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Epitaph / Of Oak and Innocence

Lynn Riggs

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Epitaph
By Lynn Riggs

Here lies a bag of bones—here lies my love
Here I lie too, who never meant to die
at last unlived, and face ignominy—
for such it is for such as I, by love.
Immutably the standard flown above
splits in the wind, announcing the poor guy,
unrewarded by the wizardry
that love is. Immured is he who strove,
past all disclaimer, by his love and me
for bliss that follows after—bliss, my eye!
Is this a thought to take you when you die?
Is this the sentiment to put on stone—
a granite coverlet of sympathy
to wrap yourself in, when you lie alone?

Illustration by Maria Valentina Sheets

Of Oak And Innocence

With wry contortions poets turn and seek
that lyric moment to be precious in:
"The frigid bird claws with his granite beak,"
"O murderous ash! O grace of terrapin!"
We must go backward to a timeless wood
of soft-dropping light and green moss underfoot,
and sit in the sun that idles where we stood
centuries ago and long: back to the root
of oak and innocence—back to the year
when the young sun soaked the amazing earth
and crashed through fibrous stem and stone to be
wombed in the darkest cell of soil and tree—
when the simplest leafy motion was a birth,
and the quiet word a thundering in the ear.

LYNN RIGGS, like his Claremore predecessor Will Rogers, was part-Cherokee. Long deceased, Riggs was best known for GREEN GROW THE LILACS, which became the Rodgers-Hammerstein hit OKLAHOMA! The Riggs poems published here are from his collection titled THIS BOOK, THIS HILL, THESE PEOPLE.