

The Lilacs on Good Friday
and
Other Poems



Joseph S. Salemi

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Acknowledgments

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The Lilacs on Good Friday

Tumult of noontide long ago dismissed—
The rent veil unremembered, and the sun
Relit, though shrouded in a new eclipse
Of rainswept sky. The garden seems to shun

That spectral agony of blood and bone;
Consigns itself instead to placid sleep
Untroubled as the moss upon a stone
And heedless while the three Marias weep.

Four decades' growth of lilac by this wall
Stretches its shallow spiral to the sky.
Clustering blossoms, soon to swell and fall,
Gather themselves like nimbuses on high

Out of my hand's grasp, yet I still can bend
The pliant osiers downward to my face,
And sniff the buds that already distend:
Late April lilacs, delicate as lace.

Unlike that rigid tree, untenanted,
And red with memory of three hours' grief,
The thornless lilacs summon up no dread,
Demand no witness. Flower, branch, and leaf

Are only what they are. They have no words
For us to ponder, though we sometimes feign
To speak for them, as augury of birds
Construes an omen of impending pain.

The book is shut, the candle snuffed, the bell
Rings the finale of a troubled day.
Did lilacs grace the garden where we fell,
Or scent Gethsemane? *I bade you pray*

*And watch with me a little while this night—
Could you not watch one hour?* The world's bereft
Of that which once gave stomach for a fight
Or certitude to vision. I have left

The Office of the Holy Cross unsung
But patient on the rubricated page:
Open my lips, O Lord, and let my tongue
Announce thy praises—in some other age.

Here in this garden how could it displease
To let the lilacs offer up my prayer—
Sweet censers that, when shaken by the breeze,
Scatter their fragrance in the evening air?

And in that garden where a sepulcher
New-hewn from rock awaits the mourners' tread,
Where cerecloths, unguent, aloes mixed with myrrh
Will soon enshroud the lacerated dead,

There is some solace from the thought of how
Late April lilacs, coming into bloom,
Shall dance the currents of the air, and bow
To shed their flowerets on an open tomb.

The Bog Man

In Bronze Age northern Europe, criminals or designated victims were ritually drowned in swamps. Their perfectly preserved corpses (called bog men) are sometimes found by modern peat cutters.

Twelve feet under, caked in a leafy humus,
He lay hidden, swaddled in putrefaction,
Till the peatmen dug with their wooden turf slanes

Down to a corner

Where four thousand years ago, sinking slowly,
He descended, gulp upon gulp of water.
Oozy silence closed like a fist about him,

Seemingly endless.

He who heard the Druid demanding blood-debt,
Felt the hempen cord and the brazen axes,
Choked in terror when he was lifted upwards

Over the bog's edge,

Hung suspended while sacrificial chanting
Filled the forest. Pitiless tribal totems
Watched him swallowed up by the brackish quagmire

In expiation.

Brought to light, his face is a mask projecting
Only sleep and sadness across the ages;
Grim exhaustion hangs on his wrinkled eyelids.

Part of his sentence,

Though unspoken, was to await this moment
And endure the prattle of foolish voices
Asking questions, wondering—while he lies there

Helpless to answer.

The Ossuary at Verdun

*I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.*
—T.S. Eliot, *Preludes*

Obedient bones, remembering
Through bayonets and tangled wire
Some infinitely gentle thing.

New splinters turn up every spring,
Confettied by the guns' brute fire—
Obedient bones, remembering

(While Mort Homme closed its deadly ring)
How each lived moment would inspire
Some infinitely gentle thing

Before the order came to fling
One's flesh upon that hideous pyre—
Obedient bones, remembering

La Voie Sacrée would daily bring
Fresh faces to the trench's mire:
Some infinitely gentle thing.

Around these shards the specters cling
All gathered in a mystic choir—
Obedient bones, remembering
Some infinitely gentle thing.

A Mirror of Sectaries and Schismatics

*If your Reformation be such a restorative as you pretende,
what letteth but that the world should presently behold a
visible difference betweene the fruites of the pure and the
corrupt diet?*

—Gabriel Harvey, 1589

From rack-drawn Geneva, the pallor of Calvin,
Nasal whining of salubrious hymns
("Salvation" usurping beatitude,
Te Deum unheard),
Hawkers who traffic in Scriptural Word,

Libera nos Domine!

