

## *The Widener Burying-Ground*

In spite of all the learned have said,  
We hear the voices of the dead.  
Not scholiasts who like Burke and Hare  
Turn dead leaves in the living air,  
Unlock the Essay and exhume  
Philosophy from its dry tomb,  
Nor wise embalmers of the text  
In humble or perplexed,  
Carved, interlaced half-calf, who come  
To show how gold they are, and dumb--  
We strike from silent lines a fire.  
Troped sea-shell, loud Æolian liar,  
Nymph-haunted cave and mountain peak  
Choir with voices that we seek  
As, scholars of one candle-end,  
We hear the hush of dusk descend.  
We unfired vessels of the day,  
Built of a soft, unechoing clay,  
Grow obdurate of ear at night  
When images of voice are bright;  
The dreamingale, the waterlark,  
Within the present, silent dark  
Echo the burden (on these stairs  
Mistranslated) the singer bears--  
He who packs, with a glowing faith,  
In one portmanteau, fame and death.  
Our marginalia all insist  
--Beating the page as with a fist  
Against a silent headstone--that  
The dead whom we are shouting at,  
Though silent to us now, have spoken  
Through us, their stony silence broken  
By our outcry (*We are the dead*  
*Resounding voices in our stead*)  
Until they strike at us, once more,  
Whispers of their receding shore,  
And Reason's self must bend the ear  
To echoes and allusions here.

John Hollander