



Burn and other poems of Sensing Transcendence

To prepare them for becoming adults, I told my teenagers that in life we have two tasks: survival and meaning. Survival because if we don't survive it's over. Meaning because survival without meaning is meaningless. Poetry is about meaning. Sensing transcendence is about the ultimate meanings as they sometimes reveal themselves in day to day happenings. A hot meal, a warm hug, a cold reception. Subject to our senses, these events point beyond themselves to meanings that resonate with us: beauty, truth, goodness in a society caught up in the ugly, the lie, the unjust. Our quest for meaning requires we wrestle with these dualities of beauty/ugly, truth/lie and just/unjust that veil the unity of the universe. This is the context in which poetry and readers come together to grasp the grit of living and to squeeze out the juice of transcendence. The poems in Burn aim to coax the reader to do just that.

Contents

Burn.....	4
The Zen of Zero	5
Our Conundrum	6
The Hiker Remembers	7
Cry of the Savior's Martyrs	8
Lives and Stories	9
When We Sit Down to Eat	10
Agni, Hindu God of Fire	11
Eons.....	12
Nativity Scene	13
Shamans Within	15
She Dances.....	16
Day of the Dead	17
Hymeneal for Francis of Assisi.....	18
Where Are You?	19
Grandpa's Grace	20
Ocean	21
On Io	22
Reflecting on Agony in a Moment of Peace	23
Children in the Storm.....	24
A Man for Others	25
Christmas Reflection.....	26
Every Once in a While	27
Statements	28
The Other Side	29
What is Meditation?.....	30
A Toast	31
No Eagle Am I.....	32
Now and Then.....	33
Aha!.....	34
Ashes to Ashes, Earth to Earth.....	35
Garbage Man.....	36
Give Me a Teacher	37
The Man Misunderstood	38
Greek Dancing	39
Is It True?	40
Nuke's Arrival	41
Is Anyone There?	42
Thy Kingdom Come.....	43
The Dreamer Celebrates.....	44
Promise.....	45
River Trees	46
My Shadow	47
The Stuff of Poetry.....	48
Is Writing a Poem Like Praying?	49

Centering.....	50
The Call of the Muse.....	51
La Raza en La Plaza.....	52
Miracle Tree	53
Poets and Muse	54
Seeds	55
Silences	56
So Much.....	57
Between the Scribbles.....	58
Way Stations.....	59
What Can Poets Do?	60
Who Are We?	61
Death	62
The Body Temple.....	63
This.....	64
Trees and Light	65
Vocations.....	66
One Last Time.....	67
What We Are	68
River Walk Sun	69
Jazz Band	70
God's Eyes.....	71
Weavings	72
Epiphany	73
Potluck with Jesus.....	74
Yes.....	75

Burn

"I want burning, burning...lovers who burn...."

Rumi, from *Moses and the Shepherd*

When Moses wondered at the burning bush
might he have asked:

What is it that burns without consuming?

It is love, of course:

A secret fire hiding in every soul,
waiting, building for the moment
it may burst and spread without consuming,
but declaring to all our pharaohs:

Let my people go.

The Zen of Zero

a number that is no-number

neither plus nor minus

an absence ever present

a silence enabling sound

a nothing that works

a no-matter that matters

the limitless encoded in limit

the no that means yes

the empty space of a doorway

Our Conundrum

This hunger here,
for this All that is You,
this You that is All:
 One Being
 beyond being.

This This-ness,
such Such-ness,
defying every gambit,
giving us to wonder
what shape Formlessness takes.

If no utterance Is utter,
if no thing can tell the All that is This,
then make of me that nothing.

Let it be as if this page were blank:
 self and other no longer.

Yet what?

The Hiker Remembers

As the sun's vernal kisses
melt the mountain heights,
and spring's rivers run
to make laughter over rocks,
the sloshing of canteen water
 recalls for him:
 the long thirsts between rivers
 of the father-hunters, the mother-gatherers
 over river canyon trails,
 past stone pillar phalluses
 frozen when the canyon god was young,

With thermal socks and boots comforting his feet,
 he remembers:
 the cushy sand on toughened soles,
 the pausing in streams to watch again
 the sun god's play with water sprites.

With insect repellent anointing his skin,
 he remembers:
 the bites on naked backs and legs
 by deer flies,
 who unlike The People,
 learned to live on blood
 without the killing.

With curls of seasoned sausage in backpack,
 he remembers:
 the crimson dots in snow,
 dropped by the wounded deer,
 the chanting of thanks to the Great Deer Mother,
 who offers her own,
 that children of The People may eat.

Cry of the Savior's Martyrs

(for Jennifer Casolo)

Who will be our voice
and speak to our killers' consciences,
remind them that someone,
someone/all is watching?

Who will be our hands
to touch the hands of our torturers,
naming their work the cruelty it is,
deeming it more hurt than our own?

Who will ask our interrogators
the questions that turn their hearts,
hearing their confessions,
granting them forgiveness?

Who will cleanse with pain-hardened truths
the eyes and ears of blind and deaf,
the nameless who pay our assassins' wages,
buy the bullets that pierce our bodies?

