

NOETRY

VERSE AT PLAY IN THE FIELDS OF NOETIC SCIENCE

by

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For me, a perennial question of my musings, a topic I seem compelled to review in my poetic reveries when I sit down in the middle of the night to write verses, is this: “Is There More?”

By that I mean: Is there more that we humans can know about the universe than what science demonstrates to us empirically and materially? However wonderful that is – the marvelous, complex, intricate world of measurable matter and energy – is there yet a metaphysical or spiritual domain beyond our senses and instruments that – as sages have asserted – we may apprehend intuitively, or *noetically*, by way of a knowing that transcends material science?

The verses I have gathered here touch particularly upon this “noetic” realm of inquiry and speculation. Many of them focus especially on the question of what I may be able to discover – by way of supposition, belief, or intuition – about this mysterious domain of soul and spirit.

If you are hoping for certainty and final determinations to emerge from my poetical soul searchings, I’ll disappoint us both, for though at times I seem to get close to settled conviction, recurrently I relapse into doubt and uncertainty. In terms of the “five stages of soul” that Harry R. Moody defines in his 1997 book of that title (an excellent book that I heartily commend to you) I have (1) heard the *call* of my soul, (2) begun my *search* for it, (3) entered the *struggle* to manifest it, and (4) experienced occasional *breakthroughs* into the spiritual domain; but I have not yet (5) *returned* (as Moody would say) to the dimension of soul that is

the ultimate source of our universe. Thus, of the five stages of spiritual development that Moody depicts – *call, search, struggle, breakthrough, and return* – I’m stuck in the struggle.

1 JANUARY 2001

Two Thousand One, the true millennium
Has finally come, and I am sixty-one.
May this time be the turning point that some
Foresaw, when inhumanity is done

And we become at last as wise as we
Have claimed to be – Homo the sapient –
Now done with devastation and now free
Of viciousness, no more malevolent.

This is the century in which I’ll die
Yet hope to live more fully than before.
May it be one in which my race and I
Both realize how we are meant for more:

To live the dream of our divinity
Until what we imagine comes to be.

FREE FORM

This sonnet form has come to symbolize
To me the shape of life, the way of days,
The loom of fate, the mystery of surprise –
How destiny is fixed yet freedom plays.

Its frame is set, its pattern is prescribed,
Its rhyme and meter must align and march;
These rules cannot be bent nor readers bribed
To overlook what’s slack and lacks in starch.

And yet within ordained parameters
A marvelous liberty of spirit lives,
A force of grace and novelty occurs
Spontaneously, as formal stiffness gives

And verse grows supple like Pinnochio
Released from woodenness to freely go.

SELF AND SOUL

“The Imp of the Perverse” Poe named our sin,
Our inclination to run counter to
The good we ought to do, which would have been
But for a stubborn will we won’t subdue.

Who is this adversary to our wealth
That undermines our soul’s prosperity,
Depleting us of happiness and health,

Seducing us into perversity?

It is the self that will not sacrifice
Its present pleasure to a distant goal,
A greater good or hope of paradise
Regained, in spite of what best serves the soul.

That good we ought to do, we do not do,
And what we ought not to, we do and rue.

IF

If you can learn beyond what others teach you
And think outside the box of their clichés;
If you resist those preachers who beseech you
To close your mind and blindly holler praise;

If you can see how advertisers tempt you
To glut your life with luxury and junk
And know that being honest won’t exempt you
From being bamboozled by alluring bunk;

If you can stand aloof from mob reactions
And stand alone on righteous principle;
If you can reconcile combating factions
And broker peace in broken lives woeful,

Then you’ll have proved your liberal education
And proudly trod the road of true salvation.

COMMUNION

I clear out in my cluttered day this hour
Of composure to commune with some deep tone
Within my soul and gain thereby the power
To sustain what spirit moves my flesh and bone.

I might just meditate to do the same,
But writing satisfies a deeper need
For insight and delight; it is a game
To entertain both me and you who read,

Since I would rather share this hour’s fruit
With you than hoard it for my own content;
Some other time I’ll sit remote and mute,
But now I mean to seek what’s heaven sent.

Attuned to something grander than my mind,
I listen and record what clues I find.

SPELLBOUND

Ephemeral affection's but a gust
Blowing us willy-nilly through this world.
By envy, greed, spite, gluttony and lust
And other passionate blasts we're wayward hurled.

Like weather in our souls, beyond control
Of wish or will, affections come and go
In spite of us, ranging from pole to pole
With cold, dry, wet, hot, sun, cloud, rain and snow.

So fickle Romeo first doted on
Reviling Rosaline and pined away
Until one new and brighter love like dawn
Arose to eclipse affection's star with day.

While their sad story holds us in its spell,
We know True Love is not ephemeral.

ON ROBERT HERRICK

As Mister Carpe Diem, Herrick wrote
Of snows and roses gliding into gloom,
Of golden lasses passing Lethe's moat,
Of Time's trans-shifting ever towards the tomb.

How evanescent is this daily joy,
Ephemeral as butterflies in May
Rising upon a gust that must destroy
Once it has loved and had its wanton way.

What remedy, what antidote, for Time
And all mortality that darkly glowers
From shadows of our passions? Only rhyme,
An amber bead transfixing bygone hours,

Preserving images that tantalize
Eternity to gaze with sleepless eyes.

SO LONG LIVES THIS

This holy, precious spirit I contain
Or am, this wondrous consciousness alive
In me that must expire, cannot remain
As it is now, and yet it may survive.

I do not think an afterlife exists
As many dream it does, a paradise
Of bliss forevermore. My mind resists
That fantasy; another may suffice.

I dream instead of living on like this

Ventriloquistically, as now I move
Your lips, control your breath to hum or hiss
By my design, so long as you approve.

Thus if I would live on and win your voice,
My wit must make your willing soul rejoice.

REFINING TIME

Though Carpe Diem's well to say
Exhorting us to play all day
Gathering rosebuds in our prime
To glut the maw of ravenous Time,
Time will still fleet
And youth defeat
And there's no countering this crime

Unless to seize another way
The hand of Time and make him stay
His depredations with the chime
Of harmony, the spell of rhyme,
And by the beat
Of dancing feet
Convert the fleet to the sublime.

A PRAYER FOR KINDNESS

What is it brings the best in people out
And curbs the worst? What nourishes our kindness,
Our generous sympathies, and puts to rout
Those devils that mislead us into blindness?

