

my father is dead. again.

(for my father-friend tom dent)

1.

what are fathers
but measuring rods
to gauge our growth

walking canes
to aid our stepping
through vast unknowns

cylindrical vessels
who house ancestral links
the planting of which

into fertile soil
turns today's sorrows
into tomorrow's joys

fathers are more
than mere giants—they are
the “to be” promise

of germinating seed
the genetic baton
passing on

the history of our needs
our deeds, our soul
expressions

2.

i was thousands of miles away
when tom's tree fell

the weight of missing him
answers the age old question

does a falling sound
if no one hears

the crash—yes
i know the answer, yes

because
his aftershock's tremble

reverberates within
the chamber of my skull

at all
the oddest moments

like discovering a special person
within the skin of a child of mine

and discerning at the same time
a lady i used to love

a lady whose love
shaped me

there are periods
when our ability to perceive

presence and potential
is predicated

on having been groomed
by those who have gone before

on having been shown
how to see beyond

what is now
what is known, how

to appreciate the shape
of things to come

all this prescience a product
of learning the living wisdom

of a brusque old man
whose gruffness was so tender

so touching
in its honest intimacy

as he suggested that
there was something beyond

what ever was
and is, and yes, even will be
there is always
something more

something better
to be/come

3.

english words were never meant
to adequately articulate
the anguish in our mouths, our hearts
when we lose the stretching part
of our selves—the stairs we climb
to see further, to descend deeper

as we look out and over
past the limits of horizon line

our vision is improved when we stand
on the shoulders of elders
whose height hoists us higher
than we could ever grow
if we remained flat-footed
married to the ground

the view from these human
balconies enables us to eye
not just near and far
but also back and down
into the wells
of our own personalities

trodding their path
we go beneath the undertow

surveying the superstructure
assaying our foundations
breathing the thin air
of emotional danger
where we are taught to distinguish
the essential differences

between bittersweet and poison
between weariness and resignation
between honesty and cynicism
between maturity and hubris
here, where self-assessment and frankness
are more important than speeches and homilies

if we are fortunate
here we have fathers
who help us
clearly see
depths
as well as distances

4.

in the new orleans
that tom knew
old griots die singing
they do not go silently
into some lonely night

in his new orleans
we do not kill our fathers
to prove that we have arrived

but rather we learn
from them that we can
crack open the kernel
of our own becoming
only by completing
the final maneuver
of life's ultimate passage rite

the step of accepting the torch
and making of ourselves a light
volunteering
to lift the father spirit
to shoulder the responsibility
of becoming beacon
for those newly born
and those yet to come

in our new orleans we do not stop
at simply burying aged bodies
we also dance forward
from funeral line
and accept the awesome
task of filling father shoes

if i really come from
the house of the rising sun,
if i really believe
in resurrection
if i am really
my father's son
i must be reborn
be his life
after death

5.

perhaps a moan
is the most profound
sound one can make
when a father is gone

when my first father died
i cried publicly
this time my tears
for tom are silent
words on paper

the two times
a man is most
alone
are when

he loses
a father and when he
loses his own
life—his
beginning his end

6.

in earth ways
my father is dead. again.

but yet again
he lives

the older i become
the more people i contain

another of my fathers
is dead

long live
my father

long live my father
in me

long live
my many fathers

long live
long live

all the fathers
i am

and all the fathers
i will ever be