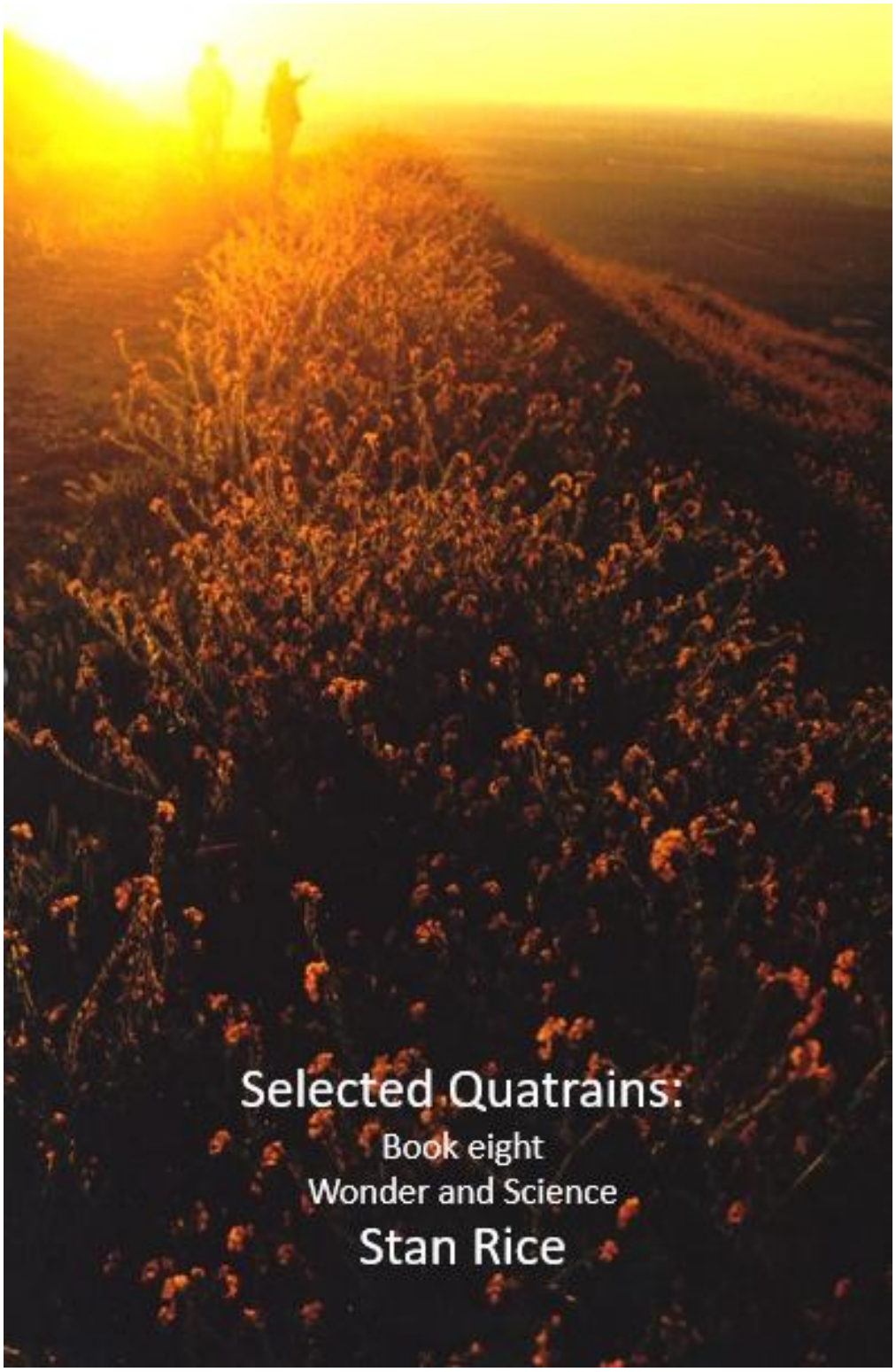

Selected Quatrains:
Book eight
Wonder and Science
Stan Rice

Selected Quatrains
Book eight: Wonder and Science
Stan Rice
2007-2009

Quatrains on Wonder and Science

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

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

Cover photo: Sunset in foothills of Sierra Nevada, 2002.

Churches:

1. *Oh, come to the church*
   Of the wildwood:
   Pews of log and limestone,
   Fall colors are the stained glass.

2. *In the wildwood church*
   The stops of dulcet and diapason
   Are played by no organist
   Except birds, and the waters of the brook.

We have become a force of nature—
We make hurricanes stronger
And the very wolves survive
Only with a policy of protection.

Upon Shaving, After Many Years:
My gray beard hid
The smooth skin of youth,
Now my shining face belies
A sagging weakness of age.

America:

1. We are like a tick
   That sucks until its very body
   Distends into grossness
   Unable to stop for a breath.

2. The lone superpower,
   We could save the world
   Into prosperity; but no, instead
   We began sucking the world dry.

Darwin's Birthday, 2007:
The most important scientist
To have ever lived—but how
Could you have done your work,
Or even lived, without Emma's help?

The wildflower is beautiful,
Tender, gentle, silent, unaware
That it grows in a nation led
By violent, screaming fanatics.

Press a button, and out comes
A dittohead response
From someone who is proud
To not think for himself.[1]

Oklahoma Congestion:
While I suffer from allergies
Breezes waft to me the fumes
From old cars, from each of which
A smoker spews irritants.

Arrogance:
He felt so sorry for me,
Since I was ignorant of
How Republicans are gods,
That he offered to pray for me.

Someday people will fight
For the smallest morsel
Of luxuries now ordinary to us
In a world we left blighted.