Whatever gracious spirits that may be
Who put the gracious spirit into me
And fan it bright with charity, I pray
To you to tend my fragile flame today.

OBLIVION

The only ones aware of transience
And our destined, inexorable demise,
We seek to obviate our passing hence
By fabricating myths and cunning lies.

Some mean to leave a name famous through time,
Remembered deeds of greed or charity,
Bold monuments of marble, brass or rhyme
Impressive ever to posterity.

And so it is with me who would live on
Beyond the term allotted by my fate,
Although I know that one day I'll be gone

Beyond all memory, as will the great,

For great and small on Earth are miniscule
To universal Will's oblivious rule.

A TOKEN

What is a talent if not realized
In deeds or words that demonstrate its power,
And what's its good if not well recognized
And praised, but pent within an ivory tower?

The day is here to seize the season of
Maturity: ripeness is all, and Now
Or Never is my cry. Follow my love
And fly ecstatically, not push a plough.

The time and my intents conspire to drive
Me from complacency and cowardice
To confident assertion and to strive
For self-fulfillment in creative bliss.

What might I do if I exert my power?
As earnest, take this token of an hour.

REFORMATION

Sharp envy, spite, lust, gluttony and greed,
Corrupting cankers in distempered minds,
Cruel passions whence foul villainies proceed,
Unkind to kin, and killers of all kinds,

What can kill thee, uproot thy evil rot
That makes humanity decay, compassion die,
And innocence despair of faith forgot
Or friendship undermined by enmity?

What can reform such sin inveterate,
Innate, and ordinary to our sort,
So muffling our pure essence we forget
The naked newborn babe of old report,

That savior in our long subjected soul:
True Love's divinity that makes us whole?

WAYWARD

The willful waywardness of love and art
That drives us near to madness with its spell
Represses reason and exults the heart,
Approaches heaven, catapults to hell,
Careers like Phaethon across the skies
Scorching new deserts, freezing both the poles,
Enflaming airy passions as he flies,
And charring living timbers to black coals.

Thus does the fitful frenzy wrought by both
Our fancy and our lust compel us from
Responsibility, leaving us loath
To labor while sweet idle pleasures come.
"Grates me! The sun." A Roman thought annoys,
Disruptive to our lush Egyptian joys.

THE GIDDINESS IS ALL

(Benedick's Lament)

O Man, thou art a giddy thing indeed,
To one thing constant never but to serve
Thy ever-varying appetites and feed
Affections vain and fickle while they swerve.

Where lie thy hope, love and fidelity,
Which thou art charged by goodly heaven to keep,
But turned and turned again through treachery
Into their opposites though angels weep.

Yet you protest your love is true and strong
And shalt outlive all monuments till Doom;
Such is thy shallowness to speak so wrong,
Though soon thou shalt forget what now presume,

For even memory is fickle and deceives
To flatter thy unvaried vanities.

ARTLESS

Prospero's Sonnet, Composed in Retirement

How such a silly goose as I might lay
From time to time a golden egg, believe
Owes nothing to my own poor art, and say
The Muses give; dull mortals but receive.

Without such inspiration from above
We'd be all beasts that now but partial are,
For Heaven instructs nobility and love
Of which our dungy Earth's all unaware.

All goodness, grandeur, true prosperity
Come from on high, and we may but aspire

To emulate what worth and dignity
We there espy and waveringly desire

Until desire declines on mortal things
Descending to the sorrow sinning brings.

INSECT SONG

Hi! I
'm a No-See-Em.

Bye, bye,
Carpe diem!

IN GOOD TIME

So many things we prize, we learn to like
Before we come to love them outrightly.
No one at first enjoys riding a bike,
It's frightening, but in time we do it blithely.

Likewise with loving classic literature:
At first it's tasteless and repelling, hard
To understand, a chore we must endure
In boring classes for a prof's reward.

Then comes the day when what was work turns play,
And words once lying flat upon the page
Leap up to dance, while images once gray
Grow colorful – dull bard becomes Wise Mage.

Taught first to like the arts he will employ,
We find that reading Shakespeare turns pure joy.

ASSUME A PURPOSE

"Assume a Purpose though you see it not."
The universe is full of mystery,
But evidence abounds: complexity
Unfolds like fiction with a cunning plot.
We cannot know our Author any more
Than characters in plays their dramatist,
Yet sometimes we've a sense we can't resist
This world's a stage we're destined to explore

Until we see behind the scenes we play,

Alan Nordstrom, Professor of English

Discover the machinery and the script,
Decipher all that's subtle, clever, crypt,
And learn at last what meaning we portray.

If we've some purpose here we'll someday see,
I hope, by God, it proves a comedy.

LUCIFER

(a conundrum)

At twenty-one I rarely knew the joy
I know persistently at sixty-one:
Too troubled and unsettled was that boy,
Too anxious to relax and find pure fun,

The fun that comes from confidence and hope,
From knowing where you're going with your life,
Not drifting aimless like a dithering dope,
At odds within yourself, all filled with strife.

At sixty-one I've grown into my own,
I've probed the bones beneath my outer layers,
Come home to what's essential, long unknown,
And quelled my inner demons and nay-sayers.

Now at long last I'm free to be true me,
The bearer of delight I'm born to be.

THIS IS ENOUGH

To justify the ways of God to man
Is far beyond what I'd presume to do
Who does not know the Truth of God and can
Not see how Justice might at last ensue.

Though such a Providence is wonderful
To contemplate, consoling to believe,
How can intelligence not ridicule
What only superstition could conceive?

No, Science now sits lofty in the throne
Once occupied by God, providing aid
To our diseases of the brain and bone,
While teaching us to let delusions fade.

A better here and now is all we need;
Hereafter is a creed begot of greed.

TRACES

There is no God that anyone can see:
That there's a God, we may suppose, infer,
Though never demonstrate or prove to be,
Only deduce from traces that occur.

Like keen bloodhounds we sniff the trail of God,
Tracking him to the cosmic origin
And back miraculously to us, a clod
Of clay that wonders how it could begin.

That we can think and speculate like this
Perhaps is evidence enough to cause
A leap of faith across the deep abyss
Of doubt and ignorance that gives us pause.

Who but a child of God could yearn to know
What's most apparent to an embryo?

