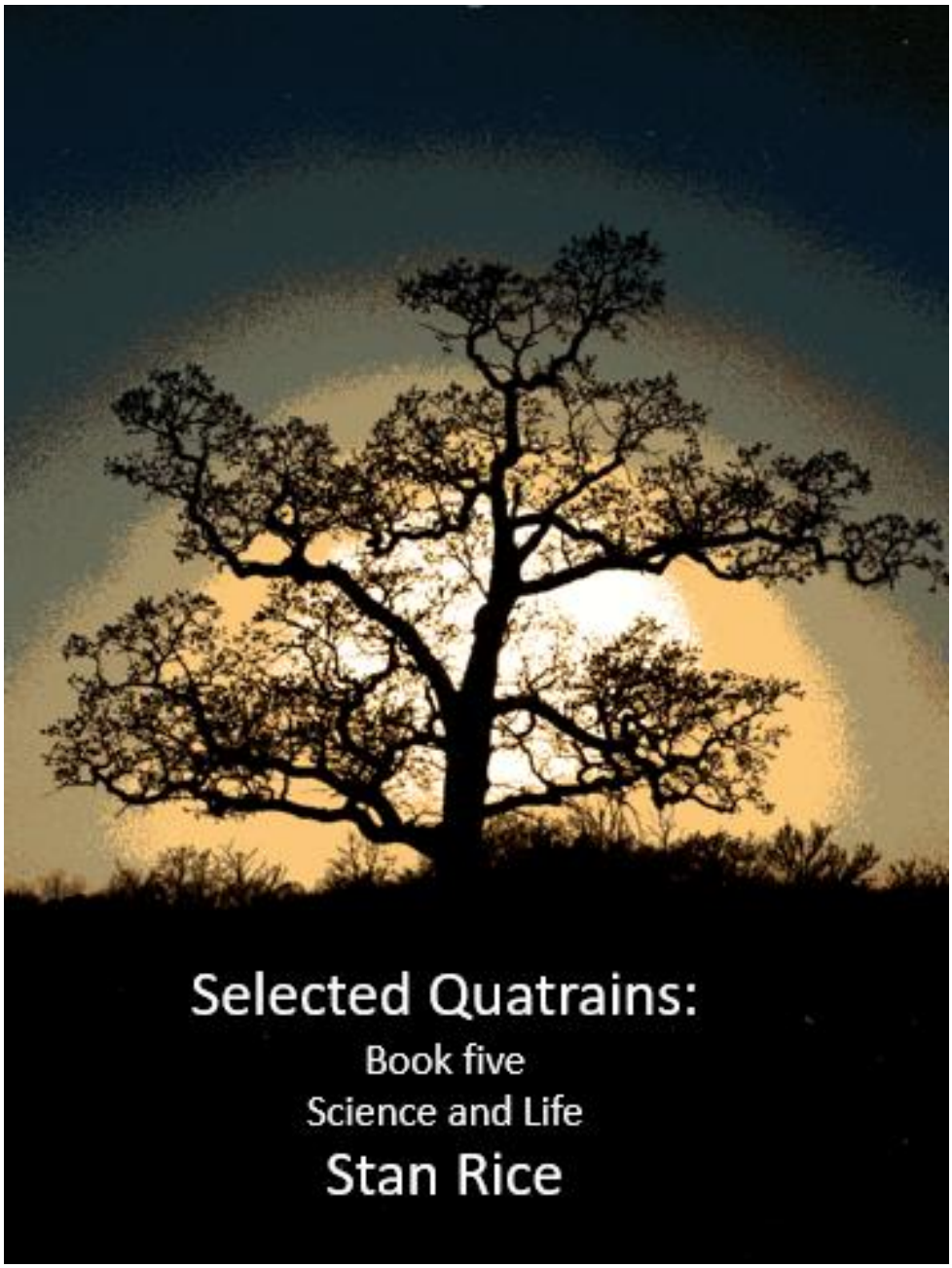

Selected Quatrains:
Book five
Science and Life
Stan Rice

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Book five: Science and Life
Stan Rice
April 2004 to February 2005

Quatrains on Science and Life

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.

Easter 2004:

The caterpillar of wisdom and love
Pupated, emerged, and flew—
Clear wings refracting Heaven's colors—
Beyond our sight.

The scent of rain: A suspiration
Of new life for dry earth
But also the threat of mudslide
On deforested hillsides.

Sad springtime—
When you find out
Which of your many branches
Died during the winter.

They drive their cars
To church, tank up
On Jesus, then rumble home
To powerless lives.

God's heavy light—
Not weightless photons
But the substance of truth
Bears down upon us.

I cling to a little Jupiter moon,
While overhead a Jupiter of fear tugs
Powerfully; If I dare to leap for joy
It will suck me into its hot frozen depths.

At death, my spirit transcends
The shackles and figments of flesh
Just as the ant, when crushed,
Releases a strong and joyous fragrance.

Waves of olfaction from distant shores,
The future, with breaking surf,
Lure me deeply, but I fear to behold
The flotsam of that place.

Wisdom:

1. *Wisdom is not entombed*
   Behind one secret lock, but dispersed
   Into a million tiny cracks
   In the bedrock of reality.

2. *There is no mother lode: wisdom*
   Does not erode in nuggets
   From a birthing core, but exists
   In a million impure veins.

I hug the shore, loving
The solid green world of light,
Safe soil, not the blue depths
Of lost and dead sediments.

Far into a glinting future
A computer solves a trillion equations
In a second, barely equaling the complexity
Of the ant I just squished.

Brain:

1. The heartless, calculating cortex
   Overgrows the core of emotion
   Like a fissured fungus—but even it
   Burns with a fever of love.

