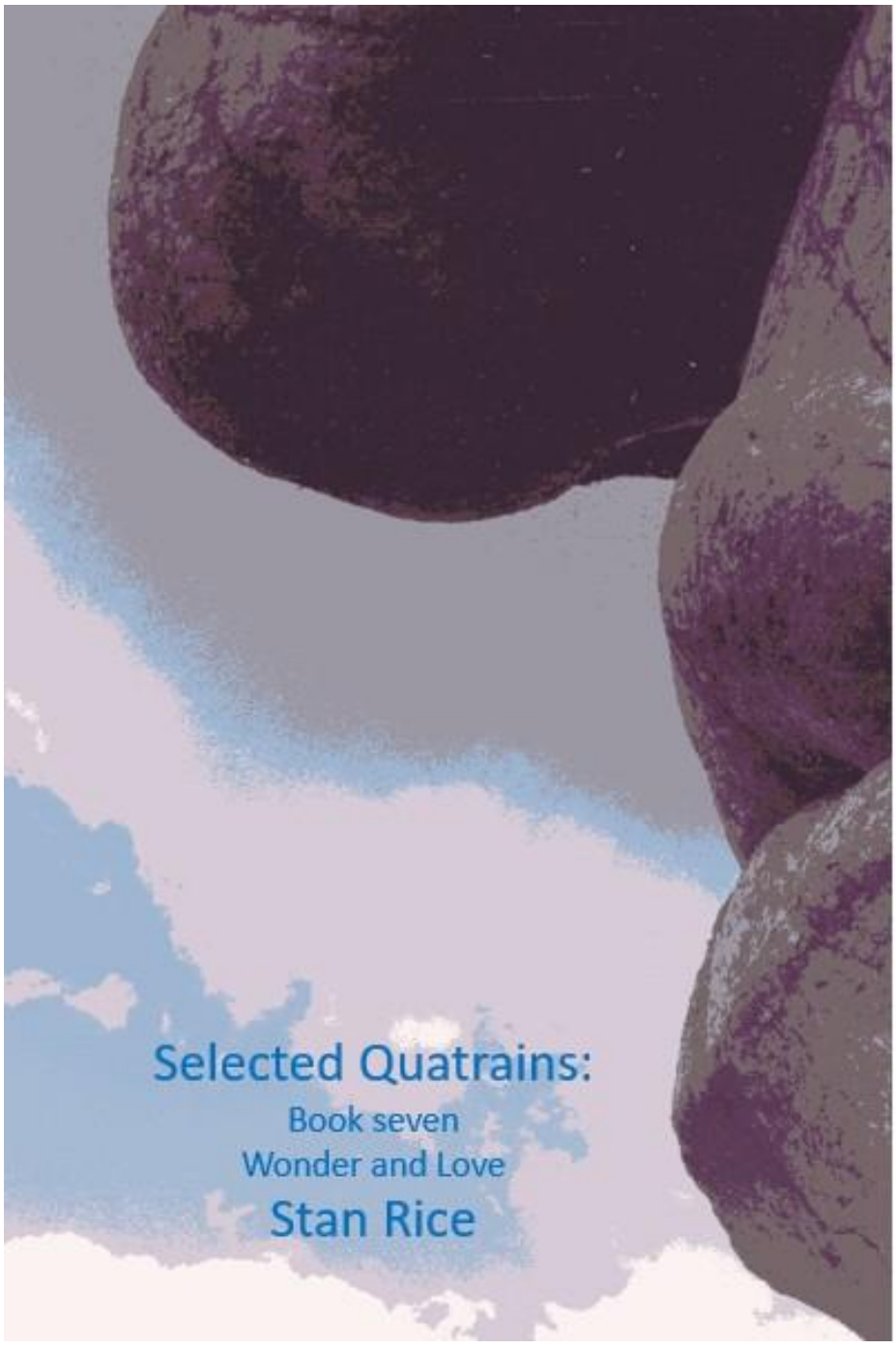

Selected Quatrains:
Book seven
Wonder and Love
Stan Rice

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Book seven: Wonder and Love
Stan Rice
2006-2007

Quatrains on Wonder 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.
Cover photo: Close-up of Crazy Horse mountain, 2000.

"I hate to tell a kid he's wrong,"
The preacher told me, when I insisted
That human nature is evil. Now
He is dead and knows the truth.

His readers loved his every word.
He could have published anything,
But wrote no crap, because
He loved those readers.

Hispañola:
Where slaves once raised sugarcane
Now peasants raise sugarcane,
Breathing the fumes of liberty,
Free, whenever they choose, to die.

America:
Roads penetrate our landscape
Like arteries and tiny capillaries
Delivering people to every tissue of nature
To plunder and pollute.

The Ottoman Empire:
The Autumn Empire
Slices its scimitar
Across the hills
Turning trees to blood.

We crucify Jesus anew
On each electrical pole:
We stampede Him with phone gossip
And electrocute Him with our greed.

How little difference! How slight
An alteration of matter and energy
Transforms a living soul
Into a silent corpse.

To Veronika on the Morning of Her Death:
The fallen leaves of the red oak
Remind me of graceful goblets:
We must all drink
From the chalice of death.[1]

[1] The leaves of the red oak Quercus falcata are almost goblet-shaped.

Trying to Explain the Cruelty of the World:
No matter where we stand
On the vast plain of propositions
We will only dig ourselves into a hole
And get dirty—And maybe not get out.

