

Stephen Gould

THE NEW COVENANT

Bowed in the sacred ark on knees
Of ophiolatry I have burned a virgin candle
To the desert flatness of my forehead and in curious
Attrition bent, arms stretched
With spread palms down, leaving
In the yet warm hardening seal
Of wax a masked impression of my face
And in the beginning light of a candle in new
Worship arisen, hand-and-knee
Stooped, studying, fingers of flesh
Following the open tracings of the flesh
Set opposite in waxen mimicry —
Felt the lumps of eye and nose
Recessed in valleys of reverse imitation,
And the lips, and where a ridge lifts
Amid the wax folds and cuts,
Felt the gullied channels down
My flesh, across the desert's stretch —

O baals of my brow, I feel the chisels
Of my time at work, and blasting sand
Wears the desert surface thin.

The slow candle in reverence to my sunning
Goddess trickles viscous liquid
Down my final slopes into the recessions
Of my valleys; slowly lower it burns
As I, back on virgin knees,
Watch a drifting curl of smoke
Ascend, ophidian, and look at last
Back to where the trickle spreads
My image again to desert flatness.
The indrinkable viscosity of wax fills
All, has seeped ameboid to the burial
Of my study; the last drift of smoke
Rings its tail up into the ark.