

THE TETRARCH AFTER MIDNIGHT

For weeks--anything remotely round,
moss-crested stones upon the ground,
curving shadows in his garden
could make him suck his breath
with a muffled rasping sound.

A change-- perhaps a trip to Rome,
he thought. Some place away from home
to leave the episode behind
along with that beguiling child
who briefly stole his mind.

My name-- Herod means heroic,
he announced aloud. I'll not
allow some unwashed Stoic
to stalk my dreams and plot
against my very sanity.

That man burned oil behind his eyes;
his tongue resounded, smoked
like incense, wild disguise
not hiding power in his thighs
and arms he never called upon.

Crucifixion-- much too public--
yes, I should have hung him.
Instead-- decapitation! Whim?
Or female devil's vengeance-- rubric
for future rites? Synonym

for usurpation? What a pair--
most women shrink from blood. Beware!
I still can see the princess, hair
a-flying, prancing to her mother
with that ghoulish salver.

I should have harkened to John's word
about Herodias. She's mad!
She set the tray beside my bed
unknown to me. And then I heard
her humming, turned and saw the head!

(cont.)