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The Tree

Ruth Stone

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In the hourglass
It came to pass
I returned from where I died,
With my funeral veil
And my fairy tale
And the tears I never cried,
And the story's grown stale,
Female and Male,
Where the stars fly,
And we all die
On the down side.

The faintest hint of a thud, generated by the $u u //$ of the meter, is enough to qualify and control the pathos of this narrative. The resulting ironic perspective serves to universalize what otherwise would be Mrs. Stone's very sad and very private story. We are all victims *together* of time's depredations, unbearable grief and bereavement, our sex, and finally of death. I know of no recent poetry which says any more or says it any better.

T H E T R E E

I was a child when you married me,
A child I was when I married you.
But I was a regular mid-west child,
And you were a Jew.

My mother needled my father cold,
My father gambled his weekly gold,
And I stayed young in my mind, though old,
As your regular children do.

I didn't rah and I hardly raved,
I loved my pa while my mother slaved,
And it rubbed me raw how she scrimped and saved
When I was so new.

Then you took me in with your boney knees,
And it wasn't them that I wanted to please—
It was Jesus Christ that I had to squeeze;
O glorious you.

Life in the dead sprang up in me,
I walked the waves of the salty sea,
I wept for my mother in Galilee,
My ardent Jew.

Love was touch and unity.
Parting and joining. The Trinity
Was flesh, the mind and the will to be.
The world grew through me like a tree.

Flesh was the citadel. But Rome
Was right as rain. From my humble home
I walked to the scaffold of pain, and the dome
Of heaven wept for her sensual son
Whom the Romans slew.

Was it I who was old when you hung, my Jew?
I shuffled and snuffled and whined for you.
And the child climbed up where the dead tree grew
And slowly died while she wept for you.

The *goyim* wept for the beautiful Jew.

Ruth Stone

S A G U A R O

Buttoned up, nailed, exactly riveted ribs
Coming together at the top of the idiot head
With a bloom and pale shock of what might be hair.
Don't endanger yourself, but feel that green skin.
They're so human. The stubs at the ends
Of those beseeching arms with little fruits
Like maimed fingers. And the high whistle
Air makes rushing up those spines. You feel
That presently when they have grown more arms
They will be useful. Do something. March in file.
Ruth Stone

T H E P E R I P H E R Y

You are not wanted
I said to the older body
Who was listening near the cupboards.
But outside on the porch
They were all eating.
The body dared not
Put its fingers in its mouth.
Behave, I whispered.
You have a wart on your cheek
And everyone knows you drink.
But that's all right, I relented,