

To a Young Wretch (Boethian)

As gay for you to take your father's ax
As take his gun - rod - to go hunting - fishing.
You nick my spruce until its fiber cracks,
It gives up standing straight and goes down swishing.
You link arm in its arm and you lean
Across the light snow homeward smelling green.

I could have bought you just as good a tree
To frizzle resin in a candle flame,
And what a saving t'would have meant to me.
But tree by charity is not the same
As tree by enterprise and expedition.
I must not spoil your Christmas with contrition.

It is your Christmases against my woods.
But even where, thus, opposing interests kill,
They are to be thought of as opposing goods
Oftener than as conflicting good and evil;
Which makes the war god seem no special dunce
For always fighting on both sides at once.

And though in tinsel chain and popcorn rope
My tree, a captive in your window bay,
Has lost its footing on my mountain slope
And lost the stars of heaven, may, oh, may
The symbol star it lifts against your ceiling
Help me accept its fate with Christmas feeling.

