

Riddles

TRANSLATED BY RICHARD HAMER

1

1 I am a lonely being, scarred by swords,
2 Wounded by iron, sated with battle-deeds,
3 Wearied by blades. Often I witness war,
4 Perilous fight, nor hope for consolation,
5 That any help may rescue me from strife
6 Before I perish among fighting men;
7 But hammered swords, hard edged and grimly sharp,
8 Batter me, and the handwork of the smith
9 Bites in the castles; I must ever wait
10 A contest yet more cruel. I could never
11 In any habituation find the sort
12 Of doctor who could heal my wounds with herbs;
13 But cuts from swords ever increase on me
14 Through deadly contest, both by day and night.

2

15 My dress is silent when I tread the ground
16 Or stay at home or stir upon the waters.
17 Sometimes my trappings and the lofty air
18 Raise me above the dwelling-place of men,
19 And then the power of clouds carries me far
20 Above the people; and my ornaments
21 Loudly resound, send forth a melody
22 And clearly sing, when I am not in touch
23 With earth or water, but a flying spirit.

3

24 A moth ate words; a marvelous event
25 I thought it when I heard about that wonder,
26 A worm had swallowed some man's lay*, a thief
27 In darkness had consumed the mighty saying
28 With its foundation firm. The thief was not
29 One whit the wiser when he ate those words.

Source: *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (1996)

*a "lay" is a short poem that is intended to be sung.

Riddle solutions: 1. Shield, 2. Swan, 3. Bookworm