

THE SEVEN CIRCLES OF ETERNITY'S GARDEN

He has also set eternity in the hearts of men,
yet they cannot fathom what God has done
from the beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different;
This Birth was hard and bitter agony for us,
Like Death, our death.

Journey of the Magi

[May 1993]
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Circle One
The Blood of Eden

“You were in Eden, the Garden of God.”

Ezekiel 28:13

i.

In the blood there is the Life,¹
And in the Life there is the Union--
The everlasting Communion of Eden (of Eden)
Which echoes as footfalls in the memory,
Or a shadow in the family.²
As moonlight in a factory yard,
Slicing through the darkness of a pale lunar night.

Born into the blood and water, we violently scream,
Fearing our future, lamenting our loss,
Expelled from Eden, paradise lost, now falling
(falling)

Into the shadow, the desert's room of rust,
As echoes disturb the fallen dust.
Blown into a musty corner
By some crimson mouth
in some crimson-colored dream.

Yet what eye has seen, what ear has heard
The flaming sword's bright edge of fire?
Crossing between God's Love, man's desire, burning?
(burning)

Guarding the gate and piercing the sun
That sets in the west when all hope is gone?
No longer is heard the voice of the Word.
Our tongues have tasted the garden's fruit
--with the lust that crawls--
--with the dust that mauls--
Our memories tear us up from the roots.

¹ *“The blood is the life”*: *Dracula*

² *“Further to Fly”*: *Paul Simon*

The circle of Eden, the Garden of God:
The circle of perpetual birth,
 where blood and water flow
 from a single spring in the fullness of the Garden.
There, there is saturation.
There, there is the manifestation of the single white rose,
 nourished in the blood and the water
 (the blood and the water).
For in the blood there is the Life,
And in the Life there is the Union. . .
 the children of Eden haunt us in our memory.
Our dying pulse echoes faintly
 to the sounds of the Pishon and the Gihon.
We hear them surging in our distant veins.
Rivers crash like distant waterfalls of an unknown land,
 yet their voices we cannot understand.
We can only hear their fury.
We can only hear them roar.
For in the blood there beats a Life that roars,
And a Union that crashes like a waterfall at war--
 and we are afraid
 we are. . .alone

Our memories haunt us within our darkened rooms.
Our eyes are opened, yet we see nothing but shadows.
Our ears are pealed, yet we hear nothing but alley cats
 that dig in the garbage and gutters,
 searching for a morsel amid the city's clutter.
We fear our future, and we lock our doors,
 lamenting our loss,
 bereaving our fate. . .
sweating, sweating, sweating in the blood.

In our beginning,
 back when the sound was a Voice,³
 and the Voice was comprehended,
 when the Word was breathed into our nostrils,
 filling up our hollow cavities of dust,
 the Word was spoken,
 and the Word was heard,
 and the Word roared,
 filling the earth with blood and with water,
 breathing the men of Eden into His Union:
 The Deeper Communion of God.
 AS I AM, SO YOU ARE
 A COMMUNITY OF ONE,
 HERE IN THE GARDEN OF OUR DELIGHT

What tree is this that strangely bleeds?
 What fruit is this that pleasure feeds
 off of the flood of dripping blood
 that permeates its roots and leaves?
 Pregnant with such life as this,
 desired with the blood of bliss,
 the serpent spoke, the man awoke. . .
 the Voice was left for a soothing hiss.

Yet when this strange fruit was taken in,
 with crimson juice dripping from each crimson chin,
 then we saw our tree: a shadow.
 Our breath was taken, from lung and from marrow.
 The black blood was spilled, the seed was sown,
 and man, now two, became dust and bone.
 For in the shadow of the Tree of Life
 there laid the knowledge of death and of strife.
 The tree was empty, the fruit was bare,

³ *Genesis 3:8*

and the man, now many, became painfully aware
that with the setting of Eden's sun,
the tree's growing shadow had left us undone
together in the desert of perpetual night,
growing old and feeble, with cataractic sight.
With the circle now broken, the flesh now torn,
the men, now distant, into darkness were born.

iii.

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,⁴
and the freezing winter crouches at my door.
I cannot master it.⁵

I have no life left in these arthritic bones--
the marrow has been sucked out,
as juice from a withered apple,
as oil from a crushed olive,
and no life remains, only a brittle frame,
huddling under a dead tree

that gives no shelter from the autumn sun,
banished to the desert, in the shadow of Death,
ever increasing as the sun sets on the western horizon.