2. The creek of habit
   Through fissured brain
   Erodes away the rich soil
   Of love and thoughtfulness.

Bird metabolism:
The bird hurtles through branches
Through days like weeks
And weeks like years, heart throbbing,
Until it crashes and dies at full speed.

Pure reason—there is no such thing:
Logic is joy, sex is creation,
Creation is sex, joy is logic
In the curvaceous hills of Eden.

The mindless wasp
Carefully selects wood
Then constructs masterpieces
Of fragile genius.

Economy:
A pool of laborers, from which
Our economy can draw, in which
Our selfishness can splash, into which
The blood of the poor can drain.

Wave the flag of freedom—
Spotted with the fat of the land,
Knotted into the rope of empire
To enslave the poor and the Earth.

Obviously:
It is obvious: Kenneth Lay's excesses
Of consumption were good for Enron,
And Enron's secret advice was good for America:
Obvious only to two beady Texas eyes.[1]

The most efficient world
Is Mercury: nothing is wasted,
No messy storms or flowers
On its sharp, sterile surface.

That little land that declares
That it does not need our TV cables
Nor our soft drinks—it is treasonous
And deserves our engines of war.

A strong defense, we say,
Is a hard crust of hate
Around a fluff of laziness
And a sour core of lovelessness.

We claim to be strong
But one slash
At our petroleum artery
And we bleed blackly to death.[2]

[1] The Enron bankruptcy was notorious in 2004, but Enron was the darling of the Republicans, especially George W. Bush from Texas. Also, rattlesnakes have beady eyes.
[2] To many of us, the Iraq War was fought to assure our supply of oil.

Our economy grows, behold,
So big: A giant mushroom,
It uses up its juices of decomposition,
Coughs out hopeless spores, and shrivels.

The world bristles, they say,
With a thousand problems,
A thousand tasks for a thousand projects.
But there is really only one problem.

Once we know that we
Do not live by bread alone—
Only then can we make good bread
From the grain of golden fields.

A Past Friendship:

1. Our friendship is history
   In the good sense of the word—
   No longer growing, but still strong
   Like fragrant old wood.

2. The old wood of our friendship
   Is a permanent record, in its rings
   Some thick, from days of joy,
   Some thin, from weeks of chill.

3. Beneath the bark, in our love,
   Beetles have etched complex patterns
   Like a Central Asian script
   That neither of us can read.

4. The fragrance of old wood:
   Not sexual pheromones
   But pungent with the sweetness
   That preserves heartwood from decay.

5. Will this new wood have a cambium
   Life and growth, each year
   Producing a layer of fresh sapwood
   To feed the sun-kissed leaves?

6. In your new plantation
   Of fast-growing pines and profits
   Will you have space and time
   For an old burl of wood like me?

7. Buried within the old trunk
   Invisible to passers-by, a bud
   Swells and tries to emerge
   But produces only a knot.

8. The tree of our friendship,
   At this moment, is strong,
   Its crown expansive,
   Outlined in gray mist.

9. As soon as the climbing sun
   Imposes its heat on the world
   And burns away the mist, the leaves
   Of our tree will wilt.

10. Our tree drinks in
    The juices of mulched decay
    Through its roots, transforming them
    Into fresh greenness.

God pulls a blanket
Over the glowing world
Reflecting its light back into itself
And hiding Him in thick darkness.

God of the Cosmos:
Uncaused love, love
Not in response to any thing
Primal moving force
Of atoms and universes.

God poured Himself
Into each molecule, each fabric
And sinew, and now feels
What we feel and lives through us.

The God of Evolution took a risk
That nowhere in His universe
Would a sentient being arise
To know and praise Him.

I awaken, astonished, between
Two women, both strangers,
Married to both, both desirable:
One is science, one is art.

Free Tooth Whitening!
Smile at the sun
Let its ultraviolet light
Bleach your dentary stains
And kill all the germs.

My Heart:

1. *Woopsie, I dropped your heart*
   And it splattered on the dance floor
   Of my busy life. Someone else
   Will clean it up.

2. *You found my heart, shelved*
   In your piles of remembrance;
   Someday I must call him, you say,
   As you bury my heart again.

"It behooves you so to act:"
For if you do not, your hooves—
You stupid cow, you hornèd devil—
Will be cut off.

Nocturnes:

1. The full moon looks over
   The shutters of a million windows
   And sees two million desperate lovers
   And a few tortured poets.

2. You are indeed a cock,
   Tricked by the moon, jumping up
   Crowing in the midst of the night,
   Surprising my somnambulist life.

Peter had a sword, and he knew
Whose hand, dipping into the bowl,
Would betray Jesus—
Yet like a rock he did nothing.[3]

Unhealthy love, toxic friendship,
A breath of my soul, strong
With fresh sapwood; but to it
I must raise the blade of the saw.

[3] Peter means "the rock."

It is for us humans, not you dogs
That Jesus suffered on the cross
Yet you look up at my violent hand
With sadness and a plea.

Like catalpa blossoms in May
Young lives are detached
By the slightest wind, their pure beauty
Is mashed into decay.

A sudden flood of new insight
Released from the surprised dam
Lifts decomposing sludge
And propels it fast and aimlessly.

Between the bastion of Christianity
And the swamps of agnosticism
Are a thousand paths, all winding,
Trodden by a few, without guides.

To a Friend, Again:[4]

1. I want someone to know
   All about me. You who once knew
   A little, who began to know me
   Have vanished like moonlight.

2. In your solar system, as you swing
   Near and far around your star,
   I am Jupiter—a distant blob
   Who sweeps your path clear of asteroids.[5]

Millennia before Darwin, the worm
Still ate its animate host from inside
And the predator crushed fresh blood
From innocent prey.

