

5-1-2014

The Body and the Blood

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Recommended Citation

Wood, Eugene (2014) "The Body and the Blood," *Hieroglyphics: the NSU University School Literary Magazine*: Vol. 20 , Article 42.
Available at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/uschool_litmag/vol20/iss1/42

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Photo: Gabriella Bowling



The Body and the Blood

EUGENE WOOD

I sit, prone, and listen to my own shallow breathing.

I open my eyes and I'm in a barn. Two doors pan out in front of me, and I'm struck by the absolute blood-red quality of the chipping paint. Moments pass and I realize that the paint is blue, that the red was something different.

I close my eyes to oblivion. It lasts only an instant, and then I'm opening my eyes to heaven. The angels' light streams down from above me; it flows through me until I've drank my fill, then I am forsaken; my vision clears, and I see I'm still in the barn. A man stands before me, and I follow the line of his billowing robes up to his leering face, then past it, to the man hanging above the barn doors, his legs close together, his arms stretched wide.

"I'm glad you're with us," the man before me says, his smile growing ever wider. "We're all glad."

From far above, Christ heaves a raking gasp. I can see the tension in his arms even from this far below, the unnatural tightness in his shoulders. His chest heaves up, then down every other second, but only by the smallest fraction. It's hard to say though with his head drooping down like that. From down below it looks like twitching.

The man before me is speaking, but I choose not to listen. Instead, I stare at Christ. He has curly black hair.

Eventually the man brings a hand to my eyes, so all I see is him. Then I listen.

"I see you have noticed Our Savior," he says, lifting his hand. He's closer, and his head blocks Christ, so I look at him instead. His smile takes up a third of his face and exposes his gums, like his lips are afraid to touch. I stare at just them, his teeth, just the whiteness of the whale, until he speaks again.

"We aren't Christians, don't be mistaken, but we borrow from their work." He steps ever closer. "That we are human, we accept, and that to be human is to have sin, we also accept, but this state is not incurable. Or predecessors present the idea of a watchful and judgmental god, watching and judging as its children cling to their sin, that is until one golden child absolves us, endures our pain so we never have to. That one good, precious child stands over us, bathes and purifies this Holy Ground with his glorious innerworkings until all that remains is the frame, that structure which we read and worship in the stead of scripture, until such time as sin prevails and penetrates even that divine template. At such time, Our Savior rejoins us on this most holy ground, and we are once again overtaken with sin. Our watchful and judgmental god watches and judges us through all this time, guarding us, granting us the great favor of its presence, so how could we subject god to bear the ruination of this golden child. It would be the most vile cruelty. So we allow god to die, as god should, and live three days of godlessness before welcoming the gaze of a new god and the sacrifice of its own golden child. It has been three long days."

He beams down at me, and the barn echoes with his sudden silence, with the space that had just been filled with words. Behind me, the multitudes of unseen become a chorus of lungs, their breath rings in my ears. But from above, Christ is silent. He isn't moving. Just waking up...

The man before me notices as well.

"People," he says, throwing his head back and arms out, taking in the glory of the limp, slumping figure above. "Our Savior has risen."

I lift my eyes to him. His hair is black, hanging down in tendrils over his abdomen, but it isn't really. It's brown up close.

Those gathered behind speak as one, but the words themselves don't register in my ears—I'm watching the man before me: the billow in his robes as he steps towards me, the shine in his scalp, the tightness of his face, the bone-white of his teeth. His hands reach for me, but instead grab just beyond my shoulders. I'm whipped around.

Now before me lies an undulating sea of twitching masses. I look into their eyes one by one until I can no longer, then I look at their teeth. When I can't stand that either, I go to close my eyes. I can't.

For the first time, I panic. The crowd blends and merges, blotting together; the room spins.

The man places his hand upon my head. I can't feel it, can only see the tips of his fingers curling above my brow. "We are all so glad to have you watch over us."

PHOTO: GIOVANNA ELIA

