Mango Garcia: A Collection Of Poems

by

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A meditation on Cassandra, inspired by the poems of C. P. Cavafy

She looks out west
from up high on the cyclopean stones walls of the city,
past the dusty plain of Ilium,
littered with cracked helmets, broken spears,
dogs sniffing through the debris of battle
to crack marrow out of bones.
She looks beyond the thousand cooking fires of the Achaeans
stretching in a long broken line
fringing the ragged edge of the plain at the sea,
and down below, the dazzling white beach
she had last seen nine years ago
is now blackened by a row of ships, hauled out, hull to hull,
the standards of the tribes snapping in the wind at mast tops.
Beyond is the Aegean,
wine-dark in the light of the dying sun,
and beyond that lay the strange land of the invaders,
of brutal, energetic men
bent on the glory of power
and the power of possession.
Many had already poured their blood
and sunk their bones into the dusty plain,
in sacrifice to their ambition,
having lunged beyond their vision,
stepping out from the light of day into the eternal shade.
And in this was the only bond developed between them,
Trojans and Achaeans,
for both here in Ilium and in the land of the Hellenes
nearly a decade of widowhood had been grown;
there were no spoils and glory for the children of the dead.
Whom the gods would destroy
they first make mad,
and whom they would madden
they fill with a proud ambition.
Death alone is not a tragedy - sorrowful as it may be -
but death at the end of the destruction of all hope.
Then, it is a merciful release, and in that is the tragedy.
Cassandra looked west, out past the wine-dark sea,
past the unseen lands of the Achaeans,
and past the tragedy of her death.
How else could one continue?
Phoebus, the jealous god,
had robbed her gift of prophesy of any credibility
because she refused to give herself to him,
remaining steadfast in her purity
in devotion to religion.
Oh, how cruel these jealous gods, bitten in their vanity,
for spite they wither our gifts into afflictions,
useless now her power of vision, her great beauty and allure.
For none believed in her prophesies,
none listened to her speech,
all were captivated by her beauty
and fixed on her their desires;
she was insane
with the unrelieved frustration of mute clairvoyance.
She walked in from the parapet,
took off her gold thread pearl earrings,
handing them to a servant,
and also her golden webbed necklace,
unclasped her belt of gold chains
with studs of amber and lapis lazuli,
and dropped her tunic.
She gathered her raven's hair, coiled it high on her head,
pinning it with a turtle-shell comb and golden needle.
She walked into the scented pool,
strewn with the petals of flowers,
and stroked virgin oil across her honeyed virgin skin.
The flute girl played a slow sweet song of evening,
and a servant rubbed warm oil
with slow deep strokes into her back.
Cassandra thought of all who wanted her body,
from the stable-boys and captains of Ilium,
to the guardian women of the king's harem,
and even to the Sun-god himself;
and she thought of the man who would rape her
at the foot of the altar of Athena,
after killing her father,
as if seeking to yank the flower and cut the root
of the House of Priam
in one fit of hubris on that terrible night
when the slaughter of Ilium's manhood
would pour out of the belly of a wooden horse -
false gift of treachery and delusion.
Out of her defilement would come the seed of their destruction,
for a multitude would perish - even their chief, Agamemnon. Athena's wrath demanded expiation, to cleanse insult from the sanctity of her temples. But Cassandra was already dead, for she knew that her hopes were doomed - one does not escape the wrath of the gods. As Cassandra caressed her exquisite body that servant girls spoke of amongst themselves and Ilium's men dreamed of as they took their wives, she thought of that hot, sweaty, bearded, bloody Little Ajax who was destined to rip her tunic off and force her to the ground, and she wondered what Phoebus thought of being put off the prize in favor of this heartless, dirty, little brute. It was the god's will that she should suffer so, and for that she refined her breathless beauty and timeless grace so that even in his godly aloofness Phoebus would feel the sting of his own spite, the bitter taste of jealousy's vengeance. They all thought her mad, none would listen, it was best not to repeat the coming story, it only made them frightened, wild, resentful. No, she had to see the truth and swallow it, so as not to add misery to the lives of doomed people during the little time remaining to them. She drew the scented bath along her arm, across her breasts, up her neck and along the line of her jaw, holding her head back, closing her eyes, smiling, luxuriating in sensation, as the flute song hung in the air and floated with the slightest breeze out over the walls into the night sky. She would be taken as a prize for Agamemnon himself, in the division of the spoils, and Little Ajax would be swallowed by Poseidon's waves. Among the Trojan women - destined for slavery - there would begin dawning an inkling of Cassandra's plight, but there could be little comfort from hearts so overwhelmed by sorrow, so devastated by loss, exhausted of love, broken.
For the mad ageless priestess child
who had loved them and suffered for them
in contained delirious transparent isolation,
it would be a small comfort,
this brief, sad time together at the ruins of Troy,
bonded by grief, with sisters and mothers,
before being dispersed to lives of slavery
across the wine-dark sea.
And for Cassandra, at journey's end,
the bittersweet vengeance - and terror -
of seeing the end of Agamemnon - sacker of Troy -
cut down by his wife Clytemnestra,
mad with grief for the loss of Iphigenia, her daughter
sacrificed by Agamemnon to secure his command
and gain the gods' favor of fair winds to Troy.
And at this moment Cassandra, too, will meet her end,
an orphan, a dead king's child-trophy, cut down
by a vengeance forged over a decade from a mother's grief.
"My bones will be cast out for the dogs"
Cassandra whispers with a smile.
The flute girl and bath attendant meet glances without pause,
"Mad Cassandra," they nod to each other,
as Cassandra lays back, eyes closed,
bathed in moonlight and music,
humming softly,
so beautiful, so beautiful,
maintaining her grace,
thinking of her release.

29 April 2002
The Flavor of Nectarines

Our lives are eternal when we are aware, and our histories are less than dust when we are not.

Bite into a nectarine and feel the sweet, fragrant juice run down the sides of your mouth, the soft flesh yielding to your tongue, your fingers and lips sticky with the sweet kiss of succulent gratitude from the orchards of late summer, sending their seeds into the world - blindly wrapped in enticing nourishment.

Leaves quiver like petals of light, a flickering translucence in the breeze, like a cloud of butterflies scintillating as a breath of sun.

Close your eyes, run your tongue along your syrupy lips, and inhale the sweet swollen fragrance released. Breath it deep, into your lungs, into your blood, into your mind, and feel the sunlight sinking through your skin, the faintest brush of air gliding over the back of your hand - isn't everything here?, completion, eternity, peace? Who is it that is unable to find this?, why is it necessary to search? Is not God's mercy great, that in the farthest reaches and briefest instants even the least among us can find the great bliss, the transforming grace?

Knowing what is right is embedded, doing what is right is the test. In the stilled mind with no thought, you know at any instant
what is right.
That is where God is.
For each, there comes a time to run,
a time to fight,
a time to stand,
and a time to abide.
When you release your desires, you lose your fear,
and find your self:
you awaken,
you live,
you transcend concepts and conventions,
you are released from your history,
and now, you are able to face death.
That is freedom in this world.
Once freed, your compassion is able to affect the lives of others.
This is peace.

3 September 2002
I can see why Petrarca wrote sonnets in such quantity
to young, unknowing Laura,
a girl of ageless beauty,
while he -
a man enmeshed in the tangles of his life,
of occupation, wife and children, and the tumult of his times -
dreamed his dream of transcendent, untransmitted love.
Yes, that deathless, idealized, beautiful, exhilarating, melancholy love,
only to be imagined, as reality breaks its spell.
An old man, projecting a fantasy of perfect emotion
onto a lithe, young minx,
shimmying her way through the routines of her day
with a natural, unselfconscious grace -
a divine, unknowing inspiration.
He can see that in three decades -
the distance now between them -
she will be a stout and earthy matriarch,
wise in the ways of family,
awaiting the betrothal of her youngest.
But now, she is fresh, frisky, full of sensual promise,
a goddess on the threshold of the chasm of love.
In his mind, he knows that compact, lively body,
that wily tender firmness that snakes through a swain's embrace,
and he knows the heights and depths such fresh love can achieve.
Love with the experienced is quite another thing,
for women of experience have patience, calmness, practicality,
they know when and how to absorb a man's caress,
the way rich loam soaks up the rain in spring.
But, young love - in its unthinking spontaneity -
is beyond words, beyond the lifetime of memory.
And so, he looks upon her, across the sunny plaza,
and remembers, as if a dream of a castaway future,
love as ecstasy, flooding, submerging the mind
while yet tingeing its vision with melancholic nostalgia,
for, like an ancient priest guarding his temple,
he will carry his sacred mysteries silently to his grave.
And, she knows.
Yes, she knows what the old man dreams,
for she is destined to mother,
and she can sense the psychic pull of a forlorn child, however old,
the adoration of the one being nourished.
He is the rain and she is the ocean
and love is the river that flows to join them.
And so,
the unspoken, unacknowledged love between them
lives at the horizon of consciousness,
an eternal reverberation whose reflection is cast onto poetry,
like a rush of wind from the wingbeats of birds
cast against the beach, patterning ripples,
as brushstrokes on the canvas of the heart's imagination.

7 September 2002
Welcome to the Village

"My lands are where my dead lie buried." - Crazy Horse

Yes, we have all had death rain down from the skies, for our world is now that way, as you know - welcome - welcome to the village.

Our young men leave to claim their conclusions, they marry their death and sire our doom. We who remain are the chaff of the land, the children, the mothers, the old, and the weak, crushed between millstones and blown in the wind, to die by degrees between burning rains. Those born to death learn to live for revenge, for vengeance gives power when all hope is dead. It forges our young men to hard smoldering nails hammered to shut the coffin of peace.

Yes, welcome, welcome, please, share our bread; we comfort each other as well as we can between storms of hate we rain down on our heads, for under the weight of a most righteous greed chaff bleeds into stone and seasons the wheat, and we are all drawn in together, you see - refugees all, outliving peace.

Welcome to the village.