NADA

Ah, the futility of seeking fame,
Making oneself immortal by high deeds
(Though not the body, still the lasting name),
Ignoring how oblivion proceeds.

What is ten thousand years in cosmic time?
A mere scintilla of an instant in
Eternity, and all we call sublime
Of human doing is destined for the bin.

Yes, all of it, and us, the famous and
The infamous, and all the mass between
Of hapless souls sojourning on the sand
That slips and swallows everything that's been.

Oblivious of Oblivion we yearn
For something Nameless Nothingness will burn.

ATONEMENT

Now here I am
within this minute,
an infinite
eternal Presence,

my self a being
in all Being,
at one with Oneness,
home and whole.

INFREQUENCY

I AM just is, is everywhere and –when,
Is all that is and was and will be, though
I know it not, because my narrow ken
Of consciousness excludes my seeing so.

I am a radio whose shortened band
Of frequency constrains my knowledge to
The range of what is sensible and bland,
Omitting grand transmissions overdue.

Too long I've waited to communicate
As once I did (by accident it seemed)
With what blessed me by lifting off the weight
Of fear and dreariness – so bright it gleamed.

In that brief sojourn in eternity
I was I AM, the Source and Truth of me.

INTEGRITY

You cannot know what's in my inmost soul
If I cannot, and I can hardly tell
If I've a soul at all – is it a mole
Tunneling within my brain, here for a spell?

Is it impalpable, immutable,
A ghost in this machine of molecules,
The secret force that animates what's dull
And dense, turns silicone to glinting jewels?

Something there is, or nothing, if you will –
No thing that can be captured, measured, known,
A consciousness unconscious, present, still,
Enduring though elusive, still as stone.

Bone deep and deeper lies this vital soul,
Yet when it flees, farewell what makes me whole.

DAD REDUX

What now could my father learn from me,
Had he not died at fifty-seven, if I,
Now sixty-two, might speak to him freely
As an older brother would? What would he buy?

Let's say he's back, still fifty-seven, still as
He was some thirty years ago, still stern
And critical, all business, no pizzaz,
Eye on the bottom line, concerned to earn.

Would Ultimate Concerns engage him now,
As they do me, considering where he's been
And what he's seen? Would now the timeless Tao

Or daily Dow mean more—or just good gin?

There's nothing I can teach him, nor he me:
Each soul proceeds toward what it's bound to be.

TRUE YOU

Who are you really? Who is truly you?
They may have sold you on their theory
That you are merely what you think and do,
Instead of something true essentially.

But don't believe you're built up from the ground
And just as easily swept away by floods
Or razed and rebuilt equally unsound—
That's just a mess-of-pottage bill of goods.

Peer deeper down. You have no cellar hole.
What you see there are roots and you're an oak
That's growing up as well as down. Your soul
Began an acorn, full of You—no joke.

You've been here all along, waiting to be
Become and grow to your Reality.

POSITIVE CAPABILITY

What you can make no sense of with your eyes
or mind or any rational faculty,
you'd soon enough substantiate with lies
you call beliefs, as if by them you'd see.
For, more than truth, you search for certainty
to ease your irritable doubt and dread.
You clear the air of musty Mystery
supposing what's ineffable is said.
Your alchemy of faith makes gold of lead
and fills the void of meaning in your mind
with something glistening, though you're just fed
on fantasies that let you seem less blind.

But blind we are to reason and to fact:
the blank of Mystery leaves our brains blacked.

LIKE FALLING

This new malevolence pervades our days
Like roots bulldozers can't eradicate,
Like bloody stains that bleaches won't erase,
Like acrid wildfire smoke, skunk stench, like hate.

* ("Negative capability," according to John Keats, is "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.")

This evil seeps in through our cellar walls.
Its choking vines creep in at crevices
And chinks. Invidious, its mildew crawls
Grayly over everything that is.

Invaded, violated by this force,
We know a fear as old as enmity
Shut off from mercy and remorse,
A fear like nothing we knew formerly,

Like leaping from a flaming window sill
And falling fifty stories, falling still.

DIVINING POETRY

What do I have it in myself to be,
Sequestered, latent, dormant, still unreal,
Could I exhibit it for all to see?

What does my hidden destiny conceal
That yearns to manifest reality
Which simple wishful thinking won't reveal?

Unless I listen deeply to my soul,
Attend to holy whispers from within,
I cannot hear how wisdom makes me whole,

For wisdom is the ocean I swim in,
My sacred source, a force I can't control
Sustaining me and turning me from sin.

The way to know myself and what may be
Is to divine, like this, through poetry.

ZAZEN KOAN



i come
and sit to
realize my Self
as I have always been
— eternal, everywhere at once—
though when I rise
and leave again
i'm only here
and now



PLEASING MYSELF

I really like to do just as I please.
Should I apologize? Should I excuse
Myself for selfishness, drop to my knees
And pray to want to do what others choose?

I think I won't. It's taken long enough
To loose my soul from bondage to the should,
The ought, the must and all imperative stuff
And nonsense keeping me from my own good.

"Look in your heart and write. Look in your soul
To see what you should be": that's now my code,
And I'm now free to find what childhood stole –
The spirit gold in my own mother lode.

That treasure's everywhere I look when I
Gaze inward on the figures passing by.

SOUL SHINE

My soul is shining and I must attend,
Despite the clamor of the world's demands,
Though choosing either way will sure offend
The other – still, my fate is in my hands.

I would be great and greatness only comes
From tending to what's grander than I know
By my poor wit alone, which simply hums
And cannot sing beyond clear spirit's glow.

It's easy to refuse and to deny
Shy spirit's light, so easy to ignore,
Yet at what awful cost do I comply
With mundane calls and lock up spirit's door.

At least for now and for one further line,
I'll prop the door ajar to let soul shine.

MY WILL TO BELIEVE

Pragmatically, I say I have a soul
And my hypothesis is genuine:
It's urgent that I yield supreme control
To something wiser, clearer now within
Than I have speculated on before
Except sporadically, on holidays;
That cheerful window now shall be my door
To walk through into wisdom's brighter rays.
I say my soul is actual and knows
How I should love and live and what become.
It only asks attention to expose
Its gifts to me; without that it stays dumb.

I will believe in this with my whole heart:
Belief's the horse to draw my hopeful cart.

