

Kinsman

Eugene England

If we live in our holy religion and let the spirit reign, it will not become dull and stupid, but as the body approaches dissolution the spirit takes a firmer hold on that enduring substance behind the veil. . . .

Brigham Young

My father's flesh appears the same,
Brown clay so burned by summers
In the wheat that still the hat line
Shows lighter into the failing hair.

But more than half the third finger
On the left is gone, the fourth clipped
By the same saw, and crooked just right
To hook the twine for tying sacks.

And on the right two toes removed
(Years later) against the constant pain
From being crushed by the big roan
As she stepped and turned to leave the stall.

A wedge of bone, ploughed from the skull
When the derrick fork pinned him to the stack.
The muscles slack, the teeth reduced—
The body's edges worn away.

The tabernacle shrinks and sinks
Toward the earth, and still the face
Juts toward the east, the hands grasp the wheel
As they did that morning I was eight:

We drove from town just as the sun
Squinted down Left Fork into our eyes.
We stopped the truck and crossed the swale
To the highest ridge on the lower field—

The stalks still green, the heads just formed,
Beards now turning silver-tan,
Still and moist in the windless dawn,
Closing calmly as we walked the rows.

Plucking random heads, we counted and chewed
The milky kernels. And then he knelt,
Still grasping the wheat, in fierce repose.
I stood and watched his face. He said:

“Thou art the Prince who holds my heart
And gives my body power to make.
The fruit is thine: this wheat, this boy;
Protect the yield that we may live!”

And fear thrilled me on that hushed ground,
So that I grew beyond the wheat
And watched my father take his hold
On what endures behind the veil.