

The Passing of a Hero

by Henning Koch

There were some who said this man/ does not grow old/ does he feed
on honey-dew?/ is he blessed or does garlic sprout/ from his navel?/
his eyes are unwavering/ he fears no horizons/ does not give thought
to/ his place of burial or/ execution/ does not tell his men in black/ to
show up ten minutes late/ so his mourners have time to remember
him/ never sat at night listening to the fridge singing/ or woke in a
cold sweat wondering where in the garden/ he buried his life or/ how
it is that words, like seeds/ must always grow into something else/
then wither?/

This man had no itch in his pouch/ the gold ran freely/ and from his
stables came the whinnying of many horses/ in his kitchens the
sizzling of much oil/ and wine was his very blood, you might say/
from the way he liked to drink/ Nor did he wait twenty years
between children/ each year came a gentle bump as/ another child
emerged with tiny hands willing/ to finish his work/ His lover, his
wife, his women unknown/ in the tents/ all singing, none
complaining/ all weaving, spinning, dancing, painting/ he buys them
jewels, he burns frankincense for them/ he worships them in
sackcloth/ cover his body in ashes/ walks with a stick to Manhattan/
to buy the finest cloth/ for them/

Yea, this man/ this man/ words fail me/ would that all could be like
him/ would that all could grow one wrinkle/ as he did/ and find its
beauty rivalled/ mountains/ and time came hurtling behind him,
gripped his shoulder/ jumped clean over him like a buck goat/ the
world aged but he did not/ he spent his afternoons in an old car with
fake leather seats/ drank cold beer under the olive trees/ or lay in a
hammock/ his head swimming at midnight/ listening to the midnight
donkey/ tonight the fools are out/ tonight I shall sip the fruits of
Nepal/ tonight let me be wild/ tonight let me make a big pyre and
burn/ everything that has weighed me/ or measured me/ or led me/
or pushed me/ tonight let me watch the moths/ each one a work of
greatness/ waft their pale wings at the moon and gently swarm/ till

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morning/ tell me, where do the moths go/ where do they sleep?/ and
why do they love the light so/ yet choose the dark?/

This man did not lean on whey-faced priests/ to earn approbation in
the markets/ this man chose the poor and feeble of mind/ to eat at
his table/ shunning the smooth and the oozing/ whose pearls are all
cultivated/ this man knew if the soil is not our home/ nothing is/
I mourn him today/ I eulogise what he gave/ no one will ever equal
him/ there is no one who can emulate/ or show/ the many tiny
things/ the tiny mechanism of his chronograph/ and then, rumbling
from afar, the charge of his cattle/

Never again will there be one/ who buried his temples when the
barbarians came/ and their feet hammered on the ground/ passing
over his treasures/ to be dug up in another time/ when tourists come
with cameras/ and ice cream/

This man, this man/ did not speak excessively/ said nothing/
I come to speak of him, I come to say/ no words of mine/ no words/ I
have not the means/ to sing of him, his blood, his lineage/ his trees
all billowing in the wind/ speaking his name.