Intelligent Design:
Look around you.
Perhaps one in ten or twenty
Will be whisked away, soon,
In random, meaningless death.

Funeral:
Because God is love, it is the duty
Of the one who loved her most
To throw the first clod of earth
Into her fresh grave.

Two fundamentalist preachers
Locked in mortal combat
Over the proper pronunciation
Of "Habakkuk."

Two Love Poems:

1. Your lips say nothing
   My head thinks nothing
   As we unite once again
   In the ritual as old as the sea.

2. The heat generated in our love nest
   Burned away the morning clouds.
   The sunny afternoon demanded work
   But we were too tired.

Senescence:

1. My beard was the first to turn white
   Then the chest hairs over my heart
   The last will be the hairs of my skull
   Domed over my inquisitive brain.

2. My life has been a bathtub draining;
   When I was younger, I did not notice it;
   Now I see the vortex over the drain;
   Someday the tub will be suddenly empty.

Billboard:

1. *"Come to our church. You will find*
   God here." They are right. But
   What they don't tell you is
   They keep Him locked in the basement.

2. *We are agnostic fleas, debating the existence*
   Of the warm flesh of Dog. But if Dog
   Wanted us to know Him, He would have
   Put brains in our little flea heads.

Some Assembly Required:
Every life unfinished—pieces of life
Fitting together in ways incomprehensible
Until just moments
Before being discarded.

Nakedness:

1. If we were all naked, there would be
   No visible difference of rich and poor
   Or of culture; and raging sexual appetite
   Would soon melt into contentment.

2. Clothes are not to hide organs
   That we tell their Creator are shameful;
   They are marks of rank and power,
   And turn the body into enticement.

I hang like a bat
And see a world
In which the ground glows
With the goodness of angel feet.

Hope is what springs from the stump
Of a mighty oak: Little suckers
None of which has the slightest chance
Of becoming mighty, but which grow anyway.

Maple seeds:
I believe in angels—I have seen them,
Made of stardust, with green wings
Whirling in the wind,
Launched from maple branches.

I've been listening to nothing but Mozart—
Insane with happiness, he crafted
Each instrument to its perfect role
Each line into a symbiosis of joy.

Finally, when you have begged
And pleaded enough, God will help you
Not depleting Himself of anything.
Or maybe not.

A dream white and soft
As a big furry dog
With little black eyes and nose
And a mean little nip.

Darkness cannot consume light
According to religion and science—
But behold the history of man
And see the hungry shadows grow.

Humor is the most serious thing
In writing and in life:
A weapon against the arrogant
And the sole preserver of sanity.

Souls of dead cavemen
Shot into a cold clear sky;
But now the atmosphere is a thick haze
Like a soup of the spirits of the dead.

"Blue is not patriotic,"
Said the Red Republican
As he tore the corner out of the flag
And stamped on the stars.

Each bite
Into the warm cookie
Is a prayer
And a regret.

I walked out
Of the church
And sat with Jesus
On the curb

Some days I am a gondolier
Slipping softly through shallow thoughts
Into whose mud I push
The stiff rod of habit.

An Old Man Soon Enough:
This is perfect happiness:
To urinate without pain
To stand up without fainting
To remember what day it is.

Meditation:
When consuming great truths
Maybe I should shut up
Like the snake that does not try to talk
While swallowing the Golden Calf.

God made the moon to rule the night:
Gibbous, adolescent prince;
Full visage of the king; fading
To the dark empty sky of newness.

Preachers calculate the precise time
Of rapture and Armageddon, ignorant
That all times are End Times:
This is the day that the Lord has made.

The weathervane was a Grim Reaper
Turning his scythe one way, then another,
With each change of breeze—
Each death is God's whim.

Vanilla is a simple molecule,
Straightforward purity; but chocolate
Is a mystery, a complex of secret places
That vanish as soon as you look for them.[2]

For Darwin's Birthday 2006:
He studied the worms that flourished
By remaining simple and hidden
And which recycle all of us
Into the mothering earth.

[2] Vanilla is just the vanillin molecule; chocolate is not just theobromine.

Chocolate:

1. *There are some evil preachers*
   But no evil chocolatiers—
   One can have too much chocolate
   But, unlike religion, it is not toxic.

2. *Chocolate is truth:*
   Bitter, but rich and complex;
   Sweet, but only when sugared;
   Darker than any sunlight dares to be.

The American Religion:
Gone are all the prohibitions
Against luxury, all of Jesus' calls
For humility. All that remains
Is the arrogance of unique Truth.

The gardener who hates
The soil which he digs
Will not enjoy
The fruits that grow from it.

Humility is not weakness.
He changes the world
Without the world knowing it.
He will not live to see this happen.

A candle
Inside a paper lantern
A risk
Of shimmering light.

The little buried seed
Too small to be crushed
Awakens from centuries of sleep
And bursts, unearthed, into light.

Every day I awaken
Amazed to be given
Another day to be liberated
From the thick chaos of dreams.

John 1:5:
Each new day is a battle—
The light shines in the darkness
But the darkness has not contained it—
Not quite.

God has never spoken to me
Yet I keep following Him
Like a stupid duck, waddling
Behind the man it thinks is its mother.[3]

The Psalmist and the Birds:

1. The psalmist praised the birds
   That nested in the altar
   Yet those birds know nothing
   Of God, or Heaven, of Hell, of death.

