

REZA



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

Reza

When the last bomb falls
there is no longer room for rage, my child,
for we are either dead or chosen to rebuild
from ash and mud, to survive is to be
marked by the one who spoke I AM still
speaking creation into the void, demanding
order and are you not a reflection of Him?
Was your Hour not formed the day He said be?
Do you not see the pendulum allowing evil
is also a pendulum allowing good, that devils
roaming the ruins in search of slaves and gold
cannot fully extinguish the spark of Sehnsucht?
See how masked devils lie awake, begging
for the Word to remind them of their first name,
see how the ruler found in a hole eating clay
with stump hands is discovered and executed
by a new ruler who begs for mercy from a ruler
who jabs an icepick in his neck saying my turn
to dance with Abaddon on our fathers' bones.

Yet the ancient spark burns! Who can put it out?
Lift thy voices O survivors of the final bomb,
cry out Aleppo, Troy, Stalingrad! Be known!
The crushed stones wish to be swept away
and ordered into something new, a temple
to the sacred individual burning through time
down the road called Via Volver, listen listen
to the Nazarene speak: all that will be already is,
and all you see is yours.

The day oil stopped burning on the sea
the captives clamored to the shore for a look
at the hope of all mankind,
do you see which way I'm pointing my love,
one of these days we will be chosen, one day
our number will be drawn from the lucky pot
and we shall take the voyage to a virgin land
free from corpses strewn across the fractured
asphalt, apartments burned down to steel frames,
the sight of father wandering without a hand.
Look yonder to the horizon where bread and honey
are as easy to find as stone, metal, mud, blood,
surely not all the light has been blotted out,
surely the longing of my soul can find rest
on this side of the grave, surely this spark in me
is not an illusion but an ancient reminder of I AM.
Each morning the rafts are loaded with victors
gripping their terrified children, let your visions
of the future abound for today our lives begin again.

O children, not all the world is confined to a camp
or breathing radiation as we sleep.
There to captain the raft is Zahid pointing its nose
to the rising sun saying I cannot find your way
I can only take you where I have been ordered
to do so with a gun in my mouth, nod and work
and perhaps in thirty or forty years you will be fine.
The raft hits shore by nightfall and Zahid tells them
to GO FORTH AND DISCOVER THE UNIVERSE,
the words pressed upon his heart by the dream-rider
who whispers not yet, wayward son, but soon.
Zahid buys bread and clean water from a child
and turns his raft back to the City of Death.

Raziya gathers the children around the Altar
of Living Hope not to warm their hands
but to manifest a new reality with her mind,
let it be that war planes are not flying overhead,
let it be that we live in a land where man's rights
are recognized, not dictated by diseased kings,
let it be that the sound ripping through my ears
is not an exploding missile but a hallucination.
Tell me, Zahid, what good does it do your soul
to wander the ruins in the night whispering
into the openings of fallen buildings I am here
still, I will not leave until I hold you once more
my daughters, my love who knows me in truth.
He tightens the mask so radiation cannot seep
through the cracks and into his pained lungs
while tossing chunks of concrete here and there,
here and there is a leg or a child's doll, a corpse
curled up and burned, the price to pay is nothing
the general said on the television set, don't ask

what it will cost unless you are an enemy of ours.
Chunk by chunk he casts the rubble aside,
ever closer to the altar where he said my love
take the girls there and wait for me by the flame,
shh don't cry little ones there is nothing to fear,
just the grown-ups working things out by trading
blood for blood, pain for pain, but there's no need
for children to be concerned.

Again the voice rises out of the depths
of the rubble but is this just the wind
working through my gas mask, surely I am
losing my mind and why should I not
grandfather, you once took me to the desert
and said all the great prophets go crazy
because they see the machinations of God
and realize man is convinced the machine
is broken, and so he rebuilds it into a monster
that dulls everyone's minds then slaughters them.
From the depths of the rubble a word
comes to him saying GO BEFORE THE LORD
TO PREPARE HIS WAY, shine upon those
who remain in the darkness and the shadow
of death,
fire will be kindled in the hearts of the fortunate
few who survive the mass extinction of mankind
and shall soon see the chaos ordered in His hands.
Be glad, O Zahid! If you are given eyes to see

you shall see the oil wiped clean off the waters
and this water you shall drink from the hand
of He who carries the same subatomic elements
as you, you who are the descendant of Adam
and no longer a descendant of Adam's desire.
A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

The king who forms himself a crown
shall have it sliced off his head tomorrow.
Listen thou roving bands of dead-eyed men,
hear the song Zahid sings over the burned city
from the abandoned tower where once
long ago he placed a ring upon her finger.
May the sun always shine upon our love
and may the God of all things give us children,
yet now the sunshine is blotted from the sky
with the residue of dust, radiation, smoke
still rising from the piles of bodies burned
to kill the disease and keep wolves at bay.
Where are the blessings O God of all
when my children are buried in the rubble,
clutching mother in their final moments
as the flame of eternal hope taunted them?
Where was your hand to redirect the bomb?
Perhaps your eyes were turned to Nathaniel
under the fig tree, perhaps you were pouring

courage into the heart of the shepherd boy
and guiding the stone at the giant's head.
But you were not here,
would you come here now?

When the world ends we must ask if it ever existed as we assume it does, the masterful mind speaks and what is not becomes real, our Father the King of Time who built us by looking in a mirror cannot place the world on a fixed axis unless He stops speaking, do you know the universe grows larger by the year, that there is perpetually more space? What other conclusion can be reached than this: though we exist in reality, reality is not just time moving in a straight line, a belly full of hot food, happy children, hair that turns grey, tears, joy. Surely my captain when you walk the streets of burned cars burned bodies burned buildings you are asking the wrong questions, like why is man so evil, does God exist, is He good or evil, am I real, how can an omnipotent God allow suffering? Ask this instead, captain: what must I do to enter the Hour set aside for me?



The falconer appears in the doorway at dusk,
the sound of footsteps waking him from sleep
as his great bird of prey spreads its wings, silent
in anticipation of a meal, the eyes the eyes gifted
from the master as a treat while he claims the heart
for himself, remember the night you set a tire on fire
in the middle of the street and burned your flag,
burned your uniform, screamed at the circling stars
that everyone you have ever loved is disintegrated
over a disagreement between who, no one remembers
the reasoning for war because war itself becomes
the reasoning for war once it has begun, the sight
of blood awakens lust for more, naked wet revenge
and thus the original reasons are inconsequential,
the machine must only be cranked once to run forever.
The falconer flung himself
into the fire only to survive and discover he was
not meant to escape the chaos but to protect it,
to adore and cultivate the madness of mankind,

to fully embrace the nature that leads to violence,
do not tell me of a coming kingdom to be rebuilt
when these ruins are lovely and in just the right place.
The scarred falconer walks into the street to meet Zahid
as the bird of prey flaps off his shoulder and circles above.
What business have you walking through my kingdom
when the living have been instructed to stay away?
On a whistle his army of hungry boys appear in doorways
as the falcon swoops down.

Zahid presses his palms against broken glass
but another layer down is the foundational dust
of the world, there are grandfather's footprints
and the seedlings soon to rise as twelve trees
at the center of the city once called Eden, yet,
amnesiacs see only shards of glass, mama's blood,
the remnants of war, the ancient machine built
over and over to self-perpetuate the illusion
that man is temporal and thus unworthy of being
recognized as the mirror of I AM.

But tell them truly Zahid, the obvious is not true,
the ground is not broken but being broken still
that it might be flooded by the river encircling
the ages, there is Paul shipwrecked and snake bit,
there is Photine leading children to Jacob's well
since they are no longer busy groveling for crumbs,
there is Mephibosheth claiming his place at the table.
But here now is the falconer standing over him
to say you should not be here, o captain of rafts,

for this City of Death is no longer open to the living
but the dead, and if you wish to be dead then nod
your head, everyone with light left in their hearts
has been killed or is shipped to new shores, let us see
life as it is, truly my boys, we must shed the illusion
of evolution and that which clouds our basest nature.
I am Adam chomping on the apple, Eve with a snake
slithering through her hands and licking her ears,
mud men clubbing one another to death for bread,
shiny things to be traded for shinier things.
If this is who you wish to be then stay with us,
but if you wish to live this is your last warning
to never return to this place.

