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Kurdénras

Kurdénras

by

Alexander Dove Lempke

I

Oh ancient destroying Sun,
oh ancient reviving Moon,
how, how was this evil done?
Around my feet are strewn
the bones that once held the flesh
of all men who were brave and fought—
now burned up like worthless grass
when the farmer has come to thresh.
Sing, sing of the fiend who brought
this vicious design to pass!

I know his all-veiling name:
Kurdénras! the Duke of Hell—
but whose is the terrible blame
that such a dark birth befell?
Whence came the awful strength
of his all-unsainting hand,
that holds the scepter of bone?
How came he to rule the length
of the once-unravished land?
He rules all the land alone.

His wrath is a shadow of wrath
and his lust is a shadow of lust,
twin bonfires hedging the path
of the weak and stumbling just;
all flowers and fields and trees
he puts to the torch, and smothers
all flames that he did not set;
all fiends of the lands and seas
are called his sisters and brothers—
what father could them beget?

And how can a feeble singer
survive in this wasted shire?
How, how can a grass-blade linger
in such an all-dimming fire?
Oh ancient destroying Sun,
oh ancient reviving Moon,
I sit, a mere broken man
at the feet of the evil one—
I know I am dying soon,
but tell me how this began.

I hear you, reviving Moon,
you Stars in your wheeling courses;
your sweet, heart-soothing tune
and your roar like the hooves of horses,
roaring with ancient rage
at the impious feet of sin
that stepped on the virgin time
of an old, first-ravished age.
Oh tell me, how did it begin?
Enlighten my dying rhyme.

II

The firstborn of angels now was a shapeless shade
of power and power's thirst, a bodiless ache
for more of that might he vainly had dared to take,
which consumed him—the first betrayer, thus self-betrayed.
Now drifting on nothing, formless, himself a void,
ravaged by thirst he could nevermore hope to slake,
dead beyond death and hating all that could live,
a high-born maker unmade, refusing to make
but choosing destruction, so by himself destroyed,
he never again could take, but still had the power to give.

He searched all worlds for a creature he might unmake:
cunning and swift, and filled with a predator's guile,
something whose nature, once bloated and rendered vile
would be merciless, mighty and fierce—and he found a snake.
His power he poured, his power of hatred burning
into the virgin serpent's slumbering coil—
awaking, white hot, it fled to the ocean's deep;
it hissed, and the ocean hissed and began to boil.
And there in the hissing heart of the waters churning
the serpent was taking new flesh, cursed never again to creep.

The rumbling sea and the fertile, steadfast earth,
the mountain's summit, the lowest lurking pit,
the milk-young clouds that had never before felt dread
all trembled to feel—oh horrible!—that unbirth.
Enshrouded in seas he burned like a star of drought,
unserved by the flame: the strands of his flesh unknit,
his heart-strings unwound, his mind and his meat unwed,
his passion unbound, the song of his soul unwrit,
his tongue unsealed—a voice from the snake rang out:
his terrible name was uttered, and never may be unsaid.

“Kurdénras!” the word outrang from the writhing storm—
“Kurdénras!” the echoes groaned as the planets wailed,
and out of the clearing steam was the snake unveiled:
the four unequal limbs of an angel's form
projecting in massy bulk from a towering frame
where once the graceful length of his body trailed;
he bared his fangs and opened his yellow eyes
and the mountains moaned and the depths of the ocean quailed—
and after the awful utterance of his name,
new blasphemies ran from the evil mouth of the lord of lies:

“Tremble Almighty! for I am immortal made—
nevermore cursed to crawl in the pious dust
or taste for my prey by means of a mortal tongue.

I now am your shadow's son, by his power arrayed
in mighty and fearful limbs and a name of dread,
loosed from desireless sleep to exalted lust.
By numberless worlds are your fruitless praises sung—
let them sing mine, for my arm has declared they must.
From every vein, let the vigor of life be bled,
from every last lifeless rock, the strength of destruction wrung!”

The star of plagues, first formed of the demon race
thus rose in his power, ablaze with the fire of hell,
and forth his first laughter rolled like a clanging knell,
shooting a fearful quake through the vault of space.
He rose, the firstborn of evil, as yet alone,
but chosen to rule whole multitudes as they fell,
to send out the ranks of the first betrayer's spawn.
Let all men hear, if words can suffice to tell—
if knowledge can hope to ready, let it be known:
he rose, and the heavens shook at the sight of his evil dawn.