

Three Poems

H.D.

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Three Poems

HELIOS

Helios makes all things right —
night brands and chokes,
as if destruction broke
over furze and stone and crop
of myrtle—shoot and field—wort,
destroyed with flakes of iron,
the bracken—stems,
where tender roots were, sown
blight, chaff and waste
of darkness to choke and drown.

A curious god to find,
yet in the end faithful;
bitter, the Kyprian's feet —
ah, flecks of whited clay,
great hero, vaunted lord —
ah, petals, dust and windfall
on the ground — queen awaiting queen.

Better the weight, they tell,
the helmet's beaten shell,
Athene's riven steel,
caught over the white skull,
Athene sets to heel
the few who merit it.

Yet even then, what help,
should he not turn and note
the height of forehead and the seal of conquest,
drawn near, and try the helmet;
to lift — reset the crown

Athene weighted down,
or break with a light touch
mayhap the steel set to protect;
to slay or heal.

A treacherous god, they say,
yet who would wait to test

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justice or worth or right,
when through a fetid night
is wafted faint and nearer —
then straight, as point of steel
to one who courts swift death,
scent of Hesperidean orange—spray.

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PHAEDRA REMEMBERS CRETE

Think, O my soul,
of the red sand of Crete;
think of the earth, the heat
burnt fissure like the great backs of the temple serpents;
think of the world you knew;
as the tide crept, the land
burned with a lizard-blue
where the dark sea met the sand.

Think, O my soul —
what power has struck you blind —
is there no desert root, no forest-berry,
pine-pitch or knot of fir
known that can help the soul
caught in a force, a power,
passionless, not its own?

So I scatter, so implore
Gods of Crete, summoned before
with slighter craft;
ah, hear my prayer:

Grant to my soul
the body that it wore,
trained to your thought,
that kept and held your power,
as the petal of black power
the opiate of the flower.

For art undreamt in Crete,
strange art and dire,
in counter-charm prevents my charm,
limits my power:
pine-cones I heap
grant answer to my prayer.

No more, my soul —
as the black cup, sullen and dark with fire,
burns till beside it, noon's bright heat

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is withered, filled with dust,
and into that noon–heat
grown drab and stale,
is sudden sound of thunder and swift rain,
till the scarlet flower is wrecked
in the slash of the white hail.

The poppy that my soul was,
formed to bind all mortals,
made to strike and gather hearts
like flame upon an altar,
fades and shrinks, a red leaf —
waste and drift of the cold rain.

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PHAEDRA REBUKES HIPPOLYTA

Swift and a broken rock
clatters across the steep shelf
of the mountain–slope,
sudden and swift,
and breaks as it clatters down
into the hollow breach
of the dried water–course;
far and away
(through fire, I see it,
and smoke of the dead, withered stalks
of the wild cistus–brush)
Hippolyta, frail and wild,
galloping up the slope
between great boulders
and shelves and circles of rock.

I see it, sharp, this vision,
and each fleck on the horse's flanks
of foam, the bridle and bit,
the silver — the reins,
held fast with perfect art,
the sun, striking athwart
the silver work,
the neck, strained forward, ears alert,
and the head of the girl
flung back and her throat.
Ah, burn my fire, I ask
out of the smoke–ringed darkness
enclosing the flaming disk
of my vision —
I ask for a voice — an answer —
was she chaste?

Who can say,
the broken ridge of the hills
was the line of a lover's shoulder,
his arm–turn, the path to the hills,
the sudden leap and swift thunder
of mountain–boulders, his laugh.

She was mad —

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as no priest, no lovers' cult
could grant madness;
the wine that entered her heart
with the touch of the mountain–rocks
was white, intoxicant:
she, the lithe and remote,
was betrayed by the glint
of light on the hills,
the granite splinters of rock,
the touch of the stone
where heat melts
toward the shadow–side of the rocks.