Look at the light in their eyes, the fear
that the oil-slick sea will swallow them
before they reach the shores of the paradise
manufactured in their minds while hunkered
in the corner of a tent city defecating in buckets
and trading their bodies for bottles of water,
clean towels, antibiotics, a nibble of meat.
No need to cry,
for one day soon they shall draw our numbers
and we will find ourselves with new clothing
in the place where men are more than animals.
Let the vision overcome your heart with hope!
In the night while passengers close their eyes
Zahid looks up to see a ghost on the stormy seas
saying IT IS I, DO NOT BE AFRAID, the voice
that speaks to him from the ruins of the altar
now infecting his mind, his vision, (to recognize
that your mind is operating outside of time
is terrifying indeed, O captain,) but who is this

calling you to pluck out your stones and trade
them for eyes, to enter the narrow gate and walk
the road called Via Volver that leads to the river?
Child of mine, know there shall be no quarter
for those who follow the Nazarene, all who see
Him walk on stormy seas suffer and die
on their way to a different shoreline.

Darling,

I've just been reading the headlines
and think I'm going to be sick, right here
it says the refugee camps are overcrowded
and they haven't a toothbrush to share
or cable television, not even clean clothes.

Oh Dove,

unfortunately this is the way of the world,
poor folks, but hey, they've had this coming
for a long time with silly religions and all that.

My Dear Darling,

they simply can't catch a break,
the virus hit them the hardest, remember?
I forget which nation they blamed but war
broke out and bombs flew and flew,
remember the piles of body parts?

Dovey Lovey,

I can tell you're becoming overly distressed
over something you cannot control from here,

why not try a new tv show to distract yourself?
But Darling,
shouldn't we board a plane and volunteer,
make something useful of ourselves?
Sweet Dove,
this is why I love you so dearly,
your heart is filled with light and goodness,
but you don't have a bone of good sense!
They'd carve a woman like you to pieces.
My Darling,
I don't like feeling this way, I don't like it.

What light dawns upon this land of death
and who has the courage to let it kill them?
Lift thy hands if you too have heard the word
spoken from the crevices of dreams or seen
the figure who wanders through the tent city
drawing the eyes of children who know Him
but cannot name Him, there is the time traveler
who has counted the hairs upon my head
and also watched father trigger the suicide vest,
there is He who crafted me in mother's womb
and also permits the blood trade, the machine
to be rebuilt year after year by diseased kings.
Look mother, look sister, a simple recognition
is all it took for the thief on the cross to live
forever in paradise, is it not? To which altar
did he make a sacrifice? Did he offer a prayer
of carefully rehearsed words to the stagetalker?
To which of man's religions did he adhere?
The child says I remember, will you remember?

The crucified Nazarene says yes, blood and water
are poured out for thee, for all who have been
and all who are still to come. Children hear me:
mercy moves through the ages on a trajectory
beyond this body of mine, this skin these bones.
No need to go begging for the mansion at the end
for time is not moving in the direction you think.
If you are a seamstress, weave light as a thread
through the darkness, if you are a warrior,
dip your blade in the Truth before devouring
enemies of goodness, if you are a child, remember.

You who stormed the armory shall soon be free
from the chains of life though the revolution
you dreamed of instigating shall bear no fruit,
O mother of three sons dead from cured diseases,
could you wait no longer? Could you suffer no more?
Any day your number could be drawn to leave
but instead you are forced upon your knees, tied
with your hands above your head as the falconer
paces behind you declaring our nature is fixed
and unable to be overcome, there's no one to blame
for any action, we are slaves to Adam's choice.
This is simply a game of consequences, cause, effect,
and thus we don't line you up next to your conspirators
with anger in our hearts but with full understanding,
you tried and failed to overthrow your rightful rulers
but the game goes on, the hierarchy of dominance
is still intact another day and to fortify ourselves
we must unfortunately put a bullet in your brain.
She is taken to the beach and turned to face paradise,

consider all that could have been, in a decade or so
your number could have been called, just a decade
to wait for your lot to improve but your spirit rose
in defiance, your words built a fortress of unrest
among the sheep we protect from roaming wolves.
Zahid watches from the distance as the rebels
crumple one by one, face first into the sand.
The Falconer looks down the length of the beach
and waves his hand at Zahid, as if to say no fear
my fellow man, we are all just playing our parts.

The Word comes to him:

One is coming to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free
those who are oppressed, the first Word spoken.

Still Zahid pours gasoline into the engine
by moonlight that he might abandon the calling
set upon him in the darkest hours of his dreams,
stay my son for your work is not finished.

Did I not ask you to stay and find your family,
have you not been told to re-light the Altar of Hope?

The raft glides across the still seas into a storm
gathering on the horizon but there is no sanity
in the land of mad men, O Word which speaks,
I can no longer witness the bodies hit the sand,
the crying children shivering from the cold, held
by mother who listened to father explain the edict
that all able-bodied men must rise against the enemy,
which enemy my love, the enemy they will point at
my love, and father walks into the night with courage

that becomes fear that becomes enduring madness,
not over the fear of battle but of man's capabilities,
his instincts towards the violent amnesia of death.
Zahid presses towards foreign shores until the waves
form four walls around his raft, rising as a forest
where the Word comes once more saying go home
child and prepare the way for the light to come.
Still he pushes into the storm and is swallowed
by the sea, quieted as he is brought to the bottom.

The prophet is swallowed by a great fish
formed for this Hour and held for three days
not that his heart would be changed for amnesiacs,
but that a living image will stay three days submerged
and come forth alive still, you are dealing in symbolism
first and reality second, O Maker of broken mirrors,
O Maker of minds, hands, tongues wagging in imitation.
The symbols you have assembled on the road to the river
move seamlessly from one corridor to the next, indicators
that trigger affection in the mind for an existence that began
long ago with breath, a stolen rib, soil on the bottom of feet.
The belly of the fish is lined with our earliest memories
we cannot help but to forget until we see them in despair,
three days in darkness, forty days and years wandering,
blood and water gushing forth from His wounded side.
Good Lazarus, do you understand yet that your death
was determined five hundred thousand years before

your mother and father lay together, there is a brother living in Bethany who must be marked for early death simply so the Nazarene can pluck him out of time and place him amongst the living once more.

We are not dealing with death and life, breath and the lack thereof, but corridors of time which carry an Hour chosen for each of us, not to die, but to fulfill.

If our own days are guiding us towards a new symbol and death is required, what use is fleeing for safety?

All will be consumed by the fire in this age or the next.

See how time comes to His feet and says what now Master, what would you have me draw forth this day and where would you have me place it, shall I repeat this again and again until your child sees his prize?

Zahid awakes on the shores of Reza.

Behold the view of a ruined land,
my son who hears without obeying,
my child who sees without bearing fruit,
but soon you shall discover there is no escape
for those who have heard the Word speak
and seen the face of the Nazarene resurrected.
Zahid, Zahid,
by now you should know you are a dead man
already, look to your feet and see the road
called Via Volver that is leading you yonder
to the garden where four rivers meet and wells
dug by our great grandfathers never went dry.
Smell the feast though on the way He will lead
you to be gutted by wicked children, to hear
the chorus of Abaddon's horse-faced locusts
singing nightly for a warm chalice of your blood.
What you have seen in dreams cannot be
ignored for when you saw you believed
and when you believed you were marked

with the seal.

What use is fleeing for foreign shores if the sea
and the storms obey His commands to swallow
the one who is unwilling to accept his own Hour?
This is no longer a choice to be made, Zahid,
just a reality to be accepted, recognized as the one
who hung beside the Nazarene said YOU ARE,
and now I am beginning to see that I AM TOO.
From the top of the tower Zahid spreads his arms
and says draw me towards the Hour woven
into me while I was still in the womb.

All things were formed into circles, the earth,
the sun, the dictate of how the earth moves
around the sun, behold the darkening horizon
Zahid, fools believe their own days are the anchor
of the universe and all of creation revolves
around their halfhearted survival, tv programs,
whether their sports team scores enough points,
yet never recognize they are the ones moving
around a force much greater, behold the sun
descending upon the horizon and you shall see
what the fool sees, that he is fixed in one place,
and tomorrow the sun shall return to the throne
of his days as a beggar looking for blessings.
Yet, who is moving, good boy, us or the sun?
The boy says we are moving, grandfather.
Do you believe this is true in your heart?
The boy says yes, I believe this in my heart.
Grandfather presses deeper into the desert
though they have no food to eat for the night

while the boy Zahid follows behind, listening
to the sound of footsteps growing more distant
until he is lost, though do not cry out for help,
wolves are listening and shall close in upon you.
The boy weeps on the ground and waits for sunrise,
and in the morning grandfather lifts him up
and asks have you been waiting on the light, boy,
or have you been returning to the light?
Understand the sun never left its position, you did.
Grandfather spreads a blanket on the sand
and distributes the subatomic elements.

Good pilot,
to end the chaos of this war you must enter
the void beyond war, the place once conquered
with a word that can still be accessed if we forfeit
the eternal string anchored from our heart to that
of I AM, He
who called us forth in His own image, from dirt
and ribs we were formed and there we will return.
But tell me, is it even true a new city is being born
from this earth? If He made us, did He not make us
this way?

