; and yes, you will drive us all home, or a place that has been waiting for you to name it home; and yes, you will nap lucid in a new un-cynical life of wet pants, bonus drinks, and learning to say yes. Put a towel on the seat. Get in. Take me home. I’m outta words. I’m blanking. Kiss me long war. Kiss me the opposite of cross fit. Kiss me Tennessee porch song. Kiss me assy. Kiss me dead as drugs. Kiss me lost. Kiss me gold in the sunrise. Kiss me all the way home.

Derrick Brown

<http://fuckyeahderrickbrown.tumblr.com>

My Last Duchess

*That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!*

Robert Browning

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43768/my-last-duchess>