

THREE PŒMS OF DYLAN THOMAS

FOR 8 VOICES

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Introduction

I came across the poetry of Dylan Thomas in 1965 when I was 19, and bought the hardback edition of his collected works which I still have. I remember devouring it in the bitterly cold winter of 1966, sitting with the heater on in my parent's camper van traveling around by myself in East Anglia. The resonance of Thomas's imagery work was a revelation to me as it has been to so many others.

The first poem I set was *There Was a Saviour*, which I would now consider my opus one. I see that I wrote and rewrote it over the space of a year from 1968-9, which would have been when I was living with the Dodgsons in Barnes. Thereafter I showed it to a few choir directors, who thought it too difficult for amateurs and so I left it.

Over the next few years my career in broadcast music and production took off, and so it was not until 14 years later, for reasons I don't now remember except that I had always felt that my existing setting deserved a better outcome, that I then composed two companion pieces ... over three days, the record shows. Despite the time between them I feel there is no idiomatic discrepancy. I was then living with my wife Clancy and our three children in Peckham; and was busy with a range of work in broadcast and theatre that had included extensive work for the BBC and conducting the world premiere of *Nicholas Nickleby* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. But again, no interest in a performance of these pieces emerged.

Eventually, we left London in 1994 and came to live in Tisbury. A few years later, after getting to know some excellent local amateur singers I formed a choir and conducted a recording of these pieces myself in 1999. The result was wholly satisfactory and a validation that the pieces do really work as I imagined.

It didn't result in interest from other choirs, alas, but gave me the aural confidence to compose the larger-scale works which followed.