I hesitate to speak so candidly good pilot, but war
demands we put aside the platitudes and slogans
that have brought us this far and recognize reality:
no one will drop their weapons until children die,
no one will give up the cause until feeble grandmother
is butchered in her bed and only then will surrender
be considered for they will know we are not men
any longer, they will know we see their children

as nothing more than obstacles to our cause,
a rock that must be kicked out of the way, a fence
that ought to be torn down and cast into a fire pit.

Good pilot,

I do not like the way the world is going any more
than you, I wish for a cup of cocoa beside the hearth,
dolly singing hymns of worship at the nearby piano,
but let us pause to acknowledge that war turned us
into the machine we feared the enemy was building
all along, it was us, good pilot, you and I
were the machine they built on accident.

Here we are and what can we do
but follow our orders?

And thus,
the pilot enters the cockpit and flies over
the border carrying a 10,000-pound bomb
named MERCY, the word painted in red
by boys ready to go home and see wives
girlfriends children, all the ignoramuses
on the other side of the world who believe
man is more than a machine, image-bearers
of a God who cannot be good and powerful
at the same time or else He'd be here now
saying tut tut boys no need for all the corpses
piling up in the streets, no need for a virus
ravaging the lungs of unsuspecting lovers,
no need for the falconer to walk the streets
at night executing anyone who disobeys
the agreement to stay within the tent camps.
The good pilot named Auguste also obeys
when he presses the button in the night
and MERCY floats through the atmosphere

towards those she plans to embrace forever,
and child what is a better place for her to land
than on top of the Altar of Eternal Hope?
What better than to crush the sanctuary's roof
and all of the boys and girls and mothers
gathered to grip one another saying surely
man is not a machine, surely we didn't remain
silent as the machine was being built.

O City of Reza,
your scent of sweet jasmine fills the streets
as a lovely bride walking down the aisle
to meet her husband named Eternal Hope,
there he waits at the altar holding ancient fire
in his hands saying we are carriers of the Word
my love, and the bond made between us an oath
to be killed together, to be crushed for the Hour
soon to be handed to us by the living Nazarene.
Gather round all you who cannot be pacified
by sex with strangers, a gold chain, a robe of silk,
desperate longing concealed by a mask of freedom.
Tonight, land and a vision unite as man and wife
(for what else is a city?),
the central metaphor to call us into remembrance
of death and rebirth, new creation manifested
in a void to carry the image of the Maker, begin
again over and over through the age of amnesia
until the scales fall from their eyes, what mercy

is shown by He who waits at the head of the table!
Pray their offspring might call forth a world
free from the devastations of amnesiacs, free
from the armies of Abaddon buried in deep holes
but digging their way out every passing day,
soon to be set free by the machine of our making.

Still,

I come to bring you a gift, dear bride, my hands
to crush those who conspire to rape your body
and slay your husband, my mind to hold the vision
and the union, my words to demand order on all
that groans to return to the formless void.

When the button is pressed it is too late
for second thoughts, the bomb called MERCY
whistles at those who cannot be warned or escape
for they have committed the great sin of being born
in a land run by diseased maniacs who crave power
weighed by the ounce, just a little more a little more,
just another ounce or two and I will relent from you
good citizens, just another handful of your soul
to pack between the bricks of my palace and I'll go
so long as you offer your daughters as concubines,
so long as a tenth of all you produce is mine first,
so long as your sons run themselves into gunfire
on my behalf.

Good pilot,
if this game is won by trading blood then take it all
at once so the game can finally come to an end.
Total war is the only just war, tell them the truth,
not all boys come home smiling, especially those
who end the war by pressing a single merciful button.

The airplane is shaken by the explosion rising below,
the monster brought forth from hell to devour the city
called Reza,
and at once Auguste is nose down into a cloud of death
as the monster opens its mouth to devour him.

In the days following the distribution of MERCY
the pilot slithers out of the cockpit into ashes,
grasping through the haze for something to hold
so he can know whether he is alive or dead,
but if I am dead then I was deceived for thirty years
about heaven because I recited the words of assurance
and nodded my head at the right time, the stagetalker
presented me as a prized pig and baptized me
saying son you are dead to sin and alive in Christ
yet all I know is the ground is singeing my hands
and my lungs are filled with metal, bone, chemicals.
He wades through a pile of severed hands and feet
and kicks the vultures that swoop down on his neck
until at once he grasps a handle on the ground
and pulls the metal door open, falling into the abyss
that opens into the tombs of the earth, the sanctuary
in which he will survive the solitary years to come,
the years where he will walk beneath the city streets
naked shouting at the top of his lungs at the ghosts

who appear to taunt him saying I thought it ended,
Auguste, but war spreads like a virus over the earth,
just today innocents were massacred for this or that
and here you are wandering the ancient tunnels
waiting on a ribbon to be pinned to your chest, you
who shall henceforth be named LEGION as you carry
the dead inside your soul eating rats for your supper.
Until the night he encounters the King of Salem in fire
and asks what business would you have with me?
The Word declares:
I have come to trade that which is behind you
for that which is ahead of you.

The falcon circles the city at night
in search of runaways, mice, the prophets
who show up time to time saying repent
O conquerors of Reza, the day of judgment
comes for you in forty days, forty years,
madmen with their brains hollowed out
by radiation who are brought to the falconer
so he might adorn them in a robe of silk
and place a sackcloth on himself, is this it
O prophet? Do you wish to see me weep
for the evil nature I never chose to accept?
Shall I be punished for being truthful?
Is this the spectacle you have come to see?
Come lay on your back and lift your chin,
ask God to save your throat from being slit,
ask God to keep my hungry companion
from starting at your eyes and eating you
inside out while me and the boys cast lots
for your clothing.

Tonight the bird sees Zahid,
he who hauls the sanctuary stones one by one
though did not master say this is the last warning?
The falcon perches on a spire and calls out
while master and the boys come running
with their weapons drawn, mouths whetted
for a living creature to be devoured by the dead.
Zahid turns to see the falcon swoop and light
on the falconer's wrist as he demands
a boy open the scroll and write the verdict.
O captain,
whatever you seek in the land of the dead
cannot be found.

The voice rises saying run into the sun,
my child, run until you see the red cord
and enter into the door I have prepared
for you, listen for the bleating of the lamb
being slaughtered, hear the whip lashing
into flesh of the Man who is forsaken
for the sake of you who shall live forever,
and this shall be the salvation of all men.
And thus, Zahid flees as boys step forward
to seize him while the falconer's heart leaps
for the chase, the hunt of a near-extinct
species called the SACRED INDIVIDUAL
who must be crushed by Abaddon's law.
Did you memorize his song my obedient boys,
you are nothing nothing nothing, nothing
at all but flesh and bone, nothing at all
but days that shall soon come to an end,
nothing but what you put in your pocket,
nothing but what you put in your veins,

the law of our nature is binding and true.
Zahid dashes through the City of Death
as the bird soars above him calling out
so the dead boys know which way to turn
until he hears the bleat of the lashed lamb
and sees the red cord dripping with blood
hanging above the doorway, seek and knock
good captain, and the door is opened to you.
Inside, Auguste says I have been waiting
for you, that we might be the forerunners
of Him.

In the tunnels beneath the City of Death
the one set free from a legion of demons
guides Zahid to the table that has been ordered
with the subatomic elements, salt wine water
bread along with a bowl of locusts and honey.
You, too, are seeking the light that cannot be
extinguished, you too have traded your stones
for eyes and now you walk the road home,
and though we have been shoveling pig slop
all of these years He is waiting with a gold ring.
Do you see my brother that though we fought
as enemies in the war of men we are bound
by a primordial power impossible to explain?
Those who walk in darkness shall soon see
a great light, those who live in the dark land
shall soon be consumed in light, in the holy fire
of He who spoke the universe and speaks still.
Zahid dips the bread in salt and wine, a taste
that awakens remembrance of grandfather

saying this life is full of great mysteries, boy,
and when they present themselves to you
you must enter with a willingness to die,
for the truth will always demand your life.
He fills his bloodstream with the elements
and says I too have entered the mystery,
I too shall cry out in the wilderness.

What is it you are seeking, my brother?
What great truths do you wish to uncover
and once you find them are you willing
to remold your days around the plumb line,
to be wiped clean and turned upside down
like a dirty dish upon the table of the King
who has no disease, He whose eyes go about
the earth and the corridors of time seeking
cornerstones for that which is already built?
Indeed, brother, I wish to be such a stone,
to be excavated out of this dark land of death
only to be told to remain here and spread salt
on bloodstained streets, to re-light the Altar
of Eternal Hope though now it is buried
under a million pounds of concrete and stone,
ripped apart by the great bomb which killed
my wife and children, the bomb dropped by
the king you served, brother, but let us eat
together in the world as it will be, not as it is.