Who will nourish initial doubts and whispered thoughts
into growing convictions and stubborn resistance,
broadcast the seeds of critical mass
till stilled hearts rise and cry as one?

Who will hail us from our graves
to hear our cries transfigured
into choruses of justice, symphonies of grace
when we come, bright and sure as morning suns?

Lives and Stories

with beginnings, middles and endings,
each with necessary failures,
surprise victories,

problems, one after another,
one danger averted
and on to more,

loves found and lost,
laughter amid tears,
masks tried and discarded,

wounds revealed,
hurts healed,
brilliant resurgences.

The last peak conquered,
a winding down,
scattered episodes fall into place

as notes in songs,
rhythms in poems,
touches in loving,

all choreographed into
a completion that dances.
Lives: the stuff of stories.

Stories: truths that free,
series of moments ending
in a silence that says it all.

When We Sit Down to Eat

Is this happy happening an occasion
to savor, relish, maybe even pray,
and wonder how life is dying to feed us?

And is this dying life's way
to birth itself anew in us?

Are these plants and animals,
in their brief being and going,
episodes, stunned and stunning,
in the Story of All,
teller to teller, listener to listener,
bidding us to get it, make it make sense?

Agni, Hindu God of Fire

Zeus raged in lightning tantrums.
Vulcan vomited lava and flame.
Satan smiled and conjured nightmares.
For Prometheus had stolen their fires
and given it gratis

to women for cooking,
to children for warmth,
and men for melting the metals of earth,
for Cain's and Abel's offerings,
for Moses to find in the desert,
for Elijah's swooping chariot,
for the Spirit's eruption at Pentecost,
for Hiroshima's victims and victors.

"They are becoming like gods," cried the gods,
"and nothing, not even us, can be as we were."

In drunken joy, the people grieved,
"We are gods becoming. Who can save us now?"

Fire,
in its smoldering thoughts,
ignited a hymn to itself
and crackled.

Eons

On high cliffs
over the Rio Grande,
along a thin trail
hides a cave-turned-grotto.

Rock walls,
in red ocher paint,
manifest figures
of antelope, bison, deer,

bows and spears,
of shaman,
arms stretched out
radiating earth's dark-light powers.

Nourished by seeping rain,
green vines, bearing blossoms,
draw flights of bees
to suck nectar, proliferate pollen.

The work of ancients and earth,
it is enough to bring
a born Catholic to kneel,
to meditate, in the bee-hum silence,

on doors to mysteries,
links to eons past,
connections that bleed
into memory for eons ahead.

Nativity Scene

It haunts us still,
that long ago
oft told story.

A woman, a man,
far from home,
their villages, their families.

Just arrived in a town
full of strangers.
A birth at the edge of happening.

The woman's womb-waters already flushed,
her rhythmic pangs quicken,
no time to find a midwife.

Between her deep gasps,
the woman whispers:
Help us.

Through the man
thunderous thoughts
race as lightning:

This is no work for men.
Woman's blood forbidden.
A forever shame to touch.

Holy Mother Eve,
who might midwife her, but Adam?
Where was the taboo then?

The woman tells him what to do.
Tells him what she learned
helping other mothers.

The man kneels.
He waits between her thighs,
at last receives the baby.

He washes its warm body,
the woman, himself.
Water from the animals' trough.
The woman

takes from him the baby,
puts it to her breast.

Soon they sleep.
The man steps from the shelter
into crisp night air.

He stands under stars to wonder.

Shamans Within

Riding dark dreams,
they plumb the sacred pole
down the axis of our minds,
hunting vast deeps
for tales yet to be told.

They wrestle our angels and demons
discover truths we hide,
sift the lies we harbor,
fathom the secrets we keep from ourselves,
name the names we dare not say.

We wait their homecomings
to rouse us with their deeds
that we sweat out our fears,
shed our masks,

midwife our courage,
buoy our hopes,
become a people again
with stories our own.

She Dances

At the PTA carnival,
near the deejay's amplifiers,
on elementary school blacktop,
she dances.

Eyes closed,
her hands
slide in sync
with legs and torso;

lips make silent words;
hair does counter point with hips.
All partners in a poem.

She draws a crowd.
We know we watch a private thing.
As if a prayer, a kiss.

The music ends,
she stops. We applaud.
She opens her eyes.
Surprised.

But the music begins again.
She is gone into sacred space.

What demons wait to corrupt this innocence?
What angels plot celebration?

Day of the Dead

Wake and rise, all of us,
all forgotten souls,
sweep our craven selves
from the corners of our crypts
into the sunlit cemetery,
toward the grotto aflame with flowers,
candles and food.

Behold the shaman/priest,
hear his bold bellows echo down Hades' halls
to shake the roots of our indifference,
cut open the cocoons we wove in life.

Hear the heartbeat of the drum,
the plaintive mantras from the mandolin's mouth.
Dance the litanies chanted to North and South, East and West
to rouse the bowels of memory in the Father-creator,
in the Holy Mother and all the saints,
that they may waken in us the Receptive Spirit,
the Beginning and the End of our being.

