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The Day We Marched Behind You: A Modern Twist to Graveyard Poetry

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Death is the only inevitable phenomenon we experience as humans. No matter where we're from, our socioeconomic status, sins, or good deeds, our lives lead with honor or disgrace; death will claim us all. In the eighteenth century, graveyard poetry became how death was brought to light in daily conversation around communities. That poetic genre religiously follows a set of tropes as identifying markers, always ending the poem with religious reconciliation.

Spirituality is becoming a journey of discovery; a discovery of the self and what we as human beings can do on our own. People are moving away from the providential and the "what is written" as a way of living, they/we are gearing toward our ability to take charge of our lives and believing that every decision we make contributes to our future. The idea that

everything is predestined lifts all responsibility off us, and our failures and joys of our successes, giving all blame or praise to God after believing that, and to quote the eighteenth-century Scottish graveyard poem Robert Blair, "Sicknesses, / Of every size and symptom, racking pains, / And bluest plagues, are thine!" are a form of punishment bestowed upon humankind for all the crimes we have committed against God (2015, 65).

Eighteenth-century poets reconcile their poems by going back to God at the end, offering faith in an afterlife and resurrection. In a way, ending it with some hope that we are not alone in this. They also offer proof to mankind that we will go to heaven if we believe; we just must never lose faith.

There are eight tropes with the addition of a well-suited ninth:

- 1- Memento Mori: always remembering the inevitability of death.
- 2- The transitory nature of life from one realm to the other.
- 3- There is always a graveyard setting in each poem.
- 4- No escaping the bodily decay in the poems.
- 5- Death is an absolute leveler in this life.
- 6- Always a tone of gloom, sadness, and mystery.
- 7- A religious reconciliation must occur at the poem's end, reflecting the life they led in the eighteenth century.
- 8- In each poem, there is only one narrator, and he/she remains alone.
- 9- The last trope was a question mark, but the poems leave no room to debate this trope. One way or another, there is an apparition somewhere, somehow.

As I am a strong believer that the world is moving toward a secular worldview, Jose Fuliga proves

me to be on to something. He starts off his article, “Factors Contributing to the De-Christianization of North America,” with a powerful claim in the opening paragraph stating that “The hold of the Christian faith on Americans is rapidly fading. Its churches’ pews are almost half empty, only filled with a graying generation. The absence of young faces is noticeable. The institutions preparing priests and pastors have dwindling enrolments” (3). He did not waste any time. I can see Fuliga’s statement and research reflected in many contemporary/modern poets.

In the Graveyard poem I composed, I move away from the religious reconciliation and leave my endings open to interpretation. I stay true to form except when it comes to the seventh trope, the religious reconciliation. As in life, unanswered questions outweigh the answered ones. Loss is part of life. Grief is part of life. My poem translates my pain, anger, and reconciliation with death.

The Day We Marched Behind You

Sinéad O’Connor’s song Nothing Compares 2 U
Came on the radio in the car the other day.
It reminded me of you.
I had to pull over to catch my breath for a minute.
It was your favorite song.
You would sing to it so loudly
Even though you never really knew all the words.
It reminded me of you.
It reminded me of the day our city turned into a
graveyard
Welcoming you onto your next journey.
We were only sixteen

Yours was the first funeral I attend,
The first body I had ever seen.

You didn’t look like you.

You weren’t pretty anymore.

I guess death does that to you.

You loved life.

You used to call me out all the time for being cranky
and angry.

You hated whenever I started fights with people

Who would just look at me the wrong way?

Remember when you had to pull me off that girl on the
street?

I had blood all over me

And you hated that I stained your favorite shirt.

It wasn’t my blood

It was hers after I broke her nose and jaw.

“You are abnormally strong for a tiny human,” you
said.

I liked that.

Your blood didn’t stain my shirt

It stained our streets.

Where you died.

Where we carried you to church.

You never cared much for churches

But you went all the time because you loved to pray.

You loved wearing the crucifix for protection.

He must’ve been too distracted the day you died on
that bike.

She was your baby, wasn’t she?

I don’t think you ever loved anything

Or anyone more than you loved that bike.

She killed you, didn’t she?

So stubborn.
Always playing daredevil on busy streets.
Never wearing a damn helmet.
That was beneath you; it wasn't cool.
I hated that you were so stubborn.

