

# Grief and Wisdom's Fruit

by [Edward Greenwood](#) (July 2018)



*Velvet Chair*, Bill Sharp, 2017

## Grief

What did your untimely going give?

It gave a measure

By which I may weigh

That by which we live.

In grief lies secret joy,

Finding in sorrow a strange pleasure.

I felt it even as a boy:

My brother's death in war brought dangerous pride,

As if I had been singled out to share

A treasure that I should not hide.

Death is life's measure,

And though to bear the death of others

Can be too horribly a thing of ease,

Yet, make your loss too hard to bear,

You'll do as Heine's tribe of Asra do

And feel you must die too.

Contagious grief for one they never knew

Can sometimes seize a crowd,

But that is much unlike an individual grief,

The grief that's deeply true,

For in it what is mere contagion spreads,

And it's not long before grief's had its due.

Real grief's a lifetime's sorrow

Our memories perpetually renew,

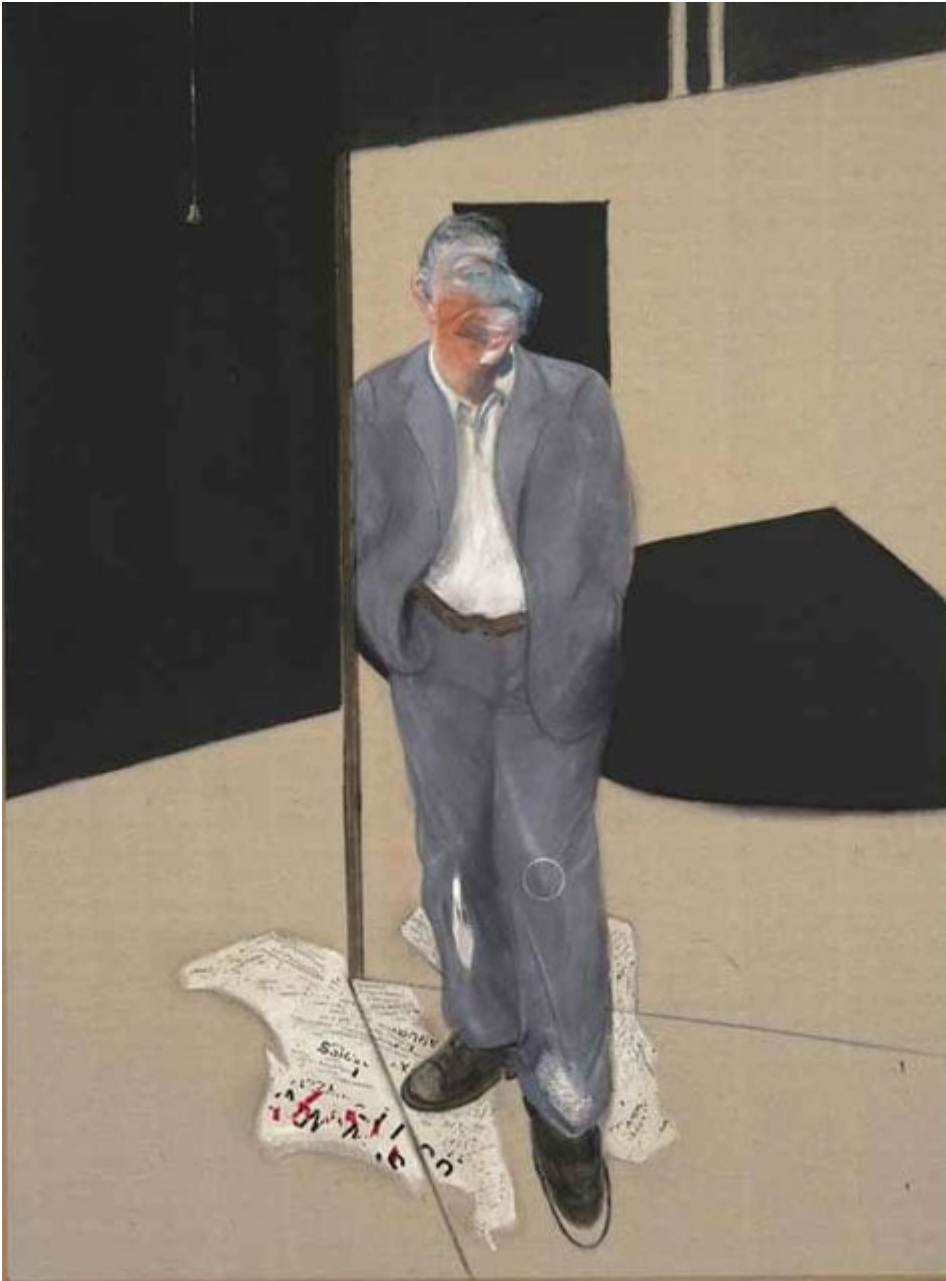
For, though one is not grieving all the time,

True grief is always latent there,

So, intermittently, as days unfold,

Dark meditation, like recurring rhyme,  
Will suddenly take hold  
With sorrow's piercing unrest,  
And speak what is life's shibboleth,  
The grave expression: 'Death'.

It is as though Death has bestowed a crown,  
A wreath to decorate the mourner's head  
Woven from wisdom that can weigh the dead  
Against the living  
Death makes the mourner the assayer,  
Impartial, unforgiving,  
Whose touchstone tests the good and bad,  
The piercing surveyor  
Of all the meanness and the vanity  
In this our world where worthlessness is praised,  
Wisdom discovered in inanity  
And music in the musicless



*Study of A Man Talking*, Francis Bacon, 1981

## **Wisdom's Fruit**

The old man, heavy as a tree  
With wisdom's fruit,  
Is often baffled what to say  
Meeting coevals on the way,  
And, for a while, stands mute.

But then begins the usual talk  
Of common themes,  
The various vicissitudes  
On which the human spirit broods,  
Lost powers and thwarted dreams.

And still embarrassingly there,  
That strange not yet,  
Which all the aging are inclined  
To cover over in the mind,  
But somehow can't forget.

The last vicissitude of all  
That ends all fear,  
The one we do not like to name,  
As though we have a sense of blame  
We are somehow still here.

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**Edward Greenwood** was educated at Kirkham Grammar School and at Hertford College, Oxford. He obtained a B.Litt for work on Matthew Arnold. He is now an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Kent. In 1975 he published *Tolstoy: The Comprehensive Vision* and in 1978 a British Council pamphlet on F. R. Leavis. He has also published privately a collection of poems *Unfrozen Leaves* which can be obtained if you e-mail [edward.greenwood1@btinternet.com](mailto:edward.greenwood1@btinternet.com)

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