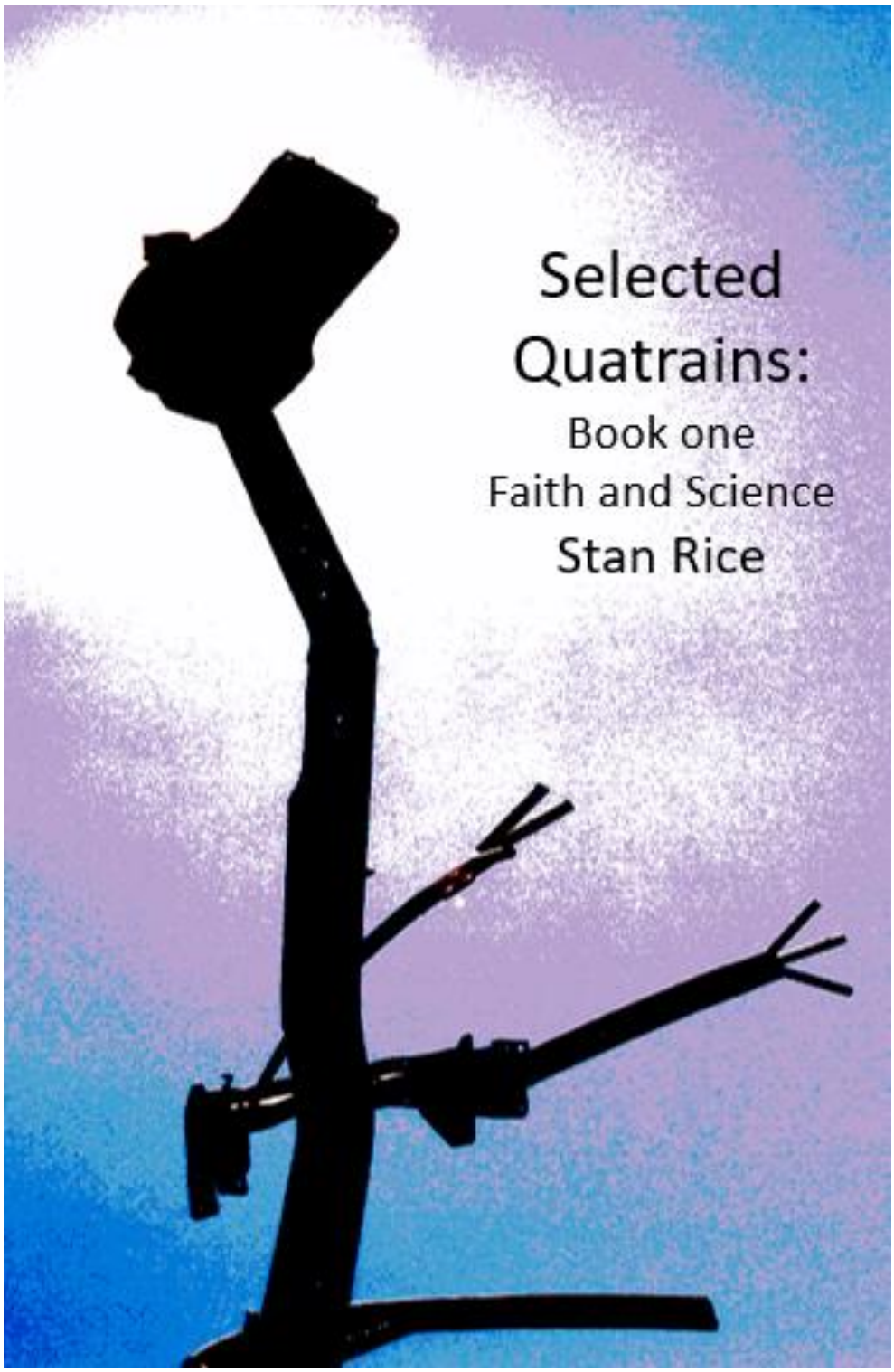

Selected
Quatrains:
Book one
Faith and Science
Stan Rice

Selected Quatrains
On Faith and Science
Stan Rice
Book one: January to November 2000

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Quatrains on Faith and Science

I am a mediocre poet, usually. When I try to write poems, I lose interest and competence after about four lines. Then I realized that this was not, in fact, a weakness, but a strength. If you cannot figure out what to say in four lines, you probably haven't thought about it enough. Besides, quatrains are an art form unto themselves; just think of the eleventh-century Persian poet Omar Khayyam, who wrote thousands of them. I have, at this writing, composed 3,505 of them myself. Some of them are good (especially the ones in italics), and I will share them in a series of books that are not overwhelmingly large. Nearly all of my creative work is about faith and science.

Note: I am not the poet Stan Rice who died in 2002.

Winter at Bluffwoods, Missouri:
The warmth comes from above
But so also does the chill;
The equable stream flows steadily
Under its crust of ice.

A Professor Eats a Shrimp Dinner:
One little bite of tender white meat
Feeds the blood and breath of the scholar;
Yet it is the little shrimp that had explored
The very depths of the sea.

On Listening to Sarasate and Thinking of You:
Long strokes of the bow
And pluckings of the strings
Are the gypsy body
Of your kisses and caresses.

Giant cartages of commerce
Rumble down the snowy highway
Coating all their servants and masters
With wicked haloes of grime.

A scribe to words too wonderful—
A witness to sights too astonishing—
Ravished by music too devastating—
To compress into this weak trembling body.

Gravity is utterly reliable
To hold me grounded in orderliness
But also to draw me into the Earth
And shatter my mind on the ice.

Lifetimes of work wait undone
But the work of a lifetime
Is to love the journey
And to know one place.

Genes live forever: Somewhere in me
Is Tsiyu Gansini's prowess and Nancy Ward's love,
Irish peasants and English bosses both;
And maybe even the spark of Eve.

A fool is afraid of silence—
He must fill the night with noise,
For its emptiness frightens him;
The wise man embraces solitude.

Religion is a paper tent
For those weary of thinking;
The love of God is a deep grotto
For those willing to carefully dig.