See the breads, sweet with life,
fresh from the fires of ovens.
Let us gather them in our skeletal frames
and remember the food we forgot to share.
Let us gorge ourselves on grace
and with it feed the worms that eat our isolation.

Look how the living proceed in a circle
to prophesy our completion.
Come, fuse our smoky souls
to the gray curls of incense
and with them ride the autumn winds to clouds
to wait the dawning of our destinies.

Hymeneal for Francis of Assisi

In his unsealed celibacy
Francis did not deny love
or try to force it,
but let it squeeze itself
into all forms and beyond.

The wet dream,
from which he woke
in red stained stigma,
promised the consummation
his hungry heart had courted.

A lover's juice
oozed from hands,
feet and side,
a once invisible ink,
legible at last.

Ultimately,
Sister Death and Francis,
engaged since birth,
completed kept love.

Like a Jewish groom's
crystal crushing step,
they smashed the glass
that separates.

At Death's patient urging,
Francis broke her bloody seal,
bled himself into the waiting womb
of the Universe.

Where Are You?

Where are you,
in the fury of a lynch mob,
in the gleeful sale of arms,
in the pollution of rivers,
in the torture of a child,
in the dread of death?

Are these the terrible price of our freedom to love?

Grandpa's Grace

With belly rumbles,
salivary floods,
these morsels
assault his senses,
play with his passion
to eat.

He lets them lie
beneath his breath,
his silent thanks
and *remember*
the mother of all
from whence they come,
remember:

the reaper's blade,
the miller's wheel,
the oven's fire
the wheat underwent
to become this bread.

the blood,
bones and teeth
the milk moved through
becoming butter and cheese.

the birth of flesh,
its growth and death,
bleeding and skinning,
chilling and cooking
to be his meat.

Before these pieces
pass taste buds,
teeth and gullet,
he holds them in thought,
so with this awareness
the Mystery gets to enjoy again.

Ocean

What is this chasm you uncover in me
that hungers for the formless fullness of you?

Who are these Ishmaels in me
of Genesis - thrown to the wilderness,
of Melville - drawn to the sea,
never content with your works:
not silhouettes of pelicans patrolling at dawn,
nor whitecaps aglow with setting sun,

but questing for some primordial matrix,
thirsty to slake my amnesia with amniotic brine,
yet tickled to feel beneath my feet
the slipping sand you wash away?

Cast into tides, lost and connected,
I sway in your dance with the moon.
In your silence I wait
for your soundless word
to echo up the abyss between us.

On lo

Castaways, we drank and drifted
finally landing at Luther's Cafe
to drink more beers and fill our bellies with burgers.

The way to the can was laid with hazards:
table corners menaced me,
the normal flat floor held
secret steps for tripping.

Ah. I made it to the four by four closet,
with bare-naked bulb, incommodious commode,
and grimy written walls.

I passed my water,
panting the praise of bloated bladders
to the gods of urination,
and surveyed the scripts of felt pen
and ball point onto flat white paint.

Off in a corner, there it was, a little by itself.
*"On lo, we drank the blood of Christ
We cast the ashes of superstition into the solar wind."*

Back at our table I told it to you.
"What's that mean?" you said.
"Let me translate. lo is an island," I fibbed.
"where only by shipwreck people come:
where you and I drink together."
I raised my mug between us.
You clinked it with yours.

"This is the blood of Christ we drink.
What we cast away is the bullshit superstition
that believes in nailing down Danger,
denying its ever present power to kill and resurrect.
Along with ourselves, ashes that we are,
we fling the exclamation pointed finger at
and into the sun god's spirit-wind."

"I don't understand," you said.
That's okay, (I knew) you do.

Reflecting on Agony in a Moment of Peace

To stand affirmed and at one
at the center of person,
to begin where we are,
so the future flows out
from the presence of now.

With Adam
we walk
in the garden

Then, inundated by busyness
and the glittering sequence of things,
our eyes glance away from the heart
and our hearing turns out

in our Eden
erupted by
Adam made many.

The opening and shutting of vision,
the cupping and muffling of ears,
the remembering and forgetting.

Piquant and bland
is the fruit
of the tree.

In our thrusting out and shrinking back
we brave out our fears.
Our cowardice dies in the living of it,
our courage lives in its daily dying.

From Eden's nourishing womb,
we climb with Calvary's tree,
ill content with peace we've known,
risking it all for an Easter dawn.

Children in the Storm

Side by side, we scotch our bodies down,
huddle along the wall furthest from the porch's edge,
and face the caterwaul coming down,
bare knees hugged, drawn to chins,
in ear-filled awe, wide-eyed watching:
 sky-shot water-sheet slapping tin roofs,
 gushing down rain spouts,
 making new rivers of gravel walks.

We wonder at the angry sky-man who makes all this,
of whom we sing, I think, in brave derision:
 It's raining, it's pouring, the Old Man is snoring,
 he jumped in bed, and bumped his head,
 and couldn't get up in the morning.

Is it in wrath punctuation or promise of punishment
that he pronounces his opinion in hurled thunderclap
and with cussing concussion rattles our bodies,
quivers the linings of the void in our bellies?