MY CONTRACT FOR LIFE

I live two lives at once and they compete:
The one is ego driven, taking cues
From all around on how to dress or eat,
Behave in every way, how win, how lose.

The other is the life my soul would lead
According to its contract made before
This earthly birth, one I must rightly heed
To serve the destiny sown in my core.

To serve I must believe; believe to see;
And seeing, know at last what I was meant
To be, according to my destiny –
That reason why my earthly life was lent.

Could it be this, to write about belief,
To show the struggle and reveal relief?

ZORBA, TEACH ME TO DANCE

I go a little mad when I sit here
Abstracted from the world of busyness
And care, intending only to get clear
About what constitutes my soul's success.

The world and my soul are at odds on this
And coldly reasoning seems not the way
To reach the final golden source of bliss,
That Paradise we lost and still betray.

A little mad is not enough to know
The whole – "Much madness is divinest sense,"
I'm told, and told to cut my rope and go
Raving into liberty – to dance

Abandoned in the whirl of gracious winds
Loosed by a levity no half-god sends.

YES

"Is peace possible?" The paper asks,
And readers of all stripes fill up a page
With their replies, from one who warmly basks
In hope of Grace and prophesies an age
Of love and harmony, to one despairing
That such a flawed and wicked race as ours,
Innately ruined, incapable of caring
For others more than self, will use its powers
For anything but evil. Where I stand
Is with those souls who have established peace

Within themselves through prayer, practice and
Humility that makes aspiring cease.
That this is possible I know is true
Though rare. What some have done, others can do.

THE SENSIBLE ONES

How canny are those animals who know
To flee from dangers humans don't perceive,
Whose senses are alert to every foe
Nature presents, urging them when to leave.
What elephant remembers such a wave
As some long-gone tsunami sent ashore,
And yet instinctively he will behave
With prudence at one's far-off, angry roar,
Racing inland to drier ground and hills
While people on the beach stand still and stare
In wonderment, anticipating thrills,
Too lost in admiration to take care.
Yet we have dubbed ourselves the master race:
For that we'll need more savvy and more grace.

HARD TRUTHS

These two eternal truths are hard to swallow:
That we are always happy as we are,
However deep in misery we wallow,
And always do our best, however far
From good that be. Learn these, and more will follow.

TRUE BELIEFS — A SESTINA

*"In dreams begin responsibilities."
— old Chinese saying*

If I'm responsible for what I dream,
Then all the more am I for my belief
In this or that. Though life is not a play,
Still, what's at play inside my head will work
To shape the seeming world in which I live,
And my beliefs could use a little help.

Though many say belief in God can help
With everything, some say that's just a dream,
A comforting illusion kept alive
By wish and hope and fear, a dead belief
Debunked by science long ago, the work

Alan Nordstrom, Professor of English

Of superstitious minds—or rather *play*.

And yet I much admire the mind at play.
I think that what we do in play can help
Us live more happily and even work
To rectify our wretched days, as dream
Can pacify our fretful nights. Belief
Is but a kind of dream by which we live.

You think we live by fact alone? We live
By so much more than what we know. We play
At knowing, being scientists. Belief
Is the hypothesis we form to help
Imagine what is real. It is a dream
Conceived in hopes to show how things might work.

By such-like suppositions, which may work
Or not, we stumble on and learn to live
By our approximations, though we dream
Of finding truth. Meanwhile we mostly play
With our As-Ifs and call them Real. They help
Us through the night. We'd die without belief.

And we'd do best to cultivate belief,
To choose beliefs that serve us well, that work
To energize our deeds. Belief can help
Us struggle against odds, and help us live
Into reality what first was play:
We are responsible for what we dream.

What first we dream evolves into belief
Which, put in hopeful play proves it can work
To let us live and thrive. Belief does help.

(See essay, "True Beliefs," on page 17.)

MAKING SENSE

We *search* for sense and meaning everywhere.
Where is our point and purpose to be found?
What is it all about? Why are we here?
What should we do? And then, where are we bound?

These are our human questions, consequent
Of our self-conscious, restless intellect
That asks not only what, but what is meant,
Assumes intent, and seeks cause and effect.

But what if no such meaning can be found,
Search wide and far, seek low and high in vain,
Only to find absurdity's the ground
Of being and nothing's meant, just senseless pain?

That's more than human minds can bear, and hence
We set about the task of *making* sense.

TIPSY

Last night a table tipped for me to say
That, yes, this spirit was my Dad come back
To visit me and, yes, it was OK
I'd gone the way I chose. Then he went black.

The table stopped its rocking, leaving me
Elated and bemused, half skeptic still,
Yet half relieved, confirmed that I am free
And right to climb the sacred Yggdrasil.

There is a higher way to prosper than
The economic way of buy and sell,
And to advance than by a worldly plan
Of status and acclaim. I know that well.

And now from him this confirmation comes
Leaving me tipsy while my spirit hums.

THAT'S ALL

You know, I'll never know the way I thought
I should, trying however long or hard;
For everything that I have ever sought
Is right here now within my own back yard:

Within my heart, let's say, and not without,
So I can cease my scouting and my search
And simply slip inside to banish doubt,
For there is Spirit, there is Truth – that's church.

Thus all these years of fretful wandering,
Of questioning and curiosity,
Of tentative, provisional – nothing:
End now, end here, end finally

In this infinitude I find within,
This Awesome All, where thoughts begin.

INVOCATION TO MY SPIRIT GUIDES

All right, you guys, I know you're there – show up!
Enough of hide and seek and indirect
Communications – mediums. I'd whup
Your asses if I could. No disrespect.

But really, show yourselves. Let's, face-to-face,
Sit down and talk, then you can let me know
Outright the answers that I've yearned to embrace
All of my life, it seems. Come on, now, show!

How come you speak with others and not me?
Now is that fair? Don't I deserve to hear
And talk with you, as well? O, hear my plea.

Alan Nordstrom, Professor of English

It's time. My patience's all run out – appear!

What? Silent still? All right, then once again
Communicate with me through my own pen.

WILLING TO BELIEVE

My way of looking at this world has changed
Since I am willing now to see anew,
And everything before is rearranged
According to my fresh internal view.

What had been meaningless, obscure and dense,
A cold, unpersoned universal void,
Now makes exquisite and ecstatic sense,
A visionary scheme to be enjoyed.

