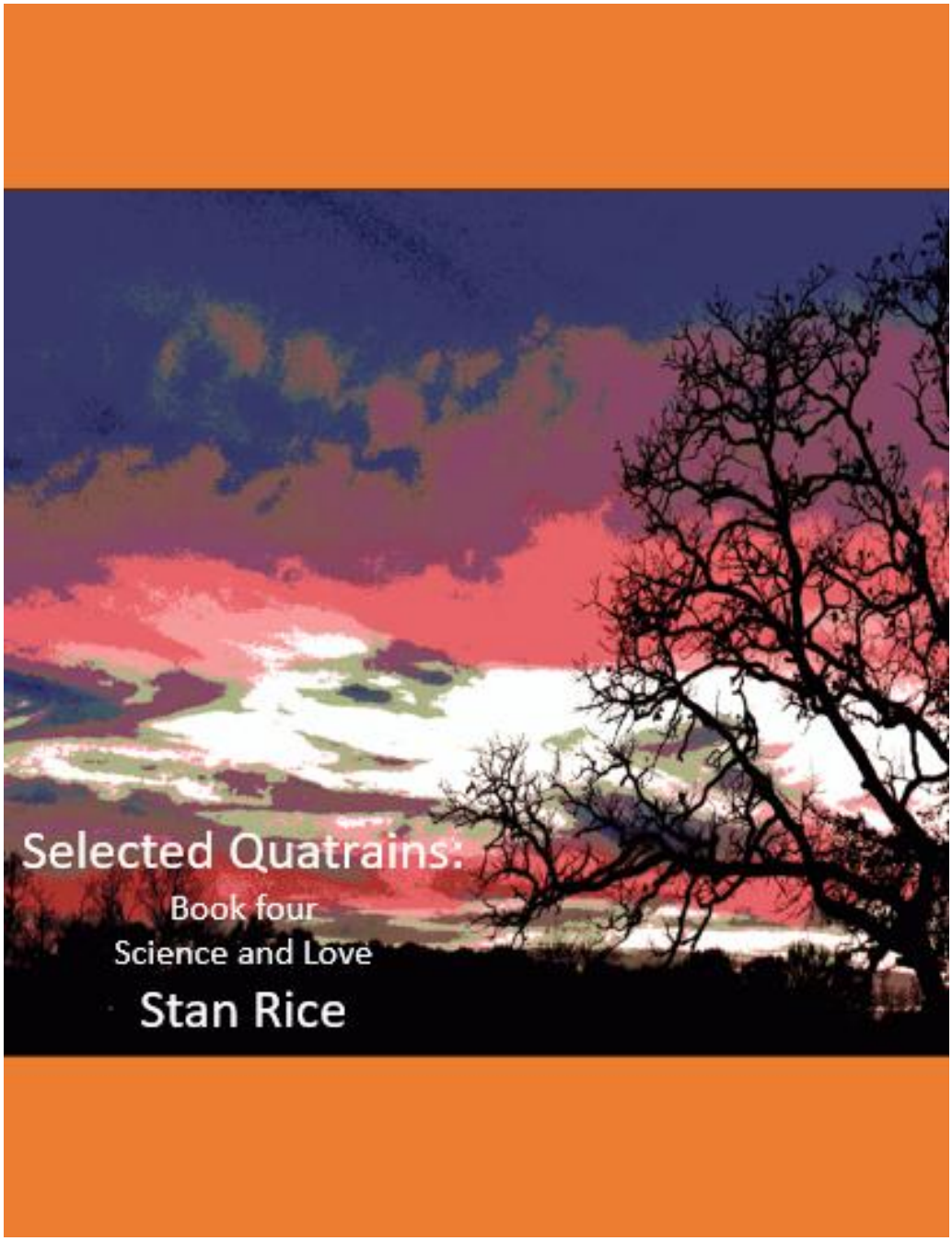

Selected Quatrains:
Book four
Science and Love
Stan Rice

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Book four: Science and Love
Stan Rice
July 2003 to April 2004

Quatrains on Science and Love

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.

He kept out the scouring wind
The cleansing rain, the scorching light
From his dusty cave
Of dormant, waiting spores.

The field of chicory, early morning,
Bluer than the sky; the blooms
Close at midday—A memory
Of a vanished heaven.

The sun of spring
Glows again
In the autumn leaf litter, wherein
The earthworm basks.

Shadows of pine branches
Form a neural net upon me;
Swaying, changing—God's mind
Projected uncertainly on mine.

Strong sunlight, simmering
My animal juices, bleaching
The bones of death, proclaiming
The purity of heaven.

What we have lost: stubs
Drying in the blasted wind
Where we have severed our own
Connections to the greening land.

Tears of beauty, for the green
That blankets human tragedy
And hides the bones of senseless death:
The clouds congregate and mourn.

A Scientist on Vacation:
Brain fabric woven by discipline
Of science and pedagogy, is worn out
By the same logic that formed it,
And is renewed—by poetry.

We look into the vastness of the heavens
And the smallness of our lives: but
In our small bodies is more love
Than have all these black distances.

Blue space, gray clouds
Each claim true democracy
Is separated by the white edge
Of a tattered storm.