From crop-headed tinkers and weasel-faced tailors,
Haters of surplices, images, Yule
(Chalice and altar abominated,
Burghers who sup
At a brown table with a pewter cup),

Libera nos Domine!

From pious sedition, the dissident rout
Of Presbyters, Levellers, Quakers and all
Prophets aglow with fire
Apocalypse-bent,
The scrupulous conscience of fish-eyed Dissent,

Libera nos Domine!

From dyspeptic righteous, the tight-lipped Elect,
Depravity, Zwingli, the Synod of Dort,
God begrudging of redemption,
The spirit spare,
Dead good deeds, and the skeletal prayer,

Libera nos Domine!

Penelope's Postscript

Uncounted days, wrung dry of tears—
Lost wanderers do not return:
So much for the departed years.

Heap up my mangled hopes and fears,
Leave Ithaka to mock and spurn
Uncounted days. Wrung dry of tears

I shut from my importuned ears
The suitors' pleas. How could I yearn
So much for the departed? Years

Spent weaving shrouds amidst their jeers
(Feigned piety would serve my turn)
Uncounted days wrung dry. Of tears

I shed enough. My vision clears:
No longer am I keen to learn
So much for the departed years.

Out of the mist a man appears,
A revenant whose angers burn
Uncounted. Days, wrung dry of tears!
So much for the departed years.

The Pilgrim Fathers and Mothers

The eatinge of much meate doth provoke carnall desire.

—Elizabethan commonplace

The folks at Massachusetts Bay
Sat half-starved before their fires
Wondering, from day to day,
How to get what flesh requires.

And though they were the Lord's elect,
Scripture-sure and doubly graced,
They seemed more like a petty sect
A-perishing in heathen wastes.

For pilgrims in their broad-brimmed hats,
Buckled shoes and pantaloons,
Seldom grew immensely fat
On oysters, squash, and macaroons.

A friendly Pequot Indian
Provided them with maize and cod,
But since they were true Englishmen
Raised on meat and Calvin's God,

They knew their little settlement
Could not consume just plants and fish.
The pilgrims needed nourishment
That satisfied a carnal wish.

And so they went forth after prey,
Each carrying a blunderbuss,
To seek out turkey, quail, or stray
Quadrupeds herbivorous.

Soon their larders were replete
With game of every sort and size;
The pilgrims had sufficient meat
To give them strength to sermonize.

Nevertheless, real men would scorn
To feast without a cup of cheer,
So someone took a sack of corn
And brewed up plain but potent beer.

Fortified for living life
By having been so amply fed,
Each pilgrim turned to his good wife
And pulled her towards the nuptial bed.

And thus New England grew and thrived—
Red meat and liquor manned the breach,
Insuring that the girls were swived
(Despite what ministers may preach).

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, in Brief

When Doctor Faustus mastered every licit human art,
The pride of his achievement was a canker in his heart.
And so he turned to magic and those necromantic charms
Available from Lucifer, the father of all harms.

He lit a holy candle and proceeded to begin—
He made a magic circle with a pentagram within.
He read some incantations from a black, forbidden book,
And cursed the saving blood of Jesus Christ, Whom he forsook.

Thus learnèd Faustus conjured and a spirit rose from hell
So foul and so horrific and with such a foetid smell
That Faustus bade him change his shape, and so he reappeared
An old Franciscan friar with a tonsure and a beard.

His name was Mephistophilis, and soon he would arrange
For Faustus to give up his precious soul, and in exchange
Receive whatever he desired, with all dispatch and speed,
In knowledge, power, rank, and the delights of lust and greed.

The devil wrote a contract between Faustus and himself
Whereby he got the Doctor's soul for knowledge and for pelf.
And just to make immutable this most unholy link,
Poor Faustus had to sign in blood, instead of normal ink.

So Faustus drank and feasted, and he sampled pleasure's store,
And lived in fleshly pride and pomp for twenty years or more,
But on occasion Faustus felt a twinge of doubt and fear,
And more so when the stipulated reckoning drew near.

The magic was alluring; the indulgence took its toll;
The power and the women were narcotics to his soul;
And yet somehow the Doctor sensed that something was amiss;
He inwardly repined about his lost eternal bliss.

