

At the gym by mark
doty



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

At the Gym, written by Mark Doty, dramatizes the conflict within the mind of a bodybuilder and his desire to change who and what he is. The speaker observes the routines of the bodybuilder bench-pressing at a local gym, and attempts to explain the driving force that compels him to change his appearance. The speaker illustrates the physical use of inanimate objects as the tools used for the “desired” transformation: “and hoist nothing that need be lifted” (5, 6). However, coupled with “but some burden they’ve chosen this time” (7), the speaker takes the illustration beyond the physical use of the tools of transformation and delves into the bodybuilder’s mental state. The speaker ends by portraying the bodybuilder as an arrogant, muscular being with fragile feelings of insecurity.

Similar to a church altar where baptisms take place, the speaker begins by depicting the bench press as an altar of change and transformation.

Illustrating the setting in this manner suggests that the speaker begins to wonder what drives the bodybuilder to lift an inanimate object repeatedly with a sense of addiction: “and hoist nothing that need be lifted” (5, 6). In the line “but some burden they’ve chosen this time” (7), the speaker implies that the bodybuilder’s desire to change is attributed to demons from his past that compel him to change his physical appearance. The “burden they’ve chosen” is the burden of destroying the inner demon in order to feel at peace.

The poem continues with “this sign of where we’ve been” (11) suggesting that the bodybuilder only feels a sense of accomplishment through the increase of body mass. The increase of body mass is his only visible sign and symbol of transformation; further removing himself from the demons. The

demons, or burden chosen, suggest that the addiction is the result of insecurity. " At least over flesh, which goads with desire" (17, 18) further suggests this. In other words, the bigger the better, but it is still never enough. These.

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