

The New Criterion

Poems

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Moses

by [David R. Slavitt](#)

If Moses could not enter, which of us can presume?

His offense was striking the rock? But where does it say
that to strike a rock is forbidden? And what harm did he do
to the rock, that, anyway, gave the precious water?
His defect, I fear, was more grave—an excess of goodness
that common sense would suggest is where we should look
in such a man, against whom, it is said, “the angels
banded together.”

Because he had brought from heaven
the mighty mainstay, the Torah. His act did not
diminish heaven so much as elevate earth—
but still, from then on, the separation was less.

No ravening ...

David R. Slavitt is the author of over sixty books including *Aspects of the Novel: A Novel* published by Catbird Press.

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