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## Five Poems about Life and Death

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## Five Poems about Life and Death

### **Cover Page Footnote**

N/A

*Poetry*

## **Five Poems about Life and Death**

Barry S. Brummett

*University of Texas at Austin*

### **After the memorial service**

They spoke many words of beauty, sorrow, grace.  
Yes.  
But in the end they shook the dry leaves from your tree,  
leaves left stirring in the crumbling wind.  
Now see your barren branches stark upon the sky,  
defenseless against time and chance.  
And when at home I brought out your books they told me to take,  
they were dusted by a haunting of smoke.

### **Family reunion**

When my grandson was born the Old Ones returned  
as they had for his mother in her time,  
and hovering around they pulled up rockers  
or swivel chairs or barrels or logs or chaise lounges  
according to their times and means  
and settled in to see who he is and to join the play.

One by one they audition for a part, his face a stage,  
jostling for rebirth in the churning of expressions centuries old.  
Bone and blood and sloppy flesh and fluids  
make grins and grimaces, moues and outrages,  
a magic lantern show of ancestors sliding beneath the skin,  
Transfiguration in Baby, moments of resurrection, the gift of every newborn.

In due time he will pull himself together,  
the Infant Impressario, and will cast one or two or three,  
a small company staged in himself,  
a family gathering rehearsing to stride the stage of the world,  
a reunion of revenants joining the comedy, learning their parts,  
and taking it on the road.

## **Cargo**

Above, at the gate, revelers beam and joke.  
On the tarmac below, the flag is removed  
and the casket moves up the conveyor belt  
into the hold of the plane.  
His widow and his mother watch from a corner  
of our window, sobbing, bereft, and alone.  
Their presence will haunt the plane for him  
while the rest of us sail our ship toward carnival,  
with death in our belly below.

It should be this way for the makers of war.  
Gorge and guzzle if you will,  
but do it atop of the dead.

## **Where the ice is the thinnest**

He was there.  
Then a moment of turning.  
Then he was not.  
The sudden blow of the fatal second  
shattering the ice atop the deep river.  
There is always a moment of untethered float  
and then they go into the endless depths beneath.  
The empty space above now filling  
with wind and snow and time.

## **A social call**

I opened my front door to go outside  
and there on the doorstep, not trying to hide,  
was a great big toad as attractive as sin,  
as if he were waiting to be bade come in.

We froze for a moment, amphibian and I,  
wondering, each, what the other would try,  
its social intentions I fear I'd inhibit,  
for it stared at me and it gave a loud "ribbit."

Then it leapt for the bushes and back to its pond,  
and it quickly vanished like some magic wand  
had been waved to transform it from toad into bush,  
and I never saw more of its green hairless tush.

Yet I'll treasure the moment when toady and I  
could just for an instant regard eye to eye  
the mystery each of us brings to our space  
and the shadow of God that each saw in that face.