

Rags of April's Finery

Generations waste beneath an apple-tree.
If I had known what comes with age, if love
Of anything, of art, of woman, or this tree
Had once removed the soft concealing glove
That made my love both discipline and mystery,
Would I have kissed that charge of time and death
And praised the trend of flesh's favouring?
Is there disease upon a mother's breath?—
Her lullabies were full of secrecy.
Did ruin foul the ancient nursery?
Her milk was sweet and warm, her voice, a cloak, or wing.

I love a woman and a worldly art;
My life can be consoled by shedding trees.
My youth has passed, a murmur of the heart,
And with it all my burning loyalties;
And yet, these leafless days set well with me.
I am a figure at a windowpane,
Staring at the lesson in the leaves.
The trees are dripping with a pewter rain;
A surgeon's hands are rinsed for surgery,
Children in a nurse's custody,
She fits them with miraculous reprieves.

All seasons claim the dreamer at this earthly watch.
Distractions of a dying fire, art
Hangs garments in the closet of a bitch,
At once a tailor to a virgin and a tart,
It fashions wardrobes from the fire's drapery,
Concealing which is which, divided love,
A lifelong study in a single dress,
It kisses ruin through a virgin's glove.
Those leaves are rags of April's finery;
A naked woman waits beneath the tree.
She has an ailing child and something to confess.

Patrick White