

## THE SIXTH ELEGY

Fig tree, how long have I pondered your meaning:  
For you suppress almost wholly your flowering,  
And press your pure secret, unheralded,  
Into the early ripening, resolute fruit.  
Your curving branches drive the sap down and then up,  
Like a fountain's jet: and it starts from its sleep,  
Scarcely awakening, leaps into the joy of its sweetest fulfillment.  
See: like Zeus enters the swan.

.... But we linger,  
To us it is given to flower, and into the core  
Of our final fruition we go, too late, but spent and betrayed.  
In only a few is the impulse to action so strong  
That they're already waiting, glowing in their heart's fullness  
When the temptation to flower touches their young lips,  
Caresses their eyelids like gentle night air:  
In heroes, perhaps, and in those fated to die early  
In whom the gardener Death twists veins in a different fashion.  
These plunge ahead: they outpace their own smiles  
Like the team of chargers races ahead of victorious Pharaoh  
In the gently hollowed reliefs in the temple at Karnak.

The hero is strangely akin to those that died early. Survival  
Is not his concern. Ascent is his being; ever again  
He renews himself and enters the fresh constellation  
Of his constant danger: few could find him there.  
But fate, that hides us in dark silence, is suddenly glad  
And sings him into the storm and tumult of his world.  
I hear *him* like none other. Suddenly I am pierced  
By his darkened voice amid the currents of air.

Translated from the German by Tony Stephens and Tom Morton.  
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