The monster of greed and war
Tied with little twines
Of government policy
Is still a monster.

Perversion:
"Sex is bad,
War is good."—Tell me,
Who is it, again,
Who is taking LSD?

Self-Control
God is very strong and firm—
He can hear the screams
Of every sufferer, and yet
Remain silent.

[1] Rush Limbaugh's followers believed everything he said and proudly referred to themselves as Dittoheads.

Future Fossils:

1. Someday our cancerous civilization
   Transforming Earth into disease
   Will be buried, a geological deposit,
   And the world will be at peace.

2. What sort of rock layer will entomb
   Our civilization? A conglomerate
   Of compressed garbage, toxins,
   Colored plastic, and dry bones.[2]

3. Any future civilization
   That reads of us
   Or digs up our remains
   Will be contaminated.

Mom's Birthday, 2007
In every small house
And in my small life
You created order
And security.

The behemoth tractor in the field
Crushes every stem and clod
And every burrow
Of ev'ry quivrin' tim'rous beastie.[3]

Conservative Think Tank:
They inserted their centrifuge tubes
Upside down, so instead of
Separating complex reality into layers
They splattered it.

Hard earth
No fragrance
No seedling's root
Can embrace it

[2] Conglomerate is a kind of rock recognized by geologists.
[3] Based on a Robert Burns poem.

Bartram's Journey:[4]
In his wilderness journey
He saw orange groves, planted
By Spaniards in soil built by Seminoles
From mulch and bones and shards.

Death:

1. Sudden death. Why?
   My Darwin bobblehead shakes
   His brain in every direction, saying
   There will never be an answer.

2. Life consists of outgrowing,
   For a few moments, death,
   Slowing the gradual erosion and
   Rapid mudslides of extinction.

He raised his garden on the mulch
Of a collapsed, decayed government,
But the fruits and grains
Had an untastable poison.



[4] Botanist John Bartram, journeying through what is now Florida in 1776.

Two rattan vines, extending
Their branches inquisitively,
Finding no support, they twined
Around each other firmly.

Yes, I am a fence-sitter
Saving my butt by letting it protrude
On the religious side, while my vision
Gazes into limitless heavens.

Colony Collapse Disorder/American Collapse Disorder:
Before we noticed
The bees were gone
The soil had washed away
And love grew cold.[5]

Winter returns after
A full month of springtime
Slapping the tender leaves
With confusion and fear.

Pickups parked around a church
As around a strip club—
Religion is an appetite
No society can suppress.

Cows grazing amidst
Green grass and buttercups—
Brief golden days
Of buttery richness.

Places blackest
From winter fire
Are greenest
With spring grass.

Even in death
The branches of the bois-d'arc tree
Scratching the air like claws
Are recognizable.[6]

[5] "And most men's love will grow cold." Jesus, Matthew 24.
[6] They can be recognized by their gentle arc branches and by their big thorns.

The mole tunneled back
In time, back before
Roots filled the soil
And soil hid the sun.

To Kurt Vonnegut:
During the first yoctosecond
God said, "Let it be."
Ever since then, God has said
"So it goes."[7]

I hear scrapes in my house
And I wonder, is it a rat
Or branches in the wind? Either way
It is the restlessness of the living Earth.

To love the woods,
It is not enough to exult
In greenness of leaves; you must
Know the story of every tree.

A forest is not
Still and stately trees
But a flood of change
As one tree replaces another.

Happiness is to discover
That the solution to the problem
Is to continue
What you are already doing.

You never walk alone.
On that path to diminishment
Whole races and nations and worlds
Walk with you.

I suddenly realized
I was in the midst
Of happiness, just as
It was passing on.

[7] "So it goes" was the recurring phrase in Vonnegut's writing. He died April 2007.

Trees:

1. *Without forests*
   We would not have even
   Imagined that it was possible
   To stand up and touch the sky.

2. *Trees are patient, but obstinate,*
   Awaiting their opportunity
   To move back and reclaim
   The fields of human collapse.

3. *The gods of forest and brook*
   Embraced Earth and mankind
   Unlike the haughty Olympians
   And the cloudy angels

4. *Pan Still Lives:*
   In forest haunts
   Diverse life thrives
   Hidden from human law
   And from church doctrine.

On the frontiers of the world
And of the mind, old rules
Stop confining us; we find
Astonishments of pleasure.

Piles of books sit silently
Holding in centuries
Of wisdom at which I will never
Have time to even glimpse.

The autumn prairie fire
Cleared away old leaves:
Spring flowers celebrate
Liberation and new life.

The heavy scent of privet
Immerses me in languor—
A springtime sabbath
Without doctrine

The everyday noise of trains
Is louder than any sounds
During normal times of Earth history,
Even the bellowing of dinosaurs.

The giant sycamore
Holds up the sky
And cleanses the air
For itself, not for us.

Of all Mother Earth's creations,
Our species hates its mother most.
She is no loving mother.
She may yet purge herself of us.

The Amish remain hidden
In microcosms of goodness
But the vast evils of the world
Will batter them as well.

I sit quietly, invisible, behind a wall
Of trees, happily thinking of things
Other than myself. To find your life,
Jesus said, you must lose it.

Haunted Quantum Universe:
Emptiness is a seething foam
Of entities that pop into being
Too briefly to be detected—
Ghosts that do not not exist.

Nobody understands spacetime;
Few know what $E=mc^2$ means;
But we need to hallow those few
Who almost do, at Einstein's altar.

The human economy is in
A fever; air conditioning
Allows, and requires
The endlessness of this fever.

The crabgrass walks sideways
Across the lawn
A thousand little eyes on stalks
Watching our every laziness.

Books fill the shelves
Many angles, many aspects
Of knowledge, crammed
Together in confusion.

