

# *Dylan Thomas: Elegy*

Too proud to die, broken and blind he died  
The darkest way, and did not turn away,  
A cold kind man brave in his narrow pride

On that darkest day. Oh, forever may  
He lie lightly, at last, on the last, crossed  
Hill, under the grass, in love, and there grow

Young among the long flocks, and never lie lost  
Or still all the numberless days of his death, though  
Above all he longed for his mother's breast

Which was rest and dust, and in the kind ground  
The darkest justice of death, blind and unblessed.  
Let him find no rest but be fathered and found,

I prayed in the crouching room, by his blind bed,  
In the muted house, one minute before  
Noon, and night, and light. The rivers of the dead

Veined his poor hand I held, and I saw  
Through his unseeing eyes to the roots of the sea.  
(An old tormented man three-quarters blind,

I am not too proud to cry that He and he  
Will never never go out of my mind.  
All his bones crying, and poor in all but pain,

Being innocent, he dreaded that he died  
Hating his God, but what he was was plain:  
An old kind man brave in his burning pride.

The sticks of the house were his; his books he owned.  
Even as a baby he had never cried;  
Nor did he now, save to his secret wound.

Out of his eyes I saw the last light glide.  
Here among the light of the lording sky  
An old blind man is with me where I go

Walking in the meadows of his son's eye  
 On whom a world of ills came down like snow.  
 He cried as he died, fearing at last the spheres'

Last sound, the world going out without a breath:  
 Too proud to cry, too frail to check the tears,  
 And caught between two nights, blindness and death.

O deepest wound of all that he should die  
 On that darkest day. Oh, he could hide  
 The tears out of his eyes, too proud to cry.

Until I die he will not leave my side.)



This unfinished Elegy of Dylan Thomas was given the title "Elegy" in the latest version of the poem after the provisional titles "The Darkest Way" or "Too Proud to Die" or "True Death" had been used in preparatory drafts. Among his papers he left sixty pages of manuscript work towards the poem, including this note:

- (1) *Although he was too proud to die, he did die, blind, in the most agonizing way but he did not flinch from death & was brave in his pride.*
- (2) *In his innocence, & thinking he was God-hating, he never knew that what he was was: an old kind man in his burning pride.*
- (3) *Now he will not leave my side, though he is dead.*
- (4) *His mother said that as a baby he never cried; nor did he, as an old man; he just cried to his secret wound & his blindness, never aloud.*

The rest of the manuscript work consists of phrases, lines, couplets, and line-endings, and transcripts of the poem in various degrees of completeness. The two most complete versions, which are clearly the latest, are both written in quatrains. One, with no title, has no division into verses, and the second, with the title "Elegy," is divided into verses of three lines. This, to me, seems to be the latest version of all, and seems to hold the final form the poem was to take. The poem extends to the seventeenth line, ending "to the roots of the sea," after which there is a line which is deleted.

The extension of the poem has been built up from the manuscript notes. The lines are all found there, except that two or three have been adjusted to fit the rhyming scheme. "Breath" was an isolated marginal word which I have used in line thirty-four; and "plain," which ends line twenty-three, has been added to "was" without justification from the manuscript. In the third line I have chosen "narrow pride" as against "burning pride" although "burning" occurs more often than "narrow" in the transcripts; but it was "narrow" in that line that he quoted to me from memory when I last saw him.

Of the added lines sixteen are exactly as Dylan Thomas wrote them, and the remainder are only altered to the extent of an inversion or one or two words. Their order might well have been different. The poem might also have been made much longer. It recalls the earlier poem, also written for his father: "Do not go gentle into that good night"; but it is clear that in this last poem Dylan Thomas was attempting something even more immediate and more difficult.

VERNON WATKINS

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## Dinner with the Rabatis

**T**H E R E is a loud knock at the door. Since I only moved in two days ago and nobody knows my address, it can only be the man from the Electric Light Company. I put down my paintbrush and open the door unsuspectingly. This is a mistake. Outside are two of the Rabati brothers, immaculate in flowing white Moorish costumes. I am far from immaculate in an old pair of khaki shorts and a liberal coating of blue paint.

They greet me with exquisite old-world courtesy and ignore my appearance. Since they obviously expect to be asked in, there is nothing I can do about it. I stand aside and they climb my steep, narrow stairway. Hussein, the elder, is short and stocky. Abdel Madjid is tall and thin. They are both very dignified. I seat them on two trunks as I have as yet no other furniture, and retire to make some coffee. As we drink it, they exclaim over the beauties of my one floor and roof apartment; it would fit inside the gatehouse of their own vast, sprawling palace further up the hill.

They have been searching all over Tangier for me for the last two days in order to ask me to dinner tonight. They are entertaining the new Nicaraguan Minister and his wife, and I simply must not refuse now that they have at last found me. They are expecting their guests at eight. It is now nearly seven. I have plenty of time to change and their car is waiting for us in the square round the corner. I wonder what Emily Post would

suggest, but Abdel Madjid says firmly that they will go up on the roof and admire the view while I change.

It takes me a good ten minutes with turpentine, pumice stone, and soap to remove the paint. By this time I am raw but reasonably clean. My clothes are crumpled from being packed, but I finally get dressed and we set out. A black Cadillac is waiting to run us the few hundred yards up the hill. It drops us in front of the long blank wall of the Rabati Palace.

The gatehouse is filled with a rabble of manservants. Inside are gardens with flowering trees and shrubs. Fountains splash into marble basins. On either side and in front are pavilions in various states of disrepair. Away to the left I can see the glass roof of the ballroom rising like a giant hot-house above the trees. The dinner is to take place in a room off one of the inner courtyards, where another fountain drips with a pleasant, soothing sound into a moss-grown basin.

The room is long and narrow and disproportionately high, as are all Moorish rooms. The floor is covered with beautiful rugs laid one on top of another, so that they form a soft bed into which the feet sink. The walls are hung to a height of about six feet with pink and purple velvet patterned in the form of Moorish arches, each arch outlined in gold braid. Beneath this, and running all round the room, is a narrow, low divan, heaped with cushions covered in flowered cretonnes.