Far off, to the east,
across the desert of wandering,
the great cities of Rome loom flat on the horizon,
far from the Four Rivers,
far from the Olive Tree,
far from the Single White Rose.

In the middle distance, a shattered visage lies,⁶
naked and sneering, and eaten by flies:

“Look upon our works, O Lord!

Look upon our works and despair!

Nothing of your creation remains,

Only bodies that rot, and hearts that tear!”

⁴ “Gerontion”: T.S. Eliot

⁵ Genesis 4:10

⁶ “Ozymandias”: Percy Bysshe Shelley

O MY PEOPLE, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?⁷

The lone and leveled race of Eden stretches far away. . .
Across the sand of the shadow's vast expanse.
Though marked for murder, and banished and cursed,
my memory still lives beyond the Eastern Gate,
that slowly fades with the setting of the sun.
And the shadow of time holds me prisoner
to all that slithers on the ground. . .

for I cannot live in my memory.

I must live within the walls of darkness,
within this time of the shadow of the desert,
within this freezing winter--

my garden grave,
as the easterly wind chews my bones. . .
blowing. . .blowing. . .blowing over empty shadows.

⁷ *Ash Wednesday: T.S. Eliot*

Circle Two Rome

“To all in Rome who are loved by God,
and called to be saints.”

Romans 1:17

i.

We are the new Rome,
the golden eagle that rules the western world,
and beats our wings against the iron cross.
(. . .blind men in a backward alley, trapped,
trapped in stone walls, and enslaved by lunar light
that narrows into the musty corner. . .)
And this is how we pray:

“our father (mother, other)
who art in heaven (yet within our dominion),
acknowledge our name as mighty,
may our kingdom come,
may our wills be done
everywhere, anywhere, nowhere, we please.
we rape for our bread (the flesh of the dead).
in usury we live, we shall never forgive, as we
blindly follow the darkening call, as it
echoes down the deadening hall.
we chew the child,
we molest the mild.
we rape the poor,
we worship the whore,
dark madonna. amen.”

ii.

thank you. . .bless you. . .thank you, babe. . .
dime for a disabled vet? thank you, sir. . .
hey, d’ya hear?

johnny got caught pissin' on a bookstore.⁸
we're headed for social anarchy, man,
when people start pissin' on bookstores.

thank you, babe. . .thank you. . .

he shu've called it artistic expression.
probabl'led got an endowment from ol'uncle sam, yep. . .
(freedom in the arts!)

thank you. . .bless you, sir. . .thank you. . .

same gov'ment pays for a sliced fetus in a pickle jar,
or a crucifix in a bottl'of urine. . .
(freedom in the arts!)

thank you, babe. . .land of the free. . .free-dom. . .
thank you, sir, bless you. . .
nickel for a vet? thank you m'am, you're a saint. . .
(free-to-be-dumb)

thank you. . .you're too kind. . .
social anarchy, man. . .

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.
Disgraceful and disgusting. Disgusting and disgraceful.⁹

i didn't choose this--
swear, i didn't choose. . .this. . .
you don't knowyou just don't. . .know. . .
no. . .can't possibly know. . .
the pain. i can't hope. . .no hope to escape. . .
when i. . .was little a little girl,

⁸ This scene is a variation from a scene in the movie, *The Fisher King*, in which a homeless vet is talking to Jack.

⁹ These two lines are taken from William Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130* and Leo Tolstoy's novel, *Resurrection*, respectively,

mydaddyhe. . . he. . .
used to. . .never stopped. . .
just kept on. . .never stopped. . .
evenwheniasked politely, or. . .or. . .cried horribly. . .
he wouldn't stop.
and. . .after it was over. . .iusedto stay inthebathroom
forhoursandhours--scrubbing, cleaning, washing,
scrubbing, cleaning, washing,
scrubbing. . .but i never felt clean
never clean again.
how could i trust him anymore?
how could i trust any. . .man?
my dress is so dirty. . .so filthy. . .
 i didn't choose this--
swear i didn't choose.
i try to be goodwhy can't i be any good?
i cannot bear this burden any longer. . .
i cannot bear. . . it.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.
Disgraceful and disgusting. Disgusting and disgraceful.

The pews were cracked, the altars were all broken
in the chill of a blue light--
a graveyard in this city of night.
And in this hollow cavern,
skeletal frames stumbled among broken bones,
genuflecting with each falling stone:

 "Go to hell, you child killer!
 God will never forgive you, faggot!
 We curse you in the name of our God!
 We'll take our case to the highest court of men!
 Amendments! We want legislation!
 We want a decision in the books!
 Death to the unrighteous!"

genuflecting with each falling stone.
shuffling through the ruins of a deserted garden throne.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.
Disgraceful and disgusting. Disgusting and disgraceful.