15 September 2001
"...the standard of justice
depends on the equality of power to compel,
and that in fact
the strong do what they have the power to do,
and the weak accept what they have to accept."
- Thukydides, ~415 BC

Twenty-four hours of war in Iraq,
vodka martini with two queen Spanish pimento olives,
little girl playing with her tea set, flooding the kitchen table,
"The Basement Tapes," with Bob Dylan and The Band playing,
reminding me of art in 1967,
during the height of the Vietnam War
before Tet, when we finally realized we'd lost it for sure,
and the helplessness of people who could see the truth
and could only be creative in recompense,
while big gasoline motors were sold for entertainment value,
and the children of suburbia
were high on recreational euphoria and no-fault sex,
while small dark people in hot climates
hunkered down under a rain of American bombs
opening hearts and minds to a superior beneficence -
absurdly simple, yet mysteriously unappreciated.

I am working on tax forms,
seeing the ink flowing across the paper turn from black to red,
cascading into a flow into government coffers
swelling and sweating out streams of bombs
flung across the skies
to rain down on a burning Bagdad,
and blowing across the earth
as a lusting wetness of hot hateful breath
close on the faces pressed to the ground, where some
ignorant, insignificant, dark-skinned moustached father
huddles in confusion, fear -
perhaps even watching his blood spill into a thickening pool -
unable to influence anything that happens to him,
just as I, an
ignorant, insignificant, dark-skinned moustached father
am unable to influence anything done in my name -
as an American countryman.

So, I suck down martinis,
send off my taxes,
watch my little girl play -
unaware of the bloody world
outside her imaginative paradise,
and the murderous grinding of the gears of human greed
pressing the branches, skin, and fruit
of a tortured culture into a smoky thick pulp
to be thinned, blended and barreled to foreign taste.
It is surreal, on such an immaculate spring day,
the freshness of nature exquisite in its untrammeled purity -
human disharmony being irrelevant
to the Buddha-nature of non-human existence -
the citizens of the homeland
stunned, or ignorant, or malevolent
depending on the admixture of vision and compassion in each -
pushing on with their disjointed lives,
like ants rolling sand grains across each other's paths -
a crowd, each one a Sisyphus -
victims of a voracious salvation.

21 March 2003
**Why does the Buddha smile?**

Autumn light falls on the leaves
and makes them luminous against the blue,
it falls upon a woman's form
and chisels breath to beauty -
even desire.
Breeze percolates through the light,
quivering leaves;
life is sweet.

Like a lotus, radiant, blooming
above the fetid pond it roots in,
so the luminous beauty and joy of life
flower in every corner of time and place.
Whether we find ourselves in war or peace,
satisfied or desolated,
the honeyed light
dims not its warming grace
to match the hue of our anxiety.

Somewhere in this world,
at this moment
for some individual
there is no personal God,
there is only loss, abandonment, despair.
We each will have this moment.
Yet, the light falls,
the lotus blooms,
the grace is there
amidst the wreckage we feel entangled by.
Tranquil beauty and stark terror are all one in this world.
The lotus blooms over the stench of death,
but it blooms - daily.
And so, the Buddha smiles.

27 October 2001
Mandala Jesus

Jesus was an old man when he died.
What were his kids like?, his wife?, his girlfriends?
What kind of love and gratitude
brought Mary Magdalene to his feet?
Is there any way left of recapturing
the humanity of Jesus,
or are we stuck with the mummified wrappings
of religion, fantasy and cult?
How did it feel
to sit with Jesus drinking at night
meditating on the course of human events?
The dreams and visions of Jesus were those of a man.
Perhaps we deify him
to avoid the burdens of paradise.
"The kingdom of heaven is within you."

11 January 1983
Purpose

The purpose of poetry is to understand that life has no purpose - being is.

The arpeggios of flamenco guitar - purpose?

Drift into the universe of the spaces between the notes - vastness beyond comprehension.

Purpose is the amnesia of God.

23 May 2003
Put it on plastic, then flush your mind

Do the prayers of fat, dumb and happy Americans outweigh those of the desperate people, giving their all to keep us this way?

Do you really imagine Jesus could vote Republican? What a mockery are your churches, America! What an obscenity your cellulite thighs coddled in cavernous air-conditioned splendor in petrol-eating mastodons!

We are earning our Ground Zeros.

Our willful ignorance is the future revenge of the clusters of death in our wake.

23 June 2003
Li Po Shows Tu Fu How To Make War

"It is a time of war, of struggle, strife; kingdoms change hands, empires crumble, blood runs over the earth; every man is called to principle. And do you think that in drinking wine, writing poems, and laying in the arms of pliant women you do your duty!"

Tu Fu looked hard at Li Po. "Especially in times like these am I a patriot," replied Li Po. "But, how can you fight?"

He smiled.

7 February 2004
Before the flood

Imagine awareness beyond thought, thought beyond desire, knowledge beyond mind, feeling beyond sensation, life beyond body, body beyond time. Imagine yourself - you are that.

Imagine yourself hiding in the darkened heart of the enemy - buried alive - demonic, fearful, obsessed, waiting to be overwhelmed by defeat, and, only after the end to be released to liberation.

I dream of an earthly paradise, after the coming flood, impossible, profitless, unpatriotic: no property, no bosses, no God. How will our present future be drowned? In water?, ice?, blood?, tears?, bile?, dust? Why do we create such a remote, heartless God to fear?

I believe that human life and human rights are far more important than the greed of the wealthy or the comfort of the ignorant. But I am nothing and my thoughts - noiseless wind in the middle of an unseen ocean, rising to rain.

25 October 2002
A voice crying in the wilderness

Can I stop a war, by holding my peace?
Does the courtesy of personal silence help a people stirred to war,
frightened to submissive obedience
by leaders anxious for greater power?

Does the annoying discomfort you feel
on hearing the lonely doomsayers - raving in the streets -
add, or subtract from the collective psyche for peace?
Do the elements of discord, in a nation herded to action,
sap vital energy?, blur a sharp and necessary focus?,
or do they add a tincture of caution, perhaps even wisdom?

In the end, who really are the patriots?
What is being preserved, defended, acquired, lost?
Who will be proud to claim a role in the legacy created,
and who will be called upon to pay its costs?

Peace is war without violence,
not an avoidance of conflict.
Peace is a brave and unwavering perseverance
in the pursuit of compassionate justice.

In seeking peace, you cannot fail,
however deep in silence you are cast.

20 September 2002
My Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the flag
of the altered states in America,
and to the republic-of-dreams for which it stands,
one nation under the gods,
the goddesses, the spirits of the ancestors,
and the great unknowable void,
with liberty to imagine justice
for all.

28 June 2002
Pangaea Resurgent

The earth quakes
Olympus breaks free
Floating west an island,
The heights rise
The shoreline plunges
The wine-dark sea runs to blood,
Old lands wither unseen
Plato is upended.

I wake cast upon the rocks,
Find the edge of town
Meet the Prophet by the tracks,
Where am I?
Everywhere, he says.
How?
Capitalism is Theft
Suburbia is Segregation
God is Murder.
I have no money to pay him,
Is there no hope?
He smirks:
Blood dries.

20 January 2005


Tsunami

Does God have an ego?
Does God's ego need acknowledgement?
Does It have a preference on our form of worship:
   Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, free-thought?
Would not such a needy God be limited?
And if so, from where arise the people and beliefs
   outside God's limitations?
How could such a God create a nonconforming world?

The water comes in frothing, foaming, white,
throbbing with agitation,
pulling out the very roots of ground underfoot,
suffocating light under a flood of black gravity,
time compressed to timelessness its heart stops,
parallels converge, infinity sleeps;
the waters suck back into distant depths
the souls of earlier dreams,
leaving only the wreckage of their hearts.

Why has God abandoned us?

You have not been abandoned, merely awakened --
loss of a dream -- nothing more.
The life and death themselves are real,
but they were never certain.

Truth is indifferent, I am sorry this is painful.

Release disillusion and tend your proper grief.
May the bitter rain replenish the well of compassion,
for who is untouched?

3 January 2005
Arriving at Work

The bass lays down a fat groove,  
the vibes skip over the surface like a flat rock  
leaving a trail of silver rings  
quiver, expanding, tinkling into each other,  
breaking into a glittering sheen  
like sharp slant morning autumn light, hard and cool,  
etching the moment dissolving  
into a whispering breath of brushes on cymbals,  
the stirring of light into heat, sound, memory -  
a jazzy human resonance to the eternal breath,  
the great, quiet pulsing of light in air,  
the cool kiss of a moment's breeze,  
the buzzing squeak of a hummingbird  
warming in the emerging heat of the unshrouded sun,  
the cawing cry of ravens, hanging around,  
waiting for opportunities.  
And then, through the living space  
rises the mechanical drone of human insularity,  
the whining of turbines, the grating blare of commercials,  
the noisy friction of ignorance  
forcing its uncomprehending way  
through an unsensed immersion in seamless life.  
Goodbye crow, goodbye hummingbird,  
goodbye air, goodbye light.  
I must go into the cavern, the netherworld,  
the triumphal Hades,  
to walk among the shades for a while,  
for in these times we make our living  
by being dead to the world.  
Real living, for those who still have that thirst,  
must be done in small stolen snatches,  
unobserved moments of self-contained rapture,  
like the sparkling wrinkles on water in autumn morning light.

3 December 2002
Leaving Work
Chill, haze-mist air, glassy puddles on the walk, gray overcast sky.
Sun, blazing at the horizon - setting -
a blinding white amber-tinged light
splaying god-rays into the quilted ceiling and dark shadow earth.
Leaving work, walk out from the dry indoor air
into wide open freshness - chill - hint of Christmas,
haze-white moisture, luminous, suffused, beneath the overcast -
the visible breath of space.
Relief, day's end, resurrection from work,
and yet, foreboding, the job is ending, what next? anything? -
but light calls me out, be eternal.
What a glorious sight, the horizon,
the depth of space along eye-shot illuminated, translucent,
the easterly beams diffused into a radiance of space -
a cloud of unknowing -
immersing me in the last surge of light
from the receding tide of day,
like sea-foam drawing the shade of night across a beach
as it follows the sheet of water down the sloping sand into the sea -
one mind drawing all the lost and distant castaway thoughts
on so many lonely shores
into its unfathomable interconnectedness -
each one being "I am who am."
Then, straight up, a patch of blue,
a clear sight of day-lit void,
and a line of geese, flying across,
as if ferrying over a cobalt-blue mountain lake
from a rosy-tinged powder-granite strand
to the other side - the distant shore.
Near me, hummingbirds pirouette in luminosity,
their chirped squeaks drilling the air
as if the miniaturized tinkling of droplets set to vibrating
by the trailing eddies of their flight.
Promises that we have never heard are being kept.
Below the clouds, knotted tangles of narrow view:
uncertainties of war, anxieties of occupation - fear -
lives draining away through oblivious fascination;
and yet, we live in paradise,
immersed in incomprehensible immensity.
Life is so beautiful, breath it in, look.
9 December 2002
Mazurka Beans

I looked down into a pot of beans, shaking oregano, sunlight shines through the trees and fills the house, the music of Chopin Mazurkas fills the air, spilling out the open door diffusing into the streams of light.

