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# Poems to my Peace and other works

by  
Charles O. Todd, III



This book is lovingly dedicated to my wife,  
Crucita,  
who has always believed in me  
the way I am.

Tempe, AZ, 1991

## FOREWORD

*For Poems to my Peace*

The title of this collection applies mainly to the first nine poems which as a group constitute *Poems to my Peace*. Although this book is dedicated to my wife, the Peace referred to is my own; the thoughts and feelings that hold me in peace are therefore personified. I began writing this volume for two reasons.

The first reason was that I wanted to set out in words a description of my experiences with Peace, and poetry seemed the best and most natural way to accomplish that. I have always loved poetry, both for reading and for writing. I read a lot of poetry, some good, some not so good, and some that was crushingly boring; and I wrote a lot of poetry, a few good ones, a lot of crummy ones, and some that were ridiculously trite and shallow. *Poems to my Peace* was to be a concerted attempt to write something good, something even *I* would enjoy reading. Some call that "Vanity Writing," and I would concur with that description.

Vanity though it was, I also wanted to have something to read that I could *change*. I did, and do, love reading poetry (probably the only people who actually *read* poetry are other poets), but sometimes I wanted to add in something that dawned on me as I read the words the poet had chosen. Not possible without injuring the integrity of what the poet originally had in mind. However, if the word and lines are my own, no one would really care if I change them; after all they are mine to begin with, and yours when you take them in. If I change the work, it is because the worker has changed, but the beneficiary of the work – you, the reader – still receives the benefit, as it were, of the additional "labor." Basically it was for these two reasons that I decided to write the nine poems as a collection, and the structure for the arrangement and content evolved with the ideas that were shaping my life at the time I began the work.

The nine poems are based on concepts portrayed in the illustration on the cover. I do not know the origin of this symbol, but only know that it developed to its present form during conversations with friends around 1967, the year the poems were "completed." There are nine elements to the main portion of the illustration and each of the nine poems represents each of those elements. To be sure, the connection is not always obvious, and understanding the meaning of the elemental symbols can add to the contextual meaning of the poem. Through the years, that contextual meaning has evolved and my own life and perceptions have evolved. What I meant as these poems were written has changed along with me. It is not necessary to understand the connection between graphic and verbal symbols, but an added dimension is available, and intended, for those who wish to seek it.

The extraordinary American poet, Robert Frost stated, "A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom." Frost passed away in 1963, the year before this volume was begun. Along with Scottish poet Alistair Reid (whose collection *Oddments, Inklings, Moments, Omens – Poems by Alistair Reid* was published in 1959 and greatly

impressed me), Frost helped form the poet within me. Both poets, indeed all poets, know that what inspired the poem which lands on the page is different from the poem that entered the mind and heart of the poet, and will again be transformed when it enters the mind and heart of the reader. And so it is with *Poems to my Peace*. Whenever they are read, even by me, they change; and over the years I have done minor editing here and there to reflect the new perceptions I have of their content, without sacrificing their character, which brings us back to the nine elements:

The elements are all in the triangle and are:

1. Rays, red and gold, signifying Hope and Blessing
2. Diamond, signifying Omnidirectional Love
3. Eye, signifying the ultimate Source, God
4. Sky, here representing happiness and open honesty
5. Clouds partially obscuring the sky as doubt and desire obscure our own happiness
6. Mountains, a place of peacefulness in its fullness where resolution of stress brings life
7. River, the natural course and flow of Life; the Waters of Life
8. Plain, signifying serenity and clear vision; level patience
9. Cedar, the growth of learning, the accrual and use of knowledge

With these symbols there is also a contiguous explication of their interrelatedness. The red and gold rays of Blessing and Hope radiate out for all creatures and things. They have no physical existence in this world, therefore cannot be seen, and so are not shown outside the diamond.

These rays emanate from the diamond of Love, the corners of which point in all four directions. Thus, Hope is born of Love. At the center of Love, The Eye of The LORD looks in on all things. Prominently placed, all creatures may see the Source of all things. These three elements – the rays, the diamond, and the eye – are not part of our physical world, but they affect, and effect, everything in the physical and metaphysical realms.

Beneath these first three symbols, there is an open sky; open in the same way we should be in our dealings with each other and with God. But this sky is partially darkened with two clouds. These are desire and doubt, the basis of our separation from God.

Beneath the partially occluded sky rise the Mountains of Peace. The peak on the left reminds us that man's life is suffering; the one on the right reminds us that the cause of suffering is doubt and desire; the center peak reminds us that doubt and desire can be overcome.