In backward alleys, in the muttering retreats,
where scarlet smells proffer the selling of meat,
the bodies lay naked in rose-colored rooms
that constantly drip their nocturnal perfumes.
Silhouettes and shadows that drink in the gutters,
the mice and the men that spew out and sputter
their odds and ends of obsessive fascination,
paying for passion, they burn in consummation.
These vagrant sounds of dust and desire
envelop the mind, the memory of fire.

And thus I was lost in the shadowing streets,
where alley cats moaned in the city's burning heat.
The taste of the refuse that painted her lips
was the taste of raw sewage that flowed from her hips.
Her apple was sweet, or so I would tell her,
(for we were two rats that lived in the cellar).
Her blood, her water, and her fragrant perfume
had stained my heart, my mind, this room.
The sheets are wet, and sorely are stained,
as the rain cries down upon the window pane.
We fall among the thorns--we bleed¹⁰
the fruit on which strange pleasure feeds.
And with these tears and blood we shed,
strange seeds are sown, and sprinkled, and fed.
No wound is healed when whetted with fire,
Love's parasite is blind desire.
We copulate with no communion--
Though 'unified,' there is no union.

¹⁰ "Ode to the West Wind": Percy Bysshe Shelley

O Lord, I cannot bear your burden.
I cannot bear it any longer.
My home is the bed of a jackel-headed woman,¹¹
a nocturnal beast that climbs through my opened window.
 "The blood is the life!"
Yet my blood grows thin, and my face is flushed.
The sheets are stained in yellow and red--
These sheets that slither upon my bed.

I saw the fog creep over the city streets
and rest just above the pavement--
 leaving only room for me to crawl.
But the queen of hearts flew out of her red-light town
and crept softly, just below the streets,
 leaving crimson streaks that stained
 my hands and knees as I crawled.
Brief moments of desire flip through my inner projector:
 the saltwater mouths in backward alleys;
 the smells of sewage and yellowed pillows;
 hollow mornings with a bitter taste in the mouth.
Like photos in a frame,
these scenes stand on my heart's mantle.
These scenes have made up my life.

Impotent desires fall short of expectation,
and the ensuing rape of innocence is consummated.
We marry sorrow, and commit adultery
 whenever we taste the fruits of joy.
Is it any wonder why the 'illegitimate' conception
 is unwanted? Aborted?

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.
Disgraceful and disgusting. Disgusting and disgraceful.

¹¹ "Verdi Cries": 10,000 Maniacs

A voice from the wilderness was heard,¹²
 under the shade of an almond tree,¹³
 on a hill, a stone's throw from the city gates:

“The crows have gathered on the rooftops
 of the cathedrals and capital of the city,
 preparing for a feast!¹⁴

For all have been born in the blood and water
 of the dark whore madonna, the Whore of Babylon!

Her filthiness clings to her skirts!¹⁵

Her children wither away like shriveled fruit!¹⁶

Indeed, she feeds on her own young!¹⁷

In the dust of the streets lie your prophets and priests,
 bitten by the serpent's tongue, who spews out his poison
 on the desecrated altar in the city!

The Lion awaits outside the city walls,
 waiting to devour your bones!¹⁸

Choose this day which death to die!”

Teeth were gnashed, and stones were thrown,
 and the prophet's body was ripped from his bones.
 Thus his flame was blown out. He died,
 as an almond tree branch was thrust into his side.
 At the city gate stood Bramachari, the Indian,¹⁹
 covered with ashes, dressed in sackcloth,
 sitting in the corner, chuckling:

“Alas! Alas! My master! Alas!

He will be given the burial of an ass!²⁰

Dragged away will be his bones,

¹² *Isaiah 40:3*

¹³ *Jeremiah 1:11*

¹⁴ *Revelation 19:17*

¹⁵ *Lamentations 1:9*

¹⁶ *Lamentations 2:12*

¹⁷ *Lamentations 2:20*

¹⁸ *Jeremiah 5:6*

¹⁹ *The Seven-Storey Mountain: Thomas Merton*

²⁰ *Jeremiah 22:18-19*

Thrown outside these gates of Rome!
Glory, Glory, to the desert be the Glory!"
Drifted away, like the barren shell of the moon. . .chuckling.²¹