I look down into a pot of beans - black beans - the food of Cuba, of Puerto Rico, the dish I loved my mother to make. Below the carpet of basil, oregano, paprika, cumin, salt and pepper, the black beans soak, their skins browned in garlic olive oil, mingling with chopped ham and onions, caressed by diced stewed tomatoes, all blending into a nectar of the earth, a nourishment, a celebration, an essence of a culture - sabor.

I look down into that textured herbal blanket waiting to see the eruption of bubbles signaling a boil, a brown boil with blood red flashes rending the herbal shroud and issuing billows of aromatic steam, the taste of the south like the spirit of its people - rising, rising - to overwhelm with luxuriant sensuality the thin dryness of a pallid north.

I look down into that pot of black beans in this perfect moment and I see the entire world radiating out - the entire interpenetrating web created and unfurled beyond the edges of infinity - like the eightfold rays of Buddha truth, flung from the vortex-eye of a Tibetan sand mandala. Time evaporates, mind is one, "I am who am."

Outside, I hear my little girl, babbling and toddling like a little sparrow sifting through the leaves, as purple florets of lantana sway in the mazurka breeze - music, the kiss that transcends time, the breath that transcends death - and little Ella's arrow gaze and impish smile are my eternal rebellion's salute to a narrow sleeping world.
I am the pepper in your pot of beans,  
the heat rising from below,  
the browned garlic olive skin rubbing up against you,  
the nectar blended from many fine extracts and cultivations,  
heir of an ancient and unending impetus,  
the innocence and adventure of eternal experience -  
an enticement, a flood -  
the love-child of revolution and sustenance -  
sabor.

19 May 2001
Letter to a Forgotten Lover

Friday afternoon.
Sunlight filters through still air,
October leaves glow with Indian Summer.
Walls muffle voices in adjoining rooms,
the relentless, ocean-like pounding of distant freeways
and the ebbing wail of sky-high turbojets.
In my room - still air.
Connected by the open window
to the last full-bodied outdoor caress of the season,
I float far off
on the subtle airs of the dream of memory.
Remember?
That last weekday afternoon of preselected obligation,
those last few hours of conscious productivity
before slipping into the dream surpassing all dreaming -
a weekend celebration of being with you.
I can still smell the crisp, moisture-laden air
in the oak and maple groves, and wild lawns
along hypnotic Bring More Brook,
that fluid rippling babble of melted sparkle.
How we loved to swim in each other’s eyes,
to soar through each other’s hearts
on peaceful October summer days,
sipping wine and kisses by the brook.
We would run and frolic,
laugh and horse,
and spill through the meadow like a rolling stream.
Yes, and we would walk quietly through the wood,
our brimming love enfolding that endless moment.
It was only a scant lifetime of hours ago
that we had sailed through the razzle-dazzle high-jinx
of an artful Friday night.
We had seen,
we had eaten,
we had been
and we had known - together,
how many things?
Wine and cider,
smokes and film,
sidewalks and city lights,
music and motion,
talk of poems and poems of touch,
glistening eyes suspending breathless starlight.
Wake up, wake up, I want another kiss.
The dream has broken, I want another kiss.
Long palms stroke your smooth sleeping warmth.
Wake up the feeling that glides through my hands.
I want another kiss, another kiss.
I want to cover you with love.
I want to soak in that abyss.
Wake up and blend into the dream.
Wake open, mouth, and draw me in,
another kiss, another kiss.
Endless, endless, endless - where has it all gone?
It was so easy to flood with emotion
and forget all but feeling the real.
The imprint of that moment
leaves a trace, sharper today,
than these garish superficial
grown-up gainful days.
Dream in defiance or dream in regret,
dream on the loving - forget all the rest.
Dream on her sunlight, her moisture and breath,
dream on regardless, as lovers forget.
Dream on the wind streaming the leaves,
dream on your living, endless and free.
Dream on.

9 October 1983
"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

"We be of one blood, ye and I."
- Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*

It is said one lives longer
if part of some community.
Does this mean outcasts
are slowly being murdered by society?,
and hermits are invisible suicides?
Both might see
a deadzone of spirit and intuition
in the congenial orthodoxies
and mindless homogeneities of social convention.
If so, then what does it mean to 'live longer,'
and who, indeed, has really 'lived'? 
And for our loners,
driven by the unrelenting power of their visions of truth,
do their solitary paths
weave into some tenuous fabric of kinship?,
like castaways
trading messages in bottles across an indifferent sea?;
or cougars
spraying their pungent declarations on distant outcrops?
Some of them, I know,
distill experience down to its essence, its nuggets, its salts,
and throw these back as poems into an unsensing world,
knowing there are others like them
also casting,
also, occasionally, breathing in the sting
of newly found insight:
"We be of one blood, ye and I."

30 December 2001
Variation of parameters

Perhaps it was a change in the weather that caused things to happen. I remember warm winds blowing up from the south in early spring, and yellow moons in blue glazed nights. The melting of the cell phones was first. Overnight, they were just frozen puddles of plastic and metal, nothing seen, no heat felt, just stone-cold carbonized slag heaps in their hundred millions. None have been made since - they all dissolve - as if the very form, even the concept had been banished by some capricious god. Soon after, every fifth spark plug failed, crankshafts and turbine blades inexplicably disintegrate. No cause can be found, no process observed, large gasoline motors rarely run, now, there was much fearful whispering about gremlins. Still, we all adjusted reasonably soon, and then the great shock arrived - all the money disappeared. One morning, no account could be found with a balance, all bills showed zero totals, all currency had vanished. Everyone is penniless and free of debt, work has no pay, selling has no buyers - no obligations, no inducements. At first, there was chaos, riots, death, many went insane or took their lives, "He's gone back to look for his money," we say now - our phrase for the departed. Yet, soon enough, most people found occupations, either from habit, inclination, or simply to shake off boredom, like a group of children picking through a pile of costumes
to take on roles in a game.
In this game, we trade
for food, for our chores, for our entertainment.
With so much use of time,
and no easy accounting,
no one can accumulate
beyond the stores for a winter.
Our leaders bemoan the fall of civilization,
and, as they are ignored,
it must be so.
Our evangelicals howl in ecstasy,
dancing naked around bonfires through the night.
The children are delighted,
now, with so many schools close by,
and always elders, and relatives in attendance
along with their teachers,
so joyous, compared to what now seems imprisonment
in the old moneyed days.
I think it is the learning joy of children everywhere
that makes one feel as if always walking in a village,
even as it stretches between the oceans.
The young easily try on any role,
experimenting with great fervor,
adding such sparkle to the daily routines,
and reminding us to keep our perspective,
for they can leave without notice
for vacations of unknown length,
to satisfy the needs of the spirit.
Yet, in this ebb and flow,
all social needs are filled,
like the hollows children dig out at the beach;
our social lives are smoothed
by the washing of tides from an unseen ocean.
While the fortunes of many have tumbled,
most have tasted liberation, by now,
and those who have lost are left to their own devices.
Shortly after the money left,
the wars erupted - somebody had to pay.
By two years the shooting sputtered to a halt,
all the bullets were turning out to be duds -
plutonium turned to salt, rockets crumbled to powder -
and so they remain.
No explanations.
Our armies are helpless, vulnerable, unable to attack, and unassailable. The great migrations began when the guns died, but soon quelled when gold was found dissolved in the oceans, and laced through the sand underfoot. It is so common, now, it is worthless, though most beautiful, and a warm metal to replace broken teeth. And so, we live under a mysterious power we cannot explain. We are people with a broken history and a continuously randomized future, liberated from our parallel lives of isolation, and the apprehension of survival. Around here, we each hoe our gardens while spending long afternoons watching clouds curl, or walking into town to carry home a gallon of milk. Just this afternoon, I heard the pub switched from sports on TV to poetry - for a change. Maybe I'll go down and have a few, tonight.

17 February 2003
Why America will fall

America will collapse because its people are unwilling to face facts, and its elites are unwilling to let ethics impede their ambitions.

Need America collapse?

Well, when in history have wealth and power shed their insularity to share the burdens of the world? - to merge with the ocean of humanity?

If we awaken to such socialist revelation - before the popular revolution - then it will be a beautiful and transcendent experience.

If we seek refuge in such a politics - in desperation - after the revolution, we will have already drowned in blood and surrendered to a dour regimentation.

Our power, our armies, our technology may be a carapace that endures for centuries, but, like a beetle drained by a spider, or a hollow trunk that topples a century after desiccating, the spiritual, ethical, intellectual essence of the nation's life will long since have passed, and the poor, fat, dumb, happy, slow, and wide people will be frightened victims of surprising shocks, fodder for the machinations of their hollow, craven rulers.

America will fall because we - you and I - tolerate the acquisition of success without honesty or truth, because we tolerate the abandonment of ethics, as impediments, because we revere and fear, because we choose not to see.

8 July 2002
Republican Campaign Address

"The people who own the country ought to govern it." - John Jay, ~1783

Rape labor! Rape the environment! Rape privacy! -
the three R's of unfettered market capitalism.
The purpose of American government
is to keep public greed
from interfering with corporate interests.
The purpose of American government
is to send the Marines overseas
to secure the profits of American corporations
extracting bananas, coffee and oil
from the dark and primitive areas of this globe.
The purpose of American government
is to assign the domestic population -
whether in the homeland or the service nations -
their duties as workers, consumers and citizens:
providing obedient, reliable, cheap labor,
being a readily-trained, unquestioning market,
and funding the upkeep of our government
and its technical research, which we privatize to profit.
In short,
the purpose of American government
is to keep us as the capitol of capitalism,
the managers of the world order,
the insurers that those entitled to profit do so,
and those who fail to produce do not evade responsibility.
Victory is possible, in this great crusade,
and for each there is a place
in this great structure of peace and prosperity.
Come, join us now, for I say to you,
you are either with us or against us,
and we will prevail.