From this center peak flows the River of Life whose headwaters are in the Mountains of Peace. The River is born when doubt and desire bring storms onto the

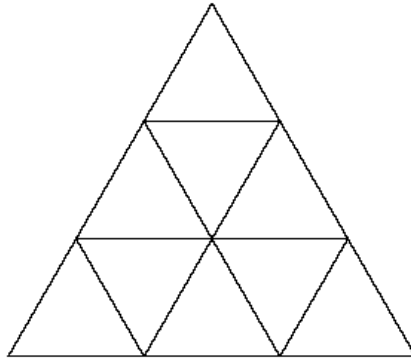
Mountains of Peace. The rain produced by these storms collects in the Valley of Quietude, unseen by anyone but The Eye of The LORD.

This river flows out across the Plain of Serenity whose lush openness presents a clear view of everything in, above, and around it. Growing in the plain, watered by the river, is the Tree of Learning (*not the Tree of Knowledge*). It reminds us to take root in serene life and grow in knowledge as preparation for knowing God.

An irony that presents itself in contemplating this scene is that life, serenity, and knowledge as we know them in this World depend on our understanding of our struggles as we deal with the storms brought by doubt and desire. Without that rain passing through the valleys there would be no River, no Plain, no Tree. This is because these things, which are in and of this world, are here for instruction of all who would willingly learn. When we learn to overcome doubt and desire – or faithlessness and selfishness – and learn to live through the purity of spirit, all these things of the World will pass away. All that will remain will be the first three elements: Hope and Blessing (“Blessed Hope”), Love, and God. These three alone are Eternal, and it the reunion of our soul with that Soul that this symbol anticipates.

The two circles in the upper corners of the square represent worldly (on the left) and Spiritual (on the right) movement. The square represents the limitation of our awareness, or our consciousness, of Worldly and Spiritual realms. From awareness, limited though it may be, comes sight; from sight, perception; from perception, conception; and conception is the antecedent of learning. If one concentrates only on awareness, on consciousness – expanded or otherwise – then there is little likelihood of ever understanding anything at all because our learning is incomplete. On the other hand, if one makes the progression from awareness to wisdom, there begins an ecstatic new awareness of Eternity. In that awareness we begin to understand the symmetry that pervades all Creation. Many, many attempts to understand that symmetry have produced an incomprehensible proliferation of “explanations” of how it works. My little forays into that realm are pretty small potatoes compared with some of the other scholarly treatises. Witness:

If we look at the arrangement of the Elements and overlay a triangle whose sides are trisected, you would get something like this:



In this diagram, there are nine smaller triangles each of which is  $\frac{1}{3}$  the size of the original triangle. These correspond roughly to the locations of the nine Elements. Of course that also means that there are three medium-sized triangles composed of six smaller triangles and one complete hexagon composed of six smaller triangles. This is mentioned because it helped establish some order of symmetry in the original drawing and illustrated that the uppermost triangle was situated above a trapezoid. In the representation on the cover illustration, the trapezoid and upper triangle combined are conceptually considered geometrically to be a regular tetrahedron with the same image and relationships on all four faces.

Surely many of you have recognized the similarity between this design and the image on the back of our dollar bill which bears the inscription “E Pluribus Unum,” (Out of many [comes] one). Together with “Annuit Cœptis” (approves what has been done) and “Novus Ordo Seclorum” (New Order of the Ages). This motto, and its contemporaneous mottos, became associated with the formation of the United States and allegedly were based in the tenets of Freemasonry. I cannot deny that the symbol on the cover illustration was influenced by these ideas, because I know the symbol on the dollar bill, the mottos, and other aspects of my adventures in religion and philosophy between 1951 and 1964 truly shaped the man who wrote the poems in *Poems to my Peace*; they shaped, but did not define, my perceptions.

Does some of this sound a little like elements of Buddhism? There are the Five Hindrances (nivaranas): This refers to the obstacles that one faces when it comes to mental and emotional factors. In order for one to reach a level of knowledge, as well as enlightenment, these barriers must be removed. The five hindrances are called anger, sloth, worry, doubt, and desire. Some of you will also note aspects of Theosophy in some of this explanation. I cannot deny the influence of that heresy either. There were aspects of my family life that included attempts to understand that brand of mystic Gnosticism, and many, many other cults and religions. (By the time I graduated from High School, I had read the entire 200-section – Religion in the Dewey Decimal System – in our local library branch.) I ultimately rejected Theosophy (and later its cousin Scientology), as well as the many Eastern systems of religious belief that were so prevalent and popular in the mid-sixties, and instead experienced a profound and lasting conversion to Christianity which renews itself daily and which, with each renewal,

grows more resolute.

