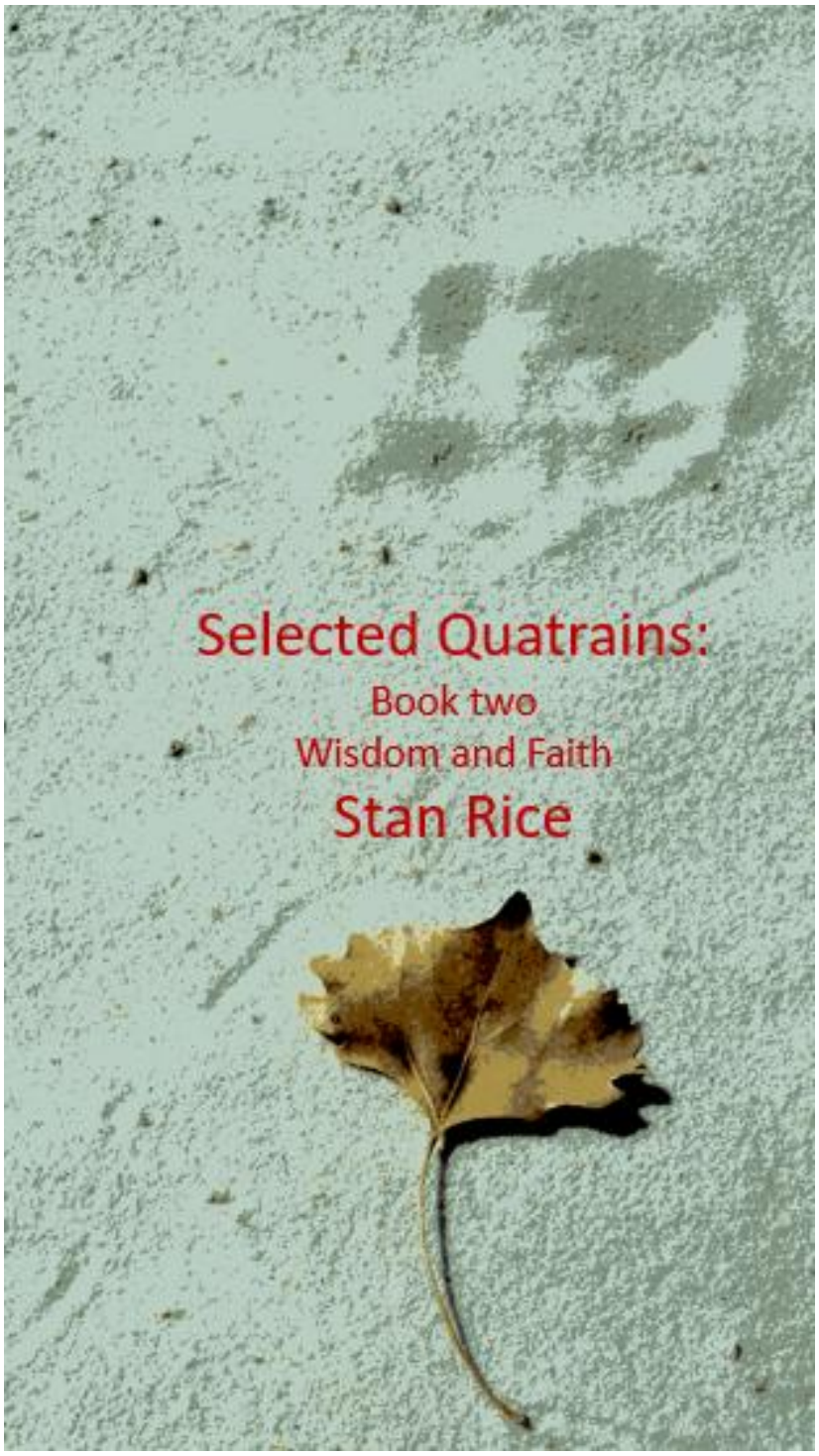

Selected Quatrains:
Book two
Wisdom and Faith
Stan Rice

Selected Quatrains
Wisdom and Faith
Stan Rice
Book two: October 2000 to October 2001

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Quatrains on Wisdom and Faith

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.

Allah calls it salaam.
Jehovah calls it shalom.
The same God calls it, and demands
Right now, the same thing.

The oak creates a solid core of wood,
Standing firm in the wind; the palm
With scattered fibers in its trunk, bends
And grows taller than the oak.

Evolution gave us the ability to love.
God commands us to love.
Hey, we can do this. Let us stir up
Both animal juices and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus the Comedian:
His humor is embarrassing;
The ruse of His resurrection
Turns topsy-turvy the serious business
Of death and decay.

I dreamed a color that does not exist—
Of a leaf both alive and dead; of sunny sky
And depths of outer space; of heat
Red and black; of colorless energy.

The tree, and the whole world
Of leaves and DNA and evolution
Blocked my view
Of the limp American flag.

Decked in fierce lights, the truck
Pierces and thrashes aside the rain
And sacrifices little cars
On the altar of profit.

Optical illusions in a flat world
Make us see gods and demons
That are not there, and fail to see
Those that are.

