

# DEFECTOR

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CRAIG CUNNINGHAM



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*Other Books in Theology*

1. PATRIARCH
2. DEFECTOR
3. REZA
4. NAZARENE
5. VIGIL

I have seen the burning bush and heard the Word speak. What was spoken over me will surely be spoken over you. There is a new kingdom in us now waiting to be claimed and then proclaimed to those who must hear the truth of their origins.

But my brothers and sisters, know this: to pursue the calling of God in your life is to rise in defiance of powerful forces. The sacred individual is incompatible with those who wish for you to bow before manmade towers.

Be strong. Be willing to give your life for what you know to be true.

You have been marked for death among the living, living among the dead.

- Craig Cunningham

*Defector*

Defectors line the banks of the river,  
here is your reward lady Maia, a .380 bullet  
in the back of your head to remind you  
of a simple fact:  
Your mouth was made for repeating.  
Say it, Maia, my mouth is made for repeating,  
these are not the days to speak a new creation  
into the barren womb of our nation  
because words originate in the mind, O citizen!  
If your mind is not in line then your thoughts  
will steer you to the banks of the mighty river  
and two deep grooves in the soil where knees  
fit just so, take the position, Maia, what realities  
do you wish to speak into existence now?  
What fire do you unleash on dry fields today?  
The river here is deep enough so bodies vanish,  
plop, absorbed by Antipas scratched off the walls  
and saying I told you so, I warned you years ago  
that man will forget Father's face as he looks

in the mirror.

Tell me, did anyone hear the song  
she sang under her breath, the song  
she sang louder and louder as she fell  
to her knees and waited on the steel  
to touch her head in final caress?

Oh my love, I am only sorry because you  
aren't here with me, nothing else,  
nothing else.

Another kind of song must rise in offering,  
a centennial performance in the Great Hall  
to celebrate the overthrow of the diseased king  
and the coronation of the next diseased king.  
Hail Hail to the keepers of the Ideal Mind!  
Mother Roza promises no child will go hungry  
so hand over your labor for distribution,  
what joy to live in a land where all are made  
to be equalized, by choice or by force is  
the difference between comrades and defectors.  
Tell them Mother Roza of your great love  
for our obedient children, tell them how you  
go place to place in fluttering robes of silk  
kissing the cheeks of those willing to give  
of their lives, labor, mind to the state first,  
tell them how you carry a dagger on your hip  
inscribed with the wheel to remember  
the Suffering Servant who died for all, she  
who was strung up by the imperialist dogs

and pulled apart while singing we shall live  
as one, not as one, man's worth is nothing  
if he is not a useful piece of a larger machine.

Soon,

the great musicians of our age will gather  
to play the anthem of the obedient collective,  
the anthem of collective obedience.

Vulcan with the fire at the tips of his fingers  
moves them across the keys to bring glory  
to another kingdom, this is a song to the power  
born in the soul of man, not permitted to him,  
not to a fictitious servant with a mind floating  
in formaldehyde under the watch of Mother Roza.  
The conductor stands atop his box looking out  
at the prodigy who vanished from the city  
twenty years ago and has now returned a man  
prepared to play the anthem as no one else can,  
what a wonder that in the wilderness you lost  
your way home but never lost your skill developed  
in the academy, gifts do not come from God  
child if God does not exist, you are a pinnacle  
of thought and commitment pressed into a child  
and your continued abilities are evidence of love  
for the nation, your mind would not let you  
forget the flag, Mother Roza's embrace, the song  
to be played on the centennial as our sons glorify

the obedient collective.

Vulcan, my prized Vulcan, what are the odds  
you still know the anthem of our people by heart,  
doesn't it flow from your surrendered hands?  
Vulcan says I still know the song, conductor,  
it flows out of my surrendered hands.

Mother Roza waves to the gathered crowds  
and says line them up from tallest to shortest  
so we can adjust our aim accordingly, gather  
at my robes O children and have a lollypop!  
This is not a spectacle but a rite of passage,  
see what becomes of the man who thinks alone  
speaks alone acts alone to affront the collective.  
Ignore the evil ramblings of your lying souls,  
it was not God but the collective who created  
rights granted to those who choose coercion,  
observe children and be proud of your soldiers.  
The sun shines on faces glistening, anticipatory  
glimmers in the eyes of the near-dead defectors.  
Words originate in the mind and thus provide  
a glimpse into a man's reality, so speak and die.  
Kiss the icon truly, one must lay down his life  
and hand over his name his talents his spark  
so he isn't lined up from tallest to shortest  
against the northern wall of the city overcome

with the weeds retching from blood and bone.  
Kiss the icon and become a comrade once more,  
take the mark of the prodigal and you shall live.  
The children leap as the bullets find their marks,  
and Mother Roza pins pyrite badges on the chests  
of the ones who watch the corpses nudged  
into the river without averting their eyes.

Behold Vulcan who stands alone on top  
of the mountain he climbed in the night  
just so he could see the world he shall rule  
as dawn breaks, here is my kingdom, O soul!  
How shall we form the clay to our liking?  
Maia's song comes to him, I am in the care  
of Antipas, there is a place for us  
just not in the land of the living, my lovely,  
recall that He promised stars to both brothers,  
one who walks in light and one who begs.  
Twenty years ago the boy Vulcan vanished  
into the woods beyond the city walls  
and could not be found by dogs or mother  
who wept until the officials came to say  
he was only one boy and you are young  
enough to have another, are you not?  
Give the state what you have lost for it.  
Mother starved with the expendable millions  
not knowing the boy she loved had fallen

into a deep well where his broken legs  
were mended by Antipas who touched them  
with fire, saying boy you have a great Hour  
assigned to you by the Maker of time and space.  
Together they climbed out of the well and pressed  
into the edges of time and space that His face  
might be seen more clearly, for the Hour is nigh  
when your life must imitate actual reality.  
Mother do you remember the day he sat down  
at the piano and without instruction he played  
the nocturne you hummed to him each night,  
do you remember thinking surely we are more  
than bodies committed to the good of the state?  
Your son is not dead but discovering the universe  
so one day soon he can reveal it to the lost.

Darling,  
I can never thank you enough  
for securing tickets to the Centennial,  
I won't ask what you had to do  
to find them.  
Oh Dove,  
we have only one short life to live,  
and what better reminder than to hear  
the anthem played by a full orchestra!  
Of course Darling,  
and I'll have a chance to dress up,  
but have you heard about the hundred  
prisoners who will be hanged  
to represent each year of our struggle?  
Dovey Dove,  
symbolism is important, what better  
way to fortify our love for the nation  
than to publicly crush those who defect?  
Darling O Darling,

don't misunderstand me, I agree  
with the symbolism but am concerned  
that we will smell them, my perfume  
could be marred by stinky corpses.

Dearest Dove,

have you heard they found the prodigy  
boy who became lost in the forest  
so long ago and walked into the Great Hall  
last month as if nothing had happened?

Darling,

it's all anyone can talk about, they say  
he played without missing a note,  
twenty years without a piano  
and he ran circles around the others,  
even the conductor was beside himself!

Dova Lova,

consider how much he must love us  
to stay alive for this moment.

Mother Roza approaches the Ideal Mind  
as an act of worship, the withdrawal of power  
from a bowl of blood collected from the ones  
who have made an offering of their power—  
the children are the strongest of all of us—  
thus she dips her face into eternity.

Raised upon the mantle and bathed in light  
is the Ideal Mind (the paragon of evolution)  
the watchwoman of every waking thought  
as Mother Roza nurtures comrades  
towards their highest usefulness.

Fill your bellies up to your throats, Mother,  
for another revolution is at hand.

She reclines in bed as prisoners are paraded  
through the room to meet eyes with her,  
and now and again she says you there  
tell me why you were arrested, I don't know  
Mother they just knocked on my door  
and took me in the back of a black truck

is what they wish to say, but each answers  
the same saying I chose myself over the rest,  
I was not useful to the state and thus I hurt  
those who needed me most, as all need all.  
Mother eats cake and points out one hundred  
prisoners to be chosen for the Centennial  
hanging, be glad, you can no longer say  
that you aren't useful.