Warned,
we sit in silent wonder
at a world alive.

A Man for Others

We reduced him to our ideas of a god,
just as we did with other heroes who dared
dance with danger to bring back bounty to share.

He left us no inked memoirs of his own,
leaving us only his life for us to shape and warp
to fit our yearnings.

Still, his stark presence haunts us,
lingers with vague tastes of:

how he let himself touch and be touched
in electromagnetic linkings of flesh and gut,

how he scattered stories and healings to crowds
to make of them what they will,

how he hung out with friends and strangers
at food-laden tables presenting himself as

a crushed grape
rising in wine for sipping,
a ground up grain
baking in bread for chewing.

All in one shortened life
that in the tides of time and meaning
throbs to flesh itself again in us.

Christmas Reflection

When truth strikes,
goodness overwhelms,
beauty stuns,
what, we ask, do we do
with these insidious invisibles?

Consign them to airy abstractions
to drift innocuous in flocks of clouds?

Or embody them boldly in stories,
studded with imaginings,
flowing in music,
incarnating them in
hay-filled mangers,
flights of angels,
one guiding star,
where, as yeast in dough, they spread,
bubble up into brains and hearts,
to turn our lives upside-down, inside-out,
lives worth dying for?

Every Once in a While

Through our classroom windows
blared sirens of ambulance,
fire truck, squad car,
halted the hum
of student work.

Out of the silence
that held our
unsaid dread
of unknown perils,
a nun's voice came:
 Someone's in trouble.
 Stop and say a Hail Mary
 for them.

We did
and went back to work,
knowing a power
that couldn't be said.

Statements

Water,

up from springs,
down in torrents,
and all in between.

Wind,

from seed bearing zephyrs
to hurricane blasts,
and all in between.

Heat,

from womb-warmth
to bursting volcanoes,
and all in between.

Light,

from glowworms
to galaxies,
and all in between,

aching to utter,
whether in whispers or shouts,
the intent of ultra violets,
the pith of infra reds.

The Other Side

If death is not a mere snuffing of a candle,
if death is an ending with a beginning,
what is it that continues?

Is there awareness of what has ended
and might have been?

Is there anticipation of a becoming,
a maybe, a can be?

Is there a diffusing into oneness,
like the raindrop
blending with ocean?

Is there a gasp of completion,
as what Van Gogh felt
on finishing *Starry Night*?

Are there menus
of challenges ahead,
trials required,
surprises hoped for?

Is this side a taste of the other?
Is it all one anyway?

What is Meditation?

When asked, the teacher,
so quick with answers, hesitated in surprise.
“I don’t know. I’ll have to think about it.”

Days later, his child toddled up,
stretched out her arms in expectation.
Taken up, she laid her head on his shoulder.
When satisfied, she wiggled to be let down.

As she ambled off he had his answer.

A Toast

To the One in whom we are one,
to the One coming with us
in our journey

to being other,

(Blessed be otherness.)

to being different,

(Blessed be difference.)

to being unique.

(Blessed be the unique.)

Blessed be us,
as we return with the One
back to the One.

No Eagle Am I

No eagle am I,
lifted by drafts of canyon winds,
to the high romance of history's breath,
master of the bird's eye view,
under an all-seeing sun.

I am the mole,
making a maze of vaginal tunnels,
mapping blindly the lost logic of dreams.
I gnaw the roots of gnarled trees
that watched over covens of witches,
moon-made shadows of shamans.
I forage for hibernating insects,
earth-fattened worms,
seeking the meat of some secret muse.

Under frozen fields,
a-sheen with sun-drenched snow,
stitched by swooping shadows of eagles,
I sip the juice of fermenting humus,
the warm-wet rot of what has died
and waits, waits and meditates
its vernal possibilities in me.

Now and Then

Amid forest light,
shade, breeze, bird chirp,
I listen to your woodwind.
You sit at the picnic table,
sheet music on a stand.

I remember the girl,
(yes, once you were a girl
and I was a boy.)
who played that summer Sunday
with the City Symphony.

Now, its fifty-six years together.
Long ago, you said,
“We've known each other
longer than we haven't.”

Lately, we have noted
in each others faces
the lines of care lived out,
the weight of age we shared,
the test of youth outlasted.

Then we were brave, trusting.
Now, we see in the crucible of years
the shapes of our secret selves
carved, crafted, earned together.
Sometimes we talk about it.

“This is better,” you say.

Aha!

The fountain-spring draws forth from its womb
an overflow of amniotic water,
spurts it into sparkling patterns in sunlit air
for itself and all to see.

The songbird opens its throat
and calls from a species' hidden history,
the chromosomal notes
that wake the sleeping mate
to welcome the dawn.

We dream of the Dark Beauty,
older than Buddha's muse, fresh as the day,
and rise to find rhizomes under our minds
that run to unseen fields
where destiny's flowers unfold.

Ashes to Ashes, Earth to Earth.

Dropped on your coffin,
the earth-clod's thud
echoes down the drafty hall
of my thoughts of you.

