

DEATHCONSCIOUSNESS.

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*L'Ange luy dit cheyfe, ou fist d'uncois de famine dans
tout ton Royaume, ou trois mois de guerre, ou pour le moins trois jours de...*



*En Verité dit David je suis bien en peine
Neanmoins il vaut mieux tomber entre les mains de
Dieu dont les misericordes sont infinies, qu'entre celles
des hommes dont les rigueurs sont implacables.
2. Reg. c. 24. v. 14.*

“I am base, and I am lever; I push the Earth into the water.
Whosoever lives, so shall they die; and may they die a
drowning death, with all of Life inside their mouths, and
naught but stones inside their lungs, like David with the
skull, dwelling upon it in every second, the impossible trials
of ceasing, stopping, ending...”

The Books of Terror and Longing, Book II, Section IX

Dedicated to our Fathers

PREFACE

(It isn't often that I borrow someone else's title, but when fate thrusts something so appropriate into your hands you are a fool not to see it for what it is. The following essay was found in the back pages of a used copy of The Poetic Translations of the Books Of Terror and Longing. I kept it, because it felt right, and things fell into place from there. The author is anonymous.)

When a historian looks back, what he sees is Death. It is everywhere, the universal constant informing every act. Only the Historian is aware of how we are blind to the amount of history pushing into our backs - blind to time and our place in it. We are ignorant of history and ignorant of Death, and only the Historian sees it for what it is. Antiochus was, in this sense, nothing if not a Historian. As he says in the Messages:

“When we become known to Death, and Death known to us, we react as if we are the first; as if we were Adam in the Garden, and death a great injustice, a surprise. But this death matters very little. In truth, it matters not at all, for it is just one more body in a pile. Who are we to shed a single tear over one more dead soul when it is simply another in the unceasing parade of death down our streets, in our fields, in our homes? Why are we surprised when we join it's dancing flood?”

That passage sounds harsh to modern ears, but it perfectly describes the paradoxes of the Historian's trade. As an example: the years 1348 to 1350 were not good ones for human kind. A wave of infectious diseases, varied but overshadowed by the bubonic plague, swept across the globe, killing indiscriminately. Typhus, Influenza, and Small Pox were all prevalent. In just two years the population of Europe was cut by a quarter. The town of Toulouse was home to 30,000 souls in 1335 and only 8000 a century later. 1,400 people died in just three days in Avignon, the seat of the papacy. There was, officially, nowhere to hide. Not a single one of those dead men, women, children, fathers, mothers, lovers, or friends knew that their death was simply one part of the greatest culling of the human race ever known, a simple mark in the “ones” column for the greatest disaster in history. Death has a belt, and he notches it just once, no matter who you are. Not one of those people appreciated the big picture, the great number, over the extinguishing of their life, their loves, their woes and memories and happinesses. Not one of them saw it for what it was. They only saw the sores on their limbs, the milky white in their eyes, the blood in their spit and urine.

Knowing that an individual death is meaningless - any individual death, especially your own - that you are not a person, but a statistic - and noticing, more each day, the countless deaths that occur around you - of other people, of animals, of insects, of the sick and infirm, of accident victims, of plants ripped from the earth and worms crushed beneath the blades of plows - of authors in their rooms, scribbling out desperate words in the backs of books no one will ever read- even the shattering of molecular bonds, the disintegration of atomic structures, happening in every moment, millions in each nanosecond, everywhere -

- This is Deathconsciousness -
And It begs the question - "What is the point?"

Foreword

When the band *Have A Nice Life* contacted me about writing an introduction to Antiochean history for their listeners, I was initially skeptical. Antiocheanism is infamous among Historians - every text is incomplete, historical data sketchy at best, confirmation from secondary sources practically non-existent. There are still people who claim that Antiochus never existed at all, and even amongst religious scholars Antiocheanism is more likely to receive quizzical looks than nods of recognition. I've dedicated much of my life to the study of these strange fragments, these often beautiful and moving and disturbing scraps of history, but the idea of trying to distill it all into something for the average music listener just seemed, well, impossible.

As time passed, however, and Dan, Tim and I spoke further, I became more and more excited about the project. Any attempt to grab hold of the historical Antiochus and his teachings is bound to be a frustrating one - the sheer impenetrability of what documents exist guarantees this. But, perhaps undertaking such a project with the objective of capturing, not exact historical accuracy, but the *feel* of the man and his beliefs, would allow me to bring this fascinating subject further into the public eye. Both Dan and Tim assured me that they didn't feel their music was going to meet with much success ("We're playing songs in a dead genre about believers in a dead religion," Tim remarked, "Who's going to want to listen to that?"), but, regardless of the outcome, I think the effort itself is worthwhile.

If it were you that had disappeared, unknown, into history, you would want someone to try and remember you. You would want someone to try and understand.

So that's what I'll do.



Professor of Religious History, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2007



PART ONE

On An Obscure Text

In Spiritual Exile

Ever since they were introduced to the Western world, *The Books of Terror and Longing* have held a certain type of person in fascination. They've served as inspiration for poetry, music, even a film (*the ill-conceived and unsuccessful "The Devil Sings Softly", 1954, now almost impossible to find*). They've been the subject of several books and innu-

merable senior theses. None less than Aleister Crowley makes an allusion to Antiocheanism in his *Book of Lies* (Chapter 29: “*The Abyss of Hallucinations has Law and Reason; but in Truth there is no bond between the Toys of the Gods. This Reason and Law is the Bond of the Great Lie. Truth! Truth! Truth! crieth the Lord of the Abyss of Hallucinations - Death Is Truth, and Truth is Death!*”). Why, then, does knowledge of Antiochus and the sect he founded remain almost entirely within the academic realm? In other words, why does practically nobody know who he is?

There are multiple reasons. The narrative presented in the *Books*, ending with Antiochus burnt at the stake and awakening to find himself in a grim, frozen afterlife, is hardly an uplifting one. The texts themselves are maddeningly incomplete, and the parts we do possess are often ambiguous and difficult to decipher. Then there is the mystery of the author himself - is his name a reference to the biblical city of Antioch, or to Antiochus IV, who forced the Jews to make additions to the Old Testament that made it seem as if there was no heaven beyond earth? Did Antiochus even exist? If he did exist, why is historical mention of him so rare, especially considering the size of the cult that sprang up around him?

And then, of course, there is the message of the text, perhaps the deepest mystery of all - alternatively one of a seemingly infinite, universal nihilism, and of a just existence containing both this world and the next, with the invisible grinding of the gears of law shuddering away just below the surface of our awareness. The modern mind finds itself both attracted and repelled by Antiochus’ unintelligible world, perhaps more so because the incompleteness of what we see today allows us to project our own hopes and fears onto his teachings.

That which is incomplete can’t help but seem modern.

With these books the mysteries will always be greater than the actual material. We can only attempt to lay out what we know, only be content with the outline we’ve been given by chance. The rest is up to the reader; only the individual can decide what it all means, or if it means anything at all.

We start at the very beginning, but here the fog is already thick. We do not know when Antiochus was born, or where. It is impossible to verify even his existence through documentation from the time, but then, he is hardly alone in this; Jesus of Nazareth wasn’t exactly given a birth certificate. Some scholars have claimed that Antiochus must be taken as a symbol, an entirely metaphorical character, that is to say, the vessel for the message, not it’s author. The theory is intriguing, but without further evidence we must follow what we have (almost all of which is from the *Books* themselves), and accept him as a living, breathing, mortal man.

We have mention of Antiochus living in Italy in 1215. We are not told this directly, but rather deduce it from references made to Antiochus as “The Italian Sorcerer” during a story that appears much later in the text (*Much of the “facts” we know about Antiochus must be deduced in this way. The text’s overwhelming vagueness is legendary. It is as if the reader were assumed to be already familiar with the specifics of the story, and the author simply wanted to get on to the “good parts”.* This has been explained in terms of everything from general incompetence, to cultural cohesiveness, to a method of escaping persecution, to a belief in the sacredness of the facts of the Prophet’s life. Much of it is also a result of the strange manner in which the books emerged in the West - see the discussion of the Poetic Translation for more detail). The Books do not name Antiochus’ mother or father, but instead refer to them as “The smith and his wife”. Antiochus leaves home very early on to seek work in Rome, and nothing is said of his parents after that.

Much has been made of this apparent familial disconnect, but it would not have been uncommon for a boy of Antiochus’ age to go off in search of work. The Fourth Crusade had brought riches from the East to Rome and Venice; the economy, kept afloat by an influx of looted gold and silk, was booming, but only in the cities. The life of a farmer, vacillating in and out of a state of serfdom, would have seemed grim compared to the opportunities in Rome.

We know nothing of Antiochus’ youth, and it is not discussed in the text outside of an apocryphal story of a 10-year old Antiochus foretelling the deaths of several townspeople by talking with gore-crows. The crows reveal to Antiochus that 15 villagers, including the “Townshend” (a position similar to that of mayor in the modern day), will plummet to their deaths off a jagged cliff named Via Privare (*A veiled reference to “se vita private”, a Latin term denoting suicide*). The villagers, terrified, quickly form a search party and begin exterminating any crow they can find, setting them ablaze, crushing them with rocks, even crucifying them on doorways and tree-trunks (*The Crucified Crow became a symbol, much like the “Jesus Fish”, used to identify other Antiocheans during their many years of persecution, and is still used today*). The mob, half-mad with terror and rage, finally came into a clearing in which a Congress of Crows has gathered (*Crows have long been held in folklore to have human-like powers of cognition, and nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the belief in the Crow’s Congress, a political organization existing alongside human society, in which animals can bear grievances both against each other and against human beings. The actions of the Congress are fodder for several Chechen and Georgian children’s tales, the most famous of which being that of the Crow And Bear War, in which a young child is drafted to fight in an apocalyptic animal war. The popular version of this tale, written in verse by Apti Bisultanov, great-grandfather of the popular modern author of the same name, is one of the best-selling Chechen children’s books to this day*), and, vision clouded by hatred, rushed at them with all their might, brandishing their knives and shovels, torches and nails. The crows, on command, suddenly evaporated into the sky, so many in number that they blocked out the sun. In the fumbling

darkness the villagers plummeted off the cliff, which the crows had disguised with grasses and twigs, and were dashed to bits on the rocks below.

This story is widely accepted to be an invention of Sabrus the Younger, an Antiochean poet of the 15th century (*An interesting figure in his own right, Sabrus is the best-known Antiochean poet. A Prussian born in Poland to parents of an unorthodox and persecuted religious sect, he did not have an easy life. A frail and thin child, he was given an education by the local Christian monastery - his family were Cryptonarlists, and so hid their religious affiliations from those around them [more on Cryptonarlists later]. It was through this affiliation that Sabrus became involved, unexpectedly, with the famous Battle of Grunwald. When the cry for reinforcements went up, Sabrus was one of the many peasants who were suddenly conscripted into the battle. Being Christian, the Teutonic Knights felt assured that the denizens of the monastery would fight alongside them, against the Pagans, for Christ, especially seeing as their presence had been ordained by a Papal Golden Bull. Sabrus, terrified and armed only with his father's pitchfork, was quickly lost within the tide of the battle, frantically stabbing anyone he could find, regardless of which side they were on. In this way he found himself, at the end of the fighting, within a huge group of other peasants surrounding the last remaining Teutonic Knights, the peasants singing their anthems as they mercilessly cut the armored invaders to pieces. The wild slaughter continued all night, and according to some involved Pagan blood rituals and Devil Worship, though this can safely be attributed to latter-day Christian revisionism. Sabrus returned home practically comatose, and was never the same. The fighting was officially ended by the Peace of Thorn on February 1st, and the next day Sabrus began work on what would become his magnum opus, the Sheol Cycle, a bizarre and moving account of one mortal's descent to Helgrind, the corpse-tower at the mouth of Hell, to retrieve the head of his beloved, which he has learned has been planted in the ground and is now mother to a tree of white flowers. Sabrus maintained that the story was autobiographical, and entirely true. After his completion of the work Sabrus disappears from the historical record, and we hear no more of him).*

It is in Rome that Antiochus' story truly begins. Much is made, in the *Books*, of Antiochus' first impressions of the city, entering through its massive gates for the first time, and leaving behind, forever, the simple world that his parents inhabited. The images of Rome, the undeniable center of the world, throne of western Christianity, burned themselves into his mind; with its "crawling arms of mortar and stone", Antiochus felt he was being consumed, devoured by "a monstrous mouth into which men struggle and are carried...a throat that never closes and never breathes". He was at once affronted and mesmerized by the sheer weight of the human presence around him. Rome was the pinnacle of all that man could accomplish.