An Almighty God
Without a universe
Finds no independent souls
Who choose to love Him.

For every statued mausoleum of the rich
There are a thousand shallow graves,
Unmarked, of the insignificant poor; all they did
Was to raise all of the food.

We have three cats; one sleek and black,
Ragtime playful; one brown, cautious;
One fat and white and growling
That others share its world.

Into the framework of my cubic order
Come parabolas of confusion;
The ovoid pustules of enmity,
The round demands of love.

Jesus:
Your blood does not clot, but flows
Unstaunched, heedless of your life, forever
From your throne; you weaken and swoon
In your love for the world.

Descent of Man:
The ancient sweat of lusty power
Still seeps from our pores; perfume
Cannot hide it; but the scented soap
Of love and wisdom washes it away.

In the gray sands of time,
Microscopic flecks can be seen:
Red of martyrs, black of evil,
White of forgotten goodness.

Atoms were formless and void
Until the Master Artist
Distilled colors from their greyness
And created corpuscles of life.

Faith (Nicodemus):
Jesus shatters my wisdom and says,
“Life is like the wind; you cannot know
Whence it comes, where it goes;
You can only hear its rustle.”

From an airplane:

1. Glinting houses: Beadwork lines
   Blouse the land's healthy hide;
   Civilization's hair coat
   Rubs Earth's ecstatic skin bloody.

2. What we see as massive cliffs
   Unscalable in a lifetime, God sees
   As worn edges of plastered layers
   Cracking from Earth's fiery urn.

3. A little mole in a broad suburban scab,
   Skyscrapers pretend to defy
   Tall mountains that can shrug aside
   All that we have built.

A bright hill of midriff emerges
From your short dark blouse;
Rivered and creeked with veins:
A last frontier of wildness.



Cross timbers forest, Oklahoma, 2000

Cross Timbers

1. Oaks with cast iron trunks and copper leaves,
   Bois-d'arc wood like brass, bound
   By barbed-wire brambles:
   No silver or gold in this landscape.

2. Hard-faced against wind and drought,
   The oak forest clings to sandstone
   With hawk talons of steel, even in death
   Not releasing their grasp.

Conqueror Germ

1. I scoff at charge of sword brigade;
   Into their ranks, their very cells, I diffuse;
   I lay low whole villages; I am
   Emperor of this expiring world.

2. The mindless germ simply eats, eats simply;
   Reproduces, and eats simply more;
   He wills no evil, but kills more
   Than all the raging warlords.

A man will die for a flag,
But will not live
To save the soil and blood and life
Of that flag's homeland.

War:
One man, in the image of the undivided God,
Slices the flesh of another—
Dividing him into a trinity
Of blood and flesh and ghost.

Mars
A distant red planet receives
A blue crystal colony from a green planet;
But it is infected with the same germ
That browned the soul of Earth.

Jude 12-13:
Waterless, wandering clouds; fruitless trees,
Uprooted, twice dead; directionless waves
Tossing foam and flotsam; stars not fixed;
Of no use in the nether gloom.

A little sliver of scorching moon
In the frigid blackness after sunset;
But the moon is fully there,
Quenching stellar fires.

Millennium Statesmanship:
The bore and gush of politics,
Sound and fury and fake goodwill;
At the speed of light we hurl
Into lostness.

If I were a tree, I could live
Forever: remove a slip from me,
And root it; I could start another life
Of blessing the world.

All my work, unfinished; smiling briefly
At successes that flow past
In the stream of new challenges, I am
Exactly where I ought to be.

Suspense:
I am an air-filled plastic ball, suspended
In a vertical stream of rushing air
Kept in my track by the pressure
Of the motionless atmosphere.

Ice Storm:

1. Magnolias, usually swaying slowly
   In Southern ease, now rimed with ice,
   Brittle, rigid, now bend stiffly, hating
   To bow to the northern wind.

2. Bicycling in the snow: the leader tire
   Wobbles an uncertain curve
   While the follower, weighty, forces
   A straight, average line.

I set before God the volumes
Of my life's work; He pours
His pure acid over them—only
The pages of love remain.

Resurrection:
Angels hover over me, laughing
At me as I lie in a crib;
Helpless, babbling, and pointing
To my life's list of accomplishments.

Helpless God:
God in diapers
God bleeding
God dead in a tomb
God reborn.

All we, like sheep,
Have grazed
The green grass
Down to the very ground.

Dark Ages:
While Europe crept in night
Fearing the tepid stars
Arabic minds drew heavenly lines
From Al-debaran to Al-tair.

When all order, color, gentleness
Is blasted into the dead sun's red inferno
Only God will remember
This restful afternoon.

The dormant insect knows nothing
Of winter, no more than do I
Of a sightless night; God lives forever
In the interstices of our blindness.

The heated water seethes;
Small bubbles fret and wait on the bottom
Of the pan; a few dare to rise; a drumbeat
Announces their assault.

Thank Allah every Shabbat
That He has Passed Over your sins,
Purchased you with His blood
And freed you from your karma.



Out standing in his field, 1985

St. Peter:
His name was Cephas, but the Lord
Called him Rocky—a hard man,
Resisting your transgress; and when he fell
Great was the crumble and shard.