Young Mars exulted in his strength,
Blood-red with warmth and life;
But he could not hold onto his air and water;
Now he is choked in dry dust.

The voice of the prophet, every word pregnant,
Goes unheeded, while the scripts of mediocrity
Are displayed before everyone's view—
But the prophet will never give up.

Grimy comets, caked with life
Slip in from the distant darkness,
Beyond the liquid ammonia planets
Misnamed for gods of time and joy.

To Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln on Their Birthday (February 12):
You have emancipated our spirits
By a proclamation at all species are equal
And you strove to preserve the Union
Of northerly reason, southerly dignity, divine love.

Swirling as in a giant dance
Stars around galaxies' cores,
The angels of light, centripetal fireflies,
Surround the throne of God.

Love beyond love, life beyond life,
Compressed into an instant of timelessness,
The moment of death—a portal,
Or illusion? And who can know?

Here comes the dawn—right now it begins.
But no, not yet; now, there it is!
Or was it there before? So comes the sunrise
Of love into our blighted lives.

The musical score of eternity
Is written in the staff lines of DNA—
Genetic themes, useful and precise, interrupted
By playful junk and variations.

Slapped by the hand of God, I staggered
Into a realm of cold, utter darkness,
In panic until I understood:
I had been transformed into light.

The Eclipse:
I am not some ignorant tribesman
Who thinks the sun has actually died
Or that the moon has bled; but I still feel terror
When my beacon, my reference, is shadowed.

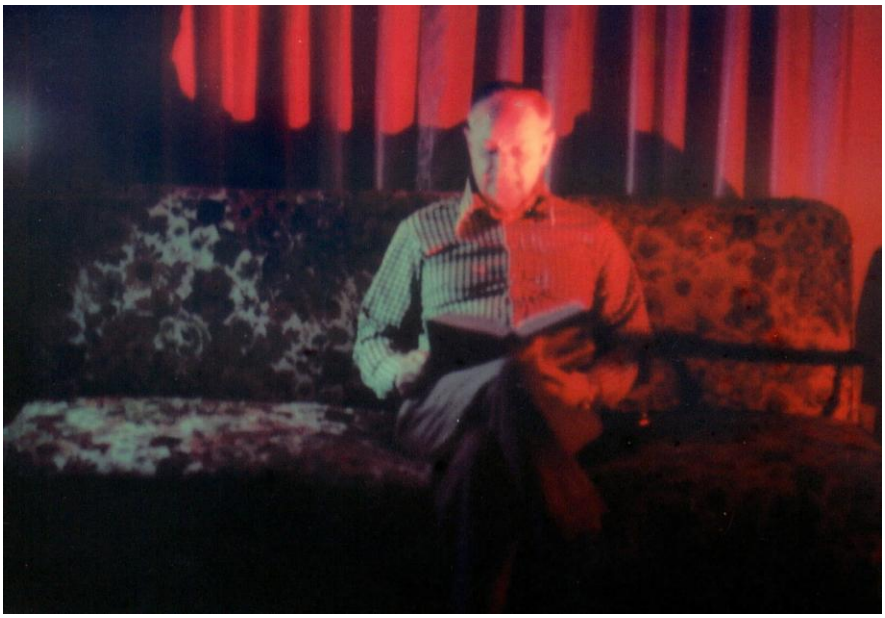
The tobacco smoke of death
Creeps through the streets of the promised land;
Murdering DNA, battering hearts, strangling arteries;
No Passover spares our first-born youth.

The Gray Head (for Mom):
Gray is a rich color, like silver
When it is at rest; rolling clouds
Of life-giving rain; ashes hiding coals;
The hair of long life.

The Earth does not care that poets praise it,
Scientists study it, miners bore it,
Nor that Mahler wrote a symphony for it,
Nor that we boast of cities reaching to the clouds.

The paddles of the ceiling fan
Force Heaven down upon us
But we notice only that it cools
The sweat of our frantic labor.

My daughter captured a cranefly
In the house and released it outside
To save its life. I have no doubt
That she will go to heaven.



Dad, 1974



Mom, 1974

To Mom:
How many worlds my mother has seen
In her eight decades; but she knows
The one true worth of every future:
She never tires of loving.

As different from one another
As Jupiter's moons—ice, fire, dryness,
Are the facets of the soul
Of a loved one closely observed.

Our minds create worlds, weaving
Strands of reality, and filling in
The interstices of moment and momentum
With a blur of love—no less real.

The old woman with the loom had
A cat named Warp that curled through time,
A dog named Woof, and little mice
Like balls of lint.

Ocean Loves:

1. Like the ocean, with hidden
   Tons of gold, you froth
   With movement, engendering
   Salty caresses of life.

2. Your friendship is a salt spray
   From an ocean of mystery, invigorating
   Those who love, stinging
   Those who close their eyes to light.

3. You admit your uncertainties
   But stand firm; you do not use
   Your doubts as an excuse
   To slide and sink in the sand.

4. Your root runs deep
   In an ocean of sand
   You pull up water and bless the land
   With shade and nourishment.

Spring:
Each new leaf is a wisp of green hope;
But even a dying land
Has weeds and scum and looks green
In the distant view from space.



Red light in fog, 1974

Like a maple fully leafed, I am
Bent under the weight of an untimely snow;
While I should stand straight like the spruce
And pray with my face skyward.

There is no purity of whiteness; it is only
Nerve impulses, blue and red and green
Arriving together in the brain; everywhere
Is the taint and tint and hue of life.

Life emerges from the dark grotto
Overhung with black ferns and vines
Where silent fragrant bacteria live
On slippery warm surfaces.

A toast:
From the fields of barley fair
And the vines bent with weight of sweetness
Come the spirits that call us
To share the peace of comrades.

Bright lights, big city:
Dinosaur light, released
From deep wells, illuminate
Undersides of night clouds,
Obese like the consumer's world.

The slender sword of the spotlight
Slices the soft belly of the clouds
As rain bleeds and blood rains
Onto the gasping Earth.