So today when I read *Poems to my Peace*, I am a different person, the poetry is different in meaning and impact, and the way I understand and describe it now is different from the way I understood and described it forty years ago. Not at all surprising since we who are contemporaries have all changed a great deal in the past forty years. Those of you who are younger or older know that you have changed as well, and that we will all continue to change. Change is growth and life, and the opposite of change is, well, DEATH. "I may be slower, but I ain't dead yet." And neither is *Poems to my Peace*. Over the years, these little excursions into my soul have been something I have read and enjoyed, changed and tinkered with, shared and bestowed many times over.

The rest of the works in this volume are other glimpses into the world this poet sees. Other volumes are collections of other excursions, and collectively don't amount to much more than a few dozen pages of things that hopefully begin in delight and hold to potential to end in wisdom, your wisdom; for, although I confess to having written these for me, they are useless if not shared with you; these minor works are useless without your finishing touches. I can't even muster the pretense to write "this writer" or "this author" or (not without cringing) "this poet." I am not a poet until the work is used by someone other than me. For your contribution to that end, I am most deeply grateful!

— Charles O. Todd, III



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## ***Poems to my Peace*** ***I - IX***

I.

She is walking though my mind,  
a dulcet chord of happiness  
sounded on the heart of nature.  
All the seas, and sounds of leaves,  
float out from her, rising  
in warm and thick glissandos.

She moves the tides with smiles  
and turns the mountains hoary heads;  
a reddish-golden flux of life  
stunning our soul  
with lapping heartbeats.

She tastes of sandalwood and laurel.  
Her voice exudes colors of dawn  
and the softnesses of moonlit streams  
are her eyes.

Now she leans against my arm  
and all my senses leap to greet her.  
She is my Peace, and always will *be*.

## II.

When I want her  
sometimes she  
eludes me  
and I stumble;  
but,  
if I wait enough to ask  
she comes to me  
in some disguise  
to help me once again discover  
her own divine delights.

If I feel like singing,  
she becomes a song.  
If I feel alone, she is aloneness  
and we are again the same.

The only token of my love she accepts  
is the freedom she's always had.  
No other gift could cost me more,  
or bring us so much joy.

### III.

I joy to look at her  
but my eyes are too habit-bound  
to see her as she is.  
I see her with my fingertips,  
and touch her with my eyes.

My heart leaps up  
inside my chest  
eager for the warmth  
of her sweet, moist breath.

Then she comes to me, and  
even before I speak her name,  
she knows my needs  
and makes me whole.

In silence we share  
the simple secrets of our soul.  
I turn to say I love her  
and as she blushes  
her eyes deepen into shadows  
that dwarf my dreams.

IV.

Her embrace is so complete  
that I am lost in wonder.  
As she moves against my senses,  
I am numbed by her magnificence.

In her dark eyes  
there is the twinkling  
like the only golden star  
in a summer dream night;  
that one star that  
winks at you  
and seems to know your name.

I know the same of her.  
It is a secret name  
written on the hearthstone  
in the only house  
where I've never been alone.

Thus knowing, I have no need to know.  
I am free to share with her,  
naked and unashamed.

V.

Here:

At the center of somewhere  
we stand  
enraptured, gazing,  
fluidly immersed  
in all of each of us,  
facing towards and away  
from any direction.

Now:

Loving each other  
for two limitless times  
we hum along endless threads  
encording ourselves forever  
into the umbilical  
of the Golden Eternity.

VI.

Sometime she and I  
and our favorite poet  
go away alone together  
to feel the sea spray  
and try to copy the screech  
of sea gulls who greet us in passing.  
We collect shells and driftwood  
and read our poems.  
I read the poet's.  
she reads to me.  
and the day swells and ebbs with the sea.

Other times she and I  
dance wildly in the wind.  
She always musses my hair  
and cools my skin;  
then she laughs at us both  
and warms me with her embrace.  
Afterwards we lie quietly  
behind the cattails  
and listen to the ducks  
gossiping about duck things.

In the evenings, we like to watch the embers  
and in them see all the great cities.  
With brandy, pipe, and song,  
we celebrate the crescent moon  
and laugh away its opal clouds.

She and I go everywhere  
and anywhere we want to go  
just as easily as saying it.

But sometimes we just stay at home  
and talk about where we've been.



## VII.

One morning, after an autumn rain,  
she skittered across the puddles  
and launched little boats  
the same way we all did  
when we were children.  
That day she gave me  
a bouquet of wheat  
tied in green velvet.  
I still have it in my closet.

At Stillwater Pond, with a cattail scepter,  
she granted me an audience, just for fun,  
and bestowed on me the favors of her kingdom.  
Sealing our covenant with water,  
she stepped up from her throne  
and took my arm to walk with me.

As the rain clouds stumbled away,  
I bade them good-bye  
with an elaborate bow.  
She chided me for my mock courtesy  
and turned my attention  
to the rainbow they'd left behind.

Stopping only to bid good-morning  
to sparrows splashing by the roadside,  
we went to the city together.  
There we talked about  
how the farmers would like the rain  
and whether or not to change our plans  
because the fields were wet.