2. The psalmist praised the birds
   That nested in the altar;
   Modern American Christians
   Would call an exterminator.

Funeral flowers, all perfect
From factory greenhouses
Bid farewell to buoyant souls
Churned out by the factory of death.

In my paint-by-number, the sea,
The crests, waves, and clouds were enchanted,
A heaven of embracing colors. The real sea
Is livid, stark, and smells of decay.

This Happened in 1982:
I awoke one morning, and looked out
The window, at cars and trees below. Suddenly
I was no longer in love with her, free
To again see the color and logic of the world.

Oh God, forgive me for going to church,
A church that insists it is the gateway
To You, and for clinging to doctrines
And using them, not love, for salvation.

[3] The famous imprinting experiment by Konrad Lorenz.

Touch me there, you know, that spot
That only you know, from which
Pleasure oozes, not erupts.
It isn't even sexual.

Like a compass to true north?
But I just read in *Science*[4]
That magnetic north just wandered
From Canada out into the sea last week.

You are not welcome in my mind.
You entered, set up house,
Then said, "Be right back,"
And never returned. Don't bother now.

Poem Based upon a Student Blooper:
"Magellan circumcised the globe
With a hundred foot clipper;"
The world, now sutured by commerce
Will never recover from that wound.

For Mother (March 7, 2006):
Mother,
Though you are now weak
Your strength lives on
In your children and grandchild.

The great palace of Babylon,
If we could see it today, would look
Like a small, dull apartment house
Full of dust and filth.

Solar Flares:
The sun's brief indigestion
And passing flares of anger
Are larger than the whole Earth
And its entire history.

At My Funeral:

1. *At my funeral*
   Have live plants
   Then take them home
   And care for them.

[4] The world's leading science journal, published by AAAS.

2. *At my funeral, sing and clap,*
   Shake your fist at Death
   To keep him away from you
   For one more day.

3. *At my funeral*
   Meditate on silence
   You will discover it is impossible
   To have no thoughts.

Red fire consumes red leaves
In a red sunset, as lava flows
And as blood drains
From the soul of the crimson world.

Solitude is embeddedness,
Connection to unseen worlds;
Loneliness is disjunction
From worlds all too visible.

Raindrops trace messages
On the window, in an unknown script:
Water, as resource,
Water, as information.



The ghost in the winter tree branches
Is just a plastic bag
Its sibilant voice in the wind
Warns us of imminent death.

The swallow weaves heaven to Earth
With lilting stitches and gentle song
Then falls to Earth and crashes
In death, a fabric always rent.

"God help me," I mutter
To the agnostic sky
Which may or may not be
Contained within a responsive Father.

Servants of God (Gitmo):[5]
In our small way, by subjecting
Uncharged prisoners to torture until
They confess what they did not do, we imitate
The infinite tortures of Hell.

Your love is like the cherry coke
Into which the greedy bee
Stumbled and
Drowned

Space heater?
But you cannot heat space.
You can only heat molecules
For a moment in cosmic time.

The religious man turned his back
On God's offer of eternal life because
When he looked into Heaven he saw
His old enemies there.

Make a joyful noise
Unto the Lord—make sure
You do not listen
To the sounds of the forest.

I will not look at your breasts. I
Will not look at your breasts. I will not
Look at your breasts. I will not look at
Your breasts.

[5] Prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where America sends those it accuses of terrorism.

Bleeding heart liberals
Care more about our troops
Than does Herr Rumsfeld, for whom
They are just numbers.[6]

The newborn calf
Full of springtime energy
Gallops in joy
Towards the slaughterhouse.

O2BAB:
Oh, to be a bee—her brain
So small, she cannot
Comprehend death; nectar and color
Give her unmeasurable pleasure.

Mind Control:

1. The Preacher, 2500 A.D.:
   He flipped a switch, and his entire congregation,
   Implanted with brain electrodes,
   Bowed in worship and obedience. He smiled
   As God thanked him for a job well done.

2. A genetically engineered faith:
   A brain that cannot be saved
   A faith that cannot question
   Is not faith.

3. An electrode implanted in her brain
   Made her vividly feel
   That even a single note was
   As rapturous as all of Mahler.[7]

Remus and Romulus:
Bush and Cheney suck at the teats
Of the giant wolf that bestrides
The seven hills of Washington D.C.
And growls at the world.

[6] Donald Rumsfeld was Dubya's Secretary of Defense, who sent troops to battle based on false information, and who sent letters of condolence to parents of fallen soldiers, signed by a machine.
[7] Modernistic composer Milton Babbit said that a single note of his music was as expressive as a whole Mozart sonata.

I digested his poems.
They were roughage that gave me
No nutrition of their own
But they cleansed out my inner soul.

The Ecosystem Viewpoint:
The buffalo and the earthworm
Are exactly the same:
They consume organic matter
And process it into soil.

The landscape is a book
Which we all read differently:
To some, as science; to others, as poetry;
To most, as ledgers of mammon.

Sewing Confusion:
She stitched a garment
Both revealing and concealing,
Colorful and subdued, which said yes
But also said no.[8]

I've spent my whole life
Vigorously stirring a pancake batter
Of science and religion: They will not mix
Nor consent to being flattened.

Ants:

1. An algorithm of ants
   Tries every possibility
   Before massing along the scent trail
   That leads to the solution.

2. The pungent ant
   Lays down its life
   To leave a scent trail
   Leading other ants to sugar.

Humans construct religions
As beavers construct huts
Not knowing any other way
To have shelter from chaos.

