



Trips to a Far Cafe

Poems and prose by Jon Adams



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Trips to a Far Cafe

This is my second chapbook of poetry and prose. The first was titled Heaping Abuse On The Master (December 2004) and it presented poems I wrote from the late nineteen-seventies until June 2004. Most of the work in this book was done after I left my former home in Long Beach, California while awaiting the official stamp on my long-sought divorce petition. I wrote them in a ranch house near Somis, California, my place of exile (re: Elba.)

Poetry is personal and self-defining. Depression is evident in some of these works. It was a time of frustration, boredom, anxiety and impatience - but it also saw resolution and rediscovery.

During the exile I completed a small nonfiction book about dealing with pet death, my second mystery novel and several meaningless philosophical tracts. I went to Europe. I self-published five chapbooks of short stories and these two books of poetry and prose. I read incessantly.

Voltaire wrote: "Paradise is where I am." I, too, have discovered paradise is not a heaven. It is an unconsummated aspiration, a longing for something we hope to find or reach.

Some poems are Parthian shots at California. I will spend the remainder of my life doing what I wish to do: writing, doing art, and not inhabiting any particular place for too long. In this era of wireless connection, I will never be far from anyone, and by staying on the move perhaps I will enjoy more of the world before my own appointment in Samarra (See the next page).

A note about reading poetry: Close the door, turn off the music and the TV, chase everyone away, and read poems aloud to your own ears, sounding each word and syllable.

I have included NOTES on the last page to assist the reader in identifying metaphors that occur or reappear in my poems. – *Jon Adams, February 2006*

Dedicated to James Joyce

(Ulysses was published 100 years ago!)

"Will they wrest from us, from me the palm of beauty?"

APPOINTMENT IN SAMARRA

(From an old Arab Tale)

A merchant in Baghdad sent his servant to the market. The servant returned, trembling and frightened.

The servant told the merchant, "I was jostled in the market, turned around, and saw Death. Death made a threatening gesture, and I fled in terror. May I please borrow your horse? I can leave Baghdad and ride to Samarra, where Death will not find me."

The master lent his horse to the servant, who rode to Samarra.

Later the merchant went to the market, and he also saw Death in the crowd.

"Why did you threaten my servant?" He asked.

Death replied, "I did not threaten him. I was merely surprised to see him here in Baghdad, for I have an appointment with him this very night in Samarra."

IDEAS (2005)

Will wrote that ideas were

"The very coinage of the brain."

Shakespeare's skull

was stuffed with change, it's plain!

THANKSGIVING PRAYER (2004)

Simple pleasures I have here.
I hold them dearly in my breast:
Writing poems, building dreams,
taking in a good night's rest.

Simple treasures I hold dear.
Loved within my thankful chest:
Three cats, my books, my parakeet,
my muses, spirit. I am blessed.

ROAD VISION (2004)

I don't cherish
where I've been,
only where I am.

I see anvil clouds,
preening swans
on a wide green pond.

I see no mountains.
They are recent rumors,
road-swept over the horizon.

Sparks on dark squares,
the vast roadside empties
its nighttime tale to me.

I turn my tired eyes
to the monotone road,
and reach for another Camel.

MOJAVE ROAD NIGHT (2005)

Attracted to fire
my moth night spirit
awakens to incandescence.
Long drive to Vegas.
Same distance back.

ONE EXPLANATION (2004)

Nothing I say will assuage
or abate your concerns.
No words I speak will
offer understanding.

Only I can live my life
and only I can understand.
Even I don't know why,
someday I may.

When enlightenment arrives,
I may be too confused to explain.
So change the thought;
Worry about the rain
instead of me.

RANCH DAY (2004)

Ghosts of leaves mottle the lawn,
sun-drawn on fine brown grass,
traceries of late autumn light.

Somewhere over there
a coyote lopes along the lemons,
a lone hawk quarters a field.

And over there a dirty truck
grinds along the narrow trail,
carrying pipes to water.

Campesinos gather at the edge,
bundled in layers against the cold,
and cardboard boxes line the rows.