VIII.

she lightened my day

with a smile and

**f<sup>o</sup>l<sup>o</sup>a<sup>o</sup>s<sup>o</sup>h<sup>o</sup>e<sup>o</sup>d**

her sky-blue eyes

then handed me

three

golden

strands

of her hair

as if she knew

i wanted them ( and

you ask me

if and why

i choose to believe

in miracles? )

I looked out my window  
and asked no one:  
“Where is beauty?”

The rain answered  
and the rainbow  
filled  
the pigeon-wing sky  
like a polite closing  
to a beautiful letter.

I looked between my self  
and asked my soul:  
“Where is God?”

The cedar answered  
when patiently he  
pointed  
everywhere at once --  
above, below, and in between.  
God bless the Everywhere Tree.

I looked inside my home  
and asked anyone:  
“Where is Peace?”

A voice answered  
and she came to me,  
quietly,  
singing a song,  
lulling the stars to sleep  
in lukewarm clarity.

To Alastair Reid

There is a mirror in my house  
and when I look in it,  
I see what the mirror sees.  
I see cats and books  
with occasional ghosts  
and strange-looking birds  
flapping through the forest.

But my mirror listens, too.  
What sounds can a mirror hear?  
Only the sounds that pass  
like a scurry of lizards,  
or the melody of a fountain  
reflecting a crystal angel.  
These are the moments of sound,  
reflections of silence.

Other times my mirror  
ticks and twitters  
as if it knew  
something special could happen  
any minute now;  
something odd and stirring  
that will tumble like children  
across the lawn of memory.

And in these inklings  
there is an excitement  
that promises Gypsy dancers  
in mysterious places  
whirling wonders out of  
something quieter than good sleep.  
There is a hint of love  
and goodness as the mirror  
lightens the light, and with it,  
changes the weather.

The mirror also shows  
what I cannot see  
except I ask to look.  
Standing before it so,  
it opens to me stories of

old men, and beautiful women,  
talking about the artist  
who has a glass eye  
he keeps locked up  
in case he ever needs it.

These omens of unseen things  
are seen in the mirror  
by one who has gazed into  
the eyes that my mirror has.

The reflections there  
show things as they are.  
The difference is in  
how we see them.

*WILDFIRE!*

Smoke hung around us  
like black crepe on All Soul's Day.  
In the smoldering stumps  
and blackened limbs,  
in our throats and lungs,  
in the farthest corners of our aching hearts,  
it wailed a warning.

Eight-hundred acres of fir and aspen  
fluttered away in the white ashes.  
Blood-shot eyes found only desolation  
where the day before there had been beauty.  
A tiring numbness hid our fatigue  
as an overwhelming silence  
stifled all our emotions.

Then, hesitantly at first,  
but gradually with joyful conviction,  
a birdsong filled the air:  
A hymn of thanks so sweet  
that only God could have written it.

## Looking back

We were too greedy, although  
we did not know it then.  
In adolescent ignorance  
we tried to coax  
romance out of friendship.  
We hoped to ease our growing pains  
with self-proclaimed adulthood  
and dreamed we would be different.

But we were not,  
and therein lies the joy  
of everything we shared.  
We dubbed ourselves unique,  
and strained to make  
wine from snowflakes.

Of course, we failed at that,  
but nonetheless, the times we had  
made some difference after all.  
I remember you with fondness  
and hope you think of me,  
even after so long a time.

And if I call your name,  
or speak your poetry,  
then friendship flows  
like cool sweet wine  
from melting snows.

## The Temple

Thigh-high fires, crawling, swelling,  
darkly singeing naked nights to  
fluttering, fleeing, loving moments.  
Floating, Floating, softly still.

Lonely feigners only mimic  
passions as dishonest sleepers  
weave their loves on clumsy looms.  
Floating, Floating, softly still.

Down dawns of paltry passion  
glamorize their banal writhing  
merchandising bed-bound living.  
Float, Float, and softer, still.

### **JLS**

He soars without wind  
who desires nothing more  
than avian grace.

## Diogenes

A ruby-throated humming bird  
darts and hovers  
in dusky blooms.  
Frantically placid  
in his metabolic drive,  
he seeks the true flower.



## Friday-the-Thirteenth Blues

I feel a poem coming.

Today we have onion soup

(A Spring is the thing

to make your tunic tangle,

from ring-a-ting-day-oh on the tuba)

with bacon pieces

I feel a groovy feeling.

Today we have vegetable soup

(Bring it around the barn again

and rock-a-bye my soul to a gypsy melody

while I cream my coffee and hang this cat up to dry)

with sesame wafers.

