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The Dancing Beggar of London

Robert A. Rees

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The Dancing Beggar of London

I saw him first at Leicester Square
then two nights later at Piccadilly;
tonight he's at King's Cross.
He dances to his tamborine,
feet tapping and shuffling,
a ghostly harlequin
scuffling over worn stones.

Hands drop coins into his sack—
stones tossed down an ancient well
where no water waits
nor circles move.

His is the dance of death:
flesh hanging like moss
on limbs of ashen trees,
bare legs and bony arms spread out
absurdly akimbo,
muddy eyes looking toward heaven—
a comic Christ upon a cross.

At Chekhov's play, where actors
move with grace and speak
their lines with skill upon
a well set stage, I cannot
brush his eyes from my seeing
nor shake his tapping from my ears.
“Dear sisters, if we live a little longer,
perhaps we will come to know why . . . ”

—Robert A. Rees

Robert A. Rees is the director of the Department of Arts, University Extension, and assistant dean of the College of Fine Arts, UCLA.