

IXION

Along the rutted road to conquest
the warrior stops and wonders:

Haven't I come this way before?

But the old injunctions
rewritten, as always, in blood
leave no room or time
for doubt.

There is another Canaan
to be plundered
asherim to be hewed down
utter destruction to be visited
upon the unchosen.

The hunger launched from the eyes
is no appetite for bread
or even fragrant flesh;
such elemental urges
are not the stuff of covenant.
Behind the wrathful Elohim
and his priests
there is the leering skull
with which a bargain must be struck
and the broken bodies
amid burning shrines
are always the coin
of *this* realm.

Chariots, tumbrels
and caissons
roll not out of their own center;
they turn and return
to fiery ruin.

The road to conquest
turns and returns;
yet it is always *Anahata*
and not Canaan
whose portal looms before us.

Only in the starlight
will the wild rose bloom;
all its secrets and joys
found within the heart.
Neither dust nor mud
nor bargained blood
will blight the beauty

of its steady revelation.
In the heartland
of risen inner light
is the hunger of the eyes
offered to the sacrificial fire.

Spinner, you cannot make straight
the way
nor forge a final victory
at the end
which is no end.
Spin if you must
spin as you have always spun
but let it be a dance
and not a dirge;
for the way of the wheel
is the rondure
of the open rose.

OCTOBER AIR

There is something mysterious
in this fall fragrance
something older and more elusive
than the air itself.

It moves across the meadow
like the shadow of a passing cloud
spins and drifts in open space
like leaves shook free
of shedding branches.

Through this suddenly charmed air
redolent in autumn
a secret has been whispered
to one who watches:

*Remember
if just for this moment
that you are what is vast and old
yet ever moving
ever new.*

*Remember, watcher
that you are the source
of the secret
the beholder and the beheld.*

A SHORT HISTORY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

History is *his* story.

Her story lies buried and unknown
amidst birds and serpents
carved in stone.

His story:
a dream of warriors
and magicians,
tribal oaths sworn
before bonfires.
Covenant, temple
bloodline and creed;
contract, boardroom
title and deed.

The hero of his story:
a ravenous conjurer
in his high retort
lusting after heaven's fairest stars
and the raptures of the Earth;
his hungers have condemned him
to perpetual rebirth.

The moral of his story:
take your greatest pleasure
in power and in treasure;
what leaps beyond all measure
you can happily disdain.
Wisdom is heresy; peace is profane.

But her story, too
will one day be told;
out of ancient, graven signs
this prophecy unfold:
*All that is coming
is all that has been.
His story will end
where hers will begin.*

CASSANDRA AT THE MILLENNIUM

That you chose fire
did not surprise me;
estranged from the stars
that carried the seeds of your birth
you are a fading ember
fallen happily into fault.
You came to learn
two ways to burn
two ways to earn a life
beyond dread and dark desire.
I pled for one
and warned you of the other
but you, driven by old fears
and hungers reasoned into destiny,
chose the craft of conflagration
naming your late ages
for those fired, earthen ores
whose metals made you
madly proud.

That you will weep in ashes
I foresaw from the beginning.
I have prayed for the ashes to come
although I wept at the prospect
for I am the flesh of your flesh.
I have known the pain you felt
for every god that faltered
for every hope that failed.
Yet I have prayed for ashes
knowing they will be sanctified
by the final wisdom
that overcomes great folly.
You have learned
two ways to burn
two ways to earn a life
beyond dread and dark desire.
The first comes to ashes
the second, grace
But in the end
both ways are one:
the fire of the faustian forge
is the fire of the holy tongue.

THE LONGER VIEW

(For Marija Gimbutas and Joseph Campbell)

Spirit of my ancestors, shaman of the north
you return, as always, in the spring
to remind me of the lunar rite
when I donned the gown of my mothers
to dance as reindeer and bear.

In the light of a waxing moon
history's nightmare suddenly ends.
My inner vision clears
and I am awake again
under the ancient tri-lined signs.

I see an iron-hearted age
pass by in mere moments,
its towers and thrones,
bought with forgotten blood,
rise furiously, vainly
then quickly fall and vanish.

A clockwork comes apart
in a tangle of flowering vines.
I find myself at home
once more within the wooded shrines
with eyes opened wide, pacified
ready for the longer view.

MAGICIAN AT THE SOLSTICE

(A Threnody For Magister Georgius Sabellius Faustus Junior)

Church bells from Stephansdom

The vespers will soon begin
he said to himself.

