

CANTICLES OF DYING

Lynn Harting-Ware

IN MEMORIAM DYLAN THOMAS

- "Do not go gentle into that good night."

But stalk it
blade-sharp
with baited blood
smeared traps.

Tie it
ball and chain.

The futile bowing
of a cello

imitates irreversible

shapes of faces
moving in dark hues.

Pacing this night
of eroded hills: nostrils
flaring

quidquid latet apparebit.
Nil inultum remanebit.*

Weaving vine ropes
of unintelligible syllables,

blind hands sift
through roots, bone
ash.

Ha! Would supreme trickery
encircle it,

panting

leap-out of darkness
tear it apart
limb by limb?

Diving birds

-
- whatever is hidden will reveal itself. Nothing will remain unavenged.
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compose a dirge-canon

from rows of serialized
notes for which

the hills forgive.

Devour the rancid
configuration
behind stone walls?

Dried orchids
intone requiems;

confined
among lit candles
of resolution.

Shake off
that human terror
of fire and amber light

confutatis maledictis
flammis acribus addictis,*

coldness
shivering.

Harmonies
of four trombones

signal the discordant
preludial procession -

quantus tremor est futurus.*

Defy Death!
Bury me alive.

The aimless sleepwalker

will consume itself
to satisfy the obscene
hunger.

Smoke rises

* when the accursed have been confounded and given over to the bitter flames

* what dread there will be.

above silent, burnt
wicks quando judex est

venturus cuncta stricte
discussurus.**

Murderer!
Do not sneak in

disguised as some tortured
mystic to steel
that last breathe

in quiet strangulation.

Silhouettes
from a remote past
descend in unfamiliar

planes, resist invitation
to fluted dances.

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,
Deus Sabaoth.

Pleni sunt coeli et terra
gloria tua. Hosanna
in excelsis.*

A prolific groundskeeper
trims roses, sings

to the inaudible strumming

of loose strings,
glissandos.

(Keenly aware
of your iridescent
suicides, I

await confrontation, dreaming

of this ceaseless
immortal obsession:

** when the judge shall come to judge all things strictly.

* Holy, holy, holy, God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest.

ne cadam in obscurum,
ne absorbeat me Tartarus.*

An ornamental saraband

disintegrates in perfect
flame.

BEYOND DEATH

Beyond death
is there no comfort?

Memories resound
like wordless

litanies, and
the canonical hours
proceed with
discoloured

viola drones.

Tracing

lines and creases
from a recent

photograph,

transpositions

impose themselves
like vague

shadows.

Carrying violets,

I anoint myself
with holy water.

Priests

in the sanctuary
murmur Latin
verse, chant

canticles for
gathered mourners.

Hostias et preces tibi
laudis offerimus.

Suscipe pro animabus
illis quarum hodie
memoriam facimus.*

* lest I fall into darkness and the black abyss swallow me up.

* We offer unto Thee, this sacrifice of prayer and praise. Receive it for those souls whom today we commemorate.

At grave side:
name
inscribed in stone,
 counting
 purple petals
(token buds)
like the days
 I embrace
 death beyond
allotted prayers
carillon bells
 in loving memory
 of you.

DO NOT DONATE MY BODY TO SCIENCE

Should I be laid out
stone-cold bloodless
and drained of bodily
fluids

 the interns
would dissect me
piece by piece,

tissue and vein
without

 consciousness
or lament.

Reshape,
 file
the nose into perfect
 symmetry.
Realign
 jawbone.

A sharp incision
 throat
through abdomen -
examine the
 windpipe,
(pointed instruments,
mirrors)
 replace

with tubing.
Scrape traces of
bile,
measure intestines.

All the while
clinical
incantations.

Kidney and heart
cut out/stitched back.
But ah! Certain components
placed into
labelled
jars: eyes
and connecting nerves.

Sterile
masks, finely-tuned
scalpels.

But
the donor card
conveniently
omitted
explanations about . . .

cranial drilling and
thinly sliced brain tissue.

Flesh
falls
so easily
from bone.

Those
shapes moving
among the cadavers,
lifeless ruins,
profane
odours, without grief

without remembrance.

REQUIEM

What then shall I say,
remorseful sky?

Sparrows have tamed the moon.

A consort of crumhorns
grows restless, launches
into a sombre galliard.

Alabasca flowing. Fleshy
thighs once revelled beyond

moist pine desire
only fluidity along needle-swept paths.

Untouched mouth, lips
vibrating: Tuba mirum spargens
sonum per sepulcra regionum
coget omnes ante thronum.*

A fugue begins
chromatic, yet benign
among loose stones.

Retreat!
Dismiss the choir!
The orchestra
must not assemble.

Trombones unrehearsed

have misjudged
their entrance

Dies irae, dies illa
solvat saeculum in favilla
teste David cum Sibylla.*

Wildly circling hands
curse the madness.

* A trumpet spreading a wondrous sound through the graves of all lands, will drive mankind before the throne.

* Day of wrath, that day will dissolve the earth in ashes as David and the Sibyl bear witness.

The shadow of a woman
moves unnoticed between deserted

brick walls. Dead birds

tucked inside small, simple
breasts.

But, the rehearsal resumes:
a nod from the maestro

Veins rise-up
precise and powerful closing

hand, hard stroke struck.

These chosen trees
have decided to remain
tending fruit, tender berries.

Quaerens me sedisti lassus,
redemisti crucem passus, tantus
labor non sit cassus.*

The Requiem
is played then replayed

without intermission;

the tired Lacrymosa
will descend no further
down the scale.

Sleep sustained
befits dreaming quiet

slender fingers, opium-pipe

fingers cupped and numb
sliding rosin along the bow.

* Seeking me Thou didst sit down weary, Thou didst redeem me, suffering death on the cross, let not such toil be in vain.

Advise! (Death) Advise
as any unyielding
counsellor must!

Rex tremendae majestatis,
ne me perdas illa die.*

cor contritum quasi cinis,
gere curam mei finis.*

Mountainous night
transfigured like so many

stone faces, no dispute
muttered under breath
with the emptiness.

Oh! To be beautiful
once again: alto flute

blissful tone transpired.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis
peccata mundi, dona eis
requiem sempiternam.*

(misery
receding) unfathomable.

Resonating breathless
oneness: Lux
aeterna.

* King of awful majesty, do not forsake me on that day.

* My heart contrite as the dust, take care of my end.

* Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant them everlasting rest.