2 December 2002
Boundary Limit

"Bigotry is the disease of the religious."

"No matter how many ways you try, you cannot find a boundary to consciousness, so deep in every direction does it extend."   - Herakleitos, ~500 BC

If God exists, is It Christian?
Is God an intolerant monotheist,
who only believes in Its one inflexible form?,
the Jerusalem God of sheep herders and camel drivers,
the choosy God,
the insecure imperialist demanding conformity,
stingy with pleasure - dour -
frightened of women?
Or, would God be an atheist?,
a great unconscious source-point,
manifesting Itself as a natural universe
unfolding endlessly without embedded reason,
without cohesive purpose,
a Godhead of Alzheimer's vacuity - pure unaware existence.
(And so, can we have aware nonexistence? -
a cognizant void -
of necessity by sheer conceivability?)
Or, perhaps our God is the Zen God,
the Buddhist God of inexplicability,
a weave of awareness and unawareness
folded and braided onto Itself,
with an unending array of parallel self-consciousness,
a confluence of parallels, of flickering perceptibility.
And then, perhaps God is simply a concept,
a characteristic resonance of neural circuitry,
a mental projection easily cast as language construct,
simply a part of the psychic hum of human machinery -
bio-electro-chemical static -
an inconsequential artifact of chance reality.
And then, again, perhaps not.
Certainly, each proclaimed form of God has it uses,
as comfort to its faithful, or their cudgel against infidels.
But, no true God is created by the uses we impose,
the true God is only to be known, and only by the true person.

16 December 2002
A lesson - half understood - in poetics

As I walked, I turned, and saw Apollo beside me. 
"Why do you rail against the world?" asked the god, holding my book of poems in his hand. 
"I want to strike, like lightning, opening men's minds to the truth."
"This is pointless," said the god, 
"Men are but the mere implements of God, and this world will be righted, as necessary in due time."
"But that would be bloody, and devastating," I protested. 
"Mortal fool," chided the god, "abandon your false pride. It is not for you to direct your kind. Men are but the many blinks of the eye of God, and whether one is a drop in the tide of blood ending one civilization, or a glint in the flow of honey at the cresting of another, it matters not. I, in my unknowable infinitude will rewind the spring of time and replenish the well of knowledge, to maintain the eternal cycle."
"But can't we try to steer our culture to the good?" I pleaded. The god shook his head with a patient smile, "Life is given to you, make the most of it, achieve what good you can, but do not attach yourself to prideful dreams; all of this has come and gone countless times, and it will cycle uncountably on. Hew to what endures." 
"In my poems, I seek the essence of God," I said, "to present Him so as to touch hearts and open minds to a greater awareness - perhaps leading even just one person to greater good."
"Him, Her, It, Them, The Great Unknowable Void," instructed the god,
"Thought is to God as a ripple to the ocean,
a leaf to a forest,
the whisper of a breeze to the expanse of sky.
God is immeasurably beyond the confines of mere words and concepts,
and no man can know anything about God
by the word.
Release yourself," commanded the god.
"Still," he said as an afterthought,
handing my book to me,
"the effort has merit."
I blinked, and he was gone.

8 July 2002
Lord Krishna, disguised as Apollo, dismisses my writing

"Parasites neither herd nor flock -
they accumulate.
They all have identical aims
yet share no goal in common.
Humans may be the most cannibalistic of parasites."

Suddenly, he was there, leafing through my book,
muttering an answer to the question floating in my mind,
"Yes, it is a work of genius, too bad."
"Why!"
"Well, no one will read it."
"But how...,"
ignoring my voice to answer my mind, he continued,
"Men are wedded to their delusions,
they only want to see what conforms to their views,
enlightenment is tenaciously blocked."
"And women?" I asked.
"Women, too, are deluded,
though, of course, they are wiser than men,
and so, they are oppressed.
Women have less compunction,
their focus is their young,
or the surrogates they adopt when childless.
If you wish to be read,
write what people think,
do not challenge their ignorance.
By elaborating the general delusions,
you will be honored and rewarded,
by exposing them
you will be shunned to invisibility.
The seekers of enlightenment
are disappeared from the world
by the collective defense of popular delusion,
not by a choice to become meditating hermits.
The world is delusional,
and to live in it is to participate in the collective madness.
This is why the world collapses and periodically must be wiped away. It is the cycle that endures, not the phases of delusion that revolve through it.

You can reach enlightenment, but you cannot transmit it. You feel compassion for some, because your heart is still mired in the world, and in your love for these others you wish to pass on knowledge. But that, too, is a delusion. Only they can find their own enlightenment, which so very few choose to do. So, ultimately, to awaken, one must release all emotional entanglements - whether of pride or love. You cannot save the world, only live in it, you cannot save your loved ones, only appreciate them, you cannot save yourself, only awaken."

10 July 2002
Footprints in the river, handprints on the sky

My life is as dewdrops on a lotus leaf
spread above the quiet of Walden Pond,
disappearing slowly, inexorably, in the warmth of the sun
birthing an unending present - my unknowable future;
evaporating my sufferings
into the buzz of hummingbird wings
and the laughter of children playing,
no different today than in the days of Pericles and Gautama,
and certainly no different in those days to come
when my forgotten name will be half as old as theirs.
The American Ryokan, the Japanese Thoreau,
how glad I am of their gifts,
examples of living by principle -
content, enlightened, generous, humane, calm, funny,
engaging me with their words
the way their living engaged their neighbors,
waking so many from torpid lives of expediency
by the sheer force of example -
without exhortation,
their tangible traces, now, pure art.
And when I am gone what will be my legacy?:
the impish glee of a child laughing on the swings,
hands furrowing the warmth of the sand,
plunging through sweet air reaching for the higher bar,
watching ripples of light on the water.

24 November 2002
The weight of light

At times in certain places
the light has weight beyond its normal measure -
dense, thick, heavy,
rich with an abundance of warmth and color.
It soaks into the world it falls on,
re-illuminating it from within
so that the texture of air, of streets, of faces
etch crystalline images indelibly
in memories of living presence,
simple scenes
where non-action leaves the surface unrippled,
revealing a clarity of great depth,
as when early evening's golden light
brightens the streets in San Francisco's North Beach,
on a quite Sunday in spring
after rain-showers have passed,
making warmth visible
in the freshness of clear sea air,
and ripening hues
on the peach-smooth faces of girls,
laughing together as they pass the sunlit coffeehouse
where poets of former decades convene
in earnest determination.
What a fluid stroke of exquisite freshness
drawn with elegant simplicity across the field of vision
by the sure hand of timeless life,
a poetic embellishment to this evanescent moment,
so marked in contrast
to our belabored plodding after a muse
in search of words to even hint at the radiance
that manifests so effortlessly around us.

17 April 2003
Butterfly Cove

The sand is white, white, white,
warm and still and fine.
The tide is high as breakers roll
and sheets of foam sweep sandy slopes.
Sanderlings on quick stilt feet track the charging surge,
stitching ocean to the shore with rhythmic probing beaks.
The wind sweeps off the breakers
up the beach and overhead,
lofting rainbow spray and ribbon kites
over pine and cypress tops.
The woods enfold a bright cool shade
of breathless distant sound.
A river of air flows overhead,
a river of warmth shines down.
Clusters of butterflies shower in light
high at the airstream edge.
The laughter of children rings through the trees
and eddies on currents of mind.

22 January 1987
Early September

Early September evening
in the hills above Oakland,
California,
hot still clear air,
Mozart,
Renée Fleming,
Pouilly-Fuissé --
heaven;
burnt umber sunlight
on the rhyolite hillcrests,
dark eucalyptus green
in the deep matted folds,
like female secrets unseen.
A flicker
as birdsong peaks, then fades
into the deepening pool of night,
crickets chirp
as they always have at night,
even before electricity.
Bottles empty,
ice melts,
batteries fade,
women go to sleep,
but the crickets remember their song.
Don Giovanni returns to console Eurydice
until Orpheus arrives,
I open the Mâcon-Villages,
crickets and echoes of Mozart in the dark
my serenade.
A poem defeats the entropy
at least for a century,
maybe less.

11 September 2004
Dusk

Evening slant-angle light
crisp, yet soft and warm like the glow of wine,
a promise of compassion
immersed in breathing amber:
a martini, jazz on the radio,
brushes on cymbals behind the sax,
families getting tables at the trattoria,
the slow release of summer night
fading in through its curtain of light;
the comfort of warm food,
the silent progress of a ballgame on TV,
the glow of life's fullness
radiating through a spectrum of compassion.
How I hate Americans
in their rude ballistic ignorance
on their caffeinated morning highways,
but warm to their gentle quiet acceptance
in the easy bars of mid-summer evening.
Was this why Jesus offered wine as sacrament?,
the elixir dissolving brittle resentment
for spent life and fleeting profit?
Castaways thrown together in dusky calm,
survivors of the manic insanities of the day
beached in plush warmth
like sea lions hauled out under a Capricorn sky.

15 July 2004
La Donna

I still can feel your dawn-window eyes
as I walk through this night,
and I still can smell your long, dark hair
softly catching the light.
The sweet taste of your tender lips
I still can savor with care,
and the warming voice of your soft, soft skin
still glides upon my face.
I still can feel your dawn-window eyes
as I walk through this night,
this night though but a wisp of the past
is a night eternal.

7 October 1969
Loving Acceptance

It happened again.
How can I ever explain the great mystery of experience?
Yes, I crossed that thin line -- once again.
My heart melted every time you looked my way,
every time your voice called mine.
A light, full voice and half-sleep eyelids
but with a sharp, penetrating wit within.
Intent on your purposes, like a black leopard in her tree,
you lounged on your bed looking down to me
with that smooth, calm level gaze of graceful intensity.
How could I help but fall --
willingly, thankfully,
for then I could finally gaze straight back into your eyes
and let you feel the full measure of my heart.
The world evaporated
and I placed my trust in that moment's bliss,
a spark of life we shared through each other --
eye-to-eye, and heart-to-heart.
Yes, life really is beautiful -- it's true --
and with the slightest smile of recognition
you and I know how true.