This world is filled with spirits I can't see
Or yet distinctly hear, and nothing is
Amis in its benevolent design.
Our souls live on forever and will be
On Earth life after life. These premises
Now promise me two worlds that intertwine.

CALL COLLECT

What do I know of spirit guides or Source
Besides what I have read about or heard?
Have I directly felt the cosmic force
Ordaining us, this world's beginning Word?

I know there's Mystery and I'm aware
Enough to sense the awe in everything,
Its intricate design, the apparent care
For life at large, the love from which we spring.

Need I know more, or can I if I do?
Others tell me they constantly converse
With Source, that spirits guide and lead them through
The courses they must take. I could do worse.

But how do I make contact and connect
To Source and guidance? Can I dial direct?

WHY WE'RE HERE

We've come to learn some lessons, wise ones say:
This Earth's a schoolhouse for our vagrant souls,
Who choose to suffer this material way
In order to achieve their holy goals.

The kinds of trials this existence yields
Can challenge us to grow in virtuous powers
And win our way home to the Elysian Fields

Beyond this fearful, painful veil of hours.

It is a kind of cosmic hide-and-seek
Where we've run off into the wilderness
Of darkened woods that nightly grow more bleak
Until Love dawns on us, our soul's success.

Then we're Home Free at last from wandering
Confused, forlorn — once more remembering.

SUB SPECIE AETERNITATE

That was then and this is now
And somewhere up ahead
The future shimmers into shape,
And after that we're dead.

Or so it goes by linear
And temporal reckoning;
Yet from the true eternal view
There's nothing happening,

Or all is simultaneous,
One grand coincidence,
A singular plurality
Where everything makes sense.

THE PERIPATETIC WAY

"Why am I here? What purpose do I serve?"
The earnest part of me persists in asking;
The cheerful part, however, with more verve,
Is gratified with ambling and with basking.

He'd rather walk his dog, peek into flowers,
And hobnob with his neighbors on the street.
He never counts the minutes or the hours:
What matter's not how long, only how sweet.

And that may be the answer earnest me
So urgently would find by pondering,
Perusing books, and writing endlessly:
Wisdom's nowhere but in our wandering.

As ancient sages walked and talked all day,
Careless of time, so I would make my way.

A GLIMPSE

I'd like to say my search is over now
And I have seen the meaning I had sought
So many years, have found the blissful Tao,
Alan Nordstrom, Professor of English

Enlightenment, Nirvana — all I ought.

I'd like to say my Spirit Guides and I
Confer like old friends now on everything
Above and here below, while Angels fly
Familiarly about my head and sing.

I would be lying though. It isn't so,
And I continue scouting on my trek
From book to book — looking for a glow,
A glimmer, whisper, hint or speck.

Sometimes, however, when I just relax,
I catch a glimpse between the cosmic cracks.

INTUITIVES

Of all the ways to know something,
The subtlest is intuiting.
Most say that knowing comes through eyes
And ears and touch, not otherwise,
Then they use reason, logic, but
Intuitives know in their gut.
Their evidence is not overt
And they must stay keenly alert
To sense what is not sensible
And see the half that isn't full.
For this not everyone is fit,
Just those who are most into it.

BEYOND SECULARISM

A secularist insists this world's enough
And there's no possibility beyond
What we see here and now, the only stuff
That is. Believe there's more and you'll be conned.

A metaphysicist knows otherwise,
Appealing to a sense above the five
That touch this world, to thereby realize
Another world wherein we all survive.

Imagine that, intuit that, then see
Past sight and hear beyond your ears a land
Above of spiritual reality
Where nothing is haphazard, all is planned.

A secularist shuts out the sight of this,
Steadfast and stern, oblivious to bliss.

WASTED TIME

These are my chronicles of wasted time
Not spent to earn a dollar or a dime;
Misspent, like idle youth, on having fun,
With nothing more to show when I am done
Than trifles of poetic artistry
Beguiling you a minute with their glee,
Then vanishing from memory like mist
Lifting from mountains morning's sun has kissed.

Or think them visitations from the past,
From spirits I have summoned from the vast
Unknown beyond all time and mortal change,
Who live a little longer through this strange
Compact between my soul and theirs, my pen
A channel to the Now from bygone Then.

THE WAY OF PLAY

The rigid and the regimented way
Stifles the spirit of spontaneous play
That always flutters gaily out of bounds
Allured by merely arbitrary sounds
To thoughts no sober reckoning can find
Since novelty springs from another mind
And creativity is not aligned
With reasoning but sees best when it's blind.

GOODNESS, TRUTH, BEAUTY

That Goodness, Truth and Beauty should prevail
(As problematic as they seem today)
I still believe: they are the Holy Grail
Of education and our spirit's way.

For Goodness is the aim of every choice,
Not only for ourselves but everyone,
And Truth gives forceful credence to the voice,
Although the search for it is never done,

While Beauty quickens awe and reverence
Before the Cosmos' wondrous Mystery,
Yet for these three to have significance
They must be felt and known internally:

Cool intellect alone cannot reveal
What hearts know well to help our spirits heal.

THE POET'S WAY

To excavate my secret daimon mine,
Exploring my True Self to find its source,
Using my gifts, letting my spirit shine –
All this is why I'm here: this is my course.

And then to cast in words designed to last,
The record of my deep discoveries,
Is why this verse is turned and fastened fast
With rhymes to live in memory and please.

If I succeed in this endeavor of
My soul, complete my spiritual quest,
What shall I find, what shall I make, but love
To share with others till we all are blessed.

For love is Home, love is the holy Source
From whence we come and where we go perforce.

UNBOUND

While Body is quite palpable and gross,
The Heart, the Mind, the Soul are hard to see:
The Heart's affections hold its loved ones close;
Its fortitude and courage set us free.

The Mind is more than brain and can know all
The universe when it is opened wide,
As Soul would have it be, hearing the call
From God, where all intangibles reside.

Heart, Mind and Soul are more than Earthly things
And do not die but live eternally:
Life after life they grow till Spirit brings
Them Homeward, like ripe salmon from the sea.

The body is a husk that turns to dust
When blissful Spirit soars away untrussed.

SO THEY SAY

If what I see is what my mind believes,
As neo-metaphysicals declare,
My destiny is what my will conceives,
And I'm responsible for all that's there.

A heavy burden that, to be the cause
Of all befalling me, both good and ill,

To know I am the author of my flaws
And virtues too, that everything is will.

