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No. 1451, Groaning

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No. 1451, Groaning

Garrick (Ricky) Sinclair Beckett

To them disaster is an enigma, —
when Earth flushes the ocean
upon humanity in whirlwind atrocity.
And when with shouted quakes
she shatters our foundation, leaving us
in remnants of brokenness.
Such disaster bequeaths itself to Man,
who courts with the Devil's mistress,
quaking a community with lead.
Some then march in with aid
and thunder political affirmations;
and when the storm subsides,
disaster fades into obscurity.

Consider Beckmann's *Scene from the Destruction of Messina*:
Earth shouted her quake, clasping 80,000 souls.
Bodies broken and limbs marred amongst ensuing chaos,
casualties duel whilst a police officer arrives for aid,
only to wrestle a man frothing in chaos.
A woman's breasts lay bare, nude against a bleeding man,
head downcast and breathless mouth agape.
Death sighs across the grey terrain,
tripping men who cripple towards shelter.

Such a history lies distilled in a painting,
but who remembers such a tragedy?
Like the officer, we come to aid,
instead bashing victims with authority self-proclaimed,
ignoring the bare woman sunken in despair,
trampling over corpses in our political boots,
only to forget the disaster in a fortnight.



This is an ekphrastic poem. An ekphrasis is a poem about a painting. This particular poem is about the same painting mentioned in the second stanza by Max Beckmann (1884-1950). Beckmann created this painting in 1909, which was a year after a massive earthquake in Messina, Italy that killed about 80,000 people. Additionally, although the painting was not based on Scripture but an actual event, this painting made me think of Romans 8:22-23, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Max Beckmann, German, 1884–1950; *Scene from the Destruction of Messina*, 1909; oil on canvas; 100 1/4 x 105 3/8 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Bequest of Morton D. May 837:1983; © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

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