

The Prophet's Lament

Salvation is of the Jews. — JOHN 4:22

SIX DAYS I ambled through the wilderness,
Nimble of foot, though famished to the brink
of death; bones starting forth
From wrinkled bag of parchment skin.

Not sentient, nor wise, yet could I see,
Through fly-lined eyes, half blind of dust,
The thin brown band, baptismal font,
Wringing bounty from a barren land.

Not sentient, empowered not to think,
I stumbled downward, ravening to drink,
For having drunk I should not fade away,
And dying not, might live another day.

Laden fast with strange iniquities,
Old Bacchus-form; too black for sacrifice;
Too lean for meat; too manged for shearing . . .
Four cloven hooves, their weightless burden bearing,

Softly tripping to the river's edgeless brink,
(A pause; a furtive look; no enemy in sight)
I drank, ignoring, for I could not comprehend,
The bloated bodies drifting slowly down.

Like chunks of driftwood on the tidal flood,
These bodies bobbed along toward the place,
Where holy waters touched the bitter lake,
Asphaltitis, called the sea of salt.

Lady, believe me

BREATHES there an agony so keen,
A man might not endure it?
By the impassable legions snared,
I am crucified before the zealous eyes.

Enduring so the nails, the taunts,
The brutish lust of bored indifference,
Fixed; suspended, the soldiers draw me up:
Two sunsets hanging by the walls.

Had I as many eyes as thou hast wounds;
Had I as many eyes

Breathless; muscles tied in knots; the pain
Not past endurance, for I struggle on
Upon the brink, yet terrified to die.
Two days full I am my torturer.

Rising, falling; rising falling,
As the rhythmic movement of the sea;
The well-worn regularity of verse,
I spy the movement on the battlements.

Diverted by the circus-sight;
Advance and fall of stony-visaged legions,
Well-tempered to war's privations,
Fearful more of friend than foe,

I see my kinsmen gathering about,
Upon the wall, and whisper to my soul,
Amen! Amen!
For they stand free, and I am crucified.

It is finished. Too soon my hour has come.
The crack of bone, the disbelieving groans,
Regale my ears, of succored men,
Consigned to mercy with the iron bar.

O grant me not such easement yet!
But let me hang here one day more, and
Know the climax of this hopeless strife!
My legs are shattered, and I suffocate.

A spirit, God

FORTY lifetimes in the earth I slept,
While grass grew from the sockets of my eyes,
And bloody torrents from the ages rushed,
Befriending tears, monotonously wept.

And was I such a sage that I might yield,
All prudence; wisdom, to that childish hope,
That He should come; would come, within that term of life,
That single age so fast consumed?

One basketful of bones, a wicker grave,
Remained to tell the story of my error,
That folly born of terror; bred of hope,
The hungry end awaited in a cave.

They supped upon the ruins of the dead,
(No drop of oil, cup of wine, nor yeast),
And dreamt of bitter herbs; unleavened bread;
Unblemished lamb: the makings of a feast.

I would I had been martyred in that place,
The tramp of armies sounding from above,
Ere I had seen the falling of that Star,
That prodigy: the Star called Wormwood.

In spirit, and in truth.

IN MOAB on a mountain once,
I took my stave in hand,
And gazed out wistfully upon
The hoped-for promised land.
Then bade me Death my eyes to close,
And drew me far away,
Behind a rampant stallion,
In heaven's formless dray.
When here I stopped, in bonds of flesh,
I bound myself to earth,
Again (who have with Pharaoh walked)
To know the dread of birth.
And have I come thus, far in time,
My bootless rod in hand,
To sigh upon a mountain-top,
For you, my Promised Land?