Without you, the hall seems empty
except for (now that I see it)
the soft light of the afternoons
we noshed and communed,

and your mounted paintings
stretching from here
to Brandeis, to Yad Vashem,
remaining, immune from ash and earth.

You left (now that I see) nothing in me empty.
All the spaces I gave you
you filled,
not with perfection,
but your questing presence.

You overflowed our times:
the spaces of silence filled with notes,
the blank canvases with dark/bright moods,
and the corridors of my mind.

And filled, you let them go.
So full, these words flow out,
not from need but completion.
So nothing now is empty and everything full.

Garbage Man

Crazy white boy
wild ass redneck
pitchin' garbage cans aroun'
workin' like us, black an brown.

Hundred houses,
four, five cans each,
forty, fifty pounds a can,
call'n you: pussy? or man?

Hundred times four
times fifty pounds:
twenty thousand pounds a day,
tempts you to say, ain't no way.

Like most of us,
for breakfast at
any ice house we get near,
chug-a-lugs a quart of beer.

He can take it,
he got huevos.
It don't matter that he's white.
He can work with us real tight.

He's a brother.
He's got soul.
He believes in me and you.
Ain't ashamed of what we do.

Garbage hit-man.
Hauling shit-man.
Grass, booze, head like a feather.
We bust our ass together.

The last gringo like him
was five years ago,
so drunk crazy he lay down on a railroad track.
Train ran over him.
Never saw him again.

Give Me a Teacher

Give me a teacher who gives a damn,
needs to know more than my name,
strains for the song I have not sung,
follows me in my ennui
to find my fishing hole.

Give me a teacher who gives a damn,
seduces, surprises,
spades the soil of me,
fertilizes feelings for what is fair,
with anger at what is not,
hope for solutions,
appetite for application.

Give me a teacher who gives a damn,
who tenders truth and trust
more than rules and roles,
favors sticky freedoms
over cool controls,
who risks career and cares
to take a stand for students,
is not unknown to laugh.

I can build you a future in what I am
if you give me a teacher who gives a damn.

The Man Misunderstood

“Don’t *cling* to me,”
I am said to have said
to Mary, my friend.
I had to go.
Unless I did,
you wouldn’t get
the spirit of it all.
You wouldn’t get
the whole point of my life,
or of yours.

So surrender forever
the notion you can own me.
It is enough to remember me
with wine and bread,
where you can taste
the blood-spurting, fleshy
meanings of me.

And please don’t reduce me to doctrine
or trivialize me with comfy feelings.
If you want God’s kingdom,
dump your images of kings.
If you want God’s peace,
let go the hope that war will bring it.

If mythologize me you must,
let the myths *be* myths,
doors to the Unknown.
Don’t bury my meanings
in tombs of words taken literally.
If you would explain me with words,
let them be lyrics to music.

So don’t cling.
If you want to meet me, feed the hungry,
free the prisoners, touch your enemies with love.
Such are the real presences
where universal compassion abides,
and I wait for you.

Greek Dancing

Is there a line
between lust in life
and ardent appreciation:
 that hard-driving entering into
 all that throbs of earth and sun?

Lust, some say, is sin:
 a sundering and surrendering
 of reason divine
 to animal joy,
 a muse inspired subversion
 of passion's purer purpose,
 a celebration of body's being,
 too base to soar
 the lofty realms of thought,
 the nirvana of genteel ideals.

There is a line.
But it is not between.
No horizontal boundary
divides body and soul.

The line is a radical radius
connecting vertically,
root en-earthed in dirt,
and winged seed,
sailing on songs of seas.

Is It True?

Is it true that body happens
when soul enters time and space?
Or is soul the illusion
that is our body's hankering
after the ever after?

Will our love-made moments
be remembered after death?
"No," say those who see memory
locked into the stuff of brains.

"Yes," say the poets who trust
that we are more than our brains,
that time and space
and the matter
swarming within them
are happy-poignant dreams,
enabling us to grasp
something of all that is
in these uniquely specific places,
in these particularly piquant moments.

Still, we yearn for more.
"And yearning," say the poets,
"is what we are about."

Nuke's Arrival

The moment it happened,
when the horror
long dreaded came,

when the blinding flash and radiation
revealed to us the bones
beneath our still living skin,

but before the nuclear hurricane
crushed our walls upon us,
and before the inferno
reduced our bodies to ash,

I remembered our last love making
and focused on your belly,
squinted to see your womb,
hoping our seeds had met,
that new life was growing there.

Is Anyone There?

The question,
dropped
into tides of time and space,
dissolved in the sea,
evaporated into sky,
sailed on clouds,
condensed in rain,
fell on flowers
and bears munching berries,
beavers gnawing birches
children plotching puddles.

Absorbing,
they shouted,
"Here!"

Thy Kingdom Come

We are the world that has.

This is how we dream:

we let ourselves assemble
to fit intentions of entrepreneurs
who follow leads of markets
that care not to know who we are
so long as their doing gets done.

We are the rest of the world.

This is how we dream:

Fitfully, amid babies' cries.
We harvest colonial garbage cans,
ponder melting into mountains with machetes and guns.
Poets, we celebrate our desperate hopes.
Painters, we color our future and wake to cold and gray

We are the tribe of dreamers.

