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Elegy for a Dead Man

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ELEGY FOR A DEAD MAN

I

The dread morticians hurry to the grave,
Strew it with bunches of dried lavender,
Turn back with many and most false regrets.
Here the man lies—he keeps his stilly secret.

Are there no echoes to his words on earth
Now that he lies amid the starry skies?
There are the things he said, the things he did.
How can the raddled worm catch up with these

Pervasive essences, or the false ant
Scurry without a look past bone and tooth,
A puny ballet-dancer? Intellect
Keeps not his form, but keeps his eyes erect.

A falsity, that modulation? Oh,
False stars, false whims of fate, false whimsical
Discussers and dissecters of his reason:
Eyes through the glass have seen the winter snow.

II

There is no death that is not half of death
And half of life. At least for such as this
Man, whose whole life was built upon a premise
No worm can bore a hole in. Time has kept
Past wane of fame, past rot of bone, past stench
Of gracious flesh, a character in time
That's tuned to earth, to all the worlds that come
Upon the frenzied ebb of politics.

His music is as of the evening breeze.
Shall we, his earthly angels, wear the robes
Of swart morticians, pondering funest
Upon characterless mortality?

His music is as of the blooming bees
Who scurry back with honey to the hive.
Shall we stand white around the skeleton
And dote upon his newfound innocence?

His music is as of windsplintered trees.
Shall we compare his purity to snow
That lies before the keen eye of the sun
Turns all to water, then runs back to earth?

The great fragility of human life
Is borne-in by mechanical religions.
The eagle falls. The ocelot is struck,
Its grace gone down' before the final spear.

III

But, though the breath of winter kills the bees,
The honey's safe: the nectar in the hive
That comes upon the air sweet from Hymettus.
The dread morticians look in vain for bones.

The trees will bud in spring, the evening breeze
Whispers, beyond his death, the living essence
Of what he was: incarnate in the storm.
His ancient spirit rages. He is here.

Between the pages of a certain book
Who reads may learn more of him than they knew
Who strutted by his side upon that stage
He with his words erected for their dancing,
Unknowing puppets, whose most furious acts
Grow pale beside the tides of history.
Yet he has made their lives legendary,
And they will stand like ghosts upon his grave.

What falsity is this? The tiger stands
Flaunting his tail. The delicate gazelle
Goes quietly to drink the frozen seas.
Eyes through the glass look on the winter snow.

A MESSAGE TO THE BABOONS

The anarchies of time and state—
Fa-la! This is a grand life, brother native.

From the days when we climbed trees and threw coconuts
We have indeed gone a long way.

No longer are we content with quite the same
_Arbor vitae_. . . . but this is a grand life!

Indeed we have our monstrous legends too,
Of kings whose castles grew too big for them,

Of Cinderella beauties and their princes,
And more primaeval stories, of mere sex . . . .

Fa-la, we shall grow even to greater estates:
What need women, if we can swallow swords?

THE DARK GIRL

The black girl crossed her heart upon a stone,
_Heigh-ho the green holly._
She bit her fist, and carried an old maid’s bone,
Under the fictive eyes and the Hollywood tan
_There was nothing, O there was nothing._