We travel through the universe together
Like two particles on parallel paths,
Creating no force fields—not repelling, not attracting.
But this is not friendship.

Blood, when shed, is ugly
But blood when in arteries
Carries oxygen to the cells, feeds them,
And washes away their sins.

April Fool (For April 1, 2000)
Spring makes me a fool,
Steamed in misty storms,
Stirred in a green pottage,
Grabbing at every flowery joy.

Responsibilities of the Mind:
These are your duties three:
To sing, O science;
To reason, O poetry;
To be skeptical, O faith.

WYSIWYG:
My website, my words, my voice
My photo—these are not really me,
Which you truly know only
From the powerful grip of love.

God creates the open windswept spaces
In our lives, where we can stand
And survey the orchards of our work
And the thickets of our confusion.

I've run out of things to say
And so have you; but we would rather
Howl like dogs or chirp like crickets
Than to let our conversation end.



Quercus douglasii at sunset, California, 1974

The flowers you overlooked
When gathering your bouquet
Will live another day
And produce seeds.

The Omega Quadrant:
Middle-aged men with teenage fantasies
Design the galactic worlds of sci-fi;
Everywhere in the universe, every life form
Has females with voluptuous mammal breasts.

A dream so impatient as to demand
My awakened attention
Stirs me from sleep, then slithers away,
Afraid to stand and speak its case.

Fragrant compost from centuries
Of mistakes and crippled progress—
The professor's moldy notes, in which
The seedling of the future tries to grow.

I grasp the hair of Athena
As she grasped the hair
Of the hasty Achilles—I will not
Let her leave without blessing me.

The octopus leaps over ocean rocks
Dragging its massive brain
Large wise scholar's eyes
Seeing the world as clearly as we.

Singing a Hymn:
When I think of you, Brother Sun
And Sister Moon, my tears swell, but
I retain them in the wells of my eyes
To not "create a scene" in church.

Driving on the Highway:
The powerful voice of the radio preacher
Strives to interpret the words of God,
But I choose to hear Dvořák and Mendelssohn
Directly speaking God's language.

Enslaved urban maple trees grow only
Where we plant them, and yet
They will not give up hope: The air
Is filled with their twirling seeds.

Ridges of sand over ripples of silt
In the river bed: They will bury
And write their runes over
All our civilization.

Oaks on the hill and willows by the river
Are confined to their places and at peace
While humans trample the Earth and space
And never find satisfaction.

Alpha and Omega:
A particle traversing the perimeter
Of a great circle experiences its journey
As a line, but it leaves old futures behind
And races toward new pasts.

A Sunny Good Friday:
Because of His burdened, gory path
Along the Via Dolorosa, I can laugh
And enjoy the springtime greenness
Fertilized by His blood.

Okie Doubletalk:
Amidst pains and spruces
The land heals; and the trail
Judges me by its dips and steppes
And its gentle yawls.

The vulture floats on delicate wings
Elegantly describing precise circles
On the slightest breaths of wind—even death
Has its beauty in God's world.

Rare Earth:
In the universe of planets—frozen rocks,
Or scalding sulfur, or liquid ammonia
With no surface to even die upon, how rare
Is this gentle, stable Earth.

Carbon makes life, and is precious
Because it is rare: A carbon planet
With a diamond core would be rigid,
Cold, hard, and dead.

Leghorn University:
A chicken has taken up residence
By the Math building, which was once Home Ec;
Where once they studied omelets, they now study
The equations of ellipsoid solids.

Motorcyclists floating on the mirage
Far ahead of me on the highway
Leap into heaven, then sink
Into the shimmering, waiting blue sea.

The laughing male scissortailed flycatcher
Moves elegantly despite his long tail,
In flight proving himself worthy of the female
Who chooses him in a spiral of chatter.

Militant gun owners insist that God
Commanded them to stockpile arms—
They must be the angels of Revelation
Who released scorpions on the Earth.



A different viewpoint, 1975

On the field trip we tread lightly
And do not pick the wildflowers
But we use Styrofoam cups
From a company that razes whole forests.

Parallel lines of plowed soil follow
The land's contours—imposing
Mathematical precision on the wild shrugs
And twitches of the restless continents.

The slim, brown leg, smooth
With female power, on the wooden stair,
Climbing ever upward, vanishes
Into the loose, heaven-blue shorts.

I look into the darkness, seeing only
A few clear points of distant suns,
And your reflection in my glasses
Gazing wisely from your world of light.

The defiant tree resprouts
From trampling, and shouts greenness
In a landscape of sterility, refusing to stop
Blessing us with its healing leaves.

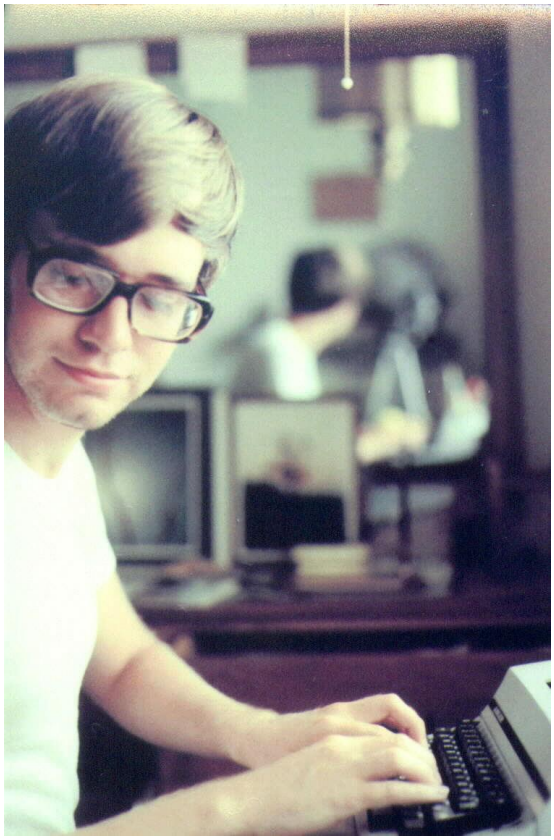


Point Concepcion, California, 1977

The Earth People (Environmentalists):
We are disorganized dreamers
Stumbling over our own hooves
Imagining spirits in every tree—
But only we can rescue this world.

