My Sad Captains

By Thom Gunn

One by one they appear in the darkness: a few friends, and a few with historical names. How late they start to shine! but before they fade they stand perfectly embodied, all

the past lapping them like a cloak of chaos. They were men who, I thought, lived only to renew the wasteful force they spent with each hot convulsion. They remind me, distant now.

True, they are not at rest yet, but now that they are indeed apart, winnowed from failures, they withdraw to an orbit and turn with disinterested hard energy, like the stars.


Source: Collected Poems (Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1994)