Michaël Maxwell Steer

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There was a Saviour

Words Dylan Thomas i/1940

Music Maxwell Steer vii/68 - viii/69

Tempo markings: $\text{♩} = 85$, $\text{♩} = 170$

Soprano
There was a sav- iour

Alto
There was a sav- iour

Tenor
There was a sav- iour

S
Rar- er than rad- ium

A
Rar- er than rad-

T
Rar- er than rad- ium

S
Comm- on- er than wat- er
Cruel- er than

A
ium
Cruel- er than

T
Comm- on- er than wat- er
Cruel- er than

7 *mf* truth, *f* than *mf* truth

A *f* Comm- on- er than wat- er *sfz* Cruell- er than truth *p*

T *mf* truth, *f* than *mf* truth

9 $\text{♩} = 105$ *mf* 1° Child- ren kept from the sun Child- ren kept from

A Child- ren kept from the sun

T *f* Child- ren kept from the

B *f* Child- ren kept from the sun

11 the sun Child- ren kept from the sun *f* Child- ren

A *f cresc* Child- ren kept from the sun

T *f cresc* ass- em- bled at his tongue

B *f* sun ass- em- bled at his tongue

Child- ren ass- em- bled at his tongue

13

S kept from the sun *f* Child- ren kept from the sun

A *mf* Child- ren *f* Child- ren kept from the sun

T *f* Child- ren kept from the sun *mf*

B *f* Child- ren kept from the sun *mf* Child-

15

S *mf* *ff* Child- ren kept from the sun

A *mf* *ff* Child- ren kept from the sun

T *f* Child- ren kept from the sun *mp* ass-

B ren kept from the sun

17

S *mp* *cresc* ass- em- ble ass- em- ble ass-

A *mp* *cresc* ass- em- ble ass- em- ble ass- em- ble

T *cresc* *fff* em- ble ass- em- ble ass- em- bled at his

B *mp* *cresc* ass- em- ble ass- em- ble ass- em- ble

19

S *fff* em- ble ass- em- bled at his tongue

A *fff* ass- em- ble ass- em- bled at his tongue

T *f* tongue ass- em- ble ass- em- ble ass-

B ass- em- ble ass- em- ble ass- em- ble ass- em- ble

21 *cresc*

S ass- em- ble ass- em- ble *ffff* $\geq$

A *cresc* ass- em- ble *ffff* $\geq$

T *fff* em- ble ass- em- bled at his tongue to hear the *fff* $\geq$

B *fff* ass- em- bled at his tongue to hear the *fff* $\geq$

23 *ff* **ACCEL** $\text{♩} = 226$

S to hear the gold- en note turn in a groove turn in a groove

A gold- en gold- en note turn in a groove turn in a groove

T gold- en note turn in a groove turn in a groove

B gold- en note turn in a groove turn in a groove

26 sf $\text{♩} = 240$ RIT $\text{♩} = 160$

S turn in a groove

A turn in a groove turn in a groove

T turn in a groove turn in a groove

B turn in a groove turn in a groove

Leggiero $\text{♩} = 100$

S *p* The voice of child- ren says from a lost wild-

A *p* The voice of child- ren says from a lost wild-

33

S er- ness There was calm to be done in his

A er- ness There was calm to be done calm to be done

There was calm to be done calm to be done

There was calm to be done in his

38 *mf*

S safe un- rest

A in his safe un- rest

f

mf

Lontano

in his safe un- rest a lost wil- der- ness

safe un- rest

45 ♩ = 90 Marziale

S When hind'- ring

A When hind'- ring man hurt an- i-

T When hind'- ring man When hind'- ring

B When hind'- ring man hurt man

47 *fff*

S man hurt man an- i- mal or bird We

A mal or bird an- i- mal or bird We

T man hurt man an- i- mal or bird We

B an- i- mal or bird or bird We

Slow threatening accel

50

S
hid our fears in that murd'-ring breath Si- lence Si- lence

A
hid our fears in that murd'-ring Si- lence to do si- lence when

T
hid our fears in that murd'-ring breath Si- lence Si- lence

B
hid our fears in that murd'-ring Si- lence to do si- lence when

mf ma intenso

54

S
to do when earth grew loud in

A
earth grew loud Si- lence si- lence when earthgrew loud in

T
to do when earth grew loud in

B
earth grew loud Si- lence si- lence when earthgrew loud in

ff *mf*

58

S
lairs & as- y- lums of the shout of the tre-

A
lairs & as- y- lums of the shout of the tre-

T
lairs & as- y- lums of the shout of the tre-

B
lairs & as- y- lums of the shout of the tre-

ff *f* *ff*

61 *fff* mend- ous shout Si- lence si-

A *fff* mend- ous Si- lence Si-

T *fff* mend- ous shout Si- lence si-

B *fff* mend- ous Si- lence Si-

63 *p* lence to down earth grew *ff* loud when earth grew loud in

A *p* lence to down earth grew *ff* when earth grew loud in lairs

T *p* lence to down earth grew *ff* when earth grew loud in

B *p* lence to down earth grew *ff* when earth grew loud in lairs

65 *fff* lairs & as- y- lums of the tre- mend- ous shout

A *ff* & as- y- lums of the tre- mend- ous shout

T *ff* lairs & as- y- lums of the tre- mend- ous shout

B *ff* & as- y- lums of the tre- mend- ous shout

Andante Grave ma NON lento

67 $\text{♩} = 107$ *Dolce e quasi sotto voce* *mp* *rubato*

A There was glo- ry to hear in the church- es of his

T There was glo- ry to hear, to hear in the church- es of his *rubato espr*

B There was glo- ry to hear in the church- es of his

71 *mf* *rubato*

A tears und- er his down- y arm you smiled as he

T tears und- er his down- y arm you smiled as he *rubato espr*

B tears und- er his down- y arm you smiled as he

74 $\text{♩} = 90$ *Più largo*

S O you who could not cry on to the

A struck O you who could not cry on to the

T struck O you who could not cry on to the

B struck O you who could not cry on to the

76 Dim e rit A Tempo

S ground when a man died put a tear

A *rubato espr* ground when a man died put a tear

T ground when a man died put a tear put a

B ground when a man died put a tear

78

S for joy in the

A for joy in the

T tear for joy for joy in the

B for joy in the

81

S un- earth- ly flood & laid your cheek your

A un- earth- ly flood & laid your

T un- earth- ly flood & laid your

B un- earth- ly flood & laid your

84

S
cheek a- gainst a cloud- formed shell.