Each poem alike (four lines)
Yet they arrange themselves
Like iron filings, into magnetic images
Of the poet and his formless God.

Bird territories:
The flicker accomplishes with one note
The work for which the mockingbird
Employs whole symphonies, unheard
Except by silent, vanquished foes.

Dominion:
With heat and stench we carve out
An ever widening sore in the world
Which we rule because
No free beast would dare enter there.

Give us this day our daily bread
Trucked or flown from distant states
Punched then flamed by machines
From grain whipped from battered soil.

Vulture Poems:

1. The vulture soars, far higher
   Than from which place
   He could even see his food—even he
   Yearns to seek God's face.

2. The vulture soars, along
   The edge of storm, looking
   For corpses of souls frightened
   To death by flashes of reality.

Pneuma:
You cannot tell the wind, or spirit,
Where to go or when—invisible
It comes, surprises, then is gone
Answerable to no equation.

Had my life been a straight path
From school to success
What wisdom would I have? I'd be
A book, two covers, without pages.

Our Christmas tree, a Norfolk pine
A living fossil: from Paleozoic time
God foreknew His Incarnation.
Our tree, uncut, is alive.[1]

The preacher screamed on the radio band
Adjacent to and drowning out public radio;
Not hearing his words, I knew his message:
"I hate you unless you agree with me."

There must be a devil
For why else
Would it be so difficult
To say, "I love you"?

Nature is not beautiful; it is
Photons and atoms, trajectories
Of motes and mites. The human mind
Assembles it into beauty.

Writing fiction:
I want my book to be
A Beethoven—the theme
Never lost, always in dialogue,
Each word in its best place.

He patched every insight
Into a quilt he called wisdom—
It kept him warm, but only
If he stayed at home.

Ecclesiastes:
A time to cast away stones, a time
To gather stones together: the world
Cannot turn forever with both—at last
The gathering must prevail.

[1] This was one of 29 poems I wrote at one sitting on 3 July 2003.

The intersection of chance and necessity
At right angles, the burden
Of human sin—the cross
That Jesus shouldered.

Cold stones and cold steel
Of warrior and castle—and still today
Our claymores of technology
Cut the Earth into vanquished squares.

Love is a thick fog that hides
Deep faults and dangerous caltrops
In a muffle of softness, and leads
The lover to a happy death.

Storm:
A great green monster of cloud
Drags, bleeding red, over the land,
Its static ions flashing blue.
It recedes into the threatening distance.

Job saw God in the whirlwind
Precipitated from invisible air
Surprising him with suddenness
And shaking his frame of reason.

Pain:

1. *During intense pain*
   Every pleasure is nauseating,
   All sublime music annoying
   And every purpose trivial.

2. *When pain ceases,*
   Every ordinary object glows
   With intense color; and comfort
   Breathes like Paradise.

3. When pain released me
   I walked lightly on the carpet
   As if it was the meadow of heaven
   Beneath an eternal tree.

The bee brings sweetness and light—
Pleasure distilled from a thousand flowers
And wax for candles that defy the night—
And defends them with venom.

The greatest pleasure—admitted
Neither by Apollo's science
Nor by Dionysius' ecstasy—
Is a life well lived.

The wildness of field and forest
Bristling with unnamed fears
Has been shorn by civilization, replaced
By the oppression of uniformity.

The scientist, hard-headed realist,
Looks up at a land-locked mountain,
Scored with strata, and sees
Millions of years of ocean.

Violent intelligence turns on itself
In clever war and terror, until at last
The unintelligent Earth purges itself
Of this brief human fever.

My enemies will crash and burn;
And even if no other good
Comes from their attacks, their corpses
Will fertilize the soil of my growth.

Psalm 23:
Oh, my eyes! What else have I
To show me the way through the valley
Of shadows, or the green pastures—
Thy rods and thy cones, they comfort me.

Australopithecines:
We do not believe, despite our claims,
In a diversity of ways to truth—we
Who are the unique survivors
Of a complex of human species.

We distort the face of God, we scar
The skin of creation, we pull
The corset cords that strangle justice
And crush the viscera of life.

America is fat, stressed with strife
And complex problems; we all know
This will not change until a giant flu
Seizes us and cleans out our bowels.

The open discussion of truth
The fair enforcement of simple laws
Decisions based on facts
Are now threats to national security.

Independence Day, USA:
The man who criticizes the government
Who proves himself not a comrade
Just might be a terrorist
And must be pre-emptively stifled.

The flowers of spring, fruits of summer,
Autumn leaves: blazing colors
And scents too bold for us
To dare taste, or use in our décor.

Like a cat in a shoebox, I curl
Contented, peaceful, protected
From the complexity of the world
By four right angles.

For Anita (14 August 2003):
The unexpected child, the one
From contraception that failed
Has already flowered in wisdom
And blessed her world.

The cricket saws his violin
During the rain—uselessly
But in mindless optimism,
For no mate will seek him now.

Raindrops on leaves, jewels
Repelled by the waxy surfaces,
Useful only as decorations
And refractions of the world.



Bridalveil Falls, Black Hills, 1995

Evolution Poems:

1. Life was born in stench; the air
   Hung heavy with the haze
   Of organic compounds,
   With no refreshing oxygen.

2. The first life forms: bacterial dots
   And squiggles, tiny bags of chemicals,
   Featureless points of reaction. These dots
   Still dominate life on Earth.

