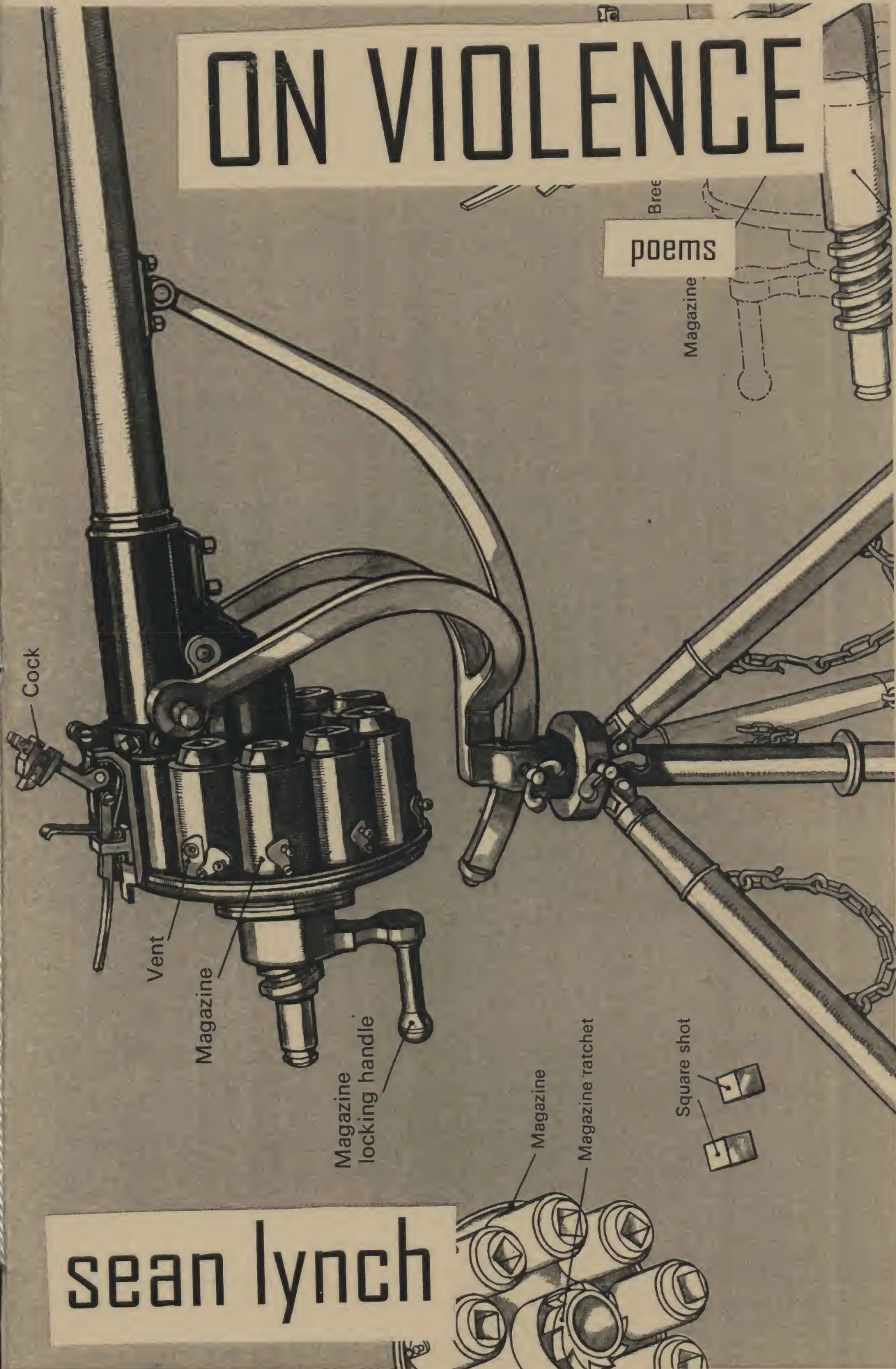


ON VIOLENCE

poems



sean lynch

Session 10

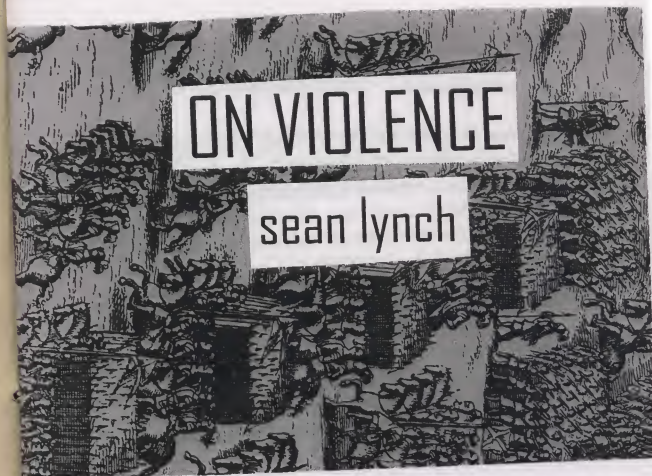
Exploring Anger In A
Supportive Way

Materials needed:

Old pillow for pounding.

Paper, pencils, envelopes.

Bible; also *Concordance* or *Interpreter's Bible*, if obtainable.



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Acknowledgments

"To Wear Disease Around Your Neck" was originally published in *Milkfist*. "The Infinite Spaces Between Everything" was originally published in *Eunoia Review*. "The Sodomite is Dead!" was originally published in *Cacti Fur*. "Feed the Piranhas" was originally published in *Curate This: Philly*. "At Whitman's Tomb," "With the Word We Will be Healed," and "Militant Throws King's Colt" were originally published in *Misfit Magazine*.

Sources for these poems include: *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, *Sources of European History Since 1900* by Marvin Perry, Matthew Berg, James Krukones, and *Negroes with Guns*, by Robert F. Williams.

Previous Books by Sean Lynch

the city of your mind (Whirlwind Press, 2013)
Broad Street Line (Moonstone Press, 2016)
100 Haiku (Moonstone Press, 2018)

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An Ode to Robert F. Williams

We don't intend to be lynched,
the black WW2 vet said
while pointing a gun
in the face of a frightened cop
who refused to protect his family
from a Klan rally.

Mr. Williams sat in his car
with his two sons
as a swarm of ghosts
surrounded the vehicle
stopped at a barren intersection
in small town North Carolina.
The veiled white men hollered
and shook Mr. Williams' car
until he opened the door
while holding an Italian carbine.
He didn't even have to fire.
The Klansmen scattered,
parted like a white sea
to let blue pigs approach the car
with authority. *Surrender your weapon,*
one cop shouted until he had the butt
of a gun held by a black man
break his nose. The other cop
reached for his revolver
but Mr. Williams' eldest son
was faster—at 17 years of age
he held the power few other
black boys have held
