



Lament for the Makers

I who was full of health and gladness,
Am troubled now with great sickness,
And feebled with infirmity—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Our pleasure here is all vain glory,
This false world is transitory,
The flesh is porous, and Fate is sly—
Fear of death unsettles me.

The state of man does change and vary,
Now sound, now sick, now blythe, now sorry,
Now dancing and merry, now like to die—
Fear of death unsettles me.

No earthly state here stands less fickle,
As with the wind that waves the wicker,
So waves this world's vanity—

Fear of death unsettles me.

Unto the Death go all estates,
Princes, lawyers, Heads of state,
Both rich and poor in all degrees—
Fear of death unsettles me.

It takes the savvy business man,
Protected by his business plan,
With only an eye for victory—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Death, that strong unmerciful tyrant,
Takes from every mother's pliant
Grasp the babe's benignity—
Fear of death unsettles me.

It takes the stockboy in the store,
It takes the captain from his tour,
And women in the flower of beauty—
Fear of death unsettles me.

It spares no lord his eloquence,
No clerk for his intelligence,
Its awful streak no man may flee—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Magicians and astrologers,
logicians and philosophers,
Discover no variety—
Fear of death unsettles me.

In medicine the most practitioners,
Nurses, surgeons and physicians,
Cannot themselves give guarantees—
Fear of death unsettles me.

But best are the designer lot,
who carve their things from what is not,
Then foist them up for all to see—
Fear of death unsettles me.

From picks that better clean our teeth,

To buildings shaped like lotus leaves,
Altruists can all agree
Fear of death unsettles me.

I see them making in the lave,
Taking their time from god to grave,
Sparing not their faculties—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Unto the end they scrutinize,
The blooming of forsythias,
In admirable absurdity—
Fear of death unsettles me.

And since they devote all their years,
To making things that disappear,
They have no use for this frail plea—
Fear of death unsettles me.

For Death comes to them every day,
They hear their paying clients say:
But where's the profitability?
Fear of death unsettles me.

This death did petuously devour,
Gropius and his Bauhaus,
Breuer, Mies, and Loos, all three—
Fear of death unsettles me.

The scorpion spur has done upset,
Rietveld and Riemerschmid,
Singers of love and tragedy—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Relieving us of Charles and Ray,
J. J. P. and Eileen Gray,
Alas! there can be no reprieve—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Taken Wright from Taliesin,
Saarinen and Jacobsen,
Aalto, too, from Helsinki—
Fear of death unsettles me.

The Constructivists could not prevail,
Slain with a shower of mortal hail,
Even the Futurists could not flee—
Fear of death unsettles me.

It claimed the Werkstätte Viennese,
And brought De Stijl to its knees,
Truer forms will never be—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Anni Albers, reft above,
That did so lively weave in love,
So short, so quick, of shuttle she—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Corbusier and Jean Prouvé,
On ne les a pas retrouvés,
Two better fellows did no man see—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Taken Ponti of Milan,
Antoni Gaudí the Catalan,
And Frankfurt's Schütte-Lihotzky—
Fear of death unsettles me.

And Death has slain, last of all,
Good gentle Verner, Charlotte and Paul,
Of whom we have no right to pity—
Fear of death unsettles me.

While good saint Morris Lapidus,
Exalted to the maximus,
atop a stair to nowhere sees—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Consumerist Democracy,
In point of death lies verily,
Great truth it were that so should be—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Though it has all my colleagues slain,
It will not let me settle in,

By force I must its next prey be—
Fear of death unsettles me.

Since there's no remedy for Death,
Best is we draw our every breath,
In fond ephemerality—
Fear of death unsettles me.

And since we'll devote all our years,
To making things that disappear,
We'll have no use for this frail plea:
Fear of death unsettles me.

I who was full of health and gladness,
Am troubled now with great success,
And feeble by celebrity—
Fear of death unsettles me.
Fear of death unsettles me.
Fear of death unsettles me.

The original Lament for the Makaris was written by William Dunbar (c.1460–c.1513), a Scottish poet and Franciscan friar who served in the court of King James IV. It is an elegy dedicated to the distinguished writers who had preceded him, including Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower and John Lydgate, a.k.a. The Monk of Bury. Influenced by both aureate French poetry and bawdy street lingo, Dunbar preferred to call his writings ballads rather than poems and himself a maker rather than a poet, distinctions that stressed technical skill and versatility over metaphysics and intellect. It is not known how Dunbar died, but he disappeared from all records after the battle of Flodden in 1513.

I have updated his Lament to be an elegy to twentieth century architects and designers instead.