

Song of My Youth

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In "Fern Hill" Dylan Thomas presents the tragedy of the paradox of time: while man enjoys and revels in the pleasures of youth, he is moving, at the same time, away from youth to the dreariness of old age.

TIME OFFERS me his paradox on a golden plate. He piles the fruits of youth in a high bountiful heap in the center: golden apples of beauty, purple grapes of power, plump figs of skill, and, intertwined among them all, green branches of freedom. And under this tantalizing mound he hides the contradiction of it—the grey, heavy mass known as age. Time tempts me with the fruit, commands me, dares me, to taste it. For the moment he hides the dark nucleus and says it does not matter and brings forth cups of passion for me to drink. I hesitate, but the dark memory of age fades and dims in the light of this shimmering, glistening cup before me, and I take one sip from the golden goblet, and then another, and then a long, deep gulp. The hot, stinging liquid sweeps through me, makes my body tingle, even to the fingertips, and my muscles feel the surge of indomitable power. I have forgotten all but this world, this now, this youth. All is mine—I am prince of my world. I race through the countryside laughing, with my head thrown back and the wind whipping my hair.

Time is my constant companion, and together we meet success at every turn. Time is always there, urging me on and on, further and further. By night he sings me to sleep with his hurrying, breezy whisper, and by day we sing the song together; in a loud, triumphant voice we carol it to the world. It is the song of my youth—it tells of my power and glory and agelessness. It tells of tomorrow and the next day and the next, and it says they will all be this same, glad, golden-green color. It sings of me and praises me and is the promise of my soul.

And all this while I pass, rushing, by the warnings, the testimonies. Others, older mortals, warn me, admonish me; they try to hold me back when my every cell strains forward, to stop me when there is no stopping. They do not know; none of them can know; how can I tell them that I am different—that I will never be like them—old and dry and wrinkled, for now is forever, now is eternal—my song has said it. But they do not understand and cannot hear my song. Their threatening arms reach for me; their craggy hands try to draw me back and keep me, but I am free of them, above them, in a world where they have never been and will never be; they have never heard my song. I fly above them, faster and faster, urged by time and propelled by the hot, fierce flame in my blood.

And thus I pass my days, singing, flying, reveling in the strength and power that is mine alone, until one day I awake from my time-lulled sleep and find my green-golden world barren and still. I look down and see my feet shackled to the dry, dusty land. I listen for my song and hear only a faint, mocking rushing above my head. Looking up I see a beautiful body, a lithe, youthful body, flying above me with its head thrown back mouthing a silent song.