The Painting:
The dancer swirls, frozen
Forever in time, never tiring,
Never bored, never doubting
The greatness of her eternal moment.

Poems of a Gentle Storm:

1. Rain, tears of joy,
   Cleanse passions and regrets
   Down to the fragrant humus
   Of decay and rebirth.

2. Were I to be baptized
   By the gentle cool rain
   It would only weaken me
   To the germs of defeat.

3. *Drumbeats of rain, dripping*
   From the obliquely wise roof
   Are not a march
   But complex unknowable rhythms.

4. Gentle thunder
   God's musings
   Answering Himself
   Over distant hills

5. The thunder retreats.
   God, as it happened,
   Had very little to say
   And we did not hear it.

6. "Limited Vision in the Rain"
   If I could see beyond the mist
   Like Petrarch on Ventosum
   I would behold the useless turmoil
   Of all human society and history.

7. The raindrops could go
   Wherever they wanted, but
   They cling together, and travel
   In cowpaths down the windowpane.

8. The conservatives continue
   To burn with hatred and zeal
   Steaming away
   God's gentle baptism.

9. My mind floats more freely
   Than the mist, or nebulae in space,
   Which must obey
   The laws of physics.

10. The world is as soft and vague
    As the inside of a cocoon
    In which one can dream
    And rethink a life's whole structure.

11. In calm happiness, I float
    Through a life in which nothing
    Perturbs me—As in the fatigue
    That follows a fever of wrath.

Hope lifts the floater bulb
In the toilet tank, and holds it
Until a sudden disaster
Swirls the hope away.

Short stories are mirrors
In which everyone sees
Their own secrets, warped
Into surprising funhouse shapes.

The mockingbird has no song
Of his own; he is jealous
Of the clarion catbird
Whom he drives away.

Monarch Migration:
The butterflies thickly filled
The air; We could not open
Our mouths, which was fine,
For there were no adequate words.

What is Conservatism?:
Truth is something
We invent to praise ourselves
And which we pay
Iraqi newspapers to print.

Like a man just freed
From a burden of parasites
He felt liberated from
The grasp of religious delusion.

Insults:

1. In the Outhouse:
   I want to give one last kick
   To bare conservative butt
   As he tumbles
   Into the honeypot.

2. The end of conservative reign
   Fills me with visceral relief
   Like the blessed passing
   Of intestinal foulness.

Appetites:
The ear and the mind
Are hungry and horny
For music and order
In a chaotic world.

Out of the Corner of My Eye:
What I thought was a bird on the ground
Leaping for joy
Was a blade of grass in the sun
Leaping for joy

There are so many ways
To die
But you can only
Die once.

Roads Not Taken:
I could have followed a trail
Of safe sexual pleasure
But instead I pursued
Agonizing and useless purity.



A gorge near the Columbia River, 2000

He was hell-bent
To get to Heaven;
He almost enjoyed
Trampling others in his rush.

An idea is not a dead stick
Whittled irreversibly
But is a living branch
Constantly pruned and growing.

If my view and knowledge
Of the whole world were blocked
By trees, I would gladly
Accept the resulting ignorance.

We climb mountains
Of statistics, then look
Down into the valleys
Of our predicted gloom.

Hope is not optimism
Or naïveté, but a conviction
That there are good things
Worth working to save.

I am just
A sliver
But in the strong wind I become
A dangerous projectile.

Smell of Putrefaction:
The maggots crawled out
Because on this hot humid night
They could not tell the difference
Between inside and outside the corpse.

Clean and combed
Scraped free of bacteria
The gleamy fly
Lands on a pile of shit.

If we have never
Known chaos
We can never
Know peace.

The bird fashions its nest
From twine and twigs
And remnants of man's discontent
With the unraveled world.

The fish in the bowl
Cannot know
That he is not
In a vast ocean.

Your eyes are slim
Crescent moons of happiness
And you are just as contented under a tree
As in a palace.[8]

Casting the First Stone:
Dead ages past, compressed
Into a little stone—it fits
Perfectly into the palm
Of the man who hates.

What makes each daisy unique
In the spring fields?
Each differs from the others
In its flaws and scars of fortune.

Even Moses, the prophet
Of undimmed eye and unabated virility
Was allowed only a glimpse
Of the distant haze of reward.

In the sleep of autumn
The leaves bled
Then the white snow
Cleansed the world.

I was the least of His disciples
But He washed my feet.
How did He know that this
Was exactly what I needed?

Faith can move mountains
Only when it flows
As slowly as glaciers
Or as magma under the crust.

Matthew 11:28:

1. *O Comforter, Whose presence*
   Makes me uncomfortable—
   The rest that you offer me
   Is a yoke.

[8] Inspired by a photo of a Wheaton student at the science station, writing in her journal while sitting under a pine tree and looking out at the landscape, 2005.

2. *The peroxide of Your love*
   Fizzes on my wounds
   Killing the raw soreness—
   I accept Your healing.

3. A Tree's Prayer:
   Your spirit blows
   Fresh from the north
   And breaks the arms
   I spread to welcome you.

4. Where is love? Which lobe
   Of the brain? In the nucleus
   Of each cell? In the blood
   That feeds each cell?

War:
The dry sands of Mars
Reached closest to Earth in 2003,
And America became an aggressor
On the dry sands of Iraq.

F = ma, a dead equation,
Is nevertheless precisely what happens
When mass of sword moves through the air
And spills the red blood of a man.[9]

Upon Reading "Mars As Bright As Venus" by John Updike:
Small dry red planet, when you loom
Again, this world will be much changed:
Our loves and wars, at rest, as one,
And all our atoms rearranged.