This is how we live:

Becoming a people to make a people of all who dream.
We wear on our faces the blueprints, store lumber,
brick and mortar in the basements of our minds.
Seeds, dormant in winter's dirt, we wait for spring.
Yeast set aside, we prepare for the wheat and the fire.

The Dreamer Celebrates

In smiles and tears you told me
of your freshly cemented commitment
to seize at last and seduce
your angel of happiness.

That night, I slept in the depths of peace,
while sensual celebrations sailed in my dreams:

my battered old Buick,
pushed by provident hands,
edged along a mountain
down a rock-studded path
to a trail head plain.

long-haired ponies
hugged on a mountain top.

your pantry and cupboard
were cluttered with food,
long sprigs of spaghetti
for feasting and friends,
guarded by the family's
friendly retriever.

a spring of fresh water
sprouted from my penis.

Promise

I ponder the promise of our appointment,
this torch that centers our attentions
and augurs the gifts we make today:

our lavishly shared joy
in seeing each other,
the eager engaging of lips,
our reciprocal press of bodies,
the quick ease of undress,
our simply being together.

I consider the givers and receivers
of this warming, light-shedding hope:
our bodies, these workshop-playgrounds of our becoming;
our minds, our stand-under, sky-embracing branches;
our body-breeding souls,
our spirits, radiating reach of us
that root us in the inviting unknown,
where one day we may remember
the Oneness whence we came.

And I pray to that diversifying Unity:
Take these dimensions of us,
these emerging certainties,
multiply them in offspring and deeds,
that in its eager reception of them,
the world will one day bless itself
and remember the promise we were.

River Trees

Leaping from the sun,
just in time for morning,
light
bounces off the river's still water,
flashes onto undersides of summer leaves,
flows amid ribbons of shadow,

while the trees,
with stretching down limbs,
reach at their roots,
sending sight of light
to where roots suckle darkly
in the river-wet soil,

to complete a circle,
grasp how light and dark
unite in life.

My Shadow

In my dreams,
I'm the star,
he, in a supporting role,
plays the antagonist,
the poseur for our drama's
crucial conflict.

No fighter he,
frail, shabby,
but stubborn,
refusing retreat
despite my challenges
and threats.

He knows me,
maybe better than I know myself.
He propounds a danger
I don't understand.

Once,
he appeared in a tunnel
as a sharp horned,
sleek-muscled bull,
stubborn still,
blocking my way.

I talk to him,
not to confront,
just to accept.

He lets me pass.

The Stuff of Poetry

Peeing from a bursting bladder,
moving the bowels when the urge is urgent,
salivating on the menu.

Little things that
make momentous the moments
between birth and death,

wherein meanings out there
collapse into
one anticipated satisfaction,
one hope realized.

Is Writing a Poem Like Praying?

When unknown meaning fills the air
and we breathe the mystery of it,
smell it,
let our skin itch for it,
let it salivate our cheeks,
go to our heads,
stab our hearts,

and we think,
we have to tell this in words,
and we think,
are there words for this?

And we try anyway.

We be present
to the presence of mystery
and let the telling happen.

Centering

Adonai Echad.
(The Lord our G-d is One)

It is our ritual at meals,
a centering of ourselves
and what we are about,
the becoming
we do with food.

With moment to moment relish
we take in
the home grown tomato,
onion, mushroom,
the sliced zucchini,
steamed, then lightly browned
with olive oil,
the pico de gallo with its
cilantro and serranos,
the chicken,
whose life it
surrenders to us.

All the while,
we sip a dark Merlot,
just enough to give an edge,
a balance point
where spirit and matter
make love,
where laughter and tears
are easy as rain,
where the muse can
move these thoughts,
making us more the pen
than the writer.

The Call of the Muse

Something happens
and the core of it shines
of inner light
to blast the inner eye.

We stand touched, grabbed,
struck dumb,
yet called,

not quite so strong as
Allah giving birth to
the Qu'ran's poetry,
commanding Muhammad:

Recite!

But maybe a little like it.

The caller has found us
and we will be our own becoming.
Now we are blessed/cursed
with hunger and thirst for words
to speak the unspeakable.

La Raza en La Plaza

Band leader Francisco calls his audience
to celebrate our existence:

Welcome to the cosmic heart
as it beats in these players,
in the music, in ourselves,
in this city-center park
where children frolic in the fountains,
before San Fernando Cathedral
whispering the holy,
and County Courthouse
groping for justice.

The trumpeter blasts his notes
till blood from his heart
reddens his face,
floods our ears,
vibrates our bodies,
sets our souls to tremble.

He blazes to angels in the air,
in ourselves:

Tell the world.
Throb.
Wherever life is,
wherever it may come,
drum it into being.

Miracle Tree

Surprise.

You call me to the window
to see how the sun
at an angle just right,
celebrates itself
in water drops
clinging to tips
of branches and leaves,
then, off them, reflects itself
through window glass
to us.

For this moment
the oak becomes
a showcase of diamonds.