A Junco chirps, a rabbit flashes
from the corner of my eye.
The day renews.

IBID (2005)

Footnotes, bibliography
stuck to my pages,
being the writer's
proof of pudding.
How can I do that here
and append them to
the pages of my life?

SONG FOR FRIENDS (2005)

*Ieu sui Johnannes,
que plor e vau cantan...**

Stay your tears,
your fears, your
unspake words of loss.

Save memories,
remains, my friends, for
later recollection.

Nothing in your hearts
has caused or sentenced
me to wander.

Nothing you have said
or done has brought
this pained departure.

Mystery, fortune,
faceless fates,
call me to their companies.

Willingly, I join
their choir to learn
their other harmonies.

* a line from Dante,
Purgatorio, canto 26:
“*I am John,
who weeps and goes
on his way singing...*”)

NIGHT MUSIC (2004)

California dreams
became my nightmares,
reminders - the stack of
old calendars I saved.

When I packed the garage
before I moved to Elba,
I ripped them all to pieces
and fed them to the bin gods.

When I move again
to that place where
wolves once walked,
I will not hang calendars!

I will mark the days
by plucking off
dandelion flowers,
and puff them all away.

I'll dream no more
of places past,
but bold new roads
that stretch ahead!

FOR APHRODITE (2002*)

I will be your evenings
and bring you beer and bread

iced coffee in mornings
and make your wakened bed.

I will be your solace;
in darkness hold your head

listening to your every breath
recalling words you said.

I will be your steady stone
and keep the home fire warm.

I will be your ready one
to ward away all harm.

Silent here, I wait the day
you'll come again. Forever stay.

*(*I wrote this before I petitioned for divorce in 2002. At the time I expected a reconciliation.)*

THE EDGE I (2004)

I wandered to the precipice
where madness claims its prey,
and blinded by the furies
chanced a foot above the void.

The One who gave me sight.
pointed to the darkness,
"There is no landing ground
where you will find salvation."

My coward heel regained the earth
and thus I left that awful place.
I will choose the battlefield
and there will fight my demons.

FORGONE (2004)

Tunneled Elms,
spindled green arches,
broken sidewalk,
flashing caution light,
far off diesel engine,
snowy goldenrod
busy in the breeze.
Home town of my dreams,
where tombstones
name my ancestors,
sits astride a ridge
of ancient glacial sand.
Walking here,
where no one
knows my name
I pause over puddles
to find my reflections.

MORNING HUM (2004)

*This bird you cannot change.**
The lyrics dawn my day,
(I saw a roadrunner at the gate)
as my coffee chills away.

*I'm as free as a bird now.**
The music lifts my heart.
(A blackbird turns a leaf)
I can't recall the next part!

(*Lyric from Free Bird, ©Lynerd Skynerd)

EXILE'S MAXIM (2004)

There is no shame
for a fool who loved,
but plenty for those
without apology.

A snow goose longs
for end of winter.
He lifts up into the
freshening breeze.

ENTER (2004)

I go to the beach
to bid goodbye.

That magic place
where sea and sky

meet firmament.

Pacific, kiss my feet.
I bid a fond adieu,

and turning away
to face the new,

I kick the sand
behind me.

NUCLEAR FAMILY (2004)

My cats are the sled dogs
of my sanity.
They offer love and charity
when all seems lost.
They do no work except
to safeguard me from rodents.
They care little for bedspreads
or the clean new rug.
They know the sounds of
cans and paper bags.
They recognize my footfall
beyond the closed door.
They comfort me with
purr and careful rub.
They ponder the mystery
of why I cage a parakeet.
They know no other love
but the man who feeds
and offers them a playful hand.

I wonder what I would have done
without them!

ROCKY PEAK (2004)

I pass there often and cannot stay.
The soft earth beckons me there,
to sit with my dead friends
and speak of trees and sky
and wind and windows.
I stop when I can and climb
to find a nearby rock.
They can't hear me now,
but I talk to them anyway.
I felt a touch the last time.
A talon on my shoulder,
a feather there, against my cheek,
the careful peck of a tiny beak.
No matter where I go or
where I find a rock,
they will always be there
but always with me here.