of pointing a gun
in a police officer's face.
The parade of racists retreated
except for one old white man
who fell prostrate weeping

at the sight of black men
excelling at survival.
God damn!
God damn!
What is this God damn
country coming to?
The old baby whined
and Mr. Williams
replied a final time.
We don't intend to be lynched.
The black man returned
to the driver's seat
with his sons safely
in the back.
Mr. Williams
sped down the steaming
southern dirt road
and sighed in relief.

That's What They Get

Before Wikileaks was banned
by the American government
I went on their website
in the Paul Robeson library in Camden, New Jersey
and watched a video called "Collateral Murder."
Dirty rainwater streamed down the window panes
featuring the supposedly revitalized city
as we stared into computer screens on my display—
pixels stood static as I witnessed footage of the slaughter
of innocents.
My countrymen howled *ooh rah*
with joy as explosive rounds
pierced the thin doors of a Toyota
mini van (the same kind those airmen's wives
drove their precious kids to school with)
carrying small Iraqi children.
In grainy sepia I saw their fathers' bodies
disappear beneath smoke
as students around me lounged
in cushioned chairs. They typed loudly
and I cried silently and the American soldiers
thought themselves American heroes
evacuating limp little bodies riddled with holes
punctured by projectiles from omnipresent helicopters.
Inside the floating death machine
an American said, *That's what they get*
for bringing children to a warzone.
But the victims' obliterated fathers
held cameras not rpgs—journalists, not terrorists.
Born above pools of black liquid.
Bombarded into pools of red.
That's what they get.

With the Word We Will be Healed

*Stoned to death in the streets of San Francisco, in the year
of grace 1869 by a mob of half-grown boys and Christian
school children.*

—Bret Harte, "Wan Lee, the Pagan"

The tiniest one cast first
then lined up for smiles
in a sepia school picture
viewing a future stranger
says how cute the young
pale tot smiles into the present.