The common ground of the world,
Of the swirling cultures and crises,
Is the ground under our feet,
Soil and aquifers and earthworms.

[4] I do not remember who or what these were for, if anything or anyone.
[5] Astronomers believe Jupiter swept away many asteroids and confined them in the asteroid belt.

The Future:

1. *The future is our only hope—in which*
   All tears dry, all wounds heal,
   And which, being the future,
   Never arrives.

2. *The future is a fictive realm*
   An infinite bank account, a frontier
   Into which all failures,
   Like outlaws, can flee.

"Catfish King" Restaurant:
I am king of the catfish: all catfish
Are my slaves, their souls
Are worthless to me; I deliver them
Captive, unto the Fishergods.

Road of death: Asphalt reeking
Of prehistoric swamps, roadkill
Roasting in the sun, trucks
Rushing headlong to death.

"Would Jesus Drive an SUV?"[6]
I saw Jesus! He was driving
An SUV on the expressway.
He was frowning; He had no choice—
The SUV was a gift from His church.

Five sycamore trunks, strong, stately,
In a cluster—they were once suckers
Sprouting from the stump
Of a tree we thought we'd killed.

What you thought were tears
Were snowflakes from God's cold world
Swirling from a confused sky
And melting in my poor eyes.

The TV screen of wisdom, whereby
God explains what is going on
Is dark. I see the world, bent,
Reflected in it.

[6] 2003 headline.

Even a pigeon, said Audubon,
Has iridescence, life, unlike
Dead marble ideas
And whitewashed sepulchers.

In the cosmic vending machine
The coil screws, dropping
Lives and souls into oblivion
But the coil itself stays in place.

Scientists, like clouds,
Are flat and disciplined on the bottom side
But heavenward we leap
In dreamlike swirls.

From an Airplane Window:
Way down there is life,
Fleeced with a shawl of clouds;
Up there is beautiful, sterile blue
Falsely hiding cold dark death.

Wedgwood china, ornate,
Fragile, and shining its fortune
Into Darwin, and into which drains
A gravy of Nature's shed blood.[7]

Heresy?:
God ignited a universe
Of stars and planets; when one of them
Sprouted life, He said, "Over there—
Let's keep a watch on that one."

Slung by spinning Earth
And tugged by its gravity
In such perfect balance
That not a hair stirs on my head.

July 4, 2004:
We do not really want
Freedom; we desire the security
Of a royal crown, and easy answers
To the questions we ask God.

[7] Darwin married Emma Wedgwood, the pottery heir.

Within the walls
Of my secure garden
The tree of life drinks blood
From the corpses outside.[8]

Emmaus Road:
Jesus walked up behind us
Disguised as a clodhopper
And pretended to know nothing, so that we
We would explain Him to ourselves.

If God tried to hug me
His arms would be too big
Knocking galaxies against me. Instead,
He wants you to hug me.

Clouds like sand dunes or cerebral folds,
Jesus walking upside down
Upon them, His head and heart
Spilling down on us.

Cows in a roadside pasture
Resigned to the annoyance
Of flies, and humans in wasplike cars,
Both parasites eating their flesh.

For a billion years, Jesus
Widens His embrace at
The speed of light, to incorporate
The least, the last, the lost, me.

An efficient green planet
Buzzing with photosynthesis
Was invaded by the crazy beauty
Of bright pink orchids.

Red polish on toenails—
You have scrambled to the top
Diggin your claws
Into struggling flesh.

Years of careful handiwork
Connections among brain cells
Creating wisdom and beauty—
Destined only for collapse and decay.

[8] This was the idea behind the Darwin short story I wrote, “Potatoes.”



Campfire, Black Hills, 1996

Holy temple, sanctified
By love, over millions of years—
I enter its clinging warmth
Boldly, and with awe.

In Sunday School, they recite
Genesis, Exodus, Numbers; in science,
Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian:
In the beginning was the word.

In God's holy city
Behind blocks of crumbled buildings
There was a restful garden
That wasn't even on the map.

She never curses—how pure she is
As she ascends into her SUV and drives
Over the crunching backbones
Of the poor creatures of slum and forest.

The merest idea of love,
Of justice, of liberty, glowed
On one small wandering stone
Before the universe faded.

The immigrant, scarred
By British hobnails
Swings his shillelagh against
The son of a slave.

God could not
Create a world
In which love
Was not golden.

All forests have died;
One hollow twig remains;
The wind turns it into
A flute of mourning.

The scientist wore a necklace
Of jewels—A, C, T, and G;
Oppressors ripped it from her neck
And made it into shackles.[9]

They say you are a love goddess,
Yet one breast is like another
And all sucking warmths are the same.
I will just stay home with my wife.

Forests of wisdom, mulched
By cults of death. A weed sprouts—
Its children are just as green
As the forest, but a mockery of it.

He is now an atheist, swearing
That there is no good God,
But only selfishness; yet he himself,
Ineradicably decent, is his own disproof.

Sunflowers turn their faces
Towards the morning light
In unashamed celebration: even plants
Have a primitive form of religion.

Datura:
Loud white trumpets of God,
Jimsonweed flowers proclaim
The insights of hallucination
And the poison of truth.

[9] The four bases of DNA; decoding DNA should liberate us, but it can also be used as a tool of oppression.

Windows:

1. *When you open the window*
   To the breath of God, be prepared
   For your papers and orderly plans
   To be rustled, scattered, and sucked away.

2. We have closed the window
   To God; we have told Him
   There are no prophets, Your voice is dead.
   We will listen only to ourselves.

3. We have closed the window
   To God's sunshine; our churches
   Are now dominated by large mushrooms
   Living on the pungent molecules of the past.

We bombed her house for no reason.
She screamed to the sky for Allah
To wreak justice upon us; we are so sure,
Oh, so sure, He will not listen to her.

