



12-15-1994

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Recommended Citation

Whitehead, James (1994) "A Poem for My Humerus," *Westview*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol14/iss2/12>

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A Poem for My Humerus

by James Whitehead

1

A recent x-ray of my arm and shoulder
Set me against cremation's cleansing fire
More than I was before.
One time I heard it called *a cleansing fire*,
Suggesting guilt and terrible regret
Concerning life on earth. I'm not for that.—
Also, one time I called to ask about
A funeral, was told that the cremains
Were at the home of the deceased.

Say what?

There'd be a service in another city.
Cremains! O this is how the language dies
Or says we're desperate for metaphor
To give a little dignity to death,
A sort of mousse with ashes that won't do.

2

My humerus was lovely glowing there
Upon the wall, looking like the moon,
Or at least its head did, lit from behind,
The doctor smiling over my old wounds,
Scores in the bone, stray pieces of calcium.—
Worst comes to worst, he said, we'll take it out—
My humerus!—and put a new one in
Made from incredible materials.



I asked him could I have the one displaced.
I realized I'd want it in a case
On view, with a bright plaque explaining things
The arm had done, helped by its hand,—tackles,
Blocks, embraces, many sentences.—
But it won't come to that, the doctor said.

3

Some Christians won't cremate because they fear
much difficulty with the resurrection,
God finding problems with the chemistry
It takes to put a body back together
After fire.

I'm not concerned with that,
For—alas—the Christian reconstruction
Seems far-fetched, to say the very least,
And is a mighty viciousness when faith
That some will rise tortures all the others.
Tacky or vicious seems to be the word.

Christ, I'd be rendered to a skeleton,
Then let an archeologist come on.
She's fascinated. She is taking notes.
She holds my humerus to the sun.

