

MARVIN BELL

The Book of the Dead Man (Decomposition)

Live as if you were already dead.

—Zen admonition

1. About the Dead Man and Decomposition

The dead man has a mulberry bush on the brain.

A mulberry chopped down forty years ago, not one others can see.

It grew by the house, it was immediate, it was personal.

The dead man is of more than one mind about it.

The dead man's nature, like his brain, has been etched, chiseled, planed and diverted by a
single bush, tree or flower, by a moment as quick as the claw foot of a bird overhead.

It takes little to inscribe in the dead man the forefront of the mystery.

To the dead man, that one mulberry was more than a forest.

To the dead man, the heron in his cedar was more than a rookery.

The dead man evades the notion of species to count by ones.

He is himself a species unlike others.

Others may sense, perceiving the dead man, that the silences of nature are a welcoming, and
the sounds of nature are cautionary.

The dead man's love of nature, like yours, must be cognizant of the end.

It was not nature invented time.

It was not the devotees of entropy who said to live and let live.

The nature of nature will not be replicated in poetry ink.

The dead man greets Aristotle in the mindscape of imitation, it is not re-creation but
a new world.

Such is nature to the dead man that the world may be endlessly reborn.

Even as the long dead live on in the dead man, so a mulberry bush may stay behind.

2. *More About the Dead Man and Decomposition*

Have you been waiting for the dead man to compose or to decompose?

The dead man, in becoming, unwrites and unsays.

The dead man has left no tracks in the loess, not in the humus, the loam, the dust, the salt or the talcum.

Not in the peat or chalk, the silt, the gravel or the spilled feed.

His footfalls in rain and snow lifted off, into the ethereal.

The dead man's weight is not dead weight but disperses, aerated and released.

Your memory of the dead man is a child's balloon, and where is that off to?

Of the dead man, still there remains the whole of nature.

In the whole of nature, the dead man is of many forms, a thread, a mesh, a graft, a skin, and the spine of the natural.

The dead man does not save for posterity, he dispenses with drafts, he lightens the future for his children.

He is out ahead of literature in this regard.

It was the *what* beyond words that made him speak to you this way.

Take a line from it when anxious, for it will compose you.

You may remember it, you may memorize it, you may take it to heart, it will endure in the interstices of time.

For here the excerpt is a whole, and the whole is an excerpt—it is so.