Auguste dips bread in the salt and oil and says
brother once our lives were bound to the rulers
of lands that shall be renamed in coming days,
lands that will be ruled by wandering dogs
and whose fruit has fallen from the tree, poisoned
by chemicals meant to poison schoolchildren.
Once we aimed our weapons where they said
there is the man you must kill, his is the land
of savage beasts who threaten our evolution,
his descendants are the devils who haunt we
who will thrive another hundred years or so.
Yet tonight,
we serve the light that has always been,
the light that lives within us even now,
the light that is soon to come.

Darling,

I'm afraid the world is getting worse
and we are circling the drain to hell,
whatever that word means and I hate
to sound so grim but it's closing in.

Oh Dovey,

you're watching too much television
and filling your mind with terrors
that are far away on the other side
of the world, don't you know nothing
like that could ever happen here
where we are civilized and have more
internet than we know what to do with.

Of course my Darling,

it's just that those poor poor people
never expected something like this
to happen to them either, yet look!

Dovey Dove my love,

we have top-notch medicine for viruses

and democratically elected officials
who keep us from being blown to bits,
two reasons I sleep so well at night.
Yes Darling,
it's true, a freight train can't wake you,
just last night I lay awake bawling
my eyes out looking at the photographs
of children washed up on the shore.
Dovey,
your heart will be your undoing,
but didn't we know that already?

Zahid

see how the children clutch their life vests
as you push out to the sea you have known
since you yourself were a boy casting nets
into the water so your mother could eat
a meal won by means pleasing to whoever
made the earth and set its rules in motion.
Eat what I have brought and be proud mother,
mother who takes men into the back bedroom
and says shh shh go play outside a little while,
we all survive how we must so ignore the boys
who throw dirt at you for they do not know
each of us is an equal distance from the One
they serve on bruised knees, let them scold us,
who among them has a father who went crazy
in the night and began mumbling prophecies
to walls, to plants, to light bulbs about a day
to come where a bomb will drop from the sky
and disintegrate all the earth and its inhabitants,

a father who leapt off a cliff to go back in time
to admonish Eve for misunderstanding her desire
to become more than the reflection,
to slice the head off the serpent and return to us
as if he had never been gone but child his body
was found smashed at the bottom of the cliff
and covered in vultures, never forget your blood
has a tendency towards madness and illusion.
Zahid offers wrapped candy to a mother of two
and says soon we will all be in a liberated land,
for whatever will be already is.

On the shores of paradise
the boy carrying a basket of unleavened bread
and a gallon of clean water waits for Zahid,
though today the boy holds a scroll given to him
by one who laid on his broken side for 430 days
to bear the sin of amnesiacs, he who appeared
in the night with honey stuck in his teeth
and hair shaved to the scalp saying behold,
the day of judgment and freedom are the same.
Though, the side of this man does not bleed
or burst forth with living water as an old well
unleashed for the children to draw from hand
to their dusty mouths, hear me good captain:
soon you will come to these blessed shores
and find One who was before I AM, before
you were, the branch of peace and the sword
of truth is upon us good captain.
All seek passage away from the City of Death
but He

seeks passage into it.

This man you shall carry from these blessed shores
into the City of Death for no fee, for what fee
can a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth pay?
What fee can be paid by One who has no place
to lay His head?

He comes by His own volition to finish the ordering
of chaos and call amnesiacs into the obedience
of remembrance.

Zahid stops in the middle of the sea
and looks up at the stars once promised
to an old man who could not conceive
of an atomic bomb turning those stars
into ashes, he who could not comprehend
viruses spreading into a scared king's lungs
no matter how many locks on his doors.
Though how many fathers fell in Siddim
for the sake of rescuing a single nephew?
Still, the King of Salem steps through blood
to deliver the subatomic elements and bless
WHAT IS AND IS TO COME FROM ASH.
Old man, surely you heard how he crushed
twin whores called Sodom and Gomorrah
and left none alive within the city walls?
And were you not a remnant of the flood
that swept sleeping children from their beds
and into the abyss of an age-old metaphor?
You have heard the man begging for food

and gasping for breath as life leaves him,
you have taken a seat at the table, a remnant
of earth's destruction for that is who you are,
one who has been left behind to wander about
dreading His next metaphor that requires you,
that leaves the expendable millions asking
why two angels did not fly down to the gate
and say Up, take your wife and two daughters
or you will be swept away in the punishment
that shall soon come upon this city.

Father,

were we not worthy of being warned?

From the center of the sea he hears
the plane fly overhead, MERCY falling slowly
towards the center of Reza where the mother
of his children holds them dearly asking when
will father return from scouting the pathway
and carry us to faraway shores of paradise.
My little beauties after tonight we will be free
from this place, close your eyes and dream
of what your lives can become, of clean streets
upon which you can ride your bicycles, shh,
shh, go to sleep now tomorrow is the day, yet
tonight he is blown a hundred feet back
from the raft and hears the primordial voice
say I have spared you to prepare the way
for the light that cannot be extinguished.
All he sees are the faces of his daughters
growing older older until they are elderly
sitting on the porch watching grandchildren
run circles in the front yard saying what a life

we have been given the opportunity to live,
what a gift that father had the courage to save
us all those years ago when the world was evil.
Zahid rises out of the burning sea to look upon
the City of Death flattened, crushed
for whose transgressions?

He joins her body in the dance designed
to remember that creation is born of love
and desire to know the limits of our power,
the Word that manifests nothing into reality
and the choice of what that reality must be,
to draw the fruit up to our lips and sniff it,
to make our own image-bearer who carries
the universe in his mind, his heart anchored,
pumping pumping blood to his hands charged
with ordering the chaos placed before him,
(what else is work, my children, or life itself?).
Zahid I will always love you, to betray this
would betray everything I know to be true,
his bare skin wet against hers as his hands
move from her belly to her breasts to her throat
and death presents itself to him as a twin brother
to life, give me everything you have tonight
as we use the power of this holy bond
and fill the earth with those who also hear

the primordial voice saying I am coming soon,
I am the light you have sought in the darkness.
Love, unbroken by anything but death.
Tell them we are already dead, laugh and tell them
inside of you now is the entirety of creation,
the power of the Word spoken in perpetuity.

From across the campfire
grandfather hears the boy speak of great plans
to find shores free of diseased madmen roaming
the streets in search of the desperate masses
willing to trade their image for a bowl of stew,
I cannot blame them old man I can only decide
that I do not want to be here anymore and thus
tomorrow I will leave this cursed land forever
and begin my life in a place where men are free,
where life is honored as sacred and beautiful.

Grandfather asks,
has your life not already started, and is your mind
not already free? Does your mind not order reality
to bend towards beauty, to manifest new creation?
The boy says I have been given a few short years
and do not wish to spend them suffering for bread.

Grandfather asks,
do you not realize you have been placed here
in order to set men free, to reveal the great light

at an Hour that was determine a million years ago?

The boy says let me go far and earn my fortune
so I can return as a prodigal, a conquering king,
and then I shall be prepared for the Hour.

Grandfather asks,

do you not realize riches rot in storehouses
and all gold reveals itself to be pyrite in time?

Do you not realize if time is not on a line

the Hour is now,

always now?

A herd of pigs tramples through the dead city
carrying demons forced from Auguste's mind,
that is where they live dear child, in the recesses
reserved for the Word that manifests into reality,
measurable reality, yet here the demons sit down
at the table and feast upon a plate full of memories
so none can recall Father's face, you are an orphan
they chant and sing, a crocotta, a bug, a dying fool,
a worthless pile of garbage so why not lift the pistol
up to your temple and end this disappointing line
of time once and for all, you see the ending now
so what's the use of going on, oink oink, the piggies
charge after Zahid who flees for the doorway
marked with the red cord and enters the tunnels
to find Auguste rocking back and forth saying
you don't know what I have done, you don't know
what comes to me in the night and calls me Legion,
you don't know what drove me into these tombs
nor have you seen me bite through iron shackles

and rat bones, you have not seen the scars inflicted
upon my skin with stones or smelled the smoke,
metal, blood in my lungs consumed with radiation.
But God
in His great mercy asks my name
and grants permission for these demons to flee,
though my friend, that does not mean they perish
or forget the way back to our doorstep.
Zahid says lead us to the Altar of Eternal Hope
that light might rise from the darkness
in and out of us.