Everything We Do Is Wrong:
We fed a caterpillar in a jar.
The glass protected its chrysalis.
When it emerged, we set the jar outside.
Freedom! The rain battered its wings.

Uncle Sam, obese, stomps
Across the prairie, crushing
Tiny flowers and lizard skulls
But the bison stand their ground.

Life, as a whole, persists
Through flame and glacier, but
One tiny slip, one chance delay
Brings quick death to the individual.

Angels, naked, plump, floating
Like clouds across the sky—they've no need
Of bosoms, or legs, yet they have them
Nor need to hurry—yet they do.

I asked God for a beautiful
Female companion; I simply waited
And He transformed into new beauty
The body of my wife.

Right and Wrong:
On the map, the shore
Of the Great Salt Lake
Looks so clear—but it is
A gradual regress into slush.

God looks upon me, a lump
Of clay, and uses His imagination
And says, I see an angel;
Such is creation.

Creationists insist that man
Has a noble origin; but God says
Man began with a lump of clay
Of simian flesh, of DNA.

I am just a shard of a clay pot,
Broken, no longer malleable
Into new forms; but at least
I can scrape Job's sores.[10]

Drain, drain the whole cup,
Down to the sediments,
The syrup of excess sweetness
And the grit of earthiness.

In the sunset of our nation
Our gold will be splattered red
With the blood of those
Whom we have oppressed.

I must not be a true prophet;
I must be hidden, for
A true prophet would not hide
His tears in church.

The woman finds the lost coin
In the dust under the table—
She reaches out to reclaim it—
A scorpion stings her.

[10] The Biblical Job scraped his sores with potsherds.

Dogs leap and strive each day
Eager to earn our love;
But cats know that our love
Does not depend on their behavior.

Lazarus had a name.
The rich man did not.
He was generic greed and sloth,
And faceless complacency.[11]

An oasis of preaching—
They invite wayfarers
From the world they made into a desert
By their own theology.

Poems about the Bible:

1. How malleable is scripture.
   We can hammer it into
   Such a diversity of idolatrous forms:
   Hawk, bullfrog, or sloth.

2. How convenient it is that scripture
   Is fractured into numbered bits
   Each so small that we can make them
   Fit any mosaic pattern we please.

3. "How faithful am I!" proclaimed
   The preacher, who took
   The scriptural sackcloth of meekness
   And made it into a flag of war.

4. Don't vote for Jesus; His bleeding heart
   And willingness to render to Caesar
   Would raise taxes; a sorry General;
   A forgiver, soft on crime.

If I Had Been Beautiful:[12]

1. If I had been beautiful
   All doors would have opened to me:
   Weakness would have sufficed
   And mediocrity of mind welcomed.

[11] Luke chapter 16.
[12] Based on a song by Ann Zimmerman.

2. If I had been beautiful
   I would have married a chick
   Bulbous of boob and brain
   And would never have found you.

Because of my beard,
Gruff and gray, my tears
Run amidst the hairs and they hide:
I can pretend to be tough.

Soil is wisdom—in autumn,
When showers of blessing
Drench the land, the soil holds it
Saving it for spring.

Red Shift:
Distant galaxies
Blushing, hurtle away
From our boasts of truth
And our glories of war.

On Listening to Mussorgsky:
Roiling evil of witches
Laughing thunderously
Can be dispersed by
Something as simple as dawn.[13]

Humans and caterpillars
Chew the green Earth
Never stopping to admire
The beautiful flowers.[14]

The rain cleanses the leaves
Of sticky dust, and rinses
The sin of the world down into
The sweet rotting mulch.

Swooning with anger, poor women
Sew our fine clothes, and pack them
In crates for our discount stores; they pray
A plague upon American consumers.

[13] Night on Bald Mountain.
[14] See "Inchworm," a song in Danny Kaye's Hans Christian Anderson movie.

Her gaze focused on infinity, on building
Shelters in distant villages
While she walked briskly past
Unemployed carpenters on the sidewalk.

The artist did not waste his time—
As thousands starved
He created beautiful music
That kept us human.

The green tree
Converts my wastes
Into sweetness and freshness
And into pillars of strength.

Blood of soldiers and tribes
Fertilizes the growth of weeds
Which make a crown of thorns
Upon Gaia's furrowed brow.

The Doctor:

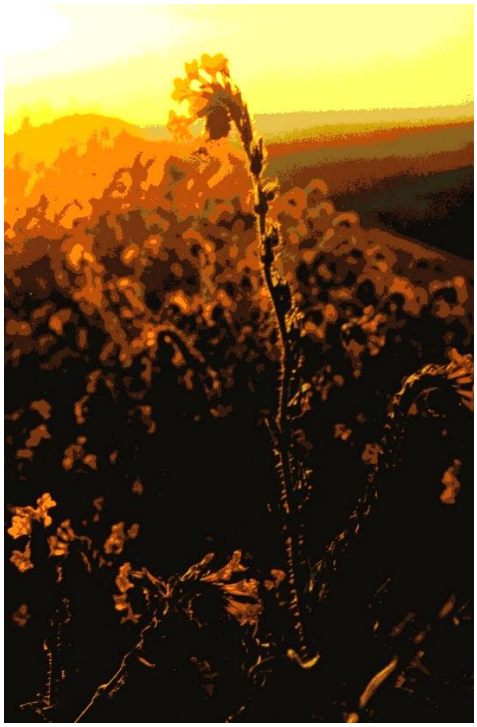
1. I am a doctor, surveying
   The broken and debauched body of
   The nation; rather than despair
   I begin anew the work of healing.

2. What can I do, said the physician,
   When my broken and infected patient
   Arrogantly claims to be
   The all-powerful king of the world?