"Okay, I'll hold up the world,"
Said Atlas. "Just give me a place
To stand." There was no answer.
His feet dangled in outer space.

Explorers:

1. Together we explored
   The underground river.
   During the drought, this river
   Was the only water that flowed.

[9] Force = mass times acceleration, from Newton.

2. The true partner is the one
   With whom you have explored
   The hidden rivers
   And the ferny caverns.

A masterpiece of landscape
Is both created and revealed
By the mindless sun, which cannot know
The beauty it has wrought.

Rebirth of a lost friendship;
Like strong old heartwood,
It died, and molded. But still
It had an irresistible fragrance.

Plagiarized from Paul Verlaine:
Calmes dans le demi-jour
Que les branches hautes font
Pénétrons bien notre amour
De ce silence profond.

Reflections on the Inside of an Abalone Shell:
The shimmering pinks and greens
Are refractions, not pigments;
As long as there is a heaven
In my mind, they will not fade.

The religious oppressor
And the hypnotized victim
Are both infected
By the same delusion.

It Started in 1869:

1. The newly infallible Pope
   Condemned the electric light.
   And still millions of people
   Take popes and evangelists seriously.

2. *What were they smoking when the message*
   Arose from the Vatican chimney
   And yet another mere human
   Had become infallible?



Ice bank near Mt. Baker, Washington, 2000. The red color is microscopic algae.

I'd make a terrible pastor.
I would tell people to use their brains,
That only fools need sermons,
That you can encounter God out of doors.

Stained glass is not merely
Artificial pictures of artificial concepts
But removes all the information
From the complex outside light.

The most beautiful thing
About the Navajo woman
Was her silent reverence
Of the desert.

Rats and bats
Behind the slats
Of the wooden wall
In the ruinèd hall.

Faith:

1. *The closer you examine*
   The fractal border of faith and knowledge
   The more complex and obscure
   It becomes—never to be defined.

2. *Faith is gold, beaten so finely*
   That it exactly matches the form
   Of the facts underneath—
   But makes them glow.

3. *Faith is gold: if you eat it,*
   It provides no nourishment
   And comes out the other end
   Untarnished.

4. Faith is gold, over which
   Men spill blood, for which
   Men enslave, and by which
   Men justify an Age of suffering.

5. Faith is gold—men insist
   It is pure, divine, not merely
   Electrons and nuclei just like
   Those of base metals.

The sun hangs like a low fruit
Red and overripe in the hazy sky
Ready to burst, to pour
Its richness, wasted, on the horizon.

The Good. The True. The Beautiful.
The Holy Trinity of the Romantics.
They rejected the starkness of science,
But science how affirms their view.

In the bright rationality
Of the laboratory
The clear numbers of precision
Wall off the night of terror.

Jude the Obscure:
To the God of little coffins
Whose Nature takes its course
And the creatures in Whose Image
Take their course, we offer silence.

When I Cannot Sleep:
I imagine a beautiful woman, as soft
As lemon soap who cleanses my soul
Of its every stench and whose weight
Buoys me heavenward.

We cut down the trees
So we could get rich;
Now mudslides have covered
The only road back home.

The consuming world of passion
Is only a flood of hormones
And a glittering network of nerve-sparks
Inside a small cranium.

The beauty of sunlight
Glancing brilliantly on the water
Of a pond in a pasture
Is more beauty than we can understand.

In the funeral parlor
All are drunk with grief
The clueless pastor
Is the designated driver.

He walked across the snow
Leaving the first footprints
As if he were the first man
In a newly created world.

Mulch is bread
Humus is wine
Body of Earth
Broken for you.

Conflicts and confusion
Unresolvable
I am glad to leave them
When I awake.

Cadaver:
Someday I will be
A sick sweet smell
Wafting from a lab
Full of medical students.

A hundred pickup trucks
Scramble to park
In the patch of shade
Of the last tree.

If a being came from Heaven
And demanded to see proof that Earth
Has goodness and wisdom
I would show her a leaf.

He climbed a tree and said
I am closer to the moon
Than you are. There he sat
Staring into the vacuum of space.

The big double-chinned world
Does not notice our agony
As it forks out roasted forms
And our fat drips onto its chest.

Trees are competing penes
Reaching as high into the air
As possible, to release
Little sperms called pollen.

Oh, cockroach, from a common ancestor
We have gone our separate ways
And now, alas,
I must kill you.

If we had never seen
Light from the distant stars
Would out minds have ever
Learned to wonder?

The cat walked in my lap
Circled and circles
Finding comfort but seeking
A contentment it would never know.

Your confident stride
Has muddied the water
That I was watching quietly
In search of answers.

Your fingers tremble
Which once brought blessings
From the keys of the piano.
God's blessings fade.

I walk past the pool in which lie
A thousand dead fantasies
And go home to the comfort
Of my wife's gentle love.

Question for Hildegard:
Am I a feather in the breath of God
Or am I the Styrofoam cup on the highway,
Swirling with each breeze, and which
May or may not be flattened by a car?

Humans die
And so do plastic cups
But the plastic itself
Lives forever.

Every kiss is viral
Each assurance false
In every step, one foot
Is on the cliff of death.

Black center of sunflower
Dark core of the sun
Shadow in the heart
Of the God of pure light?

My body is a manure
Belonging to the Holy Earth
Wherein I reside briefly, and
Whose borrowed atoms I return.

Khyber Pass
Beautiful mountains, white
Almond blossoms and snow
And dried brown blood.[10]

I am a bee
I am so small
But without me
Your world would die.

Hungry water rushes
Down from bare hillsides
Slurping soil and nibbling rocks
From the fragile banks.

