

## The Ship of Death

### I

Now it is autumn and the falling fruit  
and the long journey towards oblivion.

The apples falling like great drops of dew  
to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.

And it is time to go, to bid farewell  
to one's own self, and find an exit  
from the fallen self.

### II

Have you built your ship of death, O have you?  
O build your ship of death, for you will need it.

The grim frost is at hand, when the apples will fall  
thick, almost thundrous, on the hardened earth.

And death is on the air like a smell of ashes!  
Ah! can't you smell it?

And in the bruised body, the frightened soul  
finds itself shrinking, wincing from the cold  
that blows upon it through the orifices.

### III

And can a man his own quietus make  
with a bare bodkin?

With daggers, bodkins, bullets, man can make  
a bruise or break of exit for his life;  
but is that a quietus, O tell me, is it quietus?

Surely not so! for how could murder, even self-murder  
ever a quietus make?

IV

O let us talk of quiet that we know,  
that we can know, the deep and lovely quiet  
of a strong heart at peace!

How can we this, our own quietus, make?

V

Build then the ship of death, for you must take  
the longest journey, to oblivion.

And die the death, the long and painful death  
that lies between the old self and the new.

Already our bodies are fallen, bruised, badly bruised,  
already our souls are oozing through the exit  
of the cruel bruise.

Already the dark and endless ocean of the end  
is washing in through the breaches of our wounds,  
already the flood is upon us.

Oh build your ship of death, your little ark  
and furnish it with food, with little cakes, and wine  
for the dark flight down oblivion.

VI

Piecemeal the body dies, and the timid soul  
has her footing washed away, as the dark flood rises.

We are dying, we are dying, we are all of us dying  
and nothing will stay the death-flood rising within us  
and soon it will rise on the world, on the outside world.

We are dying, we are dying, piecemeal our bodies are dying  
and our strength leaves us,  
and our soul cowers naked in the dark rain over the flood,  
cowering in the last branches of the tree of our life.

## VII

We are dying, we are dying, so all we can do  
is now to be willing to die, and to build the ship  
of death to carry the soul on the longest journey.

A little ship, with oars and food  
and little dishes, and all accoutrements  
fitting and ready for the departing soul.

Now launch the small ship, now as the body dies  
and life departs, launch out, the fragile soul  
in the fragile ship of courage, the ark of faith  
with its store of food and little cooking pans  
and change of clothes,  
upon the flood's black waste  
upon the waters of the end  
upon the sea of death, where still we sail  
darkly, for we cannot steer, and have no port.

There is no port, there is nowhere to go  
only the deepening black darkening still  
blacker upon the soundless, ungurging flood  
darkness at one with darkness, up and down  
and sideways utterly dark, so there is no direction any more  
and the little ship is there; yet she is gone.  
She is not seen, for there is nothing to see her by.  
She is gone! gone! and yet  
somewhere she is there.  
Nowhere!

## VIII

And everything is gone, the body is gone  
completely under, gone, entirely gone.  
The upper darkness is heavy as the lower,  
between them the little ship  
is gone  
she is gone.

It is the end, it is oblivion.

## IX

And yet out of eternity a thread  
separates itself on the blackness,  
a horizontal thread  
that fumes a little with pallor upon the dark.

Is it illusion? or does the pallor fume  
A little higher?  
Ah wait, wait, for there's the dawn,  
the cruel dawn of coming back to life  
out of oblivion.

Wait, wait, the little ship  
drifting, beneath the deathly ashy grey  
of a flood-dawn.

Wait, wait! even so, a flush of yellow  
and strangely, O chilled wan soul, a flush of rose.

A flush of rose, and the whole thing starts again.

## X

The flood subsides, and the body, like a worn sea-shell  
emerges strange and lovely.  
And the little ship wings home, faltering and lapsing  
on the pink flood,  
and the frail soul steps out, into the house again  
filling the heart with peace.

Swings the heart renewed with peace  
even of oblivion.

Oh build your ship of death, oh build it!  
for you will need it.  
For the voyage of oblivion awaits you.

## Shadows

And if tonight my soul may find her peace  
 in sleep, and sink in good oblivion,  
 and in the morning wake like a new-opened flower  
 then I have been dipped again in God, and new-created.

And if, as weeks go round, in the dark of the moon  
 my spirit darkens and goes out, and soft strange gloom  
 pervades my movements and my thoughts and words  
 then I shall know that I am walking still  
 with God, we are close together now the moon's in shadow.

And if, as autumn deepens and darkens  
 I feel the pain of falling leaves, and stems that break in storms  
 and trouble and dissolution and distress  
 and then the softness of deep shadows folding,  
 folding around my soul and spirit, around my lips  
 so sweet, like a swoon, or more like the drowse of a low, sad song  
 singing darker than the nightingale, on, on to the solstice  
 and the silence of short days, the silence of the year, the shadow,  
 then I shall know that my life is moving still  
 with the dark earth, and drenched  
 with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal.

And if, in the changing phases of man's life  
 I fall in sickness and in misery  
 my wrists seem broken and my heart seems dead  
 and strength is gone, and my life  
 is only the leavings of a life:

and still, among it all, snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches of renewal  
 odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange flowers  
 such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms of me

then I must know that still  
 I am in the hands of the unknown God,  
 he is breaking me down to his own oblivion  
 to send me forth on a new morning, a new man.