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While He Is Soiled

Alex R. Schmidt

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AND THE GRASS

"Life," Enrico said, "is only a strength
or a weakness; the wave rising, the wave falling;
and the grass and the trees thus, the cities, the peoples;
the invisible virus thus, and the prayers, and the gods.

"Freedom is the right to obey Senate not King;
duty is the chance to die today not tomorrow;
kindness is a hilltop where strength turns downward,
justice an idea like two-times-two-is-four.
That is why I despise life," Enrico said,
"and why I despise the chemist gods who made it.

"And that is why I have learned to shoot so straight,
and why I thrill to the killing that I scorn;
and that is why you will have to be strong to beat me—
stronger than grass or locust or madman's dream,"
Enrico boasted as he marched with the others.

JOHN RUSSELL MCCARTHY

WHILE HE IS SOILED

I bear his wale and scar, burn with his sore,
I am his kin in bone and blood and beat,
His fellow's blows are livid in my core,
I share his burden as when brothers meet.

I look upon him and I think upon
The dispossessed who never learned to sing,
Or love, or play, or shout into the sun,
A dwarfed, misshapen, toil-bent, broken thing.

His soul-ache, heart-ache wound me like a wrong,
That cannot heal and I am scant and lean
Of beauty, dreams, the true accent of song
While he is soiled; and I will be unclean,
Until the day when he, too, holds the light,
With a trimmed wick and oil to keep it bright.

ALEX R. SCHMIDT