Wan Lee's human flesh
was never photographed.
Rather, the iron and wood
in which he worked became
what his master's religion bid
them to be. A conduit imposed on.
A conduit to conquer the Sierra Nevada.

It was true.

Wan Lee
was meek
and so he inherited soil.
And yet it was foreign.

Militant Throws King's Colt

VOTES FOR WOMEN
materialized five years
after you had sewn
the phrase into material
hidden under your dress, Emily.

Why did you cross
under the fence
and stand in front
of the king's horse
that early Summer's day
at the Epsom Derby?

Why not starve? Cut wires?
Smash paintings? Burn mansions?

Emily, your name still touches
ears, but much unlike the hooves
that trampled your fallow flesh and bones.

Were the Pankhursts proud
of your endeavor?
Was it more than just inequality
eating through you?

Did you intend to die?
If so, was violent death worth
a card inscribed
with names of men
who lacked your courage?

On Violence

I learned from a woman named Emmeline
that violence enacts change.

Like magic, violence marks our lives—
its scars fill the pages of history.

Mundane violence haunts the everyday
experience of commoners.

The violence on the TV: from football
to crime drama, from soap opera to cartoon.

Violence penetrates us from an early age.
Violence gets things done.

I was taught that violence isn't the answer
then was bombarded with violent entertainment

that cheapened it. Emmeline Pankhurst proved
violence has purpose in protest and sacrifice.

that instead of the usual violence that men
exhibit—of intimidation, assault, rape, murder—

that there's an opportunity cost of violence
that violence against capital creates freedom.

To disrupt commerce. To sabotage industry.
To never accept the status quo.

That in order to break chains
there needs to be force.

To Wear Disease Around Your Neck

The ebola necklace at the flea market
was not in the shape of a microbial
ambiguous blur, nor did its reddened
innards resonate on a blue slide.
No, the item was not an artist's rendering
of some surreal flattened figure.
The ebola necklace gemstone
was a vial in which liquid
shifted as its steel chain-link swung
before the pale vendor.
Inside its weak cage the worm-like
replication floated peacefully
hanging from a wooden rack
among the inane as American consumers
laughed while touching the novelty.
An alien disease only temporary to them.
The object a satirical memorial to dead Africans
held between white, plump, pallid fingers—
the ebola necklace at the flea market.

The Infinite Spaces Between Everything

The protestors with picket signs
will surround you and yell *Have mercy*.
It will be sunny and cars will pass
with glare obscuring humans oblivious
to the pain and profundity
of a concrete and stucco one-story building
holding the remains of living people.
And you will remember this day
when the sun shines a certain way
above the asphalt holding
imprisoned fossils
of invisible dreams.

Deaf Child at Play

There's this simple yellow street sign
planted into cement that's diamond shaped
and decades old. The paint chipped and post rusted.
DEAF CHILD AT PLAY.

There's a ghost of a child on this block
on Westfield Avenue in Camden.
A street lined with abandoned businesses
and boarded up houses.

There's the phantom toddler
who plays with a ball
by itself in the center of the street.
Cars pass by, the drivers unaware
that down the hill there's the vacant schoolyard
in a neighborhood where so many
dreams have died along with their bearers
who will never be recorded. Sufferings annihilated
by time. There's the pain separated
from the body and minds floating through space.
The sign is still there in spite
of the deaf child being a dead child.
A toddler with a long blouse and bowl cut.
There is the figure at a distance.
The city knows the sign must still stand
to warn motorists not to kill the invisible child.
There is the pulse of the street and the ability
to bear witness to every personal tragedy
regardless of how major or minor.
Four corners abandoned. The center filled
with traffic. There is the traffic of brain matter
released as energy into a place anyone can see
but cannot comprehend.
To a time where no machine can travel.
There is the street that can be stood on
but not understood.

At least not until you're dead yourself
then that deaf child will be visible.
There is where the living will be phantoms
and the city that looks dead in life will resurrect
from the thoughts of a dead deaf child at play.
There you will know
why the dreams of the dead
still touch the living
as if those that are alive
are stiff bodies in a morgue.

The Sodomite is Dead!