On This Rock:
I stand like a rock: entombed in me,
Dead fossils from a failed past; burls
Of cooled volcanic anger; pressured diamonds
Encrusted in weak faults.

Don't tell me if you like my painting;
I know you do not—its starkness,
Its clutching hegemony of pain
Disturbs you. I have succeeded.

"The Bible has given us all truth
For all time," said the preacher
Who drove his automobile
To his electric house.

To be faithful to the truth
I must sometimes break a trust
That I have unwisely made. Beauty
Isn't always pretty.

Meekness:
I meekly assert myself
For I owe my life to others
And I will not disappoint them.
The meek shall inherit the Earth.

In a Fundamentalist Church:
“I built this church with my money
And my lumber, so I determine
Its frames and joints of doctrine; I will crucify
Anyone who crosses me.”

Fresh sheets, taut
As catgut, sing beneath
Cleansed holy bodies
Of true lovers.



Illinois, 1987

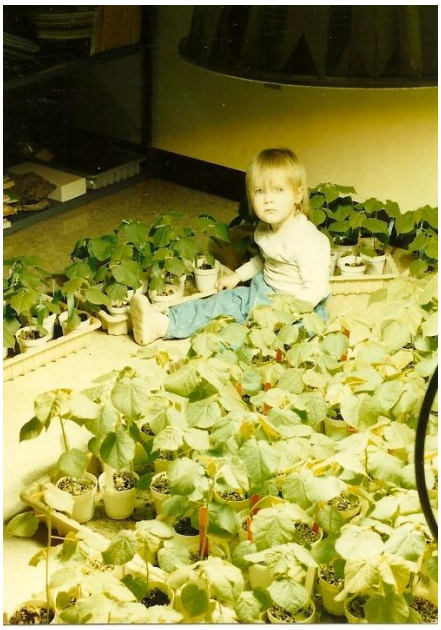
The Real World:
They block out the light of Heaven
And make trees into boardrooms;
In filtered air, they make guesses
About the values of life.

Giants in the Earth:
A fie! The foe charges a fee
To smell the blood of his quarry
And grinds the bones of the Earth
To make his dough.

Wounded Knee—January 15, 1891:
A clod of dirt thrown in the air, yellow
As blood decomposed and rinsed into bile,
Shouted the start of the final dance
Where bullets killed even the ghost of hope.

From the skein of DNA, wound
On histone spool, stretching back
Forever into unfabled forgetting
Comes the hope we cannot quench.

Everyone has a song; for some,
Its voice is clear and stirring;
Others swallow their music
Until it erupts in retrograde.



In a botanical experiment, 1988

Hominids:
They wasted their time around the fire
With stories of monsters and exploits;
Their readied minds made them

The ancestors of our species.

Fides et Ratio (John Paul II, 1998) :

1. Faith and reason are two wings, on which
   The human spirit rises to behold truth;
   But what happens when one wing
   Is mightier than the other?

2. They call my reasoning circular—
   But what else can it be
   When truth is a circle and we must find
   Someplace to begin?

Sapiens (to Darwin, February 12, 2001):[1]
The ape is not a failed human
But is, equally with ourselves, an apex
Of its own branch, even if protruding less
Into the winter wind of wisdom.

I saw my wife and daughter
Through a window, unreal,
Like some unskilled writer's fiction
Of a life too good to be true.

E.A.P.—R.I.P.[2]
"'Peccavimus,' but rave not thus—"
Except to depict depravity
In ev'ry mental cavity
Stilled by Death's red masque.

Your crystalled logic
Leaves me cold; tell me instead
A story by a campfire:
Unfocused glow of truth.

Hamlet's Poem:
Doubt thou the stars are fire (they are not);
Doubt thou the sun doth move (the Earth does);
Doubt truth to be a liar (Our minds rationalize),
But never doubt, love exists.

[1] Charles Darwin was born February 12, 1809.
[2] Edgar Allan Poe's tombstone

Qwerty:
The new cosmos of cyberspace
Flashes timelessly instant, and lives
In the old fevered bodies
Of hands and keyboards.

You slip aside your shimmering web
And stand in stunning nakedness before me,
And while I am paralyzed in awe
You can extract my life.



Kissing a giant Galapagos tortoise, 1989

Rapa Nui and the Heaven's Gate Cult:[3]
My heaven-ship came, just as I said;
An iceberg of pure whiteness.
I rode it until
It melted in a sea of terror.

Ice Storm:
The land lies heavy
In beauty; every tree
Desires to sling away
Its oppressive jewels.

[3] Based upon the Kevin Costner movie *Rapa Nui,* right about the same time as the Applewhite mass suicide.

A character in my novel, whom I love,
Prayed to me, "Save me, whom you love,
From this cruel plot." My tears
Doused, but did not alter, the words.

How can I resist the river
That brings old age, filling
My very chromosomes
With millions of years of decline?

The Neanderthal man gazed
From his cave, thinking of no more
Than his next meal, unaware that this place
Would someday be called Bethlehem

Tarzan the Baptist (Luke 1:80):
From his grey and noble past
He leapt from living stone to stone
Amidst bushes
All aflame with God.

