

Send not for whom the bell tolls

Each man's death diminishes me. (John Donne)

The bells, the bells, on Saturday morn?
An eerie melody;
they do not rouse the sleeping to church
but hail eternity.

The bells cry out in mournful tones
as befits the day:
the dawn when Jesus lay entombed
and followers hid away.

The bells peal on, yet do not come
to watch this mournful scene:
the murder victim was a boy,
his killer just as green.

No mother falls to weep at his feet
No father stands in silence
before a boy his loins had sired
convicted of such violence.

Only the flinty faces of police
watch for his final breath;
only a priest who yet believes
that Christ has conquered death.

Too late, too late for pardon now!
The king is far away.
They will not wait for letters to come,
nor a day delay.

When all was fixed, that faithful priest
still wrestled for his soul
with anguished prayers and urgent pleas:
‘Make peace with God your goal.’

Confession poured from him like blood:
five minutes—all it took—
between intent and fatal act,
to pass from boy to crook.

And little time it took to die
when they pulled out the cart
and turned away from gasping breaths
and his still beating heart.

Like Joseph did, they cut him down
and buried him in sand
on the lonely western tip
of his adopted land.

And when he died, a mask was made
for grim posterity,
so scientists could gauge the width
of criminality.

When morning broke on Easter day,
the priest looked out to sea
and mused upon the empty tomb
that set all prisoners free.