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Four Poems

James R. Caldwell

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POETRY

FOUR POEMS

WORD OF A DEATH

The bell ringing to bring,
To bring the word into the arbour,
Ringing to break the word in the arched arbour,
Twined until now of those questions and placid answers.

Ringing again and answered, yes,
Oh,
But in Oh, how fallen tone;
Heard beyond the wall and the door and
The door constricted of the heart;
So that the flash of a few faces stricken
Dispells the netted answer
And the question
Turns to which one stricken and in what disaster.

*Margins of cold spring,
Lie broad between my lintel and that ill.*

Under the footfalls on the stair,
The drip of water in another room,
And the rasping of my blood,
It is distilled
And stilled;
Until the name be spoken there beyond the door.

But already the tree in the garden,
The crumbled wall behind the garden tree
Recede then
Listen . . . stand . . .
Not at all willing nor yet suffering this
See, they have put space between them and the blood.

TO SARA TO WEEP NO MORE

Weep no more lady,
These bombs propound in no new darkened sky
These questions burst in minds not newly dead.
We are an old fellowship,
The Pontius Pilate a late, jovial member.
Our Pentacostal damps
Made dewey brows in Crete,
And Indus, where we learnt the ways of Wyrd
Rolled under cries according.

With no less cloudy look
Tanagra saw the blessed Islands fade
And heard the rattle of the shingle under the ebbing wave.
Always the sea bore riddles to the cliff,
Bore slaughter up along the shore,
The crop of hours and distance and desire, annulling breath
Annulled desire; lady, weep no more.

This is an old sword, and a grey wrath
And a very old unmeaning;
And it outgrows your tree a thousand years.

Consider this our birthright
That we shall barter for the reddest broth
Juice of no lentils, and still undilute
After the pouring of an age of eyes.

FOR THE DEAD

With a slow scrupulous ministry
 For you the white hand moved;
 And wrought your wounds at leisure, severing stroke
 From stroke
 With stately intervals of pain.
 Destroyed,
 And twice destroyed, too close you kept
 The earlier, inward death;
 Too sternly bade the flesh
 Cover its slain.

Do not return;
 Cherish the unaching grave;
 Or, if the ghost requires
 A world-revisiting by night,
 Stay from this darkened house;
 Shun the sad valley where beloved feet
 Move now in random ways,
 The lips so loved utter the words of sad un-meaning.

Do not return.
 Drift, if you will, the night wind above a distant ocean;
 Sigh amid foreign boughs;
 This grievous door
 Let the world's half sunder
 From your avoiding of the alien dawn.

EVEN SONG

Although this hour be brief as any,
 And full of great motion—
 Earth's swift aversion dark-ward,
 The hill and tree-top cutting a moonwise arc,
 Yet it loiters above this hill,
 Quietly, quietly,
 As if it knew no first, nor ultimate pulse,
 Beginning, nor ending.

In this immutable and changing hour
Returns the Dark-and-Single,
Asking its heritage of multiform and dappled earth;
In this still whirling time,
The sun-wrought fantasy give place
Before the shadowed fact,

Which was in the beginning, and shall be hereafter.

JAMES R. CALDWELL

L'INFINITO

This lonely hill has always
Been dear to me, and this thicket
Which shuts out most of the final
Horizon from view. I sit here,
And gaze, and imagine
The interminable spaces
That stretch away, beyond my mind,
Their uncanny silences,
Their profound calms; and my heart
Is almost overwhelmed with dread.
And when the wind drones in the
Branches, I compare its sound
With that infinite silence;
And I think of eternity,
And the dead past, and the living
Present, and the sound of it;
And my thought drowns in immensity;
And shipwreck is sweet in such a sea.

LEOPARDI

Translated by Kenneth Rexroth