With baited breath the crowd awaits  
the raising of the curtain, the familiar  
prelude to “Ode to the Suffering Servant”.  
One hundred prisoners hang in the lobby  
to generate patriotism  
for all the pains taken to ensure this is  
a land where men are truly free, truly equal.  
The tension awakens lust for the nation,  
if only she were a woman, a real fleshy one,  
who could stop themselves from ravishing  
her into tiny pieces? From choking her  
as a child might choke something he loves  
because he doesn’t understand his strength?  
In the land of pure equality the most equal  
hold seats in the auditorium, O Darling,  
you know me all too well, whisper to me  
once again how we will never forget  
the orchestral celebration of the Centennial.  
We won’t, O Dove, we can’t!

Tonight the Ode is to be played by Vulcan  
who channels fire in his dancing fingertips—  
imagine the love he must hold for us to survive  
twenty years in the wilderness.

Mother Roza stands up and orders the curtain  
to be raised, and the crowd falls silent.

Though, when the stage is revealed they see  
no orchestra, just the piano dismantled  
and a message written in blood on the lid:

GOD IS, AND I AM TOO.

Seated in the balcony at midnight  
Mother Roza stares at the empty stage,  
the empty auditorium recalling the day  
so many years ago when she toured  
the academy with the blind conductor  
and he said I would like to introduce you  
to the prodigy boy who plays better  
than all of our best musicians combined,  
here here sit down and listen to him  
though he is a strange child, hard to reach  
with slogans and lacks the vigor of others  
who chant in the gymnasium, not him  
Mother Roza, he wanders about quietly  
as if the music is controlling his mind.  
Let it do so, Mother Roza instructs, I hear  
the beauty coming from his fingers  
and a talent like this must be nurtured  
never questioned, the mistaken orders  
now ringing in her ears as she endures

the destruction left behind by the boy  
who should have never been trusted  
after spending time alone in wild places.  
GOD IS, AND I AM TOO taunts her  
as if saying the earth is flat or the sky  
is green or time is not on a flat line.

Yet, the question remains:

who radicalized Vulcan in the wilderness  
and how did he come to the conclusion  
that if his mind is free, his hands  
cannot be controlled?

A reward awaits anyone who can deliver Vulcan  
on bended knee to the Temple of the Ideal Mind,  
what amount none has said,  
but does that matter so much as the contribution  
to a society once again whispering the word  
called God?

On his table they discover the subatomic elements  
—bread, salt, water, wine—  
beside journals demanding a revolution of the mind,  
freedom to think speak believe whatever you want.  
Tell Mother Roza we are dealing with a madman  
and that he thinks God is moving through time  
as if it is a corridor, and each door opens to an age  
worthy of salvation, insanity has been snuffed out  
before and it can be done again, good soldiers,  
just need to find him before he infects someone else.  
Vulcan writes to ignore the rules of fools,  
my fellow images never allow your mind to be stunted  
in order to receive a portion of poisoned stew,

we are  
the intention of an intelligent Creator's creation,  
centuries come and go but the integrity of a man's  
thoughts and actions will be judged by eternity  
not the mind of a dead revolutionary from ages past,  
the slave is not freed with a brand-new television  
but with an invitation to set his thoughts upon origins.  
This man is more dangerous than we imagined,  
Mother Roza declares in newspaper interviews,  
his words are violence upon those we were born  
to protect, our crippled siblings, consider the evil  
that festered in his isolation from our collective conscience.  
On the distant mountain, Vulcan waits for the smoke  
to rise in towers over his home, the pages torched,  
the ideas immutable.

Fair Maia,  
did the heat of the steel burn your skull?  
Brave Vulcan,  
you're asking the wrong questions again,  
reason is a much more reliable chauffeur  
than rage, though rage will have her day.  
Fair Maia,  
when will rage have her day, for she pulses  
through my blood morning and night?  
Brave Vulcan,  
hold your rage until you need the earth to break.  
Vulcan rises in the depths of the mountain cave  
to check his hands, his hands—  
are they not filled with fire?  
Would fire not burn the temple to ashes?



After forty days without food his dreams  
are invaded by the Ghost who moves  
between the minds of those who remember,  
go now and be swallowed by the great fish  
or consumed in fire, sleep in the lion's den,  
seek His face on the mountain while the nation  
waits for you to come down and reveal truth.  
Vulcan, your body is laid upon a bed of bones  
swallowing you into the forgotten centuries,  
you are not alone, you are not alone, you  
will never survive this but you are not alone.  
Vulcan awakes on the memories of martyrs  
to find the bones pushing him back to earth  
as Maia floats past on the river of blood  
as deep as the wretched centuries are long,  
some blood is warm and some stone cold,  
some Chinese and some Soviet and some  
floated over all the way from little Laos,  
this is the international river and, listen,

my friend,  
the obedient collective has risen up  
to cut your head off and pour you out  
like wine from a carafe made of skin.  
WAKE UP! the bones cry out.  
The subatomic elements are ready  
to be consumed, transfigured into breath.  
O my soul,  
may all men see the kingdom of God  
is within each of us.

There is Maia again, this time naked  
at the vanity holding the family scissors  
to shear off her hair, what use is running  
when we have been promised the road  
that leads to death, did we not eat  
the bread, did we not take the inheritor's cup  
and hold it up to His side?  
She stands before the great window naked,  
let them see my body, let them feel primal desire,  
let them see in me naked dirty freedom, the smell,  
the power, the weakness, let us feel God inside  
us for just a moment.  
He carries her to the bed and entering her  
she whispers we're already dead anyways,  
isn't that obvious?  
Vulcan touches her skin and leaves ashes,  
the residue of his fingertips.



At the ringing of the bell the children spring forwards to make a line, the daily assembly awaits, today is the special presentation featuring Mother Roza. Oh child, perhaps you can rise to be a tax collector one day but not if you struggle to obey and repeat the phrases word for word, no fillers no ad-libbing no improvising no spontaneity no offhanded guesses. Say this, homogeny of mind is the only true diversity. Homogeny of mind is the true diversity, no, no, fool try this, the Ideal Mind protects the outcome for all, the Ideal Mind knows the outcome of all, my son, you've bastardized the meaning and shall be kept from your hot lunch, now it is another child's turn. The children walk the silent halls to the assembly, their hands twitching in anticipation of Mother's treats. From the stage she declares a single word:  
Vulcan.  
The children hiss and become frenzied in competition at the pleasure of Mother Roza, who says Vulcan

Vulcan Vulcan Vulcan, our enemy, go wild, go crazy!  
Our child seeing what must be done to survive,  
hurls himself off the top bleacher  
and into the river of blood.

Vulcan steps out of the cave after forty days  
and turns to see that Antipas has left him  
once more, just as he did in the ancient desert  
after showing the boy how to prepare a table  
for twenty years, this is how you eat and drink  
child, this is how to find your way to the garden  
and this is how to draw water from Photine's well,  
now go back and play the anthem composed  
at your birth one hundred million years ago.  
Over the valleys below he declares his name,  
I am Vulcan, I am alive, I have been to eternity  
but here I've returned through the corridor  
at His beckoning, who stands in my way?  
Who can endure the fire from my fingers?  
Who wishes to lay claim to my mind?  
Which one of you pre-existed the rights I carry  
in my veins, breathed inside of me by the One  
who continues speaking stars in the universe?  
The rocks tremble on His footsteps, not us,

not us, only a fool would dare  
to stand in the way of he who bears the image.  
On the mountain path he encounters the boy  
who has fearfully wondered upon the lightning  
rattling the cave for the last forty days and nights.  
Lifting his chin, Vulcan says  
all that will be already is, and all you see  
is yours.

