

A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a



SUMMARY

Not until the end of the world—when the darkness that creates and destroys all people, animals, and plants silently brings forth the last dawn, and the sea that lunges like a harnessed animal falls still, and I'm about to die and return to the sacred earth (including its water, crops, etc.)—will I utter the smallest sound of prayer, or cry into the smallest fold of a funeral suit, to grieve this child's extraordinary death by fire.

I won't defile the immense human tragedy of her death by preaching some serious moral lesson. Nor will I desecrate the sanctity of life by writing yet another tribute to lost childhood innocence.

This London girl is now buried with our oldest ancestors. She's covered in long worms and the timeless soil of Mother Earth, hidden underground beside the flowing Thames River, which does not grieve. The first death one experiences (or the world's first death) is final and encompasses all others.

seed") or speak in hushed tones ("let pray the shadow of a sound") would be inappropriate to the scale of this horror. And turning it into moralistic or sentimental writing would be even worse. Using the girl's death as an opportunity to pronounce "a grave truth"—that is, a serious moral lesson—would be like "murder[ing]" her all over again. Using it to fuel an "Elegy of innocence and youth" would be like "blasphem[y]" (that is, sacrilege).

Indeed, the speaker treats this subject as so sensitive that it's almost sacred. He views the child's "going" as a blow to all "mankind"—or as tragically representative of the human experience—so he won't "blaspheme" it with a solemn, pretentious elegy. He doesn't even dare to cry ("sow my salt seed"), as if he doesn't have the right to.

In short, the speaker is deeply affected by the girl's death, and by the destruction of "innocence": he's not refusing to mourn it so much as refusing to sentimentalize or exploit it.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24



THEMES



THE TRAGEDY OF A CHILD'S DEATH

"A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" is an unusual kind of [elegy](#). Rather than grieve its subject, it pointedly *avoids* grieving. The poem's speaker "Refus[es] to Mourn" a young victim of a World War II air raid until the world ends or until the hour of his own death. The speaker isn't unmoved by the girl's death; instead, he holds back deep emotion as a gesture of respect, signaling that none of the conventional ways of mourning could be adequate in the face such a profound loss.

The death in "A Refusal to Mourn" is tragic not only because it's violent and senseless but because it's a "child's death." The poem implies that childhood innocence is precious and its loss terribly poignant. The speaker describes the tragedy itself as "the majesty and burning of the child's death" and as "the mankind of her going." Far from minimizing the death, these phrases portray it as something stunning and immense, as if the girl were a martyr. The word "majesty" accords the girl dignity even in her victimhood. In calling her "London's daughter," the speaker also conveys a parental or protective feeling toward the girl.

Thus, the speaker's "Refusal to Mourn" is really an attempt to honor the tragedy—or not dishonor it with a trite, conventional response. That is, this is really a refusal of shallow or inadequate mourning. The speaker suggests that even to cry ("sow my salt



THE NATURAL CYCLE OF LIFE AND DEATH

The speaker's "Refusal to Mourn" the child is partly an attempt to emulate the "unmourning" quality of nature. Despite the horror of the event, the speaker recognizes that death is universal: even the most shocking death is part of a natural cycle, the poem implies, whereby the living return to nature and join the dead who came before them. Indeed, the speaker acknowledges that he is part of that process; he, too, is vulnerable and mortal.

In struggling to remain stoic, the speaker is also trying to keep this tragedy in perspective—to understand it in the context of a natural and generational cycle. In describing the child as buried by the "unmourning water" of the "Thames" River, the speaker suggests that nature joins him (or vice versa) in refusing to mourn the tragedy. Even a senseless death, the poem implies, is part of the natural flow of things, a consequence of humanity's shared mortality. (The phrase "the mankind of her going" evokes the same idea: that death is part of the collective human experience.)

The speaker also describes this lost "daughter" as buried among "the dark veins of her mother," a phrase that invokes both Mother Earth and the girl's human family. Again, death is imagined as part of nature and the cycle of generations. The soil she's buried in is "beyond age," a reminder that she has now left or transcended youth; death unites the young and old of all times and places.