The electric fire from a metal beam
shines silent shadows upon the ground.
But the white and metal sheds are rusting through,
and the concrete is beginning to crack.
The electric flame sees this, but
it cannot fix this:
This world of pale-yellow light,
and rusting white sheds
and cracking concrete
and flattened tires
and reeking urinals
of broken, splintered wood,
and burnt-out engines
and smoldering butt-ends
that die in the ashes of its nicotine flame.
No, the electric fire on its metal beam
cannot raise the dead, nor
heal the dying, nor even
light the way for the living.
The electric flame creates only flickering shadows
in the night that desperately devour the fading light.
These are the late April days.
These are the last days in which a few voices pray:
"Through the desert skies, let it rain.
Through the blackened stares, let it shine.
Through the faceless moon,
let the sun smile upon us all,
so that we may be like Him."
But many will die in the last days of April
that casts its shadow upon the dead.

²¹ *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man: James Joyce*

Circle Three Death by Water

“They have forsaken me, the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns
that cannot hold water.”

Jeremiah 2:13

i.

High on a hill that sleeps by the salty sea,²²
after the shouting and the dancing,
after the mocking, jeering, wailing, crying,
self-mutilation gave way to exhaustion,
answered only with the silence of a god
--and the bleeding of rotting clay--
yet there was no fire, no rain.

High on a hill that sleeps by the salty sea,
after the laying of the stones,
after the sacrifice was prepared,
twelve leaking vessels were spilled on the altar,
answered with a consummation of fire
that licked up both body and stone
--and a fist rose up from the sea--
Then, with a flash of lightning,
a nail sank into the cloudy wrist.
The fist opened, as if in supplication, palm up...
bleeding rain and soaking the dust.

Lord, here comes the flood!
We will say goodbye to flesh and blood.
If again the seas are silent, in any still alive,
We'll meet those who gave their islands to survive.
Drink up, dreamers! You're running dry!²³

²² *An allusion to I Kings 18:16-46*

²³ *“Here Comes the Flood”: Peter Gabriel*

Far out beyond the deepest sea swell,
 far from any fog-light bell,
 Prufrock's maids sang one to another,
 lamenting the loss of the loved and the lover:²⁴

"We dreamed of a circle, we dreamed of a circle round,²⁵
 And in that circle there was a face,
 with eyes that filled the seas with grace.
 And the Voice was calling, calling us near,
 yet we whispered, we cannot rest here.
 For the circle is now broken, no union can be found.
 The words are unspoken, or is there just no sound?
 We dreamed of a circle, we dreamed of a circle round..."

So deep, so wide...
 Will you take me on your back for a ride?
 If I should fall,
 Would you swallow me deep inside?²⁶

Bevel looked out over the river--alone,
 with rippling waters and surging streams,
 and currents with reddish-yellowing cream,
 that splashed up against the weather-beaten stones.
 Baptism: forward and down,
 forward and down,
 forward and down.

A silent current caught the young lamb
 within the silent swells of a torn, gentle hand.
 The fear and fury were left behind,
 back with the empty hands of the swine of "paradise."²⁷

²⁴ "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": T.S. Eliot

²⁵ "Circle Dream": 10,000 Maniacs

²⁶ "Washing of the Water": Peter Gabriel

²⁷ "The River": Flannery O'Connor

Out in the boat, riding the water,
riding the waves of the sea, in the storm,²⁸
my brothers and I were scared.
And then an apparition called, "Come out!"

In fear and hysteria, I stepped out. . .
and began to sink in turmoil and trepidation.
The more I called out, "Lord, save me!"
the deeper I sank. . .deeper. . .deeper. . .
"You of little faith."
Drowning in the depths. . .deeper and deeper.²⁹

iii.

How could the boy have known?
Young and ignorant of the streams of the spirit,
hearing muffled, fragmented messages,
how could he be guided by clear light and sound?
For the density of the water was too great.
Seeing his face in the reflection of the pool,
and feeling a deep communion in his own,
he drank from the spring, and tasted. . .
it was good.

Yet he thirsted for more, more than
previous curiosity had initially yearned for.
And the boy began to drink from a foreign pool,
which resounded in his own pure being--but dark.
And the boy began to drown in his own drips and drops
the more he tasted his darkened pool.
Enveloped in his own reflection,
the more violently his hands dove in to drink,
the more his reflection was disjointed--
fragmented by the disturbed waters,
no longer silent, but rather screaming of thirst.