Sheathed upon the hip of Mother Roza  
is the sword named Compassion, now rusted  
with the blood of moving minds deemed to lack  
compassion, this is good for you, this is freedom,  
haven't you read the manifestos of my fathers?  
Compassion groans in the night, let me loose,  
let me find the ones who have some learning  
to do before the sun rises upon us, fair Mother.  
The people cry out, I am yet to be equal, some  
have more money brains friends muscles lovers  
and this is the society of the Ideal Mind, is it not?  
All must believe they are equally worthless or else  
one will believe he is more than dust and bone,  
let's force him to bow, force him to offer his throat  
on my behalf, the collective has come to consensus.  
The sword like a magnet is drawn to his throat  
so the mind might be accessed, feast Compassion,  
feast until your belly might burst on a pinprick,  
the righteous mind is the root of his choice  
to be contributed to the river.



Here's how your knees might find the grooves  
on the banks of the river (listen, dead Maia):  
Declare that man is an actual reflection of God  
and carries the same spark in his blood that made  
the sun, declare  
that governments cannot grant a man his rights  
and therefore cannot take them away, they exist  
in every age and cannot be withdrawn by kings,  
say it out loud in public, in public so every soul  
knows you believe the mind masters your fate.  
Declare and wait for the door to come down,  
the grooves are waiting, still warm, the river  
flowing from generation to generation  
beckoning for one more blood contribution,  
one more or a million more, a billion please.  
Vulcan appears in the doorway at dusk,  
outlined in fire.  
Who are you?  
I am a son of God.  
The earth shakes.



Yours is the mind you have been waiting on  
to unlock your chains, the illusion which holds  
man under an oppression he cannot help  
but to name, an imaginary lover in the dark.  
O my lovely oppression, play in my lap  
and give me kisses each time I suffer questions  
about the origins of the universe and myself.  
The amnesiac begs for the victim's crown  
to be placed upon her head so she may justify  
the severance, so she may believe as Mother  
Roza tells her that worth is dependent on value  
to the state and commitment to new definitions.  
Am I beautiful in the victim's crown or am I  
repulsive?  
Henceforth  
the illusion shall become the communal pell,  
they will kill you to justify why they kill you,  
Maia says,  
lying naked on the couch. O Vulcan!

Gift me with the fire once more, the fire  
leaping from the tips of your fingers  
onto the black keys of my inner thighs.  
Isn't it wonderful to think that fire  
like words begins in the unplowed fields  
of the mind, the mind that leads us here  
to the couch where in our minds our bodies  
merge together? Isn't it wonderful that your gift  
begins in your ancient and eternal kingdom?  
Isn't it terrible to think a body disconnected  
from the free mind is a corpse?

A storm warms the horizon with light  
as Mother Roza caresses faces in the crowd  
saying surely you have seen Vulcan around,  
surely you know a tidbit of information rewarded  
with a glass of cold milk, the nooses lined up  
behind me are not meant for you good comrade.  
Fathers whisper see my daughter, best to obey  
and repeat whatever your teachers say,  
don't want our necks to be snapped, eh?  
Don't want to soil our pants in public, eh?  
No father, no, I am committed to obedience.  
Hooded in the midst of the crowd stands Vulcan.  
Witness the defectors, those who chose  
to serve their own interests at the expense  
of you who needed them so badly, you  
who are being exterminated by their thoughts,  
you who were born to receive the abundance  
of fruit grown on the stranger's faraway land,  
and yet,

the stranger withholds your earned inheritance.  
We have come to the end of our patience!  
The pockets of these Vulcans are deep and sealed,  
and yet,  
the sword of Compassion cuts them open for thee.  
The ropes snap the neckbones at the pleasure  
of the Ideal Mind while the crowd applauds  
meekly.

By dawn the bodies have frozen stiff,  
blocks of ice to be contributed to the river  
which floods the banks at the exultation  
of Mother Roza who goes from place to place  
with a scepter of Justice and sword of Compassion,  
wearing a hood of Rights and rings of Tolerance,  
sandals of Progress and the belt of Fairness.  
Now that they are slaughtered equality is nigh  
until tomorrow makes her into a liar, again,  
shh, shh, the night is long and hot tea awaits.  
Vulcan kneels before the iced bodies to offer  
his prayer as boys in the nearby park  
polish their pyrite badges awarded for allegiance,  
aren't we valorous, didn't we promise satiation  
to the oppression which you have endured?  
The badges prove that it is so, comrades,  
the badges are proof enough of our love.  
A beggar appears beside Vulcan with pillars  
of steam pouring forth from his mouth, spare me

some change dear fellow, I have no bread or wine,  
no salt or water.

As Vulcan offers bread the beggar recognizes  
him and grips his hands, trembling.

I would like someone to set me free,

I would like someone to give me liberty.

Vulcan lifts him up and says this I cannot do  
for thee, for thee I cannot recognize on your behalf  
how you have always been free and cannot be  
otherwise, this I cannot do for thee.

Stand from your knees and seek the fire  
that is seeking you.

In the temple a servant boy polishes the glass  
case holding the Ideal Mind, the task so fragile  
he cannot sleep but wanders the streets wishing  
perhaps he might die of lightning strike and be free.  
Mother noticed you missed a spot on the glass  
and isn't it one of your fingerprints, wipe it away,  
quick, boys are not supposed to have fingerprints.  
Leave no mark, says the implanted conscience  
still fresh from the incisions, the flesh tender  
from the day father was pulled out of the window  
by the shirt collar, are you in possession of a gun,  
dear sir, no comrade I am an obedient comrade,  
ah, good comrade, then you must agree if we find  
a gun your boy will be the one to pull the trigger,  
I have no gun comrade.  
And yet, the men in uniforms notice the seam  
in the wall of the attic, sniff sniff, look here captain.  
Drawing forth the revolver they call the family  
to the street, do whatever they tell you Mikael,

father says from his knees, I have forgiven you,  
the kingdom of God lies within each of us, Mikael.  
The same words are used by the man who lived  
in the cave for forty days and forty nights  
as lightning and fire fell upon the silent earth.  
In his mourning whilst walking the mountain road  
to forget the sound, the spray of red, mother's howl,  
Vulcan appeared carrying subatomic elements  
and said the kingdom of God is within you.  
The boy leaves his fingerprint upon the glass  
and forces the world to react to his choice.

Once upon this hallowed ground stood a church,  
the fulcrum of the compass until Coronation Day,  
don't panic my sisters and brothers and preachers,  
the compass shall remain, north is always north,  
yet the fulcrum must be calibrated, good comrades.  
Won't you at least discuss the possibilities with me?  
Mother Roza arrives with a pot of stew and invites  
the believers for a discussion in the sanctuary,  
come with your questions, come with your concerns,  
take a seat and I will join you any minute now.  
Let the children run about playing hide and seek,  
shake a hand shake a hand and sing your hymns  
of praise to the God we are scheming to kill.  
With chains the doors are sealed shut,  
the emancipation of the masses from the reactionary  
influence of religion, the Ideal Mind cannot grow  
in the acrid soil of your beliefs, so let's add some ash.  
First come the flames and then the panic, pray loud  
sisters and brothers and preachers, prove your God

to us in this moment so we might learn of His power.  
Then comes the char-scent of flesh and then bones  
reduced to ash, ash twisted into the soil, soil fertilized  
to grow the Temple of the Ideal Mind.

Walking through the abandoned village Maia  
hears music coming from the upstairs window  
above the bar that was burned when the owner  
said I will not close the doors, I will not forfeit  
my ability to care for my family for false safety.  
She climbs the stairs and cracks the door to see  
Vulcan dance through the Ode to the Ideal Mind  
without using his mind, the keys play themselves  
as they have been doing since he was a prodigy  
sent to the academy, boys and girls you are nothing  
until you have mastered the Ode, play nothing  
else until you can perform this piece for me,  
flush your own creations down the toilet like urine  
for the truest musicians are masters of repetition,  
so repeat!

And yet, on this night, the grown man unleashes  
his hands to move beyond the sheets and continues  
into a song unknown, a song born in a moving mind,  
an anthem to God in man, an anthem which hammers

a spike from her head down through her heels, liberty.  
Could it be a man  
still exists who creates without an echo of force,  
whose mind is not owned because it cannot be?  
Could it be that an anthem will be the pillow  
placed over the mouth of Mother Roza sleeping  
while she dreams of the forced Ode deafening?  
Maia follows him through the midnight streets  
until he turns and says I have no money to give.  
She shows him her hands and says I know you  
see Him in me as I see Him in you.

