

② Hist, Memory, Imagination

Chap 8 Job's answer to Bildad

helplessness before God's infinite might

then denies to divine justice

THE HARD HOURS

POEMS BY
ANTHONY HECHT

*Were is that lawhing and that song,
That trayling and that proude gong,
Tho havekes and tho houndes?
Al that joye is went away,
That wele is comen to weylaway,
To manye harde stoundes.*

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rites and ceremonies

Begins with affirmation of God's omnipotence → Jobian conclusion

I THE ROOM

Father, adonoi, author of all things,
of the three states,
the soft light on the barn at dawn,
a wind that sings
in the bracken, fire in iron grates,
the ram's horn,

H a
2 b
4 c
2 a
b
c

Furnisher, hinger of heaven, who bound
the lovely Pleiades,¹
entered the perfect treasuries of the snow,²
established the round

growth of fins
¹ Job 38:31
אִיִּם אֵינִי יִבְרֵן אֶת־
Canst thou bind the chains of
the Pleiades

course of the world, birth, death and disease
and caused to grow
veins, brain, bones in me, to breathe and sing
fashioned me air,³

38:22 אִיִּם אֵינִי יִבְרֵן אֶת־
Hast thou entered
the treasuries of the snow
10. 11

Lord, who, governing cloud and waterspout,
o my King,
held me alive till this my forty-third year—
in whom we doubt—

Who was that child of whom they tell
in lauds and threnes?
whose holy name all shall pronounce
Emmanuel,^{*}
which being interpreted means,
"Gott mit uns"?

funeral lament

b
c
a
b
c

^{the sign of the cross}
I saw it on their belts. A young one, dead,
Left there on purpose to get us used to the sight
When we first moved in. Helmet spilled off, head
Blond and boyish and bloody. I was scared that night.
And the sign was there,
The sign of the child, the grave, worship and loss,
Gunpowder heavy as pollen in winter air,
An Iron Cross.

poet's experience
in WW II

a
b
c
b

38

8-line stanzas riming abab cdcd

* Is 7:14, 8:8 The child whose birth was foretold by Isaiah as the sign to Ahaz that God would deliver them from their enemies. NT = Jesus

God

It is twenty years now, Father. I have come home.
But in the camps, one can look through a huge square
Window, like an aquarium, upon a room
The size of my livingroom filled with human hair.
Others have shoes, or valises
Made mostly of cardboard, which once contained
Pills, fresh diapers. This is one of the places
Never explained.

Warehouse

Out of one trainload, about five hundred in all,
Twenty the next morning were hopelessly insane.
And some there be that have no memorial,
That are perished as though they had never been.
Made into soap.

Who now remembers "The Singing Horses of Buchenwald"?
"Above all, the saving of lives," whispered the Pope.
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde,

Goethe

But for years the screaming continued, night and day,
And the little children were suffered to come along, too.
At night, Father, in the dark, when I pray,
I am there, I am there. I am pushed through
With the others to the strange room
Without windows; whitewashed walls, cement floor.
Millions, Father, millions have come to this pass,
Which a great church has voted to "deplere."

gas chamber

sees himself being
gassed

Are the vents in the ceiling, Father, to let the spirit depart?
We are crowded in here naked, female and male.
An old man is saying a prayer. And now we start
To panic, to claw at each other, to wail
As the rubber-edged door closes on chance and choice.
He is saying a prayer for all whom this room shall kill.
"I cried unto the Lord God with my voice,
And He has heard me out of His holy hill."

Ps. 3:5

אִיִּם אֵינִי יִבְרֵן אֶת־

39

II THE FIRE SERMON

France, 1349

approach of
death as a fox

Small paw tracks in the snow, eloquent of a passage
Neither seen nor heard. Over the timbered hill,
Turning at the fence, and under the crisp light of winter,
In blue shadows, trailing toward the town.
Beginning at the outposts, the foxtrot of death,
Silent and visible, slipped westward from the holy original
east.

a
b
c

mare nostrum

Even in "our sea" on a misty Easter
Ships were discovered adrift, heavy with pepper and tea,
The whole crew dead.

Was it a judgment?

Among the heathen, the king of Tharsis, seeing
Such sudden slaughter of his people, began a journey to
Avignon

With a great multitude of his nobles, to propose to the pope
That he become a Christian and be baptized,
Thinking that he might assuage the anger of God
Upon his people for their wicked unbelief.
But when he had journeyed twenty days,
He heard the pestilence had struck among the Christians
As among other peoples. So, turning in his tracks,
He travelled no farther, but hastened to return home.
The Christians, pursuing these people from behind,
Slew about seven thousand of them.

At the horse-trough, at dusk,
In the morning among the fishbaskets,
The soft print of the dancing-master's foot.

In Marseilles, one hundred and fifty Friars Minor.
In the region of Provence, three hundred and fifty-eight
Of the Friars Preachers died in Lent.