The prophet mourned, depressed
And silent at the triumph
Of the arrogant. But what he saw
Was a world of work awaiting him.

The boy sat on a chunk of concrete
In a vacant lot, filled
With spring wildflowers, and saw
The fate of civilization.[15]

[15] This was me, about 1968.



Fiddleneck weed, Sierra foothills, California, 2002

His mind was a vacant lot
Rich soil but unplowed, untreed, in which
Weeds grew rapidly, shallow-rooted
And produced prickled seeds.

Jesus organized the crowds
Into fifties and hundreds
Not to dominate them, or divide them
Into strife, but to prevent chaos.[16]

The autumn of our civilization
Explodes in a blaze of color
Loose leaves of wealth
Ready to feed the soil of the future

God gets praised for conducting
The genetic orchestra that produced
The mind of Mendelssohn, but
Not blamed for the mind of Hitler.[17]

[16] The feeding of the five thousand, or four thousand, depending on your source.
[17] Note: Mendelssohn was Jewish.

The spider walks on strands
So fine that I cannot see them
Even when I know they must be there—
Even so, I walk on a web of faith.

On the axle of my love
There is a wheel: My wife
Fits, with slippage and friction,
But adequately.

The moon turns to blood.
Ancient minds freeze in horror
But for me it is playful:
A persimmon in the autumn sky.

Above a motionless garden
Clouds scud past the moon.
We are protected by the trees
From heavenly unrest.

Buds swell, fat as fists,
Straining to open in balmy spring,
Prepared months ago for this
Perfumed explosive moment.

Shameful God:

1. One can pretend that the phallus
   Is a sword of defiance, or
   Practical plumbing; but the clitoris
   Exists purely for pleasure.

2. God, grim in gray robe, scowling
   Like silver light over leaden cloud
   Disapproves of pink lechery; yet
   He created the clitoris.

3. Today it is enough for me
   To picnic in the sunny meadow
   Of mons veneris; some other day
   I will visit the dark caverns.

4. Glans, wick of Eros offering up
   The heat and drive of love
   Its ganglia of sensitivities
   Crowded into a little brain.

5. With My Wife:
   I rejoice that yesterday
   Our warm moistnesses met
   But today let us enjoy
   The sunshine, and go for a walk.

6. Crepe and origami, exquisite
   In crumpled red folds,
   Each woman's is a different
   Masterpiece of randomness.

One fine day, God finally
Got enough of human hatred
And irrigated the infected wound
Cleaning the Earth of us.

Numb death
Cycles of Earth
Sweet decay
Cold silence

Masterpieces of nature
Crushed and burned
To produce a world
Piled high with trinkets

Dogs singing barkarolls
Echoes from old hills
Skeletons tending fires
Under hotchpots of mistakes.

Fiery rage, tender love,
Corn wit and rye humor
A century later are all
The same: fragrant loam.

The prophet bows in prayer
Upon his back the ruts
Of impatient commerce
And intercourse with mammon.

From ancient roots come old errors
From ancient roots come waters of life
From ancient roots grow new errors
From ancient roots grow new wisdoms.

Born to run
Mindless direction
Hormones jamming
Animal impulses

No tree ever did harm;
This one, firm and twisted
Intercepted the lightning bolt
That was meant for you.

The mind is a hawk
Sharp-eyed on rising air
Seeking warm quick food
But accepting carrion.

Washed ashore in darkness
I have no idea which coastline
All I know is the sand is solid
And I smell sweet decay

"Watch for ice on bridge"—
When you cross over
To a new land, cold air
Slides underneath your bravery.

Columbus Day 2004:
He bridged two worlds
Of sinners; the one
That was ready to rape and pillage
And one that was not.

He created a life form: music
Based on a genetic theme
That metabolized sweetness
And moved in agile grace

The one absolute protection
From terrorists is to, ourselves,
Dismantle the democracy they hate
And destroy our own environment.

My plate is ever full
Of blessings whose warm fatness
Congeals in a cold world
Before I can even taste them.

Communists:

1. *Communists and Republicans*
   Are comrades, fully agreed
   That the Earth is a dumping ground
   And all who dissent are traitors.

2. *Communists and Democrats*
   Are comrades, fully agreed
   That state bureaus know all truth
   And humans are resources.

"Fill dirt wanted"—it doesn't matter
What lives and dreams are rubbled
Concrete, granite, amethyst,
Temples or tombs—just throw it in.

A Poem by an Aficionado of Mozart, Dvořák, and Mendelssohn:
ZZ Top
BB King
AOK
Just not my thing.

The American flag
Is your priestly vestment
And the veil that divides
Man from the Holy of Holies.

You reject Spencer's dictum
That the fittest survive
And yet your measure of success
Is conquest and wealth.[18]

Conservatives and Liberals:

1. Even the animals and birds
   Who recognize a universal call of distress
   Can communicate better
   Than conservatives and liberals.

2. To liberals, all speech must be
   Politically correct; to conservatives,
   All dissent is treason. There is here
   No dialogue.

[18] Herbert Spencer, not Charles Darwin, invented the phrase "Survival of the fittest."

3. From oriental sunrise, from liberals,
   To occidental sunset, to conservatives,
   We all must fear if God decides
   To take matters into His own hands.

4. *And the glory of the Lord*
   Will be revealed: It will burn away
   Conservative ropes
   And liberal veils.

5. And the glory of the Lord
   Will be revealed: It will burn away
   Mists that hide the truth
   And the fog of complacency.

Gentle rain: if only
God's judgement could cleanse us
So softly, and so caressingly
Heal our injuries.

Science has freed us from
Demons of fear, and replaced them
With chromosomes of fate
From which there is no exorcism.