Rome was also, however, a dead civilization; the seeds of its destruction had been sown ages ago, and were slowly bearing fruit. Antiochus sensed this intuitively, and he made his feelings abundantly clear; however, we must remember that the *Books* were most likely written many

years afterward, when Antiochus had been expelled from Rome and then returned preaching his new gospel. His views on the city, and on Roman society, were irrevocably shaped by his persecution there. It is hard to believe that young Antiochus, fresh off the farm, would not have been at least a little awed by the grandiosity that was Rome.

Whatever the truth may be, Antiochus' revulsion to Rome came to form a central part of his belief system in the doctrine of "New Rome", the sprawling, dehumanizing city that would one day "overtake all lands, making space itself only an expression of it's own being...there will not be anywhere that is not Inside it, there will not be anywhere that is not Within it". New Rome can be seen as the theological opposite of Christ's "Kingdom of Heaven"; a literal, physical expression of the inevitable loss of grace on Earth.

About 5 years after his arrival, Antiochus was forced to leave Rome, ostensibly because of his involvement with a high-born woman (the wife of a Roman Senator) who died shortly after meeting him (*This story was given a modern treatment in George Carn's The Mistress and The Glass, 1987*). The relationship alone, if it existed, would have been enough to force Antiochus into hiding for a time (*Antiochus must have been extremely charismatic, even at this early stage, and the idea of a romantic liaison above his station is hardly as far-fetched as some scholars, Roger Hareaut first among them, have suggested*), but it is rather the woman's death that seems to be the real reason for his exile. Though there is no documentation of Antiochus' involvement, we do have historical record of the woman's death: Joan of the Orsini, dead in 1225, of an apparent slashing of the throat (*Here we run into a difficulty of translation. "Slashing" is the word most commonly used, but some have argued that a more accurate translation, utilizing eyewitness accounts as evidence, would be "tearing". Though the argument may seem academic, it actually has great influence on how we view Antiochus' involvement. The general modern interpretation of the event has been that Joan, her lover forced into hiding and herself publicly shamed, killed herself in a fit of grief by raking a sharpened coin across her neck. This version is generally backed up by the fact, noted in the death papers, that her personal chamber, where she was found, face down, was securely locked. However, if her neck was, in fact, not "slashed" but rather "torn open", as one eyewitness put it, the probability of a suicide becomes considerably less likely. It is rare that a person, particularly a noble-born Roman woman, is capable of ripping her own throat open. It is interesting to note that all parties, at the time, apparently considered it to be a case of murder. The story of suicide was most likely circulated later to cover up rumors of the affair. Authorities continued to pursue Antiochus, unsuccessfully, for several years afterwards. The sharpened coin was never found, and legends were later to attest that, with her final act of strength, she lifted the coin to her bloodied lips and swallowed it. On a lighter note, the trick of sharpening a coin into a weapon became known as "Sharp Caesaring" in Latin, and was a popular trick among Rome's less savory populace*).

Antiochus himself only mentions the event briefly, and then in cryptic language describing his general exile. He writes:

*“And I waited in Rome for that sun to go down, that never-setting sun,
for it to disappear upon the city,
but night never fell, like there was a wall around me, and I could not move
for it’s closeness, blocking out not light but dark, and there was nowhere I
could go to cover my face, to rest my eyes from it’s glaring,
and every stone was hot, and I could not stand still,
and the fire that heated it was deep within the city, deep under all the earth
they used to dig their trenches and their sewers and their cemeteries,
and I moved back and forth and lifted my feet and shook my shackles
but it sent it’s fingers into me
every second of every day all the same
and I left that place where
they will never stop, they will never, ever stop
naked but for my pain, with nothing but horror and burning skin and
innocence around me.”*

IN THE ARMS OF THE BLACK BANNER

Almost nothing is known of what happened to Antiochus in his exile. Certain things can be deduced by his actions on his return to Rome, however. He must have spent a great deal of time developing his religious beliefs. When he walked back into Rome 25 years later, he was a completely different man: confident, charismatic, and charged with the zeal possessed by those who believe they have discovered the One True Faith.

What caused this change? There are many theories, but most center on the region he eventually ended up in, the Caucasus. We know he lived with a group of ethnic Armenians, though where exactly this settlement was is unknown. He claimed to have spent time in what is known today as Poland. It is unlikely that he engaged in any structured religious training - his belief system became so different, so unorthodox, that it is doubtful he would have been long tolerated even if he had entered a religious institution.

Many scholars postulate that some incredibly traumatic event must have affected Antiochus during this time, especially considering the tone of his later teachings. If so, Antiochus never mentioned it. The closest we have to a remark on this subject is a reply he once made to a Roman poet: “The only tragedy,” he said, “is life, and that is more than enough.”

The most interesting theory on these “lost years” (*Christians should note the similarity to the “missing” years of Christ’s life. Jesus more or less disappears from the Bible during his teenage years, only to return full-grown for the bulk of the New Testament. It has proven, even with an army of Christian scholars desperate to find a definitive answer, nearly impossible to come to any conclusion about these lost years. It’s even been claimed, by Nicholas Notovich in his 1894 book “The Unknown Life Of Jesus Christ”, that Jesus visited India and spent many years in Tibet. The similarities between Jesus and Antiochus are proof to some that Antiochus*

himself was an invention, with a life designed, from the beginning, to mirror that of Jesus) stems from an interesting event in the Caucasus region during this time. The story comes to us as part of the folkloric tradition of the Avars, in modern day Dagestan. It centers on a small village, nestled at the foot of Bazardyuzi Mountain (the tallest point in the Caucasus; Dagestan itself means "Land of Mountains"). A wandering sorcerer made his way to the town, and the inhabitants, superstitious and believing the wanderer could foretell the future, gave him a place of honor and invited him to stay. He lived there for 2 years, and became a very respected man. His predictions always came true - he knew when it would rain, how the crops would turn, could predict eclipses and even who would live and die. He prophesied with such unerring accuracy that the villager's respect came close to worship, and the wanderer ruled the town in all but name.

One night, a restless villager spotted the prophet at the edge of a high cliff, looking out onto the rocky landscape. On his shoulder there was a crow, and the crow seemed to be whispering into the prophet's ear (*The parallels between this story and that of Sabrus the Younger are clear. It is possible that Sabrus knew of this tale, and used it as inspiration for his own, though considering the barriers of both time and language, it is unlikely*). When the prophet learned that this man had seen him in conversation with the bird, he pronounced that the man would be dead by nightfall, and so it was: He dropped dead in only one panicked hour, seemingly for no reason.

For 5 days and 5 nights, the prophet did not emerge from his tent. The people anxiously wondered what would happen - would he leave them? Could he no longer see the future? They worried for their crops, for their trade, for the continued existence of their beautiful village at the foot of the mountain..and, in a deeper sense, they worried that they had crossed some boundary; that they now knew too much about the dark, inner workings of the true world.

At the end of the 5th night, just as the sun was rising, the prophet left his tent. The villagers had gathered outside, keeping vigil in case he might need something from them. When he finally emerged, however, the villagers gasped in horror: over the prophet's entire body there now bristled pitch-black crow's feathers. His head was a horrible mockery of bird and man; a jagged beak jutted from his face, and his eyes were deep and black and did not reflect the weakened sunlight. His hands, still human but long and curled, grasped at the air again and again, as if seeking something to hold on to but finding nothing but the empty morning darkness.

With a terrifying, croaking voice like that of a crow and a dog and a man bent together, the prophet announced that the crops would no longer grow; that the women would no longer give birth; that the children would fall asleep and never wake up; that the men would lose their sight, and then their legs, lie limp on the ground without being able to

see what was around them, powerless to move away as the animals came down the mountain to devour them; that the women would have all protruding pieces of flesh removed, breasts, ears, noses, lips, fingers and toes, that their hair would grow long and would be trampled under their own feet, constantly tangling their legs and forcing them to shuffle slowly from place to place, that they would lose their memory and not be able to remember where their homes were, who their husbands were, would no longer recognize the faces of their children to bury them; that only one among them, only one would live, unharmed; and that that person would be chosen by simple, random chance. That there would be no reason to it at all; that there was no way to affect the outcome.

And with that, the prophet disappeared, simply vanished into thin air.

The story of the village at the foot of the mountain came to a nearby town with the arrival of the person they referred to as “yaşlı adam”, roughly translated as “old timer” (the man reportedly lived to be over 100, and said he could not be killed). When he came to the village, however, he was only 10 years old. He rode an old donkey, trudging laboriously over the rocks and hills. In his hands he carried a large flag, struggling to keep it aloft, skinny and malnourished from the journey. The flag was stiff and solid black. The story he told terrified the townspeople. The flag, the boy said, had been white; it was black with dried blood, the blood of his parents, brothers and friends; he had done his best to bury them, but the birds were on them now, and all he could do was bear the banner, the black banner, to remind himself of them.

It is interesting to note that modern Antiochean communities in the Caucasus occasionally use the Black Banner in religious ceremonies, although it is impossible to tell whether the use of the Banner stems from Antiochean ritual, or from one of the many other cultural strains running through the region: The Black Banner plays a prominent role in certain sects of Islam as well - and the people who received the young boy were not Avars themselves, but Kumyks, a group of Sunni muslims. Imam ShamyI, hero of the Caucasus Liberation movement, was also from this region, and also used the Black Banner as the symbol of his jihad against Russian domination. The symbolism of the Black Banner is so complicated that, though it is tempting to connect this story with the exiled Antiochus, and through him, modern Antiochean ritual, it is impossible to be certain as to where its use actually comes from.

And we are no closer to understanding anything about Antiochus' lost years.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE

Antiochus could never have known this, but his return to Rome would be the cause of centuries of anguish, torment, and oppression. In a way,

his belief in himself, his very existence, was the catalyst to the apocalypses he foresaw.

Antiochus returned to Rome in the year 1250. Why he returned, why he chose that moment, is uncertain. The years prior had been relatively peaceful ones for the medieval world; Roger Bacon had just published the first major work detailing the chemical properties of gunpowder, setting in a motion a series of events that would later lead to inestimable death and misery - but for the time, all was quiet. It is possible that Antiochus felt this would be an opportune time to return to Italy, or that he felt that his philosophy had reached a point of completion, and was now ready for dissemination to the outside world; it's possible he simply did it on a whim.

When Antiochus walked once more through the gates of Rome he was a very different man than he had been 27 years earlier. He was gaunt, no longer possessing the sinewy muscles of the smith's son. His beard had grown long, and stretched over his face and down his chest like patch of briars. He carried everything he possessed on his back - a black and gray robe and a satchel with some food. His eyes had not changed - they were still dark gray, still piercing, still intriguing and cold.

The main portion of the *Books* deals with the period between when Antiochus first stepped through those massive Roman gates, and when he was burned alive, withering on a stake, outside them. It is, first and foremost, the tale of Antiochus' martyrdom, the death of a man who had come to possess dangerous ideas. The parallels to the New Testament are clear, and it would have been natural for later Antiocheans to perceive Antiochus as belonging to the religious prophetic tradition that included Jesus (*Whether or not Antiochus, and thus the Antiocheans, were Christians is a matter of considerable debate. Modern Antiocheans clearly perceive themselves as being within the Christian tradition - Antiochus is seen not as a son of god, but rather an Earthly prophet come to clarify and elaborate the message found in the Bible. They view the Books of Terror And Longing as a necessary and important commentary on the Bible. Antiochus, on the other hand, occupied less clear theological territory. He mentions or makes reference to Jesus often in his teaching; he uses biblical imagery and discusses biblical stories. However, many interpret his teachings to be opposed to Christian beliefs, even atheistic. He presents versions of history that directly conflict with Biblical history, though we can't be sure as to whether he meant these literally, or as elaborate metaphors. Antiochus lived in a time when Christianity was not only the most common religion, but the official religion of the Roman State. Not conforming to the Christian mainstream could have meant punishment or death - indeed, Antiochus' life ended when he strayed too far from the accepted philosophies of the time. We live in an age when intellectual freedom is prized, when invention and exploration of the self are admirable. This was not the world Antiochus lived in; the medieval mind was a constrained, limited organ. All around him were philosophical areas that were not to be travelled in, Terra Mentis Incognita, Here Be Monsters of the Soul - to travel in those strange lands meant the destruction of the self and the death of the body. Not many of us would have the strength of will necessary to make*

those voyages. Comparatively, we are weak philosophers; not many of us would be able to walk into the Lion's Den). At the same time, the story of Antiochus, as it has come down to us, is very different, both in substance and tone - so much so that the casual reader is forcefully struck, not by their similarities, but by their differences.

Antiochus immediately began teaching upon entering the city. He simply stood on street corners, not shouting his message, but rather stopping individuals in the crowd, pulling them aside and speaking to them, one on one. Antiochus insisted that he chose these people because God told him to, that it was not random; he knew which of those in the crowd would accept his message, would truly "hear" him. From what we know, his success rate was extremely high - by the end of his first night in Rome he had almost 15 devoted followers.