COFFEE (2004)

Pleasant viand,
aromatic enervator,
stew of crushed berries,
you energize the world.
Here's a toast to
your warm company!

PARADIGMS (2004)

Shifts occur quickly
rather than relatively slow.
Paradigmatic shift!

EXIGENESIS (2005)

All is winter.
Cold the ground.
What glories
are there here?
Strike my tent.
This Templar goes
to seek his lost
Jerusalem.

CYPRESS FAREWELL (In 5 Haiku, 2004)

Great blue herons squawk.
Tractors remove habitats.
Cypress is no more!

Verdant fairways here
are poured into parking lots.
We loved to play there!

No more the arbors.
The ponds are filled with rubble.
The greens were gentle!

Standing at the tee
I look for rows of herons.
Finding none I weep!

We make play labor
and labor hard at our play.
But the dollar wins!

(Cypress Golf Course in Cypress, CA was a tough, almost links-style narrow 18 holes I loved to play. It humbled me every time. It was a virtual arboretum and full of wildlife, including vast flocks of great blue herons and cranes, a refuge of green in the midst of uncontrolled urban sprawl. The city swapped it to a church for land on which to develop a Wal-Mart. Rest in good memories, C.G.C.)

BETRAYALS (2005)

Old swords still cut,
but wounds will heal
in time with care.

Words are sharp,
weapons as honed as
any killing blade.

Wisdom salves the pain,
knowing your jabs
are thrusts of ignorance.

Truth is my armor.
My conscience bears you
no ill will, old friends.

SATORI (2005)

He lived on porch
by cobwebbed cacti,
watching apples ripen,

Day, week, passing years,
never reaching for difficult
fruit or fabulous fortune.

He found a mirrored pond
and there: No horizons!

No past.
No future.
Only the moment!

ON THE CONCRETENESS OF MEANING (2005)

I trust the clarity of words. They are the numbers and signs in the equations of our language, the products of our thoughts put into sentences. Words are the concreteness of our meaning.

Once asked what were the books I have most read, I replied: First, Webster's Dictionary; second, The American Heritage Dictionary which is my handy portable softcover version; and third, Roget's College Thesaurus. I have read those three cover to cover. If that appears strange to you (they change subjects frequently!) consider this - to use the language in writing fiction, poetry, prose, letters or any form of communication including speech, one should be as clear as possible to avoid the errors of misunderstanding.

Reading and writing have much in common. The reader may stumble over the meaning of a term, just as the writer may struggle for a term with a clear meaning. Those reference books are where we go for definitions to be clear.

Writing is like speaking. When we speak some of us tend toward loquaciousness (Quick! Look it up under 'L'.) The writer avoids loquacity in his or her work by selecting the most concrete of words to describe what is being written. For instance, I like the word 'thesaurus' rather than a 'printed compilation of synonymous transpositions.' The former is precise and avoids the obfuscation that our language sometimes asks of us, such as in the latter definition. Most readers will know the word 'thesaurus' and already understand the meaning of the word.

By the way, 'loquacious' means 'very talkative.'

BRANDENBURG REVISITED (2004)

I went to Berlin
to see what had become.
Potsdammer Platz was waste ground then.
Cinder wall, concrete and steel barrier,
barbed wire and watchtowers.

Now: IBM, Daimler, Sony.
Giant hotels line the spokes.
Linden trees and tourists
seek historic sustenance.

On Pariser Platz the Vopo is gone,
replaced by limo drivers
and two-hour bus tours,
cell phones and camcorders.

Atop the Reichstag - glass dome
wrinkled in the rare sun,
smacks of Krystallnacht,
a fitting monument!

So old, so new.
My city reaches one arm out,
and one leans back,
old terrors kept in hand.

There are stone-faced buildings
along Museum Island with
bullet scars and splatters.
Am I the only one who knows?

The wounds can't hide
behind plaster, steel or glass.
Berlin, I love you for remembering.

