

Titian Left No Paper Trail

No sonnets, nor letters like Michelangelo.
Still we feel the oblique motion, the atmospheric
colors of his martyred St. Lawrence, his *Assumption*;
landscapes with river valleys and Alpine peaks,
ancient Roman myths, a sumptuous nude goddess.

Dawn is uncertain, pagan, shadowy.
Sudanese killers and thieves
are poachers in Kenya, for tusks of ivory.
A mammoth bull elephant pushes trees
down, forages with body guards to survive.

The vulnerable fade like ivory magnolia blooms.
Everything is fragile. Whole forests burn.
Antarctica is the most stable continent.
Titian's frescoes last. His late works show rough
loose brushwork: St. Jerome in a barren desert.

Art appears impotent to face down violence.
Marsyas played a double pipe but lost
his hide--flayed by a jealous Apollo,
King Midas watches. Ovid says so.

To study topography and meteorology,
is to feel baroque fault lines tremble at night.
Beside me in the dark my lover labors to breathe.
I listen to learn, labor to believe.
Titian expires during the plague. He paints allegories.
His self portrait does not look us in the eyes.

Buddha In Brass

*A sleeping Buddha occupies my mind,
and half-obsures its whole religion
by mere presence, contemplative and blind,
the intolerable comedy goes on. --Peter Levi, **Water, Rock & Sand***

Buddha did not come to me on the Silk
Road but in Saigon. A Chinese merchant
sold him to me. The war was still young.
I was young. Buddha is well-traveled, a veteran.

His figure fattens in meditation, brass zen.
He knows Indo-China, wars, the French,
now the Americans. Buddhists set themselves on fire.
We bleed; Vietnamese bleed; we leave brass shells,

bomb holes, poison in rice paddy, napalm on jungle.
Buddha waits in temples, reclines in Thailand. He shows
his teeth, forged, formed in a desperate foundry, weighed
down with lead & iron, polished shiny--like brass

army insignia, buckles, .45 caliber bullet casings
recycled for art, joss sticks, a zen garden, a vet's
bookshelf. Tibetan monks light themselves ablaze
in China. If Buddha is happy, rub his ample belly

for good luck. I pray to God. Buddha
is no god. He was a rich prince
who gave up his soft life to roam and beg.
Burmese Buddhists visit violence on Muslims.

Buddha & I have a history. We each have
a war or two to wear like a hairshirt. We each
seek peace. We sit & stare in the study.
I feel like Buddha, contemplative & blind.

White Dove In The Desert

Nine miles from Tucson, some Pilgrims
find the Church; it stands alone: White
Dove of Sonoran Desert. The rez
is a troubled home for the tribe living on the border,
on both sides. The Papago met Fr. Kino, who rode
in Jesuit robes, on a mission: prayer.

The missionary made a space for prayer,
in a dry place not far from Tucson, for pilgrims.
Franciscans followed the Jesuits, who rode
away leaving order in prickly pear paste, adobe white
walls old as suffering saguaro cacti. The border
is bone-dry; Rio Santa Cruz, on the rez,

runs dry. Illegals pass through the Papago Rez,
flee mayhem and madness to trade terror
for peaceful prayer in the White Dove. The border
is brutal, metal sculptures, homage for pilgrims:
the Nogales side in Mexico is hung with white
crosses, migrants killed crossing. Mormons once rode

by in a historic brigade. Franciscans rode,
with knots on cords, around robes, around Papago rez.
The cool White Dove, walled in white
wears a cord in the facade. Pray no predator. No terror.
No beheadings, Mules, Coyotes, cartels. Pilgrims
eat fry bread at taco stands near the border.

Feel the heat: afterburners above the border;
patrols with night scopes. Where blackrobes rode,
ICE finds torched holes in the fence. Pilgrims
pack prayers; smugglers pack weed, pass the rez;
illegals on the run are prey; the predator is terror.
Prey seeks prayers, under clouds dove-white.

The Pima Air Museum preserves war planes white-
hot, bone-dry; A-10 Thunderbolt pilots train. Border
in infrared sights--dehydrated souls journey in terror.
Migrants die with empty water bottles. A blackrobe rode
to bless St. Xavier del Bac, Arizona icon, on the rez.
The landscape is trashed with plastic. Pilgrims

revere a statue in glass sarcophagus, a blackrobe,
uncorrupted saint in his grave. White church on border
thirsty, contrails over rez; pilgrims pray, flee terror.

