

TO RUPERT BROOKE

Ficke, Arthur Davison, 1883-1945

Died before the Dardanelles, April, 1915

I

You too, "superb on unreturning tides,"
Pass; and the brightness dies out of the air.
Our life itself seems dreamlike, waiting where
The desert of no paths forever hides
Your hates and longings, your revolts and prides,
The secret miracle that your songs declare—
As these few reliques to our eager care
And long delight your stricken hand confides.

Beautiful lover of beauty!—child of the sea,
Sunlight, and mysteries of the evening foam!
Though sleep shall heal the feet too far a-roam,
Are you at peace now as you longed to be ?—
Or beauty-hungered does your soul go free
Out of the harbor of its mortal home.

II

It was enough, that common men had died
In this vast horror of the shaken world
Where life's primeval hate broadcast is hurled
To crush the age's generous youth and pride
In flame and anguish ; proving how we lied
Who dreamed a nobler banner now unfurled
Over mankind—while bitter smoke-wreaths curled
Up from the Moloch-lips we had denied!

But you not as this age's sacrifice
Should have gone down ; you were foredoomed to be
Not of the age, but of all time a light.
This hour has grief—too much !—but you are price
That the race pays for its apostasy,
Its hour of madness in the abysmal night.

III

Song lingered at your lips—delicate song,
Whose flowing waters in the golden day
Bore from the hill-lands of the far-away
The dews of rarer heights for which men long.
But when the tawdry baseness of the throng
Opposed to that fair stream its dull delay,
Your words leaped skyward into stinging spray,
A scornful challenge to the powers of wrong.

When you sang of beauty, Beauty's self came down,
Blue-robed and shining, to the courts you laid
Where the heart walks at evening, hushed and free.
But when you touched the dullard and the clown,
The jangled keys of your tense spirit made
Discords, that were your prayer to harmony.

IV

Clear level light across the English hills
Where garden-shadows track the afternoon ;
Dusk under willows where a summer moon
Its long cascades of ghostly silver spills
Down pools of silence; a refrain that fills
The heart with sense of some forgotten tune ;
The trembling white limbs of youth's night of June
When life's whole perfume up the wind distils:

These drift out of the regions that enfold you,
And from my memory almost smooth away
The picture of your known and mortal face,—
As though the lineaments could no longer hold you
Their prisoner, nor the earthen lamp betray
With dust the flame that there had dwelling-place.

V

The song is ended, but the years have set
No boundary to your memory ; you have done
A young man's miracles; your dreams have won

Some little of fadeless wonder from the fret
And torture of the days; your eyes have met
The eyes of the Archangel of the Sun;
And your lips cried, in brief last orison,
A gleam and glory men will not forget.

The rest is silence . . . your smile of swift delight
Shall flash to ours no more, nor shall the hand
Bring the heart's greeting as you come again.
Only an echo from the silent land—
Only a gleam sometimes through summer rain—
"A width, a shining peace under the night."