He tells her of the night Antipas appeared  
in the well with his hand outstretched saying  
we have a long journey ahead of us my boy,  
the deserts are widening as we wait so leap  
for me, trust that I am guiding you to a place  
you are meant to go, but this place will not offer  
chains of gold and platters of roasted meats  
but a crown of thorns, a wooden cross to humiliate  
your naked body on the side of the highway,  
spikes through your hands and feet, a whip  
to lash your back into mincemeat good boy.  
What have we traded to diseased kings  
of a passing age, and what have they given us  
but a bowl of poisoned stew for the birthright?  
What measures must be taken to claim it back?  
(This is the question I fear asking most, truly  
my daughters I have been led to high places  
where the future spreads out before me, ask  
if the bowl of stew is enough to fill your belly.)

In time they enter the river hand in hand  
as the living metaphor bound under the law  
that has yet to be written, found inscribed upon  
the hearts of those who remember their Father.  
Now a man and woman are born again, Nicodemus,  
watch how they have become one flesh,  
watch how they move between abandoned houses  
lying awake late at night to receive the elements.  
Maia licks the sweat from his sternum  
and declares:  
those who wish to group you  
wish to kill you.

On the road he meets a Forest Brother  
carrying a pistol who blocks the path to say:  
the revolution is at hand, will you join or die?  
Soon we shall be set free from the embrace  
of she who sings lullabies in the ears  
of our children before cutting their throats.  
Vulcan's defiance spreads among the masses  
who wish to peel the fingers from our labor  
one by one until we can breathe vengeance  
in the many faces of Mother Roza, executioners  
of my children of my wife of my hopeful soul,  
may we put a bullet in each of her eyes.  
The ragged army steps out from the forest,  
hungry boys with rifles, orphans craving milk.  
Which side will you choose, traveler?  
Vulcan removes his hood and says I choose  
to do what I have been called to do.  
(He cannot enter the Hour until it opens up  
for him and time has reached its fill.)

Brothers, you dream of rights recognized  
as you should but will amnesiacs be shaken  
with a gun pressed against their heads, or  
with symbolism that speaks to ancient sparks?  
Vengeance  
can never be yours until you discover time  
is not moving in the direction you think.

My comrades,  
survival is hard enough without being asked  
to philosophize about our place in the universe,  
man is a simple creature who must work eat  
laugh excrete orgasm sleep eat laugh excrete  
orgasm, what more?

The burden of thinking is not yours to bear  
when Mother Roza has already separated truth  
from falsehoods as wheat from chaff.

Unless,  
you believe you are not a body but a mind-soul,  
surely not, that could be interpreted as insult  
to those who have accepted our collective fate.

My comrades,  
lay upon the millstone and let us fill your bellies  
with an endless river of sugar-sweetened manure—  
don't fret when your intestines turn bitter  
and your souls  
are pulverized under the weight of the millstone.

Mother Roza wishes to wring you out fully.  
The man and the woman lounge on the millstone  
to absorb light and motion, words and stories,  
isn't this clever, just now I'm understanding  
how the hero is not supposed to be a hero  
but an invertebrate.

Beside the campfire Vulcan sees  
Antipas step out of the bull  
with his skin renewed, good brother of mine  
I would like to introduce you to Stephen  
who rises off the ground after three days  
and wipes away the marks left by stones,  
Stephen who places his hands into the fire  
and grabs some of the flame to place inside  
his heart for the days to come, hear it speak  
good brother of mine, hear the voice say I AM  
as the curse of enlightenment falls upon thee.  
Vulcan lifts his hand to the stars above  
and twists the world to his liking  
so he might be in bed with Maia, Maia  
who kisses his face and says I am sorry  
it was me who killed you, not them,  
not the rope which snaps your neck  
or the bullet in the back of your skull,  
not the dogs chewing you into mush,

not your head forced under the bath water  
or the choice to hurl yourself from a cliff.  
It was me who said I see Him in you.  
But how could I love you, how,  
if I didn't kill you? You accepted death  
when you agreed to the metaphor with me,  
it was you who held your cup up to the side  
of the Nazarene, it was you who drank the cup.  
My Vulcan, the curse of enlightenment  
falls upon thee, so won't you take a seat  
at the piano and play the death-song?

Dead philosophers in white coats form a circle  
to discuss the status of their rehabilitation,  
the tenuous invitation to be restored to society.  
Charles, are you still wondering upon eternity?  
No, Madam Leona.

Nikolas, are you still dreaming in vibrant color?  
No, Madam Leona.

John, do your children belong to you?  
No, Madam Leona.

She passes them copies of Mother Roza's poetry  
to memorize my dead philosophers because words  
which confuse the population are dangerous, words  
have a way of digging into man's brain and speaking  
freedom, in days past you might say what exactly is man  
and what exactly does it mean to be free?

But freedom is an illusion, we are advancing daily  
to new heights never reached by human beings  
and your miserable life is nothing on its own,  
but your value is relative to how much you give

to the progress of our collective, give your labor  
so one day all the boys and girls are happy happy.  
The dead philosophers nod, yes Madam Leona.  
One philosopher whose lungs wander for breath  
cannot nod his head while echoes of a former life  
spark the formation of a question in his mind,  
and at once he tastes salt on his lips, the primordial  
voice that called him out of the void to order  
the chaos.

A pill is pressed into his mouth, go no further,  
and Madam Leona tips the tonic down his throat.

Vulcan refines the Ode to Liberty  
while Maia dips a venison heart in melted fat  
at the kitchen table, her lips greased, her teeth  
gnawing through the flesh, her spirit amused  
by the ones who believe in the capability  
of bullets and bombs to hold the world in place.

Do you hear the lyrics?

The rights of man cannot be granted or revoked,  
they can only be recognized or not recognized.

A right cannot be taken with a budget cut or  
a perceived word or intention, no Vulcan,  
we were pushed through the same womb  
as our brother Lightning and our sister Moon,  
timeless, you and I, breathed to life by God  
and now instructed by a diseased mother  
what we are allowed to think speak believe.

Shall we laugh in her face or tear her face off?

She dips the meat in the melted fat once more  
and feasts while Vulcan's fingers find the keys

that crush the collective under an ancient roar.  
Sing this with me, Vulcan, so the children  
cannot help but hear our voices in their dreams,  
come and taste my lips.  
Louder louder, this time with laughter,  
come and taste my lips.

Before the mirror Mother Roza dresses  
in the armor of her fathers, to repeat  
what must be repeated in order for it to be  
true or else the mind will reclaim itself.  
Vulcan is the river's priority, won't his knees  
fit in the grooves on the banks like so?  
Isn't his skull craving a caress of steel?  
Maia that dead bitch filled his ears  
with cream, with discord, with the song  
of the sirens who cannot let the world spin  
without hissing liberty like snake charmers.  
All these years I have carried the collective  
to peace equality compassion fairness justice  
and still the people are restless for change,  
confused by the definitions of old words,  
great grandmother's archaic ideas, yes comrade,  
it is the definitions of words that must change  
before stability is possible, prepare a manual,  
liberty is the freedom to repeat agreements.

Homogeny of mind is the only true diversity.  
Mother Roza moisturizes her hands in a bowl  
of blood, the Ideal mind watching over them,  
boxed in glass, is that a fingerprint?  
In the mirror she hears her father say release  
the Wild Boys and blame Vulcan for the mess  
they are certain to make, have them kill a few  
soldiers or burn down a school, point your finger  
at Vulcan so the people know who to fear most.  
Mother Roza blows kisses at her fathers,  
before he is contributed to the river  
Vulcan shall play the Ode, in obedience.