And yet what liberty this power entails:
Depending how I master what I think,
Each project I conceive succeeds or fails,
For thinking makes it so: I swim or sink.

If I'm not happy with the world I find,
I have a choice, since I can change my mind.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

The universe evolves according to
The laws of physics, not by some intent,
But randomly. No need to wonder who,
Or to assume it all is heaven sent.

So say Darwinians, making their case
Against the dread Intelligent Design
That claims to find a plan, a telltale trace
Of authorship proving we all are Thine.

That Thou hast made us out of lowly dust
And made the laws for miracles like that
Gives us more reason to suppose and trust
There's hidden purpose: no, the world's not flat;

It only seems so to Flatlanders' eyes.
The next dimension shows when we grow wise.

AWAKENING

What does it mean to be wholly awake,
As were the Buddha and the other sages
Who set about to learn for their own sake
Then left their wisdom to ensuing ages?

They came to tell us that we're sleeping though
We think we're not while walking through our days,
That all our follies and our vices show
We stumble on in a benighted maze.

To waken to reality is to
Discover finally why we're here at all,
Wayfarers far from home, pledged to pursue
The course of our return after our fall.

We fell from some mysterious heavenly place
Into this sleep, dreaming we'll wake to grace.

INKLINGS

When I sit down to write, it's to reveal
Myself to me, for lurking deep within
Are things I hardly know I know, more real
Than what I think, more me than what I've been.

My writing works to figure out the dream
Enfolded in my soul composed in code
That keeps its mystery until I beam
Attention on it in this metric mode.

The need for meter and the search for rhyme
Distract me happily from what I think,
Letting new thoughts emerge, thoughts more sublime
And true than what I knew – through magic ink.

These inklings from some deeper consciousness
Surprise me as they slowly coalesce.

AS IF

for John Franklin Miller, III

"Faith in a fact can help create the fact,"
Said William James, as willing to believe
As any man of reason and cool tact:
We may not see what we cannot conceive.

Conception brings the birth of many things
That were not here before. The evidence
Lies in the womb of faith, which kindly brings
New truth to light, new facts we then can sense.

How sensible is this odd paradox
That turns belief and seeing on their heads,
That turns, by force of will, clouds into rocks,
Turns water into wine, stones into breads?

Who know the power of the great AS IF
Unless faith carry them over the cliff?

A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW

There's *this* world that we know by common sense
And all our implements of science, then
There's maybe somewhere else as recompense
For this world's horrors, past our common ken.

That other world's a better world than this,
Not random, purposeless, and wracked with pain,
But filled with light and peace and loving bliss,
Not secular but sacred, whole and sane.

Perhaps that second world's a mere ideal,
A fantasy, a dream to compensate
For agony and grief, but still not real

Or reasonable, a scheme our hopes create.

So be it then, yet why not try to blend
The real and ideal to comprehend?

PEACE IS POSSIBLE

The fact is, day to day, I live in peace:
My neighborhood's serene, except for mowers
And leaf blowers; I rarely see police,
And on the lake – water skiers and rowers.

I walk our dogs in pure tranquility,
Chatting with neighbors, peering into flowers,
Checking the clouds for rain, thoughts flowing free –
No evil's in the air, no hardship lours.

So why is it the daily news tells us
Our world's a place of chaos and disaster,
Replete with terror, warfare, rapine, plus
The miseries of disease no one can master?

I will not be seduced to disbelieve
That peace is possible, and yet I grieve.

TWO WORLDS

These things I *choose* and *will* that I'll believe:
That there's a realm of spirits we can't see
With daylit eyes, from whom we may receive
Insight and wisdom, grace and piety;
That this transcendent world past space and time
Is whence we've come and where we shall return,
Though while we're here we visit that sublime
Abode in visionary dreams and yearn
The more for Beauty, Truth, and Goodness such
As we see there with perfect clarity;
And that our purpose here's to reach and touch
Divinity within, through ecstasy.

The more we can align that world with this,
The sooner shall we find transcendent bliss.

SOME PROOF

Who is this Higher Self who's said to be
Residing in my soul or deeper mind?
Am I in touch with him or can I see
Some evidence that we are both aligned
And that my ego's on a path to blend
Its small desires with greater purposes
Serving a worthy and transcendent end
While I become more awakened than I was?

My only proof is that my verses flow
More swift and easily when I don't try

To force or urge them on, but let them go
Which way they will: relax, stay clear, stand by
Until I'm prompted by a whispering
That feeds me words and lines and makes them sing.

OUR KIND

So much remains the same for humankind
Through all of time: That most of us are blind
Deluded fools, who find the very griefs
Which spring from our peculiar beliefs;
That though we're quick to hector and advise,
Our practices reveal us less than wise;
That while we think our ways the best around –
The most enlightened, reasonable, and sound –
So likewise do the unenlightened blokes
Who make us butts of their satiric jokes.
What seems to be the flaw in humankind
Is not an aberration of the mind
So much as a malfunction of the heart:
To be a kind more kind would be more smart.

A RUBAIYAT

The lesson of Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyat"
Is not to dwell on anything that's not –
The past that's gone, the future never here –
But to drink deep this NOW that's all we've got.

A NATURAL HIGH

The chemicals of happiness
Are coursing through my brain
And constantly euphoria
Drowns out the wind and rain.

Although it seems improbable,
This is a natural high
And surely is my preference
Who'd rather laugh than cry.

THE MYSTERY OF SPIRIT

What is this thing or nothing we call spirit

That people praise and worship reverently,
And can we touch it, taste it, see it, hear it,
Or is that an impossibility?

Inspire, expire, this spirit is our breath:
Seeming no more than air, no more than light
That when it's out it's night, it's vacant death,
Bereft of touch and taste, hearing and sight.

This essence of all animated being
Eludes our keenest instruments of knowing;
Hypotheses abound with none agreeing
On what it is that keeps our essence glowing
And when it's out if elsewhere it may be
Alive, and may return. That's mystery.

**HOW DO I KNOW WHAT I THINK
TILL I SEE WHAT I SAY?**

My Dad would always urge me, "Alan, think
Before you speak," since as a kid I'd blurt
Whatever came to mind while he'd grow pink
With consternation in his starched white shirt.

His was the way of logic, plan, precision:
An engineer, a brigadier, who craved
The rationale of orderly decision,
And from palaver, he hoped I might be saved.

