

Sestina of the Martyrdom

Mark Bennion

On the long tether of a day in June
Beyond the Zion swamps, the prisoned palms
Of four men opened toward a promised land.
And yet, below the shadows of limestone
Joseph thought again, *I am going*
Like a lamb to the slaughter.

There was time to think of slaughter
As the sun poured down its muggy June
And their voices rose in the glare, going
Out to the hungry mob. Their prophetic palms,
Sweaty with the dust of limestone,
Wore the memories of open land

From Kirtland to the Far West landing
From visions of Armageddon slaughter
To Daniel's thick and growing stone.
They wondered if they'd live past June.
They sang a final hymn. John raised his palms
To the ceiling soot. His voice went out,

Passing the mob's yell; it went out
Like a string to salt's vast land.
Willard watched Joseph's palms
Shake—white brink before the slaughter.
Bullet wind rushed the starchy June,
Cracked the slabs of limestone,

Scattered red shards of stone
Across the withered floor. Hyrum went
To the jail door, buckled in his June
Sweat. *I am a dead man.* The land
Choked beneath the cry of thieves. Slaughter's
Phlegm gnashed in their teeth. Their palms

Stroked rifle bellies. Their tar-smearing palms
Left prints on the hot limestone.
They circled again toward slaughter.
Smith's taken here, he's not leaving
For home again. The rocky land
Rose in Joseph's eyes, swallowed June

Undergrowth. His palms closed as he went
Through the stone ledge window, falling to the land
On a June afternoon like a lamb to the slaughter.