3. When life broke the crust of complexity
   And worms swam and flapped in oceans,
   Immediately, one ate another; soon
   Fishes hid behind armored plates.

4. When life strode onto land
   It brought a pool of horror with it—
   Dinosaurs bashed their heads together
   And sliced one another with talons.

5. The human brain—oh, marvel!
   The chance, at last, to comprehend
   The mysteries of God and cosmos—but
   We used our brains for war.

6. We have the worms, the spider,
   And stomp on them; we praise
   The magnificent steed; and yet we destroy
   The steed's grassland home.

7. O sing, sweet science, the praise
   Of progress from the slime—
   The peaceful slime, upward into
   Frantic complexities of violence.

8. When at last the reddened sun
   Exhales its fevered neutrons of death
   It sighs relief that, at last,
   Human hatred has died.

9. No upward force propelled
   An inevitable human mind
   On evolution's bush; we exist
   From God's pure grace, a gift.

10. February 12, 2004:
    Why do they hate Darwin—the sitters
    On wooden pews, the amateur scientists,
    Every year fresh attacks on the quiet man who
    Insisted on the earthly humility of our species?

11. Billions of years, trillions of deaths—
    But the emergence of the human mind
    Makes it all worthwhile? So says
    The murderer, the oppressor, the destroyer.

12. The conservative reviles Darwin
    And yet his whole view of life
    Is that the rich deserve their wealth:
    Survival of the fittest.

Flow of Blood (Luke 8):
Jesus did not say, "My power
Has made you well," but rather
"Your faith." His power is constant—
Our faith is the variable, the cause.

The Spirit of God breathes
From the pores of the soil
And from singing strands of fungus
On the pungent dew of morning.

To behold the world is to see
Not only its sunny joy, but also
Its regrowth from thrashing storms
And its hidden complexities of death.

Flag on a Cloudy Day:
The gray sky washes red blood
Into a brown soil; hides blue sky;
And muddies white purity, feeding
The green growth of the real world.

Flood on Interstate 35:
Our highways of arrogance
Built above the creeks and plans
Of nature's risks, are still flooded
By storming torrents of creation.

The gossamer beauty of spiderlings
Ride on web parachutes
Past the lamp, through the window—
Infesting the house with venom.

God rinses us, rain upon rain,
From the dust of our busyness
And dead pollen of our failures—
But the oil of sin remains.

My Daughter and Joseph Conrad:
She finished reading Heart of Darkness
Then summarized it into one flippant sentence
And flung it like a leaf on roiling waters,
Then began to play her guitar.

God is unseen, but so also
Is the heart that beats
Within my breast: I know only
What it does: Throbbing, it creates life.

The sharp pen creates
A false sense of precision;
It is the blunt pencil that shades
The vaguenesses of reality.

Learning the Guitar:
From three chords, as from four DNA bases,
The music of life forms
More melodies than we can imagine,
A few of them beautiful.

Passed on the Highway:

1. The car with the Christian fish
   Races down the highway as if
   The driver thinks that he, not He
   Controls the laws of physics.

2. The driver of that car
   Is a follower of Jesus
   And a tailgater of me, hostile
   That I am in her hurried path.

When the oppressed poor,
And oppressed Earth, rise up
Against Republican domination
Not just Republicans will suffer.

Gross Fantasy:
There is so much of you to love—
Always a new chasm of flesh
To bury softly into, and from which
To bouncingly emerge, and gasp.

Angels have black hair.
Their dark skin absorbs
The sunshine of Heaven
And glows invisibly.

A peaceful afternoon
In the safe suburb:
Every few minutes, the scream
Of an ambulance siren.

Biophilia:

1. The love of the green world
   Led the first intelligent creatures
   To successful observation,
   Adaptation, and survival.

2. Those who shun the green world—
   The frantic multitude, will die;
   The renascence of the human species
   Will come from those who love it.

The brutal light of the sun
Shines on the pages of truth,
But tree leaves interpose themselves and cast
Dreamlike shadows on the words.

I looked into what I thought
Was the shadowed wisdom of your eyes—
Now I know that what I saw
Was simply darkness.

In the vast blue sky of happiness
One angry little cloud
Blocks the sun; All I can think of,
All day, is that cloud.

Painting in a Museum:
Like a rubber band, like spaghetti, like one
Of those strange El Greco beings,
I am stretched between the glory of God
And the black hole of death.[2]

Yin and yang equally share the circle
But not with the straight whack
Of the righteous sword; each half
Is erotic: slithering nucleus and tail.

The short days and moisture of autumn
Deceived the pear tree—it bloomed,
Shedding its delicate petals
Like rain into the cold wind.

[2] Once something, being drawn into a black hole, passes the event horizon, it gets “spaghettified.”

Blind sperm, almost all destined
To die on the acrid battlefield
Of female membranes; each carries
A packet of hope: A load of chromosomes.

The Fate of the Earth:
Bacteria, lymph of Earth,
Attack the human disease,
Melting its arrogance
Into a stew of forgottenness.

A broth of sweat and tears
Contains the spices of hope
Barely discernible, and only by
The tongue that speaks peace.

