Poem by Rosanna Warren

The Twelfth Day
FOR PAM CANTOR

It is the twelfth day
The hero will not take food
He refuses wine  sleep  women

How can the body not spoil?
Dragged by chariot
gashed  smeared

in mud and horse droppings
Mutilate Mutilate
cries the hero’s heart

as he lashes the horses
around and
around the tomb

If he can just
make his mark on this
corpse whose

beauty freshens
with each lunge
as though bathed

in balm  Even the gods
in gentle feast are
shocked: Is there no

shame? The hero has
no other life
He has taken
to heart a body
whose face vaulting
through gravel and blood

blends strangely
with the features
of that other

one: the Beloved
For this is
love: rigor

mortis in the
mortal grip
and never to let

go Achilles hoards
and defiles the dead
So what if heaven

and earth reverberate
release  So what
if Olympian

messages shoot through
cloudbanks sea
chambers ether

So what if everything
echoes the Father  let go let
go  This is Ancient

Poetry  It’s supposed
to repeat
The living mangle the dead
after they mangle the living
It’s formulaic
That’s how we love  It’s called

compulsion  Poetry can’t
help itself
And no one has ever

explained how
light stabbed
the hero how he saw

in dawn salt mist
his Mother’s face (she who
Was before words she

who would lose him)
Saw her but heard
words Let him let

go  Saw her and let
his fingers loosen
from that

suspended decay and
quietly
too quietly

turned away


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