FROM AKHENATEN (2004)

Pity is all
I have for them.

Verity is all
I have to give.

I will live
in Ma'at*

and never
suffer gods

whose coffers
fill with gold,

whose priests
fill with beer,

whose ears are
filled with stones.

**Ma'at (Ancient Egyptian word for truth.) I transcribed Akhenaten's speech to the High Priest of Amun-Ra when the Pharaoh announced he had taken up worship of the one god, the Aten, and reworked it into a simple poem.*

DECEMBER HAIKU (2004)

Fire on sandstone hills,
sinking sun paints my forehead.
The green flash will come!

High on a smooth knoll
a Kite hovers still,
awaiting its prey!

Furrows follow lanes.
Eucalyptus lines the road.
Brown hands seek carrots!

The fresh wind trembles
metal shed and wooden barn.
It whistles through me!

A single bright point
emerges from horizon.
Jupiter rampant!

Snow capped far off peaks
hold the sun's last yellow light.
It's here, the Solstice!

FREEWAY (2004)

Far cafe beckons again.
The road is lonely.
Lately I notice rubber
laying in the lane.

Driving in the canyon
speed slakes to a crawl.
Impatience gathers
before my eyes.

A fist is shown.
A curse uttered.
I roll the window closed
and touch the radio.

Single corpuscle,
clogged artery.
Then, somewhere
the heart finds another beat.

RESURGENCE (2005)

This Elba
inflicted by forces
hermetic and
labrynthine,

my island
dictate of fate
unknown to me,
unsuspected,

hosts tragedy -
my solitude,
but suckles a
covenant:

for in some
far-off Paris
legions gather,
send dispatches -

pleas for my return
again with plans
regenerate, a map
by which to foray.

Courage!
In Elba's warm hut,
I count the days,
eyes on the horizon.

BOXES (2004)

Buckwheat ran away
with her toy boy surfer.
I went to the cafe, and
lived on toasted bagels.

I packed her things
and put them in boxes,
clothes, jewelry,
photos, crystal angels.

I drove them all
to a storage room
and locked her away
behind a cinder wall.

I went to the far cafe
and let the dream
that Buckwheat was
set with the waning sun.

There are still boxes here,
holding what I kept.
They're for me alone,
waiting for a sunrise.

HOMECOMING (2004)

Nights in Wolf Creek
where lightning bugs spark
like summer snowflakes and
new mown grass
hangs in your nostrils,
are balmier than some.
Bats flit after flies,
moths to electric candle,
and moonbeams glance
off window pane.
Slow trains whistle by
hauling mail to
some far town, and
never stop in Wolf Creek.
An old man steps along
the ancient shale walk
toward a gathering spot
long ago forgotten.
He stops and stoops
to pick a stone
and flings it down an alley.
He sees the young man,
coming home again
and knows it can be done.

THE INEVITABILITY OF FLIGHT (2005)

Having wings comes later.

First, gather strength as
tiny pupae, worm-like
caterpillar slug.

Spin a satin cocoon
and peel away the legs,
grasp your shoulders and
pull out your wings.

Then rip away
the close embrasure
and suddenly:

Butterfly!

THE BLACK PIANO (2004)

I made a thousand dollar down payment on the baby grand piano on April sixth. It was gloss black and projected like a concert Bechstein. The dealer would deliver it during a trip we had planned to Alaska in the first week of May. I made a set of house keys for him and all was set.

The piano was my gift for her forty-seventh birthday on May 1st, 2002.

On April 25th she walked out and I was stunned, devastated and numbed. I could not work. I could not eat, and lost twenty-five pounds in the next two months.

She told me that she needed to be alone for a while. She said that she had old resentments.

I cancelled the trip, the hotel, the rental car, and waited for her. She did not telephone or return.

I called the piano store and explained my plight, and they were full of understanding. A week, two weeks and a month passed and they called me. They would need to deliver the piano right away or the deal was off.

They gave me back all but a hundred dollars of my down payment. I used the nine hundred to pay some of her abandoned bills.

