T.E. Lawrence and the Old Man, His Imagined Tormentor
(1967–1968)

As if Arabia were a broad-leaved book
and the rest of his life had been the merest tenets
of its philosophies, he cocked his head
like a child in bed, and curiously invented
a logical machine of storybook torture
that ran on lies to friends and ended with
the physical rod, on certain anniversaries.
But when he took the book in his dry hand
it became cold and curved, a scimitar
in the hand of the Old Man; it ought to have cut
his husk of manhood. What a machine! He was left
without the book he turned to in his sleep.
Suicide is a machine. Arabia
unfurls her terms like an absurd equation;
the silent Wailing Wall; or a Buddha’s palms.