A
cheek a- gainst a cloud- formed shell.

T
cheek a- gainst a cloud- formed shell.

B
a- gainst a cloud- formed shell.

$\text{♩} = 81$
p

T
Now in the dark there is on- ly

B
p
Now in the dark there is

89

T
mf your- self & my- self *fz* your- self & my- self

B
mf on- ly your- self & my- self *fz* your- self & my- self

RIT

$\text{♩} = 180$ **Quasi tempo primo**

91

S
sfp Two *mf* Two proud black broth- ers

A
mf Two proud black broth- ers *sfp* cry *mp* Two proud black broth- ers

T
mp Two proud black broth- ers *sfp* cry

93 *fp* *f*

S cry cry win- ter- locked side by

A cry Two proud black broth- ers *sfp* cry

T *fp* *f* cry win- ter- locked side by

95 *ff*

S side To this in- hos- pit- a- ble holl- ow year

A win- ter- locked side by side

T side To this in- hos- pit- a- ble holl- ow year

98 *fff* *ossia*

S O we who could not stir one lean sigh one

A O we who could not stir one lean sigh one

T O we who could not stir one lean sigh one

B O we who could not stir one lean sigh

103

S lean sigh When we heard greed on man

A *ff* > > > >

T lean sigh When we heard greed on man

B one lean sigh When we heard greed on man

106

S on man beat- ing near & fire neigh- bour =69 **Più mosso**

A beat- ing near & fire neigh- bour *ff* > > > >

T on man beat- ing near & fire neigh- bour but wailed

B beat- ing near & fire neigh- bour

110

S *ff* > > > > **RIT** 3 *f* **Tempo elegaico**

A but wailed & nest- ed in the sky blue wall Now break a

T & nest- ed in the sky blue wall Now break a

Now

114

S
gi- ant tear for the litt- le- known fall.

A
gi- ant tear for the litt- le- known fall.

T
break a gi- ant tear for the litt- le- known fall.

♩ = 110 Andante Grave ma NON lento

118 *Dolce e quasi sotto voce*

A
For the droop- ing of homes that did not

T
For the droop- ing of homes that did not

B
For the droop- ing of homes that did not

121

A
nurse our bones Brave deaths of on- ly ones, but nev- er found,

T
nurse our bones Brave deaths of on- ly ones, but nev- er found,

B
nurse our bones Brave deaths of on- ly ones, but nev- er found,

125

Anim *p* > > Trattenuto Anim *p* >

S

yet see yet

A

rfz 3 *rf* 3 nev- er found, nev- er found, nev- er found,

T

rfz 3 *rf* 3 nev- er found, nev- er found, nev- er found,

B

rfz 3 *rf* 3 *p* > *p* > nev- er found, nev- er found, yet see yet

131

Trattenuto *mf* =118 Con Vivo

S

see yet see our own true stran- ger's dust

A

nev- er found, a- lone in us

T

nev- er found, a- lone in us

B

see yet see our own true stran- ger's dust

136

f *mf* *f*

S

ride thro' the doors of our un- ent- ered house

A

ride thro' the doors of our un- ent- ered our

T

ride thro' the doors of our un- ent- ered house

B

ride thro' the doors of our un- ent- ered house

139

S *mf* Ex- iled in us we a- rouse the

A un- ent- ered house ex- iled in us the

T *mf* Ex- iled in us we a- rouse the

B

143

S soft un- clenched arm- less silk & rough

A soft un- clenched arm- less silk & rough love

T soft un- clenched arm- less silk & rough

B

147

S love that breaks all rocks.

A that breaks all rocks.

T love that breaks all rocks.