A year later I found out that she had never been faithful in our marriage. She had called me "clueless," "a fool," and other names to her friends. She was correct. I didn't know who or what she really was, it turned out.

I had spent several months looking for the piano before I found one that would fit into both the little dining room and my budget. It would have been a great surprise, but the surprise was on me.

I tried to write a lyric about it, but nothing rhymes with 'piano.'

MORE FROM ULYSSES (2004)

I read Joyce over and over.

“Love loves to love love.”

I dream Joyce some times.

“Tink to her pity cried a diner’s bell.”

And Joyce awakens me.

“Whispering gallery walls have ears.”

And he summons me.

“Hoho begob, says I to myself, says I.”

And dares me to try.

“At Duke Lane a ravenous terrier choked up a sick knuckly cud on the cobble stones and lapped it with new zest.”

But I read him more.

“Paris rawly waking, crude sunlight on her lemon streets.”

And confidence abates.

“On his wise shoulders through the checkerwork of leaves the sun flung spangles, dancing coins.”

So I must read more.

“The soul is the form of forms. Tranquillity sudden, vast candescent: form of forms.”

And cast my pen aside, thwarted instrument abandoned on the heel-humped, boot-stained threadbare rug of outdone dreams.

I wrote that!

BLINDERS (2004)

Love's dark glasses
hid his eyes from the
doubts and jealousies.
Random whispers,
arcane curses
chilled his heart,
filled his ears
once haunted with
honeyed promises.

When Love perished
in the fire, the light
that painted morning
warmed and melted
all sweetnesses away.

Night survived and
brought a warm wind.
He put the dark glasses
in a box and
never put them
on again.

SAMADHI (2005)

Require me to bring
tea and flowers
where your image
summons incense.

Require my deep bow
and steeped hands
by saffron robes
and sandalwood joss.

Require me shoeless
to enter your hall,
dark and quiet
soundless, silent.

Require me humility
without my ego
and a simple prayer
to leave behind.

Require my anger
rage and selfishness
to peel and fall
on your stone hard floor.

Wait! I can find you
in the garden
where the willow
dips weeping stems.

And I can find you
where snow falls
and paper birches
bend the wind.

STORM DUMP (2005)

Slowing rain bands
stuck on sudden
mountain scapes
dump their burden here,
choking culvert and
rutted road, breaking
bridge & furrow.
The bird grips limb,
shrugging out his
wispy raincoat.
The rabbit, a hole.
I, the umbrella.
The cat, a nap.

ROSHI (2004)

Gravelly ancient,
sanguine, sunken eye,
he said hello
and shared his tea.

I was not patient,
grown tired and
pained by what
had come to me.

He said,
"Patience stifles.
Lose the pain.
Live impatiently."

Reluctantly,
I bade farewell.
He died next day,
So bitter, tea!

ELEGY TO A WORN OUT SHOE (2005)

Stalwart servant,
your task is done.

My pleasure
was your value.

You have release
from treading here,

and bearing me
wherever.

Your partner's fine,
but I'll never

find another
just like you.

So, farewell, shoe,
to both of you.

Your comfy soles
were treasured.

THE EDGE II (2005)

Love is unbounded
except for the precipice,
which unseen, unmarked
on life's vain charts,
gapes unsuspected
hidden in the lie
behind love's veil
awaiting blinded victims.

Ah, but wait!
Only the bloodied heart
falls from that edge.
The soul turns away
and lives again.

IN PRAISE OF SINGLE MALT (2005)

Oisge. Water of Life.
Piped from burns
brown from rotted peat,
itself the decay of heather,
and sprouted barley
hewn and wetted,
roasted over the
smoking peat fires
whose aroma lingers
in the bottled essence.
All mushed and percolated
steamed and barreled,
aged therein ten long years
for just this taste tonight.

A LITTLE DEATH IN THE FAMILY (1993)

We recently lost a family member. He wasn't with us long. He moved in about a year ago. He lived in the corner of our bedroom, with his own window on our back yard, his cage next to Bebop, our Parakeet, and Leonardo da Finchi, a Society Finch.