The Wild Boys lie in wait for their prey,  
perhaps a crippled granny so it can be said  
Vulcan walks the streets at night with fangs  
out for the weakest among us, how can we  
live with such a monster roaming freely?  
Perhaps it should be a group of children  
who are thrown off a cliff and we will leave  
a note on their bodies signed by Vulcan,  
take a photo to be spread in the newspapers  
see it right here my love, what's more true  
than photographic evidence that this man  
is truly dangerous to us all, Wild Boys, what  
Wild Boys, don't spread conspiracy theories  
in this household unless you wish to be mocked.  
Yet the chosen one is a young soldier stumbling  
home from the pub slapping his pockets to find  
a lighter for the cigarette hanging off his lips.  
The Wild Boys step out and say let us help  
good soldier, we are fellow comrades and you

appear to be lost, come along come along now  
and take a seat right here on the statue's steps.  
In the morning the body is discovered stripped  
naked and slashed to pieces, the patriotic boy  
who wore the wheel lays upon the statue  
of the Suffering Servant with a note pinned  
to his chest reading

Mother,

Who will be next?

- Vulcan

Once as a child great grandmother sat her  
down to say you can choose your own destiny,  
that is the glory of humanity  
with breath and the spark of Holy God  
burning inside of your soul day and night,  
the flare stack roaring across the horizons  
of your years, the flame cannot extinguish,  
proclaim it child, proclaim your place on earth  
and then go and build, who will stop you?  
You are free because you cannot be anything else.

Once as a child the schoolteacher sat her down  
to say think of yourself as a very tiny wingnut  
holding a very tiny bolt on a massive machine  
so complicated you cannot begin to understand,  
and all of your life is meant to hold the bolt firm,  
consider all the pieces doing what they must  
as the machine prowls from age to age.  
Be proud of your role to play! Play it well!  
Now, the teacher has exchanged her chalk

for the wheel, the pistol, the pressed uniform  
and jabs a stick into her back and says move forward!  
The granddaughter takes her spot on the platform,  
as the former teacher instructs her to squeeze her head  
through the noose just like so, you're getting it now.  
On the distant river great grandmother glides past  
on a sailboat topped with her own flare stack  
still burning uninterrupted from conception  
through eternity.

Imagine the joy of discovering a bottle of soda buried in the forest, might this have belonged to a clever boy before the Suffering Servant was hammered onto the wheel and torn apart as she shouted her final words:  
“man is free when he is ruled into fairness,”  
before the mobs sharpened their shovels  
and hid butter knives in their pants pockets,  
before the family men wearing new spectacles  
who discussed freedom of the individual mind  
(and thus, freedom of existence itself)  
were invited into the back of a government van,  
we just want to ask a few questions, sir,  
there’s no reason for your family to worry, sleep  
children your father will be home by morning,  
before Mother Roza’s soldiers burned the church  
and the Temple of the Ideal Mind rose from ash.  
In those days the clever boys buried treasures  
in the woods, a sack of marbles or a bottle of soda,

little pouches of gold coins or perhaps the pistol  
father hid in the barn before they took him away.  
The Forest Brothers admire the bottle  
until one says let's drink it for the boy  
who surely must be free by now,  
surely.

Fair Maia,  
does the river ever change directions,  
or must I wait for it to circumvent the earth?

Brave Vulcan,  
the river never changes directions,  
only color, temperature, depth, speed,  
but isn't this inconsequential to us both?

Fair Maia,  
once your spirit returns to the bloody banks  
you can whisper in my ear how to avenge  
the hundred hanged, the hollowed family trees,  
the forgotten boys and the dispirited girls.

Brave Vulcan,  
tell the people who they are made to be,  
what else? What else?

Lick with your tongue see with your eyes  
hear with your ears touch with your skin  
think with your mind, the master sense.

The masses sacrifice their minds for assurance

of another stagnant decade, speak out and die,  
suffering is temporary but concession of mind  
rides on the river with me, with thee, with us—  
are not these abandoned convictions the force  
which makes the river run in the first place?  
Can't we be naked and brilliant all at once?  
Vulcan awakes in the night next to a campfire  
bowing to him, the flames say what now,  
Master,  
we await your command.

Mikael tries to think of the fingerprint  
yet his memory presses new images upon him,  
father on his knees saying I forgive you,  
mother howling at the moon, retrieve us  
O King of Time, I hear the trumpets calling,  
a stray dog in the oven and the rice bag empty,  
painting a wheel on his jacket and sister  
saying that isn't going to work, Mikael, fool,  
you must first kiss the icon to receive the blessing  
like me, I can teach you, I can organize your ideas,  
at sunrise we shall worship the Ideal Mind.  
Then there is the image of Antipas of Pergamum  
painted on the wall of the gymnasium,  
GO FORTH AND DISCOVER THE UNIVERSE  
written around his head like a halo, children  
once admired the explorer who was placed  
into the burning bull and came out a conqueror  
to establish the ordered lines of a new kingdom.  
Before the Suffering Servant was hammered to

the wheel of her death, revolutionaries scratched the paint from the mural with bare fingernails saying this is Antipas who brutalized the civilians with lies, this is Antipas who conquered tribes who conquered one another, so let us conquer him to make up for his sins of conquest, erase him. Mikael checks his fingernails for paint and is relieved to find none.

Darling,

I'm not sleeping well at night knowing  
Vulcan is still out there killing strangers,  
you saw the note he wrote and it may as well  
have been written about me, he will kill me  
as sure as I'm standing here trembling.

Dove,

don't allow yourself to be melodramatic  
when discussing a piano player, remember  
Mother Roza has all of her soldiers hunting  
and it will be no time at all until we're safe.

Yes Darling,

it's just that when I was walking home  
from the market I feared what lurked behind  
every alley and corner, behind every trashcan  
was another Vulcan, another murderer.

Oh Dovey Dovey,

these types pop up every now and again,  
rabble rousers working folks into a frenzy

but at the end of the day they're captured  
and we don't hear from them again, trust  
our masters Dove, they know what's best.  
Of course my Dearest Darling,  
I am just looking forward to the day  
his knees are placed into the grooves,  
how can any civilized society move ahead  
with a man on the loose who thinks like this,  
no one knows what his mind is capable of  
building or destroying.

At a table in the shuttered café Vulcan  
reviews the words of the columnists appointed  
to report his whereabouts, comrades, our enemy  
is hiding amongst the Forest Brothers north  
of the capital, look beneath your mother's bed,  
look inside your father's wardrobe,  
report changes in your grandfather's behavior,  
doesn't your grandmother hold old ideas?  
Isn't your own brother praying in secret?  
Any information will be rewarded with gold,  
with a tour of the temple and a chance to view  
the Ideal Mind, bring him alive, alive, conscious,  
because we cannot make examples of dead men.  
The cartoonists present Vulcan murdering  
the soldier at midnight, I AM INSATIABLE,  
he declares, I AM COMING FOR YOU NEXT.  
At once,  
a hand grips his shoulder and the café owner  
says come upstairs, O Vulcan, see my treasure.

In the storage room above the cafe  
is a piano covered in a sheet, won't you play  
us something beautiful? I need to remember  
the world is worth saving and even thieves  
are spared when they turn their heads and speak,  
even boys left to die under the bush receive water.  
Vulcan lifts the cover and his hands alight  
like songbirds on their home tree.

Behold Maia in the night who lights a torch  
and walks the center of the streets shouting  
I am a child of God, not a happenstance,  
I am intentional, I carry the same spark  
which set fire to the sun and the stars!  
Hear me, O brothers and sisters of the spark,  
we are free because we cannot be anything else.  
Her white gown flutters in the wind, a force  
of madness moving through her veins  
while Vulcan sleeps in their bed, my wife,  
why have you vanished in the night?  
The Youth Patrol with their bright red sashes  
rope her to the statue of the Suffering Servant,  
you are a fountain of antiquated ideology,  
you are a fountain of decadence, of old ideas,  
the soul is saved by reforming your thoughts  
around the future of the collective, nothing else.  
The Youth Patrol form a line to abuse her body,  
the teachers agree that lunatics won't remember,

bonk them on the head or rip their clothes off,  
the choice is yours, young defenders of the Ideal Mind.

By dawn

Maia chews through the ropes  
and lights the torch once more.