Who can see in the dark
but ones who are acquainted with the dark,
ones who live daily in death and eat dust?
Who can lead us to the holy places hidden
in the corridors of time but the ones willing
to leave this time behind, to walk away from
the brothel found inside of a screen?
My daughters, never bend down before
the stagetalker who places a drop of water
on your tongue then returns to the palace
you purchased for him, he cannot lead you
where you have been called to go, he knows
not the names of the angels at the narrow gate
who weigh the blood you have shed and saved,
he knows not the Hour designed at your making
and cannot if he teaches that death is binary,
that time moves in a straight line.
Today Christ is on the cross,
tomorrow the dove returns to Noah.

Let him assemble the guilty! Let him assemble
those who form golden idols of the Nazarene!
Let him lead songs to the imitation Son of Man!
If you wish to walk the road called Via Volver
or drink from Photine's well, you must trade
the stones you cherish most for eyes.
Who can see in the dark
but the ones who met the fire among the tombs
and heard Him ask what is your name?

From the darkness they hear the chorus raised
on the banging of the drums, of war or praise
they cannot tell the difference nor can you, child,
only that men have gathered to shake foundations
and resurrect something old. You are mistaken
thou poet for we are carving a new path unseen
in the pages of history, a government or system
or idea never shared in its purest form, revolution
to set the masses free, or the mind free, what else
the poet asks laughing dying drinking strong wine
rewriting verses that have already been written,
all that will be already is, and all you see is yours.
Every phantom kingdom of your dreams has been
dreamed already, implemented, and brought low
as a beggar on his knees saying let me come back
in a hundred years or so with a new face and name.
Nothing is new under the sun, says the wise builder
of the temple that falls and is rebuilt and falls again.
Do you hear the words they sing, rage against all

who wish to rebuild these towers and sanctuaries,
is the rubble not a reflection of our internal truth?
If we are animals, let us be animals, if we are hungry
let us seize food from the orphaned child and eat,
and if he has none let us cook his flesh over the fire
as the falconer has ordered us to do, survive today
is the cry of our hearts and our anthem of worship.
Rise rise O Sons of Bones and infect all the earth
with the reality she ignores, may everyone bend
their spirit to the truth we have accepted:
nothing is sacred.

In the corridors of time the Viennese watercolorist
chooses who should be spared from his ovens
while toasting champagne with his bloodfellows,
yet the billiards champion from Gori toasts all
so long as they trade their names, faces, hands
to the state he clenches around the throat, and there
is the poet with his little red book equalizing all
into nothing, if fair is our god then worship freely
by forfeiting your own thoughts, your own words
and memorize the slogans we have chosen.
Yet further still is the Nazarene
pierced with a spear as blood and water flow
into a pool for all to drink
and remember
who they are.



Auguste declares:

good man, where they worship darkness
is where the primordial voice beckons
you to bring light, isn't this just like Him
who hands us the road and says FOLLOW,
leave your fishing nets, abandon the dreams
that cannot possibly fill your heart and mind,
eat not of the bread that slowly eats of you.
Though, we find He is leading us to valleys
of despair, pain, heartache so we can see
what shall become of them, that valleys
can be gripped by their spines and lifted
into mountains, mountains to be moved
with a word spoken by those who watched
valleys rise and believe, I am beginning to see
Zahid, the place you fear most is the place
He has asked you to go, the land you flee
is the land towards which he turns the wind.
Was Jonah not spit back on the shores he left?

Did Moses not flee to Midian only to hear
the voice in a burning bush say return?

The living King has marked our doorposts
in blood, but obedience is a mighty price
to pay for mercy, mercy, speak nothing
of MERCY in my presence, friend.

The falcon shrieks from the master's shoulder
as the boys sniff the subterranean air saying
who dares come beneath the City of Death?
Who dares enter the tomb beneath the Altar?
Zahid flees again.

The price is great indeed
when the angel of death flies by in the night
demanding blood to quench the thirst of the One
who waits for the chalice to be filled, ask Pharaoh
with the hardened heart about the desires of God,
God who sniffs burning animals and relents,
God who accepts the sacrifice of the innocent lamb
as means for His people to remain unconquered,
or is this a generations-long commitment to metaphor
and your need for living sacrifice is just a story device?
None can know the ways of His heart, His motivations
to manifest into a human and send Himself to die
so He can become the lamb and fill the chalice
with His own blood, what madness is this O Maker!
Can you no longer be pacified by anything but yourself?
From the center of the sea Zahid sees the angel of death
named MERCY
descend upon Reza to bring judgment upon the children,
the mothers holding them tight, the old men with dreams

deemed silly sitting in circles thinking of a better world.
Instead, here are a million souls to endure your wrath
asking if they should have sacrificed an extra lamb or two.
Is this your judgment upon us, or are your eyes turned
upon another million people soon to be blown to bits?
This is just the repetition of men butchering one another
over this or that, another dispute over pyrite crowns.
Zahid hears the whistling bomb drop and for a moment
thinks this will blow up a city block or two, nothing new,
nothing that we haven't seen a hundred times in war,
before he is blinded by a great light and cast into the sea.

Beneath the sea he sees a vision:
Photine stands on Via Volver
guiding children off the road and into Reza,
though does she direct them to the rubble,
the tents, or rafts aimed at a safer kingdom?
You are the expendable millions, O faithful
children, the road back to Eden is difficult indeed
and none who follow the Nazarene shall live
into a future free of suffering, follow the trail
of blood and water pouring out of His side.
Follow the line carved from the dragged cross
as He asks was it not you who fell to your knees
and offered to join the work of the kingdom,
was it not you who said you would GO FORTH
AND DISCOVER THE UNIVERSE with me?
Are your feet not pointed at the river?
If you have come in search of truth this is it:
the ground is not broken but being broken still
so the wells and rivers of old shall burst forth

and give life to the kingdom you shall inherit.
The corridors of time open for the travelers
as Photine says there are still crumbs for all
of you, no need to misrepresent yourself
to He who formed you in mother's womb
and has already fed you
the bread of life.

Reveal to us the difference in body and soul,
reality and the ongoing metaphors that point us
to ancient truth we have forgotten about You,
about man made as a reflection of your image.
But are we not also reflections of your power,
are we not also reflections of your instincts?
We, too, grow jealous for affection and adoration,
we, too, wish for cities to do as we say, we, too,
are willing to crush the children of our enemies.
Here I am speaking something lovely and violent
into being with a word, shh poet, turn your eyes
from Cain the son of the first man holding a stone
covered in his brother's blood, ignore the flood
and ask how long must God suffer amnesiacs
who call for blood day and night, who sing
of a hundred soldiers' heads spiked on the walls.
Dear children, His patience comes to an end
for those who anchor their hearts to rotting bones.
The Nazarene told simple men they could move

mountains with a word of faith, yet one chose silver,
to become a spectator of a naked man retching
for His final breaths, to see a soldier of Rome
press the tip of a spear into His side and unleash
the river of water and blood upon the nations,
the expendable millions waiting with mouths open.
Beneath the sea Zahid sees a vision
of the eternal King casting handfuls of salt
on the road to the furnace heated seven times,
the city called Reza where He lifts the chins
of children and says come with me.

Father,

how can I turn my face from the light
you have shone upon my days, the truth
that man is made in your image and still
carries the subatomic elements in his blood?