I Don’t Remember Who This Poem Was About:
Brilliant shafts of light bend
Through your wired glasses; shafts of thought
Spiral brilliantly through your brain
And radiate into your wild curls.

Longfellow I: Evangeline
The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss and in garments green,
Stand like druids of eld beside stone fences
That once defined cleared fields.

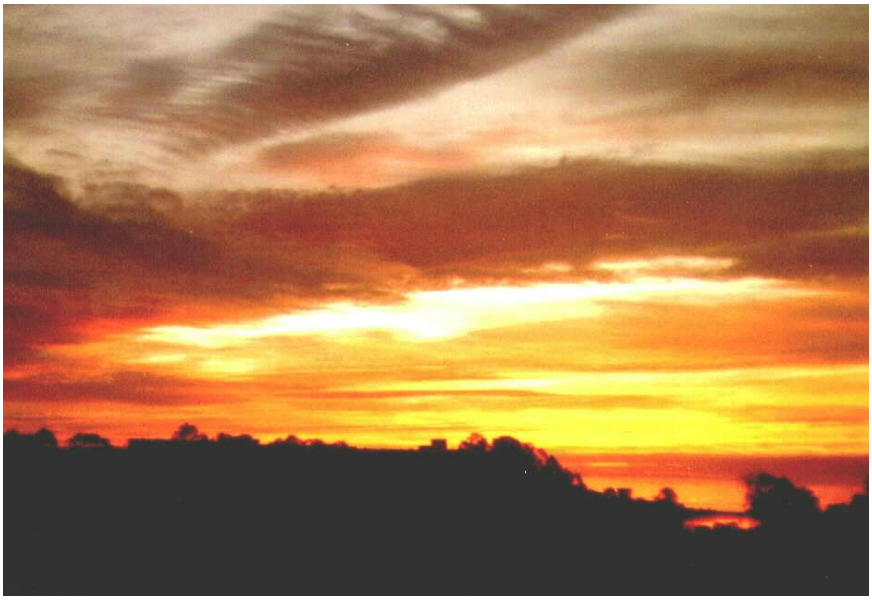


1977

Longfellow II: The Blacksmith
Under the spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands, with muscles
Like iron bands, until he doubles over
And shivers from the assault of microbes.

Outdoor Graduation:
Students and professors in fake medieval
Grandeur: The wind of the real world
Whips their robes, grabs mortarboards,
And tosses flags into the air.

Midwest:
They say the land is flat
Who never biked it, or watched
Stormwater runnels slice down
Through its wounded soils.



Pacific sunset, 1977

The storyteller looks upon the world
Not struck by honest sunlight
But its curved straight lines are bathed
In the mirror light of the wandering moon.

Churning in her breast
Is the milk of passion,
The cream of delight,
The butter of wisdom.

As the Earth spins, we are propelled
Thousands of miles each hour; with gravity
We cling to the Earth, but our brains
Are slung always heavenward.

The forest tree, protected and stifled
By its neighbors, grows narrowly upward;
The lone tree in the field, threatened
By storms, spreads its arms in strength.

Cobwebs of clouds catch the moon
As a glowing, fuzzy orb
Wrapped in dreams and errors
From which the Earth sucks life.

Abram struck out into the wilderness
Only because he looked to the starry sky
With his own brain, rejecting
Chaldean scholars' rules of God.

The old book, thick with scented words,
Long sentences woven like grain in wood,
Is a comfort on a quiet dusk, but not
Useful as a guide during a storm.

A thousand seeds in the wind
A thousand sighs in the mind—
The angels rejoice
When one of them takes root.

A sudden spirit of the storm
Blew against me and billowed out my shirt
And for a moment I imagined
That I was a powerful man.

I bring my flute to my lips, ready
To play artful phrases of song
But I am silenced by the simple single note
Of a warbler, and the wind's monotone.

From my cabined distance
The terrored storms of the world
Shift in silent colors; the sunset
Makes every storm beautiful.

The Smell of Rain:
Long days of heat and drought
Bake and dry the soil; when the first raindrops
Slightly moisten its surface, it exhales
The scented sigh of relief.

The pines fill the air with pollen smoke
And raise candled branches heavenward
In their springtime revelry
Before the mountainous throne of God.

The world scarcely needs the tiny plants—
The ferns, mosses, and the thin green crusts
On rocks—But we owe them our gratitude:
Their ancestors ruled, and prepared, our world.



The composer, 1978

God makes me climb mountains, in which
Every rock, under dead needles, is loose,
Every dead branch brittle and rotten,
And every vine is poison ivy.

Mountain Church Poems

1. We build rude tents and scaffolding,
   Little play-houses we call churches
   Amidst the pines and mountains
   Of God's cathedral.

2. Pine needles, long and sharp,
   Slice the wind into ribbons of sound
   Making the complacent congregation aware
   Of the ravishing breath of God.

3. The dancing candle flames
   Beside the dancing cross, fixed
   From two rugged limbs of driftwood
   Defy the congregation's motionlessness.

4. The organist in the little Bible church,
   In purple shirt and tie, with wan smile,
   Interjects delicate passing tones in the chords
   And hides a secret from himself.

5. *The deer, who have no religion,*
   Stop to stare at the outdoor worship service;
   They bound into the green meadow
   To celebrate creation.

Learning Botanical Names:
The wild diversity of flowers, each one
With its own language, is forced
By scientists into a strict Latin frame—
The tongue of dead conquerors.

The woman they said was ugly
Used sign language to convey
The word "beautiful," by circling
Her hand around her face.



California, 1978

Fire Poems:

1. How technically superior is the furnace
   To the fire; but the fire dances—
   Yellow spirits, red embers, hot resinous blue
   And crackles an antiphony to the wind.