Native American:
I make a bread of death
The flour is my ancestors' bones
The only seasoning
Is the salt of my tears.

Jesus calmed the storm.
The saints in the boat saw
The still water fill with scum
And felt the oppression of motionless air.

Even when spears of suffering
Pierced his life
He insisted that they
Were cupid darts from God.

The willows by the dry brook
Fragrantly remember the waters
That once raged there
Almost uprooting them.

Desiderata:
Calm amidst chaos
Productivity amidst waste
Love amidst selfishness
Gentleness amidst violence.[11]

[10] Kashmir is where India and Pakistan are fighting a protracted war.
[11] "Desiderata" was popular in the 1970s, supposedly from centuries ago but actually written recently. "Go placidly amidst the noise and haste and remember what peace there can be in silence."

I walk through life
With barefoot sensitivity,
Quiet, springing on twigs
Feeling every tiny pain.

Falling, I grabbed a snake
Which, as a rope
Holding my weight
Could not soil and strike.

The God-shaped donut hole
In my heart was a breach
Through which marched a horde
Of cynical cholesterol globs.[12]

I marvel at the sunset
And I marvel
At me
Marveling at the sunset.

Reflections on One of Stephen Crane's "Pills":
The mountain said to the man,
"Do you expect me
To do anything differently
Just because you exist?"

Weeds grow thick on Golgotha
Fed by blood of the crucified
Purifying the stains
With their oxygen.

They tore up another olive grove
Today in the little town of Lindsay,
A Gethsemane of ages rammed flat
By a quaking dollar.[13]

Just for a moment he was Jesus
Wiping crumbs off of the wooden table
So the waitress wouldn't have to—
Then he went back to being a carpenter.

[12] A theologian once said we each have a "God-shaped hole" in our hearts which only God can fill.
[13] Lindsay, California was once the olive capital of America, but many of its old trees have been bulldozed. Gethsemane was an olive grove outside of Jerusalem.

I glimpsed the nakedness
Of your feelings when
A breeze of sadness briefly
Brushed away your defensive gown.

Am I a man of sand
Crumbling, changing
Left by a careless child
Too near the water?

You are my servant, O fan,
Whirling in joy on the ceiling.
I close the circuit; electricity
Courses its joyous marathon.

His thirty-five thousand dollar door
Did not protect him—
He opened it, in flew Enza
Who kissed him, and he died.[14]

Reality is a tissue
With many ruptures, a fence
With gaps, a net that lets slip
Whatever we fail to notice.

Walking is falling
Forward into the future
With only constant steps
To prevent collapse.

My Islip Barge of ideas
Bleached in the sun
Picked clean by gulls
Is turned away from port.[15]

In what am I seeing my reflection?
Upside down in a spoon? A pewter cup?
The knife blade? A window
Into the past, or into the future?

[14] An early twentieth century article about influenza included a kids' rhyme, through the window, in flew Enza.
[15] The Islip Barge carried New York City garbage around the Atlantic Ocean, and nobody would accept it.



Mudslide from 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens, as seen in 2000. Clearcut forest, plus a little patch of uncut forest.

We frame the wildness
Of nature, flattening it
Onto straight fibers of canvas
Fearful of is savagery.

Dried sticks and leaves
Of consonants, soughing
Wind of vowels: The forest
Speaks in a forgotten tongue.

Even eternal orgasm
Would get boring
To a human mind
Always exploring

Somewhere in Satan's heart
Lingers the memory
Of a pure shining river
That once flowed out of Eden.

The Northern Cross
With the star Deneb at its head
Looks down in sadness
On a godless world

November 2008:
My mother lies dying—
One more ember of Cherokee culture,
A memory of a less wasteful past
Fades slowly, fitfully away.

God's ear is deaf to the cries
Of human and creature
While Jesus tried to refuse to help
The Gentile woman—and failed.

Wall Street rejoices, for it believes
Uncle Sam will rescue the world
From wild credit sprees—
If Uncle Sam can only get credit himself.[16]

I am bread. Taste
My nourishing flour
My strong crust
My secret leavening

Opus 3000:
I have no concept of what
God might be, but as I sat
Listening to the wind in the leaves
It was wordless prayer.

Over soldiers of the North and South
Guns at the ready
Glides a flock of cranes, settling
On the bloody ground between.

[16] The 2008 market crash. Uncle Sam did, in fact, rescue the banks even though they caused the problem.

Forest and silt will someday cover
The toxic Houston plain
But the poisons will be locked
In the sediments forever.

Day after day the forest
Remains unchanged; then
In one eventful night, a storm
Rearranges every part of it.

Sunday feelings
And Monday facts
Mix, but
Never blend.

Words hemorrhage
From my brain
Significant insights
Instantly forgotten.

Creationists insist that
If God does not miraculously create
The colors of the rainbow
Then the rainbow is not beautiful.

The wolf kills the deer
Then itself dies, its body
Nourishes the grass, which
Another deer will eat.

The universe is good
For if hate, not love
Empowered the stars
They would not shine.

The ocean of altruism
Gets shallower
No longer bathing us
But just muddying our feet.

"I see men like trees," said the man
To whom Jesus gave sight.
The rest of us are blind, who do not see
That trees, indeed, are like men.[17]

[17] Mark 8:24.

The trees stand in silence, creating
The very structure of the space
In which people
Dare to move.

How innocent is the sugarberry tree
As its trunk twists my wire fence;
How undeserving it is
Of death at my hands.

Life is an uninterrupted tissue
Covering the frame of the Earth;
Its individuals are born and die,
Cells of an animal brainless and huge.

The tree is an army, branches
Advancing against Heaven
Green swords glinting, their susurrus
The rushing sounds of cavalry.