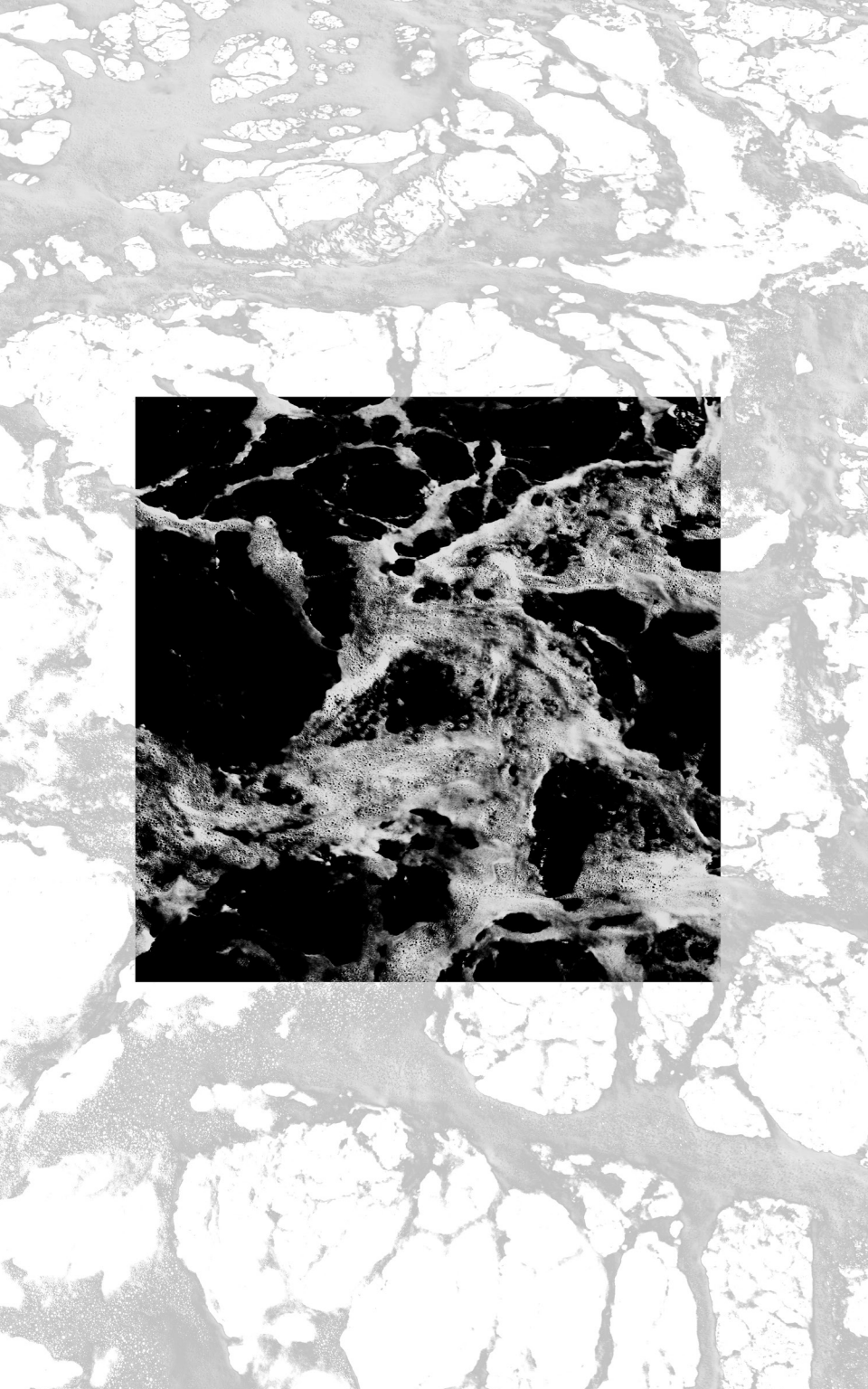
Father,

how can I turn my face from Stalingrad,
Nagasaki, the bones of Circassian women
abandoned at the bottom of the Black Sea,
lines of Armenians arriving to Deir ez-Zor,
the hopeful children of Aleppo washed
upon the shores and quickly photographed
so the images can be sold to the highest bidder?

Father,

will you let us know when you're done
breaking the world you made to prove
you love it so?

Will you let us know when you're done
letting us break the world to prove
you love us so?



Darling,

I'm growing more fearful by the day
that somehow some way war will find us,
that I will be the one floating in the ocean
or photographed with blood on my lips.

Dovey!

what a terrible thing for you to say.

Darling,

I'm overcome with a flood of emotions
and can't stop my mouth from running,
it just seems to me every people group suffers
terribly at some point or another, and this
society is a ticking time bomb, just think!
Think of the madmen hiding in basements!
Think of the psychotics living in the woods!
Think of the pundit I saw on cable television
saying freedom is more valuable than safety!
If there isn't an evil man around every corner
there's one planning to be there soon.

Oh my sweet Dovey Dove,
I'm going to have to lock you in a room
without a television or magazines or internet
if this keeps up, don't you ever forget
that we have authorities to protect us
from rebels within. They'll put them down
like dogs if they have to, don't forget it.
Darling,
I'd trade every bit of my freedom for safety,
to never feel this way again, to never fear.
Dovadove,
now the light is back in your eyes!

Grandfather wakes in the night to the sound
of footsteps leading away from the embers.
He sleeps alone in the vast desert and waits
for God to give him visions of the future,
yet all he sees is a king hacking up his lungs
and dragging men in one by one for transplants,
come you who serve the king and cut a line
down the center of your chest,
give to me what God gave to you,
set aside the notion once and for all
that you have inherent rights
that do not change with the winds of time.
Which one of us is wearing the crown? I am
bestowed the power of the willing collective
and it is their will that you give me your breath.
Grandfather says I will not give you my lungs,
O king, and at once the land of his ancestors
is vaporized by an atomic bomb.
Great Maker of Earth, show me something new!

How can I follow you into the darkness tonight?
O you who spread stars over our ancestors did so
not only for the old man's legitimate offspring
but for all who see far enough to find their names
are also written, their nations are also spoken for.
Consider, my children,
the bastard son is sent into the desert
with bread, water, and a promise,
and inheritors are sent into the desert
with bread, water, and a promise.
The great nation of the Nazarene is yet to be named.

Mother, do not despair for the dying boy,
for his cry is heard by God who strikes the ground
at Beersheba, drink deeply from the living water.
The table is long indeed and the kingdom broad
enough that cur puppies don't have to lick crumbs
off the ground anymore, there is no Upper Kingdom
and Lower Kingdom here, a higher echelon of power
served by those permitted to enter the back door,
no no, remember the slave boys and girls saw
His face the night He turned water to wine, the lifted
visage of a man revealed to be the First and Last.
Understand my daughters, death is not the great
equalizer,
but your birth, as you carry His name on your lips
you carry His being on your flesh, in your hands,
in the recesses of your mind drawn to the light
reflected from the ancient fire consuming the earth.
The fire shall one day consume the shoreline
to which Zahid guides his raft with passengers

saying aren't we the lucky ones to escape from hell,
haven't we been chosen to live while others die?
As we were born to live in paradise, others were born
to live in hell and to remain there throughout eternity.
In the bucket of numbers God directed our hands
to find the winning ticket, but did He also redirect
the other hands praying for the same?
Remember children, you did not choose your birth
or the diseased king under whom you must live.
The ways of the Lord are mysterious indeed!
He who enters the narrow gate to walk the road
called Via Volver does not find a palace of gold,
but a noose, a club, a dagger, a mass grave.
Everyone shall be saved when they remember
the promise of stars holds true for them too,
the great nations of half-brothers and curs
merged into one.

The families flee towards covered trucks
to be taken to the next place, the paradise
of their minds where the familiar face of man
says you cannot pass into the city of freedom
until I have a taste of your wife, your daughter,
until you give me the money sewn in your shirt,
until you kneel and kiss the ring on my finger.
What is this infection that moves among the hearts
of men in every land, in every time going back
to the day the first man sunk his teeth into fruit,
fruit, only a madman would break the world
over a simple act of disobedience, a single bite
and now the father is beaten so the children know
they are still the slaves, there are still evil masters
even on the shores they have long dreamed about.
What will you do when we reach the shore, brother?
I will pour gobs of honey on my bread and shout
at the top of my lungs that I am free, free to be
a famous singer or soccer star or fashion designer

yet as father is covered in dust coughing blood
and promising to repay phantom fees, brother
wonders if his dreams were premature, if the raft
actually circled back to Reza or all of this is a dream,
perhaps a memory that broke the boundaries of time,
perhaps this is all happening a thousand years ago
or a thousand years from now.

Brother lifts father from the dust and says don't fear,
we will pay them in time, we will do whatever it takes
to pay the debt we owe in this new land
called paradise.

Lift your eyes to the mountain drawn up
from the valley of bones, the great and terrible
day is soon to arrive on these shores asking
to be carried into the midst of those who cry
save us save us give us crumbs on the ground
so we can crawl about on our hands and knees
and find something for starving children to eat.
We can say to them though the King of All Days
has no room at His table He has given permission
for us to grovel at His feet waiting on fat scraps,
rinds, bones, crumbs that fall from His beard,
call me a dog if you wish but I would never ask
for bread that is already in your child's mouth!
Hope even if it is an illusion is enough for me,
see how the dustmen leap
at the mirage of rippling water in the pools!
The prophet boy on the shore pulls the scroll
from his teeth and offers it to Zahid in pieces
though only a psychopath spends his time reading

words written thousands of years before bombs
could disintegrate a million people in a minute
including a daughter who asked what it means
to die, daddy, and he said it means you are
no longer here, your body stops working, shh
don't torment yourself with these questions
tonight, you're going to live many many years.
Good captain,
all who live in the land of bones will soon see
darkness cannot understand or withstand the light,
that even cur puppies are served bread and wine.

The bride appears to me in a dream
though her face is marred by shrapnel
and the dress once white is stained red
with the blood of innocents, come near
my groom so I can tell you the names
of the men who raped me,
come smell the residue
of gunpowder on my fingertips, it was I
who dropped the bomb on the city below
and I who lived there, it was I who fell
at the feet of Baphomet, Abaddon, Chaos,
whatever you would like to call the force
moving me from order into amnesia
and it was I who called out to the Word
to speak a new creation in me, I who drank
the blood and water pouring from His side,
I who walked the road called Via Volver
and I who drowned dissenters in the river.
It was I who traded the spark

to the deceiver for a bowl of poison stew
and I who cannot be extinguished.