[8] Play on sowing confusion.

Bottles shattered, sharp shards
Of human arrogance, are abraded
Into smoothness by the restless sea
And the effacing sand.

"The Truth Shall Make You Free"
But religious people do not want
To be free. They want doctrines
To construct prison walls
Straight and strong and safe.

Note in a Bottle:
Flee from the wrath to come! But
By the time you read this
It will be too late.[9]

The heart inside its bonehouse
With windows closed
Refuses to acknowledge
The hopelessness of the world outside.

Tycho Brahe Unwilling to Admit that the Earth Goes Around the Sun:
He will not admit
He lost the fight; instead
He admires his golden nose—
An improvement, he says, on the original.[10]

The sea keeps talking to itself
Asking the same questions, rising,
Falling, wearing away continents
Just as it did in the Precambrian.

Armies and dictators and viruses
Ravage Africa, leaving behind
An immense sadness, a wound
America could not heal even if it tried.

The gossamer God
Turned out to be
Webs of thought, a fabric
Of yearnings and needs.

[9] I found a paper note in a bottle on the seashore in Santa Barbara about 1977. It was a Doonesbury cartoon.
[10] Brahe was one of the last astronomers to not use a telescope, and one of the last geocentrists. He lost his nose in a sword fight, and wore a gold prosthesis.

Earth in space
Island of lost souls
Imprisoned to watch
Their own creeping mortality.

The genius of birds is
All that they leave behind
To be light enough to fly—
And that they know when not to fly.

Birthday Thoughts, Age 49:
No person can live forever,
For a story without an end
Is not a story—unless
It begins over and over.

We forgot all about Andorra,
That little tumor on the membrane
Between France and Spain, as we swept
Our arms, generalizing about nations.

The wind was hymning through the branches:
Brusquely through the pines
Murmuringly through the cottonwoods
Whistlingly through the nameless dead tree.[11]

I said hello to a bitter-faced stranger
On the sidewalk—I hope this was
Evidence against his obvious belief
That everyone hated him.

A bare leg, a crotch, a nipple—
Or a bomb-torn body
In America's Holy War?
Which is more pornographic?

Aspartame:
Rummy and Cheney both began
As purveyors of dangerous sweetness
And ended up, in the toxic cabinets
Of Bushes I and II, telling sweet lies of war.[12]

[11] I wrote 34 poems in the night of June 2-3, 2006.
[12] Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney both began as aspartame salesmen, before being Defense Secretary and Vice President during the Iraq War.

A Prophecy:
Daily life under Saddam
Wasn't so bad, if you were not
Kurdish, or wise, or conscripted—
Americans, too, will adjust to tyranny.[13]

Insults:

1. Evolution must be true
   For we have a president
   With habiline braincase
   And simian innocence.

2. Wisdom is deep, like glacial lakes
   Unless it is the wisdom of Bush
   As shallow as the artificial lake
   On his ranch in Texas.

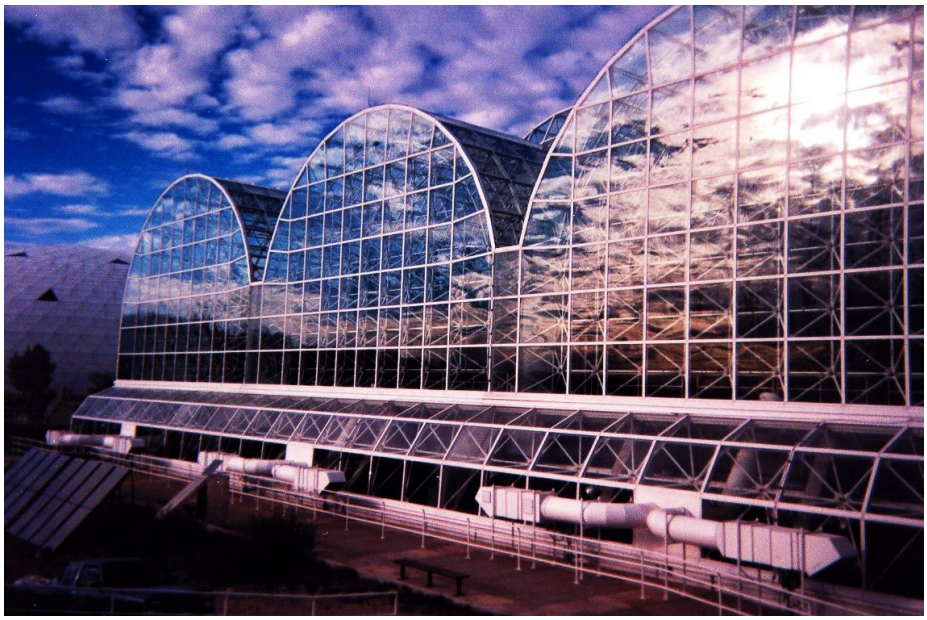
3. Klingon blood wine
   Ferengi lymph champagne
   Are favorites
   At Republican feasts.

4. In gunfighter ballads
   Justice is simple:
   Good man shoots bad man.
   This is Bush jurisprudence.

5. If Molière could write
   The "missile-anthrope,"
   It would be about George W. Bush
   Carrying around his weapon.

Fossils:
Ammonites
Amalekites
Blatherskites
Far Rights.[14]

[13] I predicted that George W. Bush would become a dictator. I was wrong. I make a similar prediction about Donald Trump now.
[14] Inspired by Mark Twain, Was the World Made for Man?