You are not nodding in agreement, Maia,  
that is because I do not agree,  
equality is not our highest calling?  
The words we use have different meanings,  
Madam Leona, and I believe in equality  
while you believe in equality.  
The philosophers in white coats wish her dead—  
kill her already, she is disagreeing with Mother  
and playing magic tricks on our minds!  
The daily chemical baths have done well  
to drive them towards docile compliance  
and create good comrades who say I'm fine,  
isn't it wonderful, we've been so busy lately,  
just hanging in there, working a lot these days,  
homogeny of mind is the only true diversity,  
how about this weather we have been having?  
Maia, child, let me roll the pill across your lips  
that you may absolve yourself of yourself,  
no need for a decent woman to wander the streets

in her nightgown and enflame the lust of boys,  
boys doing their best to serve the community.  
As she offers the pill,  
Maia bites her wrist and won't release  
until a knife enters her ribs.

She cannot be reformed, it is determined,  
and so the defector named Maia is transported  
from the re-education center to the asylum,  
where it is decided chemicals can't control her,  
and so the defector named Maia is transported  
from the asylum to the river,  
place your knees just like so, in a moment  
a .380 caliber bullet will give what you desire.  
She sings the song of freedom while Vulcan  
watches from the gathered crowds.  
You cannot take what you never gave me,  
and so she laughs from her belly,  
you cannot steal what cannot be stolen,  
and so she sings from her belly.  
Oh my love, I am only sorry because you  
aren't here with me, nothing else,  
nothing else.  
Vulcan sees the flash of the pistol before  
the sound reaches the crowd, hip-hip hooray,

they say as she crumples into the dust.  
(But what has happened to her spirit?)  
The executioner presses the icon against her lips,  
kiss my prodigal daughter, let the children see  
your repentance,  
and then he nudges her into the water below.

They ask to see his hands, the children  
who have gathered in the upper room,  
their eyes enlivened by the man in flesh  
whose name has been whispered between  
mother and father at the dinner table,  
should we take the risk, the appearance  
of alignment with the revolution means  
they will knock on our door in the night,  
we just want to have a conversation, no need  
to worry yourselves just chant the phrases  
to prove you are a reliable ally in the struggle,  
name your Mother and you shall live forever.  
He's coloring the world, my love, is this how  
we want our children to pass their years—  
in silence in submission in imitation,  
(I won't permit my children to become parrots  
standing at attention before teachers with wands,  
chant with me, the ideal mind is the Ideal Mind,  
Family is subversive, I am a child of the masses),  
in bent knee to Mother Roza?

Children hear the whispers and remember

THE PRIMORDIAL VOICE

which spoke in the moments before birth,  
go little one, enter the world with your webs  
of blood and bone and veins that you may  
order the civilizations with your God-mind.

Have we ever beheld a human being at capacity?

A boy offers him a piece of bread

and says tell us if we will survive, O Vulcan.

Vulcan eats and says you cannot die.

The Wild Boys dream of mommy  
as a moving mass of red through the streets,  
fairness is the word decided to eliminate  
the rival nation called Family, good comrades,  
marriage is over commitment to children is over  
gender is over, too.

Did you not warm your hands  
over the burning church?

The family is subversion, say it,  
THE FAMILY IS SUBVERSION.

This is the day of fairness, this is the day  
of submission and submission cannot occur  
with husbands and wives hoarding bread  
and love and oxygen for balls of cells.

Mother Roza fills them with strong wine,  
line up so we can slice off your breasts,  
thicken your necks, stuff your feet into boots  
and place the victim's crown upon your head.  
Take a sledgehammer to the feminine,

the masculine, sex is nothing, divorce is nothing,  
god is nothing, abortion is nothing, what matters  
most is the nation and the words we define.

The unaborted boys are handed over  
to the alleys where they wait for someone  
to claim them, to point at the faces deserving  
of their rage.

His name is Vulcan, O Wild Boys,  
consider what he's done to you.

Antipas forges across the wilderness on horseback  
seeking a single fingerprint left behind by a boy,  
GO FORTH AND DISCOVER THE UNIVERSE  
he declares to the mountains, the trees,  
this is the land where children claim liberty  
in small moments, fingerprints on the glass,  
the true oppressors of the spirit cannot survive  
defiance because defiance begins in kingdoms  
far away, another realm altogether my brothers,  
I shall carve the borders of the nation for Mikael  
five hundred years in advance, I shall order  
the void.

Understand my eternal brothers,  
the modern world is layered with blood and bone  
and yesterday or tomorrow it will be flooded  
by wells and give birth to a garden kingdom.  
Antipas drinks rain while sharpening his blade,  
his tongue lapping the water, the water washing  
ashes and melted bronze from the hooves of his steed,

isn't life lovely and precious, my eternal brothers,  
and isn't this the land where men shall live free?  
The eyes of Antipas singe through the centuries  
to find the boy weeping over his father's grave,  
Mikael, Mikael, you will never be alone,  
I give my life for thee.

Then come the older boys carving wheels  
into their forearms with a dull knife, the blood  
is wiped away at intervals to measure progress,  
doesn't it look wonderful, answer little Mikael,  
aren't the comrades going to pat our heads  
and won't you extend your arm towards me?  
They chase him through the streets and in the field  
stuff his mouth full of dirt, shame on you coward  
weakling defector classist traitor selfish bastard,  
your only salvation is that you killed your father  
and Mother Roza says fathers must die,  
mothers must die, family is a mark of subversion.  
O killer, killer,  
this is all you are and all you will ever be, you  
must be forced to do what you should have done,  
you who are unwilling to offer a blood-oath to us,  
to Mother Roza, to the collective, to the good of all,  
careful or we will report you to the Youth Patrol.  
Mikael cleans his mouth at the river and hears

whispers moving on the surface of the water,  
circling the earth and saying this is but a moment,  
Mikael, and you have been marked for an Hour  
still to come.

Torches descend the hillsides, closing in  
on the camp of the Forest Brothers sleeping.  
Vulcan awakes from dreams of Maia's navel  
drizzled in honey, his tongue tracing the lines  
of her body through the centuries back to Antipas  
locked inside of the bull for declaring the obvious.  
He emerges from the tent with fire in hand  
that illuminates the faces of the Forest Brothers  
cocking pistols and pointing at the darkness.  
Vulcan, I will not surrender my body to the state  
because my body is the transfiguration of my mind  
and my mind cannot be surrendered to anyone  
who did not form it out of Eden's soil.  
He stands before the gathered men and knows  
a traitor is amongst them, which of you traded  
the spark of eternity for a satchel of silver, who  
sold their birthright for a bowl of poisonous stew?  
Who has submitted to a decade more of silent  
breathing silent speaking silent thinking, who,

who today filled pockets with the blood-gold  
of those who dared to say I am a unique creation  
of God, first, and nothing of any consequence second?  
When all have been hanged Mother Roza arrives  
with flowing robes to the prisoner held face down  
in the mud, and to him she speaks gently:  
All you had to do was play the song.

A shovel in his hands makes him invisible,  
Mother, this is a man in search of symbolism  
so let him have it, let him become an image  
our children will never forget and fear to become.  
Mother Roza listens from the bathtub as her feet  
are scrubbed by your children, and what image  
shall we make of him, maybe he should polish  
statues the rest of his life or manufacture badges  
handed out at school assemblies, or perhaps  
he can take tickets of visitors to the Temple.  
A great man can only be crushed by a spectacle,  
forced submission to ideas he detests  
until one day he finds himself nodding along  
with everyone else, until he finds himself clapping  
for no reason at all, and understands he now belongs  
to the collective.  
What damage has already been done by his words  
spoken to defectors, syllables and sounds blasted  
into the minds of children, the hundred hanged,

his every thought against the Ideal Mind,  
the verses, his insistence that all men are created  
in the image of God who manifests reality, behold  
his followers who hide beneath blankets tonight  
with a screwdriver in hand, the plot, a dead bitch  
avenged by a failed avenger.

Mother, do you still want to hear the Ode?

The train comes to a halt at the platform  
to be loaded with crates of potatoes, cabbages,  
anything to feed the sloganeers at the capital  
so their mouths never stop running running  
while power grows wild from the barrel of a  
very fair gun, indeed.