Your mother was not doing ok at all on the day of your funeral.
She kept screaming and banging her head with her fist.
I don't remember what she said.
I didn't know how to react.
I think I froze that day.
I never said a word to anyone.
I don't even remember crying.
How did I not cry for you? I don't remember.
Everyone kept saying, mumbling that you looked so peaceful and handsome.
I didn't think so.
You looked horrible.
You looked swollen, too pale.
You looked dead.
That wasn't handsome.
Death didn't suit you at all.

There you were lying in this beautiful white coffin wearing a white suit.
You get white, not black.
You were young and not married.
You get a wedding at your funeral.
I thought it was ironic.
You hated weddings and you never wanted to get married.
But here you are dressed in white not enjoying your *Zaffé*.

My foot was hurting me so much that day.
Remember how I stepped on the sea urchin?
You thought it was weird I didn't see it on the beach.
I still had pieces of thorns stuck at the bottom of my foot.
We marched behind you, taking turns carrying your coffin.
The girls didn't.
Only the boys.
So many dancers everywhere celebrating your life.
I never understood that in our culture.
Just fucking weird. You would've hated it.
I thought you should've had a bike parade,
But since your bike killed you,
I suppose that would've been inappropriate.

We marched behind you all the way to the church.
I couldn't feel anything but void.
I was numb.
All the stores on the main streets of our city were in mourning.
Each sign felt like a tombstone paying tribute to a dead loved one.

You broke the city's heart that day.

Here lies "him" a beloved father and husband.
Here lies "her" a beloved grandmother and mother.
How is it that everyone that dies is "a beloved?"
Not a single one of these people was a horrible human being?
I wasn't sure why my mind kept wandering to these places;
About how horrible some humans are.

How much pain one might bring another human being.
Do you think the woman who backed her car at full
speed,
The one who hit you riding your bike will have a
“Beloved” on her tombstone when she dies?

Every once in a while, I would purposely put pressure
on my injured foot.
I wanted to feel something other than the void.
The pain was good.
Pain is a feeling. I wanted that.
The urchin’s thorns kept digging into my foot the
harder I stomped.
That was ok.
I was ok then until we got to St. Jean Marc’s Church
You loved that place so much.
You used to think it was beautiful.
I was glad your parents chose it for you.
It would’ve made you happy.
I wasn’t.
The mass started.
I must’ve blocked it because all I kept hearing is a
whimper.
It must’ve been your mother.
I was no longer feeling pain.
I was feeling angry.
Very angry.
I was angry with your god.
Angry with your crucifix.
Angry with your saints.
None of them did a damn thing to keep you alive.
I hope you knew they failed you.
I hope you know that I was right.
That they weren’t real.

That they were a made belief fairy tale people tell
themselves
So, they stop taking responsibility for their mistakes.
That saying “it was God’s will” was
And still is the most outrageous concept human beings
created.
It was your will to drive on one wheel up a hill.
It was your stubbornness that refused to wear a helmet.
It was her will to reverse her car out of an alley without
looking.
You should not have died that day.
You should not have been hit so hard that you flew in
the air so high,
And landed on your head in the middle of the road.
Your friends should not have watched you die like that.
Where were they then?
Those saints and your God.
You couldn’t answer me. Couldn’t you?

You are gone now.
And here I am writing this to you, but you will never
read it.
You know,
I used to see your mother at the Lebanese church here
in Jamaica Plain,
When I first moved here.
I saw Maroun, your little brother at a party.
His childlike heart remembered me and hugged me so
tight.
He still doesn’t know his strength.
My heart stopped for a moment that night.
His eyes reminded me of you,
And the air got knocked out of my lungs for a while.
I don’t know what happened to your little sister.

They all left Lebanon after you died.
You would've hated it here.
The law requires you to wear helmets,
And cops stop you if you ride on one wheel.

I never approached her you know, your mother.
I don't know why.
I felt void again when I saw her,
But no spikes to stomp on anymore.
The thrones are all gone, and I am left with scars from
that march.
I buried them with you.
All that is left of you is this poem.
Just a scar.

To Rami...
Until we meet again.

Note on Author: Saide is an immigrant who survived the Lebanese Civil War as a child. Growing up in the aftermath of that war still affects everything she does as a writer. She holds a master's degree from Bridgewater State University and is applying for PhD programs in Irish Studies in Europe under the mentorship of Dr. Ellen Scheible. Saide is an adjunct professor at BSU as well as a managing editor for *The Undergraduate Review*. She wrote this graveyard poem under the advisory of Dr. Elizabeth Veisz. This poem is dedicated to Saide's childhood friend, Rami. Rami died at the age of 16 in a motorcycle accident and this poem describes his funeral. His was the first funeral Saide attended, opening a long and curious relationship between her and death.

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