Refusal To Mourn

S Ashworth



Refusal To Mourn:

Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London by Dylan Thomas ,2011 **Literary Melancholia, Or the Refusal to Mourn** Maria Elena Iannetta,2002 **Poetry of Mourning** Jahan Ramazani,1994-05-28 Through readings of elegies self elegies war poems and the blues this book covers a wide range of poets including Thomas Hardy Wilfred Owen Wallace Stevens Langston Hughes W H Auden Sylvia Plath and Seamus Heaney It is grounded in genre theory and in the psychoanalysis of mourning Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London ,1945 Belief and Uncertainty in the Poetry of Robert Frost Robert Pack,2003 A leading Frost critic guides the reader through some of the poet s most challenging verse Language, Truth, and Literature Richard Gaskin,2013-04-18 Richard Gaskin offers an original defence of literary humanism according to which works of imaginative literature have an objective meaning which is fixed at the time of production and not subject to individual readers responses He shows that the appreciation of literature is a cognitive activity fully on a par with scientific investigation Modernism and Mourning Patricia Rae,2007 The essays in Modernism and Mourning examine the work of mourning in modernist literature or more precisely its propensity for resisting this work Drawing from recent developments in the theory and cultural history of mourning its contributors explore the various ways in which modernist writers repudiate Freud s famous injunction to mourners to work through their grief endorsing instead a resistant or melancholic mourning that shapes both their themes and their radical experiments with form The emerging picture of the pervasive influence of melancholic mourning in modernist literature casts new light on longstanding critical arguments especially those about the politics of modernism It also makes clear the pertinence of this literature to the present day in which the catastrophic losses of 9 11 of retaliatory war of racially motivated genocide of the AIDS epidemic have made the work of mourning a subject of widespread interest and debate Patricia Rae is Head of the Department of English at Queen s University **Three Faces of Mourning** Salman Akhtar,2006-11 This small volume comprises primarily papers presented in 2001 at the 32nd Annual Margaret S Mahler Symposium on Child Development in Philadelphia Pennsylvania Mourning and the importance of the capacity to bear some helplessness while still finding pleasure in life are central to this tightly organized volume The multi faceted processes involved in mourning and adaptation are addressed Expectably Mahler s conceptual contributions are liberally referenced throughout the volume separation individuation libidinal object constancy the unavoidable losses of developmental changes and mourning of the loss of one ness In keeping with the design of the symposium the book is organized around four primary chapters presentations each followed by a discussion chapter The unifying theme is mourning of the loss of a primary object either early in life or in adulthood **Signifying Loss** Nouri Gana,2011 By remapping the configurations of mourning across modernist postmodernist and postcolonial literatures psychoanalysis and deconstruction James Joyce Jamaica Kincaid Tahar Ben Jelloun Elias Khoury Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida Signifying Loss studies not only how loss is signified but also the ethico political significance of such signifying First

by examining the dynamics between narrative tropes and mourning it elaborates a poetics of narrative mourning in which prosopopoeia becomes the master trope of mourning while catachresis the master trope of melancholia and chiasmus of trauma Second it develops a situated and flexible theory of mourning capable of adjusting to diverse contexts in which the ethical and political stakes of mourning are different in short Signifying Loss calls for the formulation of geopolitical and differential tactics of mourning and mournability rather than for a clear cut strategy of inconsolability

History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence Berber Bevernage, 2013-02-14 Modern historiography embraces the notion that time is irreversible implying that the past should be imagined as something absent or distant Victims of historical injustice however in contrast often claim that the past got stuck in the present and that it retains a haunting presence History Memory and State Sponsored Violence is centered around the provocative thesis that the way one deals with historical injustice and the ethics of history is strongly dependent on the way one conceives of historical time that the concept of time traditionally used by historians is structurally more compatible with the perpetrators than the victims point of view Demonstrating that the claim of victims about the continuing presence of the past should be taken seriously instead of being treated as merely metaphorical Berber Bevernage argues that a genuine understanding of the irrevocable past demands a radical break with modern historical discourse and the concept of time By embedding a profound philosophical reflection on the themes of historical time and historical discourse in a concrete series of case studies this project transcends the traditional divide between empirical historiography on the one hand and the so called theoretical approaches to history on the other It also breaks with the conventional analytical philosophy of history that has been dominant during the last decades raising a series of long neglected big questions about the historical condition questions about historical time the unity of history and the ontological status of present and past programmatically pleading for a new historical ethics

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