Philadelphia's Market Street
continues underwater
and onto the Delaware River's eastern bank
where empty structures are no longer
stores in designated places
along the four lane formerly city
street [*this is no longer a city*]
with no fear of getting hit [*it's already hit*]
on its own accord the blood moon once full
bled out and yet its gray visage remains
if only because of parting clouds,
and in that instant poetry is seen
by some—the few walking this still street.
What liquid courses
through our veins tonight Walt Whitman?
As ghosts stride
by your beloved Delaware
they try to catch a glimpse
of your penultimate abode
only 200 yards south of Market,
and yet the view is obstructed
by the panopticon prison
rising as one of countless
American/Babylonian
towers, this one jutting out in the cluttered
but abandoned Camden air.
What thoughts course
through ghosts' minds
of you tonight, Walt Whitman?
Someone built a fair—tents, rides—and all
on the former foundation of another prison
directly north of the big blue bridge.
Imagine the revelry—the prison was only torn
down a few years ago and now it's a party.

Screaming drunk children
revitalize the cities, kick out the residents,
redistribute the poor not the wealth.
Prisoners shipped beyond
the suburbs in privacy—
not so subtle slavery. What do you think,
Walt Whitman?
How long is the party going for?
Will we overstay our welcome?
There are no peaches left in Camden's Market
no penumbras for you to fondle.
What fun is there in eyeing
the now jobless homeless grocery boy?
The sodomite is dead! they said, and still
the phantom mob stands
on what used to be known as Mickle Street
when they heard the news of your death.
The city rejoiced and since then America
has changed the name of your street
to MLK Boulevard in mock honor,
and all the incarcerated are thinking of you
Walt Whitman even if they don't know
it, our sinful American saint.
Rise from your gray tomb
renounce manifest destiny
renounce racism
renounce the empire
so that we may begin again
bathed in fresh morning dew.

At Whitman's Tomb

I stood in the grass by the river
lost in my thoughts like the good grey poet
except with acknowledgment
that he was far from good
that he who invented
the celebration of contradiction
who studied the faces
of countless anonymous
19th century pedestrians
who pondered the motions
of now long dead birds above
could be a hero, but also a predator.
Walt Whitman, a man
who'd desire peace and prosperity
for American masses
yet also espouse Manifest Destiny
and succumb to bloodlust for scalps
of Cherokee, Iroquois, Shawnee,
Cheyenne, Arapaho, Blackfoot,
Apache, Arawak, Delaware,
of the life and limb
of the lawless and beautiful.
How this poet inspired
humans of the future
with descriptions of nature
and rhetoric of equality
then sold his words for cheap ideas
and betrayed ideals
for the short-sighted thrills of imperialism.
I stood in the grass
by this man's tomb
and all I could see
was grass.

Feed the Piranhas

The shooters are invisible
from the artist's point of view
hidden in the dunes where firemen ignite
fuses that cause colorful explosions
because the sky seemed too blank a canvas
bodies of gold light live out their finite lives
like fish that float above the beach and boardwalk
stuffed with herds of tourists
sparks spread in predicted paths
toward the abstracted
as ash rains on wood and eyes aimed
in arcs traced thousands of miles east
through the ocean that separates minds.
A holy land erupts again.
Phosphorus clouds hover above cages
where smoke pours in like blood brewed
in boiled over data. The artist is asked,
What's wrong? There's no easy answer
except that fireworks disturb too few
Americans without ptsd
everything out of context
everyone commodified.
The artist glances
at young men in blue
who holster death machines
sport childish faces, pimples, and crewcuts
or even mohawks in mockery
of exterminated natives.
These officers of the peace laugh
at girls wearing booty shorts
stamped with male names.

This is the Wildwood boardwalk
where toys made by the enslaved
a half a world away sell as bounty
won by local boys for lust
where the feasting Gerasene swine arrest
a dreaded kid who stole some paltry item
and will be branded criminal for life.
They'll shoot him if chance begets
the moment, but Jesus will not drive
this legion into the sea.
No one bears witness on the boardwalk.
And yet something doesn't feel right
to the artist commissioned to draw a child.
And the parents cajole the artist
as to why he can't do his job
any faster; it's just a caricature.
The artist is no longer immune to violence.
Close by in a makeshift storefront aquarium
more consumers gather.
A hooded boy dumps the contents
of a plastic cup down a PVC pipe
as two young girls film
the scene with smartphones
waiting, gazing at the tank
now clouding under a sign that states:
Feed the Piranhas a live goldfish!!!
\$3.00 each or 2 for \$5.00.
As sharp teeth turn yellow bodies
into red clouds and deafening explosions
are cheered by the crowd
the artist places final touches
on the piece then turns the easel to show
a swarm of jets dropping bombs
over the naked child's decapitated head

as the kid's corpse is covered
in luxury goods: jewels, designer clothes,
electronic gadgets and the like.
The parents gasp and grab
passing authorities to nab the perverted
artist who sits in catatonic dissociation.
Then a smile appears as the officers
place handcuffs on his wrists,
since the fireworks have finally subsided.