Biosphere II, Arizona, 2000. Not as good as Biosphere I.

Somewhere, Someday:

1. …A cult will arise that worships
   Johnny Cash, Man in White,
   Who never popped a pill, and
   Whose voice, verily, was Heaven.

2. There is a universe somewhere
   Where every voice is as rich
   And deep as Johnny Cash's
   And every Teenage Queen comes home.

Flag Day 2006:
Wave the flag, then wrap it
Around your eyes, for blindfolding
Improves a citizen's ability
To understand our country's mission.

Insomnia from an Allergy Shot:

1. Inspiration is not spirit
   Nor is it careful thought
   For it is simply
   After-effects of an allergy shot.

2. Come, O sleep;
   To count leaping sheep
   Only makes me analyze
   Their trajectory and taxonomy.

3. Wisdom flows through me
   Like gushing aortic blood
   Too fast to bless
   Or to nourish me.

One Last Remnant of Mary De Van, School Secretary and Playwright, 1967:
I am the king
My praise they sing
When I wear my crown
In London town.[15]

Blood:
Blood and sand—
No longer a Valentino fantasy
On brittle faded celluloid
But our entire foreign policy.

Honest Version of a 1960s song:

1. Something happened to my heart
   The day that I met you:
   Bishop of mitre valve, king of corona arteries
   Commanded me to love you.

2. My love is deeper than
   The deepest ocean, only to be
   Subducted by continental plates
   And spewed out of volcanoes.

3. My love is wider than
   The sky, curving upon itself
   In Einsteinian singularity—
   And thus having no width.

4. My love is brighter than
   The brightest star, even the sun,
   Whose gravitational field twists
   Flames of love back into itself.

[15] Mary wrote this for me for a hat play in elementary school; I wore a construction paper crown with a little silk peach on top.

5. There is nothing in this world
   That can ever change my love
   Except decay over time
   Or some petty irritation.

Goldschmidt Was Right:
Hopeful monsters
Of sudden speciation—
A month's worth of poems
In a single hour.[16]

Duke Street:
Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run
Which means He will reign nowhere
On the heliocentric planets.[17]

Solomon's Insight about Allergies:
The waters flow to the sea
Yet the sea is never filled—
Earth's body is like mine
With its unending production of snot.[18]

Blood, Again:

1. White blood cells
   Like little fried eggs
   Slide through oceans
   Of red blood cell ketchup.

2. Plants have no blood
   Except the white latex that seals
   Injuries in spurges; nor any brains—
   How blessed is their painless non-joy.

I must not levitate
Very far in spiritual bliss
Lest I get left behind
By the racing Earth.

[16] Richard Goldschmidt proposed the Hopeful Monster Theory, by which evolution occurred in sudden lurches rather than by gradualism.
[17] Duke Street is the tune to a famous hymn by Isaac Watts (1719).
[18] Ecclesiastes, chapter 1.

July 4, 2006, What Grand Adventure…
To march across the world
With nuclear sword, titanium cross
And digitized Bible with
All references to peace removed.

Nature is no podcast of wisdom
Downloadable at your convenience;
You must be ever attentive
To receive its random lessons.

Tear away a leaf;
There is a bud at its base
Ready to replace the lost leaf
With an entire new branch.

Vintage:
The grape, sweet and flavorful
Is more than just
The source of wine—but wine
Lives almost forever.

Dust we are, each of us
A particle disconnected from the other,
Playthings of wind, unless
A drop of blood glues us together.

Sakura:
The purpose of the springtime petals
Is to flutter as clouds in the wind
To fall in piles on the ground
To stick in the blood on the sidewalk.[19]

The truth of life is fragile
Launched out, in faith
In a bulrush ark—
It might so easily have died.[20]

[19] Sakura is the Japanese cherry blossom, symbol of brief beauty. The folk song "sakura" says the petals are like clouds or mists (Kasumi ka kumo ka). In 1980, an Asian graduate student in my dormitory failed an exam and jumped from a window. Cherry blossom petals stuck in his blood.
[20] Baby Moses was launched in a little boat among the bulrushes on the Nile, according to Exodus.

To My Wife:
The scratched wedding bands
Abraded by time and space
Record blessings and conflicts—
Yet still are intact circles.

The Natural Philosophy Alliance:[21]

1. They hide their eyes from the real world
   Of light and tree and rock and ocean
   And give speeches to one another, which
   Make sense only in a darkened room.

2. *Sometimes "thinking outside the box"*
   Leads to new insights, a consilience
   Of harmonious simplicities, but usually
   It just means that you spilled the box.

Moon in Eclipse,
Blushing, furious,
Forced to behold
The brutality of man.



Native American prayer cloths to commemorate the dead, Bear Butte, South Dakota, 2000

[21] A group that held meetings in Tulsa. They believe an alternative version of Earth and universal history.

For every bud that flowers
A dozen produce useful leaves
And a hundred sit
Forever in waiting.

Dualism:
Chumbling along beside
My swift wise spirit, my body
Makes my life a joke
And mires me in pain.

Insomnia:

1. How precious is sleep
   To those of us unworthy of it;
   If we strive for it
   It retreats even further.

2. How fortunate are those
   Who sleep easily and deeply
   And who get up in the morning
   Griping about their work.

In the land without winter, they say
The leaves never fall.
Ah, but they do fall, one at a time,
In a gentle, secret snow.