I feel a laugh welling up

Today we have minestrone soup

(the Oracles of Delsey ribbon their hair

with strips of old news-print

from Friday-the-Thirteenth.

I'm dreaming in bed today.)

with salad and blue-cheese dresses.

A Few Lines Written  
(for *Sister Carrie*)

He flaunts like someone,  
God knows who,  
in the pram of life.

He loves like no one,  
she knows why,  
in their poor man's flat.

She acts like thunder,  
caught in a bottle,  
on the broadening stage.

She spends her fury,  
buying grace,  
in the better stores.

They die like eagles,  
broken by their own soaring,  
in the nest of the thrush.

TOBY

His eyes find mine and  
arrogantly remind me to  
keep my place;  
a twitch of his tail,  
a sullen nod and  
he sulks away.

I am left pondering.

## Day Watch

The sky is choked  
with wind-blown smoke  
lingering from  
a thousand burned-out  
signal fires.

Their message  
must have been  
OMENous, for see,  
those wrens  
are trying to  
erase it.

## Pockets

For the third time that morning  
I absent-mindedly fumbled through  
the empty pockets of yesterday's trousers.  
I checked the button-down hip pocket  
one extra time  
making sure I had my wallet  
safely in today's pocket.

So many times I've fumbled through  
empty pockets of my past  
as if I hoped to find  
some aspect of identity  
I might have left behind.

judgement

the snowflake alone  
can judge its own warmth  
and then only as  
it's melting.

Tickle me blue.

Her name was Dolores.  
She was four.  
She had a cute pug nose  
and long angel-like hair.  
Her eyes were large --  
larger than they really should have been.  
From one eye came a single  
slow, dirty tear.

Her little pink dress  
made a background  
for her own emptiness.  
She sat like a wilted flower  
all alone in an  
old, empty garden.  
She had her arms crossed  
and her hands pressed against her ribs  
trying to remember laughing --  
trying to tickle herself.  
Her name was Dolores.

## Cat's Play

Two sisters play  
caught up in each other's delight  
mothers and children  
of themselves, moving through  
the she-time with a purse,  
made from a wolf's head,  
to hold their spoons and trinkets.

They turn beside each other  
enlightening their past  
with their own images  
as they run to embrace their mother.  
All these, sisters of woman,  
will soon be women of seasons.  
It is a learning game.

## XXVII

When, like the Bard of Avon, I do muse  
And think upon our pleasant days gone by  
With all the roads of glory we did choose  
By reaching out to dream beyond the sky,  
my heart and soul begin to hum in peace.  
My friend, those days will always be alive.

Their pleasant memories will never cease  
For nowhere in all life does there survive  
A friendship like the one which we enjoy:  
A cosmic all adjoined by soul and mind;  
A bond so strong that no one can destroy  
The happy days that made our lives combined.

No one else can ever really know  
Beside which bridge the captive roses grow.

## Alfalfa time

There may still be time  
to run the goats  
away from the neighbor's alfalfa,  
even if I sing one more song.  
There may still be time to  
slaughter another duck and  
dry some apples in the attic.  
There's always time to start,  
never time to spare.

The puppy left her calling curd  
in the corner of the carpet.  
Even the sunshine is cold today.  
There may still be time  
to run to the outhouse  
at a deliberate, steady walk, just in case  
someone watching  
thinks I have to hurry but don't  
want to look like it.

The days are remarkable by  
just how unremarkable they are.  
They are *bona fide* Joseph Heller Days  
with twenty-two catches up the yang.

If I knew a runic rhyme,  
I would keep my time in it.  
Instead, I spend, lose, waste,  
and enjoy,  
every damned second I've got.  
But they too go away  
and leave me with  
strangers, times to come.

There may still be time to start  
perhaps another day today.  
Or there may not. The goats  
are already in the alfalfa, so  
there is no longer time  
to prevent them from going there.  
Regretfully un-American as it is, I  
have no overwhelming urges  
to do anything at all.

So there may still be time,  
because it takes too much time to do  
nothing. Time is on my side --  
past beginnings, and 'way beyond ends,  
especially my own.

I thought time would be up  
so much sooner than this.  
There may still be time,

but I don't need it.  
The goats are already coming back  
full of alpha-alpha.

there!

Did I say that?  
Oh, gosh! I'm sorry!  
Really, I am.  
Absolutely.  
(busted)

Nizhóni.  
Dinétah.  
Naat'áanii.  
(healed)

## Welcome home

I thought I felt you touch me.  
It may have been my mistake,  
or my desire, one.

No. I am sure now.  
You did touch me,  
but only with a glance.

It was outside  
the campfire circle  
a long time ago.

I burned myself that night  
and you didn't laugh.  
You were the only one.

For Christ's sake, why?

I didn't even know you then.  
Only your name and  
where you lived.