B *pppp* all rocks

computerised xii/98

Why East Wind Chills

Words Dylan Thomas 1 vii 1933

Music Maxwell Steer 14 x 1983

Moderato **Trattenuto** **Trattenuto**

Soprano *mf* *sf* *mf* *sf*
Why east wind chills & south wind cools

Alto
Why east wind chills & south wind cools

Tenor
Why east wind chills & south wind cools

Bass
Why east wind chills & south wind cools

Trattenuto

S *mf* *sf*
shall not be known

A *f* *sfp*
shall not be known till wind- well dries

T *f* *sfp*
shall not be known till wind- well dries

B *sfp*
shall not be known till wind- well dries

8 9 10 *mf*

S Drowned in winds

A & west's no long-er drown' in *sfp* *mp*

T & west's no long-er drowned drowned in *sfp* *mp*

B & west's no long-er drowned *sfp* *mp*

11 12 13

S that bring the fruit & rind of a hun- dred falls;

A winds that bring the rind;

T winds that bring the rind;

B

14 15 *mp*

S Why silk is soft & the stone wounds

A Why stone wounds *mp*

T Why the stone wounds *mp*

B Why is silk soft *mp*

16 *f* the child shall quest- ion all his days, Why

A *f* the child shall quest- ion all his

T shall quest- ion all his

B wounds shall quest- ion all his

18 *ff* night- time rain & the *mf* breast's blood both *f* quench his

A *ff* days, shall *mf* quest- ion why blood both *f* quench his

T *ff* days, shall *mf* quest- ion why blood rain & blood rain & blood

B days, shall quest- ion why blood rain & blood rain & blood

21 thirst

A thirst

T both quench his thirst *p* senza espr he'll have a dark re- ply.

B quench thirst *p* he'll have a dark re- ply.

24 $\text{♩} = 111$ **Vivace**

S When com- eth Jack Frost the child- ren

A When com- eth Jack Frost the child- ren

T

B

S ask Shall

A ask Shall

T *f* When com- eth Jack Frost When

B *f* When com- eth Jack Frost

S they clasp a com- et in their

A they clasp a com- et in their

T When the child- ren ask Shall they clasp a

B the child- ren ask When When When

30

S fists but not, till from high & low, dust

A fists but not, till their dust

T com- et in their fists? not till their dust

B When? the child- ren ask till their dust

32

S sprin- kles in child- ren's eyes

A sprin- kles in eyes not till their dust sprin- kles in cild- ren's

T lies

B *f* When com- eth Jack Frost *mf* When com- eth When com- eth Jack

34

S eyes a long last sleep

A *p* eyes a long last

T zh

B Frost

15 8 12 8

36 37 38

S zh

A sleep & dusk is crowd- ed with child- ren's

T zh

B zh

39 40 41 42

S **ad lib** ghosts, shall a white ans- wer ech- o from the roof- tops

A ghosts--shsh

T zh > ... > shh

B shh

43 44

S **Trattenuto** *mf* All things are known: *sf* the stars' ad- vice

A All things are known: the stars' ad- vice

T All things are known: the stars' ad- vice

B All things are known: the stars' ad- vice

47 *mf* 48 *sf* 49 *ff*

S calls some con- tent winds Tho what the stars

A calls some con- tent to trav- el with the winds tho

T 8 calls some con- tent to trav- el with the winds tho

B calls some con- tent with the winds tho what the stars

51 52 53

S ask as they round time up- on

A what they ask

T 8 what they ask

B ask as they round time up- on

54 55 56 Dim e rit

S time is heard but lit- tle till

A time the tow- ers of the skies till

T 8 is is heard but

B time the tow- ers of the skies is heard but lit- le till the

57 58 59 *sfz* *sfz* *sfz*

S Be con- tent,

A the stars go out. Be con- tent,

T *p* stars go out. *fff* I hear con- tent, & "be con-

B stars go out. Be con- tent,

62 *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *sffz* *sffz*

S Be con- tent, Know no

A Be con- tent, Know no

T tent" ring- ing like a hand- bell in the corr- i- dors & *fff*

B Be con- tent, Know no

Molto tratt.

