

The New Criterion

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The Etruscan graveyard at Marzabotto

by Charles Tomlinson

At the dump, the packaged waste
as neat as war-graves
awaits destruction:
the drone of a generator
insists on efficiency, promises
to destroy all traces:
on the spring wind
there is one other sound,
the whisper of discarded cellophane
like the voices of the dead
shiny and shivering with the season.
On the hill-top remain
in a fold of land
graves that are blocks of tufa,
the dark rock splashed
with ring on ring of orange
from the lichen
that thrives on nothing. One might choose
to lie here and be reclaimed by earth,
as clean as the emptiness
within each box of stone
that has no lid, but lies
open to the dateless sky
that has forgotten
how far their race once spread
who, dead, so succinctly occupy
so small a space.

—Charles Tomlinson

Charles Tomlinson's most recent volumes are *Selected Poems* (New Directions) and *Jubilation* (Oxford). He is editing a collection of his own prose for Carcanet.

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