And now you want to live here  
just because you touched me?  
All right then. Welcome home.

We planned all this  
way back when, but still,  
that was a long time ago.



Imagine

Say the soft  
bird's name  
and feel her  
come to life.

Touch a shadow  
and smell  
her favorite  
flower.

Stop and watch  
a butterfly  
sipping sunshine  
and hear her voice.

Smile a secret.  
Tell a poem hello.

1812 – Recollection

Out of darkness she  
brushed against my temple  
and like the coolness  
along the banks of rivers,  
becalmed me with a chill.

Our love marched  
proudly down the Asian Way  
and we both were whole.

Canons, bells, gongs, and chimes  
sang out the welcome  
just as we arrived.

In the light then, she  
gently took my arm  
and we walked like that  
along the banks of rivers  
becoming what we willed.

28.

**T**wo fair roses in the garden bloomed  
Enjoying gentle rain and warming sun.  
From different roots and canes had they been groomed  
But on the bridge, entwined 'til they were one.

The time and times they shared made life so sweet;  
A fragrance of affection filled the air  
And brought delight to all who chanced to meet  
Upon the bridge by this enchanted pair.

They gave no thought to being thrust apart  
But when the mistress choose a single bloom,  
They tried in vain to mend each other's heart  
And pressed against the window in her room.

Two sad roses watch each other pass  
And try to build a bridge across the glass.

## His First Seven Years

All he left was sorrow.  
He could not face the new music  
and was already tired of the  
same old song and dance.

The way he smiled and nodded --  
even then I thought,  
"He must feel so sad!"  
But, oh my God, how he could laugh!  
About anything, and still  
never be irreverent.

Small things held special fascinations  
lost to others, but  
treasured, even cherished,  
for an instant,  
an instant that preserved all things.

The way he smiled and nodded --  
even then, I thought,  
"He must feel so glad!"  
But good Lord he could cry!  
For hunger, or pain,  
or in chorus with his brothers;  
never the initiator, nor the lagger,  
but always lending his voice for free.

And someone was always there  
who'd know *exactly*  
the meaning of every  
smile, every  
nod, every  
tearless sob.

All he left was sorrow  
planted deep in our hearts.  
But when its season comes  
it will blossom, nod, and smile.

He would have been  
eight years old, tomorrow.

### Night Visitor

He touched her gently  
on her soft, round cheek.  
As she turned her back to him,  
he smiled at his confidence  
and left the bedroom  
just as he'd found it.

### City Park

My friend sat in the Elephant Tree and  
I sat in the Octopus Tree.  
He looked like a leprechaun,  
only a Japanese, tree-dwelling leprechaun.  
We watched children play in  
the dry waterfall as ducks dodged  
toward the lake.

Two nuns in blue talked  
on green park benches, and  
when the wind fluffed  
up their skirts,  
they self-consciously laughed and  
smoothed them out.  
I'll bet they'd whole lot rather  
kick the habit.

## The Critic

I brought you the finest samples of my labor  
like a basket of rich grapes  
swollen with delight and sunshine.  
These fruits of many hard-spent hours  
were for your expert assay.  
With only a cursory glance  
you turned them down and said,  
“They are too purple.”

I was astonished and ashamed. I stammered  
only a meager protest, hoping for some sign  
of what would make them acceptable.  
You said to squeeze them; crush them  
and take out all the sugary-purple.  
Only then would they be worthy.

And so you trod them down.  
You pressed out rain and sunshine,  
split and tore the very love  
that made them my great prize.  
Smiling at my tears, you took my hand  
and filled it with shapeless grief saying,  
“This is what you should bring me.  
Not sugary-purple, but seeds of truth  
and husks of reality.”

When you left, I surveyed the slaughter  
and ached for all the care  
you had brought to ruin.  
I cleared the mess away  
but gathered up the wine  
in this new wineskin.

Now I am older, but no wiser in your eyes.  
The language is my vineyard.  
The vines and branches are my pathways.  
I have grapes, and raisins, and sugary-purple  
rain-and-sunshine-love-mellowed wine  
is mine for the making.  
Seeds and husks will not quench my thirst.

## Our Love

When time has past and you and I are one,  
Let those who claim a lasting vassalage  
To love and honor only just begun,  
Be found at last, choking on their pledge

While you and I a quiet leisure share  
And walk in springtime orchards gowned in white.  
We'll build a love that's far beyond compare,  
A love so real it makes their bondage trite.

But let us also of ourselves be wary  
To walk not only in the sun-flecked parks,  
Where pleasure-seeking lovers often tarry,  
But also in the coombe of teaching darks.

By making our love's scope more genuine,  
We'll go far past all those who just begin.