After the Burn

An acne-faced teen named Henry Bukowski
saw a fire inside a Dutchman
at a crowded Philly bar in the 1940's.
The seventy year old longshoreman,
a Boer War veteran, eyes like a lion's,
sat with a straight, broad back
and cracked three raw eggs
into each pint of beer he drank.
The kid wondered how many men
the Dutchman had killed.

The out-of-towner kid—
a frail, twenty-something
virgin—carried a notebook
and wrote of how he feared
the rusty hook that hung
from the Dutchman's back pocket
anchoring his presence
this seventy-something
still strong
a dying breed
although immortal
now, thanks to the skinny little kid
with an aching flame who became a poet.

The difference between each of them
like that of starvation
and anorexia
but it don't matter
what it is
whether fear or desire
as long as it's real
the flame that burns.

They, Who

They invented ghosts
to blanket salted earth.

They introduced executions
in private to quell riots.

They taught children
formalities to soften

dispositions, to sell
hands and arms as maps

gesturing into the unknown,
directing willed doom.

They coordinated feigned
knowledge to digest untruth

and reteach us until soil saturates
until air solidifies

until water congeals.
They were the subjects

who were never subjected
to the uncontrolled.

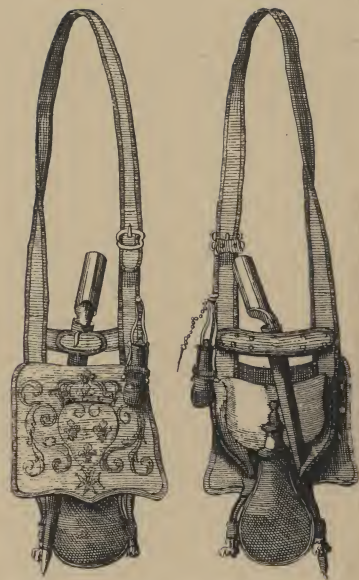
They were never subjugated
rather insulated until history

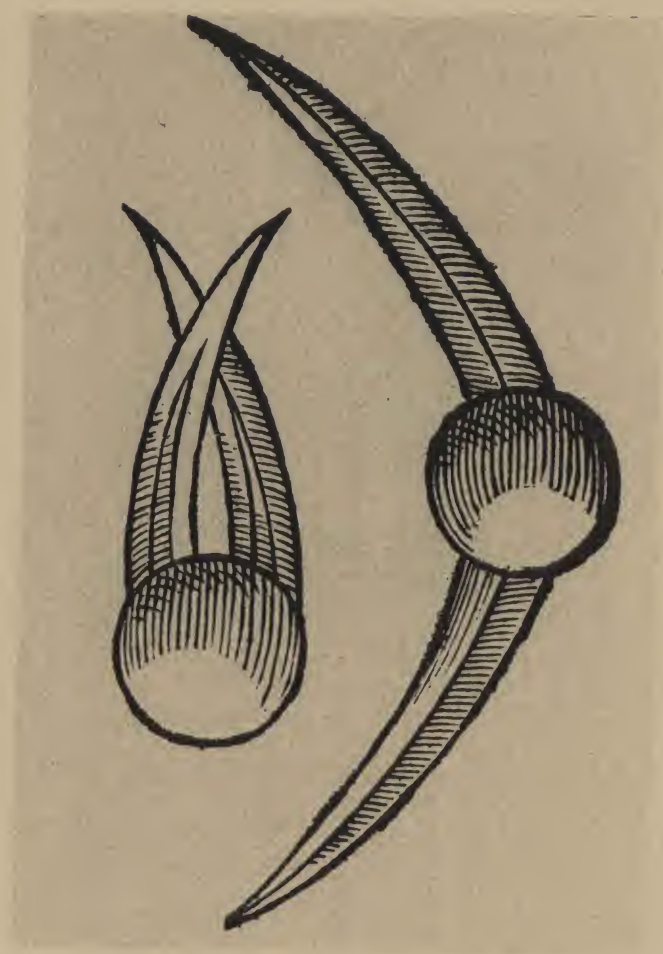
finally breaks its mold.
They, who created the cycle
yet never conquered love.



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