He wanted to repent his deed, and turn again to God,
But habits, once inveterate, make resolutions hard.
When Faustus tried to pray to Christ, the devils would begin
To tear him all asunder and compel him back to sin.

And so it went, as days and weeks turned into months and years,
While Faustus could not bring himself to shed contrition's tears.
Then finally one dreadful night there came the Lord of Liars
Who dragged poor Faustus down into the dark, sulphuric fires.

And there he burns forever as a warning to the wise
That necromantic dabbling is a thing you should despise,
And dining with the devil is a meal you ought to skip—
The reckoning is heavy, and you have to leave a tip.

To an Aging Countercultural Twit

At Woodstock you went walking in the nude,
But you were high on pot, and just a teen—
Your life is now more upscale and subdued,
And tinted with environmental green.

You still think Marx a genius, but not quite
As brilliant as Adorno or Marcuse;
Despite rheumatic damp, you will ignite
If someone sparks your old New Leftist fuse.

Fatally swift are time's extended wings—
So many sainted icons rose and fell!
Your heart yearns for those past—and passing—kings:
Daniel Ortega, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel.

Where are the marching Workers of the World?
Where are the barricades with surging crowds?
Where are the rocks and gasoline bombs hurled
Against policemen swathed in tear gas clouds?

Gone with the wind. Like *Rolling Stone* and Mao,
They've slipped into the dustbin of the past.
The only places that give solace now
Are Berkeley, North Korea, Cambridge Mass.

You've joined a health club, and you watch your weight.
Macrobiotic meals and exercise
May also undermine the bourgeois state
And work against the hegemonic lies.

Take vitamins, fruit juice, and lengthy hikes
But take them with a grain of salt. Perhaps
Organic foods and stationary bikes
Will not stave off the ultimate collapse.

Corporate Opportunity

The chance to spend life totting up
Gross income and expenses,
Forbidden to express a view
That might disturb consensus;

To turn your mind and soul-strength to
Some widget-maker's profit;
To not just sip the hireling's cup
But force yourself to quaff it;

To regulate your thinking by
The figures on a spread-sheet;
To dread a drooping graph worse than
A syphilitic bedsheet;

To blindly follow routines that
Top management arranges,
And while you parrot policy,
Anticipate its changes;

To bootlick for the CEO,
Sling flattery in dollops;
To summon up a toady's smile
To please the in-house trollops;

To cringe in paralytic fear
Before a boss's swagger;
To know your back's a target for
The cold, collegial dagger;

To tune your speech to market trends,
Endure an ad man's raving;
To finish every task, and then
Despite your years of slaving,

To wonder if some MBA,
To make the place efficient,
Will classify you obsolete,
Redundant, or deficient.

Apostrophe to François Villon

Good François Villon, petty thief,
Carouser, cutpurse, scholar, sot;
Young chronicler of gallows-grief,
Escapee from the hempen knot;

Depicter of the dregs and lees
Of drunken students, louts, and sinners;
Of beggars, pimps, and hostelries,
Of men-at-arms, and roast fish dinners;

We need you here and now, Villon,
To resurrect the vibrant brawls
Of Paris, 1451,
Its alleyways and hawkers' calls;

To down a tankard of cheap ale,
And dicker with the serving-wench;
To write ballades while still in jail,
Or sprawling on a tavern's bench;

To pilfer money on the sly,
And spend the last sou on a whore;
To spit into a priestly eye,
And contradict some bourgeois bore;

To clear the trencher, drain the cup,
To pawn the basin, bowl, and ewer;
Show incorruption rising up
In glory from a foetid sewer;

And prove that poetry's not made
By moralists and pious snots;
But is the furtive, grubby trade
Of souls besmirched with carnal blots.

The Satiric Imperative

Can poetry matter?
—Dana Gioia

They say I never write a word
Unless it is attacking—
My pen and tongue and poems are
A cat-o'-nine-tails cracking.

I am—they say—a misanthrope
Who makes his hatred purer
By writing keen-edged, caustic verse
To sublimate his furor.

They say I have no gentleness,
No pity, no compassion—
The judgment's plausible enough
When satire's not in fashion.

This therapeutic, feelgood age
Of milquetoast Sunday brunches
Just doesn't have the muscle tone
To stomach heavy punches.