Aleppo Looks Like Hell

Rubble & ruins: a bottomless well.
Well, reports of the here-after
are here--heaven appeared to a doctor;
he was in a coma. Aleppo is hell.
Hell is a war with cluster bombs.
Keep your eye on the balls, lethal.
Not toys. Mortars fall over borders. Ask us.

St. Paul had a fit on the road to Damascus.
A ten-year old girl was murdered in Colorado.
There was a killing in Abbottabad, Pakistan.
The Taliban just shot a school girl. Terror
on a school bus in the Swat Valley. Refugees
come & go talking of Aleppo. The wounded
girl is also in a coma. What does she see?

Drones have a Gorgon Stare.
It is presidential to order a kill, pick
the hit list. In Revelation, horses breathe fire.
Seven seals. Like helicopters in Abbottabad.
Getaway? Up a ladder? Angels are utility workers.
The ancients used ladders to climb closer
to heaven, up levels of adobes, Canyon De Chelly.
Mud roofs. Artists like to sit on roofs. So do snipers.
They paint the stars to stare in minds' eyes.
Or, sight a human heart in their cross-hairs,
Or, roll barrel bombs down on Kurds & Christians.

A priest told us the special machine
outside of church could lift us to heaven.
It was a joke. We knew it was to lift
workers up to the rose window, to fix
the stained glass, part of the Bible's
parables to elevate all souls to heaven.

What of Evil in Aleppo? Does the Devil do
the killing? No. It is human gunmen. Who helps
the wounded? Who buries the dead? Who kills,
who cares, who executes, who shoots on a bus?
Is it us? Is Damascus full of men & women like us?
How do we get away from here? In wind and fire.
Pick & choose. Win or lose. Be bulletproof. Wear Kevlar.
Ascend in a hot air balloon fiesta, above Albuquerque.

Sheba's Trees Bleed For The Magi

A scent of Sheba's fragrance lingers in the souk: incense.
The lines in the sand are drawn by caravans.
Arabia & Yemen share a jihadi desert waste.
Once the Queen of Sheba grew thirsty.
Water is more prized than gold, seek an oasis.
Caravans move phallic blades & bombs from Yemen

besieged by jihadis in uncivil wars between Yemeni
tribes, in Sheba's kingdom; she gifted incense
to King Solomon in his wise oasis.
Sheba ruled a kingdom of caravans.
Her scraggly trees in the desert thirst.
Thorny myrrh trees endure in desert waste,

The Magi follow stars they do not waste.
Today jihadis learn explosives in Yemen.
A reddish-brown antiseptic mummies those dead to thirst.
Herodotus wrote it is hard to harvest frankincense
from bushes guarded by tiny winged snakes; caravans
pass seeking to trade & rest at an oasis.

Predator drones prey on jihadis lurking in an oasis.
Thorny myrrh trees bleed when cut in desert waste.
Tribesmen trade ivory, African cargo, arms, in caravans.
Ramadan moon, with a Jambia dagger's curve, hangs over Yemen.
A dagger smith creates blades to bleed out incense
trees --"yellow tears"-- near the Red Sea; thirsty

goats eat seedlings near empty wells, thirsty.
Black flags fly for a new caliphate, no Islamic oasis.
Sap hardens to rocks scrapped into baskets--incense
traders travel on dromedaries, burdens over waste;
myrrh rides in leather bags to a souk in Sana, Yemen,
trades like RPGs in Djibouti, or coffee in caravans.

Trucks & camels round the African Horn in caravans.
Muslims wash in mosques, kneel facing Mecca, thirst
for holy war, behead the infidel in Syria, Yemen,
Iraq. Sheba first, then Silk Road trader, a Prophet in an oasis--
all breathed in incense; the more cuts the sweeter the scent, waste
not sacred smoke for monks in holy places; rituals require incense.

continued

If jambias with old rhino horn handles bleed out incense trees
near thirsty Gulf of Aden in dry Yemen,
who will caravan like the Magi, pilgrims in the waste?

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