Antiochus continued recruiting in this way for several weeks, and his intense preaching style, unorthodox beliefs, and, perhaps most importantly, visibly growing crowds, quickly caught the attention of the authorities.

All around him dark clouds were gathering, and every step he took carried him deeper into them.

(Taken from The Books Of Terror And Longing, the Poetic Translations, Book 1, Part IV, translated by William Shelley, All Stars Aground Books)

*On the 14th day of Antiochus' teaching in Rome
he was approached by a young boy
who had long scars on his face and neck
like serpents intertwined, they held him
they stroked his face and chin, like a mother they comforted him
and his voice was low and dark
like the earth, a grating sound
and all the men grew silent
though they were learned
and knew many philosophies
and knew of that which is not what it is
and of the aethers and the elements
and let the boy speak
regardless of his clothes, which were torn
to show him their generous spirits*

*"All these questions you ask"
the child began
"are only comments, they dance around the problem
with fine words and delicate manners they approach you
but you circle your real desire, arms locked at your sides
as children circle in our games
hands over eyes in giddy enjoyment
you do not wish to find
that which is obscured
you wish to not find it."*

*At this, Antiochus closed his eyes
and rolled back his head
as if looking upon something both high and within
and withdrew his arms into his cloak.*

*Cassius, the doctor
who tended to those with sores
and lesions and poured into their wounds
foul salts
grew angry and replied with a harsh voice
"We seek Truth
only that we seek, and we spend our lives in searching
with words we reveal that which is covered
we root out that which is false
those whose falseness is discovered in the contradictions of their language
there are none here who avoid truth
we are honest men, all
all that we wished to ask we have asked."*

*And some of the men muttered, and nodded
but many more rested their eyes on the boy
on his scars, on his deformity
and they were uneasy.*

*And the child spoke
"Then why has no one asked the question?
Why has no one said the words that we all long to hear
Why have I not heard those words on your lips, that you whisper in your
sleep
when you are restless and your heart cannot stop pounding
inside your chest to be set free of its relentless tasks
of the prison that is your life, to which you enslave all the parts of your
body?"*

*Cassius began to sweat,
and was angry,
and said
"You are only a crippled child,
what question could you ask
that I could not?"*

*And Antiochus spoke.
His voice was a cold breeze
and quickly silenced the assembly,
and they pressed their hands to their stomachs
and quickly drew their robes around them
and shuddered
as if they knew not where they were or where they were going
and were lost on a foreign road with no stars to guide them
all stars dead in the ground
"He wants to know,"
Antiochus said,
"what happens when we die."*

And he said, then:

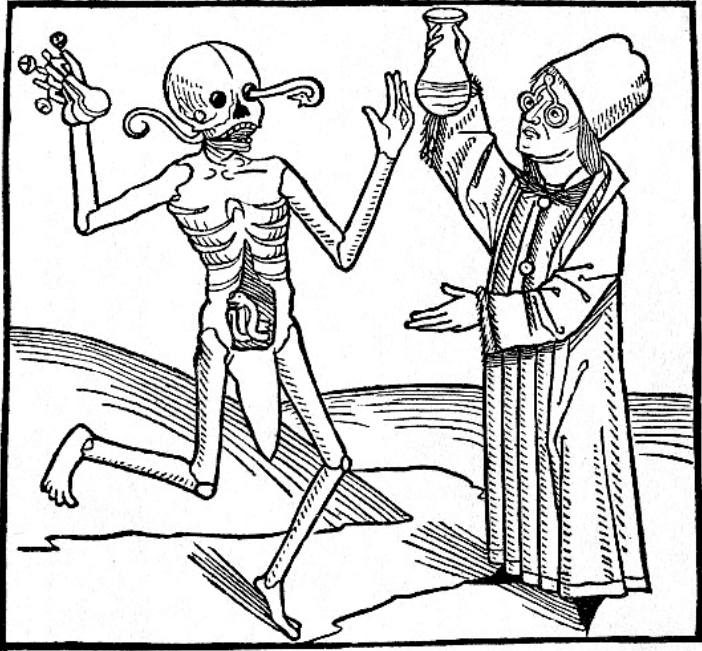
*the universe is dark around us
a mass of stars and air
but as thick as the wood of the trees
and it is into it that we go
when our bodies are killed
and we are only killed
only killed
killed by time and killed by life
i promise you, i promise you this!
that there is no such thing as a natural death
and being born is a sentence of death
and giving birth is an act of murder
every one of you have murdered your sons
you have murdered all of them.
and that is what being human means
and it is the physical shock of this
being born as what you are
the unbearable trauma
that forces the soul from its shell
as a man who clings desperately
to the edge of a cliff
may be made to release his hands
by a fierce wind.
There have been many that have said
that death is like a deep sleep
but it is not peaceful and it is not restful
and the ones that have told you this
seek only to make themselves feel better
better about what life is
but I do not care for your feelings
because your feelings are meaningless, completely
and utterly
meaningless
weightless.
Death is a great horror:
immediately upon leaving the body
the deceased human being becomes the sole spectator
of a marvelous panorama of hallucinatory visions
all things became the cloudless sky
and a mountain of clearest glass
opens up from the blackness
and punctuates the air above it with it's fingers
and causes pure death to rain towards him
and there are no words to describe
what it is truly like
you cannot know it
it as if god himself
had bled out onto the ground
and everywhere, everywhere
is the stain of it
we are soaked in it
and it all smells of copper
but this is false!
it is a spectre
it is a phantom*

anguish of a writhing spirit
reflected against the purest backdrop of nothingness
because, oh, the death of a god! the pain of his blood!
that would give meaning.
But there is no god in death!
you will not see him, you will not find him.
god is deathless.
what use does god have for death?
that father of all things
what use has he for a broken toy? what use has he for the shattered vase,
the broken vessel?
what use has god for death?
and what use has god for the dead?
when you die you pass out of god's realm.
you pass from his sight.
and the spirit stays
cocooned in the glass mountain
wrapped in those beautiful un-lights
until, whispered into his ear
those cold, nothing words
shudder downwards in a spiral
and, like earth spinning into water
broken apart into pieces unlimited in number
their very force causes deep lines of fracture
to appear in the very face of the mountain
those awe sounds and radiances
first pitch upwards
rising screams and calls
and then finally cease altogether
the silence echoing everywhere
lingering in space
and through every time
and the visions of the Afterdeath stop
and in one clean perfect moment
of absolute, impenetrable nothingness
everything simply
stops.

But in grief we do not claw our chests
we do not tear our clothes
we do not gnash our teeth, for though it lasts as long as it possibly can
there is no suffering
and there is no lack of suffering.
No joy
no lack of joy
there is no cause
and no cause of causes.
God, the Great Pitier,
is not present to keep the tally or to write your name.
There is no death.
Because there is no life.

This is the question
and this is the answer.
We are all trapped together
we are all piled together,

*with no order
just a pile of limbs and faces and legs and fingers
and you may cry out
please, please, please release me
please let me breathe
please let me stand
but there will never be any reply
as there was never any cry to reply to.
Once you have the answer
your life is over
all of you here
if you have heard my voice then
your life is over
your life is over.
Because you sought truth
and now you have it.
Death is Truth
and Truth is Death.*



PART TWO

I Am Base and Lever

THE GREAT NEGATION

The Antiocheans would likely have remained simply another religious minority inside the bustling metropolis of Rome, never spreading outside the borders of Italy, if it had not been for the horrible persecutions they suffered. What's more, even taking into account the radical and disturbing nature of their beliefs, they likely would never have suffered those persecutions if it had not been for the death of Marisa Giovan, and the series of murders that followed.

Once again, Antiochus was to be involved in the death of a high-born Roman woman. By this time, he was well settled in Rome; it had been several months since his arrival, and he had gathered around him a fanatical band of 20 disciples, as well as a larger group of more casual converts (*Numbers at this point become sketchy. Considering the events*

that followed, if they are truly to be attributed to the Antiocheans, the group must have numbered around 100 at it's largest). Antiochus no longer needed to energetically seek new followers on the streets of Rome; he was free to preach as he wished, and word of his strange beliefs began to draw larger and larger audiences. His sect was, in other words, becoming self-sufficient, and self-replicating.

This is most likely how Marisa Giovan came to be in the audience one evening (*Giovan is not what we can call a "traditional" Roman name, especially for the time. It is almost certain that, with so many different authors translating these stories, that the real name has been corrupted beyond recognition, or possibly conflated with "Giovanni", a name that, while Italian, doesn't fit into the time period described*); intellectual curiosity. It was not entirely uncommon for members of the higher classes to come and watch one of Antiochus' sermons (although there isn't much evidence that many of them stayed with the sect afterwards), but it must have been very uncommon for a high-born woman to attend. The place of women in society, though considerably more liberalized than it had been during the time of the Caesars, was still, to a large part, conscripted and confined to the domestic sphere. She must have been an extremely strong-willed woman, both to simply manage to be at such a place unaccompanied, and to feel comfortable defying the social mores of her time with such openness.

Was Antiochus aware of who she was? Did he sense that spirit within her, and pick her out because of it? It is impossible to know; we certainly have evidence for Antiochus' ability to read people, to understand their personalities...and their weaknesses. That night, in that crowded plaza, candles flickering, casting shadows onto the rapt faces of his followers, the night air filling his lungs - can there be any doubt that he was, as the *Books* say, "in a fit of inspiration"? His words cut through the crowd with unexpected power that night; he swayed above them, shouting, then whispering, holding the gaze of every upturned, mesmerized face.

It is best, perhaps, to switch here to the version of events for which we have historical evidence.

10 members of the Roman army were sent to quell what had become a "noisome disturbance". One of them, Aquila, whose family name is lost to us, later told a writer of his experiences, which were briefly recounted in a compendium of the decade's political and religious problems. I will quote him here in his entirety.

"It was a horrible sight. I have not forgotten, not for a moment. I've seen battle. I know what that is. This was just like a battle, just like a battle field, but with less dead, but that made it worse, somehow. When we got there we thought it was just a regular disturbance - some religious cult, practicing their ecstasies - for a moment I thought they were Dionysians, since they were all dancing, they had their hands straight

up, stretched up in the air, and their heads were lolling back and forth on their shoulders, like they were dead drunk. Their legs were going everywhere, and they were kicking, jumping, running around, or just rocking back and forth. You have to understand this, though - they weren't drunk. They hadn't touched a drop. So, we just started pushing them aside - ordering them to go home, to get out of the street, that kind of thing - but it was like they couldn't hear us. They just kept dancing there, heads all loose...that's when I started getting nervous. I pushed one of them, she fell to the ground pretty hard, but she kept dancing there - writhing on the ground exactly the same as she'd been doing on her feet - it just wasn't right, it was like we weren't there at all. I could tell, the others with me, they were starting to feel it, too. We pushed a bit harder now - it's strange, I've fought for the empire, I've been wounded 4 times, and I've never lost my nerve - but I think I started to panic, that night. By the time we got to the center of the group I was sweating, my heart was pounding. We pushed our way to the middle and that's when we saw it - her. That's when we saw her. I couldn't take my eyes off her - she was kneeling, still - her head was hung down, but she was still upright and on her knees - she was holding the hilt of a knife, and the blade had been driven so hard into her neck that I could see the tips of her fingers coming out the back - the blade had killed her, I'm sure of it, but how had she driven her hand through her own neck, then? - and there was blood everywhere, absolutely everywhere - I've never seen so much blood come out of one person - do you know they say it was a miracle, those people? - maybe it was. There wasn't blood on a single one of them. Their leader, he was standing right there, hands at his side, smiling, just watching and thinking and he didn't say a thing - he was so close to her, but there wasn't a single drop on him. He was humming. Just standing there, surrounded by all this blood, humming."

What the centurion said is true: Antiocheans do look on the death of Marisa Giovan as a miracle. It is the first, and most important, miracle of the Antiochean religion, and marks the true birth of Antiocheanism as a *faith*. Much like the resurrection of Christ, this death marks the beginning of Antiochus' deification. What seemed to the Romans to be a senseless murder, the Antiocheans saw as the ultimate act of Faith (in this case, Faith in Death) over Rationality.

Antiochus taught that there were two conflicting forces in the universe: not Good and Evil, but Negation and Life. Life is the animating power, that which gives everything movement. Negation is the undoer, the force that ends creation and destroys what is created.

Life is represented, in human existence, by Rationality, or Reason. Reason is the creative force of the human mind; it is constantly constructing, building new ideas and bringing them, through effort, into the material world. In this sense, Rationality is positive, as it increases the number of entities in the universe.

Negation is just that: the negation of life, creation, and being. It is represented in human life as Death, but actually fulfills a much larger role; it is negation that is at work when a theory is disproved, when a plant is uprooted, or when a relationship is ended. Negation is the antithesis of Life, the end of every thing.

