

The Hour and What Is Dead

By Li-Young Lee (1990)

Contemporary poet Li-Young Lee (1957-) was born in Jakarta, Indonesia and moved to the United States in 1964. His poetry is characterized by using humble yet striking imagery to focus on sublime themes.

1 Tonight my brother, in heavy boots, is walking
2 through bare rooms over my head,
3 opening and closing doors.
4 What could he be looking for in an empty house?
5 What could he possibly need there in heaven?
6 Does he remember his earth, his birthplace set to torches?
7 His love for me feels like spilled water
8 running back to its vessel.

9 At this hour, what is dead is restless
10 and what is living is burning.

11 Someone tell him he should sleep now.

12 My father keeps a light on by our bed
13 and readies for our journey.
14 He mends ten holes in the knees
15 of five pairs of boy's pants.
16 His love for me is like sewing:
17 various colors and too much thread,
18 the stitching uneven. But the needle pierces
19 clean through with each stroke of his hand.

20 At this hour, what is dead is worried
21 and what is living is fugitive.

22 Someone tell him he should sleep now.

23 God, that old furnace, keeps talking
24 with his mouth of teeth,
25 a beard stained at feasts, and his breath
26 of gasoline, airplane, human ash.
27 His love for me feels like fire,
28 feels like doves, feels like river-water.

29 At this hour, what is dead is helpless, kind
30 and helpless. While the Lord lives.

31 Someone tell the Lord to leave me alone.
32 I've had enough of his love
33 that feels like burning and flight and running away.

A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London

by Dylan Thomas (1945)

Modern poet Dylan Thomas (1914 - 1953) was born in Swansea, Wales, and considered himself a follower of the English Romantic tradition. His poetry is characterized by compact, vivid images and metaphors.

- 1 Never until the mankind making
- 2 Bird beast and flower
- 3 Fathering and all humbling darkness
- 4 Tells with silence the last light breaking
- 5 And the still hour
- 6 Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

- 7 And I must enter again the round
- 8 Zion of the water bead
- 9 And the synagogue of the ear of corn
- 10 Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
- 11 Or sow my salt seed
- 12 In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

- 13 The majesty and burning of the child's death.
- 14 I shall not murder
- 15 The mankind of her going with a grave truth
- 16 Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
- 17 With any further
- 18 Elegy of innocence and youth.

- 19 Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
- 20 Robed in the long friends,
- 21 The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
- 22 Secret by the unmourning water
- 23 Of the riding Thames.
- 24 After the first death, there is no other.