

**Ceremonials: Florence**

Dead bodies cram the air,  
 though not a bone's visible anywhere  
 but in the churches, cased in glass  
 as if to localize that weight of flesh—  
 centuries of history fractured and compressed  
 into a human scrap.

In the cool church interior

a Settignano tomb: the sweet flow of stone  
 immortalizes a humanist-philosopher.  
 Eyes open, staring to heaven,  
 he dreams victories of speech,  
 graces of conversation  
 at the table, in the garden,  
 spirited animadversions on a Latin crux,  
 under the yew and by the lemon tree,  
 lifting his glass, quaffing the host's new wine;  
 or strolling in the evening, languidly,  
 through the narrow streets,  
 gesturing to stress a point,  
 articulate a nuance, modestly  
 demur to praise. Laurel and bays  
 his pillow, pillow of stone;  
 on his face a half smile, permanent,  
 lighting the memory of his last days:  
 thousands of tapers, the square ablaze,  
 the breath of crowds passing, pressing in—  
 rough cloth, rough breaths; the woven vestments,  
 wools, silks, their dense neat threads; incense,  
 pungent, rising in thin spicy wreaths  
 above the mourners' heads;  
 Mass words and chants to bless, bury,  
 make the Word bread. The crowds  
 move forward, kneel, are fed.

Unmoving, past viaticum, he sleeps.  
 His soul slips free, hesitates;  
 after a final glance  
 turns toward sunlight,  
 ascends the hilly path.

*Julia Keeler*