I wasn't, though, as you can see right here
Because to make a poem like this requires
You write in spurts with no forethought about
How you can get from A to B or clear
The hurdle of a rhyme—you just don't doubt
You can and plunge on as your Muse inspires.

THE UNPREDICTABLE

A miracle is something wonderful
And marvelous and good that happens quite
Beyond all expectation and the rule
Of natural laws we know and think are right.

Thus those who take such laws as absolute,
Who place their faith in methodology,
Empirical and strict, don't give a hoot
For paranormal claims and mystery.

They know for sure what can and cannot be,
And if you then present some wondrous thing,
A sudden healing, say, they're filled with doubt,
Denial, scorn and, yes, hostility,
Because to accept this miracle would flout
Predicability, to which they cling.

IT'S UP TO YOU

Your fate is what befalls you, nothing more.
It is not Destiny or Providence
or some Design to pray for or deplore.
It's just what is, which doesn't make more sense
than what you make of it in your own mind
if you can't tolerate absurdity
and need to think that fate is more than blind—
but it is not, and let that set you free.

What happens has no purpose and no plan
ordained by hidden supernatural powers.
There are no gods or devils you can praise
or blame. Whatever happens's only chance
or something you intend. No Evil glowers.
No curse controls your life. You own your days.

GODLINESS WITHOUT GOD

Without a God can we be godly still?
Without some Person in the sky to fear
Or to revere and seek to do His will,
Can we ourselves make evil disappear?

It's in ourselves that we are thus or thus,
And we know better than we've done till now;
Somehow we know, in ways we can't discuss,
What things we should allow and disallow.

Call it our conscience or our moral sense,
A capability slow to evolve,
Yet part of us and partial recompense
For darker eons of too little love.

Without a God there's still a godly way
We can conceive and may pursue today.

THANK YOU NOTE

Amazement, wonder, awe—and gratitude
Flood over me when now and then I see
Beyond the everyday, and a still mood
Of contemplation shows infinity—

Within which here I am, a conscious mote
Aware of everything the universe
Contains, from the night owl's hollow, plaintive note
Back to the Bang from where we all disperse.

The marvel of all this, so soon forgot

Amidst the mundane rush of day's events,
At night in solitude when I am not
Bound anywhere, just here, I'm free to sense.

Whom I may thank for this, I do not know,
Though I would leave this note before I go.

HOW WISE?

How wise is it to think you're Number One?
How wise is it to value merely fun?
How wise is it to crave for more and more?
And then how wise to think you can ignore
The needs of those less fortunate than you
Believing that good fortune is your due,
Believing that injustices like that
Won't cause the Lean to rise against the Fat?
How wise is it to treat the Earth like dirt,
To ransack and despoil and cause it hurt
As if it weren't a creature we depend
Upon for life and must needs tend
And cherish as the source of everything
Sustaining us, the nurse to whom we cling?

SO I BELIEVE

What we believe is what we see, some say;
What we behold we shall in time become:
It all begins with mind, which makes the way
Reality will manifest in sum,

Yet add up differently for each of us
According as we're able to conceive
A larger possibility and thus
Behold, become, as much as we believe.

I say that this is true only in part,
Though not to be dismissed for falling short
Of absolute; it still comes near the heart
Of how things are and what they may import.

Don't disbelieve the power of belief:
Despair plus doubt will yield you merely grief.

THEOLOGY

Theology is how we can make sense
Of God, assuming God exists, is real,
Or is reality itself from whence
Begin and have their being all who feel.

But feeling's first, and then theology:
First awe and wonder, joy and gratitude,
Our sense of consciousness in ecstasy,
A keen serenity and blissful mood,

For first we know this God without a word,
Ineffable and silent, still as night,
A Living Logos, thoughts that undergird
The cosmos and guide everything aright.

Then last we seek to figure forth this thought
In words that comprehend what all have sought.

THE KNOWN WORLD

We live within the language of our tribe
And see the world its syllables inscribe;
Adopt another tongue and what we know
And how we feel accordingly will grow.

But yet, however polyglot we be,
We'll never circumscribe reality;
No matter how we study, search and mull,
The Absolute remains ineffable.

ASSUME A SOUL

Something that is or isn't, called "the soul,"
(Essential or extrapolated from
Our nervous system's dark sensorium)
Is what we call upon to make us whole.
It matters not how real it seems, its role
Remains the same: to be the vital sum
That's more than all our parts alone become:
Fictive or fact, integrity's its goal.

Assume it then, believe your soul is real,
Suppose it how you will: a ghost, a guest,
A master, a guru, a savior who
Can counsel you and heal, then last reveal
Deep secrets of a universe that's blessed
Beyond all reckoning, except as mystics do.

JUSTICE

To justify injustice some will say,
"We're all born equal and by will we may
Strive mightily and, with God's grace, succeed
In scrambling up the ladder of our greed.
You see we're rich, which only goes to show
How good we are; the bad are those below.
The Devil take the hindmost!" they will cry,
"The losers are the ones who didn't try."

To such, their fortunes are not fortunate
But what their brains and industry beget.
What they've neglected or denied is that
We are not equal but unique and that
True justice will provide for those more weak
Or poor and teach the mighty to be meek.

ARS LONGA

As long as we think we depart
Forever when we die,
There will be reason for our art
To last when we're not by.

It's quite unbearable to think
Our lives go all for naught;
Thus into artifacts we sink
Our souls in what we've wrought,

And hope thereby we may survive
Through what's more durable
Than flesh and bone. Though not alive,
Art's still not void and null.

THE RATE OF FOLLY

We're far too powerful for our own good
And for the health of every living thing:
Inclining rather toward the could than should,
We crave for that which only devils bring,
And Faustus is our patron saint in this—
Or rather heretic, whom devils hiss.

What can we do to bring under control
The science and technology we've loosed
Upon the planet? What plan can keep us whole
When all our bird-brained schemes come home to roost?
It's wisdom that we need, and need it fast,
For at this rate of folly, we won't last.

TOO MUCH OF A BAD THING

Jehovah's Witnesses may have it right—
There is no way our race can cure its wrongs,
Transcend its sins, and fix its plight—
The time's now near to face the angelic throngs.
For deeds we've done and left undone we'll pay,
Flung pell-mell into hell that Judgment Day.

