

The Future

*There is no present or future – only the past,
happening over and over again – now.*

A Moon for the Misbegotten, *Eugene O'Neill*

*We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have
followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.*

The Book of Common Prayer (1789)

A Cast of Characters.

- Two Living Pilgrims, frequently fighting in the Present.
- The Dead, frequently watching, from the Past,
the Fighting Pilgrims in the Present.
- A Princess, also dead. She has other business.
She also has a horse.
- The Buried; whose Names Nobody Remembers.
- A Watcher, who Watches.

(i)

Before a broken throne
two Pilgrims stood
and put their hands
around each other's
throats.

One bigger than the other.

Each wished the other
dead
or worse.

Watching them: the Dead.

*Watch them love
to threaten life*
the Dead all said.

Each Pilgrim prayed
they'd
win
to whatever God was
listening.

(ii)

One Pilgrim
noticed they
were noticed
turned around and said:
We're not alone.

Thank God, the other said.

The Dead said
Wait.

The Dead said
Watch.

The Dead said
*You'll both
need each other.*

*And it might mean
the death of all
you've come to know.
Watch, we'll show you.*

(iii)

The Pilgrims pilgrimed
passing many graves
along their way.

*Are these the
lonely resting places
of the Dead?* one Pilgrim asked

The Dead
said
nothing.

Some forgotten things
are lost
but might be found.

Some forgotten things
are just
forgotten.

(iv)

The Pilgrims fought.

And fought about
the things
they fought about.

A blade was bought;
and brought;
and then a cut was made;
and a hand fell
to the dirt.

(There's always something
sacrificed to earth
for the sake of someone's
fantasy of winning.)

*Pick it up and take it with you,
the Dead ones said,
make it make you
make.*

(v)

The Pilgrims fought
about the question
of who'd been hurt
the most.

Fighting about old hurts
made old hurts hurt
much more.

And then one fell.

And the other hated helping,
but still tried to help.
And the helped one hated
being helped.

And they dreamt of
separating.

Their lives had been entwined,
like families,
for centuries by now.

Not by promises,
or priests.
but by griefs sustained.

(vi)

The Pilgrims' fighting paused from
time to time.

When one found
a way to make a
kindness
to the other,
the other made a
kindness back.

But then they took it back.

But then they offered it again.

And things went on like this for
longer than you'd think
a connection should survive.

(vii)

And sometimes along the way
a story cracked. And then again.
And then again, again.

What's your name today?
one Pilgrim asked the other.
The other didn't answer.

It wasn't that they didn't wish to share.
It's that they
didn't know.

Stories are a name, but stories only
grow with
stories told.

(viii)

Along the way
a Princess came,
a dead one, riding on a horsey
ghost.

She said:
*The Future's made of storied stuff
provided you keep storying
each
other.*

(ix)

The bigger Pilgrim turned to face the other:
I know you've hated me most of your days.

*So make your meaning plain.
Speak out from that pain you're holding.
Spare no
thought
for how you'll break our Future.*

The other Pilgrim said:

*I know that my dead
mother
and her mother's mother
and that woman's mother's mother's mother
went to death
repeating the same
question:*

*Don't they have some
other fields to
sow other than
these fields of ours
they've stolen?*

(x)

Then the bigger Pilgrim cried.
Lay down and cried.
Lay down and curled up on the ground and cried.

Lay down,
believed the story that was stated
defined them wholly hated;

and knew that it was
true, but it was not
the only truth.

Stood up and shouted:
*We were hurting too.
While you were grieving for your country
we were foreigners in fields whose language
hated us with centuries of hatred.*

And then one Pilgrim produced placards
filled with poison for the other.
And a Pilgrim blamed a Pilgrim for the other Pilgrim's hatred.

And then everything grew loud.
And the sounds of violence
electrified their ears.

Of course they thought about partition,
but some
hates run deeper than a border.
Hope too. And sometimes
truth.

(xi)

The Dead returned with force.
Howling, they lamented
everything they lost.
Like some kind of storm
they crossed the space
between the living and the dead.

They brought songs, and stories.

*We are not your glory.
We were empty sacrifices
required by emptier devices and desires
of power hungry people.
We were vassals
broken by a castle-dwelling class
whose names and stories
we forget now.*

(xii)

The Dead saw death
arriving on the faces
of the pilgrims.

The Dead toned down,
they said:

*Make stories while you live.
Where we stand now
you do not stand.
But where you stand, you can
risk a bit for living.*

(xiii)

One of the Pilgrims
went right up to the other
and pulled out salve
and tried to soothe
some sores.

And then the other, sitting, sitting, sitting
letting what the other touched
sting
with the stinging
of the living living living.

And for a moment they were looking
looking
looking at the

ways of
living.

(xiv)

And when the Pilgrims — fighting Pilgrims —
saw all that
they saw
they thought about the future
and how it hadn't happened
yet.

And how they didn't know a way
to make it grow.
And how the centuries all groaned
for victory and for
blame.

They turned to face
their destiny —
each other.
They turned to
face fragility —
each other.

They turned to
face their hatreds —
each other.

They turned to face
each other face
each
other.