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Five Poems about Life and Death

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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,
wanting, 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.