My wife came home about nine one night and noticed Tehuti was sick and breathing rapidly. We called an emergency pet clinic with bird expertise and in a few minutes he sat in his cage beside me as I drove him there.

Tehuti was a white Cockatiel with a yellow plume. He was a great whistler and never liked being handled. Our other birds liked him and his banter with Bebop was a constant background sound in our home. He wolf-whistled at our cats, and he loved to watch Saturday morning cartoon shows.

Tehuti endured the ride without a peep. I checked on him and he looked up at me each time, desperately ill but with a look of surprise in his eyes. I tried to make the journey an easy one. I drove as if I had a carload of eggs. He perked up when we entered the clinic, and he seemed to settle down while I filled out the forms.

Occasionally I would open Tehuti's door and he would climb on top of the other cages, pulling and playing with the other birds' toys. The only way to get him back into his cage was to coax him onto a dowel rod. If your hand ever got within striking distance, you pulled it back with a bloody nick.

The receptionist took Tehuti away and I sat and waited. In about a half hour the veterinarian, a young and competent "bird" doctor, came out and told me our options. A blood workup, he said, could not be done until morning. X-rays could be taken immedi-

ately. I told him to do the X-rays.

He waited until a quarter to seven every morning before he whistled his wake-up call. TA-TA-TA-TA TI-TA! It was that familiar “charge” bugle call, and it always began our day.

A short time later the vet came out and said he had bad news. Hanging two X-rays on the lighted glass, he pointed to a white mass that filled Tehuti’s chest. It was probably a tumor, he said. Then he pointed to two small dark areas above the white blob. These were all the clear lung space Tehuti had with which to breathe. He only had about ten percent of normal lung volume. That explained his rapid breathing.

Tehuti is an odd name for a bird. It is the way you pronounce the name of the ancient Egyptian god of scribes. The Greeks misspelled and mispronounced it as “Thoth.” Since I am a present-day version of what the ancients called a scribe, I thought the name was appropriate.

I asked the vet how long Tehuti had to live and he said not long. There was no hope, no procedure or operation that could save him or extend his time with us. I asked how long in terms of hours. He said, “Not hours. Minutes.” I asked if we could alleviate his suffering. He said, “Let me check on him.” I waited while he went back into the examination room.

Tehuti wasn’t with us long. We got him as a gift a year ago October. He stayed with us for a little while, whistling us out of bed, entertaining us and our friends, cheering our days and nights. I named him after a long dead god, and our Parakeet learned to say his name.

The doctor came back. “He’s gone,” he said. I sat down and caught my breath, overwhelmed. In a

moment I thanked him and called Lynn with the bad news. Then I paid the bill, collected his cage, and drove home alone.

All that morning Bebop called for him. "Tehuti! Tehuti?" And the next morning the alarm clock greeted us, not his familiar cheery bugle charge. The cats are on the back porch, no whistles to greet them. A bare space on the table in the corner catches my eye as I walk past the bedroom.

There's no message here. It was just a little death in the family. If you read this and are looking for a twist, a sudden revelation, or even a moral precept to hang on, you'll be disappointed. The only things I have to speak and write about today are grief now and grief to come. That's the way it is when you keep pets. Their lives are shorter than ours and we must bear that burden if we are to go on caring for them.

We will go on. We will probably find a new bird, perhaps even another Cockatiel. We'll give it a strange name and try to teach it "Pop Goes The Weasel." It will make friends with our other birds and it will probably bite like the Dickens. And we know that one night, hopefully a long time from now, we may once again have to drive that road home, alone.

MYSTERIES (2005)

The unplumbed well of History
holds an amazing mystery
the One will not reveal.

We seek the answer eagerly.
Puck said: "What fools these mortals be!"
the One does not reveal.

I found a magic place one day
beside an ancient boundless sea.
I asked the One, "Reveal!"

A stranger came beside me there
and softly whispered in my ear,
"The One does not reveal."

I turned to speak but he was gone.
The message echoes even now.
The One *cannot* reveal.

