MANUSCRIPTS

HOW DISTANT NOW?

"... as always, where Dylan was, there were no tears ..."

J. M. Brinnin

I

So clear the notes which sang men on their way,
The broken tones of temperance and delay
Rang, and he heard, cursed that they should be
The anthem of man's immortality.
"Do not go gentle into that goodnight."

Bright in the green dawn, child, be the father;
In the blinding light, chained, by the breaded water
He sandaled words which swung the knotted line
And stormed the very temple of the mind.
"Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

II

How strangely now we sense
No music in his death,
No afternote legato to enhance;
Beauty breaks and falls with no illusion—
Memory is the only resonance.

Yet could it be at last he knows
What here we cannot understand,
A meaning almost caught in many things—
Death, a summer sidewalk
Green with voices, a Chinese
Windchime blowing in the rain.

III

The seawalls darken now. The claret wave,
Raging, mounts the breast of the mackerel sand;
O genesis, somewhere, child of another Christmas,
The lightning breaks at last from its cockled shell.

—ROBERT PETTY
Gathering now, April leads
Her thirsty armies to the spring,
While silver warriors with their beads
Steal quickly down the onward year.
Desperately we reach, for what?

Again to the blood which holds us here
Fast to the love and vanishing
Of dreams that are and those that were,
A language comes which has no name,
Asking, loud, in every man,
“What is the meaning of your name?”

But life is not to question life, here
Breathing dampness underneath the alders,
Where the young crow, lean and angry out of winter,
Finds itself reflected in the river,
Rises from the bottoms, swift and silent,
Black against the blooming of the year.

We grew too wise; goodbye, yet what is this—
A dying man, a cross and heart’s slow turning,
That we should be reborn beneath the altars,
Startled by our image in blest waters,
Rising from and to, we know not what.
It is not life to mock this crucifix;

Nor is it easily our dreaming goes,
Hiding blood which sings the primal vein,
Here in the middle mist; for God denied
The one choice—to remain; and nature lies,
Speaking so beautifully in mud and feathers,
To us, knowing neither Christ nor crows.
The rivertowns are lonely
With music and regret;
Flood-water has the levee,
In June we will forget;

And who will write the ballad,
Nor make it less than prayer
To say drowned fields are hallowed
Because the lord is there?

As death would have it, we exchange our doubting,
In manner that is fashion for the day,
With all our wilderness of senses crowding
To some new growth, flowering in old clay,
That we, who would be public in our pain,
Might live for a moment in our march to die.

But listen, the deaf are ringing bells!

—Robert Petty

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CREDO

Nothing breaks that will not lend a whole,
And we are but a part of any day,
Knowing some wingless feather lay
Where once our childhood thought it to be all.

In your heart, your only priest,
Your only saviour, love,
Go to your communion with the least;
Dare their wing to be worth dreaming of.

—Robert Petty