Soon the moving sun
will find another angle.
The drops will turn to vapor,
or fall to thirsty earth.
The tree, even, will die.
We too.

But the memory:
It promises to live forever.

Poets and Muse

Do poets fathom our connections
with the whole and the holy,
with that Voice informing us
from deep within,
from deep without,
urging
we speak the unspeakable,
tell the untellable,
celebrate the infinite universal
in any unique particular?

What do we name this muse
that drives us,
reveals with each writing
we are more than we think we are,
know more than we think we know,
tells us in our truth-feeling moments
that it is not in solitude
we write what we sign?

Whence does it come?
Where does it go?

Seeds

Wherever they fall
only there
can their hunger to grow
take root or not.

For all their power
and desire to sprout
they lie helpless
without a welcoming soil,
a favorable season,
or sun and water
that is neither too much
nor too little.

Our urge to love
fell on each other.
A rain of events
occasioned our yes or no,
our decisions to trust or not,
our choices of risk or safety.

So, who do we thank for
this garden we became?

Silences

*Silence is God's language.
Everything else is a poor translation.
Rumi*

the beggar's open hand,
the unopened letter returned,
breath's pause after in, before out,
blank pages within plain covers,
the seed yet to be planted
the interlude between movements,
the glance that tells all,
sleep when it sinks beneath dreams,
the peace when prayer runs out of words,
the Abyss before birthing universes.

So Much

It is a day,
a string of moments.

November sun on my lap,
brandy in my eggnog,
allure into floating
on the waters of being,
letting whatever was, is, or will be
absorb me.

All so much.
More than this cup
of my being can contain.

For what then is the cup?

Poured out, refilled, over and over?
All consummated contents
dissipated, forgotten?

Could some entity find what is lost,
grasp their meanings,
and, for God's sake, appreciate?

Between the Scribbles

Are we born blank slates
utterly open to scribbles
of families, schools, politics,
or industries of ads?

Do we come with those slates
invisibly imprinted with destinies
waiting to be discerned
between the scribbles?

Do soft winds blow hints,
do dark skies cast thunderous urges,
calling us to unscramble the scribbles,
rewrite them into stories of our lives,
blending tragedies with comedies,
conflicts with resolutions,
curses with blessings,
that tell of the meanings
with which we came?

Way Stations

Dreams of frustration,
where like Tantalus,
my grapes of desire
hang inches beyond my grasp.

Then moments of consolation,
when nothing matters
but this here and now
presence of us together.

Then these valleys
between those peaks
of hunger and plenty
where rumination
spades the soils of
puzzle and promise.

Are these landmarks
to a destination?
Or are they in themselves
points of arrival
hiding the meanings
I seek?

What Can Poets Do?

How do we justify the time
we spend attending to words?

Can mere words unveil discrete feelings,
hurts, delights and sights
that yearn to be told,
hunger for recognition and naming,
that ache to be acknowledged?

Can they forage, find and assemble
the images, the sounds,
the pauses, rhythms,
repetitions and patterns
that belong together,
that will carry
a payload of meanings
and drop it into the oceans of wonder we are?

Can they take the waters of our becoming,
transform them into wine
to inebriate our lives
and to spread ourselves
like manure on the garden of humanity
to nourish and renew this planet?

Who Are We?

Are we these masks we wear
in order to belong, to woo a mate,
to pass the castle gatekeepers
to get the jobs that feed our kids?

Are we the I, this self,
the incommunicable entity
of this naked person that returns
our stand still stare into the mirror
that wears no mask,
that is more than a what,
that dares to be a who
with a will to become?

And are we more?
Are we the soil that grounds
this who that we are,
some companion who goes where we go,
who waits there for us to arrive,
some Soul-Self that calls our who
to be and become?

To become what?

Some Beyond
that is all within us,
that is all outside us,
some Root predating
this universe's big bang,
its ever expanding contraction,
some Wellspring to which we all return,
where every yin, every yang
dissolves into the one Tao,
one finality for all beginnings,
one beginning for all finalities?

Death

The penultimate adventure.
Only after comes the ultimate
where whatever unknown waits
our science can not say,
our knowing foretell.

We face a choice
who shrink not
from the abyss:

 Despair, that all will be lost, even self.
 Hope, that says, "So what."

The Body Temple

Is it there
where The One
takes delight in taking food?

...in salivary glands
oozing in anticipation?

...in nostrils where waves
of coffee aroma break?

...in taste buds
dancing in appreciation?

...where time takes its time,
slows to savor?

...in the alchemy of ease
as urgent belly fills?

...and eyes embrace
companions at table?

This

Of all possible universes,
this one,
this galaxy,
this sun,
this planet
this exact house, room, table,
this meal, this wine.

This present flowing out
of all possible pasts
into all possible futures.

In this intersecting of
this space with this time,
there is nothing more to be had,
nothing more to do,
nothing more to be,
than this here and this now,
with you.

Trees and Light

It would seem they have some understanding.
Part of the tree-seed descends into dark.
Another up-springs to meet the light.

Leaves make green-stuff to turn light into food.
Light feels transformed, born again into life:
a trade off of sorts, if ever there was.