So what if the desire for God
Is only the sublimation of sex?
Into this fevered dark animal brain
Shines clear cold light.

The vast ocean of God
Is unknown to me, but at least
I gather shells on the shore—dead,
But hinting at unknown life.

Some say Darwin's brow
Harks back to the simian ridge;
But is it not more likely to be
The expansion of a big brain?

Morality feels good, and all
Is well with the world; so claims
Evolutionary philosophy.
Tell this to Osama bin Laden.

Hartshornian Thoughts:[3]

1. God cannot look at a sunset
   And be amazed, or read a novel
   And be surprised by its end
   Or fear a germ of death.

[3] I think this refers to a physicist, Charles Hartshorne, but I do not remember what I read that inspired this.

2. “I have the answer!” said the physicist;
   “I have the answer!” said the preacher.
   When their two arrogances met
   They exploded into nothingness.

3. The scientist came to Heaven’s gate
   With a bouquet of theorems;
   But during his translation from light to light
   The bouquet had withered.

4. He defined pi to a million digits
   But in the real universe
   Where atoms shiver and rove
   True circles do not exist.

5. I cannot comprehend the full face
   Of the spewing spotted sun;
   Let me contemplate merely
   One shaft of light through the leaves.

6. Bold Science:
   We have done what God
   Said that only God could do
   And yet from the heavens comes
   No punishing voltage.

NYSE:
Monads on the Trading Floor
Coalesce into a random chain—
“Behold! A snake! An omen,” they say
As the snake devours itself.[4]

Dickens:
Xenon, inert gas, puffs up
His stentor lungs and haughty brow
And pours out, stifling us
With waves of empty erudition.

The cat jumps up
Almost weightless, on the bookshelf
As full of life as the books
Are crammed with dead knowledge.

[4] The ouroboros—the snake eating itself—is a common mystical theme.

Materialist:
To him, love
Was a calculated investment,
Though a risky one—
And God blessed him.



1995

Admiration for an Imagined Woman:

1. How could any equation
   Of dancing particle and elegant curve
   Explain the devastating beauty
   In your eyes and soul?

2. Your breasts are two galaxies
   Rotund swirls of time
   Rich with nurturing love
   And nebular softness.

In Utopia, the genius
Filled the empty expanse of peace
With the creativity of conflict
And the excitement of war.

On a Beautiful, Cloudless Day

1. On a beautiful, cloudless day
   The shadows of hatred
   Created clouds of smoke
   And splatters of blood.

2. On a beautiful, cloudless day
   Photons from the sun
   Rammed into chromosomes
   And wakened demons of cancer.

No breakthrough of theoretical physics
Will alter the trajectory
Of Newton's falling apple
Or its taste upon my tongue.

Quantum physics, invisible quarks
And the dark hearts of galaxies
Make utterly no difference
To planes, trains, and automobiles.

By the time we understand
Even one small morsel
Of this crumbled world
It has changed.

Toxic Religion:
The concupiscence of religion
Warps the mind and consumes
All zeal, as surely
As pornography addicts the mind.

In the thin air of imagination
Strong winds have little power
But pressure bulges up inside of me
And my mind dangerously expands.

The skin of the water
Did not break as He walked on it
Filled with joking lightness
And gulping the air of Heaven.

Uncle Sam, fat and gross,
Tries to slap the terrorist
Like a mosquito on his back
But cannot reach him.

Human Ecology:
First he tore off Gaia's clothes,
The trees and flowers; and then
He drilled wells into her, to satisfy
His urges for comfort and power.

Do the rocks remember
Echoes of birdsong, the crumble
Of mistaken steps on cliffs? No more
Shall the Earth remember us.

The sharp-eyed Christian sees
The little mouse, free in its field,
And swoops upon it like an angel
Crushing its quivering life.

I gulp the nectar of morning
But am never drunk: my mind
Is sharp, my feet nimble
With the joy of living.

Jesus slips in and out of the world
First a kid on a bike
Then an old man on a bench, then
The driver who passed you on the road.

The Church of the Blessed Lamb
Shot a volley across the road
At the Church of the Holy Lamb. The shot
Fell on a traveler and killed him.

Your eyes clear-cut
The forests of love, leaving
Shavings, snapped branches,
And a regrowth of thorns.

A gray mist arises, shrouding
This weary Earth; the souls
Of those who lived without focus
And died without purpose.

David needed only one
Of his five smooth stones
To penetrate the brow of power
And humble the Goliath of oppression.

Vultures, why flee?
There will be plenty for you
In this land of strife
And the bloat of dead wealth.

His faith is an eggshell
Strong for its thinness, but fragile,
Constraining into roundness
A wild spreading spirit.

He did not worry about
The contagion of sin
From his worldly neighbors—
He had his own secret germs.