Ancient trees, ever young;
New roots, ever reaching;
New leaves, ever tender;
Old wisdom in their heartwood.

I shatter crystals from cold clear wisdom;
They fall invisible upon the snow;
If I search for them, to make them
Into jewels, they cut my skin.

Blue Sky:

1. God's blue sky, scarred
   By contrails, tainted
   By sulfur fumes, heavy
   With dust abraded from the Earth.

2. The scientist inscribes an equation,
   Succinct, of photons and refraction
   For why the sky is blue, and thinks thereby
   He has explained it fully.

Mom (on her birthday, March 7, 2001)
Your love protected me, but
You also knew just the right time
To release me so that I could roam
The rugged and flowered hills.[4]

The desert bush waits leafless
Until winter rains awaken
New greenness; it is not fooled
By brief summer showers.

Dark mountains loom before her;
If she knew this, she would not begin
Her journey; She notices only
That they block the starlight.

With every step in this broken world,
Every rag of color,
Every shard of glory,
Unutterable beauty surrounds me.

Fragrant furrow, birthing
All mankind; wild
With weeds—
It cannot be domesticated.

To Jon Stewart:[5]
Back to you, Jon, anchor
Of a wandering world
In stitches from your surgery
On its hidden fractures.

Rice:
If only the fragrant puddles
Of my flooded creativity
Could feed the world
I would be happy.

The giant hawk
On the slender branch—
Even at rest,
As light as air.

[4] This happened about March 1967.
[5] Anchor of the Daily Show, Comedy Central, back in 2001.

Comets:

1. Her hair is a comet, she faces
   The blowing sun of truth, her mind
   On ice. A dry tear cracks
   On her brown fractured skin.[6]

2. The contrail is a false comet, above
   The pleading branches, of trees who see
   In our gluttonous economy the end
   Of their world, the sunset of hope.

Rural Water Tower:
The obelisk, in Freudian straightness
Proclaims its rape of the rolling hills,
Forcing the woodlands to disrobe
For pasture, farm, and city.

Sin and silt and salt: the tears
Of Jehovah flow in the Euphrates
As he beholds the death
Of fertile land and minds and souls.

Conquistadores in Peru:

1. We have cut off the wild arms and legs
   Of their pagan religion, and confined them
   To a Christian box, just as we have forced
   Their bodies into rectangular coffins.



Beautiful Quechua people in Ecuador, 1989.

[6] The coma of a comet always goes away from the sun, not trailing the comet.

2. Atahualpa to Pizarro:
   I crushed my neighbors, and took
   Their land and gold; I enslaved them;
   Yet I look now into your eyes
   And expect mercy and fairness.

3. Atahualpa's Lament 1532
   You crush us, to take our gold
   Just as you crushed your own Jesus
   Whose dying image your priests
   Hold aloft over our broken bodies.

Fountains in winter:

1. O Thou Fount of Life: water,
   Itself barely unfrozen, leaps
   From hoar-crusted spout into
   A cold halo in the ice.

2. Poison-blue water frizzes and shoots
   From the copper sulfate pond
   Antifreeze defying the cold air
   In gaudy mockery of the sky.

Good Luck, Spencer Abraham[7]

1. Great gushers of oil
   Proclaimed, Feast on me!
   But we became gluttons
   And desperately suck the last drops.

2. A billion billion joules of sunlight
   Crash down on the Earth; but our life
   Sucks oil from the realm of death
   To feed our desperate fires.

3. A roll of fat dangles below
   The smile of the Energy Secretary
   As he extols the virtues
   Of waste, greed, and consumption.

To define God's will would be
To lasso and nail down the wind
And force it, which has not even roundness
Into numbered squares.

[7] Energy Secretary under George W. Bush. This scene was repeated twice with Donald Trump.

God slips, unnoticed
Into the rear pew, beside
The stained glass window, dull
On this unpromising, overcast day.

If I used every opportunity
To do good works, it would be
As if every acorn grew
Into a useless thicket.

Yokuts Indian Basket:
Flimsy reeds, quaking in the wind
Are woven by small hands
Of the small brown woman, into a basket
That can hold boiling water.

An explosion of pain, buried
In a glacier of forgetting, creeps
Into its future, and emerges after decades
In an astonished remembrance.

Our lives are like the winter dawn
Above the Arctic Circle:
It never quite comes, but its smudge
Mocks us with the sun's presence.

Cold air is steaming, overlain
By colder air, the slow river plated
In hammered sunrise brass, overlooked
By the circling crow.

The upwelling spring of life and love
And wisdom, in his heart, had no place
To go, no work to do—
It became a sucking swamp.

Here I Stand (Martin Luther):
The Throne of Truth is a folding chair
Upon the very Rock of Ages, which
Is tossed on waves of magma, and crashes
To form mountains, ever new.



Street vendor cooking cuy (guinea pig) in Ecuador, 1989

Flushed into a new life:
Mexicans in the New River[8]
Frothed with sewage, slipping
Through the cloaca in the fence.