Golden sunset
Previous heaven
Copper oaks
Cheap world

You trample the grapes of wisdom
Into pulp, but not into wine—
The germs of your feet
Create a deathly fermentation.

Rain Shadow:[19]
Past my prime, I slide down
The leeward mountain slope, leaving behind
The tall trees of aspiration
And entering the withered desert.

[19] A rain shadow occurs when most of the rain and snow falls on the windward side of a mountain range, leaving the air dry on the leeward side. Examples are the Cascades and Sierra Nevada of the western states, where the Pacific slope is thickly forested but east of the mountains are grasslands (north) or deserts (south).

Midrash Tales of Exodus:[20]

1. *Pharaoh's army thunders behind us.*
   The Red Sea is before us, not parting
   Even when Moses screams at it, until
   Nachson walks in, up to his nose.

2. A slave in Egypt has food,
   Onions and leeks and garlic,
   But a free man in the desert
   Bows his forehead to the dry earth.

3. Buzzing locusts, rasping frogs
   And flies drinking rivers of blood—
   God did not get our attention
   Until our old futures died.

4. *Faith isn't so hard after all—*
   When your old future dies, and the ground
   Of your life collapses, you take
   The next step; what else is there to do?

5. We are stiff-necked, complaining—
   But what do you expect? We thirsted
   In the desert, only to find
   God's promised waters were bitter.

6. We build a box of wood and gold
   And weave a tabernacle; the priests
   Say that God will dwell there.
   This is ridiculous, O God of hills and stars.

7. *Manna every day—as if sweetness*
   The empty calories of frivolity
   Can feed the true hungers
   Of mind and bone and spirit.

What loss would there be if
The entire library of our species' wisdom
Vanished? We have made but one
Discovery of value: love.

[20] Midrash is fiction invented as a way of interpreting scripture in Jewish tradition.

Ancient languages of timeless tribes
Die, and with them
The ability to express ideas
Inconceivable to the modern mind.

Like Herod, the God of DNA
Has slaughtered the innocents,
Deforming them, or leaving
Gaping holes in their hearts.[21]

The worm is fat, that has drunk
The juices of our decay—
It hates the light of day, now hidden
By the smoke of our industry.

Metabolism:

1. Consumers, digesters, we crush
   The complex world of sustenance
   Into a pablum of sameness,
   An ocean of foul chyme.

2. Through canyons of flesh
   We rush headlong in pursuit
   Of our goal: the anus.
   Heartburn is our only sin.

The liberal laughs and disrobes
To bask in the Dadaist sun—
Why not? There is no way, he says,
To stop Hitler's popular tide.[22]

Osama, hater of freedom,
Lies in illness watching the US
Turn into a dictator's realm:
He will die a happy man.[23]

Giant ticks of industry suck
The blood of nature, black oil,
Scarcely even digesting it
Bloating with waste.

[21] I am not speaking figuratively. I mean actual deadly mutations.
[22] Dadaism emerged in Europe between the two world wars.
[23] Osama bin Laden died in a raid ordered by Barack Obama. We do not know if Osama died happy, but Barack Obama interrupted Republican dreams of dictatorship.

Dinosaurs:
They thundered the Earth
But the only ones that survived
The blast of death were feathered
And scarcely touched the ground.[24]

Prophecies:

1. The prophet lies awake
   Counting the hours to dawn
   When, in the new day, his nation
   Will be silent ruins.

2. The stream of history rushes fresh
   With patriot dreams, then is dammed
   By business and government
   Into silted bureaucratic ponds.

Trees in Winter:

1. *Sticks of history*
   Seeds of the future
   Shiver in the cold wind
   Of winter reality.

2. Like a brave man leaning back
   When bullets cancel his advance
   And he reaches to heaven—so trees bend
   Against the rude wind.

3. Trees are not architectural perfections
   But accidents of history
   Branches twisted by wind
   And snaking around disasters.

4. *Tall buildings rise*
   In phallic defiance of God;
   Trees open their arms
   In heavenly acceptance.

God loves you, but the universe
Doesn't give a damn
About your suffering
Or your bewilderment.

[24] Birds are, in fact, the only living representatives of the dinosaur lineage.

Protests:

1. *Peace Is Not Extinct:*
   The dispirited protestors, afraid
   Of their own voices, are like
   An old dog or a half-lit menorah—
   But they are alive.

2. *Protest at Night:*
   The strong lights of tyranny
   Shone through dark winter trees
   Creating webs to entrap
   The protestors with their feeble candles.

3. *Beatitudes:*
   Busted are the peacemakers
   For they shall be called
   Enemies of the state
   And sons of the Antichrist.

"O God, show us how to love,"
The church prayed. God said,
"Very well," and His strong breath
Swept away all their shelters.

To Mom, Christmas 2004:
You were always my star in the sky.
When we moved across the country
And when mushroom clouds loomed
That star was still in the sky.

Our dreams re-create us nightly,
Reinforcing our beliefs and concepts
While throwing off random fragments
Into our dim awareness.

Money grew on trees—the leaves
Were twenty dollar bills, the seeds
Were diamonds. Men scrambled to it,
Killed one another, and became fertilizer.

Eagles do not have to flap
Held aloft by warm air
From the burning city
In the winter land of fear.

The troops came home. Now,
All our wars are fought by robots,
Efficiently killing one another.
At last we are freed from guilt.

Tsunami, December 2004:

1. Run up the mountain
   From the tsunami
   And back down the mountain
   From the mudslide.

2. O God of love, we praise Thee
   That Thy Great Hand has slapped,
   With a massive wave of the ocean,
   The poor shacks on the Indian coast.

3. Rich Republicans and Democrats
   Suck the teat of satiety, wallowing
   In the blessings of God
   Who smites the poor with disaster.