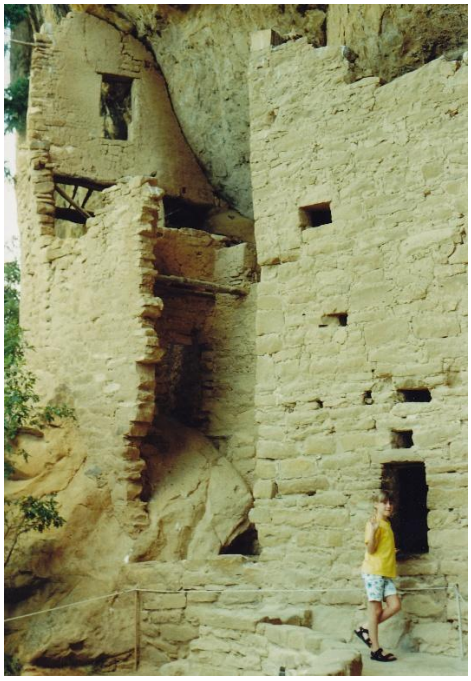
Columbus Day, 2003:
Admiral of the Ocean Serum,
The bacterium, tragically, knew
Only one thing in its New World—
To grow and to destroy.

Biotech:

1. If scientists create artificial blood
   A hundred times better
   Than our own, would we not
   Shed it, just as we do now?

2. We transplant hearts
   And implant pumps, to prolong
   A few more idle hours
   Of meaningless life.

To the starfish, the rocky shore
Is a cosmos, not a journey;
A life, not a project;
And all directions are forward.



Mesa Verde, Colorado, 1995

If I lived for a million years
And walked a million paths
My entire skin would be
A history written in scars.

Truth is beautiful and deadly.
A sleek and nimble deer
Big-eyed, quiet, leaping havenward
Then through my windshield.

Here is the defining glory of man:
Only she can play, waste time,
Create absurd excesses of beauty
And know her own mortality.

My ideal form of mind and soul
Is woman; man is only a tool
Specialized, used by the species
For war and insemination.

Wisdom lies deep and rich
Crisp and sweet, like potatoes
A stored resource for future growth
And found only by those who dig.

The insects of truth skipped around
On the surface tension
Of my placid pool, until one day
God's breath broke it into waves.

The plant, expiring
In the deep shade
Needs only one beam of brightness
To awaken and revive.

Job:
Life is a mystery
To be experienced, not
A problem to be solved
Or a work to be defended.

You have opened the storehouses
Of life-giving moisture
But it comes in the form of snow
Whipped by a deadly wind.

Israel in Goshen:
God prospers everything we do—
Everything we touch turns to gold—
Thereby we become a threat
To the rulers of the world.

Moses' mother put him in a blanket,
Set him adrift, and went home;
Moses' sister stood at a distance
And watched.

The Truth Will Set You Free:

1. The truth will set you free,
   But freedom is terror
   When you must let go
   Of the moorings of comfortable habit.

2. The truth will set you free—
   The searing pain of its fire
   Cuts through the very tissue
   In whose firmness you trusted.

A tree is a crowd of branches
Each weaving its own way
Towards Heaven and Truth—
Some branches are living, some are dead.

But It Is Not True of the Plants:
The Eternal has so constituted the world
That life must feed on life.
All that lives must kill. With this fact
I will never be at peace.

I passed the communion tray
To the descendant of men
Whom my ancestors enslaved
And whose blood they shed.

A tree accomplishes
What we cannot:
It unites Heaven and Earth
And creates a space of life between them.

Ornithology:
The great tit hovered
Before my eyes, suspended
Above the fragrant thicket
Then brushed against me.

Our souls are reflected
In plants: They reveal us
As cultivators, as nurturers,
Or as destroyers.

True Patriotism (11 November 2003):
The environment is a word
For the medium through which
I convey love to my neighbor
Or contempt for humankind.

The judge sat beneath
Ancient boughs of oak
To mete out justice, based
On eternal truths.

The man who steps on an insect
Is one who would gladly kill
His fellowman, but does not,
Only because laws prevent him.

The cat machine
Purrs the subroutine
That elicits generosity
From the human machine.

Wisdom is a sweet fruit,
A rich meat, a landscape
Of beauty and vastness
In which I daily rejoice.

Strong wind from the west—
From cold mountains and deserts,
From imminent sunsets.
From realms of darkness and death.

I did nothing to deserve
This beautiful autumn world
Nor did I anything to deserve
The winter sleep of death.

His conquests, red blood
On shining gold, soon changed
To a crusty brown of disappointment
And a stench of shame.

Thanksgiving 2003:

1. God has filled the Earth
   With food; I graze through field,
   Browse in forest, then lay down,
   Eating wormlike through fragrant soil.

2. For the harmony of scents
   In the rejoicing foods,
   And for delicious music
   I weep in joy.

Movement:
The horn toots a fanfare
And from the dark tunnel
Emerges a cargo train
Which slips into the sea.

Scientists:
Like Helen Keller, we are blind
And deaf, in a universe of realities
A model of which we must build
In our minds and, like her, rejoice.

After Thanksgiving:

1. Every delightful food,
   Of every flavor, from every land,
   Is within easy reach; but
   Our famine is of wisdom.

2. Our billowing mountains of flesh
   Every cell dripping with fat
   Scream out for more—
   Gluttony feeds on itself.

We are afraid of love:
Its intensity terrifies us.
Its light repels us
From the glare of truth.

Clear sky; strong wind like blue blood
Scours away life and leaf, a clean slate
From which all memory is erased.
A tree's muscled trunk defies it.