Chant this between your bites, my obedient,  
one man with a gun controls one hundred  
without one,  
command the guns or they command the party.  
The train moves again through the countryside  
where Vulcan beholds the farmers who starve  
to death by growing food for armed strangers,  
the mobs are clamoring my good men so fork  
your vegetables into their mouths, won't you?  
Your children can eat the crumbs which fall  
from their beards as they exit your home.  
The train comes to a halt at the encampment  
where farmers who placed the fork in the mouth

of their own children are held for re-education,  
stripped naked and sprayed with hoses, bark  
like a dog if you wish for me to leave you alone,  
snort like a piglet if you wish to keep your belly  
from being opened and your bacon removed.  
You who are unwilling to act fairly to brothers  
shall be treated with the fairness you deserve.  
The train keeps rolling and carved upon the hill  
is the image of the stiff-necked woman overlooking  
the fair earth she adores.  
Children, if you no longer like the nation,  
become a new one.

The guard carries a gun to protect the nation  
from the man who carries an idea of origins  
unknown,  
unknown severity, unknown offense,  
for unknown intention is assumed intention  
and it is clear Vulcan must be chained  
and transported to the capital for execution.  
As a boy the teacher once remarked that  
if only ideas could be chained in boxcars  
and shipped to their executioners we'd live  
in harmony, one day soon my dear students.  
How did you come into being, he questions  
the boy who now carries a submachine gun.  
Who has ownership of your mind and labor,  
and, my watchman,  
what is the difference between a human right  
and rights which can be given and taken?  
O my watchman, my youthful watchman,  
what is the last book you read, the last song

you sang at the top of your lungs, the last time  
you made love to a fellow image of the Maker,  
the last time you licked honey from a naval  
and said the earth bends to my moving mind?  
When is the last time you felt the eternal spark  
swell through your veins and ignite your hands?  
In the night as the boxcar rattles along the river  
the watchman awakes in terror to say look there,  
there, Antipas paces the train on his blood-horse.  
O prisoner,  
he is looking right at me.

The mighty river breaks the city in half  
at the doorstep of the temple, knock Vulcan,  
and the door shall be opened to you.

Mother Roza guides the shackled prisoner  
into the tower which protects the Ideal Mind  
pulsing behind glass, the national conscience.  
But is that a fingerprint, look, there, a smudge,  
impossible Mother, Mikael the slave boy  
feverishly cleans the glass morning and night  
and would never leave his mark behind.

Vulcan is pushed to his knees in her bedroom  
while she strokes his face with painted nails,  
tell me, where did you disappear all those years  
and who took control of your mind in the wild,  
surely you did not come to this madness alone.  
There is no other conclusion, he declares, I am  
a reflection of I am and thus what is true of Him  
becomes true of me, the image-bearer of the Creator  
and creation itself, today I am on my knees

and tomorrow I am eating bread on the hill  
receiving a new name from the Son of Man.  
What you don't understand yet but soon will  
is that the war is won, the war goes on,  
and this is our vigil.  
He awaits the barrel on the back of his head,  
Fair Maia,  
does it burn?  
Brave Vulcan,  
does it matter?

Darling,  
everyone is talking about the capture  
and how brave the soldiers must have been  
to descend upon those maniacs in the dark,  
sure enough there was Vulcan in his underwear.  
Oh Dove,  
that's wonderful news and just what I predicted,  
he's no threat to us just a wacko wandering  
around the woods at night sharing falsehoods  
with people who can't tell right from left.  
My Darling,  
you've been correct all along, I also heard  
he has secretly apologized to Mother Roza  
and will become an advocate of the state  
at school assemblies to tell children his tale  
of redemption.  
Dovey Dove,  
everything seems to work out in time, eh?  
Yes Darling,

there's just one small thing he must do  
publicly and that is to play the Ode  
in the square for all to hear, don't forget  
he's a prodigious pianist, the best we have  
and he owes us the anthem at the very least.

Dovey,

imagine the patriotism that will rise amongst all  
the children when they see how this man can be  
convinced the collective supersedes the individual,  
that giving your life to Mother Roza is the best  
way to live a little longer.

The sun crests over the river as children gather  
to see the naked monster caged in the courtyard,  
poke him, smell him, throw a pebble at him,  
but my obedient child stand clear so he doesn't  
clutch your throat or infect you with aspirations.  
In the cage is the grand piano repaired, the strings  
tightened and tuned for the prodigy to submit  
his hands to the playing of the Ode, the Ode  
which he should have played on stage so long ago  
to avoid the spread of disease amongst minds  
this close to accepting they are nothing at all.

O Vulcan,  
save your life, alight your birds upon the branches  
white and black, submit your hands, your mind  
and you will be invited to feast at Mother's table,  
you will be given a glass of cold milk, a bed of silk  
sheets, you shall take your pick of woman and wine,  
no one will blame you for choosing to play the Ode  
in order to avoid being forced to your knees

and feeling the pistol pressed against your skull.  
Besides,  
what do hands have to do with your mind?  
A wrist elbow shoulder neck stand between them.  
Play the Ode, says the son of a woman in red.  
Her son crouches beside the cage to see the monster  
clearly, to feel the heat of something truly dangerous.

Every word forges a light that travels  
across the sky to illuminate the darkness  
of your choosing, whisper to me Antipas,  
bring me the light of your memories.  
Antipas appears inside the cage to declare  
once upon a time, in a land far away,  
I mounted the steed and pointed him  
at horizons which already belonged to me  
before I arrived, they knew my name.  
O Antipas, carrier of the ages, you  
are the newest border forger and still  
one day they will claw your image  
from the wall of the local gymnasium.  
Maia enters the cage to breathe life  
into the lips of Vulcan, to speak a light  
which illuminates his fear that the world  
cannot be made to spin in reverse, O Maia,  
see how the farmer's child starves to death  
delivering vegetables to a train of strangers.

Hold fast, lover, never give away the fire  
which they cannot take, never, never.  
My Vulcan, do you have the strength  
to host a caravan of visitors from the river?  
The historian says none of this is new,  
the doctor advises you to seal the wounds,  
the philosopher says perhaps we devolved.  
I say to place your hands around my neck  
and gently insert your thumb into my mouth,  
to smell me, to taste my face, to remember  
that your Hour is upon you.

Vulcan rises by Maia's breath to reunite  
with the boy he met on the mountain path  
after forty days and nights in the cave.  
Mikael hands him the subatomic elements  
and the boy understands  
he is not dealing with a god or a monster  
but a man just like his father was a man,  
pull the trigger as they order, I forgive you,  
one day you will meet me on the river  
and I shall hold you once more, my son,  
the blood will not follow you to the seat  
of final judgment, your survival is not a sin.  
We have already met one another in dreams,  
Vulcan declares, and the boy remembers  
as all of the river people remember,  
time is not linear and the soul jumps centuries  
as a child might run from one room to another,  
we are already together in the future, there's Maia  
Antipas Paul Stephen, all of the river people

who have no reason to be afraid of definitions  
of steel barrels of empty stomachs of Wild Boys.  
Will you play the Ode or will you die?  
Vulcan drinks from the cup,  
and his fingers ignite.

Behold the fate of the man who defies the collective  
in order to fatten his own ambitions, his egomania,  
look, look, stare into his eyes so he must justify himself  
to you, my obedient, make him explain how this fate  
is better than pursuing the Ideal Mind in submission.  
See how the animal bleeds sleeps defecates in public!  
O hero of fools, O king of the unenlightened,  
O majesty of prodigals who cling to defeated ideas,  
here is your castle, a bronze cage in the Temple Square,  
here is your throne, a wooden bucket to hold your waste,  
here are your subjects, hissing mocking schoolchildren,  
here is your key, a grand piano waiting to be played—  
isn't this a simple thing? Kiss the icon, truly.  
The busloads of children untie their satchels of rocks  
so they can hurl them at the monster,  
the cave-dweller who stabs soldiers at midnight.  
In the sea of red uniforms he cannot see their faces  
nor can their voices be separated, the one is many,  
the many are nothing, faceless dancers to the wand

waved by Mother Roza who watches from on high,  
behold your evil father, children, hit him with rocks,  
don't let him infect you with madness and delusion!  
The children demand the Ode, O Vulcan, submit  
your hands to the music of the Suffering Servant,  
and our slurs will turn to cheers,  
isn't this a simple thing?  
Mercy awaits all who choose equality.

