

# substance shadow spirit

*by* strannikov

## **said substance to shadow:**

Earth and heaven last beyond us,  
creeks and mountains hardly ever change,  
trees and grasses grow in seasons,  
killed by frost, restored by dew:  
—but man, called wise, esteemed as god,  
alone is not their equal.  
Today we find him in this world,  
but soon he's gone with no way back:  
and no one notes there's one man less—  
no friend or kin remember long.  
What things he's used are all he's left,  
these things might bring some grief or tears.  
I have no art for changing change—  
no staying here, of that no doubt,  
so take or leave my plain advice:  
when offered wine, don't dare refuse!

## **said shadow to substance:**

“Immortal life” is useless talk  
when staying alive is chore enough—  
might want to move where immortals dwell,  
but that's too far, the road's long gone.  
For all the time I've been with you,  
we've only shared our griefs and joys.  
I seemed not there when you stood in shade,  
when you walked under sun, I walked, too.  
Inseparable, we won't long be—  
we each will vanish into dark.  
Once the body dies, the name dies, too—

but this thought makes me burn inside.  
Do good, and maybe love will last—  
the effort, at least, won't be misspent.  
While wine may wash away our cares,  
it surely could not outlast love!

**said spirit to substance and shadow both:**

The Great Potter grants no special requests—  
all created things run out their course.  
If man can rank with Heaven and Earth,  
in no small part is it due to me.  
Though I differ from the two of you,  
we're bound by common origin:  
and bound by common goods and ills,  
it suits for us to chat this way.  
The Three Great Kings, those kings of old—  
where do they reign and live today?  
Though one endured for many years,  
he, too, could not live all the days he'd hoped.  
Die young, die old, the death is the same,  
wise and fool die equally dead.  
Some wine each day might ease your cares  
or might cut short what years remain.  
—or is doing daily good superb?  
No good that's done earns lasting praise.  
Thinking too much can be its own pain—  
Destiny may be trusted if not loved:  
ride crests and troughs of ceaseless change,  
without delight but without fear,  
and once it's time to leave, then simply go,  
without regret, with no unseemly fuss.