No guard rails
No signposts
No pavement
The road of life

Hope:

1. *Without hope*
   No cell would divide
   No sperm would swim, no woman
   Would submit to travail.

2. *Because of hope*
   The oak makes a thousand acorns
   And new little leaves
   Inside its autumn buds.

I'm surfing on the magma:
My board, the North American Plate;
I cram a froth of mountains
That shiver with earthquakes.

Magi:

1. *One wise man wanted action,*
   A swift gallop; another, to analyze
   The star; the third, to worship.
   They all traveled together.

2. *Only wise men, eggheads*
   From a heathen country
   Recognized the little boy
   As the Son of God.

3. *The baby in the manger*
   Grew up into a man
   Who stares wise men in the eye
   And demands their souls.

Money is seldom in her hands,
And irregularly; but she holds it lightly,
And lets it bless others—and always
It comes back to her.

In my life, like a symphony,
Dissonances resolve; harmonic rhythms
All line up; melodies interweave and complete themselves
As they were meant to do from the start.

Painkillers:
The gifts of the gods, herbal decoctions,
Release us from the tyranny of pain
But also from the clarity of mind
And sense or mortality that pain enforces.

Good Samaritan:
The sinners we hate
Are the ones who stopped
By the side of the road
To help the victim.

Quit bleeding! Your blood
Is staining the silk
Of my robes, and the veil
That shields my eyes from you.

My little glass spaceship of wisdom
Pops, scattering littered shards, releasing
Gases into the vacuum of space
Infinitely cold and mindless.

Balmy breezes, nectar-scented,
Cannot mix with outer space
Whose infinity of cold and vacuum
Would diffuse them to nothingness.

Ginger cookies—the fragrance
Of timeless Dutch tradition
Was a bold new invention, when ships
First returned from the Indies.

For you, said the tree,
A hole in the ground
Is a tomb, while for me
It is a cradle.

The future of the planet
Is not a smoke-dark hell
But green and bright:
A wild forest, without humans.

Hegemony of Brain:
No matter how poor and desperate
Humans become in a future
Bleak and blasted, there will always be
A hunger for knowledge.

I recognize the path of truth
Through fallen leaves;
They are depressed ever so slightly
By the steps of the very few travelers.

Christmas and Easter:

1. *In the full awareness of our sin,*
   Our bloody lust for death
   God strode into the world
   And allowed us to kill Him.

2. *Baby Jesus will never forget the love*
   Shown to Him by the villagers
   Nor will he ever forget those
   Who abused the poor children.

The scarlet of autumn
Is a scream: blood
Pouring forth, the Earth
Raging against death.

A mind, chained in a closet
From its birth, took one beam
Of light through a crack
And made it into a religion.

God's ultraviolet truth
Assaults the soft skin
Of our hiddenness,
And stirs it into cancer.

God's House, invisible walls
Bricks of human minds
Beams of ideas; no roof
To deflect Heaven's sun and rain.

The Doctrine Committee:

1. *Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jesus*
   Peter, and Paul: the only doctrine
   On which they all reached consensus
   Was love.

2. *Love is a wave, a particle,*
   A force so strong
   That no mere vessel of atoms
   Can contain it.[5]

[5] Photons are both wave and particles at the same time (whatever time is).

Resurrection:

1. On a dead planet
   Killed by human sin
   A lone trumpet dares call
   And a few bacteria awaken.

2. God will wait until
   The last electron sleeps, and then
   Sound the call of wakening.
   Relax, and let the world die.

My unthinking head banged in
Through holy doors, past vestibule
Intent on penetration, ignoring
Dark mystery and holiness.

Kill the messenger. Medicines
Let us ignore the pain from our vices,
As we ignore the fevered Earth
Infected by our greed.

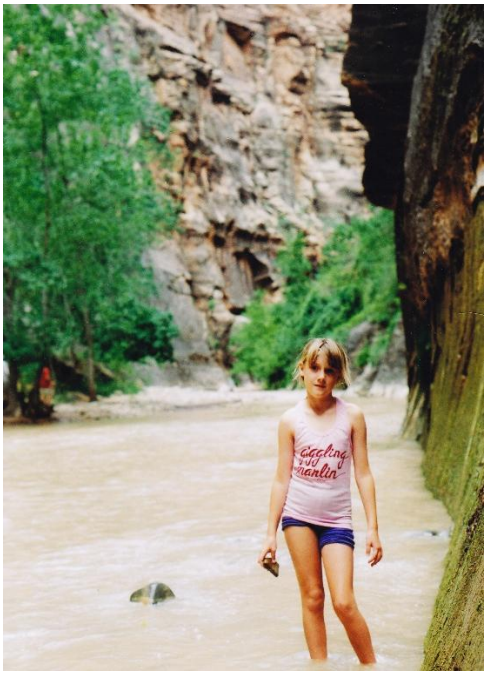
In crises, my mind works
Smoothly, like windshield wipers
In heavy rain; but minor irritations
Make my mind scrape.

Don't worry about theology
Don't worry about DNA
Sometimes you just gotta shut up
And dance.

The doors to truth and the universe,
Infinitely high, are balanced
So that one little man, standing at the base,
Can nudge them open.