My groom, do you still love me?

Does the oath still hold true?

All along it was I.

Come to the wedding feast

O expendable millions, there is a seat for you
still at the table overflowing with the elements
distributed to those who see and shall one day,
come dip your hands in blood and water, come
eat the bread which is His body broken for you
and know that He who entered the strangeland
is returning with an olive branch in one hand
and a sword in the other to strike down devils
dancing on the bones of His children.

Stand up, O terrified mothers of Stalingrad!

Point us backwards down the road of history
to all who have been rounded up and crushed
into dogfood, are you beginning to see our evil
is nothing new at all, the same old game played
over and over of this king or that declaring man
is not an individual but part of a dangerous collective
inhibiting the perfect society, those who group you
wish to kill you while saying they will protect you,

defy them, raise your voices out of mass graves!
Know now your chains are broken and your enemies
will soon remember the Word is still speaking stars
across the universe as brethren of the coming kingdom.
Climb out of your hidden holes and spit the clay
from your mouth in exchange for a dusting of salt
on your hands, a chalice of wine down your throat,
then you will remember how to speak His name.

Once they sat at the table while children slept
in the other room saying one of these days
we will trade the raft for four boarding passes
to an unstained land, someplace we can grow
a garden in the backyard and take family walks
around the neighborhood every evening.
Look at this photograph I found in a magazine,
there are people in the world who live like this
Zahid, we aren't one of them but we can be
with a single blessing from God, a single stroke
of luck and now it is our home photographed
to make others grow jealous, I feel no guilt at all
for wanting to escape this broken land of fools,
we can even cook our favorite dishes
and invite people over to eat and dance, now
I see the girls on a tire swing in the back yard
just laughing and laughing until we say enough
it's time to come in and do your schoolwork
if you wish to keep perfect grades, Zahid

I believe in my heart we were meant for more.
Raziyah I believe in my heart we have much
to give the world, that we are meant for more
and here tonight I trust that God sees us truly.

Yet now

he stands upon the rubble piecing together a scroll
chewed into pieces that smells of honey, the words
unified on the tongues of madmen over centuries
who wander into the midst of amnesiacs declaring
REPENT AND BELIEVE,
bread is multiplied to be eaten by those who hunger
and those who shall.

He spreads the scroll upon the broken stones
to reveal the Image and the Word transfigured:
the bride sitting on a stool in the ruined city
covered in dust and blood, breathing radiation
as she orders torture and death on her enemies
who have ordered death upon her, revenge comes
as the ambassador of Abaddon whose appetite
cannot be satiated until all is devoured, the locust
king sees the land of men and desires all of it.

Forgive me Father

as I refuse to forgive the transgressions of others.

Give me my daily bread

as I snatch the bread from those who snatched mine.

See how one of her legs has been gnawed by dogs

and one of her eyes is plucked out by the falcon,

see how one of her hands clenches the dull blade

and the other reaches through the corridors of time

hoping to be rescued by the One who descends

into death in order to steal Adam's teeth forever

and fill Mother Eve's womb with light, not a curse.
Listen to her beg for mercy, is she worthy of salvation?
Listen to her order that her enemies be lined up
on the edge of the grave they were made to dig,
surely the inheritance cannot belong to the butchers
of my children, surely He does not remember
the names of soldiers in different colored uniforms.
Zahid seals the scroll and says He did not come
to judge the world, but to save it.

Darling,

I worry humanity is an infection
on the earth, no different than the virus
or cancer or anything else that kills you.

Dove!

Your mind is sure swinging low today
to say such a thing while eating brunch
with someone who hoped to talk about
financing a brand-new vehicle.

Oh Darling,

I'm sorry, my timing is always the worst,
it's just that I read a truly gruesome article
about bands of rebels killing bomb survivors
in Reza and eating them over a campfire, yes
darling you heard what I said, cannibals.

Dovey my Lovey,

what will you be ordering to eat?

My Darling,

I found myself tempted to pray last night,

and you're lucky I didn't wake you up
to tell you about it, but I fell into a dream
about skating round and round an ice rink
while children in white gloves applauded.
Beautiful Dove,
now that's a wonderful image to consider,
no more talk of cannibals and atomic bombs.

Do you feel the winds shifting as a prelude
to the winter who will scoop up the first million
names and faces into her arm as a gentle mother
saying you don't know what's coming but I do,
children, come inside and let the virus devour you
if you don't want to be disintegrated by a bomb,
certainly one death is instantaneous but the other
can at least be justified, these pandemics happen
and are not a result of man's inclinations to war
unless you believe the uniformed man who goes
door to door at night passing out pamphlets to prove
this is no accident, this was a chemical assault
on our children and elders and must be repaid
doubly, let us poison their water supply, let us
come together as a nation and crush them forever.
There is proof for whatever you want to believe,
daughters of Reza, and justification is easily found
on the lips of profiteers who bow at Abaddon's feet.
Tonight grandfather's sheets are spread on the floor

as Zahid enters the house with water and medicine
to lure him from the edge, to call into his other ear
that I am not ready for you to give up your spirit,
old man, whoever is calling you into the mystery
will still be there tomorrow and ten years from now
so take the pills and believe you will survive this.
Out the back door he sees naked grandfather reaching
towards the sky singing to the stars of all nations:
wisdom begins with fear, and fear is knowing
that all things are happening at once.

Far outside the city gates grandfather's body
was placed into the hole with a thousand others
by workers in hazmat suits paid to dig and cover
without being seen, without being questioned
by the journalists asking too many questions.
But this feels like so long ago to the Son of Reza
who enters the city and follows the trail of salt
in search of Auguste to reveal to him the scroll
and its message that One is on the way to save
EVERY TRIBE, TONGUE, AND NATION,
not to judge, in truth what good would it do
for the Nazarene to bring judgment on everyone
who has eaten of the forbidden fruit, have we not
all fallen into amnesia, help me remember O God
that one day grandfather shall rise as you rose.
The scroll reveals the day is upon us even now,
Auguste, today we spit the clay from our mouths
and drink His blood instead, today we drink
water from Lahai Roi though we are first called

to prepare the way by lighting the altar anew.
THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME NOW,
may the fire in the center of the city draw the eyes
of the captives soon to be released,
the blind who shall receive their sight,
the oppressed who shall be set free.
The salt leads Zahid to the upper room to find
the subatomic elements spread on the table.
Zahid unrolls the scroll and declares
the Word has been spoken.

Light the scroll on fire my brother and be consumed,
 see how the flame guides our feet through the darkness
 that has been lurking as a wolf through the epochs,
 see how he prowls the barren lands for those who cry
 give me pleasure give me riches give me a kingdom
 at any cost, go on and devour me from the inside out
 so long as I am crowned in pyrite and have an orgasm
 now and then, I'll trade the spark for a bowl of stew.
 Tremble as the wolf howls promises of an illusory feast,
 that whoever eats of it will be eaten, line up O collective
 on the edge of the grave you dug for yourself, be buried
 in the crown you adore and rule your kingdom of death,
 for what else is there to life?

By this torch the forbearer shall light a way for the Branch,
 not for His sake but so lost children know how to find Him.
 The all-consuming fire of old cannot be extinguished,
 the dove returns from faraway lands, the sea is parted,
 the diviner stones are consulted but Thummim is gone,

where is the sting? I can only find Urim in the breastplate, may it be multiplied endlessly as we lay it upon our hearts and declare innocence by the work of the dead Nazarene, the living Nazarene who waits on the shoreline fixated upon the horizon where Reza waits, where children pray for that which they cannot know but do, remember Him and sing hymns of praise with me, Auguste, lift up the name alongside me, Zahid, what is true of you is true of all. Tonight we carry the burning scroll into the dormant heart of the City of Death that light may fill the eyes of the dead.

I feel the winds of this age changing directions
while the masses march to anthems of amnesia
as one moving force, do you feel the earthquakes
or the floor upon which we have danced so long
dissolving under the weight of man's wickedness?
Lift your eyes to see the sun has stopped moving
in anticipation of the trumpets sounding out,
the spoken creation holds its breath for a new word.
Jericho Jericho how strong are the walls you built
on the backs of captives?
Alexander, point us to the borders you painted
with the blood of your enemies!
Priests of Tenochtitlán, what became of the temple
where you offered beating hearts for blessing?
Suited devils of our age, where will you turn
when you discover your riches turned to rot?
A great light fills the tunnels as the forbearers
push towards the center of the City of Death
to light the Altar of Hope.