Astronomy:

1. I will never be a wandering star
   Propelled into ever widening darkness,
   But am, forever renewed, a part
   Of God's ever-birthing nebula.

2. A constellation is artificial—
   Mere lines on a sky map; each star
   Is coldly independent, homeless,
   And without a destination.

Why do poets smoke? They think
The frantic cancer cells are dancing;
And they hide, in shrouds and pall
From the sunshine glint of truth.

I wait, untilled, my rigid bowl
Spurned by the shapeless Spirit that brings
The wine of life and death
In one burnished, acid draught.

[8] Rio Nuevo flows from Mexico into California, loaded with municipal pollution from Mexicali.

Atlas:
I am a virile man; but within
My muscled ripples flows
A feminine tenderness and love
For the world upon my shoulders.

I daydream; the fragments
Of the day's memories swirl
Like shattered seaweeds, resisting
The ocean's forgetfulness.

I open the scriptures, expecting
Warm comfort from the Shepherd;
But hidden in the wool is a blade
Of truth on which I cut my finger.



Inca ruins, Ecuador, 1989

Mystery of Woman: Asymmetry
Your left eye is keen; your left breast
Sleek in the pursuit of life;
Your right eye is deep, your right breast
Full of nurture and comfort.

Jesus' Lament:
O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
How I would have embraced you
As the vine tendons the ancient tree—
But you daily hew me down.

The NRA Vision:
Patriots grab rifles from racks
On their pickup trucks, and assault weapons
From cabinets, to steal gasoline
From their neighbors' compact cars.

Wisdom of the Anti-Environmentalists:
"We will not sacrifice our children
So that whales may live—" as if
A polluted world unsafe for whales
Is the only one in which children can live.

As Will Rogers Would Have Said:[9]
"Jump in the SUV, kiddies;
Take your DVDs and PlayStations!
We'll rev the engines loud
While we drive to the poorhouse."

Idolatry:

1. "My truck is God! It has more power
   Than your little car—ah, worship
   Its gleam and noise! It will not be hurt
   When I drive it over the cliff."

2. The path to Molech's Temple—
   Where the blood of holy martyrs mixes
   With the wine of stupor, is paved
   With hologrammed credit cards.

Leprechaun Poems:

1. I am the ghost who hides
   In the trees, and scatters
   Dollar bills into the wind
   Like autumn leaves.

2. I am the voice who slips in
   To add sweet harmony
   To the melodic lines and bass structure
   Of serious labor.

[9] His quote was that America would be the first nation to go to the poorhouse in an automobile.

3. I am the little flower that glows,
   Defiant of the clouds, unnoticed
   By the boots of heavy work
   That grind me into gritty mud.

4. I am the scent that makes you
   Happy even before you notice
   My presence; even then, you cannot
   Define what scent I am.

5. I am the little raisin
   Hiding in the pungent grains
   Looking like a little turd
   But full of sweetness and nourishment.

6. I am the little campfire
   On the distant hill, to which
   You cannot journey in the night
   But whose fragrance you savor.

7. I am the little particle
   Expelled from the swirling sun
   Through the solid emptiness of space
   To penetrate your heart.

8. I am the little panpipe
   That follows the bombastic trumpet,
   Drowned by the crowd's hubbub
   But luring you to the mountains.

9. I am the little worm
   That lived and died in ocean sands
   Noticed only by God, leaving
   Not even a fossil.

10. I am the penny, rounded off
    By the accountant, who totes up
    The drachmas of significance
    And denarii of accomplishment.

11. I am the inconvenient hope
    That invades the certainty
    Of your failure, which
    You have already accepted.

12. I am the tatter of red cloth
    Mocking the dead brownness
    Of mulch, a joke against
    The matted pelts of decay.



Learning about puffballs 1989

To Tchaikovsy:
You lived in such pain;
In depression you wrote the Pathetique
For yourself; If you could only know
How happy your music makes me.

Credit card receipts float
Like dead lives into a puddle
Building an ever deeper mass
Of unforgetting decay

Opus 500:
The prophet's zeal ignites
The very air around him,
Sucking the snoring breath
From the world's dead coals.

Brother fire, you inhale,
You eat, you reproduce,
Then you die. But were you
Ever alive?

The major scale has only one color: gold
Of happy sunlight; the minor scale
Shifts its hues, like clouds revealing
Glimpses of moist spring sadness.

The air is filled with fragrance
Of broken stems and tattered flowers
Crumpled and torn
By the fresh rain.

The tragedy of fire
Opens the windows of sunlight
And gives a kiss of potash
To the little seedling.

Communion:

1. The little girl, aware only of life and joy,
   Watches her mother sip the communion cup.
   Someday the girl will understand
   The world of blood and sin and death.

2. The bread races ahead
   Of the little cups of juice, as the body
   In its exercise of work, races ahead
   Of the reflective spirit.

A Friend Thinks She Is Not Religious
You say you do not know God
And do not follow His law;
But you dare to love and be hurt for it—
Which is exactly what He did.

Walking in the Urban Night:

1. The sodium street lamp emits false color,
   Turning the redbuds mauve—
   But it cannot pervert
   The cherry blossoms' scent.

