



AT A FUNERAL

DENNIS BRUTUS

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page consisting of three parallel, wavy vertical lines. The outermost line is yellow, the middle line is a light green, and the innermost line is a slightly darker green. They all follow a similar undulating path from top to bottom.

At a funeral

Black, green and gold at sunset: pageantry
And stubbled grave: expectant, of eternity,
In bride's-white, nun's-white veils the nurses gush their
bounty

Of red-wine cloaks, frothing the bugled dirging slopes
Salute! Then ponder all this hollow panoply
For one whose gifts the mud devours, with our hopes.

Oh all you frustrate ones, powers tombed in dirt,
Aborted, not by death, but by carrion books of birth
Arise! The brassy shout of Freedom stirs our earth;
Not Death but death's-head tyranny scythes our ground
And plots our narrow cells of pain defeat and dearth:
Better that we should die, than that we should lie down.

THE TITLE

Contextualises the poem

“At a funeral” implies this is one of many

STRUCTURE

Two equal stanzas

Regular rhyme (a a a b a b c c c d c d)

STANZA 1

A description of the funeral of Valencia
Majombozi

L I: colours of academic gowns
and sashes of her colleagues
or
the colours of the flag of the
resistance (banned)
“sunset” symbolically the end
of a life
“pageantry” the rituals of a
funeral

At a funeral

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Salute! Then ponder all this hollow panoply

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L 2: graves covered in hard grass
“stubble”

“expectant, of eternity” as if
they are waiting on the
afterlife

L 3: the colour of the nurses’
uniforms

At a funeral

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In bride’s-white, nun’s-white veils the nurses
gush their bounty

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L 3: “gush”, “bounty”

an abundance, overflowing
the red cloaks of the nurses

L 4: “frothing” bubbling, linked to
“gush”

“the bugled dirging slopes”
playing a lament for the dead
on the trumpet from a hill

At a funeral

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Salute! Then ponder all this hollow panoply

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L 5: He salutes the fallen one

“hollow panoply” meaningless
display

L 6: “the mud devours”
personification
image of the grave hungrily
consuming

At a funeral

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L 6: “gifts” the potential of the
deceased

“our hopes” the hopes of all
the people rest on these
young fallen heroes

Tone: devastated, despairing,
hopeless, bitter

At a funeral

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gush their bounty

Of red-wine cloaks, frothing the bugled dirging slopes

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STANZA 2

A shift in focus to addressing those at the funeral, the oppressed

L 7: addresses the oppressed
“frustrate one” the unfulfilled
and discouraged people

“powers tombed in dirt” who
are as if they are already dead

L 8: “Aborted” potential cut off
before birth

Oh all you frustrate ones, powers tombed in dirt,

Aborted, not by death, but by carrion books of birth

Arise! The brassy shout of Freedom stirs our earth;

Not Death but death's-head tyranny scythes our
ground

And plots our narrow cells of pain defeat and dearth:

Better that we should die, than that we should lie
down.

L 8: “not by death” they are not
really dead

“carrion” = rotting flesh

“books of birth” at their birth,
their death through
oppression begins
irony

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L 9: “Arise!” call to the oppressed
to rise up

“brassy shout of Freedom”
the sound of the trumpet’s call

“stirs our earth” signs of
coming to life

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L 10: “Not Death” death is not the
real threat to them

“death’s head tyranny” skull-
and-cross-bone

Apartheid government

“scythes” cuts down violently

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L I I: “narrow cells” their graves,
not literally, rather the life of
oppression
(but also evokes prison)

“dearth” scarcity (never having
enough)

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L 12: “Better ... than” the two
options facing them

“lie down”, an image of death,
but figuratively giving in to
oppression

Tone: defiant

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