Over God's pure water
One drop of oily sin
Spreads over the surface, and refracts
The sunlight into swirls of color.

In ages past, we are told,
God said this, God said that,
Talked and talked and talked; today,
He seems only to listen.



Virgin River, Utah, 1995

My vision is blurred, but
I can follow the ruts
Through snow and wind
Of survivors ahead of me.

Let justice roll down like water—
Like glaciers, which cut
Through confident stone
And toss mountains like toys.

Des Fahrenden Gesellen (Mahler):
The blue sky is your eyes
The dry grass your flaxen hair
The wind your breath, calm
As you ignore me.

Our frenzied civilization
Is a mere heartbeat in the life
Of the universe—a brief terror
That soon passes.

I Pledge a Legions:
I wedge a region of the frog
Of the umbilical scrapes of Anemia
And to the Republican Thunderdog
With misery, scrumptious, for all.

A History of the Marching Band:
A control freak's dream: a mob
In perfect harmony and precision, each march
With two stanzas, trio, and break strain; and yet
The march's ancestor was ragtime.[6]

The wildness of a tribal dance
Is actually a choreograph
Of stereotyped sound and motion
And millennia of tradition.

Love is power and light; beware,
For even lead shield of laws
Cannot protect our hearts
From bombardment by its particles.

Orchestra:

1. The delicate blonde
   With tender smile and bright eye
   Raises to her lips
   A bass trombone.

2. Musicians warming up, little strands
   Of melody, like molecules
   Finding each other in the ocean
   No melody of cells yet formed.

Morality:

1. Like muscles of the epileptic
   Uncontrolled, breaking their own bones,
   So is the power of eros if unleashed
   From the moral chains of the mind.

2. Even the Bible, ancient armory
   Of moral structures, proclaims
   That male and female created He them
   And behold, it was very good.

3. Men and women, intermixed,
   Will always find a square inch of lust
   No matter how tightly they bind themselves
   With clothes and rules.

[6] Ragime even has a trio that modulates up a fourth, the way all band marches do.

4. Beware of love, toxicating potion,
   That focuses the mind into a mist;
   Unrequited, it dampens the soul into dryness
   And creates cold fire.

The whistle wails as the train
Slips into the cold night—
The economy of our sleepless appetites
Stabs the helpless world.

Lascaux:
The ghost of the fierce auroch
Still snorts on the cave wall,
While in meadows overhead, its children,
Meek cows, make sad hamburgers.

One little gnat survived
On the clobbered planet
And laid the eggs of civilizations
In the empty world.

God told Pat Robertson,
"Bush is my chosen messiah;
Worship Him, and not
Some longhair who preaches love."

For Mom, March 7, 2004:
Even when dense Valley fog[7]
Blocked out the whole world
It did not occur to me to fear:
Such was the home you made.

Driving through Rain:

1. A frozen world is preserved
   But it is the gray spring thaw
   Before the burst of bud and seed
   In which the fungus grows.

2. On a wild world of swirling rain
   We impose straightness—roads
   And fields; the wipers beat time
   To Strauss polkas on the radio.

[7] San Joaquin Valley, with legendary pea-soup fog in winter.

3. The old veteran carried the flag
   As rain drenched the parade.
   "It is a beautiful day," he thought,
   "For I am alive."

When I got to Heaven I expected to see Jesus
In gold and shining light, but instead
I saw Him sitting beside Johnny Cash
Picking a guitar and humming.

God decided to change His mind
And stop insisting on love and mercy
When He saw the beautiful new church building
The Republicans had built for Him.

Poem Number 2000:[8]
Two thousand ingots of wisdom
Delimited into quatrained slots; but daily
I encounter wildness, casting
All my insights into disarray.

Willows drooping with their own softness,
Weighted by the world, alongside the stream
That buries hope in its sediment,
Still shoot their twigs straight up.

Redundancy:
Backup copies of God's wisdom
Exist, in fragments,
In a billion ape brains—
It will not be lost.

Dogs in the woods are scientists,
Pleasure flooding their minds
As they explore and map their world
Modeling a landscape of scent.

On the Road Ahead:
A whirlwind: an organism
Elegant amidst formless air
Dances, until I kill it
By driving through it.

[8] I miscounted; it was only 1500.

Meat-hooks suspend our souls,
Diversity cubed into sameness
On a conveyor of consumerism—
Yet your soul dares to sing.

Caveman eyes, lit with torches
Glowed with zeal and error
But his descendants glance at truth
And close their eyes.

God's Love in Clay Pots (II Corinthians 4:7):
Fancy, gleaming pots, delicate
Sublime art—but still just clay
From which divine love cannot
Be poured without it vanishing.

Lofty, firm mountains
Are broken boulders,
Rubble, the fragments
Of ancient layers of history.

The swallow cannot escape gravity
Nor can a human escape the need
For food and shelter; can our spirits ever
Escape our animal minds?

College Education:
Truth is a terrain thick with brush
Over which students drive ORV's
Destroying what they do not comprehend
And laughing at the adventure.

Cashew nut: a smile
Penetratingly long
Yet curved like truth
And rich with oily wonder.

Proof of God:
In a million worlds under
A million suns, in a million brains
And a million spirits, there can be
Only one Golden Rule.