Strasbourg 1349: On St. Valentine's Day 2000
Jews were massacred in the Jewish cemetery where
a huge fire had been made

If it was a judgment, it struck home in the houses of
penitence,
The meek and the faithful were in no wise spared.
Prayer and smoke were thought a protection.
Braziers smoldered all day on the papal floors.

During this same year, there was a great mortality
Of sheep everywhere in the kingdom;
In one place and in one pasture, more than five thousand
sheep

Died and became so putrified
That neither beast nor bird wanted to touch them.
And the price of everything was cheap,
Because of the fear of death.

How could it be a judgment,
The children in convulsions, the sweating and stink,
And not enough living to bury the dead?
The shepherd had abandoned his sheep.

And presently it was found to be
Not a judgment.

The old town council had first to be deposed
And a new one elected, whose views agreed
With the will of the people. And a platform erected,
Not very high, perhaps only two inches above the tallest
headstone,
But easy to view. And underneath it, concealed,
The excess lumber and nails, some logs, old brooms and
straw,

Piled on the ancient graves. The preparations were hasty
But thorough, they were thorough.

A visitor to that town today is directed to
The Minster. The Facade, by Erwin von Steinbach,
Is justly the most admired part of the edifice

<And presents a singularly happy union >

historically accurate

graveyard

high
culture

tour guide

Of the style of Northern France
With the perpendicular tendency
Peculiar to German cathedrals.
No signs of the platform are left, which in any case
Was outside the town walls.

But on that day, Saturday, February 14th,
The Sabbath, and dedicated to St. Valentine,
Everyone who was not too sick was down
To watch the ceremony. The clergy,
The new town council, the students
Of the university which later gave Goethe
His degree of Doctor of Laws.

For the evidence now was in: in Berne, under torture,
Two Jews had confessed to poisoning the wells.
Wherefore throughout Europe were these platforms erected,
Even as here in the city of Strasbourg,
And the Jews assembled upon them,
Children and all, and tied together with rope.

scapegoat

The Fire Sermon
It is barren hereabout
And the wind is cold,
And the sound of prayer, clamor of curse and shout
Is blown past the sheepfold
Out of hearing.

The river worms through the snow plain
In kindless darks.

And man is born to sorrow and to pain
As surely as the sparks
Fly upward.

Job 5: 6-7

Father, among these many souls
Is there not one
Whom thou shalt pluck for love out of the coals?
Look, look, they have begun
To douse the rags.

DE

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
To crie to thee,
And then not heare it crying! Who is strong
When the flame eats his knee?
O hear my prayer,

And let my cry come unto thee.
Hide not thy face.
Let there some child among us worthy be
Here to receive thy grace
And sheltering.

It is barren hereabout
And the wind is cold,
And the crack of fire, melting of prayer and shout
Is blown past the sheepfold
Out of hearing.

III THE DREAM

Rome 16th cent

The contemplation of horror is not edifying,
Neither does it strengthen the soul.
And the gentle serenity in the paintings of martyrs,
St. Lucy, bearing her eyes on a plate,
St. Cecilia, whose pipes were the pipes of plumbing
And whose music was live steam,
The gridiron tilting lightly against the sleeve of
St. Lawrence,
These, and others, bewilder and shame us.
Not all among us are of their kind.
Fear of our own imperfections,
Fear learned and inherited,
Fear shapes itself in dreams
Not more fantastic than the brute fact.

Rome, counter-reformistie, ghetto established

return to rime

1522 - 1560

It is the first Saturday in Carnival.
 There, in the Corso, homesick Du Bellay.
 Yesterday it was acrobats, and a play
 About Venetian magnificos, and in the interval
 Bull-baiting, palm-reading, juggling, but today

Regrets (1558) = his
 homesickness for
 France

The race. Observe how sad he appears to be:
 Thinking perhaps of Anjou, the climbing grace
 Of smoke from a neighbor's chimney, of a place
 Slate-roofed and kindly. The vast majesty
 Of Rome is lost on him. But not the embrace

Of the lovers. See, see young harlequins bent
 On stealing kisses from their columbines.
 Here are the *dolces*, here the inebriate wines
 Before the seemingly austerities of Lent.
 The couples form tight-packed, irregular lines

On each side of the mile-long, gorgeous course.
 The men have whips and sticks with bunting tied
 About them. Anointed Folly and his bride
 Ordain Misrule. Camel and Barbary horse
 Shall feel the general mirth upon their hide.

First down the gantlet, twenty chosen asses,
 Grey, Midas-eared, mild beasts receive the jeers
 And clouts of the young crowd. Consort of brasses
 Salutes the victor at the far end. Glasses
 Are filled again, the men caress their dears,

The children shout. But who are these that stand
 And shuffle shyly at the starting line?
 Twenty young men, naked, except the band
 Around their loins, wait for the horn's command.
 Christ's Vicar chose them, and imposed his fine.

