

Myth and reflection



Of gods and truths

In Thebes the mighty Amun ruled perhaps two thousand years before he grew in power fed and nurtured by the nation's service to reign a further thousand years and more. And then his fading started: his bones grew weary; his phallus drooped except as counterfeited in granite or in limestone (memorial of glories past); daily services by the priests and pharaohs, morning offerings and lavings, failed to hold against decay, that creeping tide. How terrible it is to rule as god so long forgetting death, to sense one's powers seep, to know again oneself as fleeting. Instead of raising arms that held no strength (with sinews slack and bones already porous, time-leached, his back crush-fractured) – instead of raising arms against the Romans, he turned in desperation to use the wiles and nether charms of Grecian Cleopatra. By then he knew his end loomed very near.

For several hundred years Osiris, lord since far before all writing of it, lord of corn and vegetation, lord of afterlife, archetype of death and resurrection, and with him sister-wife, skilled in powers and lore, a mother goddess giving suck – this couple thrived. They spread their nurture far beyond their native shores until eclipsed by him of wounded wrists and ankles, of bloodied scalp, more newly resurrected. In turn, that elder holy family also was displaced; it slid from life to story.

Two thousand years ago plus half a thousand in the Ganges valley, called by those who knew him 'best of men', 'awakened', 'teacher

of gods and men', Siddhattha Gotama,
who found and showed a path from suffering,
foretold decay and passing of his *Dhamma*.
And who dare say it will not happen, or even
assert it does not happen yet? These days
the perfect ones seem sparse as desert trees.

Be careful not to call your truth eternal;
in summer skies the gleaming clouds dissolve.

Isaac's boyhood

(Ge 22.1-19)

Although we're told an angel stayed
that blow and pointed to a ram
entangled by its horns in twigs
and branches of a nearby bush,
although the angel said that God
was testing Abraham and found
him faithful, the tale tells not one jot
how, after bearing up the wood,
how, told the lamb would be supplied
by God, the shock shook Isaac's frame
when his father grasped and bound him –
and now betrayal – of disbelief
as he was lifted up and laid
down on the altar-fuel that jabbed.
Nor does the record tell the young
lad's terror as his father raised
the newly whetted knife of bronze;
nor does it tell the narrow glint
of sun along the edge, burnt deep,
in Isaac's memory.

When Elohim through Moses

(Deu 7.1-6)

When Elohim through Moses charged
his chosen folk to cross the river
and take the promised land, he bade
them utterly destroy those peoples
and their sacred sites and objects:
'Make no agreement; be merciless;
on no account allow your sons
to wed their daughters. For,' He said,
'you are a people holy to me'.

Be glad the Israelites could not
maintain the cruelty they were bidden.
Well it was for Canaanite
and Philistine the chosen people
had no stomach to sustain
that ancient ethnic cleansing. Wrathful
waxed their God they disobeyed;
or was He jealous that His people
could outshine their Lord in kindness? –
or simply jealous of those lads
who'd hitch with Canaan's lovely daughters?

Agnus dei

(Lu 22.39-46; He 5.1-9.28)

However white the wool, however spotless
no lamb nor goat can yield up blood to cleanse;
for blood, once spilled, grows thick and sticky yet smooth
to smear; it sets a stain indelibly.
If lamb's blood cannot cleanse, then why would human?
Yet Jesus, we are told, once sweated blood
and pleaded with his Father: 'If it be
your will then lift this blood-cup from me; your will,
not mine, be done.'

The Lord in his celestial
holy of holies wanted Jesus as both priest
and lamb to make one perfect sacrifice,
tortured his son as once both Abraham
and Isaac, this time without release, without
the ram caught in the thicket by his horns.
Somehow the blood of human sacrifice
that thickens on his limbs and cross is said
to wash us clean before the Lord, a just
necessity. Not all the oceans' waters
can wash away that dark nor drown the stench.

Prince of Peace

A rose has sprung
ancients have sung
from Jesse's root
a tender shoot
in desert stone.

Isaiah said
that fragrant head
be Prince of Peace
bringer of bliss
between all nations.

Plucked and torn
and capped in thorn
that sprig was hung
from cross bar slung
with ache of nails.

Peace has not come
trumpet and drum
bode bomb and flame
lead flies the same
as arrows of old.

Skull-locked

Still voice that ripples
through skull's fluids,
vibrates grey folded
lobes direct:
swimmer in dark
interstices,
synapse leaper,
neurone nudger,
whose echoes barely
sough from skull-dome,
whom once I thought
to take on tongue
as melting wafer,
to sip with fume
of full-red wine –
o quiet indweller
can we ever
know if you
be more
than skull-locked?