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To Radcliffe Squires

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TO RADCLIFFE SQUIRES

In Memoriam

“The dangerous magic of human memory.”
You envied that phrase by Frederic Prokosch
and his pretty-boy looks, and his year of fame.
Shyly, you showed me a studio photo once,
yourself as his double, girl-glamorous,
prewar faun’s flesh unwrinkled as Narcissus.
The Asiatics whispered to your generation:
journey among the wicked vanities
and turn what is “tarnished, perverse, epicene”
into vignettes the world will savor secondhand,
keepsakes for an afterlife of vanished esteem.
You hero-worshiped this vagrant who “had no master—
and hardly a peer,” who never answered your letters
as you charted his intensities in an admiring book.

Prokosch abandoned verse; you took it up,
six postwar volumes of crystalline speech,
stanzas wind-carved as the Utah buttes.
Tracing these fey solitaires to their source
I found a mercurial tree-keeper, a connoisseur
gracing the house and garden with rare slips
from Olympus, cuttings from Andros and Carmel.
“Life is the only *pragma*; it is the only fact,”
you wrote in summarizing *The Skies of Europe*,
and neglect of your art did not entirely sour,
even in your seventies, the praise of life
you offered a few hundred readers, till life
stopped one Valentine’s Day, and you put by
your spoiled body on that unnatural shore.

I wonder what made you love, so much and so long,
the maker of *The Carnival*, wayward, haunted,
the Shelley this century keeps from its schools.
The only unforgiveable sin, you often said,
is to impersonate oneself. Of course,
but how many others are worth mimicking? One
model, at least, must drive the hungry spirit
among otherworldly gardens, the Asia of poets.
Love will crown the voice of a generation.
You never knew celebrity, not even a year,
but your obscure life grows elsewhere still,
in human memory like mine, in the exotic herbs
you divided among friends, in the language
you made a dangerous magic of. *Requiescas*