2 August 1988
The Touch of the Open

Will this love last?  
I would like it to, but I can't know.  
I stand outside and look west into an August evening.  
Warm light and cool breeze flow up from the bay  
warming my heart and refreshing my spirit.  
Sunset - that endless moment of exquisite living -  
will I see another? Probably, who knows.  
Treat it like love -  
enjoy it peacefully now, hope calmly for more,  
and try to forgo a nighttime of gloomy foreboding.  
Sunsets - like butterflies - are lost in the grasping.  
I sat daydreaming by sun-drenched flowers one afternoon  
and had a butterfly alight on my hand.  
What a magically graceful experience that was.  
How much like true love this must be:  
alighting out of the blue,  
radiantly alive if left free,  
eternal -  
if accepted with an open heart capable of saying goodbye.  
Will this love last?  
I hope so, I really hope so.  
I have memories for a lifetime out of just days of experience  
and I hope for a lifetime of such daily experience.  
Yet, to be fresh love must be fleeting -  
like a butterfly in your palm -  
always on the point of departure.  
Thus, I must have a tranquil, open heart  
capable of parting graciously in an instant  
with the woman my life is focused on.  
The sun tracks off over the hill of ocean to the west  
as daytime air cools down and night expands.  
I'm sure I'll see another evening sun,  
and another day of love? Yes, certainly.  
But how long can it last?  
I don't really know.  
My only chance is in acceptance  
to the course of its inevitable unfolding.

16 August 1988
You Can Marry a Poet, But You Cannot Possess Her

Love is lost in the grasping,
like breath
it must be free to rush in and ease away,
to inspire and expire,
to flood and to drain, like the waters of the Nile,
to overwhelm our senses with its graceful rapture
and diffuse into memories of quiet warmth;
a miracle requiring only our acceptance,
and stifled by imprisonment when netted by control.
To love is to grant freedom,
to dance with surprise,
to accept the unknown,
to be grateful.

A pure, true love is like the circling of hawks
weaving spirals centered on each other,
or the kiss of sunlight on flowers that surely cools to night,
a cyclic constancy of spontaneous eruption,
an intimacy through distance,
a knowing and unknowing beyond understanding,
beyond all possession;
like the echo of a birdsong through the forested hills
that fills you with tears on a warm spring day,
like the smile of another poet nodding with closed eyes
as she hears you speak your prescient verse.
I have known love like this,
possibly deeper and keener than between others as husbands and wives.

I have had that kind of connection -
eye-to-eye -
that stopped thinking, arrested time, cleared the mind, and centered being.
Marry me, I said, this must happen again,
and so it has,
pouncing on me catlike unexpectedly,
in knowing glances darting from young children's faces,
in moments of recognition when all else disappears,
when each one knows with no thought;
a life woven from scattered moments along the stream of time,
like a string of pearls.

And so it goes.
The poet circles in and out of my life,
sometimes a woman, always a mother, sometimes a fury, always the other,
a presence, an illusion, an invasion, an enigma, a grace,
hijacking my DNA for a new generation,
free as a bird in a summer garden,
beyond my control, that is quite certain.
But love is like that,
it lives on enticement and rewards with renewal.
I must offer nectar to the wind like a flower to a hummingbird
for how else can I coax that spontaneous miracle?
Oh, and I do love to hear her sweet clear voice nearby.

5 May 2001
Love for a Mother

You know how you fall in love with a woman, young, or at least never a mother, still with that leanness hinting of girlhood; and you have your times and adventures, and wonderful moments together enjoying all the sweet pleasures that come from love; till the day comes when you realize - you've grown familiar, your routines are habits, life has reached a crux, will something be added?, will something be lost? And she turns to you one day in all her loveliness, sitting leaning back, soaking up the sun at the beach, as beautiful as you've ever imagined her, and she says "I want a baby." "Of course," you say, "I love you," and it takes a great deal of that to make a baby. It is then that you learn why nature made love so engaging; for love's purpose is to remove the functioning of mind from the process of reproduction. Soon, she is absorbed completely in herself, with life revolving around her three concerns: what am I feeling?, what am I eating?, what am I wearing? And you, dear boy, are now a forgotten accessory of a former life, a life completely taken over by the alien invader, the explosion in the belly of your former manhood trophy. You are no longer the practice child, your second mother has gone, your role now is to fetch and carry, to bring what is needed for the comfort of her egg; and so are children brought into this life.
Time passes, it never seems that long in retrospect, and the whole spectrum of this fresh childhood flashes through your life, and your children grow, to lose their fascination with your presence, fading into a smattering of phone calls and birthday cards.

You glance up, releasing a breath you may have held for decades, and you see her again, how beautiful, this mother you've married, a bathing beauty you can still see so clearly within that soft layer of maternity, her mind abuzz with families of distractions, seeing past you like a breeze she walks through after decades of silent practice with each other. Time and intermingled living add such depth to what endures in our affections. Ah, the young lovers, lost in each other, how little they know of this love for a mother. This trophy has taken you from merely being a man to truly being a hero. You see that girl who could dance all night, you see that woman of love beyond dreaming. You catch her eye, and ask "now?" She smiles that smile, and walks your way.

3 April 2002
Young Love

Children touch all the buttons
with dirty little hands, cling
forever fighting weaning
and after suck has ended
sulk sullen seeking second mothers
rebirthing them as love's evangelicals,
shouting praises of amorous physicality,
lingering languorously on love's lips and nipples,
iron pinpricks of rootedness awash in pendulous sensuality.
And old men sipping coffee quietly in corners,
stroke ears, raise eyebrows a hair,
remembering the first awakening -
just for a moment -
faint echoes returning to forgetfulness;
and old women walk by
passing hands over fruit
laid in open boxes
mellow sweetness to the sun
squeezing sensing softness
mindlessly,
while chattering one and another
as they stroll through the market.
And each writes their verses on flakes of light -
leaves of memory -
like a forest burning, a crumbling cascade of color
peppering autumn's wind,
fading to the earth of innumerable beginnings -
again unknowing.

22 March 2004
Hardboiled Half Dozen

Polishing the egg
her unwavering focus.
Best stay out, rooster.

"I me carry you,"
Ella big-eyed reaches up,
I stoop to obey.

Mommy has her charms,
but none give rides like papa.
Ella has it made.

She stole the wife's man
by stealing the man's woman.
Child conquers marriage.

Sex has a purpose:
your child consumes you, leaving
love as memory.

Limp battered old cock,
testy clucking old layer -
what's left after chicks.

1 December 2001
Immersion

One is childless in one's art, 
and artless in one's children.

Like Bodhidharma, 
we descended into our caves, 
immersing ourselves 
in the mysteries of the arts we pursued, 
till, finally, a day came 
when a combination of fatigue, 
enlightenment and hallucination 
drove us out into the sunshine 
of the bustling, unnoticing world. 
In time, we settled into our places in this world, 
mining the stored treasure of our artful visions 
for bits and pieces easily auctioned off 
in the marketplace of daily living, 
diluting, 
till we ran indistinguishably 
in the thin streams of thought and purpose of our times - 
the promise and potency of our cave days 
a hidden memory (if that). 
Only the mad among us, 
or those too deeply and accursedly sane, 
dare immerse themselves 
in some new vision again. 
Imagine someone like that - 
willling to unravel the social fabric they're woven into - 
what the power of inspiration must be, 
to fly so far out of this world 
and the certainty of a role in it. 
People would hold their breath, in fear, 
watching you disappear below the surface, 
remote, 
in bliss.
Conclusions are like the full moon on a winter night, they arrest attention, but their intrinsic emptiness cannot sustain that suspension, so eventually, all focus drifts and dissipates. True essence is continuance, the fact that life continues. We are mere forms, momentary eddies in a flow between forgotten rains and unimagined oceans. When you look away from the moon you see deep into a winter forest under silver light, and you feel the truth.

1 January 2003
The sound of light falling

I walked under eagles, high on the hill, looking out west to the ocean, alone, warmed by harmonics of light, like a bell, soft sound of sun soaking deep into stone. Under the oaks, breathing clouds to the earth, twining life-cycles are rustling unseen, a mysterious web of unending birth weaving me out of its multi-thread skein. All this surpasses my understanding, the silence suffused with amazing grace, and what humbling awe, on awakening to nature reflecting my very face. I am no greater, now, in this knowing, yet draw in such comfort, being this place.

28 October 2002
Job Application

I would be good
at watching the quality of morning sun in fall
shift from crystalline horizontal incisiveness
to a near invisibility of diffused blue,
the texture of reality softening
from a pointillist granularity of color and shadow -
razor sharp in its purity -
to a shaded weave of fluid color, lit from within,
alive with the fullness of the universe,
autumn leaves tumbling like petals of amber
dancing across the luminescent blue,
carried by the eddying sighs of a living earth.

I would be good
at watching wispy white feathers of icy cloud
curl in slow vortical whorls,
sailing with majestic grace across the cupola of atmosphere;
and I would be good at telling you
how the rays of evening sun
glance off the salty foam of wavecrests in the Pacific
to warm the pink bellies of creamy pendulous clouds,
an amorous sky rolling its effulgent Rubenesque abundance
over the sprawling darkening body of the earth.

I would be good
at telling you how the droplets of mist
hang in the air between pine boughs and leaves of eucalyptus
in the quiet of the morning
before the rising sun crests the canyon rim
flooding the humid silence with light,
and how the silent swoop of a hawk low in the forest canopy
cores vortices of clarity as its wake,
a clarity that diffuses into misty white opaqueness,
an opacity that evaporates in the light;
and I could tell you about evening's blanketing fog
pulled westward over the rim of the canyon
dissolving the panorama of clarity
into a hushed proximate blankness of unlit white
punctuated by the resonant whoo-whoo of a pair of owls
flapping noiseless wings to reach invisible perches
in the heavy coolness of descending night.

I would be good
at telling you how the hummingbirds pair,
confirm the noonday light
with a swirling darting weave of whistling clicks,
sprinkling glints of blazing color
as if sparking the very air with a furious friction;
and I could tell you of opalescent clouds,
rim-lit on passing across the sun,
trailing sweeping purple arcs of evaporating rain
that disappear into the clear blue,
only a shadow reaching the ground.