Revelation:
When Colin Powell spoke, trying
To sell the Iraq War to the UN
He had the Picasso images
Of Guernica hidden behind drapes.[22]

Green counterpane
On the bed—
Hopeless dreams
Of a newly forested world.

Trees, imprisoned in cities
Are yet wild: They burst their buds
Not at human bidding
But when Heaven calls.[23]

[22] Colin Powell was Dubya's Secretary of State. Guernica was the Picasso painting of the aerial bombardment of a Spanish town before World War II.
[23] I studied budburst times of trees within an Oklahoma city for sixteen years.

I am not black with sin
Nor cleansed into whiteness—
I am a rich brown,
Like earth, like wood.

Science Educator:
"What do you want me to do?"
I asked the fossiliferous rock.
"Just go back to work," she said,
"And tell everyone my story."

To George W. Bush:
The spirits admire you
Quarreling among themselves
About which will have the honor
Of greeting your arrival in H—

The green Penicillium mold
Pretends to have chlorophyll
But it does not refresh its home—
It only putrefies it.

Wisdom is a seed
Hard-shelled, lightly buried
Waiting to be awakened
By fire.

Mahler's Third Symphony, Fifth Movement:
Even in Heaven
The clouds cast shadows
Creating a momentary gust of coolness
Amidst the brilliant heat.

Theological Inquiries:

1. God cannot be a person
   All powerful and good
   But God can be
   A nebula of goodness.

2. I fantasize about
   Creating goodness for others;
   So also would God
   If God were a person.

3. How can Jesus be Son of God
   If God is not a person?
   Because Jesus was the focus
   Of Goodness unique upon the Earth.

To balance the interests
Of the environment and profit
Is like sharing blood
Between bleeding and circulation.

The twisted rope ladder of DNA—
We cling to it as we dangle
While coptered over the chasms
Of our evolution.

Squatting in the Bushes
Republicans pretend
No one will notice
Their shit.

The Amish are tiny corpuscles
In the rushing blood
From the severed arteries
Of American greed.

What a theological web
Of guilt and hope we weave
From the silence of God
And the deep blackness of the sky.

The full moon rises, exhausted,
Barely slipping away
The cloud sheets, as her bleary eyes
Survey the sinful world.

Marching orders of DNA
Sent out on a trillion insect legs
And in billions of human brains
Can never be called back.

Our brains are fried pies
Crumbly on the outside, defenseless
Against misinformation; inside,
Fat with empty calories.

He went wild. That is, he became
Disciplined to survive
The sharp rocks and merciless ice
Of the wilderness.

I am blessed: I have loved
A few friends, a family,
A few forests, a few deserts
Before I cease to exist.

Wilderness
Is what
Every place
Will become.

A nightmare
Is the only way
I can empathize with
The plight of womankind.

Eternal bliss in Heaven
Singing the same song over and over
Can happen only if
We no longer have minds.

I am camped, alone, unseen,
In a forest right beside
The busiest human paths, into which
They toss their garbage.

I read the sacred texts
Stratigraphy of rocks
Layers of wood
Calligraphy of rivers.

Falling asleep is a rocky shore
Or a Norman beach with battlements
Between daytime alertness
And restless waves of the deep.

Creation continues:
On behalf of God, Christians
Raze forests, pave farmlands,
And intelligently design new malls.

Erosion:
The humus of culture,
Knowledge of the Earth,
Love of community, wash away
In sad, heavy storms.

Your chalice is bone china,
Baked from ground bones
Of war victims, fragile,
Filled with eucharist wine.

Gaia's preacher-man
Stood in the toxic dump
And asked forgiveness for being part
Of the economy of waste.

A helicopter brought the CEO
To the wiseman on the mountain
And the wise man told the CEO
Whatever he wanted to hear.

My Attempts at Proverbs:

1. *The decisive man steps out*
   In measured paces across
   Any terrain, firm, confident,
   Until he strides into a pit.

2. *The wise man meanders,*
   Curling under boughs, around cacti,
   Sitting on the fence to consider
   Whether he should even move.

He stepped out of the church,
Squinted in the sunshine,
Breathed brisk air. The Spirit
Awoke within him then.

Science does not intersect
Religion and art in the world
Except within the focus
Of a person's soul.

Republicans:

1. The Republican mindset
   Of dominion is threatened
   By dissent, but even more
   By scientific curiosity.

2. Unless the Republicans
   Suppress scientific inquiry
   They cannot continue
   Their mythology of dominion.

Burning Rage of a Dying Planet:

1. Elves of the forest emerge
   From darkness into artificial day
   To turn civilization
   Into a bonfire.

2. *You will get more prison time*
   For eco-freak graffiti
   On a McDonald's than for
   Raping an Iraqi girl.

3. *Smiling Wal-Mart employees*
   Are like the smiling darkies
   Who dared not complain
   While Massah was watching.

4. *Poor women in factories*
   Painted radium on watch faces.
   Before they died, they glowed
   With the glory of capitalism.

5. White on shining white is the beauty
   Of the baby harp seal,
   To which human hunters add
   The beauty of shining crimson blood.

6. The Earth liberation activists
   Igniting flames to purify the world
   Are as fallibly human
   As the oppressors they hate.