And then midnight mass:
celebration of the Davidian fanatic's birth

prayers raised again

to the first flesh of the Merovees.

He knows not of your church
and hears no supplications.

He smiled to himself:
Old deceptions have a long life

But they, too, must someday
come to an end.

Fifteen-hundred and forty years
of folly were not long enough

the prayers would rise like vapors
vanishing into the darkness

of another winter's night.

In the vas before him
the visions had cleared

the last drops of the wine
in purified rainwater

had brought forth the shapes and faces

seen only as shadows

in a lifetime of dreadful dreams.

He saw the poets who attached
his name to their own visions

and he saw his spiritual heir
in quest of the knowledge of causes

and the secret motions of things.

*Yes, my son, you and your brothers
will enlarge the bounds*

of human empire

to the effecting of all things possible.

He wept at the sight of the paladin
whose question healed a king:

*Disarmored and unmasked
you pierced the veil.*

*Yours not mine
is the way and the light.*

Finally came a hooded figure
trudging through snow

forever exiled by her prophetic gift

ravaged by the pain of prayers
finally answered.

*I should hate you
he thought*

*you who are the perennial enemy
of dear and deep delusion.*

You have prayed for ashes

and they will come

*for ashes are the legacy
of my creed.*

He drew a last bitter breath
rose above his crumpled corpse
and saw the end of his vision:

the woman wept freely
as she pushed along

through heaps of fallen ash.

In her cupped hands
was the white stone

middle eye of the healing knight

a great gift forsaken.

The ashes fell like snow
descending gently

on a wasted realm

whose ruin

was its own secret wish

fulfilled at last.

RUSTED PALADIN

The stooped figure

quivering with age

picked up the helmet
and breastplate.

Aching in borrowed armor
he lifted a broken lance

against the one-eyed dragons

of an iron-hearted age..

They are but windmills!
cried his threadbare companion.

They are Satanic mills
he answered

speaking in the voice

of a later incarnation.

They are a cross of gold
And evolution's mocking ape!
he thundered

while a ghostly legion
fell in behind him:

old believers risen

out of the dust
of dead crusades.

The mills turned in the wind

and took him up

another Ixion

caught on the turning wheel

spinning from shadow
to sunlight

to shadow again

with the dream
spinning too

elusive glory's lost chalice

always out of reach

always beyond
his trembling grasp.

LAPIS EXILIS

He had borne many sorrows

the greatest of which

his silence

at the court of the wounded.

Now he walked the middle path

that was nowhere in Heaven

or on Earth.

*I have no place
in the kingdoms*

that are above and below
he said.

for they are cursed

by the given law

and the rule of right and left.

The magister and the madman
cast their shadows

to the right and the left

and the dark agon

that grew in their depth

became history.

He was the end of history
and he knew it

fired into purity

in the vas of his own flesh.

vir unis standing between

the shadows

of himself.

The weeping prophetess
had foreseen the shadows:

magister and madman.

She had seen their many incarnations

stealing the souls
of the young

from generation to generation.

By whatever new names
they spread the lie

of the eternal order

whether of Heaven or of Earth.

She saw, too, the walker
of the middle path

reborn from one time and place
to another

invisible sacred scripture

resonant in the mind
and body

of each incarnation.

He was invisible

in the world
ruled by his shadows

and he suffered exile
everyday that he lived.

The prophetess that the magician
had seen

sobbing among the ruins

carried his light in her hands.

*I will hold the gift
for those*

who are thus come
she said.

She walked slowly

between the furious shadows
that were busy making history

and as the evening fell

she smiled.

THE CRUCIFIED

IXION AND OTHER POEMS

© 2000, ROGER STEIGMEIER

MAHLER, 1910

Dawn and silence

The first light broke
total darkness

but not the stillness

or the chill.

Familiar objects before him--

Chair, table, pen and manuscript--

were the unborn

waiting to take substance
and form

from the awakening light.

Soundlessness struck
a sudden and terrible blow.

Here it is again !
cried his mind.

Dear God, I must fill it
with something

anything!

Nothing came
but the panic

and the unsteady drumming
of his afflicted heart.

Courage, man, courage!

I will face you this time
he said

not knowing to whom or what

he spoke.

He sat at the table and shivered
palms wet with fear.

*Let it be death
Or the Demon himself*

I will not run from you again!
he cried aloud.

His voice broke the stillness

a sound born

out of dawn and silence.