²⁸ "Mercy Street": Peter Gabriel

²⁹ Matthew 14:22-33

Bending down, trying to focus on himself,
drunk with self-desire,
he dove into himself, and into the pool,
and lost sight of his reflection,
having closed in upon himself.
With this impassioned burning,
the silent pool's spring prematurely erupted,
drowning, suffocating the boy with his self,
always thirsting for more--never satisfied.
Drowning in the yellowed sheets,
bleeding to death--a different death
than that of water.

Though the vision was there,
there in the dream of the water's dance,
the experience was not clear.
As the swirling streams within
the inner eye blurred his vision,
the waters closed over his head,
and he was submerged. . . lost.

In the dream there was both birth and death,
but also confusion,
and an altered sense of identity.
The garden was seen,
but the roots spread out from the soil,
unearthing the virgin earth,
showing was need not be shown at so young an age:
the swelling dream of the water's dance.
And the serpent glided on the surface--hissing.
The inner world of the child's being was innocent
in the collective memory,
yet corrupt in its realization:
for the shadow had fallen,
like dust from a corpse,
like rain from a cloud.

The memory of the garden dissolves itself
in the blood and water in which the embryo floats.
And the death that comes by water
 is really a second birth, a rebirth.
In the circle of the garden,
in the circle dream of the sea,
 birth and death are interwoven,
 like fibers in a live body.

Circle Four
The Olive Garden

“One day the trees went out
to anoint a king for themselves.
They said to the olive tree: ‘Be our king. . .’”

Judges 9:8

i.

And still he climbed, up the eastern slopes
that lie across the valley of grey dust lands,³⁰
to search in the garden for some ray of hope,
yet all there was, was the grey olive lands.
For the olives had been crushed
and slowly been squeezed,
here among the shadows of these silent olive trees.
Snickers and snores were a stone’s throw away,
here in this night of the pale shellfish day.

In his blood there flowed the Life
that burned and beat throughout his veins,
that echoed in the footfall’s flight
of memory, now clouded within the rain
of his pouring eyes, bleeding crimson pools
of sorrow; crying for the fate of fools.
A single white rose lay, splattered with mud,
as he lay sweating, there in his blood.

Thursday night.
The olive trees are giving shade
in the rain
in the rain
in the rain of his pouring eyes--
The sorrowing seeds of his passion are sown.

³⁰ “*The Olive Garden*”: Rainer Maria Rilke

The cat that cries in the olive shade
--the black cat, the newborn cat, the innocent cat--
searches for his mother's milk,
yet finds nothing but the rain of the olive trees.
And under a rock, under the moon,
the cat curls and twitches in spasm
--from time to time--
reliving the impending nightmare
of the claws of an eagle,
and the teeth of the rats.

Upon the eastern slopes of the city, in the torchlight,
a sword began to plow the earth,
preparing for the burial of a rottened, crushed core.
"Good morrow" wished the fleeing shadows,
hiding in the trees, life sucked from their marrows;
Darting away from the dark eagle's claw
that snatched up the cat, which the dark rat gnawed.

ii.

Holy. . .Holy. . .Holy. . .

iii.

Tomorrow will be Friday—
Friday will have no olive shade.
The black cat, the newborn cat, the innocent cat,
will crawl beneath the dusty-red wooden crates
that are thrown against a dirty-white shed,
and live in the dirt, underneath a hot April sun.
He will die there.
He will die there.
The sacred head lays wounded and slain--
Slain by the serpent that lurks in the weeds
here, underneath this sacred moon tree.
The white bird cries, engulfed in the flames.
The frost lays claim to the olive tree's dread,
here, underneath this garden grave's bed.

Was this passion? Was this desire?
Or was this Love that kindles this fire?

When The Word spoke Himself into existence,
The Word could not speak--only cry.
We could hear the sound, but not the Voice.
(But we heard the sound! A silent purr.)
Now, in a roar, we heard another cry.
Not just a sound, but a Voice:

IT IS FINISHED!³¹

What tree is this that strangely bleeds?
What fruit is this that strangely feeds
off of the flood of dripping blood
that permeates its roots and leaves?

What strange, and withered, and rottened core
receives such kisses from the lips of a whore?
And what strange fruit, when taken in,
with crimson juice dripping upon his dead chin,
lies down in the dust of a garden grave's floor?

In this garden, were these dead bones divine?
We had heard the Voice, but is there still time
to taste the Life that now lies down in the dust?

