



From Laments (no.5)

Just as an olive seedling, when it tries
To grow up like the big trees towards the skies
And sprouts out of the ground, a single stalk,
A slender, leafless, twigless, living stick;
And which, if lopped by the swift sickle's blade
Weeding out thorns and nettles, starts to fade
And, sapped of natural strength, cut off, forlorn,
Drops by the tree from whose seed it was born –
Growing before her parents' caring eyes,
She'd barely risen above ground when Death
Felled the dear child with his infectious breath
At our very feet. Hard-eyed Persephone,
Were all those tears of no avail to me?

JAN KOCHANOWSKI

Translated by Stanislaw Baranczak and Seamus Heaney
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