I would be good at all that.
Surely, many would want to hear
how the day's light progressed,
being shut away in their self-contained preoccupations -
unconnected.
I could remind them,
my words would reach out
like a mother's arms to a frightened baby,
ensuring it in warming comfort -
connection to the mother.
Surely, in today's world
there must be a job like this,
the need is so great.
Think of me as the weatherman of the soul.

16 November 2001
An Expired Doctorate

Riding down the hillside along this lovely tree-lined street, 
early evening liquid sun 
oozing through the dancing cracks in the mosaic vista of the distant bay, 
a luminous weave darting through a trembling fabric of leafy green 
masking the immense face of the ripened sky behind its rippling veil, 
and filling sight, 
as susurrus of rushing air fill sound, 
and reflections of lost promise fill mind.

How marvelous to be alive, to be aware, to feel the light, 
to ride my breath through this eternal now. 
How fortunate to have such balm to soothe the sting of failure. 
Not a major failure to be sure, 
only that of work and ego to achieve any useful end or recognition, 
to see the raw promise of youthful ambition, 
distilled by fine education to a potent extract, 
now become a weak vinegar - sour and watered - 
and a passionate vocation reduced to hireling occupation, 
the reductionism of mind to mere calculator.

So I find myself 
engrossed in the minutiae of a superfluous part 
in an unnecessary weapon 
within the excessive arsenal 
of an insensate empire. 
While I speak this poem - or you read it - 
about fifty children in our world 
will die from easily preventable disease, 
and one hundred women will die or suffer disability 
in pregnancy or childbirth 
for lack of simple remedies and care. 
To overcome such tragedy only requires 
one quarter of the military costs of the third world, 
or ten percent that of the United States.
Imagine,
so few less bullets, so much more life.
I look into my little daughter's eyes
and think of those mothers and those fathers suffering such loss.
I look into my little daughter's joyful dancing eyes
and draw purpose in each day of pointless employment,
as a trivial cog in the sprawling machinery of blind empire,
a Cyclops gone mad with lack of vision,
ravening the world with unquenching power.

I work among a swarm of aphid zombies,
each focused on his own proboscis
oblivious by intent, trained through rigorous education,
to even the agony of one beside being chewed alive
in mandibles of political expediency
by preying mantises invoking greater imperial glories,
the whole an infestation withering the vine of life.
I marvel at such voluntary unanimity in the degradation of human soul,
at such profound denaturing of awareness,
at such complete filtration of compassion from human hearts -
are they even still human?
Can it be true that so many accede to such enslavement?,
emptying themselves of their spiritual birthright
solely to tremble in fear as hollow vessels of mindless desiring
for things metered out by owners of a vampire economy?
Those quick of mind, well educated, articulate,
mouth such perfidy and platitudes to curry favor, to move up-class -
parasites in a parasite empire -
with no moral anchor
to drag along the course of their ambition.
How well did Yeats write:
"The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

Could I somehow liberate myself
to do some greater good - however minor -
yet still support my family?
How many others feel like me?,
engaged in our pangs of conscience
being rich enough to support such luxury,
and too weak to live on principle alone.
How much simpler the logic of life without such impediment,
yet what an opulence of poverty.
One in ten, surely not that many,  
one bullet out of ten,  
one French fry out of ten in a soldier's mess,  
one warplane out of ten,  
one general out of ten.  
Surely we would never notice,  
surely we could train that marvelous capacity for unseeing  
to shield consciousness from any perception  
of such a trifling reduction of opulence.  
Yet, wouldn't even these willfully unseeing  
feel the smile of grace for a transformed world  
from the face of every child?

To open your mind and heart to this world is to go insane -  
certainly if alone -  
to survive one needs refuge in community.  
Like a Christian in the Roman legions nineteen centuries ago,  
I, too, will rejoice with the fall of empire.  
How can I not pray for revolution,  
even knowing how fearful a thing that can be?  
My demeanor is resigned, my soul is in rebellion.

3 May 2001
How I know

I remember the smile that you gave me today.
Thinking about it
makes everything right in this world,
not that I would have you believe Utopia has arrived.
No, our miserable world is still its same miserable self.
But your smile, today,
lingers in my mind like the silkiest of wines,
a reassurance
that yes, yes, in these days the things are arranged just so
that I can hold you close
and have your smile beam its grace into my life -
and know that I am fulfilled.

17 December 2001
Horizon

I drank from a hidden fountain:
everything stopped,
sound froze,
cracked, fell to the ground as powder;
light melted,
dripped, clung to the skin like sweat,
sank in.
I breathed in cold darkness
and exhaled puffs of light,
my eyes illuminated everything,
my vision bore through steel,
rocks, smoke;
mirrors evaporated.
I closed my eyes
and saw a brilliant azure sea
cressing a band of dazzling white
stretching away past the edges of sight,
fringing the toes of flower strewn dunes;
the air alive, vibrant, yet light as grace,
and all in a shower of warmth
under the luminous dome of sky.
My eyes opened,
I saw my other cell mates,
"We can get out," I said,
"You must leave," they replied,
"Come, let me show you,"
I said, leading them to the great iron door,
it was unlocked, as always.
I opened it, walked out,
calling for them to follow, saying
"We are always free."

They closed the door behind me,
pushing hard to keep it sealed,
"Go, do not come back, do not speak,"
they screamed without speaking,
"Wolves will eat your flesh, 
your bones will lie in the open,"
they cried in fearful anger 
and returned to their cells.
I can see them, 
each staring at the texture of the bricks 
in the walls of their cells, 
pining for freedom, 
clinging to the certainty of parallel isolation.
And I am cast out, left to die, 
wandering the dunes, eating wild strawberries, 
watching the flight of birds, 
the unfolding of clouds, 
listening to the hymn of wind across sand, 
the fall of water into the embrace of surf, 
sheets of water wiping the face of the beach, 
the hissing kiss of foam on wet sand. 
Mountains have grown and been ground flat, 
washed into the sea - 
and still, I am here.

17 April 2002
Rain in the Forest

Rain
falling through the eucalyptus leaves,
pattering on the roof in the dark of night,
stirring the air in the forest
into the sound of a sustained exhalation,
as if the woods and mountains were one great lung
holding the breath of the earth
focused in yogic meditation -
za-zen -
and I was just one corpuscle of the earth's blood
surrounded in the rush of life -
the great tides of inspiration and expiration -
cooled, washed, oxidized,
围绕ed by an endless breath
that also reverberates within me.
I am alive in the sound of rain.
Tonight, it has no terrors or discomforts,
just an absence of silence
and a timeless presence beyond place.
I am alive in the sound of rain,
listen.

1 January 2002
Time's Whisper

The voices of the ocean
course silently with the wind,
rising to rain
before the flood
that sweeps away mountains,
moistening leveled ground
with the kiss of life.
The voices of the ocean of humanity
course through the stream of time,
rising to rain
before the flood
that grinds down mountains,
and sweeps clean the sands of time
with the tides of history.
Listen deeply into the wind,
do you hear?
There is prophesy of a new pulse,
a new heartbeat, yet unborn,
timeless,
within you.
Listen.

11 April 2003
Moments Out of Time

It is so easy to see the evil in the world
and rail against it,
and so hard
to toil in efforts you see as good,
which come to naught -
ineffective, unappreciated -
and still keep some sense of optimism,
of joy.
How to be both aware and happy?
Once you've seen past the illusions of success and sacrifice,
you are free
to rest in your simple, indecipherable truths,
despite a knotted uncomprehending world
divorced from the innocent wonder of its children,
the encompassing joy of their openness.
We think so much
and realize so little.
Those with perfectly drawn philosophies
left behind by unthinking experience,
the smile of a three year old girl
crumbling empires.

25 July 2003
Eyes Shining

The difficult part of becoming aware
is in taking responsibility,
this is called "conversion" --
even "rebirth" --
a one-way passage
between parallel worlds,
another Eden's exit
to uncertain wilds.
I walk through ghosts from former lives,
flesh and blood unlinked,
a voice crying out in the wilderness
here amongst you always,
alone again,
infused.

3 October 2003
In the Arms of a Passionate Lover, Surrender

Cook your restaurant food,  
daycare your brats,  
die in your colonial wars --  
we serve, you take.  
What the German tribes did to Rome,  
descending from the north,  
we will do across this land,  
rising from below.  
We will jalapeño you  
from Oregon to Louisiana,  
we will salsa you  
from Miami to Kennebunkport.  
_Arriba y abajo --  
only the snow will be white._

23 September 2003
I Will Tax You

Here's my plan:
first million - tax free.
Not bad so far, huh?
Every dollar past a million
we tax at fifty cents,
no deductions, no shelters, no exceptions.
Pretty simple, huh?
What?, can't live on less than a million?
Well, we'll draft you in the army,
then everything will be taken care of.
Oh, yeah, almost forgot,
since corporations are "people,"
they get to live on the same income as people -
real people.
Fair is fair.

3 April 2003
The great secret to power
is that most people never learn
that they are so disdainfully manipulated,
and that most of those who do,
do nothing about it.
Those rare times when popular consciousness awakens
and flows into action against power
are called anarchy,
as in: Paris 1789,
St. Louis 1877,
Spain 1936,
Mexico, Russia, China, India,
and so many twentieth century places.
Rare?
Perhaps "rare" is an artifact of the dominant social programming,
a wishful ubiquity, like styrofoam in the oceans
or strontium 90 in the bones.
For, none of us are any longer pure,
untainted, un-imprinted;
however dilute, the tincture of control has been instilled in us all.
Those with big spirits
see through the deception and work for greater good.
Perhaps they are not so rare,
but, most likely, they are not plentiful either;
prophets are stoned, flatterers are knighted.
Most of the rest with any wit find gullibility shameful
and avoid the embarrassment by denial,
furtively playing their roles as directed;
the witless glide along in serene sincerity of belief.
The great secret to success is to serve the needs of power,
the reward is wealth,
the cost is loss of character:
you can climb as far as you are willing
to trade your self-respect for accumulation.
No need to name names,
simply look at what deeds it took
for the exalted to achieve their positions
(these will be little mentioned, to avoid the embarrassment).
And so, in making your way in this world, consider:
the outcome of your life
and your accounting of gain and loss
will depend as much on circumstances
as on the nature of weights that tip your scales.