We have no pearls, lay us down among the swine.³²

I abandoned the black cat, the newborn cat
to the dust and set him next to the wooden crates.
I saw the serpent lurking in the weeds,
as I gnawed at my flesh,

³¹ *John 19:30*

³² *Matthew 7:6*

just outside the dirty-white sheds of an old,
 abandoned medical base.
The cat, he left me, and did not cry. . .
the olive trees were not nearby
--only wooden, hollow, dusty crates--
The true condition of Heaven's Gates.

He craved for his mother's milk.
He would not take my sour cream--only milk,
 which I did not have,
for I was not his mother, but a rat. . .
 i live in the potter's field.

in the potter's field i live,
(i purchased this field of blood)³³
but i will scurry back to the garden tree tomorrow
to see if it is still raining,
to see if i can catch one falling tear,
and taste its salt,
so i can taste the sorrowing passion
of his pouring eyes that reign--
 there in the garden,
 there on the moon's tree,
 here in my grotto.
 (tcht. . .tcht. . .)

³³ *Matthew 27:8-10*

Circle Five
The Sword and the Desert

“The people who survive the sword will find favor in the
desert; I will come to give rest to Israel.”

Jeremiah 31:2

i.

How deserted lies the city, once so full of people.³⁴

As the poor little vagrant remembered his buried life,³⁵
the sword began to plow into his forgotten hemisphere,
and the buried corpse was dug up.

It had laid untouched, decaying in peace for seasons,
but memory wields a searing sword.

To remember is to die.

The wounds were re-opened, exposed to the desert wind
The little vagrant began to sweat,
awaiting his execution:

“Pray for me, a sinner, at the hour of my death.
Pray for me, a sinner. . .pray for me.
pray. . .for. . .me. . .”

no, i mustn't remember--NO!
don't make me remember--i don't want to
know. . .no please. . .bury it again—
NO, i don't wish to remember--NO. . .
but. . .o, o, o, the beautiful girl in the alley. . .
and o, o, o, the blood in the gutters. . .no. . .
the street lamp that sputtered. . .

Memory³⁶

Mount the scaffold

³⁴ *Lamentations 1:1*

³⁵ *This is a variation of the scene in “The Fisher King” where Perry has a mental breakdown, remembering the death of his wife.*

³⁶ *“Rhapsody on a Windy Night”: T.S. Eliot*

Let the execution begin
To remember is to die.
The sentence was passed--
Execution by the sword.

The little man, loose in the alleyways and streets,
screaming. . .city sounds that nobody hears:
“ME! REMEMBER ME! LOOK AT ME!”
The slice of a sword between joints and marrow³⁷
The stream of flowing blood. . .
and a faint whimper. . .
“thank youuuuuu. . .”

My death must be my birth;
For though he slays me, yet
 will I hope in him,
hoping only to die in his desert.

Grant me your rest, if it be, only in your death.

ii.

All has turned quiet. . .
The bloodless infants with arms full of sand
have ceased to scream.
The attics are all full of dust.
And littering the lands are crumbling towers
 --withered, dead wombs--
dark birds feed upon those silent tombs.
And I lay here, among these dead shells,
in this dead valley which lies
between heaven and hell.
These are the days of our dying and birth
where the desert winds sing from sea to sea,
forever calling you, forever calling me:
“To kiss without impressing,

³⁷ *Hebrews 4:12*

To touch without longing for more,
To embrace without possessing:
This is the key that unlocks Love's door."

i have never loved. . .neither now nor before.

O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a sinner
O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a sinner

I looked out at the city in which I was buried,
and it was formless and empty.
I looked at the mountains which were quaking,
and the hills which were swaying.
I looked, and there were no people,
every bird had flown away.
I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert--³⁸
The ruins lay exposed like a whore's garments
before the desert's winds.

The city walls have all fallen down,
plowed up like fields, giving no resistance.³⁹
The desert winds howl with no spoken words--
just a scream within hollow ears. mercy.

and the bones cried out:
o lord, we cannot bear
we cannot bear this burden any longer--
we have ravaged ourselves,
and have drunk from our own pools;
we have licked them dry with our tongues,
and now our thirsting appetite calls for blood. . .
here we lie, in the city without walls,
open to the desert's wind, naked and disgraced.
look, and see our disgrace,

³⁸ *Jeremiah 4:23-26*

³⁹ *"A Sort of Homecoming": U2*

restore us to yourself, o lord, that we may return;
renew our days of the garden,
unless you have utterly rejected us,
and are angry beyond measure.⁴⁰

o lord, love me for who i am where i am: a burn victim,
a leper, decaying in my own blood and defecation.
my blood has lost its memory, and
my wells have run dry, here as i burn. burning.

iii.