And King George said, Let us build
Walls between countries, and between
Humans and Nature; let us
Wall ourselves from Truth itself.[24]

Free Range Chickens:
The doors of the coop are open—
Little doors, not noticed, not used
By stupefied chickens. In this way also
Are Americans free.

It was just an ordinary day
Of spring rain in Norway
Until Edvard Grieg
Immortalized it in music.[25]

Buttered popcorn clouds,
A heaven in which
Our bulbous bodies enjoy
Everlasting satiation.

Random sexual encounters
Blend the brilliant colors
Of individuality
Into a gray sameness.

Opus 2500 (November 4, 2006):
Twenty-five hundred insights
Snatched from the ether;
Twenty-five million more
Slipped through undetected.

He was offended when a falling leaf
Hit him, and by a singing bird, and by dirt;
He will not be satisfied until
He gets to the sterile streets of Heaven.

Pecan leaflets like scimitars
Sweetgum leaves like blood—
Autumn foliage of war
Decomposes into mulch.[26]

[24] George W. Bush, of course; but it became even more true later of Donald Trump.
[25] Opus 43 number 6.
[26] You can distinguish pecan from walnut leaves because the former have talon (scimitar) shaped leaflets. Scimitar implies Arabic.

November 2006 Elections:
After the Chill, Indian summer
Comes with intense heat
After all hope was gone.
Native peoples, unite!

There is more good work,
Slow and blessed synthesis,
In the formation of soil
Than in building a cathedral.

The religion of my youth
Is sticky webs;
I have scared away the spiders
But the webs will always adhere.

Veterans' Day (Iraq):
We remember the veterans
Whom the Republicans sent
With inadequate equipment
To a mistaken war.

Vultures:
Soaring in waltzing ellipses,
Feathers spread gracefully
From wing tips
Ridding the world of wastes

Autumn:
Oak leaves on killed stems
Are brown; but on living stems
The leaves in graceful old age
Shine with copper and gold.

Astonishing human fecundity—
No end to the river of flesh
The river of blood
The torrent of oppression.

Second-Hand Smoke:
The child grew up in the haze
Of the smoke that billowed from eternal fires
Of damnation, into believing which
His parents had frightened him.

Manure, straw, oxygen, and time
Become rich scented earth,
A transubstantiation worthy
Of the Creator of nature.

We cut down the trees
And when the floods come
We throw tantrums in the mud
And blame God.[27]

The branch ends its life and falls;
But it lives one more life:
The mushroom grows from it
Creating meat out of its death.

To a Religious Traditionalist:
How can you be sure that God,
Who may or may not spare you from disease,
Will protect you from the demons
In which you firmly believe?

Man cannot sit still
Long enough to even consider
Whether there might be
A meaning to life.

Thanksgiving Poems:

1. A Germ's Thanksgiving Hymn:
   They gather together
   To spread us diseases
   From one to another
   Through coughing and wastes…

2. The First Thanksgiving:
   For one brief moment
   Natives, and their killers
   Who brought a feast of pox
   Sat down in peace.

[27] See my book, Green Planet: How Plants Keep the Earth Alive.

Two Poems about Love (Finale of Mahler's Third Symphony):

1. Love opens its birdy gape wide
   Hoping that the Heavenly Parent
   Will stuff in
   Nutritious worms.

2. In the very core of love
   Is a storm of rawness
   A quiet question
   An untrusted resolution

Autobiography:
The heavenly voices spoke to me
In a field of weeds
That bandaged the shattered remains
Of an old work camp.

Evolution is not a designer
But a tinkerer, patching up life
With duct tape. Someday life
Will collapse—and that day is Man.



A little rural town, Greasy Bend, in Oklahoma, 2000.

Science has chased away
Religion's awe of the sky.
The sun is just a big ball of fire—
Gone is the Scarab Beetle.

Spontaneous Combustion:
Religion is oxygen,
The breath of life, but
Too much of it can cause
The foliage of peace to ignite.[28]

The stars of deepest night,
And sunrise colors, on the Rez
Shatter like glass, beaded
With the tears of God.

Indian Poet:
Four lines of poem
Four directions on the prayer wheel
Four drummers—
Coincidence?

Repressive Religion:
Of all the things our cats could eat,
They have made a religion of dried food
From a bag; when they were young,
Someone brainwashed them.

"It Works for Me":
The religious man lives
His life perfectly well; his world
Makes sense to him, running
On the phlogiston of prayer.[29]

I light a single Christmas candle
In my window, proclaiming
Faith in Jesus, even though
I do not know what Jesus actually is.

[28] If Earth's atmosphere was, say, fifty percent oxygen instead of twenty percent, all the leaves would ignite.
[29] Oxygen feeds fires. But scientists before Lavoisier (even Joseph Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen) used to think fires burned because they released phlogiston, which does not exist. But you can believe in phlogiston if you want to; it is, to a certain degree, a satisfying theory.

Lemba, Tobias, Eller, Tormis, Pärt, “Forgotten Estonian Composers”:
This is not true; in Estonia
They are not forgotten;
Outside of Estonia
They were scarcely ever known.[30]

A Poem Modeled after M. S. Merwin:
If I want to tell
What the ancient forests were like
I will have to speak
In a forgotten language.

She sat in the blooming meadow
Memorizing facts.
Truth buzzed past her
And she did not see it.

Every symphony of music
Or of sunshine, is a story
Sometimes vividly discerned
Sometimes only absorbed.

Beyond the Pale:
Beyond the pail
Is a thirsty world
That will drink up
Every molecule that escapes.