And worst of all is poetry,
Our hijacked, captive calling—
Now in the hands of smirking prigs
Whose gutlessness is galling.

It's now a world of making friends
And hyping reputations;
Of sucking up to editors
And cadging invitations;

Of conferences, seminars,
And turgid analytics;
Of osculated derrières
On influential critics.

The love of language in itself
Is seen as mere pretension—
Concern for craftsmanship evokes
A mocking condescension.

What's crucial is celebrity
And trendy recognition—
The stuff you write is just a chit
To help you gain admission

Into a surreal universe
Of literary chatter,
Where grants-in-aid and fellowships
Are all that really matter;

Where no one dares to write a line
That might be thought offensive,
Since rivalry for sinecures
Is what you'd call intensive;

Where coteries and quid pro quos
And networking are nearest
The heart of that new Poet-Prince,
The tenure-track careerist;

Where publishers are marketeers
Who want all poems pretty;
And literary judgment goes
By way of a committee,

While academic charlatans
Perform vile vivisection,
Appraising work by social class
Or gender or complexion.

In such a world of fakery
And bogus reputation,
Where poetry sinks lower than
Commercial fornication,

What else is there except the lash
Of satire's stinging answer?
The red-hot knife of ridicule
May cauterize the cancer.

The Price of Flowers

*I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely head.*
—Omar Khayyam, *The Rubaiyat*

Possibly so, Khayyam, but have you thought
About the bouquet Europe's blood has bought?
A deluge from the veins of our best youth
Watered the fields where two world wars were fought.

Whole armies in their frozen ranks have lain
Along the Somme like swaths of scythe-cut grain.
Unnumbered corpses went in heaps to fill
The blood-wet wadis of El Alamein.

The gore of *poilu* and *le Boche* has run
Into the shell-churned soil of Verdun,
And Norman hedgerows sucked red nourishment
From tangled sinews that our madness spun.

At Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge earth shook
Like hammered anvils while wide meadows took
The fertilizing fluids that would flow
At Anzio, Salerno, and Tobruk.

No garden had such composting as this
To coax forth blossoms for the sun to kiss:
Bone and brain and heart and muscle strewn
Thick by the mortar's blast and shrapnel's hiss.

Where are the rose and hyacinth? What flower
Grew from this carnage of our race's power?

Why did you think that perfume would arise
Rather than what pollutes the present hour?

I would not pay a single soldier's life
For all that pointless, suicidal strife.

No drivel from a politician's mouth
Makes good our hemorrhaging. The world's still rife

With mayhem, spite, stupidity's dull spell,
And savagery enough to rival hell.

The ground we harrowed with our slaughtered sons
Sprouts the same weeds, and gives off the old smell.

The Woman Who Froze

She never knew a time she was not scared
From childhood right up to the present hour.
Her very steps were taken as if dared

Against some awful sanction that held power
Over her blood and marrow. Every word
She spoke was hushed, and shadowed with a cower.

None could convince her that it was absurd
To be enslaved by fearful hesitation,
So when she moved, the air was barely stirred—

At parties, in the swirl of conversation,
She sat apart, unnoticed and alone,
Nursing a self-sequestered isolation.

More and more she wished she were a stone:
Immovable, impassive, and unflinching
Before the rainfall's tears and wind's soft groan.

And so her life proceeded, slowly inching
Toward the conclusion that this trend prefigured:
Her habits became dispositions, clinching

Her fate, as sure as filth will foul a pig yard.
Uncertainties took root and grew like weeds.
They choked her shut, until she was a niggard

Not of mere words, but even simple deeds—
She barely moved a terror-frozen hand
To satisfy her elemental needs.

Her relatives did not quite understand;
The doctors were all helpless to advise—
It seemed as if some nameless malice planned

To clamp her motionless within a vise
Made from two jaws of hesitation paired
Like iron sentries at her captive sides.

Piety in Due Season

*And who shall dare to ask then when I am
Dyed scarlet in the blood of that pure Lamb
Whether that colour which is scarlet then
Were black or white before in eyes of men?*

—John Donne, “An Hymn to the Saints,
and to Marquis Hamilton” (Fowler 124)

When Jack Donne became a Dean
He left behind the squalid scene
Of bawdy houses, roaring drunks,
Braggarts, knaves, and poxy punks
That had filled the tawdry sessions
Of his youthful indiscretions.