Too bad we never grew to be more wise—
We had examples—saviors, sages—many,
Who sought to mend our ways and stop our lies—

Alan Nordstrom, Professor of English

A few of us caught on, but hardly any,
Then toward the end the going got so rough
God called it off and said, "Enough's enough!"

BREAKTHROUGH

for Harry R. Moody

Suppose you have a soul (though you don't know).
Let's say this soul of yours is buried deep
Within you like a rock beneath the snow,
A diamond in a mine: your Self asleep.

Your soul, your Higher Self, is always there,
And yet that you you think you are is far
Away, a sham persona—oh, beware
The glare that blinds you to that inward star.

It's more than supposition and surmise:
This soul of yours is seeking you always,
Is calling you to come and realize
The You you truly are, beyond your daze.
It's bidding you to waken and arise—
The Sun itself now breaking through the haze.

OUT OF THE BOX

Let's say it's all inane, as I have heard:
Our lives are meaningless and all for naught,
Mere accidents and happenstance, absurd,
Insane—not sensible, as sages taught.

Let's say there is no guidance from above
Nor any conscientious God within;
There's no design, no wisdom, and no love;
This universe is void of care or sin.

Let's say we own no souls, but only brains,
Which have evolved quite randomly to serve
For our survival. Chance not purpose reigns.
Injustice rules. None get what they deserve.

If so, how is it then we can conceive
The universe has something up its sleeve?

SO THERE

Who knows about the eternity of souls?
Though many speculate and some declare:
Life after life we act out countless roles,
Who knows for sure if souls are even there,

Or just some essence that we fantasize
As we dream up all sorts of sprites and ghosts

To populate a zone reason denies
Is true, lying beyond strict science' coasts?



But then, how real is anything we think
We know? How much of what we apprehend
Lies only in our eyes until we blink
Out what revisionary thoughts amend?

We see what we're disposed to see, so why
Not see souls, then, and give science the lie?

NUMBSKULL

"Faith is ultimately not the result of a rational conclusion."
— JRN

If there's a Providence, a God above,
Beyond, within or all around to call
Upon, invoke, beseech for help and love,
Why isn't He more evident to all?

Why must we suffer doubt as well as pain,
See such injustice, horror, misery,
While fearing that the injured and the slain
Endure in vain a senseless tragedy?

What holy rationale can compensate
Such grievances and grief, or bring relief
Of meaning to our desperate, dubious state,
Still yearning for the balm of true belief?

But faith is faith. It is not rational.
Its truth lives in the heart, not in the skull.

PAUL

My college roommate used to sit and brood
For sullen hours in an easy chair;
Then sometimes in the night he'd rise and stare
Semi-recumbent, fixed, like someone who'd
Just seen a ghost, though he was still asleep.
We roomies thought it cool to gawk at him
While cracking jokes throughout the interim,
Not knowing he was somewhere rich and deep.

But decades later, Paul and I conversed
At a convention on Noetic Science,
Where he revealed that he was blessed, not cursed,
By visions of a spiritual alliance,
And other-worldly beings guided him—
Angels, perhaps, entrancing Seraphim.

TRUE BELIEFS

In the realm of Ultimate Beliefs, that which is truly and dearly believed will never prove true or false in the realm of Science, by definition. Similarly, metaphysics is that territory which lies beyond physics to be supposed and speculated upon but never, by definition, drawn into the other's circle. Even if something once regarded as metaphysical (like quantum phenomena) becomes the property of physics, then it ceases to be metaphysical and is now something known and measurable scientifically.

Those beliefs one "takes on faith," leaping beyond science and reason to affirm, will never prove true in demonstrable, evidential, factual ways—the ways of empiricism. Can they, however, prove true by some other reckoning? I say yes. I say they may prove *pragmatically* true: their truth being the positive pay-off in the lives of those who so believe. At the least they are harmless beliefs, and at best they are marvelously beneficial beliefs, as measured primarily in personal and subjective terms, but sometimes also objectively, by the benefits the believer's deeds generate.

From the *pragmatic* viewpoint, it's irrelevant to ask if someone's belief, for in-

stance, in angels or spirit guides or muses is objectively, materially real. Ask rather what has followed from that person's faithful conviction: what harm, if any; what good, even the good of feeling good, feeling happier, uplifted, supported, guided, purposeful, valuable. Ask yourself this: what effects, what outcomes, what issues have come of your faith-based convictions? On that their validity should be judged: validity, not veracity, because convictions may be shown to be valid by the benefits they generate, though they can never be verified as true scientifically.

A *pragmythic* conviction is a lived illusion that works benefits and sometimes wonders. It is an illusion because it is not empirically real. Rather, it is a dream, a story, a myth; and yet it is subjectively palpable and efficacious. It is an imaginary construct that makes good sense of one's experiences and proves instrumental for living successfully—a dream that comes true in the etymological sense of proving *firm* and *trustworthy*. To the extent that your deep convictions about how life works prove salutary for all concerned, they prove *pragmythically* true.

A *pragmythic* conviction is justifiable precisely because of its *value*: it is, as I said, "a lived illusion that works *benefits* and . . . makes *good sense* of one's experiences and proves instrumental for living *successfully or happily*." Are not those qualities criteria of value? The observably positive practical consequences of, say, believing that you communicate fruitfully with a Muse or that you have a Parking Place Angel who provides you improbably with spots, proves the validity (not veracity, according to my previous distinction) of those convictions. Their validity lies in their value, their strength, their worth. My trust in my Muse and my Parking Angel pays off; the evidence can be assessed.

Famously, John Milton invoked his Muse Urantia, by whom he meant the Holy Spirit, to provide him in his blindness with the epic verse that became *Paradise Lost*. He claimed it came to him when he slept, and he then awoke to dictate what his Muse had given him. Clearly that "got him through the night"—big time. Call that Muse a "lived illusion" or an "imaginary construct," but it made good pudding. The proof is in the poem. And what about the spiritual convictions of Mother Teresa or Mahatma Gandhi or the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.: were they not validated by the good works they provoked?

Others, however, have powerful but poisonous convictions, as in the Aryan race or the jihad or the Axis of Evil. But look at their puddings and judge them accordingly. *Benefit to self and others* remains the value criterion of any beliefs and convictions, though even judging what is or is not beneficial depends on prior convictions of value—other lived illusions or imaginary constructs.

