

Yvonne Romney Dixon

ADLAI STEVENSON DIED IN PALERMO

Adlai Stevenson died in Palermo.
In the airport. His face was pasted
On the newsstand, bobbing in and out among
Jabbering Sicilians, their sweaty hands
Sticky with orange soda pop,
Their bodies fat and rank.
But you picked a decent place to die, Adlai:
Sicily is good to death; it
Tricks it up with lavish trappings —
Even the horses wear wreaths and special livery.

Your name is now identified for me
With all that island's ancient monuments:
Segesta, majestic against the sunset;
Erice, preserving its mediaeval chastity
On its high proud rock; and the temples of Silenus,
Oddly sailing like flagships through fields of grain
As we looked up from splashing in the blue bay.

I am metamorphosed myself
For a woman I scarcely know.
She takes me, as I've found,
From my letter to a friend:
I am become for her a runner on white sands
Chasing crabs into secret lairs, racing free
Beneath new constellations in a southern sky,
Hungry in the breezy air
For a scent of cloves from Zanzibar.
It is a way I would remember myself.