Then he let out a wordless roar

it, too, born

out of dawn and silence.

Weeping and laughing

he rushed outside
the little hut

to watch mountains, forest
and nearby village

be born out of dawn and silence.

It would be hours before
he would stop work on the score

and rest.

Calmly he made his notations
and wondered

if anyone would guess

the strange secret
that was the core of the music.

In this mysterious work
had he not himself crossed over

into that dreaded realm
where Orpheus had gone

and found it to be

the home of all lyres?

Had he not looked into
the world just departed

and seen it as one vast song
terrifying and beautiful?

Would he not finally turn back
to the serene source of all song?

When he left the hut
the midday sun

had maddened the air;

great waves of heat

rose off the meadows
and mountains;

while the barely breathing Earth
turned inward

toward a mantrum

of the primal light..

He walked to the broad stream

that flowed down
to the village from the mountains.

The stream passed from shadow
into sunlight

sunlight into shadow

in constant variation.

He watched the timeless play

of water, light and shadow until

there was no one there

to watch.

WESTERN ELEGIES

i. Lamy, New Mexico

The March air is cool, still
redolent of railroad ties

fragrance of journeys taken

and not taken.

The little station
along side the silent train

has blackened windows

all their yesterdays intact
and preserved in darkness.

A sudden gust of wind
and the dust rears up

off the brown southwestern earth.

It swirls around the train and station

rises against the sky

and just as suddenly falls back
to the dry rubble

and the rock-strewn waste.

The wind wanders on
with a low moan

and all is quiet again.

The high dark windows
of the train station

brighten with the reflection

of something that passes

and then

go black.

PRAYER IN WINTER

In a pale yellow light
amidst a maze of naked branches
the dream of ashes comes easily
and often:

*Let there be ruin
let this iron-hearted, one-eyed age
be done.*

That flower and leaf
are in full retreat
is fitting enough
for those who drown
the ceremony of innocence
in blood and sludge.

But the rose will open
and the civilized assassins
will come again
to claim its fragrant benediction.

*Let there be ruin
let this iron-hearted, one-eyed age
be done.*

DAR AL' HARB
(Reflections On the Persian Gulf War)

Four thousand years of fury
have congealed in his mind;
he has not forgotten
that the hard injunctions
of a harsh god
were written in the ruins
of Mesopotamia
and he has hurled thunderbolts
at the children of Sargon
whose legions burned
the ancient sacred shrines.

Nothing in his steady gaze
suggests pity or prudence.
Like his fathers before him
he was born
with the bitter taste of ashes
on his tongue.
He stares as blankly
as the setting sun
and the reddened earth
recalls again the mourned blood
of millenniums past.

Before him
lies the realm of war
and like the angry god
of his enemies
his god, too, can be harsh
and unpitying.
Somewhere beyond
the raging Arabian night
infidels have planned his defeat
and a new promise of ashes
is written over Baghdad.

A rich black blood
is pouring out
upon the Persian Gulf:
plumes of smoke have risen
to smudge the morning sky.
Compressed beneath the desert sands
the viscid rot of a saurian age

is stored.

Purged of anthems, flags and angry gods

what age of meek inheritors

will *our* extinction seed?

LINES FOR WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

There is a kind of knowing
whose truth we cannot speak;
the brilliance of its sudden light
is known to make us laugh and weep.
The noisy street, the crowded shop
the commonplace ablaze with grace—
look there for truth that needs no creed
or chosen race.
See its holy temple and its home
in every empty passing face
in every rag and bone!

LAYING DOWN THE LAW
(For Earth Day 1991)

Come home again
to the old songs and dances

fire earth air water

in singing and dancing
is lawful order

hey a heya hey!

Call the tribes together
in the the old songs and dances:

sun soil wind rivers

bear snake raven salmon

hey a heya hey!

When the songs and dances
are done

and the tribes are gathered
within you

let them have your heart , mind
and tongue.

When they begin to speak
with your voice

then you will be

laying down the law.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT OYSTER BAY

Sail boats stand at rest
in the harbor of the quiet cove.
Gulls make gliding silhouettes
against the gathering clouds
and the green of the hills
across the bay
is deepened by the overcast.

Along the two-lane blacktop
that falls away to the village below
the dense surrounding bush
moved by a dream of the wild's return
advances on the shoulders of the road.

At the Arboretum
stillness rules the day
but if you listen carefully
you can hear the old music
that takes the shape of trees;
you can hear the pattering sounds
in the woods beyond the meadow
the footfalls of a once lost tribe
dancing again
in miraculous delight.