But watch them together. See how they play.
Light dresses leaves to match moods of the day:
morning bold; noon dapper; dusk enticing.

Leaves make for trees breakfast, lunch and dinner.
Food becomes fun so that light's speed slows down
to turn this planet's worth into new things:

microbes, sequoias, whales, babies, us.

Vocations

Are they calls
to take up careers, to market ourselves,
or to give flesh to the body becoming,
to begin a telling of who we are?

What Who, what What calls?
Some angel we wrestled in soul's
dark midnight before first light ever?
Some sketch we roughed out on a scroll?

What signs can tell if we heard the call?
What scars bear witness that we answered?

One Last Time

When we die, since die we must,
let climactic cries
be our closing breaths.
Let our come together be one orgasmic meltdown.

Seasoned sailors, let us
drown content
in a storm of memories
knowing nothing is forgotten.

Let each uncounted coupling
be a bright copper coin
in our penny pinching grip,
each burnish catching the setting sun.

May our genital juices manure
the stretch and connect of us,
fertilize our longings and celebrations
bring them to bud again.

Let each melding of auras recall itself,
how seated at table we'd lean
to touch the length of our arms.
Let every nuance of silence announce its return.

Then, in that last flash,
as I nip the tip of your turgid nipple,
let our soul-oozing bodies slide,
sex-stained, sweat-soaked

down the whirling pools of time.

What We Are

Matter is what we are,
immersed in a universe of stuff,
each thing in its own moment
momentous:

each flower,
every single baby,
and its cry for tit,
every tart taste,
each erotic twinge,
every jazz beat,
each aesthetic lust.

Yet each bit of stuff tells,
smells of some awe-filled all,
some ultimate other:

the more beyond,
the more that we become
when we know what we are.

River Walk Sun

Some of the things the sun can do
along the river walk are almost quicker
than this eye can catch.

It will become halo in a laughing woman's
long black hair, curve round her face,
almost touch her breast.

It will bounce itself off the river to a bridge's
shaded arching underside,
so when the wind ruffles the water
it can strew itself into silent concerts
of patterns that with each other dance.

It will flaunt itself in myriad
slivers of mesquite leaves,
while with an old magnolia,
it mostly demurs, peeking out in places,
April green, December gold,
once here, once there,
for every hundred it hides itself.

Oh, if you could see it now, how just,
just before sinking itself into the side pocket
of a skyline horizon, that cue ball sun
shoots through my beer and bourbon
casting shadows, amber, brown, upon this paper.
If you could see it, the muse would smile.

Jazz Band

Under a fiesta sun, senses get drunk,
eyes awash with women in summer dresses,
taste of hot sausage and mustard in the mouth,
feel of its juices on chin,
ears flooded with jazz vibrations.

The percussionist punctuates around and under
undulating bongos, sensuous sax, get-down guitars.

Still caressed in these fingertips,
an empty beer can
trembles to the timbres,
tingling to urge,
"Attend, attend."

God's Eyes

The trees,
 with their circular crowns,
the birds,
 with their rounded nests,
give God eyes
to look back to the beginning,
 when the spread of squiggly sperm
 met the spherical solidity of eggs
 and God's thoughts of
 soaring, gliding feathers formed
 and notions of earth-grabbing roots took hold,
to echo down years of light,
that we too may see
God's fingerprint-swirl
in smudges of galaxies
in whirlpools of dreams.

Weavings

A nod to the passing stranger,
the piece of trash picked up,
the name remembered and used to greet,
a sudden smile for the vacant stare,
a lost dog taken home.

Each a weaving of loose ends.

October 24, 2015

Epiphany

Did the Eternal Word that Judean night
leap down from bright celestial height
collapsing the light years of distance
into the micro-measurement of presence?

Or, like the shapeless zygote, from which we rose,
did Eternal Form reach itself into toes
and teeth, eyes, ears, fingerprints and face
to drink the mother-milk of our race?

Or, like the reverse of the universe's primordial explosion
into space and time, did Utter Extension find implosion
in an infant dropped from ancestor's dreams of destiny
down a maiden's womb into Bethlehem's epiphany?

What Patient Force sought to sire in minds the inconceivable,
that our hungry, death-strewn world now holds the unreachable,
that the fat and strong are cast down from their heights
and the frail and afraid rise in the wind like kites.

Potluck with Jesus

When he came into our village contentions,
he asked the women to get up a potluck.

Bakers brought breads,
gardeners their goods,
householders their steaming stews.
We toasted and tasted ourselves
with homemade wines.

In his reach,
we felt in one another
his lighter than gravity,
electromagnetic touch,
finding us, binding us,
freeing us.

When he left,
he stayed in our memories
of how we beheld one another then
and how he continues with us now
in our potlucks.

March 1, 2016

Yes

Yes to all of us,
to each alive, aware entity:

You acorns,
waiting to plumb
earth's dark womb,
fondle sky's nursing light;

You electrons,
plus and minus, positive, negative,
square dancing, round dancing
to rhythms within and among;

We lovers,
aching to tell what we know,
sing what we feel.

May 4, 2012