Maia appears outside the cage soaking wet  
and naked, the river is not so bad my Vulcan,  
the people are wonderful and filled with love,  
each one of us has a bullet in our heads,  
sunken bellies, rope burns around our necks,  
crushed lungs and dismantled faces, like you.  
We float through the centuries as sparks.  
She holds a vanity mirror through the bars  
so Vulcan might remember he is more  
than flesh dissolving in public, a moving mind,  
remember my lover, beyond your dangling jaw,  
your face warped, your elbows inverted  
by the one who plucked the teeth from your mouth,  
cough up your lungs in chunks if you must,  
no one will notice when you arrive to the river.  
Brave Vulcan, now is the time to remember  
the mirror shows the spark of God in every man,  
do you not see the flicker still? Does it burn in you?  
Vulcan rises to the awe of the crowds to reflect

in the mirror Maia holds, still the glass my love,  
a million mirrors dance in my splintered eyes.  
He presses his face against the glass  
to see himself as he is seen, the mark of a man  
who claimed every horizon a million years ago.  
I am what I am made to be, so may I see  
myself as I am seen by the Creator in me.  
Maia declares,  
your song is sustained by the spark,  
your spark is sustained by the song,  
and your hands are intact, are they not?

Behold Mother Roza,  
the prisoner has slithered up to the piano,  
his hands have alighted upon the keys, hurry,  
hurry, the lamb offers his throat on the altar.  
Mother Roza pushes to the front of the crowds  
and says play the Ode, Vulcan, play the Ode  
so the universe you have stolen is restored.  
Kiss the icon dear comrade, we are desperate  
to know that you see us as we see ourselves,  
what we think of ourselves is inconsequential,  
what you think of us sustains the mechanisms  
used to keep you from thinking at all.  
His thumb twitches, a sound emerging  
from the grand piano with strings restored,  
though, has he changed the key, comrade?  
Vulcan lifts his chin and finds the river boy  
who once left a fingerprint on the glass.  
All that will be already is, and all I see is mine.  
His hands hammer upon the keys in a storm

of rage, a series of lightning bolts striking  
the heart of the temple, burn thou demon,  
this is the Hour this is the Hour Maia cries  
scrambling across the fields on fire, her words  
burning the nation to ashes, her breath a seed  
of new creation to spring forth in years to come.  
The crowds rattle the cage, our ears, our minds,  
what curse have you laid upon us, O Vulcan?  
The glow spreads from his fingers, his mind,  
until his body erupts in flames.

The bronze cage melts around the flaming man  
as the crowds trample one another for safety,  
run for the buses, little ones, look away,  
cover your ears, chant the slogans with precision.  
Mother Roza flees to the temple  
to save the Ideal Mind from destruction.  
O watchman,  
fire a bullet into the back of his head, take him  
down to the river, load him on the boxcar,  
(though who can capture the spirit of a man  
pointed at the object he was born to destroy?)  
Maia cackles on the riverbank, see me now,  
I am a child of God, not a happenstance.  
See me now, I am Maia the daughter of God,  
sister of the moon and stars, mother of love,  
this is my body the tool of my mind, my gift.  
Mother, let us again change the definitions  
of terror of fire of redemption of indignation  
of rage

so our reality will follow, don't definitions  
create reality rather than reality create definitions?  
The man who is a flame enters the temple,  
his eyes charcoals and the earth cracking  
beneath his feet.

Mikael follows the flame up the spiral of stairs  
and into the upper sanctuary, the presence  
of the Ideal Mind darkens the temple in trepidation  
of the coming judgment, O Vulcan, give us time  
to create a more fair society for all, a policy  
of equality should do the trick, don't you think?  
In a year or two the grand vision can be realized  
as children of all ages fill their bellies with justice,  
three years at the very most will be needed,  
credit our intentions, put faith in our philosophy.  
The flame is immovable but moving forward  
as Mother Roza dressed in father's armor asks  
will He remember me? Will He know my name,  
and is it too late to trade these stones for eyes?  
She hurls herself from the window and splatters  
on the square below.

Mikael appears in the burning doorway unafraid  
of death which has already been offered and accepted.  
What will you do now, my son, Vulcan asks him.

Mikael opens the glass case and peels apart  
the Ideal Mind,  
as if serving bread.

Three days pass before the ashes stir  
upwards in a vortex—  
not a stone or a beam of wood remains  
as evidence that once a church stood  
here, or once a temple replaced a church.  
The Temple Square is a layer of hot ash  
that still sings the skin at the touch,  
three days removed from when Vulcan  
transfigured into a pillar of fire and burned  
the world to its roots.

Gather my comrades for a change is afoot,  
perhaps the stones are reuniting for us,  
perhaps the ash is cool enough to sweep,  
perhaps the Ideal Mind is resurrecting  
on behalf of those she died saving, again.  
The vortex intensifies and a figure appears,  
his skin covered in white dust, his eyes wide  
and the people terrified, this is not Mother,  
this is not the Suffering Servant reborn,

this is an image who survived the cataclysm.  
Mikael materializes as the ashes of death  
float upwards into the night sky waiting.  
Behold the foundation of the new world,  
he declares,  
and shows the people his hands, his feet.

Darling,  
the newspaper wasn't delivered today.

Oh Dovey,  
I'm sure they're working round the clock  
to get things up and running again, how else  
will we know what's going on out there?

Darling,  
that's just it, how else will we know?

Dove My Love,  
maybe we should take some pills and sleep  
so we don't have to think about this question,  
the quiet is racking my brain.

Darling,  
this is coming out of the blue but the world  
is built upon particles and atoms, right, yes,  
and of course began with a bang but where  
did the bang come from, before the bang,  
what was there that could be banged together?

Dova Dove,

I don't mean to offend but I'm in no mood  
to dive into conspiracy theories tonight,  
can't we just be happy being normal citizens  
and paying our taxes on time?

Oh my Darling,

don't get me wrong, I'm not a conspirator  
and certainly not a defector, it's just the quiet  
making me uneasy.

Maia teaches him how to breathe underwater,  
like this my dear, and pushes air from her mouth  
into his, we breathe alone together you see?  
She moves his hands still on fire onto her breasts  
to feel the heat of his soul against her heart  
thundering, delight in me in life  
in pleasure in ecstasy in pain in work in death.  
The metaphor lives beyond life as intended.  
Hum the song in my ear, darling, the Ode  
to Liberty which unlocked the chains of false  
definitions softening the minds of the suffering,  
the poor souls who turned in their neighbors  
because they were told to do so, kill him, ok,  
shouldn't we mourn over soft minds, my dear?  
No, instead,  
let us show them fire on the mountain.  
Vulcan grips the back of her head in search  
of the bullet hole but it is covered in flesh.  
The rules of the river evade him for now,

but he will learn to visit Mikael in dense dreams  
to discuss the nature of man and offer bread,  
water, salt, light, feast boy, let the wine drip  
from your lips as you call them to the spark.  
Fair Maia,  
are we meant to live like this forever?  
Brave Vulcan,  
decide for yourself what we are meant to do,  
you are a son of God. ✱

I am so grateful you chose to read this book. If you would like for these ideas to spread, there are a few steps you can take.

The first is to write a review for the book. At the end of the day, we all give credence to books that are more thoroughly and highly-reviewed. That would be a great gift to me. Second, you could tell friends and share on social media. And third, you can connect with me online at [craigscunningham.com](http://craigscunningham.com) or by finding me on social media at [@craigscunningham](https://twitter.com/craigscunningham). You can also email [canowanbooks@gmail.com](mailto:canowanbooks@gmail.com) to let me know your thoughts and questions about this book. I would love to hear from you through one or all of these channels.

All that will be already is, and all you see is yours.

- Craig Cunningham

*Other Books in Theology*

1. PATRIARCH
2. DEFECTOR
3. REZA
4. NAZARENE
5. VIGIL