When he felt life growing shorter
He put aside the ale and porter
For a prayerbook and a chalice
And a prelate’s cozy palace.
Jack became a prim divine
Who only dealt with sacred wine.

And to show his moral strength, he
Published sermons rather lengthy
On fine points of Christian duty.
No one really gave a hoot. He
Clearly had attained the age
When one can play the pompous sage.

He forgot the private parts
Of pretty little Cheapside tarts;
He abjured both dice and tankard—
Donne was now securely anchored

In a life of sheer devotion.
But I have the nagging notion

That he never turned his thinking
Totally from girls and drinking;
And that when he climbed the pulpit
To denounce some sinful culprit
Donne remembered torrid nights,
Swordplay, curses, tavern fights,

Flush-faced bravos in plumed hats,
Joints of beef and pickled sprats,
Wassail of mulled wine and spices,
But most, among these varied vices,
His mistress, with her undone bodice,
Whose breasts and hips could grace a goddess.

So do all self-cozened gulls
Deprived by age of drink and trulls—
Those dotards who in late December
Preach repentance, but remember
How they romped and roared in May
Before they knew that flesh was clay.

How Protestant this late-life failing:
To think that when you're old and ailing
Pure faith alone will serve to quiet
Accusations of past riot.
Though virtuous from weakness solely,
You trust God will impute you holy.

Charity's Gift

When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He said unto His mother: Woman, behold thy son! Then said He to the disciple: Behold thy mother! And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

—John 19: 26-27

Pinioned here, I look downwards to see
My mother weeping in unfettered grief
Her heart transfixed by swords, beholding Me
Hang from this branch like autumn's final leaf.

Disciple John—how much more than the rest
My soul smiles on him in completest love!
Mother and friend, by misery oppressed,
Huddle and hunch together. Raised above

This scene of bleeding spirits, I can make
No sign of recognition or concern
Except to speak out from My wooden stake
And give them to each other, for I yearn

To show the world how *caritas* unties
The bond of blood and flesh, and doing so,
Entwines a new knot even as it dies.
I bid you, *mater dolorosa*, go

And seek Me in the lambs that I hold dear:
The captives ransomed by My bitter cup—
For through this gift I make love's mandate clear:
Go wash each other's wounds, and bind them up.

The Bones of the Armenians

Son of man, can these bones live?

—Ezekiel, 37:3

Not the trump of Gabriel, nor the tumult
Stirred up by a clamorous resurrection
Can awaken bones from that desert nightmare's

Prodigal torment.

Not the prayers from myriad begging voices,
Solemn penance chanted by dirging fathers
In atonement's chorus of expiation

Cleanses the blood-guilt.

Neither screaming pleas of a gang-raped mother,
Nor the pistol shots to the heads of children
Rouse them out of somnolence. Nothing serves to

Summon avengers.

Just the dumb remembrance and silent breathing
Of those few survivors who still can picture
1915's Golgotha, red with murder,

Waiting for answers.

Kipling on Mercenary Soldiers

*Then 'ere's to the Widow at Windsor,
An' 'ere's to the stores an' the guns,
The men an' the 'orses what makes up the forces
O' Missis Victorier's sons.
—Kipling, "The Widow at Windsor"*

The soldier what fights for a livin'
There's nobody cares when he croaks—
He'll never be missed
From the Regiment's list
Like all o' yer regular blokes.

They perished for Queen and for Country;
They wasn't just takin' a wage—
They died in the ranks
Or defendin' the flanks
While starin' down enemy rage.

Not one o' them thought of a shilling
Or a tuppenny piece or a groat—
For nothin's more real
To the soldier than steel
When an Afghan's a-cuttin' his throat.

A paymaster ain't a good sergeant
Who'll steady yer nerve and yer shot—
He don't take a stand
In some damned foreign land
When musketry's makin' things hot.

And no politican can tell you
The reason why you're takin' aim—
They come and they go
In a puppeteer's show
But soldierin's always the same.

There ain't nothin' for it but courage
And love for the mates at yer side—
And no bleedin' speech
Puts a man in the breach
Where some luckless blighter just died.

So when you've scooped up the last cartridge
And the Maxim is heated and jammed,
And it's bare bayonets
And "Forgive us our debts"
And you're facin' a horde o' the damned

It's then that a soldier is measured
As he faces the ricochet's whine—
And no sum o' gold
Makes him do what he's told
And stand to the skirmishin' line.

