

THE TETRARCH AFTER MIDNIGHT

Anything remotely round--
Moss-crested stones upon the ground,
Curved 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.

The name Herod means heroic,
He announced aloud. I'll not
Allow some unwashed Stoic
To stalk my sleep 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 some future rite? 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.)