The desert wind's silence settled upon the dust,
and whispered:
“Cry the tears of all your confessions. . .”

The desert dust scattered about in a hollowing wisp:
“cry? how can we cry?
we have forgotten our voice,
and our heart hates your people!”

“Cry the tears of all your confessions. . .”
“cry? we cannot cry!
we have reaped our rebellion...
our bones are scattered...
we have our inheritance.”

“Cry the tears of all your confessions. . .”
“cry? what can we cry?
we have no tears to cry--only salt remains. . .
only lust, pride, and fear. . .
these are the things which smolder in our heart.”

“Cry the tears of all your confessions. . .”
“cry?”

⁴⁰ *Lamentations 5:21-22*

The feet and fingers, the hair and withered shapes
that lay half buried in the sand,
those decayed visages which once wrought me pain,
and those which I had desecrated,
those fractured forms began to fade
 into the wind that scattered them.
As if some foul disguise had been burned away,
mild and lovely forms appeared where the fragments
 had been buried,
 and after a brief surprise and greeting
 of this delighted wonder,
all went to sleep, as the desert's blanket covered them.
 good night.⁴¹

An untamed Lion crouched by the wasteland stream:⁴²

“From where the sword has plowed the barren earth,
and cut open my servant's side;
From where the fire has burned away the stubble;
From where the wind has blown away the chaff;
It is there the spring will rise up and water the desert,
giving Life back to the burnt men of Gethsemane,⁴³
quenching their fever with the water of fire,
here in the desert,
in the solitude of each soul's wilderness.”

Blood has stained his mane.

“will you promise not to hurt me
if i come to drink from the stream?”

“I make no promises.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ *“Prometheus Unbound” (3.4.65-70): Percy Bysshe Shelley*

⁴² *Chronicles of Narnia: C.S. Lewis*

⁴³ *The Seven-Storey Mountain: Thomas Merton*

⁴⁴ *Chronicles of Narnia: C.S. Lewis*

Circle Six
The Tree of Souls

“I the LORD bring down the tall tree
and make the low tree grow tall.
I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.”
Ezekiel 17:24

i.

Wandering, forever wandering eastward,
Away from the garden gate,
Away from the setting sun,
Trying to escape the shadow,
Forever wandering on this dusty sphere. . .
 only to find the shadow once again,
 the cursed tree in strange crimson twilight,
here in a gutted out canyon, where
the lime-green lizard scuttles down,⁴⁵
 licking its tongue, shedding its skin.

Indeed, though we have wandered
through the city streets and acid rain,
through the torment of both dagger and desert,
we have only come to return
 to lie in the shadow of the tree.

Indeed, sorrow without time is never-ending,
and our grief is more great,
for we cannot crawl out from under
 the shadow of this tree, in this hollow valley,
looking into the blinding light, seeing nothing--
 nothing but shadows and silhouettes.

A Lion crouched on the sandy floor, calling from the tree:
 “These are the immortal hours
 of whom thou didst demand!
 One waits for thee!”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ “*Spirit Voices*”: Paul Simon

⁴⁶ “*Prometheus Unbound*”: Percy Bysshe Shelley

What tree is this that protrudes from the dust?
 What shades are these that sway in the gusts,
 withered and rotting, like strange, barren fruit?
 And what red rain falls down from its leaves to the roots?
 What tree is this that joins east and west
 with the certain smell of burning flesh?
 Bearing this fruit for the crows to pluck,
 for the rain to gather, for the winds to suck,
 for the sun to rot, for the tree to drop--
 Behold, the harvest of Adam's bitter crop.⁴⁷

Sitting under the tree,
 in its shadow--waiting and watching--
 with each gust of wind I saw shades of dust
 beneath it, with hands upraised,
 crying up toward the leaves.

“think, neither fear nor courage saves us now!”⁴⁸

“that corpse you planted last year in your garden,
 has it begun to sprout?”⁴⁹

“all of our talk about justice, goodness, religion, and God,
 were those just words used to conceal
 our gross self-conceit and cruelty?”⁵⁰

“we have sought after ‘all these things’--
 we have failed to attain them, or have we indeed?”⁵¹

“let our freedom rage! let it blaze!”

⁴⁷ “*Strange Fruit*”: Billie Holiday

⁴⁸ “*Gerontion*”: T.S. Eliot

⁴⁹ “*The Waste Land*”: T.S. Eliot

⁵⁰ *Resurrection*: Leo Tolstoy

⁵¹ *Resurrection*: Leo Tolstoy

“you deceived me, and i was deceived.
you overpowered me, and prevailed.”⁵²

“son of man, son of my god,
why do you remain in the grave?
you were hung once--why again?
over and over again?
if death still comes after your resurrection,
will there be a second?”

the dust settled
silence
once
again.