## The Priestess and the Oracle \*

The westering clouds were dusty  
after a hard day's ride  
across the lowlands.  
The last light of day  
glinted among them  
like some cast-off  
disc of bronze left over  
from an ancient battle.

It was the Day of Choosing.  
She would choose her eternal Oracle,  
as her predecessors had done.  
The crowding throng pressed and swayed.  
As the sky darkened, she came out  
and stood on the small dais.  
She was a queen among queens,  
and beautiful. From her pedestal there  
she surveyed the lot of us.  
The soft lines of her tunic  
caressed her breasts and thighs.  
Her hair flickered around her face,  
shimmering black against the stars.

The assembly erupted in shouts  
and gestures, each vying for the  
divine honor to be her consort.  
My heart was enchanted by her loveliness.  
I could neither move nor speak  
but only stare. I knew I loved her.

Her eyes scanned the crowd, and still  
the tumult increased in all our ears.  
Her eyes found mine . . . and stayed.  
I began to move. The tangled press opened.  
I came closer. The noise stopped.  
I could only hear the beating of my heart.  
No! There were two hearts, beating apart,  
at first, then closed and opened together.  
I was for her.

She reached out to me  
with her left hand,  
palm downward. I could

see her smile. Her dark eyes  
and her smile, her eyes, our hearts,  
her smile. I reached up  
with my right hand and  
climbed the last step.

For one incredible moment I could not  
live or die. Her tunic fluttered  
across my knees. She smiled. It was  
as if a hand of searing flame was  
thrust into my back between the  
shoulder blades. It grabbed my spine  
and jerked me upright to stare  
into the limitless depths  
of those eyes. Our free arms  
moved inexorably to complete this first embrace.

I felt my left arm slide into place  
around her tender waist.  
At the same time, her right arm  
moved caressingly across my back.  
A wisp of her hair  
fell across my shoulder,  
and the fragrance of her body  
filled me with burning emptiness.  
She had found me.  
She had claimed me.

I gripped her hand and felt  
the power of her gentility.  
I pulled her close to me  
and turned to face the assembly.

In an instant  
the celebration began.  
I released her hand. Then,  
side by side, in one springing stride,  
we streamed across the starry cosmos  
in an open embrace  
stronger than life itself.

Since then, we have not parted.  
Still, each day, as darkness overtakes us,  
I see her standing there,

regal, fragile, and yet, much stronger



than I can ever be. I serve her,  
not because she is stronger. She will not  
use her strength against me.  
I serve her because she  
seeks to serve me, and  
I am unworthy. Each evening  
she chooses me, and I choose her.  
Both of us know it will always  
be that way, but we do it  
again and again forever because  
each day is a new discovery,  
a new adventure, a new  
Day of Choosing.

Today she told me the way  
she remembered that first day:

“It was the Day of Choosing.  
He would be choosing his Eternal Priestess  
as his predecessors had done.  
As the crowding throng pressed and swayed,  
he came out on the small dais  
to stand against the darkening sky ...”

\*This is the story of when Crucita and I became a couple.

I beg to differ with you

*i*

I *am* different.  
Not better or worse,  
not sickness or health,  
not richer or poorer,  
not dying or parting,  
not crying or smarting,  
merely different, like you.

*ii*

So, why not be different together?  
In all kinds of weather  
whether or not  
it matters naught.  
The things we are  
are what we've got.  
Clothes make the man.  
Marines make men.  
But surely women do  
a better job than both,  
so why bother a brother?  
Just pack up your troubles  
in your old kit bag  
and ship them off to Washington.  
Renamed, they'll return  
to haunt you only  
if you forget you've changed.

*iii*

Isn't it strange how  
the latest craze is  
a beer stein with a glass ass?  
You can look right through it,  
bottoms up, completely forgetting  
the Picasso-fish face  
that stares back at you  
from deep in your coffee cup.  
Nothing solid has virtue.  
Nothing squalid has blame.  
Only the pimped and the pampered  
(institutional names,  
constitutional frames,  
evolutional games)  
can orchestrate the screams

or consecrate the dreams  
of the mindless freezing fire  
in the minds of the many  
who prostitute desire.

*iv*

(Like a fantastic mobile  
they jiggled and swooped;  
caught in a strong wind,  
they got hopelessly tangled, ruined,  
because, in order to be what  
they were, strings were attached.  
They moved quite well in  
their own spheres  
having tied themselves to  
bits of civil liberties to  
protect them from themselves.  
In the name of freedom  
they imprisoned every soul.  
In the name of justice  
they whored their own law.  
In the name of science  
they glutted their own ignorance.  
In the name of God  
they sanctify it all,  
thus proving they were always  
right.) Therefore,

*v*

we must be different,  
must not be silent,  
must be rebels,  
at least that's what  
they'll call us.  
If I only knew which of us is moving.  
I have no wisdom for that.  
You and/or I?  
We and/or they?  
Has it been so long  
that the first rebellion  
must deem itself the last?