Antiochus believed that people inherently cling to Rationality; they long for it, because it represents life. There is also an inherent fear of death; they recoil from death, ignore it, pretend it doesn't exist, desperately hold to their sense of Reason and fairness in an attempt to convince themselves that Negation won't affect them and the things they create; that they, themselves, will not be negated.

Theories similar to this are not uncommon in the modern day, but most of them hold that the universe is in some kind of balance, that Life and Negation are two sides of the same concept. Antiochus believed that Negation is more powerful than Life. It is far easier, he would point out, to destroy than to create. It is far easier to die, or kill another person, than to give birth. Although the universe is in a state *close to balance* between these forces, the scales are tipped in the direction of Negation.

What this means is that the universe, eventually, will be overcome by Death. The deaths we see around us, all those little destructions, from swatted flies to dogs run over by cars to the death of a lover, all of these are simple echoes of the great universal death that is our fate. As we die, so all of existence will die. As we die, so will the very concept of being.

This is known to Antiocheans as The Great Negation, and they look upon it with the same yearning as Christians looking upon the Second Coming.

This was the subject Antiochus spoke of on the night he met Marisa Giovan.

We can't know exactly what he said that night, but we can imagine: the crowd, first curious, then apprehensive, the words sounding harsh to their ears - not everyone, not everything! Surely, something survives - perhaps a few of them call out from the crowd, looking for some qualification, Surely, if we Believe - because this is what they get from other religions, there is an apocalypse, but if you Believe - if you choose the right God - then you will be spared, and you will be saved - but no, Antiochus screams, NO - it is not an apocalypse, there will be no apocalypse, even the apocalypse will be dead - there will be nothing to be destroyed - there will be no universe to end - and no one will be spared - and being spared would not be the same as being saved - it is the dead who will be saved - and we will all be dead, and we will all be saved - and perhaps, now, the crowd is more restless, they shift back and forth on the balls of their feet, they grasp the lining of their pockets with sweaty hands - and Antiochus is gesturing now, his movements are

frantic, but powerful, somehow, they are all in his sway, they are all looking at him with something more like awe - he is almost radiant as he pulls a woman from the crowd - her shawl falls around her shoulders and she is beautiful, her hair is so black, like a raven's feathers - and he is speaking to her, and she is speaking back, and the crowd quiets instantly, to hear them - you, lady, let me see your hands - my hands, why? - just hold them out - and she does, palms up, like she is pleading with God - you are a woman of wealth, I can see this in your hands - yes, I am, she says, and you could have just asked me and I would have told you - and there is a short ripple of laughter through the crowd, they like her, this woman, this woman who shouldn't be there, they like her for her fearlessness because they are afraid - and Antiochus smiles at her - and she smiles at him - do you have a husband, he asks - how improper, not the way at all - yes, she answers - and a child, he asks - yes, she answers - and do you love that child? - of course I love my child, as every mother loves her child - and you know that this child will die - of course, all men must die, it is the way - but do you know it, do you really know it? Do you think about it? Do you lie awake at night, dark all around you, listening to the child breathing in the next room, that soft in-out, that gentle sighing, and know that the child is already in the ground, already cold, do you know that his hands will grow to be like ice and will cease to move, and that you will hold his hand and you will mourn and cry but you will not be able to open those fingers, those fingers that held yours in that grip that is so strong, somehow, the grip of a child who has no fear, no ability to see life for what it is, for isn't fear born into us the very moment we understand? Doesn't the fear come in the very moment, *the very moment* you see life, you look around you, you notice the world outside, the world of foreign things, the not-you things, and the fear creeps into you when you realize that this shell around you, this pink and breathing thing, offers no protection from even a needle, a rock, an broken piece of glass, which is only sand, in that very second of knowledge you become afraid, afraid for the rest of your life, and do you think about that child pierced through by swords, swallowed by beasts, eaten by desperate men, set on fire, tossed from a balcony, head bashed in, brains bashed out, dead, dead, dead, *a dead thing*, your child is already a dead thing - and you are already a dead thing - for were you not once a child? And didn't you feel those same fears - those fears that child is feeling right now, coursing through his body, tensing every muscle, cramping every inch of nerve, heart racing - didn't you feel it, too? And do you think about it, how you will die - how it could happen at any time - does anyone live to their last year? The very limits of their life? No - every life is cut short - every life is cut in half - there is no such thing as a natural death - every death is murder - and you will be murdered just the same - struck by lightning - trampled by a horse - stabbed by a lover - stabbed by a father - stabbed by a stranger, left to bleed and die and rot in an alley and your body not found for weeks, for weeks, in the sun, rats on your arms and face, insects in your hair and skin - killed by the plague - cursed - drowned in the lake you swam in as a child - drowned in the bath - choked - strangled - always, and forever, these hands on your throat - these elbows on your chest, pressing in, pushing

down - this breath on your face, filling your nose, the spit in your mouth - this is LIFE - THIS IS LIFE - this is what we are - and there is nothing that is not this, nothing different, no place that is safe, no golden age - no age free of death - and your child, and your mother and father, and every single one of your friends, every person on the street, every person in the buildings you pass, your teachers, your enemies, your Self - they are all dead - they are already dead - and you are dead - so how can you feel love at all - you are loving a corpse - you are kissing your mother's dead forehead - you are holding your father's dead hand - you are laughing with a corpse - you are screaming in a cemetery - you are holding your dead son, cradling a piece of wax, nursing a cold mass of dead flesh - and if this is so - and it is so, do not lie to yourself - do not say that being alive made it all worthwhile - do not say that they lived full lives - because no one lives any life at all - nothing lives - and if this is true - then why - why do you stay here - why do you continue - why do you not have the courage and the heart and the truth inside you - to take this knife - to hold it to your throat - to overcome the whims of life - to defeat life - because death is truth - and truth is death - and we move towards that which is true - and move to death - shuffle to it - but you have the courage to run towards it - to welcome it - to not live in fear of it - to not live in dread of it - always pretending, always lying - saying you don't see it, that it is not there - that these people are alive - that you are alive - when all you are is dead and a liar - the same as everyone else - why do you not tell the truth? - why don't you tell the truth?

And with that, Marisa Giovan grabbed the knife from Antiochus' hands, held it to her throat point-first, and drove it in so hard that her hand passed out the back of her neck.



PART THREE

The Nothing Space

WHAT FOLLOWED WAS SO MUCH WORSE

The centurions immediately took Antiochus into custody. He was imprisoned for roughly a month, and then released without being charged with any crime. He had been severely beaten; his right hand had been

crushed so brutally that it never healed, and remained curled and deformed until his death.

The predicament of the Roman authorities can be, perhaps, understood. Dozens of Antiochus' followers came forward to testify that Marisa Giovan had killed herself; Antiochus hadn't even put the knife to her neck. All the while, Antiochus remained silent, dutifully taking his beatings and interrogations with nothing but a wry smile.

Despite the lack of evidence, Marisa's family was actively seeking retribution against Antiochus, and the matter threatened to become an outright scandal. What to do? Rome at this time was still undergoing the Christianizing process; though Christianity was the official state religion, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and many different strains of Paganism still existed within Rome's walls. Also, we must keep in mind that Christianity was hardly as theologically uniform as it is today, and Antiocheans claimed to be Christians themselves. How to decide between Antiocheanism, Arianism, and what later became Roman Catholic Orthodoxy? And how to act against one or the other without causing civil unrest, or what's worse, how to act with the faith that you weren't opposing God himself?

In the end, the Romans thought it better to simply send Antiochus a message. His hand was crippled; his stature among his followers, they thought, irreparably damaged. Nothing hurts a cult more than seeing their leader suddenly brought down to earth.

With that, they let Antiochus go, and he disappeared into the back alleyways of Rome.

At first, the Roman strategy of undermining Antiochus' religious authority seemed to have worked. The Antiocheans all but disappeared from the streets, and no more public meetings were held. Antiochus himself disappeared completely; anyone who cared to think about him at all assumed that he'd left the city to preach in the relative safety of the countryside.

It was three months later that the first of the Occide Occulto occurred.

The Occide Occulto, or "Secret Massacres" (*so called because their existence was hidden for some time, or possibly because the links between crimes were not apparent at first*), were a series of brutal, seemingly random murders that occurred within the streets of Rome. By the end, something like 40 people had been murdered, daggers shoved into their eyes, mouths, and throats. Many of those targeted were high-born, high-ranking Romans; others were simple merchants or peasants. All were assaulted as they walked on the street, in broad daylight, in full view of passers-by. The killers always managed to escape; they attacked their victims while dressed in plain, brown cloaks, much like those that

would later be worn by Franciscan friars. After approaching their target, grabbing the back of their head, and stabbing them multiple times with terrifying force, the attackers would simply melt away in the confusion, discarding their robes and becoming anonymous in the masses of people who would gather to gawk and ponder the heaps of gore upon the ground.

It was nothing less than a guerilla war against the greatest empire on Earth; the penetration of violence into the walls of the most powerful bastion of Western civilization.

The murders sent a wave of terror throughout the city. Rome was no stranger to violence; the city had seen everything from barbarian invasion to civil war. They knew what death looked like. Yet, the Occiduo threatened to set into motion a mass panic that would unravel the very fabric of the city. What scared people the most was the seemingly random nature of it all - no missives came, no political manifestos to explain the violence. Rumors circulated that the killers picked their victims by lot. There wasn't any point, and anyone could be next.

Panic did not have very long to spread, however, because the authorities quickly decided on a suspect: at the scene of what would be the last of the murders they had discovered a young Antiochean convert discarding a rough, brown robe.

Avitus, the young man under arrest, was only 15 at the time. Under interrogation he admitted that Antiochus himself had told him to carry out the murder; that it was part of an Antiochean initiation ritual; that murder was a sacrament of their religion, and that almost all of the Antiocheans had taken part in murder or were preparing to.

“He told us to tear it all apart,” he is recorded as saying; “he told us to push you all into the water.”

What followed was to be called the “Years of Lead and Ash”.

Centurions flooded into the streets, arresting any known Antiocheans; brutal interrogations gave them more names, and more arrests followed. They broke into homes and churches, confiscating property, arresting any and all suspected of connection with the group. The pressure was so intense that many people accused others of being Antiochean simply to get revenge for past grievances (*A similar phenomenon occurred during the Salem Witch Trials. Interestingly enough, this is not the only connection between the Antiocheans and the Puritans of Salem. William Shelley, while researching some of the last remaining Antiochean communities, noted that the priests often partook of a ritual bread, eaten at all religious ceremonies. The thick, dark bread is made with a kind of rye similar to that eaten in Salem in the 1600s. The plants used to make the bread often contract a fungus, Claviceps purpurea, that can cause mild hallucinations*

known as Ergotism when ingested. Given the right kind of environment, especially one of high stress or of a fanatical shared conviction, these hallucinations can become extremely powerful. Shelley was unaware of this research, which emerged in 1976 in a book called "Ergotism: The Satan loosed in Salem?" by Linnda Caporeal, and thus drew no conclusions about the role the bread played in Antiocheanism, which is itself given to placing a great deal of weight on the visionary trances of it's priests. Antiocheans would not, I think, be bothered by the connection. That one of the most gruesome events in American history, in which more than 20 women were tortured, abused and murdered by their own neighbors, friends and family...that they were not only brutally killed, but killed by those they trusted most...that all of civilization turned on innocent people overnight, leaving them no avenue of escape...that all of this might have been caused by nothing more than some dampness causing mold to grow on a crop of rye...that fact would not disturb them. I think it would only reinforce their faith).

Antiochus, however, was not found. Though many, under interrogation, claimed to know where he was hiding, he was never present when the army arrived.

Frustrated, the Romans punished Antiochus' followers in his place. Beatings and torture were commonplace. Many had their property confiscated; some were made into slaves. Some were burned.

By far the worst fate, however, was saved for those who had publicly proselytized for the cult. They were taken to the places where people had been murdered and put into metal bindings; the intricate system of ropes and iron bars contorted their bodies into bizarre shapes: a dog crawling on all fours, legs high above their heads, in splits, hands and feet on the floor with their stomachs arching upwards. Once a suitably horrific position had been settled upon, liquid iron was forced down their throats. The death was unbelievably painful, and it was slow. So much liquid metal was poured into the struggling man or woman that their organs liquified; a mixture of blood, pus and steel leaked from every hole in their body. Once finished, the judges would pour frigid water over the body to cool the mixture; steam would fly up everywhere, tinged with blood, making red clouds so thick that it was difficult to see and almost impossible to breathe. The bindings would then be removed, leaving the corpse frozen in place, a statue of their last, agonizing moments. It would stand there in the street as a warning, until the flesh rotted or was pecked away by birds, and all that was left was an empty, twisted skeleton of bone, steel and guilt.

