

KING TUTANKHAMUN:  
ONCE THERE WAS A BOY WHO LOVED TO WHISTLE

Young pharaoh, I studied  
your museumed effigies catching light,  
posed on the threshold of blue and saffron,  
paused in the old dreams from the head of Horus:  
Morning renascence out of a lotus,  
rolling across the arch of heaven on sun wheels,  
rafting under-earth rivers near shoals  
of Osiris, wrapped in the shawls of Ptah.

Mortal eyes are splended with your accessories,  
a glut of gold and gods. And everywhere  
your face with your ankh-eyes  
reflecting on your mirror world.  
You must have seen eyes when yours were closed,  
always looking at you,  
a thousand replicas to fill your own.

I saw you at the bowstring-- hunter, warrior,  
hero-murals of a lord, a moral for your subjects,  
foiled with lapis, carnelian, turquoise.  
And in the end, failed by the vulturine wingspan  
and splayed serpent hood.

But back in the trailing edges of light,  
beyond the artists' tales and the godsmith's tolls,  
before you changed your name--  
there was a smiling boy: I saw him  
through a tear in the papyrus, rollicking  
barefoot on sands old when legends began.  
You on an ungilded afternoon.  
Learning how to whistle.

It is he beneath the priceless mask:  
Amarna child with puckered mouth  
framing melodies for the songless ibis,  
and turning Selket's head.  
On moon-chilled desert I can hear him  
softly behind the myth of death.

THE REACH OF SONG, Poetry Society of Georgia