Sophia:
Wisdom stares at you
With owl eyes, trapping you
Until you cry out
And surrender to her caress.[9]

The shaman at the fire
And the scientist at the telescope
Babble about the origin of the skies
Into whose silence I gaze.

Love is a warped sheet of glass
Half melted by the heart
Distorting reality into raptures
And dulling sharp edges of truth.

He stared at the sun for forty years
Seeing it for only the first four seconds
Then having faith in its heat
And the chatter of life that it creates.

Home
Our vaulted cave is lined with books
That define reality, like cave paintings
In Lascaux, that chase away
Terror of the unknown.

Germany 1945:
Your American bombs killed my child.
Why do you hate us?
I am German
But I am not Hitler.

Plato was right: shadows
Of illusions on a wall
Are indeed the television screen
Of popular reality.

Descent of man, from apes
Who wielded clubs and stank,
Is easy to believe; but woman
Was a divine creation.

[9] I wrote a novel called Blue Wild Indigo with this theme.

Carol:

1. *A fragile sculpture, sheltered*
   From the world's rude winds
   And whose voice reverberates
   From hallowed cavern walls.

2. *A work never finished,*
   An unresolved chord,
   Beauty never fading,
   Never hardened by hatred.

First in Spring:

1. First wasp of the spring
   Gravid queen, seeking
   A wooden crevice, to spawn
   A summer of affliction on us.

2. First dove of the spring
   Lamenting the decay
   Of dead worlds
   In the awakening soil.

How can I concentrate on
Reading and writing human wisdom
When the irritating sunlight of God
Beams directly into my face?

One little leaf expanding
On the tip of the dying plant:
It is hope—But can it survive
The weight of fungus in the roots?

Three freezing men, one coat—
Each with a third of a coat, or each
With a coat one hour in every three:
They will not live.

The modesty of clothes allows
Each person to pretend
To be divine, and not to be
Lumped and molèd flesh.

The feather bed of tenure
Insulates me from the heat
Of a world burning in strife
And stumbling in ignorance.

Micrographia:[10]

1. How beautiful is your eye
   Looking into the microscope
   Pierced by its little disc of light
   And brightening to its wisdom.

2. Microscopic honesty: A world
   Of tiny monsters overwhelming us,
   And each of us is only
   A bundle of fibers and cells.

I am a chimera—contradictions
Rattle within me: A heart
Of compassion, a stomach
Of voracious rapacity.

Breasts far larger than are needed
For suckling, a mind far larger
Than is needed for thought; both
Exist to create joy.

Emerald Isle
Verdure fertilized
By crumbling churches
And spilled blood.

The glow of God is invisible,
Like infra-red photons; but can I blame
The skeptic, when he shines a light
Into the dark, and sees no God?

Traditional wisdom was, at one time,
New, not a tradition yet:
Open mind, open heart, open eyes
Of an ancient soul.

[10] A book of Renaissance sketches of what a scientist saw through an early microscope.

Two books, both unread
By the masses who have
Potent opinions: The Bible,
And the Origin of Species.

Whether at the store, on the road,
Or in church, I am only
An economic unit; a thing blocking
Others' pursuit of resources.

I wish I were a plant
Eating sunshine
Rather than killing seeds
And slaying flesh, to live.

A buggy in a storm? The Amish man
Looked out the window and said,
Why fight God? Tomorrow
Is a better day for my journey.

Spring Storm:

1. God's truth, a thunderbolt
   Forking from the sky
   Skewering the salad-bedded cow
   And making her into barbecue.

2. God's truth, lightning
   Pounds from a cloud
   Repeatedly burning his word
   Onto the tablet of the Earth.

3. God's truth, what was once
   A tree, complexly exploring the sky
   While rooted complexly in the Earth
   Is now black, simple, and stark.

4. How can the egret
   Stay white and delicate
   In violent winds, ponds of mud,
   And a world of blood?

Both turtle and armadillo
Armor their backs;
But only the turtle
Shields its heart.

Vulture: dangerous job—
Enticement of roadkill
Steaming on the freeway.
One brief luscious bite.

Beautyberry (for Jona):

1. Unplucked fruit,
   Glowing pure, defying
   The sourness of pine litter:
   You know the meaning of love.

2. In the barren woods
   As soon as spring permits
   You burst forth
   In blossomed surprises.

There is more theology
In Mahler's symphonies
Than in all the arguments
Of the ranting preachers.

Men are like sperm, ejected
From the body, seeking adventure, dying;
Women are like wombs
Integrated into the body of life.

I do not know why some people
Suffer, and others do not; but
While the sun so briefly shines and the leaves
Are green, I walk and praise God.

The Trees of Life have grafts—
My diverse branchings, and yours
Are weirdly alike, and then
They fuse, to bear astonishing fruits.

Complexes of color: In the Sixties,
They swirled into randomness,
Psychedelic; Today they are fractals
Precisely spiraling into order.

Future:
Lush rainforests, buzzing in joy,
Send runners and roots
Into piles of cement stubble
And drink nutrients from its microchips.

Good Friday, 2004:
We laugh heartily, our goblet souls
Clinking in friendship, because
One sad happy man stumbled
While carrying His cross of love.



Eastern slope of the Sierras, March 1995

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.