1 January 2002
We Ignore All Immolations

A Buddhist nun immolates herself on a Saigon street
to shock callous calculating minds
into a consciousness with peace as possibility.
A Palestinian explodes himself in Israel
to insert punctuation into the long, grim sentence passed on his tribe.
Final Solutions are dealt out by those with enough guns
to force in new settlements;
internal colonies grow to merge into a smothering occupation
rimmed in the blood of the vanquished.
Little empires curry favor with greater ones,
playing the role of Sparta-for-hire.
And everywhere:
the eyes are blind, the ears are deaf, the minds are sealed.
We ignore all immolations.
We can only drive ourselves along the scent trails laid down for us
by the masters of our destiny.

10 December 2001
Jellyfish

They're hollow,
transparently ignorant,
spineless,
poison their prey,
flexible, drift with the current,
no principle impedes their motion.
Now I understand office politics.

13 November 2001
Performance Evaluation

Without fail it arrives every summer like fleas, a shell game of lying with patronage to please. There is no escape and all must pay heed as to getting a raise why you have no need. Each one will receive a unique explanation for the management robbery of remuneration. Instead of the cash you get a fine memo as useful to me as a brand to a cow, or a number tattoo to a Holocaust Jew. So don't be so foolish to think it makes sense, you see, it has nothing to do with performance. Pay is all based on just who is who and nothing at all on whatever you do.

8 May 2001
Ignorance is Strength

If ignorance is bliss
then America is paradise.
When you narrow the scope of thought
you inflate the appearance of competence,
this is why computers we exalt
and Republicans rule the earth.

13 May 2001
Zombie Nation

Lying is woven through the fabric of our lives - dyed into its very threads - like a web of mold, a staining mildew, for how are we to live without it? Truth is hard - and cold. If we admit truth then we are left with the naked reality of having to respond. We could be faced with serious responsibility, with unpleasant work, with unprofitable consequences, with a need for strong character.

No - deny - evade - protect our zombie nation. Rather than suffer the shame of shirking life's call, it is so much easier to deny reality - enshrouding it in a gauze of lies - and thus, buffered by blissful unknowing, to choose from the convenient options remaining in view. We support each other in a community of lying, a fungal cooperative, a congregational conspiracy of comforting ignorance. We need our lies, we are all agreed to forget their falsity - zombie nation solidarity - and we toss the keys of insight into an ocean of denial. And so, secure, barricaded in our gated mental enclaves, shielded from the searing eye of our innate consciousness, we are detached from all awareness - our most godlike quality, our all seeing I.

Now it is possible - to be a vampire and make the sign of the cross.

5 July 2001
Knowing

Before I die, will I figure it out,
The meaning or futility of life?
Would that I could shed all unneeded strife,
Releasing mind from its confining doubt.
No simplistic faith can bring this about
And mere philosophy fails to midwife
New awareness; one needs a sharper knife
To rend the psychic veil and put to rout
All illusions sapping experience,
Evaporating them in the warm breath
Of this very moment - all life's presence -
Eternal, unborn, unfixed, beyond death.
It must be clear that life in its essence
Erupts at each instant from endless depth.

2 December 2000
A Seed Like Mustard

It is so hard to write of love and beauty
as my countrymen rain war
upon the hapless crazed impoverished,
abandoned in starving wastelands,
trapped by heartless fates.
Yet, what else can I really do?
At least my ragged unimportant verse
can bring a smile or two upon another face,
a happy pause in some other life
than might otherwise have been the case
had I just gone unreflecting,
eating my suppers and doing my work
like so many sleeping millions.
How few are the minds our ideas reach to touch,
how fleeting the impact our lives may impress.
Still, maybe this is actually my role,
to bring out one or two more flashing dimples --
smiles -- amused heads shaking unseen by me.
Perhaps my entire experience is to be fruited in a single phrase
eliciting a few effervescent sparkles of joy --
instants in another life --
and this will be my impact to history,
my accent in the greater karma.

I cannot stop the war,
I cannot stop the foreclosure on freedom and dignity in my country,
I cannot influence the people I live and work amongst
to see what is happening,
to see that we walk knee-deep in blood
to luxuriate so thoughtlessly in riches we enjoy so inequitably.
But, at times, I can write
of love, and beauty and grace,
and in this way my wandering thoughts may kiss another soul.
This has some value, doesn't it?

27 November 2001
Mister Rogers

Imagine,
a man who does not have to protect his cool --
that is power!
He could look a child straight in the eye
and speak slowly, gently,
with utter respect,
acknowledging the God within,
the intelligence before him.
He stood tall --
without apology, without embarrassment, without fear --
for compassion,
indiscriminate compassion.
What man alive dares be so reckless?

The second coming --
all look for a Jesus to come back and save them,
something more than just the three days of Easter,
and yet, that second coming is here now,
every time a person becomes infused with the spirit of Jesus --
awakens, becomes a bodhisattva --
and walks among us
manifesting the eternally animating principles
that walked in the footsteps of Buddha,
that walked in the footsteps of Jesus,
that walked in the footsteps of Dorothy Day,
that walked in the footsteps of countless others -
known and unknown -
that walked in the footsteps of Mister Rogers,
that could walk in your footsteps,
and mine,
but for a dose of courage,
a courage that seems to come easily
once belief permeates into experience.
Love and compassion and power and peace
must be breathed into life.
"It's such a good feeling to know you're alive."

2 March 2003
Moetet #1
Translogical truth
cascading down rivulets of mind's outpouring
melting glaciers of latent awareness
in blinding light of hot experience
cold sweat knowledge flooding
crumbling sandstone fossil thought
entombing DNA promise
beyond life spiritual linked in being
hot blood pulsing reality abstraction's pattern
feathers thrown from angel's wings
cycling granite magmatic consciousness
trembling ecstasy procreative urge
all I in I thought
merged in conscious oneness
pointed engulfment
oscillating poles of existence
shedding eddies entwining polarity
shattering sky blue fringing shards
cutting black infinity past five dimensions
exploding St. Paul blinding radiance
birthed of mother void womb night
freezing invisible stardust
gluing the clarity of water
shivering into throbbing crescendo heart pump
hot thick flow genealogy
lacing eons into gestures of the moment unseen
the glint on exposed fang curled lip
and wide-eyed oceans of love
spiraling winds spinning the wheel
in continuous pulsating cycles
slippery self-caressing entanglement
cloud wisps slow tumbling across the bay
while seagrass liquid mirrors its world beyond
and some eye breaching the unending surface
bursts to total consciousness for one shining moment
I see! I see!
icy icy icy
I cooling in glacial heights
cycles of seeing roll on un-I'ed
quivering in latency of
translogical truth
cascading down rivulets of mind's outpouring...20 August 2003
A Love Supreme

Coltrane is the angel God called upon
to blow the universe down its swingingest groove.
Music is the resonance of eternity in the transience of the moment.
But, to feel the living pulse of that essence --
holding all --
you have to hear the heart music --
the breath of God itself --
like Bach, or Mozart, or Beethoven,
and yes, yes,
that earnest, pregnant resonance of living air --
Coltrane.
He is like a pool with a buried sun --
on diving deeper its clarity expands.
Explanation is deviation,
the embodiment is acceptance, experience, devotion,
mystical wonder,
an unknowing, humbling sainthood of art.
Man is the instrument of God,
and Coltrane is God's dream of love for us
blown through a tenor sax.

23 September 2002
The Impulse to Art

Was there ever a time
when the world was not ruled by dictators?,
emperors, warlords, pirates with a veneer of elegance?
Is our time so different from the past?
On this very day
there are islands of peace and tranquility
where the depths of human spirituality
and the height of culture
seem to define the way of life.
Yet, on this same day
there are islands of desolation,
where only the darkest cruelty and unremitting despair
blanket the land.

The impulse to art lives on
despite the barbarity of power.
Athenians who had memorized Euripides
were among those thrusting spearpoints
down the throats of Syracusans defending their invaded land.
And after the Athenians had suffered utter defeat,
the survivors herded into quarries to die,
those able to recite Euripides were saved for a slave's life,
so fortunate Syracusans could dine under stars
accompanied by recitations of transcendent beauty --
the humanizing, heartrending verse of their enemies.

I hope the impulse to art -- the spiritual --
is well-woven through the smothering embrace of empire today.
Our bright young leaders,
our scientists, our graduates of the finest universities,
those devising life-saving potions against our modern plagues,
like AIDS,
and inventing so much new technology, reshaping the world;
how loath they are to release the fruits of their knowledge
to the destitute and unlearned suffering masses,
least they lose profits, stock value, pension equity,
income sufficient to purchase fine German cars with leather seats,
large homes in exclusive school districts.
These most educated of our wealthiest nations' children,
who enjoyed pleasant May days
in classes at Harvard, Oxford, or in San Diego,
savoring the profound delights of Euripides --
and so many other great minds --
in the literary classes of our splendid temples of knowledge
and prosperity,
while their counterparts in Africa
and elsewhere in the dark-skinned struggling world
are forced to till, forage, or scavenge a living
in dying lands riven by war,
devastated by plagues like AIDS,
or wasted to the point of starvation.
Our most fortunate,
given their opportunities to enjoy fulfilling lives
creating a cornucopia of modern wonders they delight in,
do they allow the world's poor to copy our miracle drugs?
Never!
"We have patents," is the cry, "make them pay, we deserve it."
"We want all the gain we imagined in our days of yearning."
Poverty is greed's pollution.

Is there really such a gain to our lives and our world
by driving the spearpoints of empire's economy
so heartlessly down the throats of the helpless?
Why is there any poverty and disease in the world at all?
Hasn't America proven that it has invented answers to both?
Why in God's name haven't we given this boon away?
Do we want poverty and disease?
How could we possibly lose
in banishing the plagues, the fears, the horrors from our earth?
Does empire mean so much
we prefer to be the lords of hell
than simply quiet neighbors in a global Eden?

Perhaps I exaggerate,
perhaps we do not actually have answers of such power,
simply a century or two of good luck.
If so, then it will be good to maintain our impulse to art,
some engagement with the pathways to the divine.
For who can say if our far-flung armies will always be so strong,
or if someday we find ourselves cut off --
empire collapsed --
the spearpoints reversed,
and we are left with only our art
to help us endure the duration. 16 January 2002
From the Hand of Saint Francis

It is in books that I rest comfortably, assuredly, intimately in the company of greatness.

