

# For Reformers of Forgotten Religions

by [Mark J. Mitchell](#) (January 2025)



Sea With Two Smoldering Steamboats (Emil Nolde, 1930)

## For Reformers of Forgotten Religions

*Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising.*

*Demons of the earth, they will not last. –Allen Tate, Ode to the Confederate Dead*

You came off the mountain. Your lightning voice warned us, called us back. You could recite the names

we'd misplaced while digging for the soft gold  
we thought gods wanted. You remembered the forms  
of worship, days of feasts, the dance the lame  
king danced. You knew the real stories. You told  
us, 'Come home or all is lost. The shifting warm  
sand will cover you. Your cities will fold  
like reeds. You'll regret the day you were born.'

You sang sweet as time's own thief,  
And the desert danced back for a while.

You rose. The sea offered you like a wave.  
Your crashing voice called, 'Our mother is warm.  
She loves. Don't be fooled by the lewd Ishtars,  
bold Astartes. Scorpion people won't save  
you from her anger. She's mother of storms.  
She'll crush you to sand beneath dying stars.  
Remember only her name, all she gave  
us—mornings, fish, our holy sailing arts.  
Remember all those dark sins that she forgave.'

Your thief song called to water,  
And while you sang the sea played

Stars shifted. Time opened, closed. Mountains shook.  
Dark clouds crowned them. We prayed. You never came  
back. No words. No old truths. The waves fell hard.  
People rode them, killing us. They looked  
like no one else. The mountain broke. Red flames  
and rock rained. Now, our aging, croaking bards  
forget songs. Prophecies fade. We mistook  
form for mystery. Old widows search for shards  
of our lost city. Dead scribes write our books.

You sang your lovely, stolen song:  
Time's the thief. Time's the thief. Time's the thief.

## **Casida of Making**

First,  
worship water with fire  
in your quiet kitchen.

Then  
take the red gifts of earth  
kissed black by flames—

bow  
before crushing them to fine dust  
while fire takes to water.

Fold  
brown paper to a precise cone  
to hold your offering, safe.

When  
water smiles, just before she sings,  
give her to perfect black dust.

Drink  
and wake up.

## **Stolen Roses**

All in red, he enters the grocery store,  
his outlaw face searching only for more.  
The door breathes open then closed. Cool false air  
slapping at his face, making him aware  
of purpose—his love's needs he can't ignore.

She's home and perfect as flowers. She pours  
her love like a watering can. He swore  
she'd have roses. Leaving, she made him wear  
nothing but red

for Valentine's, she said. He smiled and tore  
a bouquet from a stand, checking the floor  
for eyes that might stop him. There were none there.  
He walks, slow, to the sensitive door, where,  
starting to run, he remembers she wore  
nothing but red.

## **Moonlight**

### ***An Imitation of Fernando Villalón***

You own this evening:  
Joining your light with light  
like music of bells  
falling through moonlight.

Roosters never crow here.  
The city is too bright  
with cars driving fast  
ignorant of moonlight.

So, so and so, it's past twelve.

The table's clear, no bite  
is left unless you're willing  
to eat this moonlight.

Clap, slap, clap your tiny hands.  
Make a speech out of night,  
give a gift of finger blossoms  
thrown towards moonlight.

Ah and so, see how they look!  
Your cloud of a blouse,  
your legs, your breasts so bright  
they guide sailors through rocks  
on this ocean of moonlight.

### **A Found Temple**

Plants mark a lintel  
made for those gods  
kissed lightly by stars.

Nature is quick here:  
A sharp tremor  
sets blossoms dancing.

Look low and high  
as you step across, between  
two pillars guarded by flowers.

No one will say  
where this open, ancient door  
may lead you.

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**Mark J. Mitchell** has been a working poet for 50 years. He's the author of five full-length collections, and six chapbooks. His latest collection is *Something To Be* from Pski's Porch Publishing. A novel, *A Book of Lost Songs* is due out in Spring of 2025. He's fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco where he points out pretty things

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