2. I am alienated from the humans
   In the night houses, but I
   Rejoice in friendship when I hear
   The squeak of the bat.

3. The holy moon is haloed
   But it is a liar: Its false light
   Makes us believe that the world
   Is gentle in soft pastels.

Country Scenes:

1. Amish:
   "Warning: Horse-Drawn Vehicles"—
   An offense to modern power
   An insult to the information age
   A warning of our hectic doom

2. Funny face barn: squinting eyes
   And wacky-toothed grin, belching
   Methane and guffaws
   At our ridiculous modern life.

Cross Suspended over the Altars:
Two shadows: One from the harsh glare
Of reality outside the window; bent
Into a corner; the other, weaker, shivers
From the glow of a weak soul's candle.

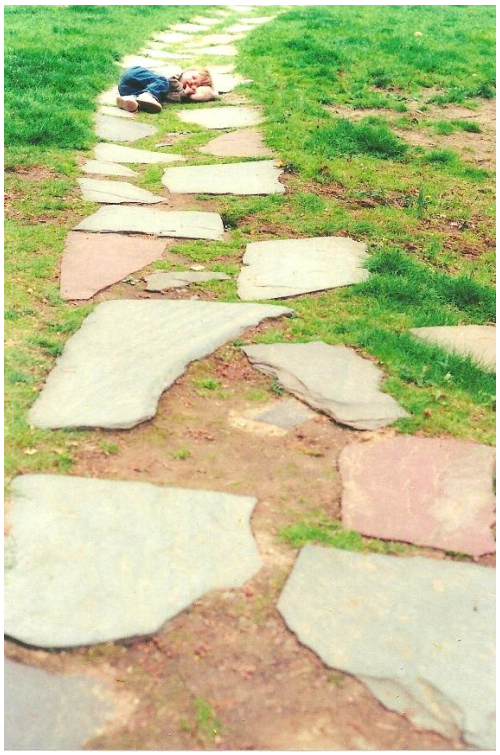
Easter 2001:
At the Last supper, the disciples
Confident that it was the first supper
Of triumph, grabbed whole pieces of bread
While Jesus selected the crumbs.

No matter how much the prophet bathed,
Sudsing deeply into every pore,
He could not cleanse away the scent of smoke
From cities whose burning he foretold.

With open eyes I behold the red
Of a world of blood and fire;
I close my eyes and see the greenness
Of a world I can only imagine.

Death, why do you seek me, I
Who would make
Only a tiny morsel
In your prodigious appetite?

A new star appears in the sky—
Ancient peasants cowered
In dark ignorance; enlightened,
Modern man does not even notice.



Asleep on the sidewalk 1989

God lives in the places
We call "nothing," shifting
Between dimples and wrinkles
Of what we call "existence."

"Do you take credit cards?" he asked
At the Amish market
Where they laughed and said, "Your card
Has been declined by Mother Earth."[10]

[10] Actually, they do take credit cards.

The Earth throws up its species
And its men, like dreams,
Unvisitably strange,
Then forgets them.

The little ant stumbled upon God's throne,
Upon my cabin table; she ran amok
Trying to comprehend God's will;
I cast her from Heaven.

A spirit slips through the forest,
Not touching the pine boughs
Stirring only
The birches.

Forest Fire:
Someday, but not now, the ashes
Of their pain and loss, caked underfoot,
Will feed the roots of new growth.
Meanwhile, allow them to grieve.

The swallow rests, if but a second,
From its frantic pursuit of life,
On the branch of an old pine
It does not know is dead.

Wind socks sticking straight out,
Turgid with the weather's power—
The green spring grass bows down
Before the rapacious gale.

The massacre of the weeds,
Mown down along the roadside:
Even in the throes of death, the clover
Emits clouds of sweetness.

The angled evening light
Brings into sharp and shadowed relief
The scars of land and life
Incompletely healed.

Power Lines:
Three crosses on a hill, bound
And connected with electric cable,
Dying with life, sizzling with power, on which
Our economy is crucified.

Like mounds of dirt under a rug
Or sand under thin grass
Are old hopes and memories
Under the habits of life.

Tipped windmill blades
Chase and repulse one another,
Yet they are found together,
Helpless in the breeze.

Geographic Center: Lebanon, Kansas
A pile of rocks in Kansas
Is the hard stone heart on which
Is balanced, half Democrat, half Republican,
These flat, commercial United States.

One day the sun swelled and exploded,
Frying and vaporizing all life;
And for just a moment, everybody
Knew everything, and nothing.

Sweetness and Power:
Once the tribesmen had tasted
White man's sugar, they submitted to it,
Never to return to the freeness
Of palm starch and grubs.

Poems of Ecology and Farms

1. When the crystal dome collapses, raining
   Glass upon our packaged foods,
   Will anyone remember how to find
   The prairie turnip and wild onion?

2. My grandfather, a farmer,
   Had a hundred jobs each day,
   Not needing to buy anything, but only receive
   Sunshine, soil, and rain.

3. (To Wes Jackson, True Patriot)[11]
   You build an altar of unhewn stone
   No straight theological lines
   No calculations of profit, but only
   A celebration of entangled life.