Jews

Du Bellay, poet, take no thought of them;
 And yet they too are exiles, and have said
 Through many generations, long since dead,
 "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, . . ."
 Still, others have been scourged and buffeted

"exiled" in Rome
 for 4 yrs.

And worse. Think rather, if you must,
 Of Piranesian, elegaic woes,
 Rome's grand declensions, that all-but-speaking dust.
 Or think of the young gallants and their lust.
 Or wait for the next heat, the buffaloes.

humane
 literacy?

IV WORDS FOR THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Merely to have survived is not an index of excellence,
 Nor given the way things go,
 Even of low cunning.

Yet I have seen the wicked in great power,
 And spreading himself like a green bay tree.
 And the good as if they had never been;
Their voices are blown away on the winter wind.
 And again we wander the wilderness

Job

p. 43

For our transgressions
 Which are confessed in the daily papers.

Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us
 A very small remnant,
 We should have been as Sodom,
 We should have been like unto Gomorrah.
 And to what purpose, as the darkness closes about
 And the child screams in the jellied fire,
 Had best be our present concern,
 Here, in this wilderness of comfort
 In which we dwell.

Shall we now consider
 The suspicious postures of our virtue,

The deformed consequences of our love,
The painful issues of our mildest acts?
Shall we ask,
Where is there one
Mad, poor and betrayed enough to find
Forgiveness for us, saying,
"None does offend,
None, I say,
None"?"

Listen, listen.
But the voices are blown away.

Turning back to
God

And yet, this light,
The work of thy fingers, . . .

The soul is thine, and the body is thy creation:
O have compassion on thy handiwork.
The soul is thine, and the body is thine:
O deal with us according to thy name.
We come before thee relying on thy name;
O deal with us according to thy name;
For the sake of the glory of thy name;
As the gracious and merciful God is thy name.
O Lord, for thy name's sake we plead,
Forgive us our sins, though they be very great.

It is winter as I write.
For miles the holy treasuries of snow
Sag the still world with white,
And all soft shapes are washed from top to toe
In pigeon-colored light.

Tree, bush and weed maintain
Their humbled, lovely postures all day through.
And darkly in the brain
The famous ancient questions gather: Who
Fathered the fathering rain

Job 38: 26 -
28

That falleth in the wilderness
Where no man is, wherein there is no man;
To satisfy the cress,
Knotweed and moonwort? And shall scan
Our old unlawfulness?

Who shall profess to understand
The diligence and purpose of the rose?
Yet deep as to some gland,
A promised odor, even among these snows,
Steals in like contraband.

Forgiven be the whole Congregation of the Children of Israel,
and the stranger dwelling in their midst. For all the people
have inadvertently sinned.

Numbers 15: 26
said on n/1
210 2

Back to the beginning

Father, I also pray
For those among us whom we know not, those
Dearest to thy grace,
The saved and saving remnant, the promised third,
Who in a later day
When we again are compassed about with foes,
Shall be for us a nail in thy holy place
There to abide according to thy word.

cyclical
continuum

Neither shall the flame
Kindle upon them, nor the fire burn
A hair of them, for they
Shall be thy care when it shall come to pass,
And calling on thy name
In the hot kilns and ovens, they shall turn
To thee as it is prophesied, and say,
|| "He shall come down like rain upon mown grass."

Ps 72: 6

52 26 26ND 3.21

And God will extinguish the fire

"MORE LIGHT! MORE LIGHT!"

for Heinrich Blücher and Hannah Arendt

Composed in the Tower before his execution
These moving verses, and being brought at that time
Painfully to the stake, submitted, declaring thus:
"I implore my God to witness that I have made no crime."

Nor was he forsaken of courage, but the death was horrible, (5)
The sack of gunpowder failing to ignite.
His legs were blistered sticks on which the black sap
Bubbled and burst as he howled for the Kindly Light.

And that was but one, and by no means one of the worst;
Permitted at least his pitiful dignity; (10)
And such as were by made prayers in the name of Christ,
That shall judge all men, for his soul's tranquillity.

We move now to outside a German wood.
Three men are there commanded to dig a hole
In which the two Jews are ordered to lie down
And be buried alive by the third, who is a Pole. (15)

Not light from the shrine at Weimar beyond the hill
Nor light from heaven appeared. But he did refuse.
A Lüger settled back deeply in its glove.
He was ordered to change places with the Jews. (20)

Much casual death had drained away their souls.
The thick dirt mounted toward the quivering chin.
When only the head was exposed the order came
To dig him out again and to get back in. (25)

No light, no light in the blue Polish eye.
When he finished a riding boot packed down the earth.
The Lüger hovered lightly in its glove.
He was shot in the belly and in three hours bled to death.

"More Light! More Light!"

No prayers or incense rose up in those hours
Which grew to be years, and every day came mute
Ghosts from the ovens, sifting through crisp air,
And settled upon his eyes in a black soot. (30)

PTX

Counter-
commentary

Ho