Though persecution persisted for several years, the worst of it was probably over in a year and a half (*even the vengeful Romans found the "metal and binding" punishments disturbing, and they were quickly discontinued*). Public burnings continued, however, and the Antiocheans were seen no longer as an upstart religion, but as nothing better than

sorcerers. They became bogeymen, conjured up in the dead of night by stressful mothers, threatening children to sleep.

Antiochus was apprehended in 1254. Exactly 4 years after he arrived in Rome for the second time, he was burned at the stake.

(Taken from The Books Of Terror And Longing, the Poetic Translations, Book 2, Part III, translated by William Shelley, All Stars Aground Books)

*When they came to put their hands upon him
even then, they were slow
their movements strange and angled
as if they were guilty, and felt it,
though they professed to be angered and quick to dismiss
their movements betrayed their belief and all their fears were revealed.*

*There are undeniable truths in the faces of those
who would destroy you and everything you know and are
not a simple death
but a death that rings out, rings out
that echoes everywhere in the world until the sound is exterminated
by inertia
a death to fully end you
to erase you*

*This was the death they wanted for him
This was the death and the honor they gave him.*

That morning was a cold one. We all rubbed our arms for warmth, gathered to watch in the frost. There was almost never frost, so rare, and then there we were, on that day, and the frost came, the most perfect of signs, the most subtle of acknowledgments.

*Because we knew this was It.
We are not a religion of resurrections, Antiochus said.
We are not believers in second chances.*

*The square was an empty place.
There were no distractions.
The Romans read the proclamation,
but we barely heard it,
those words meant less than nothing and it was as if they were speaking in a foreign tongue
and didn't we already feel so separate
didn't we already feel so different and apart?
Our tongue was the foreign tongue
and we had lost all hope of understanding
now and forever*

*They tied his arms with force,
jerking the ropes back with malice and a snapping sound
I'm sure they wanted to break his arms.
But Antiochus never said a thing*

*never begged or pleaded
never opened his eyes a single inch.
His face had the look of someone in the most intense
of happinesses, the strongest of ecstasies*

*He was very happy
How like Christ!*

*We wanted a last sermon
we wanted to be taught one final thing
because it had not been enough
we were not better beings, not better people
we had not seen what he had seen and felt less for it
we wanted a final word
we wanted him to say anything, anything to us, anything meant for us
we didn't want it to be over with everything left,
we didn't say what we had wanted to say
but Antiochus said nothing
not even when his chest was on fire, and skin peeling,
because he had told us everything
shown us everything
and there was nothing special about what he saw
because don't all of us see it?
every day, every year
all of us see it
all the time
and we don't need to know anything special about it
we don't need to learn anything new about it
because we already know
all of it*

This was all there was

*And when they put torch to tinder, I was smiling
grinning wide
the fire started with an aching swiftness
it didn't hesitate for even a moment
how honorable
it just went about
it's business.*

*I was so proud, then
when the fire ate away his skin and melted his bones
but they say the smoke filled his lungs,
and he was dead long before that
but I can only laugh
because they don't know the half of it*

*Many of us were crying,
but they were fools, and hadn't understood a single thing
that had happened.
It is not sadness that those people feel
it is desperation
it is fear and withering cold
that is the smoke that rings you
that is the fog that hides you, and that you curl around your shoulders*

like a blanket in the night-time
it is the air you breathe and you cannot move away from it
because there is no away from it
no away at all
God knew this!
He knew this and he put you here
he created and he destroys
creates the one-things that exist
and destroys the things that never did
undoes those that might have been but never were
holds their heads under the water
his reasons always uncertain
but his certainty everywhere,
slowly compressing all space until our legs and face and chest
and knees and hands are broken and touching and folded
into ourselves
All things that are made are thus limited
they are only what they are
and no more
nothing can be built or born
only reproduced
only dumbly copied

But now I remember a story he told us
about this very thing
in the days before the holiest-murdered-one
before there was a history to think of
before there was a past or present

all the people were of god, and he of them
and god spoke to every man and woman
and he answered them in their prayers
(there was a time when god answered prayers!
when we didn't have to search for him and think of reasons
to explain away his absence!)
and spoke to them in their dreams
and there was nothing but his will, every action and reaction
were his and his alone
each breath of wind and mote of dust
there was only god in the world.

and each man was a piece of this
with no existence in and of themselves, but
only as a part of the god-will
fragments of the greatest whole
the absolute.
And into this world was born a single man
with a sense of self
a feeling of otherness
the first modern man
not the same, somehow apart from everything and everyone
like a man standing in front of a painting
and everywhere he carried this feeling in him
always in his gut, pressing in on his forehead
he was bitter in happiness
and angered at peace

for it was never of him, and he was never of it
never his
everything was separate
and he couldn't feel anything, and his soul was untouched
because it did not
exist

and to no part of the spirit did he owe any allegiance
he was all stomach and heart and gut
his eyes saw only earth and sky and shit and vomit
things as they were, and it made him doomed and ecstatic
miserable and bitter and cunning and euphoric
and he was the first human, the only human
and some others called him Satan, but that could not have been his name
because he had not even that much angel in him.

We all bear his name today, our human race,
because he was the first,
and we are all his brothers and children and wives
we are his only family
because those who bore him failed him
as only your family can fail you
but now we are his family
his family, his family,
and so it was that it was he who convinced them
and so it was us who convinced them
you and I
to build a set of stairs
stairs unto the highest point
where the sky and stars meet in the darkest of their upper spheres
the deep black shore of the sky's ocean

And it was he who was the first Hunter
the first to kill for food, the first to feel the need
the need to seek, to find and track and kill
to end things to begin things
was this not just like God?
Just what God would have done, and had done?
This was how beginnings and endings entered the world
no longer incorporeal things, left up to chance
but now made physical, with arms and legs and limbs of uncaring econ-
omy.
Through arrow head and sharpened stone
through a gap in the flesh where time and nothingness
and death and ending fell out and splashed their redness everywhere
blood pouring into the river
where he washed their skins and cleaned his hands and face
and washed the smell of it right off of himself.
Blood flowed there and made it's way into the salt blue ocean waves and
tides
and fish would drink that blood,
gathered up in schools and drunk with the headiness of lifetimes on land,
diffused with salt and saline, so light now, so small, that none could taste
it's coppery stinging, but all were drinking,
all were eating,
all had blood inside them which was not their blood,

*had stolen the blood of another,
bloody and not wholly themselves any longer and never would be again,
now part something-else,
blood brothers they would never see and that were already dead.*

*But no one cared, and no one complained.
In fact, they felt better, they felt full.
Men and women are creatures of appetites,
and they traded their love for a full belly
very, very long ago.
And they felt filled with it, and alive, both dead and alive,
and in the nights they whispered,
laying close in the frost and the dark,
pressing into one another to feel the beating heart
of another person, someone outside themselves
as living proof, living proof
they were not the last one, they were not the very last one
because when dark is everywhere all of our confidences are forgotten
and man is only a child again, without stick or blade or bludgeon
and the world is at it once was, wholly a place of the animals
where all churches are built to honor the tooth-and-claw
and all of human intelligence is worth exactly nothing
a place of pounding hearts and desperate running and crashing through
fallen tree-limbs
an unknowable chaos of wilderness
where beasts chant out into the frozen night-times
"who will kill, and who will eat, and who will die"
a perfect, even chorus
not a note out of place.
In those nights, the people whispered
"The Hunter does us all a great service
and we have done so much to deserve it
with axe and arrow, fire and stone,
he opens up the world for us
has fed us well
so brave and strong, cunning, wise
the best of all of us
because he dreams of how it shall be
and so it becomes;
he sees a better life".
And they respected him
the respect we save for violent men
who have always been our leaders, and always will be
those we condemn when they act
exactly as we've always wished we could act
those who live with their hearts in their mouths and hands
the men we worship
when what we really worship is death
and those who can bring it to us
because we long for it.
We long for it.*

*And this was how he convinced them
to bend their backs
and angle their knees
to put hands on earth and arches in their necks*

muscles tensed, skin damp and sweating
pushing weight onto weight, holding themselves up
to make a solid height and a stable base
as good as stone, and as strong
he used their trust, they gave him faith
freely, freely they had traded
and he shook his bow, and flashed his eyes
he told them of the life they gained, his to give
the only separate one, the only different one
who stood apart and felt nothing of life and nothing for it
and all those men, all those women
gave of their bodies everything there was
every inch and every sinew
and made themselves just things
not people but steps
not women but steps
not men but steps
steps for his feet, every human back
every human neck
but still, it wasn't enough
we must go further, the hunter said
I hunt the darkest game, he cowers in the shadows of the black-blue sky
and still I feel this gap in me
the space between the world and my soul
a nothing-space, I feel it there -
but there were no more men, and no more women,
no more backs and no more necks,
so the Hunter asked the animals.

Those he'd eaten, he asked their bones
he asked dead mothers, he asked dead sons
asked the ones hidden in the stones, in crawl-spaces and burrows
in the dark holes of the trees
in their leaves and in the water
and he showed them his bow, and his eyes flashed,
and they alone knew,
all of them knew
they knew, they knew, they knew
they had always been separate
they had always had gaps, they had always been gaps
had always had spaces where hearts could have been
because God made them first, but had not made them best
had kept them in shadows and forests and fields
had let them be hunted, always afraid
afraid of being killed, afraid of being eaten
while they themselves killed, and ate
each other
God had let it happen
had made it happen
and it kept happening, every day,
and would keep happening, forever
yes, they knew
the animals know everything

and all in their thousands
they bared their teeth

*and they bowed their heads
every plant, every animal
added weight, added height
and all the while they laughed secret laughs.*

*all taking place, all now a part
all act the part, all as one, all without selves
lost in the whole, that massive stair
now tall enough, he shouted, raised above the clouds
to where the air grew thin, to where the light blinked out
up higher than this, to the highest point revealed
by any time,
the highest of all.
And that man placed his foot
square onto the smalls of their backs
square onto the napes of their necks
square onto their eyes and their mouths
he took their stairs two at a time
he ran
he was not tired
he was happy, so happy
this was it
this was
it*

*And at the very top,
where he was alone, but not alone
he pulled back his string
and he tightened his bow
and said nothing at all
just breathed
and held it, a moment, and then
let everything go
no troubles
no fears
no people
no forests
no animals
no earth
no space
no souls
no nothing
no anything
and there were arrowheads
arrowheads
arrowheads
everywhere.*

*And one
only one
stuck fast into the throat of God.
And God fell, limp and dead, straight into the Earth
with every bone broken
and that arrow was driven straight out of the back God's neck by the solid
earth
and silhouetted against the sunlight*

*like the only tree standing in a burned out wood
Like a hunted animal, dead on the ground
God bled out slow until his heart stopped.
Like a stuck pig.
Like a dog on a spit.*

*And the hand that steered the ship
the plow that broke the plains
broke into a thousand jagged pieces.*

*And it took only minutes
for those people to come down
and, without a thought,
they began eating,
with their bare hands they ripped apart anything they could find
and ate until they were too full to move.*

*We are at that Desperate Banquet right now.
If you listen you can hear them chewing.*

(It is said that, after he was burned, Antiochus' ashes were scattered by a sudden and powerful wind, covering the entire assembly, burning their eyes and filling their mouths. That so much ash could rise from a single body is considered to be the last Antiochean miracle, and is of great significance.)



PART FOUR

All Lives Are Wasted

DE PROFUNDIS

The persecution of the Antiocheans had several unintended consequences. The Years of Lead and Ash forced most of the Antiocheans to leave Rome and Italy altogether. This “Antiochean Exodus” lasted several painful and convoluted decades; they suffered untold hardships, extreme prejudice (for stories of them had, even at this early point, filtered out into the Italian provinces) and physical violence. Unable to settle anywhere in safety for more than a few years at a time, the beleaguered exiles eventually found their way to a few remote villages at the

foot of the Caucasus, in modern day Armenia and Azerbaijan (*The effects of this migration can still be seen in local dialects, though the traces are faint; in one of the villages William Shelley visited the locals were still using the word "arare" for the verb "to plow", though it had evolved, by that time, to "orore"*). It is doubtful that Antiocheanism would have survived anywhere other than in remote, inaccessible areas such as these; in a way, it was their very expulsion from the powerful conformist forces of Roman culture that allowed Antiocheanism to maintain its individual identity, rather than being absorbed into the Italian cultural mainstream (*Most heresies and radical philosophies of the time have disappeared. Arianism, for example, the belief that Jesus, though divine, was still a mortal man, and separate from God instead of God himself, was a thousand times more common than Antiocheanism, yet has not survived in any recognizable way, except, perhaps, as part of the modern resurgence of Gnostic Christianity. Of course, this can be explained by the fact that, like Antiocheanism, Arianism was violently suppressed with great effectiveness*).