2. The fire, almost asleep, shudders
   And collapses, awakening new flames,
   A resurrection burst of brightness.
   Then its embers subside and dream.

3. The sparks fly upward, alive
   With spirit, but only until
   The fuel in the chips of ash release
   The last of the ancient trees' sunlight.

4. I fly around the fabled light, eager
   To embrace it, but I merely collide
   With all its realistic dimensions
   Like a moth around a lamp.

Ezekiel Poems:

1. Ezeki-el (God strengthens): (Ez. 3:9)
   The hard forehead of the skeptic
   Butts against my soft brain
   That soaks in pliant truths—I am
   A naïve sheep amidst wise goats.

2. Seven Days: (Ez. 3:15)
   Seven days of invisible growth
   The slow strengthening of invisible tendons
   The mortar of blood, the cellular embers
   Looked like inactivity from the outside

3. *Dirty Bread (Ez. 4:9)*
   Four grains and two legumes mixed
   Into a potent flour of life
   Baked in a dung fire that blows away
   The prophet's own uncleanness.

4. The fire of dung shows
   There remains the spark of life,
   Given by God, by us unused,
   In what we despise.

The tree defies the wind
But is not stupid—its flexible stems
Comply with the whims of the air
So that the tree can remain rooted.

Revelation 22:
Behold the lab of God—the world
Where lively experiments of life
Try out the paths of adaptation; and trees
Have leaves that heal the nations.

The wind demands obedience—
It makes the birch leaves bow
And turn their tender undersides
To the fitful sunshine.

Young pines burn with enthusiasm,
Their sap exploding
While the old hardwoods burn low
With glowing red wisdom.

What you take for indecision
Is honesty in a complex situation—
Where many truths roil together.
The fence is sometimes the right place to sit.

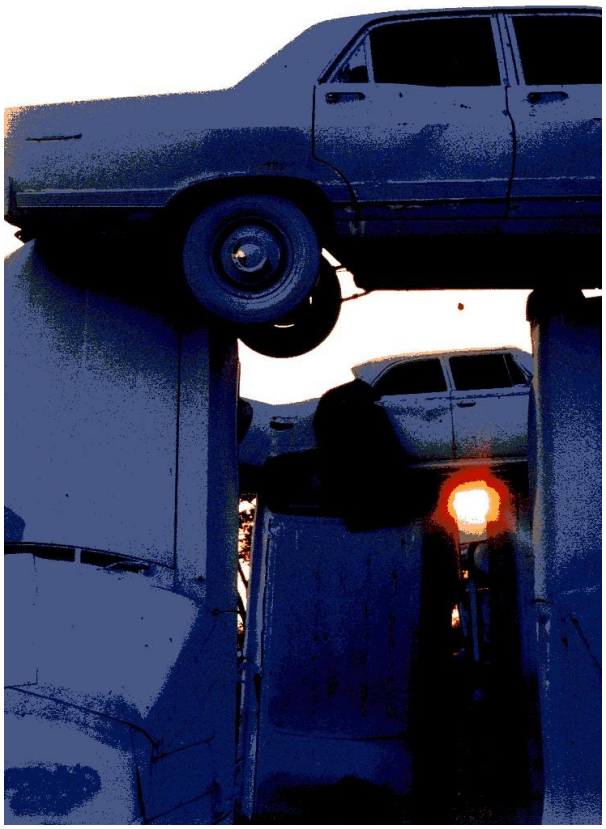
Carhenge Poems on the Summer Solstice, When I Was Alone

1. I imagine a woman's voice
   Sweeping me into sunset intimacy
   But—far better—all I hear is the wind
   Stirring fragrance from the sweet clover.

2. Disappointment:
   What did I expect at the celebration
   Of the summer solstice? A pagan abandon
   Of naked exultation? Its dullness did not even
   Greet the sunset. Pan is dead.

3. Hulks of hoopdies, set up on end
   In a holy circle; we worship
   The waste of energy, and to get oil
   We sacrifice our soldier sons.

4. On the clovered plain at rain-red sunset,
   When I see the carcasses of luxury,
   It is easy to imagine the demise
   Of our age, a tin Camelot.



Carhenge, Nebraska, 2000

5. The anatomy of a car, its underbelly
   Faced up to the sunset: I rotate the U-joint
   And, making the dead wheels turn,
   I feel like God twiddling with His universe.

Nonsense does not become sense
By prefixing "God can."
For God's mind follows God's logic
And He is true to His mind.

How can a God, Who is love withal,
Condemn to eternal hell a son who
Simply made an error? God bears no blame
For the absurdity you attribute to Him.

God is wasteful: a billion billion suns
Warming the unwarmable void;
Skeletons of failed evolvers; and
He creates me through my errors.

The flying curse shoots out
From the short-circuited mouth and mind
Of the man whose wise cerebrum
Commits its energy to pureness.

Crazy Horse Memorial:
You were just a man
Now you are a mountain
With veins of quartz glistening
In your silent lips.



Crazy Stan at Crazy Horse Mountain, Black Hills, 2000

Fantasies for a Japanese Bath:

1. Pearls of water from the hair above
   Fall into the hair below;
   Warmth soaks away the cares
   And scents of strife and toil.

2. You are such a woman, lithe
   With smiles and life; yet you mourn
   That your breasts are too small! But, like you,
   They are concise in lively beauty.

3. The crouching gowned cleric insists
   Every inch of flesh inflames lust;
   Yet among a hundred nudists
   You will not find one erection.

In a Nebraska Restaurant:
Bucolic eyes, stolid
Gaze over the restaurant coffee—
Quick minds, under feed capes,
Have chosen the path of slowness.

Buttered side down: He never stumbles
But when he falls he flips headlong
Onto the hairy carpet of disaster
And cleaves to his misfortune.

Sandhills Quatrains:

1. Mounds of ancient dust, swept
   Under a worn green grass carpet
   With wet willow creases,
   Bristle with poppies and yuccas.

2. A landscape of forgetting,
   God's canvas wiped clean,
   Green willows and beige sand
   Wait in the creator's palette.

