

Poem by Rosanna Warren

The Twelfth Day

FOR PAM CANTOR

It is the twelfth day
The hero will not take food
He refuses wine sleep women

How can the body not spoil?
Dragged by chariot
gashed smeared

in mud and horse droppings
Mutilate Mutilate
cries the hero's heart

as he lashes the horses
around and
around the tomb

If he can just
make his mark on this
corpse whose

beauty freshens
with each lunge
as though bathed

in balm Even the gods
in gentle feast are
shocked: Is there no

shame? The hero has
no other life
He has taken

to heart a body
whose face vaulting
through gravel and blood

blends strangely
with the features
of that other

one: the Beloved
For this is
love: rigor

mortis in the
mortal grip
and never to let

go Achilles hoards
and defiles the dead
So what if heaven

and earth reverberate
release So what
if Olympian

messages shoot through
cloudbanks sea
chambers ether

So what if everything
echoes the Father *let go let*
go This is Ancient

Poetry It's supposed
to repeat
The living mangle the dead

after they mangle the living
 It's formulaic
 That's how we love It's called

compulsion Poetry can't
 help itself
 And no one has ever

explained how
 light stabbed
 the hero how he saw

in dawn salt mist
 his Mother's face (she who
 Was before words she

who would lose him)
 Saw her but heard
 words *Let him let*

go Saw her and let
 his fingers loosen
 from that

suspended decay and
 quietly
 too quietly

turned away

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