Soil:

1. The fecund and the damp
   Rich fragrant blackness of soil
   Embraced by a million roots
   But killed by a man's spade.

2. The soil is a vast enterprise
   Turning death into life
   Offering it to ants and roots
   A silent testimony of good work.

To a man who never left the forest
The sky is only little patches.
A blue source of brutal light,
And stars hung in vacuums.

Trees are lungs
And lungs are trees
Turned inside out
Equally mysterious.

Every hour the clock strikes
And every hour the pigeons
Take flight, ever surprised,
Never learning.

Sharp edges of reality
Unresolved contradictions
Melt together in consonance
When I remove my glasses.

All rooms are one room
Walls defining arbitrary space
Human will imposing order
Dusted with dead skin cells.[18]

The starfish is a pentacle
Levitated on tiny tube feet
Like an exorcised demon
Sliding up from deep oceans.

Over rubble I climb
Through rooms once filled
With love, sorrow, feasting—
Now all is dust.

Cats have orifices
From which constantly issue
Disgusting slurries, fluid and lumps
Of primordial organic matter.

Thinking of Pasternak (Dr. Zhivago): Lara to Yuri:

1. "Everything around fermented,
   Grew, and rose
   On the magic yeast of being."
   In the secret space of love.

2. *"Known as*
   The kingdom of God
   There are no peoples,
   Only persons."

3. "Her hair
   Stinging his eyes
   With the smoke
   Of its beauty."

[18] Most dust in a house is dead skin cells, hair, and mites.

4. In the forest,
   "She breathed in
   The intricately fragrant air
   Of the vast space around her."

5. The forest was "Dearer to her
   Than a father and a mother,
   Better than a lover,
   Wiser than a book."

6. "Farewell, my swift, deep river,
   How I loved your day long splashing
   How I loved to throw myself
   Into your cold waves."

7. "Delivered from man,
   The forests stood
   Beautiful in their freedom,
   Like released prisoners."

With a holy scream
The newborn enters a nightmare
Of confusion, light, and sharp
Edges of sound and shape.

We are remade every day
Our childlike happiness
Hardened and confused
Into wrinkles of weariness.

They escape into dreams
Insensate to harsh truths,
Imagining heavens.
And who can blame them?

God is alive! He spoke
So politely to me today
In my computer inbox:
His name is Mailer Daemon.

If I had treated my daughter
The way God treats His human children
I would be jailed, and every Christian
Would call me a bad father.

If you know me, or read
My words, I want you to be
Neither sweetened nor soured
But nourished.

I hold words in my hands—
Caltrops, ready to fling them
Before the cavalcade
Of arrogant people.

Lightning, God's grin
Flashes across a world
He loves to shock, whose calm
He loves to blister and shake.

Each of us is a dynamite heap
Of stored organic energy
Ready to burn when struck
By dangerous divinity.

God weeps at each pain
Billions and billions of them
And completely accepts that we
Have reason to hate Him.

It takes time
To build a humused soil
It takes time
To build a human soul

Washcloths, like people, each degenerate
In their own ways: some
Fray, losing strands of identity
And some just wear thin.

Chasing ghosts
In a graveyard:
To them every crevice
Is a hiding place.

Vicarious:
I am every man who has been mired
In the mud of war, every woman
Beaten, every child orphaned:
I sit in a house and read books.

Two happy frogs
Sitting in shit
Eating the flies it attracts
Forever

On reading Matthiessen:
He threw his map
Into the dark wind
And dropped his compass
Into an unknown river.

Works sighted:
The student looked at
The book on the shelf.
"There it is!" she said.

With whips and chains they defend
The all-powerful God
Against people who have
Innocent questions.

In India, many religions
Mingle in the wisdom-wallah
Each prodding the other
To stumble

A life is not just atoms
But also every smile
And every scar
And every breath.

Eternal life
Eternal sameness
Nothing new
Nothing to learn

The liberated soul flies
Naked except for
A spiderweb lacework
With a dew of tears

More Politics:

1. The Republican mantra is now
   "We love Gabby too!"
   But progressives are still
   In their crosshairs.[19]

2. Fierce Republican attack dogs
   Now pretend to be
   Border collies, keeping
   American sheep from deficit spending.

3. Obama is salve
   Palin is vinegar
   Limbaugh is bile
   Coulter is…silent at last?

4. State of the Onion:
   Stinging stinking molecules
   Volatilize into the air
   And make us weep

It is the Earth and humans
That are our work
We can leave the Heavens
To the sparrows.

Rattlesnake:
I shed my grief like a snake skin
But kept a little piece of it,
A reminder, on my tail:
I rattle it to make me brave.

Robinson Caruso
Singing at the top of his lungs
Sends the jewel birds
Into the sky above the lonely island.[20]

Love has velvet claws
Softly inviting, harmless,
Yet grasping like a hawk
Its beak shredding my mousy heart.

[19] Republicans published images of Gabrielle Giffords in crosshairs, until she was actually shot, 8 January 2011.
[20] Caruso sang opera music during the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906.

Fans at Night:
Fan blades move at constant speed
Yet the air around me puffs irregularly—
I relax in currents
Of complex mathematical equations.

Yes, there is light in the world
But what good does it do? It is
Bright blinding glare
Or not enough to see by.

He lifted the lid of reason
And scuttling from under it
Came big roaches of contradiction
Spreading their gospels of confusion.

Wrath's nuclear intensity
Burns my mind, and leaves
Little pellets of wisdom.
Humor then eats them.

Love is the one light
Become many
Reflected by raindrops
On every leaf

Eight Poems for Kim Sueoka, 23 April 2012:

1. *You are Japanese*
   Yet you sing Sephardic songs:
   The same Venus burns bright
   Over desert sands and hinoki forests.

