



SAUL'S DEATH

1.

I used to be a monk, but gave it over
Before books and prayer and studies cooled my blood,
And joined with Richard as a mercenary soldier.
(No Richard that you've heard of, just
A man who'd bought a title for his name.)
And it was in his service I met Saul.

The first day of my service I liked Saul;
His easy humor quickly won me over.
He confided Saul was not his name;
He'd taken up another name for blood.
(So had I—my fighting name was just
A word we use at home for private soldier.)

I felt at home as mercenary soldier
I liked the company of men like Saul.
(Though most of Richard's men were just
Fighting for the bounty when it's over.)
I loved the clash of weapons, splashing blood—
I lived the meager promise of my name.

Saul promised that he'd tell me his real name
When he was through with playing as a soldier.
(I said the same; we took an oath in blood.)
But I would never know him but as Saul;
He'd die before the long campaign was over,
Dying for a cause that was not just.

Only fools require a cause that's just.
Tools, and children out to make a name.
Now I've had sixty years to think it over
(Sixty years of being no one's soldier).
Sixty years since broadsword opened Saul
And splashed my body with his precious blood.



But damn! we lived for bodies and for blood.
The reek of dead men rotting, it was just
A sweet perfume for those like me and Saul.
(My peaceful language doesn't have a name
For lewd delight in going off to soldier.)
It hurts my heart sometimes to know it's over.

My heart was hard as stone when it was over;
When finally I'd had my fill of blood.
(And knew I was too old to be a soldier.)
Nothing left for me to do but just
Go back home and make myself a name
In ways of peace, forgetting war and Saul.

In ways of blood he made himself a name
(Though he was just a mercenary soldier)—
I loved Saul before it all was over.

2.

A mercenary soldier has no future;
Some say his way of life is hardly human.
And yet, we had our own small bloody world
(Part aches and sores and wrappings soaking blood,
Partly fear and glory grown familiar)
Confined within a shiny fence of swords.

But how I learned to love to fence with swords!
Another world, my homely past and future-
Once steel and eye and wrist became familiar
With each other, then that steel was almost human
(With an altogether human taste for blood).
I felt that sword and I could take the world.

I felt that Saul and I could take the world:
Take the whole world hostage with our swords.
The bond we felt was stronger than mere blood
(Though I can see with hindsight in the future
The bond we felt was something only human:
A need for love when death becomes familiar).



We were wizards, and death was our familiar;
Our swords held all the magic in the world.
(Richard thought it almost wasn't human,
The speed with which we parried others' swords,
Forever end another's petty future.)
Never scratched, though always steeped in blood.

Ambushed in a tavern, splashing ankle-deep in blood;
Fighting back-to-back in ways familiar.
Saul slipped: lost his footing and our future.
Broad blade hammered down and sent him from this world.
In angry grief I killed that one, then all the other swords;
Then locked the doors and murdered every human.

No choice, but to murder every human.
No one in that tavern was a stranger to blood.
(To those who live with pikes and slashing swords,
The inner parts of men become familiar.)
Saul's vitals looked like nothing in this world:
I had to kill them all to save my future.

Saul's vitals were not human, but familiar:
He never told me he was from another world:
I never told him I was from his future.