[11] Founder of The Land Institute, developer of alternative agriculture, author of Altars of Unhewn Stone.

4. Soil is not dirt; to ancient sandstone and clay
   First leaves fell from the first land plants
   And fed the first brave worms and molds:
   They formed the fragrant Earth.

July 4, 2001:
Did George suffer at Valley Forge
To win for you the freedom
To chop and flay the fertile land
And lie in polluted sloth?

The priests of One Omnipresent God
Of love and joy scowled and killed
Belief in an Omnipresent Pan
Who danced in every kill and leaf and glen.

God is at home in the earth,
No mere visitor; God is not
Celestially clean, but digs playfully
Into the ever-reborn soil.

A ring of dust in outer space,
A nought, encloses nothing,
And draws a circle of attention
To the purpose of the universe.

Wilderness:
I cannot sing praises
To the beauty of the mountains
For the wind rips the breath
From my panting throat.

I cannot hold your hand
On the pathway of life
Because its straitness admits
The passage of one soul at a time.

A fundamentalist and I, one night,
Shared a telescope. Where I saw
Millions of epochs, he saw
Only illusions of time.

Mountain Time Zone: a wedge of calm
Slipped into the nation's heart,
Forgotten; slowing the frantic transmissions
Between the east and west.

Grand Junction:[12]
In new travels I intersect
Old roads I once took, seeing them
With new eyes, weaving a fabric
Of new understanding.

Nebraska Traveler:

1. Groovy rows of corn
   Rocking in the wind
   Green as acid dreams
   Lulling me to sleep.

2. Rows of corn, like hair implants
   Incompletely hiding scabs and scars
   On the gouged, flaking scalp
   Of the prairie earth.

3. A tiara of jewels in the sun:
   Sprinklers over the corn,
   A kingdom of prosperity
   From the enslaved soil.

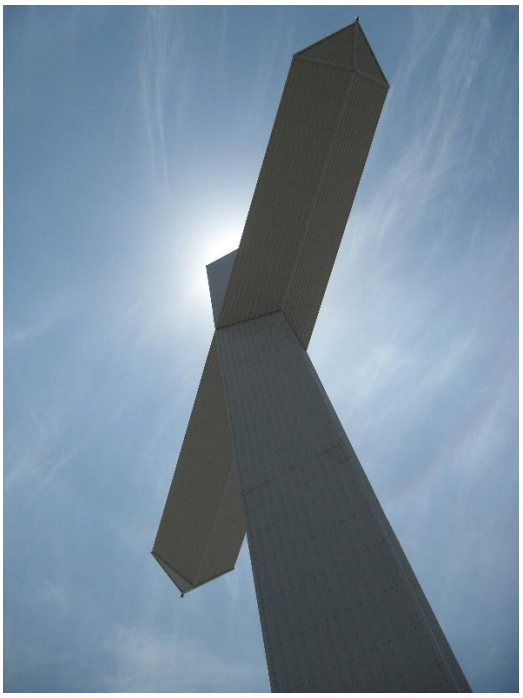
I returned to the house and yard
That was my toddler world.
It had shriveled and wrinkled
Like a leering shrunken head.

The powerful sun bleaches bones,
Ignites cancer, and sucks the water
From the salted plain, but only
Makes the tree a richer green.

The world is green with growth
Because it is fertilized
By the blood of suffering
And by the rotting of hopes.

[12] I drove south through Grand Junction, Colorado, in 2001; I drove west through it in 1981.

The Hercules of technology
Lifts humanity, like Antaeus,
Severing its connectedness to Earth
And strangling it.



Giant cross, Groom, Texas, 2012

Groom, Texas
They built the hemisphere's largest cross
In the Texas panhandle
Where God's own breath
Could blow it over.

Too Many Books:
My books pile on plastic shelves
Distorted by the weight
Into warped grins, smiling
At secrets I will never know.

Written when I traced my travels on a map:
My travels have embraced
This vast and tilted land
Like a network of veins
Draining many memories.

You are like a Russian doll
Layered like an onion
In ever deeper strata
Of scented mystery.

Mars rose in the sky
And glowered through my window,
Offended that in my home
War is not welcome.[13]

Biotech Arrogance:
"Once I have encoded the genes
Of all the million species
Onto discs, you can go ahead
And drive them all to extinction."

The tomatoes taste like blood
Because they grew in soil
Stained by tribal deaths
And acidified by their tears.

His derrick spouted oil,
Oklahoma crude, a lubricant
But soon a glue, against
The night-white window.

The Rattlesnake:
He tastes your fear
With his tongue
And matches it
With his own.

For 6 August 2001:
Two slices of the sun
Fell on Japan and lit
A world of new conscience
And an age of newer fears.

Sophia:[14]
The spirit of wisdom
Is as palpable and sensate
As the present flesh
Of an intimate lover.

[13] I wrote nine poems on 20 June 2001.
[14] This was the year I wrote the first draft of Blue Wild Indigo.

To the Guangdong Musicians:[15]

1. To Han Xu:
   If I could only be the violin
   From whom your strong soft fingers
   Evoke sweetest music, or the cloth
   That lies upon your shoulders.