68 *sffz* *sffz* *fff* *fff* *p* =75

S an- swer Know no an- swer cry of

A an- swer Know no an- swer cry of

T "know no ans- wer" & I know no an- swer to the child- ren's cry

B an- swer Know no an- swer cry

Lontano

74 75 76 77

p *p* *p*

S ech- o's an- swer & the man of frost & ghost- ly

A ech- o's an- swer & the man of frost & ghost- ly

T *mp* *f* *p* *mf*

Know no an- swer Be con- tent

B *mp* *f* *p* *mf*

Know no an- swer Be con- tent

79 80 81 82

pp *pp*

S com- ets ov- er the raised fist- sss.

A com- ets ov- er the raised fist- sss.

T Know no ans- wer,

B In their ghost- ly fist- sss.

computerized xii/98

Love in the asylum

Words Dylan Thomas iii/1941

Music Maxwell Steer 15/16 x 1983

Soprano $\text{♩} = 107$ *f*
A strang- er has come to share my room

Alto *f*
A strang- er has come to share my room

Tenor *f*
A strang- er has come to share my room

Bass *f*
A strang- er has come A strang- er has

S $\text{♩} = 107$ *f*
in the house not right in the head,

A *f*
in the house Shar- ing my room in the house

T *f*
in the house

B *f*
come Shar- ing my room in the house

7 *f* *tr* *tr* *tr* *tr* *sfp*

S a girl as mad as birds

A not right in the head with the birds *sfp*

T

B not right in the head with the birds *sfp*

12 *f*

S Bolt- ing the night of the door

A *f* Bolt- ing the night of the door

T *mf* Bolt- ing the night of the door with her, *f* Bolt- ing the

B *mf* Bolt- ing the night of the door with her, *f* Bolt- ing the

16 *f* *tr* *tr* *tr* *sfp*

S with her arm her plu- me.

A *f* *tr* *tr* *tr* *sfp* with her arm her plu- me.

T *sfp* night of the door with her arm her plu- me.

B *sfp* night of the door with her arm her plu- me.

19 *mf* *f*

S Strait in the mazed bed she de- ludes the

A Strait in the mazed bed she de- ludes the

T Strait in the mazed bed she de- ludes the

B Strait in the mazed bed she de- ludes the

23 *ff* *fp* *f>*

S heaven- proof house with en- ter- ing clouds Yet

A heaven- proof house with ent'- ring clouds

T heaven- proof house with en- ter- ing clouds

B heaven- proof house with ent'- ring clouds

27 *mp* *mf*

S she de- ludes with walk- ing the

A She de- ludes She de- ludes She de- ludes She de- ludes the

T She de- ludes She de- ludes She de- ludes She de- ludes the

B Yet she de- ludes the

trattenuto

29

S night-mar-ish room, at

A night-mar-ish room, at

T night-mar-ish room,

B night-mare room, As

a tempo

31

S large as the dead or rides the

A large as the dead

T She rides im-ag-ined o-ceans of the

B dead, rides, or rides the

33

S im-ag-ined o-ceans of the male wards *sp*

A wards. *sp*

T wards im-ag-ined o-ceans of the male wards. *sp*

B im-ag-ined o-ceans of the male male wards. *sp*

Leggiero

36 *pp*

S She has come poss-essed who ad-mits the del-u-sive

A *pp* She has come poss-essed who ad-mits the del-u-sive

T *ppp* She has come *fp* > who

B

38 *ff*

S light thro' the bounc- ing wall poss-

A *ff* light thro' the bounc- ing wall poss-

T *ff* light thro' the bounc- ing wall poss-

B *ff* light thro' the wal poss-

40

S essed by the skies she

A essed by the skies she

T essed by skies she

B essed by the skies she

54

S in her arms at long & dear last

A in her arms at long last

T in her arms at long last I may with- out

B in her arms at last I may with- out

57

S *f* I may with- out fail *mf* I may with- out fail

A *f* I may with- out fail I may with- out fail

T *mf* I may with- out fail *ff* I may with- out fail

B fail I may

59

S *ff* suff- er the first vi- sion that set fire to

A suff- er the first vi- sion set fire to

T suff- er the first vi- sion

B suff- er vi- sion

62 *tr* *tr* *p*

S the stars

A *tr* *tr* *p*

T *tr* *tr* *p*

8 the stars

B *mp*

the stars.

computerized 1/99