

Virgin Mary, Mother of God in Her Niche at St. James

I feel wear. My eyes, they droop.
Perpetually I extend my hands, saintly cupped, to receive
the woes and anguish and points of mortal heart
prayed silently from those who kneel before me.
I hear the many-peopled tangled whorl of life;
I strain to prepare the host to meet it,
but I cannot cause a turn-about;
despite my deepest yearning,
I am not God.

Many look upon the sacred mother's wrist
and lapse silently into divine plenitude
when what lacks is that they be
a frayed flag, slapping red-random
in the wind, shaking in purity.
I curve with throbbing words
and wish all would speak at God's open slot, alone,
instead of scuffing me repeatedly with their smear.

I exhale deep, a breath that becomes part of my shoulder.
I cough and it's gone without a thought.
No penitent hears this.
No one thinks I weep alone
amid the hushed colors of this holy place.
They beg deep prayers of their own agonies,
yearning to descend at the trembling of the water
and hoping I will bear their weight.
(God does not) yet I do know the bottom of the well—
dank and neither seen nor heard
except by those condemned to wear
the grimy spatter of evil days.