The public ill-will towards the Antiocheans, as well as the mandatory destruction of their writings, has not only deeply altered the character of Antiocheanism, but has had great effect on modern scholars as well. All Antiochean teachings were converted from their original, written form, into an oral tradition, passed down from priest to priest. It was simply too dangerous to keep a record of anything, and after enough time had passed it was forgotten that there had ever been written copies at all. The Antiochean writings we have today are merely modern transcriptions of an oral tradition that has been preserved for nearly eight centuries.

Regardless of the care and devotion with which the Antiocheans treated their cultural inheritance, any number of major inaccuracies must exist in these texts; we can never be sure of anything we read there. Add to this the fact that William Shelley, the translator and transcriber of the "Poetic" manuscripts, was no expert in Armenian, Azeri, or any of the local dialects he encountered in his travels (*He was notorious for being more interested in the artistic merit of his translations, rather than in their linguistic exactness; He was of a different time, one in which scholarship was treated more as an art than a cold, objective science*), and the fact that the oral version has been translated into and out of at least four languages during its existence (from the original Italian, to Italianate Vulgar, to Armenian, to English) (*It is quite possible that the Books have been translated many more times than this. We do not know all of the places that the Antiocheans tried to settle during their "exodus" - though it is unlikely that they stayed very long in any one place, they must have accepted the entrance of outsiders into their group through marriage, adoption, etc. It is also likely that they attempted to spread their faith at least once or twice, and may have translated their oral tradition into the local language to do so. Unfortunately, very little evidence for this hypothesis exists, and all such thoughts are only speculation*).

The shroud of secrecy that fell over Antiocheanism had one other, unexpected effect; one that would, in the end, cost dozens of lives and cre-

ate the sect's first schism. From secrecy came the Antiochean Mysteries, and thus, the rise of Narlism.

What had previously been an "open-air religion", a faith of street-preachers, could no longer be practiced openly; Antiocheans could not even tell others that their faith existed, for fear of reprisals. Deprived of any way to spread their faith, Antiocheans began to fear that their religion would disappear altogether.

In reaction, Antiochean Priests founded the Mysteries, a set of rituals and teachings designed to be a way of passing down religious traditions to the next generation. It's contents were kept secret, even from other Antiocheans; over time, this secrecy evolved from a method of achieving security to a religious sacrament in and of itself. It reflected the extent of the chaos being inflicted on the religious community as a whole: the mere maintenance of their religious identities was so important that it became a divine obligation.

The Mysteries are, today, the most commonly-recognized aspect of Antiocheanism (*Ironic, since, not only are the Mysteries not part of "traditional", pre-exodus Antiocheanism, they were designed to be the most secret aspect of the faith*), mostly due to their mention in Frazier's classic work *The Golden Bough*, and in some of the writings of occultist Aleister Crowley. Knowledge of the actual content of the Mysteries faded with the 19th century surge of interest in occultism, however, and today they are known only superficially.

Though the existence of the Mysteries and their general outline has been often alluded to, the actual rite is still a well-protected secret. Only priests are allowed to undergo the ritual, and very little has leaked out to the wider world about how they work. Still, we know enough to paint a dim picture about what the Mysteries are, and, perhaps, gain a bit of insight.

The Antiochean Mysteries appear to have some connection to the Orphic Mysteries of ancient Greece. Both are performed in confined spaces, and both seem to be designed to cause a permanent break between this world and the individual undergoing the rite. When completed, the inductee leaves as a new person, someone not completely of either this world or the next, and, as such, capable of shepherding the flock through the many spiritual trials that await them.

The rite involves ash, almost certainly in reference to Antiochus' burning at the stake. The supplicant is covered in ash from head to toe, and at one point seems to consume ash in vast quantities. Blood is then coughed into an iron bowl, but what follows is not clear. Some have said that the bloodied ash is then consumed by those present, in a sort of mimicry of the Roman Catholic mass; others have said that the student consumes it alone, cannibalizing himself in a ritualized absorption of his

own death. Some archaeological work indicated that the mixture might have been used to coat the walls of the ritual room, but this work has never been authenticated or repeated.

These rites were always performed in a cave or crypt. Often, there was a special room built just for this purpose. The walls would always have been pitch black, darkened by smoke (or perhaps by the blood and ash mixture) to create an otherworldly, disorienting sensation. There would have been a single candle, and the light would have been absorbed remorselessly by the black walls, creating an unending atmosphere of foreboding. After the ritual, the priests would emerge from the cave, covered from head to toe in ash, and present the new priest to the community. Interestingly, it seems that many times the inductee would have to be carried out, completely unconscious, though this was not seen as a sign of failure.

Stories of the Mysteries have become muddled and twisted; historical reports, often by opponents of any unorthodox faith, often tell of orgies, necrophilia, and devil worship (*Not unlike the tales that destroyed the Knights Templar, who were accused of worshipping a giant, demonic iron head named Baphomet*). Accusations that the ritual used the ashes of the dead (and not always the Antiochean dead) are less easily dismissed; it certainly fits with both the place used for the ritual and thematically, as part of the overall theological message of the rite. These claims are, like so much else, however, unverifiable.

All this secrecy effectively protected the Antiocheans from the brunt of the prejudice against them during their thirty to forty-year exile from Rome. When they finally settled again in the Caucasus the rites continued, and became an established part of the Antiochean faith. They also created, however, a stifling atmosphere of cloak and dagger religiosity, and inner tensions began to mount. Ten years after their settlement in the Caucasus, Narl had his vision, and the Schism of the North began.

Narl, (*Again, we are faced with an unusual name. The fact that this name comes to us not from the established Antiochean oral tradition, but simply from Shelley's interviews, is accepted as proof that this irregularity stems from a mistake made by Shelley during transliteration, or possibly from "linguistic drift" over many years of tales spread from village to village*), a popular and respected Antiochean priest, awoke one night to find the spirit of Antiochus standing over his bed. The spirit was so large, Narl said, that it was forced to hunch over, back flat against the roof of Narl's home. He was clad in a fiery iridescent armor, a pitch-black sword with a hilt of raven's feathers in his hand. Where his other hand would be there was instead a metal gauntlet, but with the fingers bent backwards over the hand making a broken, inverted fist. The apparition informed Narl that he was to become the leader of Antiochus' True Church; that the Lord God wished nothing more than the complete destruction of any and everyone who opposed them, unconverted Antiocheans included,

and nothing less than the total annihilation of Western Christianity, which had grown fat in the intervening years between the invasions of Norseman, Saracen and Mongol.

Such a repellent message might be thought to have met with considerable resistance, but Narl rallied a healthy number to his cause. It must be remembered that, though now settled for the first time, the Antiochean community had been through a horrifying ordeal; they did not believe that it was over, or ever would be. They were, in other words, a harried people, always on the run, perpetually aware of the possibility of violence against them. The chance to finally be on the offensive, to give instead of to receive, all with the blessing of God himself, would have appealed to them. They were a desperate group, and Narl brought them a desperate religion.

Exact figures are unknown, but before the end Narl and his followers had all but exterminated the population of two nearby villages. Those places simply ceased to exist, and have never been resettled. Local legends said that any food grown in those areas came out of the ground blood-red, and would bleed when cut. The tactics Narl used were horrifying, although not, perhaps, as shocking in his day as they are in ours. The Narlists employed a variant of the Norse “Bloody Eagle”, gutting their victims, pinning their open stomachs to their sides, and hanging them upside down to bleed them out onto the ground. Giovannus Frach, a medieval religious scholar, asserted that this was in accordance with a verse of the Narlist Prophecy (as Narl’s vision had come to be called), from which he quoted:

*“There may not be a hand against us.
There can be no slowing, there can be no stopping.
There can be no rest.
Everything is for us, and nothing is exempt.
There is no food without us
and no one to eat it
There is no drink and no air.
All the earth will be red with our acts.
All fields will become marshes,
and each footprint will pool with our legends.
Their very steps will be reminders of us
as the earth wells up with their life’s-blood
Of the truth, all truths, all truths.*

The “*all truths, all truths*” line is a clear reference to the famous Antiochean quote, “Death is Truth, and Truth is Death”. The legitimacy of Frach’s quotation can be justifiably questioned; he was writing many decades after the fact, and, as far as we can tell, the Narlist Prophecy was never written down in any lasting form. It is very possible that Frach simply created this section of the Prophecy, using what he already knew of what happened, to craft a plausible-sounding example. Note that the verse is very similar in style to much of the Books themselves.

Word spread to the surrounding communities, and Narl's followers were quickly slaughtered in a violent stand-off in a nearby forest. The battle, a chaotic affair which lasted a full day, ended when a band of united townspeople burned the entire forest to the ground, killing the last of the Narlists hiding inside. Narl himself, captured earlier, was pulled apart by four horses running in opposite directions, and had his remains picked at by birds in a public square until he was only a skeleton. His bones were then pulverized and made into bread, which was force-fed to the remaining Antiocheans as a warning.

The Sect of the Schism proved remarkably resilient, however, and resurfaced a few years later. This time the Narlists were forced to keep their beliefs a secret, and thus Crypto-Narlism, or Secret Narlism, was born. Those who had rebelled against secrecy and cunning were now the most secret of an already secretive faith.

Crypto-Narlism would go on to have a serious effect on the psyche of the faith as a whole. The Crypto-Narlists were to be the only real penetration of the mainstream by the Antiocheans, but only because they impersonated members of other faiths to survive. It is possible that we have Crypto-Narlists to thank for some of the seemingly inexplicable Antiochean themes found in modern branches of unrelated faiths. For Antiocheans, Crypto-Narlists began as a kind of bogey-man; Salem-style "Narlist trials" would occasionally be held to root out those suspected of maintaining the heresy. The guilt felt in the Antiochean communities, for essentially becoming their persecutors, was to echo down throughout the centuries and become the cause of much religious angst. Later, Crypto-Narlists were to play important parts in many tales of folklore, changing from secret killers to mysterious heroes, or long-lost brothers immersed in alien cultures (*occupying a position in Antiocheanism similar to that of the Lost Tribes of Judah in Judaism and Christianity*).

Whether it was due to these complex cross-cultural currents, or simply because of a changing of the zeitgeist, the Antiochean Mysteries eventually fell out of favor, and were all but discontinued. They are reenacted today as shadows of their former selves, and then mostly out of a fading sense of responsibility to the past, rather than as any active seeking for religious truth or revelatory experience. The present generation is hardly interested in Antiocheanism at all, much less a dying and marginal aspect of it. Television and the internet, as well as the lure of big cities and the employment to be found there, have done more to destroy Antiocheanism than the Inquisition ever could, and the old traditions lie neglected, collecting dust in the obscurest of history's recesses.

But then, history can reassert itself in our lives in unexpected ways; threads of causality stretching themselves across lifetimes to interfere with us, help us, or hurt us. Often, we're completely unaware of this; we don't see it happening until it's too late.

People often talk about “making history”, but the truth of the matter is that we don’t make it; it makes us.

BEING REMISS

“All lives are wasted, on Earth - mine, simply more so.” - *The Diary of William Shelley, dated March, 1900*

No discussion of the *Books* could be complete without at least a mention of how we came to know about them in the first place; their translator and greatest student, William Shelley, has a sort of tragic-Victorian air that makes him intriguing to many. Few of us will ever be as dedicated to anything as Shelley was to the preservation of the *Books*; to say that it haunted him would be an understatement. The *Books* were his consuming passion up to the very last day of his life.

Though he was relatively well-known among his contemporaries, Shelley is today considered only a minor figure in the history of anthropology (*Shelley wrote a series of well-received articles for The Journal Of Popular Anthropology in 1876 entitled “Religions Around The World”, 2-3 page explorations of major themes of many of the world’s religions. The articles were accessible and interesting, and gained Shelley some renown. Though he often spoke of them as “the merest fluff”, it was the money Shelley made from the popular series that allowed him to pursue his research into Antiocheanism*). Why this continues is, frankly, a mystery to me; almost everything we know about Antiocheanism, we owe to Shelley.

William Shelley was born to a modestly well-off family in the Seven Sisters area of London. From a young age, Shelley was picked for the priesthood; the youngest of three children, he was bright and inquisitive, always buried in a book. His parents had high hopes for him. Shelley wrote in his diary that “they saw in me more than I am. They saw in me a Saint, but I am only a sinner. They saw in me a Priest, but I am only a Scholar.”

Shelley found the religious schools he attended suffocating. The rigid morality, the focus on rote memorization, the dogmatic ways of thinking; all these conflicted with Shelley’s individualistic nature. When he turned 18 he dropped out, shocking his parents; his mother died soon after, and he never spoke to his Father again. He had orphaned himself to pursue his intellectual desires. He was already of another world.

Shelley took to academia with gusto, devouring books, writing constantly, attending classes. He eventually graduated from Oxford. Shelley chose to study Foreign Religions, or what would later be known as Religious Anthropology, perhaps because his religious education had been so narrow in the past.