3. *Arteries of pure peptone,*
   Coal cars throb eastward
   Across sandblasted hills, to feed
   The frantic play of cities.

4. A hundred coal cars in perfect line carry
   Perfect loaves of lumps, all the same size
   To power plants, whose belches of heat
   Create chaos in the whole of the world.

5. *Startled from its roadside grass*
   By the rare motorist, the dove
   Is at home—it does not know
   It is in the middle of nowhere.

6. Yes, Virginia, there is
   A Nebraska National Forest;
   Somehow the pine seeds found
   This island, distant, in a sea of sand.[1]

[1] Actually, some of the pines were planted.

7. *The little calf, a whole field*
   Of possible ways before it, learns
   To follow only the trodden path, looking to
   Generations of diploma'd butts.

8. *Arm out the Window of the Car:*
   My traveller's-arm, an ichthyosaur
   Swims at sixty miles an awr;
   Refreshed by ancient oxygen,
   Eating insects with a grin.

9. That's Really Its Name:
   When the Dismal River floods
   The little Nebraska town with a scouring rush
   Of buffing sand, the cottonwoods rejoice—
   A new home for their seedlings.

10. *Crucified Earth:*
    Blood-red Earth
    Hemorrhages into gullies—
    A sword has pierced our side,
    Blood and water mixed.



On top of Mt. Whitney, 1978

We rejoiced to hear
That Mars once had life;
But why should it make us happy
To know that a planet can die?[2]

In a Restaurant:
The puffer's smoke assaults me,
His molecules cling to every surface
Of my clothes and hair; I am now his.
A tomcat sprays his territory.

Alcohologic:
I am in the spirit on the Lord's Day—
Every day is God's, and you
Cannot expect me to work
On the sabbath. Pass the bottle.

The Writer:
Into a God-shaped hole
The theologians claim my soul had
Slipped a feathered serpent
That theologians call unclean.

Business Education:
If you would elude
The urban predators
In the marketplace jungle
You must learn to identify scat.

I cannot sleep; for unread books
Line the walls of my bedroom—
By thousands, they threaten to spill
Upon my waiting mind.

The spiders of fortune bite, even though
I explain to them that I am neither
Enemy nor food, and
That they waste their venom upon me.

New Tulsa:
Hot Southern nights, once the cauldron
Of racial hatred, now the stew
Of melding—children white and black
Playing basketball.

[2] I wrote 21 poems on 18 June, 2000.

Odes to Beauty:

1. This is not beauty: cool skin, soft
   From inactivity, large breasts shrouded
   In black lace and white smoke
   From the phallic cigarette.

2. This is beauty: Trails of sweat
   Slink back from the jogger's forehead, creating
   Patterns on her shirt; trim breasts
   Without their own gyration.

3. This is beauty: The healed scar
   Where cancer was evicted, now tanned
   In the sunlight of display, and taut
   With new musculature beneath.

Only the Prophet Worries:
One little hole in the pavement reveals
That the whole neighborhood is built
Upon sand. Great will be the fall
Of the houses, but at some distant time.

The Easter arum lily: A lollipop stick
Whose male power is greedily devoured
By flies, surrounded by the purity
Of female lips.

Poor Barrio:
Rich with children, the splintered house
Pours forth scents of spiced meat
And happy music. The woman's hair
Is slick in straight rich blackness.

Columbus and the Indians:
He cut off their hands
When they did not bring him gold;
Thus he set the pattern
For the next five hundred years.

There are no seasons in the mall,
No cold or heat, no rain,
And floral scents from candlesticks
Waft past unresponsive noses.



1979

The pine weeps; and in its sap
My ambered memories stick
Perhaps to be studied in a distant age
But, more likely, to be forever buried.[3]

The Bible is her sword; she plunges
Her hand through its flesh, spills its blood
And pulls out slivers of bone
To use as scimitars against infidels.

The lonely pod, unloved,
Swelled green with sap, then split
In brown maturity, still unloved,
And spilled its seeds upon the ground.

Staccato Scherzo:
The bean, so full of heavenly nutriment—
Its protein feeds the muscles,
But its trombone overtones create
A haze of hellish sulfur.

A Thousand and One Nights:
The priestess' breasts allured me
But after many a pillared night
I grew weary; The pure love of God
Drew me to desert paths.

[3] Eleven poems written 24 June, 2000.

Insomnia:
The fireworks of my brain
Light up the night—
It will not receive
The ambassadors of sleep.

Eagle Forum:[4]
The eagles soar and circle; the conservatives
Wave flags and cheer at them, until the eagles
Descend lower, with glinting eyes
In their bald heads.

The rugged man in the wildflower shirt
Has trudged steep dusty trails
And skinned his knees on sharp rocks
While kneeling to sniff the nectar.

What's the point? From Stonehenge
To cathedrals, miserable toil
That helped no one, gave no leisure—
And did not impress the gods.



Moonrise, University of California, 1979

[4] The name refers to Phyllis Schlafly, famous right-wing pseudo-Christian.

Poems for Jude the Obscure:

1. The poor stonemason's soul
   Takes its flight heavenward
   Amidst dust rising from the headstone
   Of the rich damned.

2. How straight are the walls, how shiny
   The windows and fixtures, how soft
   The pew of the edifice of our theology
   Where we confine our God.

3. What man hath joined together
   By rings of authority, and bands
   Of responsibility, man will not
   Let any God rend asunder.

The map he had in his mind
Was totally wrong; but no matter—
He forced his contours and ways
Upon the cowering landscape.



University of California, rainbow, 1979

Poems of Ignorance:

1. He was proud to have spent
   Four years at college without
   Ever having allowed to change
   The opinions he held as a child.

2. They called him honest
   Because he would instantly spout
   His opinion about you, about all,
   Without the cautious filter of wisdom

Two Gaia Poems:

1. A desperate Adam cannot control
   His gluttony, eating the body
   And drinking the blood of Gaia,
   Never satisfied, and hating himself.