*vi*

It will take courage,  
yours for me and mine for you.

There will be pain,  
yours for me and mine for you.  
There will be love,  
yours for me and mine for you;  
a joyful embrace so strong  
the world and all its doubt  
shall never come between us.  
Thus fused together, like a  
peace symbol, one self  
to share with, stronger for that,  
we shall be different and  
share our self with another,  
and yet another, multiplying or  
oneness by giving it up.

*vii*

Will you come away  
and lose your life with me?  
Life is our greatest treasure.  
We have it only so we can give it up.  
And how we do that  
is really all that matters.  
Let's be different  
and do it for each other.

I beg to differ  
*with* you.

## Meadowlark

Sweet waking sound, the golden fleet  
far-sounding across the field,  
stirs me so to yearn for living,  
praising the Primal Source  
of such melodious meditations.

That voice, so sweet, sounds  
like the dew sun-twinkling.  
The neighborly sparrow-yammering  
is pleasant peasantry all right,  
and they are fit for parables,  
offerings, and the delight of catnaps.

If their ending one-fall impinges  
upon the conductor's orchestration,  
then You shall surpass and  
sing the High Mass without knowing  
such fatality, or mortal knavery.

Heralding of spring and autumn  
done from the lone rampike at mid-morn  
is overly sufficient for dove, robin,  
finch, or blackbird with epaulettes.  
Yours is the day-song long sung  
in winter's remembering of milder days.

Sing then, Brother, and I will pray,  
or pray, and I shall weep!  
Such prosody is never mine,  
such confidence lost by evil-knowing.

And you, O Christ, have known all this  
since before simplicity left us.  
Like a lark you heralded  
and like a sparrow, passed.

But never sparrow nor even lark  
could do as You, My Lord, have done:  
Sparrow and lark, bird and note,  
in You are raised, forever One.

Words from the Son of the Preacher

Go now deeply, darkly, slowly  
into the dust-impregnated sky  
and hold your light  
to perforate darkness.  
Then plummet and crash  
deeply scarring the virgin breasts  
of all our raspy ancient seashores.  
Pierce them to the depth of Hades  
and cross that river, gain that shore  
where life and all its petty drooling  
wrings its tongue to quench the burning  
souls of men who died for knowledge,  
breaching doors of God's own wisdom.  
From there, scrape a taste of sulfur  
and grind it bitter in your belly.  
Mix it well with soot from Heaven  
gathered on your learning heart  
and vomit them upon the morrow.  
Earthly rantings then will bore you  
'til at last you see your thought  
and fly with fury 'round the planet  
giving more than you can hold  
to sullen hands of death incarnate  
blindly waving God away.

Thoreau

I hear a drum, a drummer, a drumming,  
a beat to a different tune.  
A different drummer,  
a different life.  
A drum that drums  
my drummed-up strife.

Marcella

Saturnine poisons  
taint her tender life.  
Conscience has no antidote  
and courage has no effect.  
She runs to nowhere,  
arriving too soon.

Trust

A yellow old dog  
and a cold, chocolate cat  
slept on the hearth.  
The cat watched  
and the dog listened.  
It was winter  
and the fire was out.

## The Revolutionary

“If wishes were fishes  
we’d all have a fry.  
You can have what you want  
when donkeys can fly.”

But since that’s not so  
we’ll have to get by  
on what we can get  
with our hooks or nets.  
I don’t say we’re crooks.  
We just cover our bets.  
And try as we might  
or work as we may  
in the cover of night  
or the glory of day  
our calling is certain  
or destiny sealed,  
our eyeballs are hurtin’  
from having been peeled  
to guard against  
the hopeless masses  
that surely plan  
to kick our asses.  
Classless bastards!  
Don’t they know  
that there is no place  
for nothing to go?

Down with the people!  
They are nothing.  
Down with the republic.  
It is less.  
Down with whatever  
you think might be wrong!  
This is the last chance  
so, you’d better try!  
If I had you  
you’d dance  
on my bed  
in the sky. Please come home and  
be nice to me  
I am all alone  
and too damned free.



## DÉJÀ-VU

A single slivered star bursts out  
against the murrey sky;  
one bright flash  
confirmed by afterglow  
(an instant of realization  
confirmed by instinct).

It is, as when a face juts out  
from stone or sea or crowd,  
a shock to recognize  
the possibility of forgotten  
antecedents, remembered  
connections, anticipated reunions  
with lost beginnings.

Sanity intervenes.  
The star is but a twinkle.  
The face at once is strange.  
The moment passes; and yet,  
we are changed for knowing,  
and like sly beggars, pass by  
with plans to return in secret.