Seated on a throne
beneath the place where the altar once burned
is the falconer wearing a necklace of boys' teeth
and surrounded by a thousand tangled vipers
slithering between his bare feet, see how the falcon
spreads its wings at the sight of living intruders
bringing fire into what is meant to be a sanctuary
of blackness, a void where nothing can be seen
or heard but the whispers of Abaddon pleading
for another boy, grab another boy by the shoulders
and lay him upon the altar, slice his belly open
so your power can grow in the absence of light.
This is the age man was always meant to usher in,
O falconer, thou architect of the collective future,
be true to your basest desires and survive, grow,
traffic in power by offering
them to me in the ritual killing, handle the blood
just so, the shrieks and screams just so, my worthy
one who is now worthy of the pyrite crown worn

by all who see man not as an individual creation
but a conglomerate of fools waiting to be ruled.
Smell the bodies picked apart by the falcon,
smell the flesh smashed on the walls as the drums
that once bang banged as a call towards freedom
have been toppled and turned into places
where the boys hide teeth collected from above
to trade to the falconer for bread, for water.
Hear me, my daughters:
our struggle is not against flesh and blood,
but against spiritual forces of evil,
true evil that one day shall be consumed
by the ancient fire.

Yet,
here stands the Son of Reza carrying a scroll
that casts light onto the faces of captive boys
who shield their eyes and retreat.
Auguste do you see what becomes of men plagued
by demons who find the door opened to their lies?
Do you see where the road of amnesia leads you?
Do you see what becomes of children left behind
in the care of those who trade flesh for power?
Behold the Son of Reza who escaped disintegration!
Zahid, this is not the place for easily fooled men
like your grandfather who told fables of starry skies.
The vipers turn their eyes to the living images
as dead boys grasp for clubs and sharp stones.
What you seek to renew in the city was an illusion
all along, for the man who understands he is not
made by anything but forces of chance lives in power
now, not tomorrow when the world descends further,
take and take and feast on children until you die,

captain, this is the way of the true man, we are not
a reflection of a Maker but of the grave.

Zahid lifts the scroll and declares IT IS WRITTEN
the grave has been conquered.

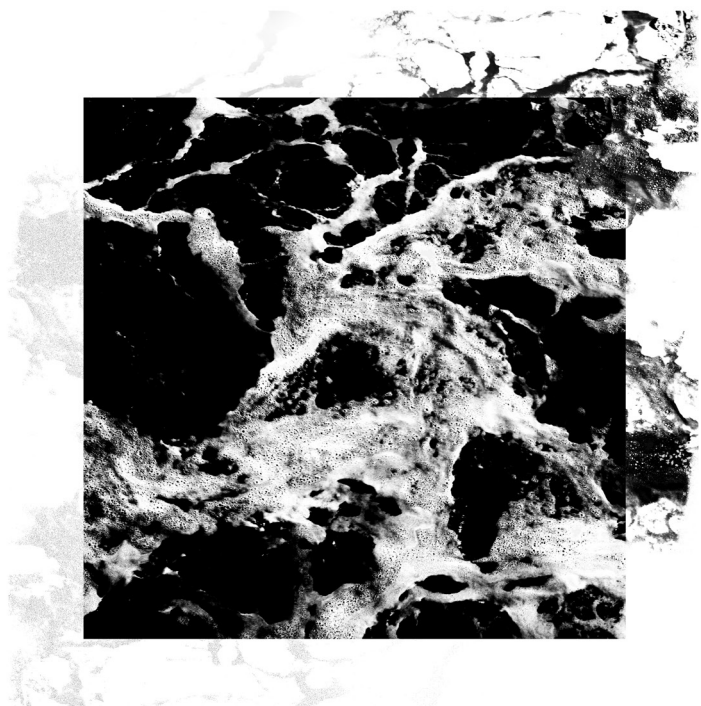
Vipers move towards the living images
as the sound of the falconer's great laughter echoes,
O Fool of Reza you brought a light that cannot overcome
the reality we have accepted, here you bring the architects
of a new age silly tales about a universal master, a Word
who allows atomic bombs to disintegrate a million mothers
of boys who are looking for something true to hold on to
in the aftermath of the storm, boys I embrace with truth
and you seek to abuse them with lies of lush gardens?
Enough! If the Word exists as you say, He is terribly evil
or exceedingly weak to allow generation after generation
to watch children starve with their hands cupped, to allow
groups to be rounded up and marched into the desert
and handed shovels to dig their own graves, where was He?
Where was the light you offer us when our fathers withered
in the grip of the virus, where was the light when the blood
of my son covered my hands as he said don't let me die
don't let me die like this father, there is so much life in me.

The light which has deceived you shall not deceive me,
Fool of Reza, and the appearance of your new God in Reza
is a thousand years too late, the bones are already chewed
up by dogs, the blood has dried, the teeth are collected.
What can I offer the Father of Chaos but your head
on a platter while my boys are made to dance?

Zahid and Auguste are seized
to be brought forth as an offering to Abaddon
who overcomes the falconer's body and mind,
their bodies held down and covered in vipers
while the dead-eyed boys sing the choruses
spoken over them as they sleep, here lies liars
of an age that never existed, here we extinguish
the light and the flame, here we give offering
to he who wears human teeth as a prize of war,
the apex of chaos between we who can't remember
father's face or mother's voice, here we grovel
beneath the sacrificed for bits of bone as Photine
once groveled for crumbs under the Master's table.
As the blade slices Auguste's body down the center
he says it was I who dropped the atomic bomb,
I who accepted the call to kill a million people,
forgive me Zahid, I who crushed your family
and I who disintegrated the Altar of Eternal Hope.
Brother,

what force can extinguish the scroll once lit?
Can these devils pluck stars out of the promised sky
or pull bread from the mouths of those who are full?
What devils lurking underground can redirect time,
or the Hour chosen for sons of the inheritance?
No one can stop what is coming
because He has already come, He is already here.
All that will be already is, and all you see is yours.
The falconer leans over the splayed bodies to say
you don't have to worry about the world
any longer.

Every treasure worth finding is protected
by Leviathan sent from the depths of hell
to stand before the one who has been called
directly into the life of light, come children
and understand that you are already dead,
what good is running, what good is fleeing
back to the land where you will hear the call
once more, though how many times
can we abandon the order of the Maker
upon our lives until we look down to see
we are no longer walking the river road
and our throats are parched for living water?
Surely there is an end to the invitations
of God, surely we will grow deaf and blind
to the subtle vibrations which come to us
in dreams, in the chorus on the mountain.
Rise up, thou demon monster, let me see
your face so that you can also see mine.



Darling,

I saw a stat that more people can read
than ever before and disease is declining.

Dove,

there's no doubt about it, only fools
are unable to see how far we have come.

My Darling,

you've always been so steadfast in hope
for mankind to solve our toughest problems.

Dovey,

in a year or two we'll have everything sorted,
war and violence and suicide and all that,
and boy when that happens look out for us
because depression will be a thing of the past.

I see it Dovey, we're closing in on paradise,
we're just a few vaccines and stubborn rulers
away.

Oh Darling my Darling,

to hear you speak of the future gives me hope

that my life isn't for nothing, we are helping
those who come after us make their way
to a more perfect world.

Dova Dova,

it's only a matter of time, isn't it?

But Darling,

I still don't know what to make

of the vacancy I feel when I consider time,

death, evil, the empty hours without distraction,

this terrible clarity that comes like an assault.

My love, what is being done to fix this?

Behold the shores of paradise on the horizon,
how the sea once burning oil is now a force
pulling the captain's raft through the night
towards the song declaring the Lord is exalted,
for both horse and driver He hurled into the sea.
Do you hear mother sing through the broken ages?
Do you hear the virgin bride rise every morning
and open the window to listen for the footsteps
of her promised groom?
Zahid is carried through the corridor and placed
into the Hour for which he was chosen, laid down
so he might open his eyes and see the stars spread
for the generations who have come to remember
the name and the face of He who sets the table,
see how there is a place for the shunned brother
and the thief who said I see you, do you see me?
From your throat to your navel you will find a scar,
run your fingers along the line if you doubt
men can die and be brought back to life

for the purpose they have been given, even you
were called to prepare the way for the light
not so the light can find its own way, but for the lost
to find their way to Him who also bears death-scars.
The raft is pulled to shore by an ancient force,
come waves, this way this way a little more now,
until Zahid stands to see a mother on the shore
cloaked and holding a baby in her arms, the son
of innocence to be dropped into the jaws of Reza.
When she bites down, her teeth will be broken
once and for all. ✱

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 or by finding me on social media at [@craigscunningham](https://twitter.com/craigscunningham). You can also email 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