Inspiration is a momentum
That propels me to create
Even when I feel sick
And disconnected from perception.

Theologians posit
Propositions and arguments.
Jesus broke bread
And told stories.

Reflections on Gus Speth’s Book:[31]
He documented the perils
Of red skies and mornings
But painted no color
And sang of no troubled dawn.

[30] Artur Lemba’s Symphony in C sharp minor is one of the best ever.
[31] Red Sky at Morning, James Gustave Speth, 2004.

The heart is a dictator
Accepting no rational advice
Sending the mind and body
Into cold gulags of despair.

The "tried and true"
May not be true
But it, at least,
Has been tried.

Winter Fog:
Truth is a mist
I am a twig
Condensing the droplets
Into tears.

Merry Christmas:
The Bibles written in the minds
Of church members consist
Mostly of apocalypse and war
And not the Prince of Peace.

The white lab rat
Exploring its surroundings
Places its curious head
In the guillotine.[32]

The pen is my sword
I slay monsters
Of ignorance and hatred
The extremists of God.

Religious beliefs
Are the flashes we see
When we rub our eyes
In the darkness.

After the Anthropocene:
A new race of trees will evolve
That lives for millennia, and whose roots
Penetrate the sterile cracked rocks
Solidified from our garbage.

[32] The guillotine is the approved, and least traumatic, way of killing a lab rat once its experimental usefulness is over.

Religious ideas have to be
Incomprehensible; if they were not,
We would begin to examine them
And stop believing them.

For 2 nivôse CCXV:
A scum of absurd wealth
Floating on an ocean of poverty
This is the ideal world of Republicans
As it was of the Bourbons.[33]

Loss of Faith:
For a long time I have been
Flotsam, foreign to the ocean;
At last the ocean has cast me
Beyond high tide, to bleach in the sun.

Merry Republican Christmas:
They celebrate his nativity
But despise his very words;
They glorify him as an ikon
Of their dreams of conquest.

Early Christians were martyred
Rather than worship the Roman Empire;
Modern Christians worship
The American Empire.

Republican Utopia:
What more do we need? We have
A wall to keep out the poor,
Prisons to hold the rebellious,
And rivers to receive our wastes.

How soft is the rich man,
His roundness plumped out;
On the drippings of his fatness
The worms shall feast.

Jungles:

1. Trees battle for light
   Slapping one another with branches
   Clambering to absurd heights
   Like skyscrapers in merciless Manhattan.

[33] Nivôse is one of the months of the French Revolutionary calendar; year 1 was 1793.

2. A little bird falls into a fabric
   Of army ants, not rescued
   By other animals; but on a New York sidewalk,
   A dozen hands rescue a victim.

3. Twenty thousand of my books
   Will vanish into an incinerator someday;
   But the ember of one of its ideas
   May light a fire in one world-changing mind.

New Year's 2007:
Tears of happiness, fatigue
Of contentment, a candle
Not for light but for fragrance:
Prophecy for a new year.

Religion is a virus
Which creates in us a sense
Of satisfaction when we sneeze
Thus spreading it to others.

Death:
When does a candle die—
When the last of the flame
Consumes the wax, or when
The wick's ashes stop glowing?

Scenes from A Tale of Two Cities:

1. The Wisdom of Madame Lafarge:
   An earthquake can swallow a town
   In a moment; but how long does it take
   To prepare the slow movements of rock,
   Stored up, in silence, for that quake?

2. The nobleman told the poor people
   That they could eat grass
   But instead the grass, fertilized
   By his corpse, ate him.

3. Can you tell the wind
   Or the fire where to stop?
   No more can you stop
   The whipping flame of vengeance.

The Hippie's Wisdom
A finger on genitals
Is more pleasurable
And more moral
Than a finger on a trigger.

We have a primal need
For sex, but also
A primal lust
For forests, fields, and skies.

Words can be beautiful
Even if written
Where no one will read them
Or spoken to outer space.

Dust and death
Coat every fragment
Of shattered beauty
Making all of them dull.

The future for which
I had always longed
Became the past
Before I had noticed.

Your expansive softness
Your creamy slowness
The custard of your words
Fill me fatly.

There is no point in waiting
For the breath of God
To clean away the dust
From my little cave.

Once a mind or a creek
Has begun to erode a path
Through rich soils and rocks of memory
Its direction will not change.

To live with a mind in which
Music was merely sound or mood
Rather than a living body
Would be a kind of death.

Contentment is a gift
That God gave to me only when
I stopped worrying about
What He is or does.

To decide to love
Makes boring work colorful
Each day a series of satisfactions
And even dulls the sense of pain.

The night mushroom bursts
Its head toward the sky
Filled with psilocybin
The medicine of visions.

The soul's anchor is not
Just a heavy weight;
It has sharp points
That grasp the ocean floor.



Ice storm, Oklahoma, 2000

Yearning for Purity:
I wish I were a plant
Growing peacefully
Producing no foul wastes
Eating light and water

Snapping in the springtime wind
The white plastic bag
Runs beside me as I walk
Like a little yappy dog.

All the good tunes
Have been written,
All that remain to be written
Are annoying tunes.

Cities are like fungi
Rotting their world to survive, and
In an emergency, unable,
Like an animal, to run away.

A Christian cannot
Enter a beautiful forest
Without imposing upon it
His theology.



Bison on the road, Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, Nature Conservancy, Osage County, Oklahoma

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.