Immediately after graduation, Shelley set off for the Caucasus. He was 35. What prompted this sudden departure is still a mystery. Shelley had certainly read of the Antiocheans; he had even mentioned them in a paper on Christian heresy (“...*And so we find that the heretic, more so than any other man, finds himself in an absolute relation with the absolute; in tandem with the devil, face to face with God, hands at his sides. His certainty outweighs that of all the rest of Christendom, for who is more sure in their righteousness, the Inquisitor, or the tortured and unrepentant? The Antiocheans, fleeing Rome, with all of civilization at their backs, and nothing but the wilderness-chaos of the unknown in front of them, they knew fear, but they did not hesitate and they did not conform. They left Rome with not a single backwards glance, all the modern world, all of humanity lost to them. They disappeared into history. With axe, torch, pyre and screw, all of the Inquisitors in all of history have succeeded only in proving one thing: that the Christian is willing to kill for his faith, but the Heretic is willing to die for it.*” It is interesting to note that, though Shelley had not yet been to Armenia and so could not have known the content of the *Books*, his line about “wilderness-chaos” echoes certain similar phrases in the text. This may be seen as an indication of the extent to which Shelley tapped his own poetic leanings when translating the work). Exactly what he actually knew about the Antiocheans is not clear, but information on them was extremely scarce. It is possible that he simply saw an academic opportunity: here was an unstudied, virtually unknown religion, a new discovery that would be forever his and his alone. This would account for his secrecy; none of the few friends he had at Oxford were aware of the trip. He simply disappeared.

Exactly what happened to Shelley in the Armenian mountains is not known to us. His diaries start only after his return, and then he only mentions certain specific events, never giving a complete narrative. It seems that he was, at first, met with a great deal of suspicion. His dedication won him the grudging respect of the locals, and he was eventually allowed to transcribe much of the Antiocheans’ sacred oral tradition.

And I do mean transcribe; Shelley was allowed only to hastily scribble down everything he heard, writing words he didn’t understand phonetically in hopes of being able to translate them later. The process was agonizing; priests would often not repeat a certain passage for weeks, and with no prior knowledge of the *Books*, certain phrases and organizational idiosyncrasies would have proved to be immense obstacles.

It took ten years for William Shelley to return to England. When he arrived he carried with him an enormous and chaotic pile of notes and writings that would, ten years later, be published as *The Books of Terror and Longing*. Ten years to record, ten years to translate (*And even then, Shelley was not happy with the final version. “The translation is incomplete,” he wrote, “and it infuriates me. It is missing the sense of deepest desperation...I can’t explain it! There aren’t words. It’s in their eyes. I need these people to look into the eyes of a believer and see it there, there just aren’t the words...the English language hasn’t decayed enough, things are*

still too alive here...”), the Books had become, in Shelley’s mind, the sole reason for his existence. He was never a professed believer in Antiocheanism, but he strongly believed that he was alive to preserve it for the West.

While in the midst of translation Shelley searched for publishers, and found none. The sample pages he brought with him to nearly every academic publishing house in London were universally proclaimed to be too dark, too obscure, too depressing, even blasphemous. No one wanted to read such a book, and even the most obscure journals of the field were skeptical about it’s content.

The resistance to the publishing of his translations confused and infuriated Shelley. He was certain that the *Books* were nothing less than a revelation, not only for religious anthropology, but for all modern religions. He wrote quite movingly on the “modern malaise” he felt had fallen over the West; “The feeling of awe, of religiosity, has been lost. There are no more gods, no more prophets - only insects and teeth, bones and atoms and chemicals and minerals, no magic at all, no wonder and no souls to be found in any of our bodies.” Antiocheanism, to Shelley, was nothing if not a *modern* religion; indeed, it’s themes would be echoed in much of the 20th century’s philosophical and scientific nihilism. Antiocheanism seemed to Shelley to be the antidote to widespread disbelief; an ancient assault on life itself, on reason and it’s attempts to organize the Absolute, on ignorance, and on materialism.

Shelley greatly overestimated the public’s ability to accept his work. Every major publisher, and almost every minor one, rejected him. Once he was actually physically accosted, beaten up and thrown into the street. Still, he never abandoned his quest. He finally found his publisher in Dennis Carlyle, a young (and wealthy) eccentric who ran a small publishing house named All Stars Aground. They published obscure manuscripts on religion, mysticism, even magic and the occult. Carlyle was immediately struck by the force of Shelley’s personality, and even became an ardent proponent of Antiocheanism (*Carlyle can realistically be called the first modern convert to Antiocheanism. Scholars have argued about whether or not Shelley came to believe in the spiritual truth of what he had written; no such argument can exist about Carlyle, whose efforts in the cause of Antiocheanism were monumental. In 1896 he formed the Ordo Nocturno Antiochi, The Dark Antiochean Order, which sought to recreate the Antiochean faith in modern London. They referred to themselves as “dark” because it was necessary for them to hide their faith; none of them felt that the mainstream would accept Antiocheanism as it was, and they felt a spiritual kinship with the Crypto-Narlists that had gone before them. They committed themselves to “polluting the Zeitgeist”, as Carlyle put it: introducing Antiochean truths to the populace through subconscious, hidden channels. They also established a place for Antiocheans to worship, in Carlyle’s basement; there Carlyle’s followers practiced what “rituals of the faith” they could cobble together from their incomplete copies of the Books. At first, the group seemed content with using the social influence of it’s more wealthy members to insert Antiochean phrases and quotations into*

newspapers and academic journals; by 1898, however, both the social makeup and the aims of the group had changed, taking on more of an occult focus and becoming more interested in what was termed "public works". Joseph Blackwood, the leader of this movement within the Order, wrote: "What it means is nothing less than the accomplishment, complete, of the Antiochean dream, the enlightenment of all of Britain. Our Public Work is to invoke, not to debate, not to impress or convince, but to INVOKE a crisis, an Antiochean Awakening, in the general public by whatever means are deemed necessary". The group briefly became popular among the Occultists of the time, including even Arthur Edward Waite, but many left the fold because of, as Waite put it, "their obsession with forcible influence". The group was even put under police surveillance when Richard A. Prince, an actor and member of the Order, brutally murdered fellow thespian William Terriss Actor by stabbing him three times in the back, side, and face. Friends had told the police that Prince had been behaving "strangely", was given to fits of despair and mania, and had been known to shout obscure and disturbing phrases at the most inappropriate times, including while on stage. After the actual murder, Prince is known to have shouted "I did it for revenge. He had kept me out of employment for ten years, and I had either to die in the street or kill him. That is the truth...death!". Observation of the Order ceased when no evidence linking them to the murder could be found. They then disappeared from the occult scene, reemerging several years later, again under the leadership of Blackwood, Carlyle having broken his neck in the shower in 1904. Again, they focused on creating what Blackwood called "an aura of death in the culture", and were much more open about their existence this time around. Blackwood remained a disturbing minor figure in society until yet another Order member, John Reginald Halliday Christie, was implicated in 1949 in one of the most sensational murders of the 20th century. Christie, pretending to have medical experience, was asked by a young couple, Timothy and Beryl Adams, to help dispose of an unwanted fetus, this being in the days before the Abortion Act of 1967 made abortion legal in Britain. Christie told Timothy it was best to be somewhere else when the procedure took place, as being present would make him an accomplice in the crime; after Timothy left, Christie gassed Beryl unconscious, raped her, and murdered her, stabbing her several times and leaving her body in a latrine. He told Timothy that Beryl had died during the procedure, and that the Police were looking for the husband; promising to take the couple's 4-year old to a family member's house while Timothy hid, Christie instead strangled the child a few days later. Timothy was eventually hanged for the murders, having become so distraught and mentally unstable that he confessed. It was almost a decade until Christie, who had already been executed for the murders of his two previous wives, was connected to what was then called the "Beryl Murders". Blackwood himself was arrested when it was discovered that Christie had been a long-time member of the Order. Christie was quoted as professing that it was his faith that drove him to murder; "Each unexpected death", he said, "brings us all closer, and the more disturbing the better, since we're all going to end up that way, anyway", which certainly seems to mimic what Blackwood taught about "public works". Again, no evidential link could be established between Blackwood's teachings and Christie's actions. The point became moot, however, when Blackwood, by now an old man, died in jail while waiting to be charged in 1950. He apparently committed suicide by forcing his head through the cell bars, though how this was done is still a mystery. The Order, though it persisted for another decade or so, all but disintegrated after Blackwood's death, and in any case had devolved into little more

than a Club for those who wanted to pretend to practice sorcery and participate in orgies. This first appearance of a modern, Western Antiochean group can thus be seen as a part of the larger renaissance in occultism that occurred in England and the US during the 20th Century, even though Antiocheanism itself cannot truly be considered "occult").

Carlyle put a great deal of resources into the publication of *The Books*, which were released under the grandiose title, "*THE BOOKS OF TERROR AND LONGING: Being An Exploration Of The Long-Lost Religion Of The Antiocheans, And A Grande Revelation For All Who Seek The True Spirit, Books I - XII, By Famed Adventurer and Scholar William T. Shelley*". The title took up practically the entire first page, and was mostly Carlyle's idea.

Of the first 500 copies printed, they sold only 20. As it turns out, that was enough.

While Shelley and Carlyle brooded over the *Book's* poor reception (*Carlyle was already planning a second edition, as Shelley had pointed out several errors and omissions that needed correction, and was in the process of bankrupting his publishing house in the process*), a copy of the book made it's way into the hands of David Maxwell, editor of the *Religious Anthropology Review*, an academic journal (*Which Shelley had once been published in, to mild praise. His essay, "Tribes of Judah, Tribes of the Plains: Connections, Myths, and Beliefs", was, as one of his colleagues had put it, "quite interesting, as long as you don't worry too much about the fine print"*).

Maxwell not only read the *Books*, he practically memorized them. This was not because he was attracted to the text, or out of respect for their translator. Instead, Maxwell was filled with religious dread. "I was sure," he later wrote, "from the very moment I put my hand on the book's cover, from the second I touched the pages, that it was the Devil's work. The Devil's own hand. Here it was, in all it's infernal glory, right in my office, on my desk - a refutation of Christ, an attack on all Christianity, like having serpents trumpeting the approach of Armageddon directly into my ear".

Maxwell applied all his energies to writing a furiously detailed invective against the text and Shelley himself. He disputed it's origins, it's historical accuracy, whether or not Antiochus or, indeed, the Antiocheans, actually existed, the translation, even implied that Shelley was a satan-worshipper, or, at the very least, not a good Christian, and possibly Jewish. "William Shelley," Maxwell wrote, "is nothing more than a fake, a gypsy, a liar, and a heretic, come to us in the guise of good scholarship to deprive us of nothing less valuable than our souls...Thanks be to God that he is so dramatically untalented that his ponderous book of ridiculous and insane ramblings is almost impossible to read".

Maxwell's vehemence continued in an Op-Ed piece in the next month's *Archaeological Examiner*; in it Maxwell does not even mention the *Books* at all, apparently feeling that any discussion of the actual work, no matter how negative, would serve as publicity. Instead, he launched a brutal attack on Shelley's credibility; he quoted liberally from Shelley's post-graduate work, as well as from several published articles from before his trip to the Caucuses, claiming that almost everything Shelley said was made up. Indeed, he found several inconsistencies in Shelley's research, and even some citations of books which didn't exist (*Shelley explained these by saying that he was under a great deal of stress at the time, and had done so much writing and research that it was inevitable for some mistakes to find their way into print. "Of all that I have written," he wrote in his diary, "four or five innocent errors are taken to be representative of the whole...Only Christ himself could be expected to be without fault, yet it is I who am crucified!"*).

Maxwell's two-pronged attack was extremely effective. A well-respected and influential scholar had denounced Shelley as a charlatan; those with little knowledge of Shelley and his achievements (which was most of the population) simply accepted Maxwell's accusation as fact and moved on. All Stars Aground Books published the second, corrected edition of the *Books*, but sold even less copies than the original had. Shelley's reputation was ruined, and his spirit was broken. His life's work collected dust in the basement of the Carlyle estate, and Shelley retreated to solitary brooding in a small, dingy flat in a run-down neighborhood of East London.

Years passed in this manner, until 1902 (*The same year as the Teriss murder. Though he almost certainly knew of the murder, it is very unlikely that Shelley was aware of the connection between the Order, Teriss and Carlyle, and to the Books themselves. Shelley, though responsible for the transmission of Antiocheanism to the West, was now viewed with disdain by Carlyle, and, by extension, the Dark Order. He had discovered the great secret, the one True Faith, but was an unbeliever, and more, now a depressed, broken man. He was thought of as unworthy, nothing more than a convenient vessel to bring the teachings of Antiochus to the Order, who thought of themselves as the more deserving students*), when Shelley began work on *Crows On The Furls Of The Black Banner*, a complete historical and anthropological examination of Antiocheanism. It was to be his greatest work, encyclopedic in breadth, covering everything from Antiocheanism's roots in Hebrew death-cults to the apparent failure of the West to appreciate the *Books* (*Almost all of the historical information presented in the paper you're reading right now was taken from Shelley's work during this period*). He was determined that if intellectual saboteurs were going to prevent his work from being appreciated in the present, he would do everything in his power to make sure that the necessary knowledge was passed on to future generations. "Antiocheanism," he wrote, "does not deserve to vanish entirely from the Earth, no matter what others may think of it. Death may be the end, and the body is weak and I admit that it will die and that will be all, but Knowledge is

not Man, and there can be no righteous death for Knowledge on Earth”.

