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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

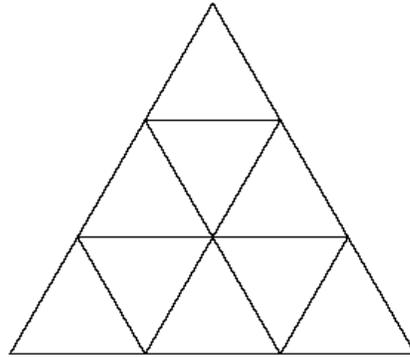
Mountains of Peace. The rain produced by these storms collects in the Valley of Quietude, unseen by anyone but The Eye of The LORD.

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^ol^oa^os^oh^oe^od

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.

Two 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.

