

Edwin Muir (1887-1959)

2 *Ballad of Hector in Hades*

Yes, this is where I stood that day,
Beside this sunny mound.
The walls of Troy are far away,
And outward comes no sound.

I wait. On all the empty plain 5
A burnished stillness lies,
Save for the chariot's tinkling hum,
And a few distant cries.

His helmet glitters near. The world 10
Slowly turns around,
With some new sleight compels my feet
From the fighting ground.

I run. If I turned back again 15
The earth must turn with me,
The mountains planted on the plain,
The sky clamped to the sea.

The grasses puff a little dust
Where my footsteps fall.
I cast a shadow as I pass
The little wayside wall. 20

The strip of grass on either hand
Sparkles in the light;
I only see that little space
To the left and to the right,

And in that space our shadows run, 25

His shadow there and mine,
The little flowers, the tiny mounds,
The grasses frail and fine.

But narrower still and narrower!
My course is shrunk and small, 30
Yet vast as in a deadly dream,
And faint the Trojan wall.
The sun up in the towering sky
Turns like a spinning ball.

The sky with all its clustered eyes 35
Grows still with watching me,
The flowers, the mounds, the flaunting weeds
Wheel slowly round to see.

Two shadows racing on the grass,
Silent and so near, 40
Until his shadow falls on mine.
And I am rid of fear.

The race is ended. Far away
I hang and do not care,
While round bright Troy Achilles whirls 45
A corpse with streaming hair.

1925

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