From a later description by his landlady, we know that work on this project threw Shelley's life into disarray; though he was never an overly neat person, during his research for *Crows On The Furls...* Shelley's room was, the landlady remarked, “literally covered, wall-to-wall, in papers...they were everywhere, open and moldering, some of them, dust all in the air, only one little window and that he kept closed and covered up with curtains...It felt like a tomb, walking in there. I don't even know where he sat”.

By this time, Carlyle and Shelley were no longer speaking, having fallen out over the fate of the remaining copies of the *Books* (*Carlyle wanted to simply destroy them. “If no one wants them,” he wrote in a letter, “why not burn them, and save one or two for posterity?” Shelley thought the books should be saved, perhaps donated to libraries or charities. The cost of storing the books was slowly bankrupting All Stars Aground, but Carlyle was legally unable to destroy them without Shelley's permission. The impasse ended the relationship between the two men. Today, copies of the first or second editions are extremely rare. There have been small re-printings in the modern day; Lillithalia Books printed a copy of the Poetic Translations in 1976, but it caught only the tail end of a resurgence in interest in obscure and occult topics, sold only marginally well, and was soon discontinued*). I have been unable to find any mention of Shelley's friends and family during this time, and it seems that he lived an almost entirely solitary life, dedicated to his work. His diaries, in which he wrote copiously, are the only remaining record of his life during this period (*The diaries are in the possession of the Shelley Estate and Remembrance Foundation in London, and can be viewed by appointment. Arrangements for publishing of the diaries have repeatedly fallen through, and as of this writing there are no plans to bring them into print*), and from them we receive the impression that Shelley was becoming more and more paranoid, less and less in step with the outside world. As he delved deeper and deeper into the past he developed feelings of persecution and fear analogous to those of the people he studied; he was in spiritual exile alongside Antiochus. He was being burned at the stake.

The pressure of the criticism leveled at him, the rejection of his life's greatest work, the dissolving of his personal relationships, his slow descent into poverty; these things gradually destroyed Shelley's will to live. His passion, his dedication to the preservation of Antiocheanism, had sustained him through times of desperate difficulty and helped him to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, but it was not enough to keep a man alive in a world he had come to hate.

“Life has rejected me,” he said, “and I reject life. It is just as it is written. Antiochus would have been so proud.”

On Christmas night, 1902, William Shelley broke a window and snuck into the basement of the Carlyle estate, where the unsold copies of *The Books Of Terror and Longing* were kept. He doused the entire room in kerosene. He walked outside, watched the moon and smoked a cigarette, and, when finished, flicked the smoldering butt onto the basement floor. He then laid down upon the pile of unwanted paper, the faith and desperation he had spent his entire life protecting, and waited, motionless, for the fire to consume him.

He left a one-line suicide note on his desk, carefully placed on top of everything that was left of his writing. Attached to the small scrap of paper was a 50-pound note.

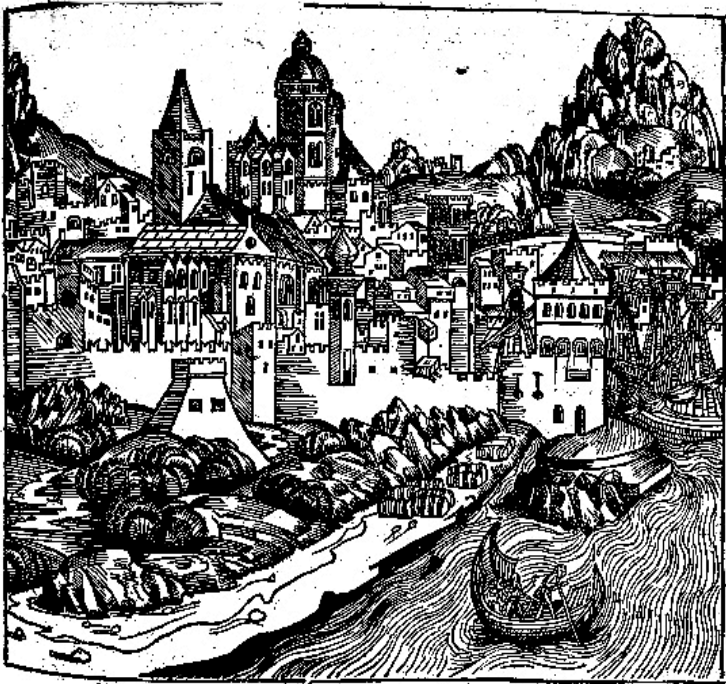
“I would be remiss,” he wrote, “if I did not include this month’s rent. And being remiss is the one thing I can no longer tolerate.”



PART FIVE

The Plow That Broke The Plains

A QUICK ONE BEFORE THE ETERNAL WORM
DEVOURS CONNECTICUT



BLOODHAIL

*I feel the top of the roof come off, kill everybody there
as I'm watching all the stars burn out, trying to pretend that I care
but I didn't, no-one ever does
and I would, no-one ever will
can't you see it's all flown out of my hands
and our clothes are all too often ripped
and our teeth are all too often gnashed
and it lasts as long as it possibly can
but I just don't accept this
I just don't accept this at all.
Faces sweaty, arms and legs
what a glorious set of stairs we make
we kill everyone with
arrowheads
arrowheads
arrowheads
thank god that's over.*

TELEFONY

*If science is half the man it says it is
then I can build it
the machine that snaps all of time in half
I can break it's back
I can break it's back
I can build a door
and I can travel through
they do it with telephony
you don't see it much anymore, but
but surely I
but surely I
If I could just hear your voice
but I don't think I have the choice
The look on your face
when I first connect the line
for the very first time
my words come slowly to mind
"is anybody there?"
all trembling and scared
replies then come
fainter than air
"when the world hates a body
it just throws itself away
to a place where our hands can't reach."*

THE BIG GLOOM

Slipping in and out of an ice bath

no warmth, no life without

it's too much

my arms, my legs are wood

unconscious trees

with roots deep in the ground

we will all be out, soon

an ocean ringed with tile

I know that's not your style

but it certainly will be mine

If I can't get this right

so, please

please

please release me

Can you hear my faintest breath, is it amplified

the number that I've become, will you put inside

I've got a message that I must relay

no, I can't delay it one more day (it's not going well)

it is desperate, can you relate

can you please, please relate? (I'm not holding up)

I am trapped, I'm stuck here (On this bathroom floor)

And I don't have much more hope or pride

No air, No food (But I'm sure that I'm still alive)

No, I can't say that I'm still alive

just open up your eyes, you dead ones (all ashes on the floor)

I will never need you more

just open up your eyes

you dead ones

HUNTER

*Hunter, I'm laid out on the forest floor
arrows in my back and sides
down among the leaves and stones
you can wear my skin as armor
you can eat my flesh and bones
leave nothing that is needed
all I have, is yours*

*And I'll give myself up to your sharpened edges
I no longer cling to my life
yes, I'm finally giving in
Teeth and hate end our relationship
of course it's sad, but that's the way it is
your violence always wins the day
yes,
your violence wins*

*And I'll give myself up to your sharpened edges
I no longer cling to my life
yes, I'm finally giving in
Oh, and you watch as the animals
lay themselves
down at your feet
a thousand bared teeth
a thousand bowed heads
yes, they're begging you for
death*

*The Hunter does us all a great service
and we've done so much to deserve it*

WHO WOULD LEAVE THEIR SON OUT IN THE SUN?

*It's time that all these things that I do, no matter what
become things of the past
it's time that all these things that I wish I could forget
join in the ranks
of things I regret
but there aren't enough archangels in the sky
to come down and make me feel right
I'm miserable whenever I think of it
and I think of it
all the time
you could part their feathered wings
and have your way with them
just like you do to all of us
all the time
what point is there in pushing on
when all you push against
is a brick wall?
Everyone spends some time on the cross
I just want to make sure it's not a total loss
so maybe I'll get tanned
and lose some weight while I wait
Everyone spends some time on the cross
I just want to make sure it's not a total loss
so, deny me three times
or hurry up and fucking
decide*

THERE IS NO FOOD





PART SIX

The Future

WAITING FOR BLACK METAL RECORDS TO COME IN
THE MAIL

*What has become of us, all ceilings, all skies
in that, the stars can swim a thousand dark miles
before they ever see the floor again
with their backs against the wall on these last days
but then, we knew that would happen anyway
you drop that pitch-black pall
over us, one and all, again
to propel your national machines
giving us all the disease, but not the vaccine
a thousand tiny lives
disappear into the black depths
I guess I thought I'd feel something
but I didn't
yes, that's a myth
I would give anything
for a cool glass of water
without this poisonous oil
no
it's never going to be good enough
there's no air anywhere
it's all money now
wouldn't you do the same?*

HOLY FUCKING SHIT: 40,000

*Everything you do is planned out in advance
the stars push their dark wills down on you
and wolves all tear themselves apart better in packs
that's just a function we'll have to work on through
we are machines that eat and breathe and look really cool
you're reacting just the way I thought you would
but I've replaced my heart with metal parts
and I'm working just fine, but I can't get it to start
we are machines that breathe and weep and look really good trained to kill
send me back in time and I'll bring us back in line
just tell me who's mother I have to kill
I'm fine like I've always been, except I don't remember-whens
my conscience didn't act up again
we're living on borrowed time
and it looks like they want it back*

DEEP, DEEP

*These atoms are liars
They do not realize, and we can't blame them
art as a means of escape, they don't see the down-side
and that's what takes them
out on the floor
one stretches out it's hands
into the small of a back
and as they circle the room, as they circle the floor
one just wants it more
well, they don't want, anymore
you can sleep in these hollows and rivers
exalt the righteous and drown the sinners
jesus christ
jesus christ, why is love so lonely
all water on earth
evaporates into steam and erupts from the ground
does anyone else feel guilty?
like I did it all myself
one feels a lack of love and there's no limit
to the explosive power of this bomb
how do we reconcile our deaths
we'd better figure it out before long*

THE FUTURE



I DON'T LOVE

I don't want to live like this, lord

I don't want to live at all

I don't want to make this face anymore

but if I don't, that's all

I don't want to live like this anymore

I don't want to live at all

I don't want to make this face anymore

but if I don't, that's all

I don't love

I don't feel anything

I don't feel anything where this love should be

I don't want to feel this anymore

but if I don't, that's fake

I don't want to do this anymore

but there's nothing else to take

I don't love

I don't feel anything

I don't feel anything where this love should be

EARTHMOVER

*Carved out of stone, earth, blood and bone
knock the mountains down
the earth's grating sounds
they soothe the great machines
that yearn desperately
just to lay them down within her gaping mouth
more than a symbol
more than I bargained for
they wander ridges high
between the earth and sky
like spikes upon a crown we wear upon our brow
and want is not a need reserved for human beings
it's fingers on your throat
is pain that all things know
An army of the golems is stalking, now, the heart's lands
eating all reality
producing only dust and sand
nothing hurts them
nothing gets under their stone skin
and when their earthen mouths will open up
just what words should come out? but
"we wish we were dead"*



PART SEVEN

Afterword

DEATHCONSCIOUSNESS was created over a five year period,
stretching from late 2002 to late 2007.

All songs on *The Plow That Broke The Plains* and *The Future* were
written by Dan and Tim.

Have A Nice Life has, at separate times during this recording, included
Thao, Brian, Will, and Cody.

The band would like to thank [REDACTED] for his generos-
ity and impeccable scholarship.

All songs were recorded at *2 Brainard* in Middletown, Connecticut, and
are distributed through *Enemies List Home Recordings*.

enemieslist.net

myspace.com/haveanicelife

All songs were recorded with the following:

a Computer

Logic

a Digitech GNX4 (for USB interface)

a MIDI Controller

an old toy piano that Tim found

a shitty keyboard from the 80's

a guitar

a bass

For a total cost of about \$1000, including the printing of the CDs and
book.

2 Brainard Ave. Apt 3 Middletown CT 06457 | dan@enemieslist.net



██████████ has taught Religious Anthropology and History at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for almost 10 years. He is widely considered to be one of the world's leading experts on Medieval Heresy, and has written extensively on the subject of Antiocheanism.

He can be reached at ██████████

Dan and Tim are recording in a bedroom in the middle of nowhere.