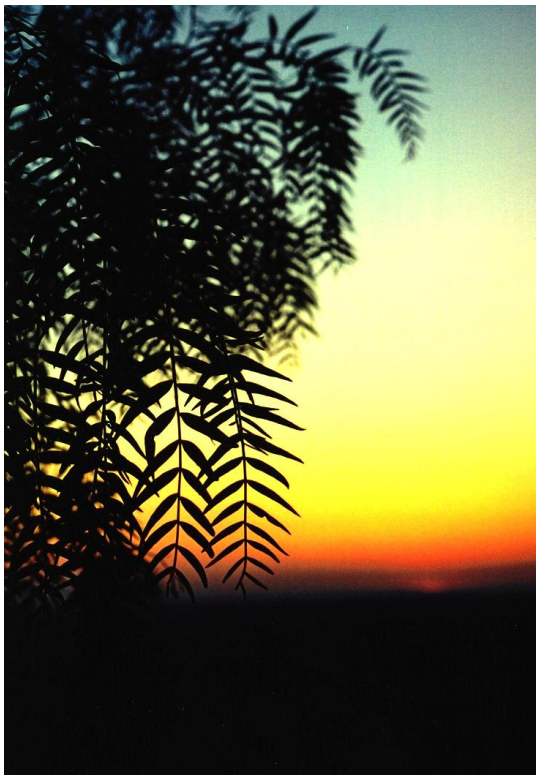
4. *God is not the criminal; He*
   Is a cop, who has the ability
   To prevent crime and violence, but
   Spends his time in the donut shoppe.

All the sin of society has been
Landfilled. Then green grass covers it.
But we still tumble into
Gas pockets of its decomposition.[25]

The bull of society charges me.
I seize its horns and flip
Grasping at heaven but landing
In a fresh pile of dung.[26]

Reality sucks on my mind
Like the great vacuum of outer space.
My mind bursts; splatters of brain
Project across the void of God.

[25] The memorable ending of The End of the Dream, by Philip Wylie.
[26] Bull flipping was a popular sport in ancient Crete.



Sunset, San Joaquin Valley, 2002

There is no Heaven, no Hell,
For Heaven is wherever God dwells
Which is in the electrons of our life
And the hormones of our love.

Not Again:
Soon the white empire
Will be gone, trampled
Into the dust by brown feet
That march toward new sins.

Arena of the Earth:
God created us, and angels watch
For amusement: O Look,
The human animals are humping
Pissing, shitting, killing.

Is God watching? How
Can there be an Eye to intercept
Photons, refracted from human madness
Without a Retina? Q.E.D.

Greenhouse:
Hot winter wind, stirred
By Earth's humid fury
Shivers in its fever dream, and
Shivers the sticks of the human fortress.

Singing, signing, the deaf girl
Has no concept of sound
But she weaves tapestries of word
And creates rhythms of joy.

So bloated are our brains
That we have convinced ourselves
That the world hates us
Because we are so good.

Christmas 2004:
Nowhere is there the slightest sign
Of Divine presence within
Sorry human protoplasm, except
One night in a Judaean stable.

I write poetry—
Or don't you knowetry?
Such as Ogden Nash
Would surely bash.

The powers of Hell
Shall not vanish, for
They were never here. All evil
Comes from man.

Etymology:
Liberty means books, words
Sensible sentences and strong backbone
Of binding, not electronic files
That change, or vanish, in an instant.[27]

The carcass of Uncle Sam
Will be ground up and mixed
With the lamb of God, and roasted
In the gyro kitchens of the Mideast

[27] Liberty and book have the same Latin root.

Final Observation, 2004:
All truth is God's truth
But only after it is censored
By the preachers, the gatekeepers
Who hate all who rejoice in freedom.

New Year 2005:
Omigod, another year,
Fresh exploits of stupidity
A new breath of repression
All new episodes of shame.

The willow spread wide
Its shading branches; its roots
Held a little plot of land
From being washed away by the river.

Jeux de Wort, Again:
Wild breasts leap and growl
Encompassing me in their grasp
Breaking my power of resistance.
I surrender to them.

The Crusader throws down his helmet,
Creates a garden rather than a kingdom,
Shares dates and figs with Arab friends
Tasting contentment for the first time.

So great is the mass of human misery
No hydrogen-gobbling galaxy could dispel it,
No coordinates contain it, no black hole
Crush its memory into eternal hardness.

Boundless imagination?—My mind
Leaps and plays, dives giddily
Into darkness, but all within
The brain's neural roadmap.

Relaxing my spasmodic grasp
On orthodox faith, I now enjoy
Peace and beauty and life
And have no dread of death.

Faith:
Reality is projected on a landscape
Of neural valleys and cellular cliffs.
We create it; we choose to create
A happy scene under God's sun.

Homo ergaster:
The last human animal
Scrambled in search of food;
His companion, the first human soul,
Stopped to adore the songs of birds.

God laughed, and out came
The universe—a spray
Of galaxies and cells. But humans
Have created only misery.

"Oh God, show us how to love,"
The church prayed; God said,
"Very well," and His strong breath
Swept away all their shelters.

Monotropa:
Delicate spooks, bent in adoration
Of the spirit of forest.
A coven of Indian pipes
Sprouts from mulch of living death.[28]

Like ghosts, fungi arise
In warm night mists,
Breathe spores into the air,
Then vanish in the sunlight.

His temporal lobe created
A God of peace and order;
When war and chaos came, he raged
Against a God that wasn't there.

An Arrival:

1. Into the vast ice expanse
   Of his solitude, she came
   Like a bear, attacking seals
   And leaving swaths of crimson.

[28] Monotropa is a little flowering plant, without chlorophyll, that lives off of food found in mulch.

