1975

Unpopular Fisherman

George Mackay Brown

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1885
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They've carried a seven-foot coffin
Down to the shore.
In Quoylay, look for no net-reft
Or rants any more.

(Who is it dead? A man
With a shortage of friends.
God send us more grief when we
Come to our ends.

Is it the laird? That great one
With five or six fawners
Might reach his long porphyry home
—But who'd be the mourners?

Is it Ezra the tinker? Not him.
There'll be pipers to blow,
Fist-fights and reels and whisky
The day he's laid low.

Is it Swart who gives the short measure
For the ale and the rum?
That one could stretch the length of his counter, unmourned
Till kingdom come.

What unpopular man is dead?
The slow feet pass
Among the tombs. . . . As for a man, his days
Are brief as grass.)

The cold tumultuous hands they fold
In the lee of the kirk
For seven winters were at the plundering westwards
Of herring and shark.

Look for no lawless cradles in Quoylay more.
Wholesome the fights
With no more gouging, blasphemy, broken bottles
On Saturday nights.