

THE TETRARCH AFTER MIDNIGHT

Anything remotely round--
Moss-crested stones upon the ground,
Curved shadows in his garden
Could make him suck his breath
With a muffled rasping sound.

A change-- perhaps a trip to Rome,
He thought. Some place away from home
To leave the episode behind
Along with that beguiling child
Who briefly stole his mind.

The name Herod means heroic,
He announced aloud. I'll not
Allow some unwashed Stoic
To stalk my sleep and plot
Against my very sanity.

That man burned oil behind his eyes;
His tongue resounded, smoked
Like incense, wild disguise
Not hiding power in his thighs
And arms he never called upon.

Crucifixion-- much too public--
Yes, I should have hung him.
Instead-- decapitation! Whim?
Or female devil's vengeance-- rubric
For some future rite? Synonym

For usurpation? What a pair--
Most women shrink from blood. Beware!
I still can see the princess, hair
A-flying, prancing to her mother
With that ghoulish salver.

I should have harkened to John's word
About Herodias. She's mad!
She set the tray beside my bed
Unknown to me. And then I heard
Her humming, turned and saw the head!

(cont.)

She ordered it to watch
 While we made love. My crotch
 Went icy, sweat rolled off my face.
 She raged: "I should have kept the rest
 And put it in your place!"

She pushed John's eyelids open
 While she danced and mocked all men.
 I swear his fire still burned
 As if some ancient god returned
 To validate his advocate.

And now this Christ is doing things
 No mortal can. It's John, I know!
 Back to punish me, to show
 The world my weakness, prove that kings
 Stand helpless under heaven.

Oh, pull yourself together!
 With Jews there's always more afoot.
 I must be careful whom I put
 In prison. Why and whether
 They brew disruptive weather.

Curse you woman, curse the troth
 I pledged before your daughter
 Like a drooling fool. Curse you both,
 And best you heed my latest oath--
 You two will serve me as you ought!

--Glenn Holloway