2. An unseen wave, she passed
   Beneath his frozen frigidity
   Bending it into ridges of surprise
   And fracturing his perfection.

Sleep Disorder:
For others, sleep comes
Like a peaceful mist; for me,
Spasms attack unpredictably
And monsters roar in darkness.[29]

I kiss each finger
With which you, all day,
Every day, bless others
With delicate precision.

Envy:
Like animals, we exist.
Unlike animals, we know we exist.
Unlike animals, we know
We will cease to exist.

You are a palimpsest
Overwritten with mysteries
In languages simple and complex,
Not hidden, but on your very skin.

Finding God:

1. A million sufferers
   Each endured her own pain.
   Experiencing the suffering of all of them—
   That is where you find God.

2. *Do not look up, fancying*
   To see God on a throne. Look down
   At world's anguish and Earth's beauty—
   That is where you find God.

Emotion is neither reality
Nor illusion; it is data
Indicating to the brain
Some overlooked truth.

[29] I have suffered with sleep disorder for decades.

Abel's meat and Cain's wheat
Ancient sacrifices, now brought
Together in one eucharist, a feast
Of human reconciliation.

Uganda 1981:

1. In the land devastated by armies
   In the stench of death
   There is one blessing from God:
   Rainwater can be boiled and drunk.

2. In the rural hospital
   There is pure suffering:
   Not even any beds
   Dilute the misery of disease.

3. A conservative is someone who says
   Market forces are always right:
   An infant with festering sores
   Deserves to suffer.

4. My white skin is the mark
   Of a race that has chewed and spat out
   These poor people—not my fault, but
   In their dazed hunger, they hate me.

5. "I show you," said the scrawny African man,
   "America's future:" He gestured around us,
   Trees shattered, people starved,
   Brown grass, a beard on Earth's corpse.

6. A camp for refugee children
   Has no clean water or medicine,
   Has only two more days of food, and one worry:
   Raiders capture the children as slaves.

7. The Psalmist said, "I have never
   Seen the righteous forsaken."
   He must have sat in his priestly chamber
   Not looking upon the world.

8. No God-talk:
   I try to devise a theodicy
   That makes sense of Uganda.
   It is this: suffering exists, and we
   Work simply to alleviate it.

9. God is unjust. My evidence:
   Millions suffer; I sit in luxury
   Well fed, recuperating from surgery
   From a whole team of clean professionals.

10. What can I do? I who am
    So rich, benefiting from medicine?
    But my diminishment would not
    Save a single life in all Uganda.

11. I am awake in the night
    While children starve. What will I do?
    Take another sleeping pill.
    Tomorrow, rested, I will love.

12. One evil man can counteract
    Then thousand deeds of charity
    But cannot pervert them
    From having happened.

13. We give a cup of milk
    To a child who will die—why?
    For one brief moment, one person
    Knew there was such a thing as love.

14. Squalor is when bacteria,
    The vilest members of God's club
    Of evolved creatures, feasts on
    The failures of the evolved human mind.

Get Used to It:

1. Get used to it, a new world
   Where devout Jews pray, and slip
   Papers between bricks of The Wall
   From which a Muslim dome rises.

2. Get used to it: The Wall
   Where devout Jews pray, capped
   By a mosque, will never see
   A throne for an earthly Jesus.

As a young idealist, I thought
To serve God by forcing religious words
To tunes of great music, as if
This made them any more worshipful.

Sleepwalkers:
Buy what they tell us
Believe what they tell us
Vote for leaders who drape flags
Over soldiers' coffins.

To the Evangelists:
If humankind is the body of God
Then I know which part you are:
It thrusts, and forces its blind head
Into places that cannot welcome it.

Our old cat grooms
Comfortably unaware
Of her own mortality, even though
She watched her housemate die.

Germany pays billions
In reparation to Israel; the USA
Pays none to its Native victims
Of genocide. We await God's judgment.[30]

Bogotá

1. In America, asbestos
   Is a forbidden, carcinogenic material;
   In Bogotá, it is the only wall or roof
   For the poor slum dweller.

[30] The Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany was signed on September 10, 1952, and entered in force on March 27, 1953. According to the Agreement, West Germany was to pay Israel for the costs of "resettling so great a number of uprooted and destitute Jewish refugees" after the war, and to compensate individual Jews for losses in Jewish livelihood and property resulting from Nazi persecution…West Germany paid Israel a sum of 3 billion marks over the next fourteen years. [Wikipedia]

2. Los Gamines:
   The Earth, a careful gardener,
   Raises beautiful heads of children
   Then harvests them when ripe, to feed
   To its pet bacteria.

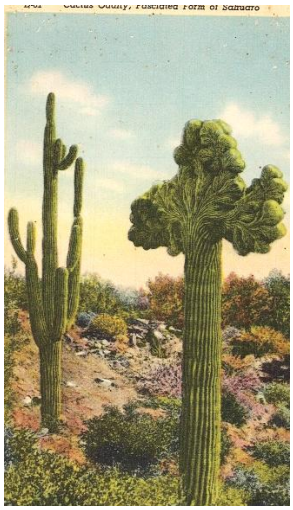
3. Rivers of sewage
   Glisten in a ghostly light
   Under gray mists
   Of automobile exhaust.

With the passing of humans
Earth entered a coma until
Its green skin healed and new minds
Evolved from gray beastly neurons.

The Crowd:
I clotted along with the juices
Of fatness and salt, of humanity, lost
In dissolution. A few fibrous vegetables
Insisted on maintaining individuality.

If God will not save us
From the scourge of pestilence
Will He not at least soften the Earth
So that we can bury our dead?

Hell opened before me; but God waited
To hear testimony in my favor. A worm said,
"He found me stranded on the path
And rescued me." God spared me.



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.