

GEOFFREY HARESNAPE

Visits to a Halifax Cemetery (established 18—)

1. Production Line

How does one 'establish' a cemetery?

Some paperwork perhaps;
fixing the hourly rates—
at first for gravediggers
and latterly for operators
of mechanical scoops.

Clearly there's no shortage of raw material.
Twenty-four hours around the clock
the long horizontal line of cold cadavers
comes rolling in.

But can one take credit
for turning out a product?

2. Icon

Like white meringue
snow covers carvern stones
that hide like berries in a pie.

Only one tall artefact
has a presence
where the death flakes fly.

What is this figure,
 hungry and pale,
 who has grabbed a sheep,

wrapping it
 around his shoulders
 to keep him warm?

You'd be able to read
 THE GOOD SHEPHERD
 in better weather.

3. Up and Coming

What when he'd taken time
 for weeping,
 for telling Mary that her brother wouldn't have to rot,
 for seeing that the stone was rolled away,
 for saying everything that needed to be said,
 I guess that Jesus must have used up half the afternoon
 to raise up Lazarus from the dead.

How will he manage with the inmates of these many graves
 that cling to icy slopes
 between the highway and a frozen stream?

No problem.

We're told he's organized a dead-awakening gig
 when all the potent horns will blow
 at the round earth's imagined corners.

4. How Long, O Lord?

Today a weak sun shines
 and the graves re-emerge from the snow—

but the dead don't re-emerge from their graves.
 O, no!

5. Tombstone Talk

Hi,
John Condon!
Your name,
if I may say so,
is like a condom
hiding the nub
of the authentic you.

Eighteen hours of flight at thirty-thousand feet
and exploration apparently at random
has brought me to where you're shovelled in.

Up here your little piece of thawed-out real estate
looks firm and trim
except where a hobo
has bashed the transom
off your marble cross.

Down under, I suspect,
your casket has reneged
upon the Funeral Home's
expensive guarantee.
It lets in dribbling water,
and the flexing, frenzied worms are free.

Is there anything that I can say
apart from the usual
'Have a good day'?

I think you'd want the matter
to be referred elsewhere.
It's a procedure
some call prayer.