Snow White and the Seven Johns

Snow: street nickname for cocaine.

You all know the tale of young Snow White, and how
The dwarfs and the Prince saved her bacon.
But if you think that's the true story, well now...
I'm afraid that you're sadly mistaken.

I'll fill you in here on the actual facts
Although they are sordid and smutty.
The case involves women who work on their backs
With morals as yielding as putty.

Snow White was a chippie with ivory-smooth skin
Who hooked from a crib in Savannah,
A city well known for its ladies of sin
(It's almost as bad as Havana).

She had seven Johns who were short, fat, and old,
As ugly as Snow White was pretty.
They were Sleazy and Sloppy and Scruffy, I'm told,
And Shabby and Stinky and Shitty.

The seventh was Smarmy, a mean ghetto tough
Who often gave Snow White a whipping.
She never complained, 'cause he paid her enough,
And Snow needed dough for her tripping.

Yeah, she was a coke-head. Poor Snow White was jinxed
With a craving for snow, and to feed it
She'd do what you asked her, though freaky and kinked,
To get the nose-candy she needed.

Now there was this madam—a “witch,” if you must—
A woman most cruel and unpleasant.
She laced some cocaine with a poisonous dust
And gave it to Snow as a present.

Poor Snow took a whiff of this doctored-up dope
And soon drifted into narcosis.
The back-parlor girls assumed there was no hope—
They often had seen overdoses.

But Smarmy came over and pulled down her drawers—
He gave her a whack on the fanny,
And Snow White awoke, and the rest of the whores
Called such a revival uncanny.

The Johns in the brothel wore seven big smirks,
And Snow was too weak to resist 'em.
They paid for an orgy with all of the works,
And Snow White got pumped like a piston.

Walt Disney, a poltroon of staid bourgeois taste,
Was troubled by anything gritty.
He cleaned up the details, and duly effaced
All marks of the grim inner city.

He made it a tale of a girl and a Prince,
Of cottages, castles, and witches.
He dropped the unpleasantries and the vice, since
That stuff gives Americans twitches.

The Great Milch Cow

You've learned a lot in chatrooms.
You think you can write verse.
Your poetry's a cut above mere zilch now.
Your lemming friends advise you
To open up your purse
And study with the High and Mighty Milch Cow.

You sit in a big circle,
Have muffins and green tea,
And everybody comments on your sonnet.
They tell you it "shows promise"
(As long as you agree
The Great Milch Cow has final say upon it).

The Milch Cow smiles benignly
In sunbursts from above—
She trusts you'll take her criticism rightly.
Your poem is deficient
In comradeship and love;
Your rhetoric's abrasive and unsightly.

She hopes you'll see it her way
And scorn the savage ends
Of strife, confusion, ill will, and defiance.
Good literature's a method
For chatting with one's friends
And setting up a network of alliance.

You squirm in hot discomfort
And wonder if she's heard
Of Juvenal, Lucilius, and Martial;
Of Mencken, Swift, and Byron,
Who wield the lethal word,
And other ballsy types to whom you're partial.

You don't pursue the issue—
Why swim against the tide?
The Great Milch Cow's immune to disputation.
She sits in bovine stupor
With pachydermic hide
And pens the verse of placid retardation.

You realize that it's hopeless—
You're but a lonely voice
Drowned out by her disciples' rapt hosannahs.
A satirist is friendless
While she's the Bard of Choice
For comatose suburban Pollyannas.

The Witness

In memory of Whittaker Chambers (1901-1961)
Gladium candidiorem patria non tenet.

You told them of a secret, hidden life:
Betrayal in the very highest ranks—
They raged, and raised unmitigated strife;
Hot squalls of spite and anger were your thanks.

They tried to shout you down. They shut their ears.
They spat out slanders, fashioned alibis.
They hoped to silence you with threats and jeers—
Whatever would shore up their house of lies.

But now, when all's long done, and you are dead,
The book that you unclasped, like Revelation,
Still speaks the testimony that you bled
Despite their whining, glib prevarication.

It stands unshaken, permanent, and firm
Though liars hiss, equivocate, and squirm.

The Lilacs on Good Friday and Other Poems



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