2. You are so small
   I could encompass you
   Like terebinths surrounding
   A small deep oasis.

3. Your smile is as large
   As your face, bright heaven,
   Yet there is a curve of sadness
   A pain behind your dimple.

4. You are older than the woman
In your photo. You were
Such a goddess. You have weakened
Gently and companionably.

5. *When you sing, your voice*
Lilts in complexity
Like an insect that lives three lives
In one human day.

6. Sephardic songs find joy
Despite oppression
In spaces between oppressions
In defiance of oppressions

7. You vanish like water in sand
Hidden under a sun-dried crust.
My love has nowhere to go.
I turn it homeward to my wife.

8. *Kasumi ka kumo ka*
You remained in my memory
As a mist, which cleared
Leaving only fragrance.[21]

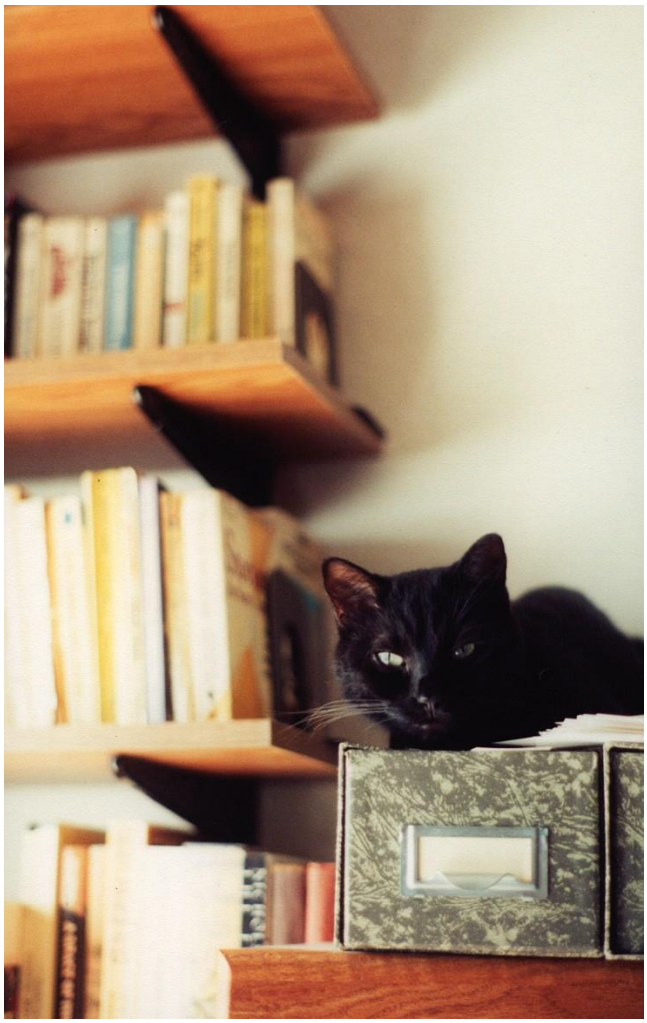
As the life of a cricket
I chirp, thinking it music
And crawl into the rafters
Of God's house, where I perish.

The dome of the universe, God's skull—
While He relaxes, the dreams
Of which He releases control
Become nightmares.

Oh, cancer, you have filled
My body; now you, like me,
Must die in the bloom
Of our youths.[22]

Creativity is a nebula
Stars of ideas ignite
Then gather around themselves
A complexity of dust and gas.

[21] "Like mist or cloud;" from the Japanese folk song Sakura.
[22] I never had any personal experience with cancer.



Spooky on a bookshelf, 2000

Möbius sweatbands
Around quantum crania
Spin antimatter thoughts
And quark dreams.

When I gaze into the macroscope
Down the barrel into the big little world
Of suns and dust clouds, I look in vain
For the dreams of humankind.

If you thirst for Enlightenment
Any molehill in Oklahoma
Will do as well
As the Maharishi's Mountain in India.

Too big for his breaches—
He can see blue sky and clean water
Through the breaches in his prison wall
But he cannot get out—

Leaping over boulders,
The water flows fast and free
Slavishly obeying
Laws of gravity and momentum.

Photosynthetic Enlightenment:
Light shines warmly on
Passive meditators, but in plants
Light splits water and creates
Electric currents of life.

The hundred dollar bill, lying
On the dry ground: The prairie dog
Pulls it underground to use
As bedding for her pups.

A few splinters of science
Can transform a dark forest,
Rimed with demons, into
A symmetry of golden light.

Transpiration:
Wisdom pours from me
Not squirted out by my effort
But pulled from me by the very air
Sucked by countless launching molecules.

Decline and Fall of the Gibbon:
As human ants ate its habitat
And the forest trees fell ill
The gibbon launched itself into the air
Grabbed a rotten branch, and fell.[23]

All life lives by death—
Even roots drink in
Minerals from rotted bodies
Of cabbages and kings.[24]

[23] Edward Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; a gibbon is also an ape.
[24] Reference to the poetry of Lewis Carroll.

First Day of Spring 2013:
Chill and clouds envelop us
Humidity clumping the dust
Softening our footfalls
On the parched Earth.

All flames are one flame
Reflected in crystal palaces
And from the molten pool
Dancing one and a thousand jigs.

Devour a Book:

1. *Devour a book, big bites*
   Of intense flavor; don't tiptoe
   On shells of eggs that someone
   Says are rotten.

2. *Devour a book, don't nibble*
   On verbose terms
   And flummery froth
   And emptiness of intellection.

3. *Devour a book: Eschew*
   The vomit of flat cynicism
   But hunger with those who struggle
   To find nourishment in bludgeoned life.