Sitting in the shadow,
under the tree--waiting and watching,
looking up into the tree,
I saw an empty hole, a wound in the tree's flesh,
 deep and wide,
hollowed out, as if a sword had pierced its side.
empty

“THESE ARE THE IMMORTAL HOURS
OF WHOM THOU DIDST DEMAND!
ONE WAITS FOR THEE!”

Looking into the hole, into the silence:
Who are you?
After the wind that tore apart the city--silence!
 (You were not there)
After the drowning in the flood--silence!
 (You were not there)

⁵² *Jeremiah 20:7*

After the prison, palace, and reverberation--silence!

(You were not there)

After the slaughter and the fire--silence!

(You were not there)

a gentle breeze whispered:

“What are you doing here, my child?”⁵³

iii.

In the dirt of this strange garden grave,

Three children played, singing to one another:

“Rock-a-bye baby in the tree tops

When the wind blows the cradle will rock

When the bow breaks the cradle will fall

And down will come baby, cradle and all!”

“O Death, dear Death, where is your sting?

Where is the pain I hear you bring?

Are you such a scorpion? A wasp? Perhaps a bee

That pollinates flowers in gardens and trees.

Your sting comes only to those who fear--

To those you scream, so they may not hear.”

“Death is but a little child who leads us by the hand

Gently to the desert stream, where lies the willow lands.

We’ll sit and watch the waves of the sea,

Or the sun gently blowing through the leaves of the tree.

And Death is a child, so do not cry--

Though Death leads you, you will not die.

So Death, come and walk here at my side;

Along this dirt path you can be my one guide.

Play with me here, as I walk right along--

When others hear weeping, I hear your sweet song.”

⁵³ *I Kings 19:8-18*

“Lead us down, beside the weeping willow--
Kiss us good-night, let your satchel be our pillow.
Then play with us in tomorrow’s sweet morn--
When the Sun will shine, when the earth is reborn.
Oh Death, can you come out to play?
Dear Death, can you come out today?”

In the dirt of this strange garden grave,
Three children were playing in some distant day.

Climbing the tree,
Finding the empty hole
 in which a bee was pollinating
A Single White Rose.
And the Sun rose in the East,
 having come full circle.

I saw not, heard not, moved not--
Only felt His Presence flow and mingle
 through my blood
Till it became His Life, and His grew mine,⁵⁴
And I was thus absorbed back into Communion.

⁵⁴ “*Prometheus Unbound*” (2.1. 79-86): Percy Bysshe Shelley

Circle Seven
The Circle of Eternity's Garden

“He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.”

Isaiah 40:22

Looking out, into the deeper country,⁵⁵
I saw my memory, alive in resplendent glow:
 “I have come home at last!
 This is my real country!
 The World within the world!
 The Deeper Wave!
 The dream of the shadow lands is ended—
 This is Morning!
 There is no more echo of memory--
 Just the sweet Voice of the Word,
 gently kissing my ear.”

Entering the garden city,⁵⁶
I saw a White Bird singing in a tree,
And the Lamb sitting upon a Single White Throne,
from which flowed a Crystal River, blazing with fire,
 flowing out from the Garden,
Whose singing streams watered the Earth.
And on each side of the River stood the Tree of Life,
 bearing fruit.
No longer was there any curse, any shadows,
For the Light of the Sun burned bright
 within each Son of God who sang:

“Here in the realms where the air we breathe is Love,
 All praises sing to Our God and King,
 Who harmonized the remnant earth
 with what is encircled above!”

⁵⁵ *The Last Battle: C.S. Lewis*

⁵⁶ *Revelation 22:1-5*

The Word went out,
And the Word was heard;
The Voice was comprehended,
And the Roar was mighty,
The Waters crashed,
And the Whisper was gentle, and none feared.

I am the First and the Last⁵⁷
The Root and the Offspring
The Setting and the Rising
The Death and the Birth
I AM, so you are
A Community of One
In the Blood
In the Life--
In the Circle of Eden.
AMEN.

Epilogue

Now when all is said, and when all is done,
The question remains, the question is One.
It does not ask, "For whom will you die?"
Many men have asked this--many men have lied.
But as His Hands form His Second Son's Rib,
He questions us thus: "For Whom do you live?"

⁵⁷ Revelation 22:13-16