

# Wilderness

## Abstract

Set in the Desert of Chalcis in the year 374 CE, this dramatic monologue explores the tribulations of the young eremite Hieronymus as he battles with both the Devil and himself in his search for God.

Anthony said, 'He who sits alone and is quiet has escaped from three wars: hearing, speaking, seeing: but there is one thing against which he must continually fight: that is, his own heart.'

*~ Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

## *The Desert of Chalcis, 374 CE*

Αυτος γάρ εστιν ή ειρήνη ήμων    ό ποιήσας τα  
αμφότερα εν και το μεσότοιχον  
του φραγμου λύσας την εχθραν  
εν τη σαρκι αυτου    Αυτος γάρ εστιν ή ειρήνη ήμων  
ό ποιήσας τα  
αμφότερα εν και το μεσότοιχον  
του φραγμου λύσας την εχθραν  
εν τη σαρκι αυτου    Cum enim ad  
imaginem et similitudinem  
Dei conditi sumus    ex vitio nostro  
et personas  
nobis plurimas superinducimus

plurimas

plurimas

and the wind laughs sand laughs laughs in  
the wind Rome seems unreal the  
laughter of a dream dreamt in  
sand the promise of a dream dunes  
of sun blight the laughter of hunger  
wild eyed nowhere oasis dreaming

## *FOCUS*

O Lord, have pity.  
I'm blind,  
Can't see.  
Sand streams my eyes,  
Strains my thoughts to visions.  
O Lord, I cannot see.

O Lord, have pity.  
My ribs hack through the  
Carcass of my chest.  
Laughing. Hungry.  
Mad demons, Lord,  
In the madness of your sun.

O Lord, have pity.  
My skin's a blister,  
Charred from bleeding.  
Dried like your fig tree,  
Withered in summer.  
O Lord, Lord

I have lost my body  
And become my body.

I have lost.

הלכ            [kā/lā]

העשר [ré/šá']

שה            [šeh]

רכש            [šé/ber]

The day you spoke to me  
the trees were in flower.

You came into the garden,  
your palla, careless, trailing  
on the ground, your eyes,  
questioning. A smiling word,  
silent amid the scent of thyme.

And I think, in that moment,  
I knew. Not love, but its likeness,  
trapped in water. Sunlight laughing  
in the fountain's glass.

And I watched you speaking with Rufinus.

Your words caressing  
in the arbour's shade, tender like blossom.  
An intimate distance of petals  
and hands, fragile like touching.

I hated him then.  
The grace of his freedom  
caging your smile. Each gesture  
lithe with the bliss of desire.  
Svelte with your innocence.

הלכ  
– העשר

*Are you there?*

I can't see.

There're snakes here.

*Snakes.*

I don't like snakes.  
They writhe out of the ground,  
blackened coils of sinuous flesh.  
Loathsome. Dancing.  
If you watch them they begin to  
blur. Shed their skin.  
You can see the  
tangled birth of limbs,  
the writhing,  
licking mass of limbs,  
the hissing  
swirl of silk and arms.  
They rouse the  
heated breath of sand.  
Sultry. Yearning.  
Haunches flexing  
with a thrash  
of heels.  
You can feel their  
voices bite the air.  
Whoring words  
through sunlight  
burning.  
The soothing touch  
of scented hands.  
*I can feel  
their fingers  
snake my hair –*

*their kiss of  
moonlight cool  
like water –  
the bliss of  
drowning –  
angels' wings –  
the tenderness  
of blossom  
falling –  
the heady  
musk of  
lissom skin –  
the tenderness  
of blossom  
falling –  
licking tongues –  
angels' wings –  
the agony of  
blossom  
falling –  
blossom falling –  
tongues of  
wings –  
licking  
tongues of  
moonlight  
falling –  
blossom drowning –  
angels' wings –  
the agony  
of moonlight  
falling –  
licking tongues –  
the bliss  
of wings –  
of tenderness –  
of blossom  
falling –  
of tenderness –  
of –*

**OUT!**

Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-  
ha-ha-ha-ha-ha –

*“Hieronymus.”*

Who are you? Where are you?

*“Hieronymus.”*

Who are you?

What do you want?  
    *"I have watched  
you squat amongst the bones,  
    your eyes longing for the guilt  
    of the dead.  
How many tombs, Hieronymus?  
    How many tears until your corpse  
    is dust?  
Did you think I'd hear you, Hieronymus?  
    Did you think I'd  
find your body in  
    the dust?"*

Lord?

Is that you? I can't see. There're  
shadows in my eyes. Patterns dance like  
broken sunlight. But the sun itself  
has gone.

*"Look at me."*

I can't, Lord.

*"Look at me."*

Cicero?

Marcus Tullius Cicero? Here?  
Alive? No. No, you're dead. Dead these  
four hundred years. Murdered by  
Marc Anthony. What are you?

*"What are you?"*

I, I am a Christian.

*"Liar. Ciceronianus es,  
non Christianus."*

No.

*"Yes. You grovel in your cell, your  
belly low  
to the earth.*

*You pray upon your knees  
and mortify  
your flesh.*

*But blood and filth  
can't wash you clean,  
Hieronymus.*

*You reek of death."*

Get away from me.

*"I know you, Hieronymus."*

I am a Christian.

*"Pagan. Idolater.*

*Nabēlâ'. You lie to God,  
don't lie to me.*

*I know you. Each painful thought  
buried in the sand.*

*Each sunburnt prayer  
left unanswered.*

We all want  
to be loved, Hieronymus.  
We all want to feel His love.  
Sometimes it burns, Hieronymus.  
Is love a sin?  
Does it make of us  
a wilderness?"

**Leave me!**

"The day she spoke to you the trees were in flower.  
I can feel her

sunlight

laughing off water.

The bitter reflection

of petals

and hands.

Can you feel it too,

Hieronymus?

Our words caressing

in the arbour's shade,

tender like blossom –

an intimate twining

of petals

and hands?"

Please.

"She never

loved you,

Hieronymus.

Never reached

out to touch you.

She never loved you,

Hieronymus.

But she loves me.

What are you, Hieronymus?

Nothing. A corpse burnt by the

madness of God.

But God doesn't love you,

Hieronymus.

He doesn't hear the

vomit of your heart.

No one loves you,

Hieronymus.

No one but me.

Worship me, Hieronymus.

And I will

love you."

Help me.

Lord...help me.

Alone.

A breeze strokes  
the sand,

and for a moment  
it dances.

Who are you?

I know you.

And yet...

Yes.

Yes, I'll follow.

Your sunlight laughs  
like water in my eyes.

And for a moment  
I can see.