A Prophet's Cry:
The vulture is the only bird
I see in Oklahoma skies
Or soaring in the blue heaven
Of America's destiny.

The Little Environmentalist Who Tried:

1. *One big pickup truck can produce*
   More fumes in a moment
   Than I do in a year. I am
   Just a whiff of goodness.

2. I am but a whiff of goodness
   A moment of peace, a shudder
   Of realization, a slight spasm
   Of clear thought, a residue of love.

The vine sneaks around the door jamb
From outside, and opens its leaves
Hopelessly, unstoppably
In the dim hallway.

Poems Trying to Make Sense of Annie Dillard:

1. There have been plenty of years
   Of spring and rain for weeds
   To grow over my muddy tracks
   But my tracks remain visible.

2. *My words are a surgeon's probe*
   Slipping under tissues of truth
   Prodding follicles of confusion
   To shudder

3. *My words are a miner's pick*
   Freeing fossils out of darkness
   Prying out gems and gleams
   Shattering weaknesses

4. *I followed a thought*
   Into a box canyon
   Now all I can do is warn you
   To, this one time, not follow me.

5. *I make you read this poem*
   Because I had to work so hard
   To write it. It is my gift to you
   With the price tag still on it.

6. *I will not make you wait*
   Until the last to be illumined;
   My words are a neon tube, not
   A fiber optic cable, dark until the end.

7. *My writing is a basket*
   Woven of found objects, fibers
   And fragments of whatever I last read
   Holding a volume of recent thoughts.

8. *From a finished pine tree*
   We cut unfinished planks
   To make a coffin for a life
   That is always incomplete.

9. The skin of my spirit is etched
With healed gashes and teeth marks
The scar tissue reflecting a luster
Not found on intact flesh.

10. The music of my heart
Is not just its primal rhythm
But deep tones of sloshing
Resonating in my ears.

11. If I had to re-invent technology
From scratch, I would be
Clueless to create so much
As a nail clipper.

12. The melodies are vines
On a trellis, voices crossing
Like stitches in a fabric
Independent lines converging

13. The melodies declare truths
Each one a long
Mathematical proof, each
Confirming the others.

14. I can understand nothing, no idea,
No feeling, unless I write it in a way
That makes sense to others
And creates the same thought in them.

15. The infinite sky
Holds all possibilities
Including the possibility
Of nothing.

16. My love for the beauty of life
Is a virus; I hope to infect you.
Inside your cells, this virus multiplies—
You awaken one day sick with joy.

17. When the first human mind
Awoke from its routine of mere survival
There was no one for her to tell about
The rhythm of the stone tools.

18. I could not write about love
While in love; I was a dope
Besotted by dopamine; I saw my beloved
As an unhuman perfectness.

19. I poke bluntly into the secrets of life
With dull probes, wondering
Why I cannot understand
The complexity I have mangled.

20. No harm
Will befall me
Should I decide
To stop writing.

21. From the bulging seam of the future
Out pours the present
In curves of beauty
That weave living chords.

Love is purple, deep with mystery
Yet you cannot take your eyes
From the red blood
Hidden within it

Death is Colorful:
Gray gravestones, red and yellow
Autumn leaves, a daring resurrection
Of tiny green herbs
In the fragrant brown soil.

Gaia:
Life itself
Encases the Earth
With a skin of stability
Calming its nerves.

The mayfly spends years
Eating, growing, safe in the water,
Then for one day she takes vulnerable flight
And understands everything.

On Reading Trefil's (Boring) Science Book:

1. *Science is not one damned fact*
   Dagwooded atop another
   But is a structure of delight:
   Newtonian walls and Darwinian dwellers.[25]

2. Oh, inconvenient angel, pouring
   Clabbered shining thoughts into
   My brain, indigesting sleep
   In the night before I work.

How lardly stands Uncle Sam
On twiggy legs of greed
Surveying his pig pen, trampled,
Which used to be a world.

Transformed by a Diagnosis:
This is now what I desire—
Carrots, not potatoes
Salads, not starch:
Behold, a new man.[26]

A bower of bovines, pressing
Their pies into the lusty grass
That esteems the effluvium
As food to their greenness.

Let them go! Let the blighters
Of Congrass and consumer
Find slight pleasure as they shovel
Fat unchlorophylled food into their gullets.

The Fantasist:
Let other men forsake wifely pursuits
And prick themselves into hives of trouble
While my dalliance will only be
Within the whorey temples of my imagination.

You might as well plant a sequoia
On Jupiter, and let its millennium roots
Bind the gassy looseness, as to
Expect people to be rational.

---

[25] James Trefil, A Thousand Things Everyone Should Know About Science—a pile of facts. Dagwood Bumstead is/was a cartoon character who liked to make huge sandwiches of unpredictable components.
[26] Diagnosis of diabetes.

The Happy Diabetic:
Lusty me
My carrot is long
And firm, more desirable
Than a Twinkie.

Scientist and Writer:
In lusty pursuit
I measure steps
Into the known unknowns
And sing my discoveries

Sediments:

1. The world, with hot brakes
   Swerves down the mountain road
   From incense cedars into salt lakes
   To join the sediments.
2. The sediments of today
   Are the future's fossil layers
   A record of waste and extinction, festooned
   With deathless fragments of plastic.

Scientists know that a sunset
Is nothing but wavelengths of photons
But we thank evolution for brains
That create illusions of beauty.

The splendor of reality
And the illusion of beauty
Both alike create
The same neural pathways.

A crystal palace of beauty—
Reflections and refractions
Complicating a complex reality:
Behold, the work of the human mind.



This is NOT what you should do when you see a bull bison along the highway! 2001

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.