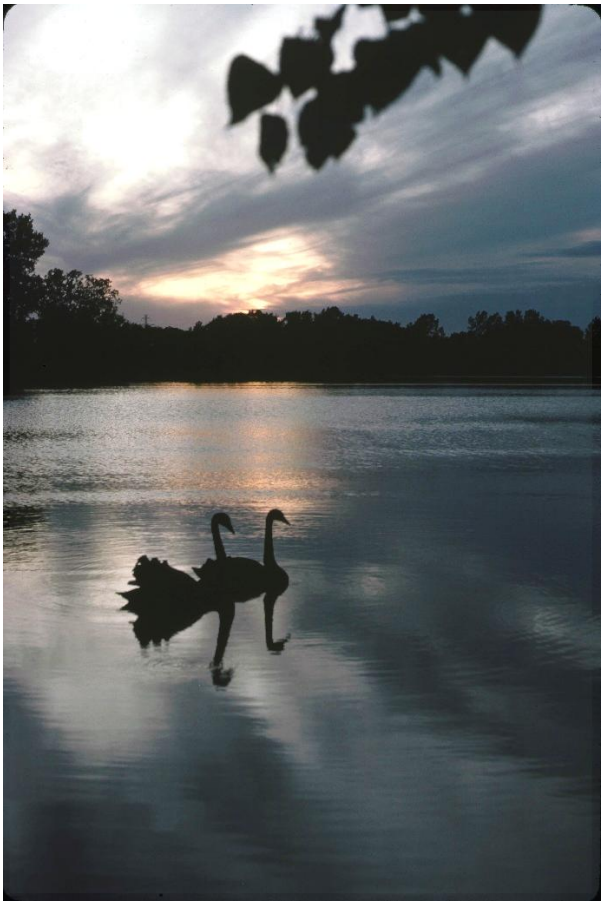
2. Gaia decks herself in autumn gold
   And scarlet; Adam compliments her
   With a tear in his eye, one final kiss
   Before her winter death.

Crucifixion:
He refused the sponge that held
A wine-laced painkiller, choosing
Full empathy with the woes of mankind—
He loved us far too much.

Frantic Mercury accomplishes nothing
As he speeds round and round the sun,
Hot and pure like an electron, carrying
God's message round to God.

A man thinks himself independent
When he obeys, unthinking, every whim
From the swelled head that stands erect
And has no eyes or mind.

Idea I Used in a Novel:
If I were invisible, I would slide
Into your privacy and whisper like a god
Into your ear, commanding you
To love yourself and all God's creatures.



Crystal Lake Park, Urbana, Illinois, 1980

You shall not rest, God told me,
Until I have scoured through you
The freshet of my wisdom
With its million glinting minnows.[5]

God enjoys traveling incognito
As a fly, and landing upon
The crown and scepter of those
Who claim to know all about him.

"Feed me wisdom!" he cried,
But he did not know
That to feast upon this food
Would make him even hungrier.

[5] I wrote 23 poems on 27 July 2000; most days I wrote none.

The ornate church, glinting anew,
Is only straightness and straitness
Unless the shape-bursting Spirit of God
Fills it with the round pressure of zeal.



Burro, Death Valley, 1981

The words of the Bible—the sexual myrrh
And nard, sick with love, Song of Songs
Whose erotic scent offends
The crusaders of conservative churchdom.

You are my hypotenuse, reaching
For my goal, touching
My vertical fingertips, stretching above
My angled rectitude.

You cannot float through God's creation
In an airship of facile faith, like
A bumper car in a rink; you must study
Its rules, or you will crash and burn.

Vietnam:

1. The soldier, who risked his life
   To save his comrades in mucking jungles
   Is not brave enough to admit the failure
   Of his nation's leaders.

2. Soldiers are like molecules, piled up
   To exert a force on an enemy
   Or are merely numbers—simply press
   The “clear” button to snuff out their lives.

3. The general says, “Your son’s life
   Is expendable, into a pine coffin, so that
   My son can attend good schools
   And work safely in a boardroom.”



1983

When I am the god in charge, I make
Every detail perfect, a blessing to all.
It puzzles me that the real God
Could do less.

The heavy, bleeding moon, scarred
And pocked with millions of meteored years
Does not want to rise, but cannot resist
The forces of gravitational duty.

Doughnuts and sweet conversation
At the beginning of the church service
Make the eucharist bread seem stale
And made the grape juice taste like blood.

Drought:
Lofty clouds, ivory mansions
Of gods who trollop through misty fountains
And drink ambrosia, give no rain,
And snub the poor, dry, mortal ground.

Seen from the air, the rigid squares
And straight lines of crops could not hide
The gentle swells and draws of the land—
A cosmetic plaster over the living Earth.

Pow-wow Poems:

1. *A constant flow of car-puscles, into*
   And out of the pow-wow, white headlights
   And red tail-lights in a plasma of smoke
   Pushed by the drummers' heartbeat.

2. On the dancer's costume, a circle
   Of feathers, old wisdom radiating out
   From a central core of information:
   A rainbow-shining CD.

3. *The old Indian woman in a wheelchair,*
   The Indian man with a diabetic leg-stump,
   Are participants in the dance: their spirits
   Swirl with the slow galaxy of ghosts.

God's distant wrath and distant blessing
Are silent, not blustering our lives, like
The huge thundercloud on the east horizon
Red in sunset blood.

Spirits in Heaven, like floaters
In the eternal pools of my eyes, swim
Weightless and mindless in a sky
Of eventless happiness.

How unfathomable God must be
If one-six-billionth of His attention
Can know me, and love me
More than I do myself.

If I would just slow down my car, the wasp
Caught under my wiper blade, would be saved—
But I will not take the time. Nor will God
Slow down the world to rescue me.

Two Art Gallery Poems:

1. In awe, I approach within inches
   Of the blue Picasso; and yet the world
   Ignores hundreds of artists who paint
   Far better things than this.

2. On Seeing Monet's Paintings of the Thames:
   Poplars ghostly, and the river shimmering
   Like spirits, in the pall of wet smoke;
   Clawlike clouds barely visible: God grasps
   At unseen human lostness.

