

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
And leave the episode behind
Along with that beguiling child
Who briefly stole his mind.

The name Herod means heroic,
He announced aloud. I will not
Allow some unwashed Stoic
To stalk my sleep and plot
Against my very sanity.

That man burned fire 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--
But I could 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.)

(stanza break)

She ordered it to watch
While we made love. My crotch
Went icy, sweat rolled off my face.
She raged: "I should have kept the rest
And put it in your place!"

She pushed his eyelids open
While she danced and mocked all men.
I swear his fire still burned
As if some ancient god returned
To validate his advocate.

And now this Christ is doing things
No mortal can. It's John, I know!
Back to punish me, to show
The world my weakness, prove that kings
Stand helpless under heaven.

Augh! Pull yourself together;
With Jews there's always more afoot.
I must be careful whom I put
In prison. Why and whether
They brew disruptive weather.

Curse you woman, curse the troth
I pledged before your daughter
Like a drooling fool. Curse you both,
And best you heed my latest oath--
You two will serve me as you ought!

--Glenna Holloway