

THEY ARE DEAD NOW

This isn't a poem

This is two men in grey prison clothes.
One man sits looking at the sick flesh of his hands—
hands that haven't worked for seven years.
Do you know how long a year is?
Do you know how many hours there are in a day
when a day is twenty-three hours on a cot in a cell,
in a cell in a row of cells in a tier of rows of cells
all empty with the choked emptiness of dreams?

Do you know the dreams of men in jail?
Sacco sits looking at the sick flesh of his hands—
hands that haven't worked for seven years

remembers hoeing beans at twilight in his garden
remembers the crisp rattle of the edger
remembers the mould of his wife's back
fuzziness of the heads of kids.
Dreams are memories that have grown sore and festered,
dreams are an everlasting rack to men in jail.

Vanzetti writes every night from five to nine
fumbling clumsily wittily with the foreign words
building paper barricades of legal tags,
habeas corpus, writ of *certiorari*,
dead spells out of a forgotten language
taken from the mouths of automatons in black.

They are dead now
The black automatons have won.
They are burned up utterly
their flesh has passed into the air of Massachusetts
their dreams have passed into the wind.

"They are dead now," the Governor's Secretary nudges the
Governor,

"They are dead now," the Superior Court judge nudges the
Supreme Court judge,

"They are dead now," the College President nudges the Col-
lege President,

A dry chuckling comes up from all the dead:
The white collar dead; the silkhatted dead; the frockcoated
dead

They hop in and out of automobiles
breathe deep in relief
as they walk up and down the Boston streets.

These two men were not afraid
to smell rottenness
in the air of Massachusetts
so they are dead now and burned
into the fierce wind from Massachusetts.
Their breath has given the wind new speed.
Their fire has burned out of the wind
the stale smell of Boston

Ten thousand towns have breathed them in
and stood up beside workbenches
dropped tools
flung plows out of the furrow
and shouted
into the fierce wind from Massachusetts.
In that shout's hoarse throat
is the rumble of millions of men marching in order
is the roar of one song in a thousand lingoos.

The warden strapped these men into the electric
chair
the executioner threw the switch
and set them free into the wind