On the vertical wall of reality, sunset casts
A realistic shadow of my small self;
Just a step further, and my elongated shadow
Blesses fields of the future.

Reconciliation:
For your race and mine to live in peace
Does not mean we should be alike—
A twisty swirl of two colors
Of flavorless soft-serv.

Internal Combustion:
My anger burns and explodes
Inside the pistons of self-discipline
Pushing the motor of construction
But also the exhaust of frustration.

A gentle rain raises sweetness
From the cracked land and crisped grass
And Nature swoons in delighted faint,
Dreaming colors it had not dared to imagine.

Cheap Grace? Reflections on Dietrich Boenhoffer:
Every drop of your redeeming blood
Was laced with infinite pain.
But now that it has been shed it is
In infinite supply for every little sin.

Deceptive Cadence:[6]
I was all ready to complete
A triumphant opus; the chord resolved
Into a strange minor mode. All this means
Is that the aria is not over.

"I'm starving!" grinned
The fat preacher after church
In which he had proclaimed
That literal words are the only truth.

Each week our church repeats
A precise ritual—how is that different
From the creaking, flapping prayer wheel
Of the Tibetan monastery?

The light that was meant to guide me
And protect me, dazzles my eyes
And I do not see the dead meteorite
Over which I stumble.

They say that when I am in Heaven
I will not hear your screams of agony; that God,
All-knowing, All-revealing, will conceal from me
Your death at His hands.

Abortion:
The fertilized egg of a novel
Descends the Fallopian tunnels
Of the writer's mind, and dies
As he grades a stack of exams.

Divertissements:

1. *How now, brown cow?*
   Thou foul round Frau—
   Mounds bound, out-gowned.
   Bow-wow! Hound found.

2. *Et hes kem te err ettentchen*
   Thet vewels err necessereh
   Te kommenikett. Bet yer leps
   Kess enleh en kensenents.

[6] A deceptive cadence in music is when a dominant chord resolves into the sixth rather than the tonic.

Puff the magic dragon
And he will take you
To distant weedy shores
Where starships shatter.[7]

The motel bed, where sheets
Crisp and white, cover dank ruins
Of drowned, acrid dreams
And springing, stolen pleasures.

Muse:
I order you into this goblet; but you
Merely laugh; so I grasp
Your unwrinklable gown and force you
Into the wine of changeless words.

Past labia large and small
Large doorway and small turnstile,
The scholar enters the library
To grasp the brain's primal urges.

Dreams and sleep:

1. Dreams are a time when silly failures
   Cannot be righted; when volition
   Is gelled into glassy slowness; a place
   Where frivolities find refuge.

2. Dreams are recycled fibers, the day's
   Papery plans and promises, colored strands
   Of documented accomplishments, pressed
   Into a soft gray blotting tissue.

3. Twelve tones of a mad song, a fog
   Of hatter's mercury, backward cubes
   On the wrong side of Picasso's mirror—
   Just another dream.

4. I fear, and yearn for, the chaos of sleep,
   For when I awaken I will find
   My irksome toil and joyous work
   Both alike scattered.

[7] Puff the Magic Dragon was banned in Thailand because they thought it meant smoking marijuana.

Banana (Yoshimoto):[8]
Your tight yellow skin softens,
Your inner whiteness turn to alcohol;
Your words draw me, a senseless fly, for reasons
My brainless head cannot guess.

Leonard Knight's Mountain:[9]
The distant hills of salvation
Rivers of life, streets of gold
Are but paint covering desert clay,
Lead and fumes and glare.

Original Sin: McGuffey-style:
In Adam's fall, we finned all,
Slipping into murky depths,
Thrashing hopelessly against the current
Of psyche's deep desires.

All Saint's Day:
Resurrection is to death
What wine is to decay:
A tart release of spirit
That the ages only mellow.

Continental Drift, New World:
A scar, unhealed, deep in the Atlantic
Where continents pulled apart—but now
A billion times faster, forces of profit push
All continents into one fractured land of greed.

"Bark" and "roof", a dog's catechism
Of praise to trees, where he marks his world,
Whose branches are his ceiling
And whose green is uncomprehended beauty.

A Healthy, Relaxing Walk in a Small Town:
The gutter is my sidewalk; trucks
Brush past me, their fumes
Probe my lungs, and trains
Reverberate inside my cranium.

[8] Banana Yoshimoto is a Japanese writer.
[9] Leonard Knight started Salvation Mountain, a Christian theme park in California.

WWJD:

1. *Why should I resist to the point of blood*
   And be sacrificed like Jesus?
   My blood, shed, would not create forgiveness
   But would only create a mess.

2. *Jesus strode into the Temple court,*
   The patio of His Father's house,
   And overturned the tables of illegal commerce.
   I cannot do this in a world I do not own.

Marie Antoinette:

1. Puce was her favorite color, the hue
   Of blood, sucked as by a flea from her people,
   Processed in the acrid paunches of greed
   And vomited into a lacework of froth.

2. In life her brain was filled with froth
   And her mouth consumed the world;
   But for one brief moment, her severed head
   Understood the world of wisdom.

The moon, a severed head,
Bloodless and bleak, rises,
Hollow eyes not comprehending
The sound and fury below.

There is no such thing
As destiny, only atoms
Fumbling their blind way
Along the crevices of Nature.

About the Author

Stan Rice is the internationally celebrated author of six books of popular science. He got his Ph.D. in plant ecology at the University of Illinois in 1987, and held several academic positions until he retired from Southeastern Oklahoma State University as Professor Emeritus of Biological Science. His writings are acclaimed for their insight and humor, especially the Creationist Funhouse series in the magazine Skeptical Inquirer. His science and religion blogs and his YouTube channel (StanEvolve, in which he is Charles Darwin) have collectively had a over two and a half million views. You can connect to his publications, including novels and stories, at his author website https://stanleyrice.org/.



No part of this book has been produced by or with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence. Everything is based on the author's direct knowledge, insights, and experiences.