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While He Is Soiled

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AND THE GRASS

"Life," Enrico said, "is only a strength
or a weakness; the wave rising, the wave falling;
and the grass and the trees thus, the cities, the peoples;
the invisible virus thus, and the prayers, and the gods.

"Freedom is the right to obey Senate not King;
duty is the chance to die today not tomorrow;
kindness is a hilltop where strength turns downward,
justice an idea like two-times-two-is-four.
That is why I despise life," Enrico said,
"and why I despise the chemist gods who made it.

"And that is why I have learned to shoot so straight,
and why I thrill to the killing that I scorn;
and that is why you will have to be strong to beat me—
stronger than grass or locust or madman's dream,"
Enrico boasted as he marched with the others.

J O H N R U S S E L L M C C A R T H Y

WHILE HE IS SOILED

I bear his wale and scar, burn with his sore,
I am his kin in bone and blood and beat,
His fellow's blows are livid in my core,
I share his burden as when brothers meet.

I look upon him and I think upon
The dispossessed who never learned to sing,
Or love, or play, or shout into the sun,
A dwarfed, misshapen, toil-bent, broken thing.

His soul-ache, heart-ache wound me like a wrong,
That cannot heal and I am scant and lean
Of beauty, dreams, the true accent of song
While he is soiled; and I will be unclean,
Until the day when he, too, holds the light,
With a trimmed wick and oil to keep it bright.

A L E X R . S C H M I D T