FINAL SOLUTIONS

*What cheer, Englishman;
what do you come for?*

cried the heathen savages.

The answer was fire.

Those who burned
did not understand

that Captain Mason's massacre

was but one more march
of the civilized.

The heavenly elect
gave grateful thanks

even though

it was a fearful sight

to see them thus

frying in the fyer

*streams of blood
quenching the same*

*and horrible the stincke
and scent thereof.*

The angelic doctor said:
*Six hundred souls
brought down to hell*

*For the sweete sacrifice
They gave prayers to God.*

Ah, Mather
if only you had lived

to see the total number

delivered to the infernal flames.

Nine million and more
would be offered up

to the Divine Plan
by last century's end.

But if, by chance

your ghost has wandered
through the carnage

of *this* fire-brightened century

what marvels of efficiency
it has found:

Christkiller heretics
dispatched by the trainloads

innumerable brown and yellow heathens

dissolved into ash

in the mere twinkling

of a bombardier's eye.

PROMISED LAND

I . (Desert Prelude)

Massive anthem

of sunstruck stones

we take our separate shapes
but the blessing

is in our tones.

Shiprock slowly moving

We have nothing to be
but music.

We are an everywhere
at once

whose song is strung
between dust

and stars.

II .

To inhabit your territory
Become inhabited.

Get rid of barbwire

and boundaries.

Hunker down

close the eyes

silence the mind.

Then try prowling, stalking
leaping, gliding, grazing,
sweeping, sounding and slithering.

When all the grandfathers
and grandmothers

are brought home

come upright with opened eyes

but remember to keep your hungers
close, simple

good servants of the stomach and loins.

Save your sight for seeing things
without appetite.

III .

Whirled without end
and everything affirmed:

Unreal City under a brown fog

the dark wood

rock without water

mistress of falling rain

sayings of graybeards

white cranes on black clouds.

O Promised Land
luminous stuff

that dreams are made on

by firelight in cavern deep
the loom has spun

that weaves the whorled
whorled without end

your loom in us.

ELEGY FOR WOUNDED KNEE

(Written December 29, 1990 , the one
hundredth anniversary of the massacre
of unarmed Lakota-Sioux tribes' people by
the United States Army Seventh Cavalry.)

Frozen earth

with its buried hearts
still beating

a soft slow pulse

like the drumbeat
of a distant dance.

This is an uncommon
common grave

it holds the living and the dead
of many nations

their buried hearts berating together
under the wintered ground.

Wounded land

by many nations plundered

you hold the buried hearts
of millions

in your struggling soil.

A century of seasons
has come and gone

the pulse become
the drumbeat of a dance

ghost dance

for the resurrection

of the living and the dead
and for all the land

that lies between the oceans

the burial ground

whose name is Wounded Knee.

ii. Southwest

Cloudscape

in a sundown sky

its rounded tops
like mounds of bright merino

its orange-purple undersides
fired by the afterglow

that flares before the night.

In silhouette
against the shining masses

a windmill slowly spins

its prophecy of coming storms

while steelgray tribes
of cumulus

gather in the north.

They make a thunderhead
of spirits

dark and angry:

Zuni, Pueblo, Apache

All the earthlost warriors

coming soon

to dance again.

For now

the bitter peace

remains unbroken.

Clouds hang low
above the land

their ochre streaks
like stripes of faded war paint

a dim red recollection

of what was once

so crystal clear.

IN THE WAKE OF COLON

By the Rio Tinto

In the last hour
before dawn

the hunger launched from the eyes
swept out to the Ocean Sea.

For God, gold and glory
The hunger went forth

ahead of the ships

riding the waves
all the way

to the islands of Canaan.

Kinder, gentler son of Sargon
Come not to pillage

but only to convert

you, too, would wash your weapons
in the sea.

You were the first
but hardly the last

of those anointed

by a long line of impotentates
founded by Amfortas

to practice the new alchemy
of cross and crown:

to turn forests, rivers, mountains and streams
into pure immortal bullion.

Five hundred years

and the wound of which
we cannot speak

has not been healed.

All that was bled
into imperial treasure

sends spirits to stand in watch.

Sentinels of murdered tribes
(two-legged, four-legged, winged
finned and scaled)

keep silent vigil

over the suffering victors
whose hunger

even at this late hour

still goes forth
ahead of its ships

into a *star*-filled sea.