2. To Su Suzheng:
   "I come from Guangdong
   With my ruan on my knee
   Caressing it so that its soul
   Dances to my knowing smile."

3. To Lei Yeying:
   You close your eyes and make
   The gao hu cry: It shrieks in joy
   Then breaks into a wildness of birds
   That vanish into thought.

4. To Wang Wenli:
   You know the landscape of every note
   And with greatest precision
   Your mallets release a flood of beauty
   From their golden hills.

The old woman said, "My memory
Is short for offenses, and long
For favors." Could she possibly be
More loving than God?

The Amish:
When we face them, they are
A visible reproach to our wasteful lives;
Then they turn sideways
And become invisible.

Sometimes it takes only
The song of a bird
To make me believe that I
Am the happiest man alive.

[15] They performed at Southeastern Oklahoma State University in July, 2001.

A burglar breaks in and steals
A TV and a flimsy VCR, and leaves
Ages of golden wisdom piled up
On my bookshelves and desk.

O'Hara played his tin-whistle, Ohara-san
Harmonized with his shakuhachi.
They played songs of love and death
From their green sad islands.

The sweat that built pyramids
And the tears of injustice
Are forgotten, but live forever
In the briny sea.

Little snatches of rainbow
Ever on the horizon
Entice me to travel further
But never satisfy me.

Lost Love:

1. The blooming apple tree
   Pours burning fragrance
   Into the spring air
   Beside her dark window.

2. My fresh wounds bleed
   Where she severed me
   From herself, as bloodless to her
   As trimming a fingernail.

Electricity, primal force,
Wanton in its Jovian power
Blindly and instantly obeys
When I flip a switch.

A living caduceus, two snakes
Test one another's character
While mating, twisting about
An invisible axis of love

Look at me when I talk to you!
I spill forth red secrets,
Green loves, blue vacancies
And black rage from my heart.

Circling over blood red mesas
Once shallow seas, teeming with life,
The vulture seeks meat
That was once alive.

Within the thick sweetness
Of the marmalade, orange rinds
Hint at a forgotten world
Of bitterness and thorns.

Queen of Hearts,
Two heads, no tail,
Stares vacantly
From a bottomless past.

A Scene from the Civil War:
A cannonball of logic
Blew his head off;
But his body kept walking
In a trance of faith.

The blazing autumn sunflowers
In the cloudy calm
Between storms, do not know
Which way to turn.

Cancer and the Summer Jogger:
Many splotches are on his back—
One of them will grow and kill him.
How can he know which, and when?
And should he cower in the dark?

You survived the summer drought
And tasted the rains of autumn
Only to be blighted by mold
From the spores in the dust.

Dow Jones:
In the internet age
The sun never sets
On a day of failure
Or loss or woe.



Fireweed, Bear Butte, South Dakota, 2003

After the forest fire, fireweed
Dances in cool pink brilliance
Then tenderly dies, as ephemeral
As the flames and sparks.

Looking to the Future:
What appears to be, high in the sky
A towering, majestic mountain
Is a thundercloud. Beneath it
Rages chaos and death.

On this overcast day
Of uniform gray
God's truth shines
From every direction.

My wolfman face, thick bearded
Right up to my eyes, make me
Look grim and gruff; but this beard
Hides my tears of compassion.

In the fog I can barely discern
Shapes of trees and worlds;
It is pure grace that I can ever see
More of the universe than this.

Botany:

1. The persimmon tree, when at liberty
   Sprouts into a host of little saplings;
   But in a yard, where its sprouts are mowed,
   It becomes a stately tree.

2. Does every plant wish
   It was an animal?
   That it could run or fly? The tree
   Smiles at our delusion.

3. The plant does not pursue life
   But creates it from sun and air,
   Sweet water and minerals,
   Ever spreading in growth.

4. The old tree has no heart;
   Its rotten core is not part of it;
   It life is all on its surfaces, not hid—
   Of leaves and roots and bark.

A Preacher Sermonizes about Creationism:
He crams scientific fact and Bible text
Into his little box; Procrustes
Chopping and hammering out
The body of truth.

Engineers and economists
Enslave the natural world
Not to humankind
But to industry.

Earth People:[16]

1. To Kathy (Whose Last Name I Have Forgotten)
   You Live on Justice Road
   But the real road of justice
   Is what your quiet feet walk
   With a passion for God's truth.

[16] Inspired by the 2001 Prairie Festival.

2. They have warts and moles, wrinkles
   And strange faces, thick glasses
   And hairy legs—but these people
   Are the only hope for this world.

3. Ecological Homesteader:
   Redolent with bacteria, calm
   In the slow wisdom of nature
   He does not shake away the fly
   That wanders on his bare foot.

Thoughts about War:[17]

1. Like a virus, salted
   On their pickled souls,
   The berserker spirit inflamed
   The minds of hopeless warriors.

2. One nation under God—
   But what we want
   Is for God to approve
   What we have already planned to do.

3. Stand beside her and guide her—
   Watch out: When God guides
   He may lead us, who are blind,
   In an unexpected direction.

[17] American response to the September 11, 2001 attacks.

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.