

ON THE FUNERAL OF MAJOR YURI GAGARIN
AND COLONEL VLADIMIR SERYOGIN

Two birds caught in the lightning, their wings burnt off.
The wonderful feathers scattered about
Picked up by whirling winds. That was the end.
Never will they orbit our Earth again;
Not the world we touch and see,
Not this world from Red Square
Or anywhere in space or time.
Do you not hear the muffled drums?
They that were dynamic flesh.
Major Yuri Gagarin and his friend Colonel Vladimir Seryogin,
Are now humble dust.
Their people and their mothers mourn
The sudden Fate that struck them down
As sudden lightning strikes the pinnacles
Of a cathedral.
(No priest chants a requiem for their 'souls';
But soldiers guard their ashes in Red Square.)
What can the living do with a dead body?
Burn the bodies,
Burn them quick
Burn them clean.
Keep the ashes
Dust to dust,
Ashes to ashes.
Tearful eyes behold no more
But the heroes' spirit burns
Like a flame of astral dust
Beyond the frontiers of this Earth.
The funeral is over. The mourning friends disperse:
Some to remember, some to forget
Their heroes' ashes stored in little urns
Beside Lenin – silent in Red Square.
Man can give no greater glory than this;
All for this earth and for this earth alone –
Some tears, some sobs and a handful of flowers.
Must we be satisfied with so little
For so much daring?
A day's official mourning,

Long speeches, stiff salutes,
Ten or twelve shovels of dust
Heaped on their bodies
Or ashes scattered to the wind
Or kept in urns,
The end of all, non-being,
Physical survival in broken ribs and skulls?
This would indeed be for us and our heroes
Vanity of Vanities!
For these two astronauts whom we have loved
Our Faith creates the substance of true being
And ultimate fulfilment
Beyond the grave.
Flesh is fragile but the soul
Is wrought in God's own Furnace,
Unbreakable steel whose cutting edge
Pierces through the complexities of Earth
That keeps the rotting body
Prisoner of a silent grave
Or ashes in small urns.
These astronauts are steel
From God's own Furnace
In Eternal flight
Around His uncharted universe
Away from Earth that soaks in her own blood.
Alas for flesh emptied of God's own breath
And for man's plans emptied of good intent!
How strong and mighty must an empire be
To cure a mortal body of mortality?
To clip Death's wings
Or break his scythe
When one by one he mows us down
And piles our bodies like so many sheaves
Of flabby flesh at Satan's harvest time?
Yuri Gagarin and Vladimir Seryogin,
Ye more than ashes in small urns
Or passing memory of fleeting time
For brief salute,
Step off the Space Ship that travels within Time
Into Eternity:
Immortal citizens of God's proscribed domain.

THE FIRING SQUAD

The firing squad is ready, guns well-aimed,
The kneeling soldiers wait for the command.
He with eyes uncovered,
A sad smile on his lips,
Hands tied but head erect,
Cries with a loud
Unshaken voice:
'Shoot well! Shoot here!'
(Shows where his heart beats)
'When 'tis hard to live
'Tis sweet to die!'
The kneeling soldiers fired a hundred shots;
He fell down on his face
In a pool of bubbling blood.
His spirit, disembodied by violent act,
With the prompt lightness of a captured bird,
Leaving its cage,
Not in rage,
But singing happily,
Left the earth and flew beyond the sun,
Beyond the reach of Tyrant's Knife and Gun.
(In the City, traffic goes on as usual.
Freedom in chains – few really care).
The tyrants' loyal soldiers go away.
Poor souls! Poor devils!
What can they do but murder to obey?

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