I want to write something clear, honest, unmannered, free of complaint and put-down, of any egoistic display of learning or attitude of superiority. And, why do I want this?, to grasp at fame?, recognition?, attention?, to build a monument to myself in the social psyche? Isn't that littered enough, with so many derelict illusory mausoleums? I'm sure I, too, am not immune to the seduction of the ego, but, no, at heart I think I want to write something of value, something that connects directly to the heart, through the groggy mists of workday mornings or the black chill of solitary nights, with the people whose hands move the many wheels of the intertwined machinery of our social lives, something that rings true, that opens a door to freedom, like the sight of birds lifting off the ground.

The bus driver, on her break, leaves her bus on the side of the throbbing boulevard and walks into the rain-soaked park, a lone dark figure in a field of green scattered with splashes of glassy reflections of the low leaden sky. Surrounded by gulls and ducks, she tosses out clouds of feed - seeds?, popcorn?, peanuts?, who can say - a clashing flutter of wings and greedy gullets erasing the gift from view.
And then, she walks back to her bus,
to her cramped, tense, exposed, repetitive role,
turning her wheel in the great machinery
of our modern human hive,
refreshed by her moments of grace.
One thinks of Saint Francis
interceding for the birds,
humanizing people
by showing them how to recognize the divine
in the life surrounding us,
and in so doing, acknowledging -- experiencing -- the divine
within us.
So, in the end, one sees that outside and inside
are but one illusion, the divine threads them both,
an intersection merging their connection:
the divine is in the human,
the human is of nature,
and nature is divine,
there is no boundary, no separation,
it is only illusion that division exists,
the necessary illusion
supporting the ignorance upon which expediency is based.
That divine unity is the spark, which flies with the kernels
from hand to beak,
reprised as the uplift of the heart
on seeing a cloud of wings envelop you
and then take flight, like a wave of God's hand.
I will never write anything as pure
as that bus driver feeding the gulls
in the muddy green of the park,
but I can return, once more, to the story of Saint Francis,
miracle of his child-like magic -- a gift that still shines --
and the gentle, clear wit of its telling
by Chesterton. --
And so, I write.

27 December 2002
Light of the Body

I read the scriptures all today,
watching the luminous presence in air,
for, these days are of quiet change:
summer lingering in the heat of midday,
cool at night, mist-hidden at morning.
I am hungry
but will not break the quiet with cooking clatter,
and besides -- I have no food.
My windows are open, my door, too,
and the sharp, cooling sun of fading day
slants shafts of warming light into my darkening room.
Oh yes, I admit the attachment to the day now passing,
its peaceful warmth dissipating to night;
sometime later I will release it
by lighting my candle, pulling on my ragged sweater,
and rattling my pots, if I find some beans or rice;
and what will be left of this awakened day
will be warm remembrance held in the heart.
What wonder,
to see the blades of living light
slicing through the trees down along my hill,
emblazoning florets otherwise hidden in green mats,
accents of color scattered through this web of life.
Later, if my stomach wakes me from sleep,
I will look up at the chilled moon and vast starry night,
drawing comfort
from the pool of warmth my spirit bathed in,
that source of day, now within.

15 September 2002
Drinking Together

The wine is red
deep
blood-red fluid purity,
skin and flesh pressed to spirit.
Fresh bread
slightly sweet,
hard to draw the yeasty scent
out pores,
the cool white pliant body.
Golden crust
flour-dusted virgin-white
yielding,
not too brittle, not too soft,
mother of life.
I dip my bread in wine --
again and again --
the world's cacophony recedes,
I am insulated from delusions
in a bubble of sacredness.
I know Him well,
Jesus is here.

25 October 2002
Here's Mud in Your Eye

The more you drink
the less poetry comes out.

The less poetry you do
the more you need to drink.

The more you drink
the more poetry you need.

The more you know
the more drinking you need.

The less you know
the more talking you do.

The more talking you do
the more we need you to drink.

The more you drink
the more you think you know.

The less you drink
the more you think you know.

Drinking is talking to yourself,
the more you do,
the less you understand,
despite the fact that things look clearer.

If you're really smart,
you drink without talking
and think without drinking,
and you don't pretend to know anything.

31 January 2003
It was a perfect day.
It started with mother waking us both far too early,
and on such a damp chilly morning,
a holiday for us, mother rushed off to work.
As always,
you had to have your way,
so we were in the park while the ducks were still sleeping,
one leg up and bills tucked in back under a wing,
the pond glassy still,
white tufts of down spread over its waxy surface.
The swings were coated in dew
and I used all but one of my pocketed paper napkins
to wipe one dry for you,
and after a minute you were all done.
Swinging through the quiet chill of heavy morning air,
just you and I alone in the entire park -
besides the sleeping ducks -
is not much fun as it was on Saturday,
a balmy sunny day with children laughing and playing everywhere.
You reached for a high bar to swing out on
but the dew-coated metal slipped right through your hand
and you landed on your back in wet sand -
shocked, hurt, angry.
I had to hold you in my arm,
brushing off the sand
as your cry filled the empty quiet over the pond.
I held you that way a long time,
through the park, around the town,
and later back at home.
We spent the whole day together,
ever more than an arm's length apart.
We washed a little,
sampled the aromas of all the herbs and spices -
some things must spill, it's not important -
and we made a tent,
a big one with three chairs and a quilt,
then we went inside and turned on our flashlights.
It was very funny being in that tent,
quiet too, you hardly heard the rain pattering on the roof.
In the end, you fell asleep on my chest,
while I slumped on the couch,
listening to Mozart piano music
and motets by Thomas Tallis.
As "Spem in alium" floated into the corners of the room
and your warm heaviness sank into my heart,
misty rain filled the forest on our mountain
and I began to reclaim some of the oceans of sleep that I've lost
these last two or so years.
I know it was a perfect day.

21 January 2002
Watching the light

Sunburst in pine-top,
crisp blue winter morning sky,
edges ablaze - rim-lit,
streaks of light dart through a glinting space,
a hovering swarm of scintillating agitation --
a hummingbird snatching gnats in flight.
I look up,
as if from the bottom of an ocean,
ascending.

15 January 2003
Empty and Marvelous

It is the silence
that can hold any sound
and so is the mother of all music,
of all speech,
all noise,
all thunder,
all terror,
all peace.
In its emptiness
it holds infinity.
A few moments of silence
can punctuate a life,
suspend you
in an instant of your history,
open a door
to a conscious eternity.
Empty and marvelous,
it draws all to it
then pops like a bubble --
an instant glint of sunlight --
reincarnating the world,
and you.

25 October 2001
Father of the Bride

I knew how to wend my way
in the canyons and gullies of New York;
but here in the Western Desert,
I am lost in a flat dusty expanse
of uncritical mind,
where everything is evident
yet nothing is ever seen.

I am of another time and place,
my advice is no use to you;
you are a child who springs from here,
a point along the journey of a migrant father.
My best advice is an affectionate wave,
knowing I did what I could,
and that you have grown resplendent.

22 May 2006
An American Prayer

God, let me experience life without thought of profit, preference or death.

Let me know justice, by allowing me to experience the consequences of my acts as others experience them.

Let me know You for what You are: the life in all, the knower, the known and the unknown.

Let me be curious without fear of thought.

Let me be expressive without thought of fear.

Let me be forgiving, an instrument of compassion.

Let me be alert, an instrument of knowledge.

Let me be humane, an instrument of peace.

Let me know truth.

Let me be grateful.

5 July 2004
Ghosts

Ghosts crowd the mind,
living flesh only mirrors images cast by memory --
realities lost to dust --
scattered into wind.
A woman, alive only in fantasies of desire,
an aroma in the mind, gardenias?
How is it I can feel the palpitations
under a receptive embrace
now not even a breath from butterfly wings?
Motionless life fills thought
while lifeless motion crowds vision of the street.
Who are these people?
They appear real but they are castaways
boring through their mutual unconscious
with blaring determination,
their horizons close,
filled with illusions but free of ghosts.

I sit in a eucalyptus grove,
the afternoon sun cascading down tiers of leaves
shimmering to the eddies,
the streaming air shushing
through swaying fronds, against vaulting trunks;
a weaving dance of light and shadow,
the shifting of veils hung from a dome of light.
Spirit brushes along quivering green,
the caress of light warming earth's uplifted hands,
massaging warmth down eager limbs
drawing the milk of life deep into folds
below the darkness of all birthing,
beneath the gravity we rise from.

Is some of the air you once breathed
now drifting in this stream?
Is some of the force of your life
now rippled by waves of birdsong?
Is some of the heat of your passion
now a whisper of love
absorbed imperceptibly from this day?
Am I as much a ghost as you?
Yes, of course;
this breath is what matters,
this kiss is what matters,
this love is the vessel of life.

I hear the voice of Maria Callas --
la divina --
an echo preserved to rekindle sensations of presence,
to relive our own times of transcendence,
to feel life.
An yet, what of hers?,
less than the whisper of sunlight on seafoam,
now as much part of the Aegean wind
as the smile of Helen of Troy.

And, so it must be,
as we loose our last breath
we melt into the earth's breathing.
Perhaps our bones will imprint future rocks,
perhaps our ashes will trail the last eddy of our body's heat
like spent candle soot coiling up into darkness.
Is that your memory, a lingering warmth in the darkness?
And now you mingle with so many,
my mind a country of spirits,
new immigrants arriving daily;
a land I can know yet never visit.

Shall I tell you about it?
There is a wonderful bar, top shelf in the well,
jazz trio backing Ella;
all the many Jesus drinking wine, relaxed,
dancing with Mary, Martha, Salome,
the intense political debates resolved.
Down by the river, the poets convene,
and I listen as their word plays
wrap around the fire and lift into velvety night
twinkling unseen with the chirping of crickets.
At dawn we stretch to greet the sun,
naked bodies flushed with warmth, washed of time.
At night in the city
I will hear sopranos and drink white Burgundy,
I will see Don Giovanni and drink Medoc.
The once ambitious wander the streets bewildered --
harmlessly deranged --
there will be no order, only peace. At the shore, a poet will say of the dawning light "It is as bright as the love left behind." I hear the voice -- love is an art.

29 October 2006
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14 February 2011

MG, Jr.