THE AUGURIES (2005)

I. THE SPELL

When did I cast
my pearls before swine
for Love's fair measures,
comfort and the flesh?

Then did I forsake,
scarce and precious,
my years of labor,
fortune and its fruits.

Then did I, blinded
by my own heart,
resist my nature
for the love of Aphrodite.

II. THE CURSE

Her fog before my eyes,
her Vestals at her beckon,
they showed me to a mirror
whose lies reflected Paradise.

No word escaped their lips
to warn me of her secrets.
I relished their praises
in the box that was my prison.

Tenacious in her plan,
she conquered all she met,
and I, in rapture's bliss,
lay roses on her bed.

III. THE RING

Pledged to Aphrodite
and her love-locked mirror,
this foolish heart
beat only to her song.

I wore her precious ring of gold
upon this well-worn finger,
my gentle heart
sworn to do no wrong.

I lifted her on pedestals.
I sung her poems and praises.
She kept me in her paradise
for twenty years too long.

One Vestal whispered in my ear
when Aphrodite far had fled,
"She shit on you, and that's not all."
and lifted off the curse.

At the ocean's boiling edge
I tore it from my trembling hand
and hurled the gold thing in the deep
and pledged no more forever.

If there's a lesson in my verse,
it's that her vows were broken;
and on this hand will not abide
Aphrodite's token.

ON GRAVITY (2005)

Sisyphus rolls his eternal stone,
bended back against the weight.
His fear is that when summit's gained
there will be no resting place.
Sisyphus can't pause and climb
to see what's on the other side,
so Sisyphus rolls his eternal stone
and begs the gods there be no summit.

UNTITLED (2005)

Noble is rhythm.
Captivating is the lyric
when sung to music.

Varied and infinite
are the subjects.
What is the object?

The question is moot,
for song comes
from the heart,

and the heart is
a fragile vessel,
not objective,
vibrator of our being.

WRITING AS PAINTING

I write best when I am burdened by things. At times the things are frustration or disappointment. At other times they are anger or concern about my condition here in my self-imposed Elba, at the end of a dusty lane among lemon trees and deep perspectives of carrot rows and barriers of eucalyptus that borders the ranch. The ideas I collect in the day and file in my memory for later development seem to replay better and more clearly when I am burdened and when it is late at night. The ideas gather their lexicon and punctuations, splash across this phosphorescent screen and take form best that way, unfettered by the urgent telephone or the daytime routines of foraging for food and petty distractions.

When I write I sketch the borderlines, the bare rendering of the ideas. After the thing is 'done,' I step outside for a smoke or a scotch, then redo it in my mind from memory. As I recall what I have written that way, I can begin to do the crosshatch and chiaroscuro of the work. That brings me back to the piece with vigor. I begin at the beginning again and work the sketch into an underpainting. After the last period, I return to the patio bench and consider what I recall from the more complete work, while it is still emerging and has not been slept upon. Then, quick to the chase, I come back and paint in the colors.

Alas! The work has gained a form, its voice, tempo and meter are externalized into words. Tomorrow, I will open the file, read it from the monitor, and carefully retouch the strokes that I find have not been finished. The thing is wrought from trouble, and it is trouble that finds its concretion in the thing. All is art when you can accept that creation is its own release.

JON'S PRAYER (2005)

Bless the suns that warm my face.
Bless the moons that light the night.
Bless the winds that dry my paths,
and bless the paths that guide me.

Bless the One who grants me grace.
Bless my friends and family.
Bless all those who'd do me harm,
and bless all those who love me.

Bless the mysteries I can't taste.
Bless these words and letters.
Bless the book I read today,
and bless these pets beside me.

Bless the soil beneath this place.
Bless the dead who give me courage.
Bless the wonders you reveal,
and bless all that you hide from me.

Bless what I have missed in haste.
Bless what I have numbered.
Grant me wisdom, heart and means
to face that which awaits me.

TRIPS TO A FAR CAFE (2004)

My journeys grow less frequent.
Little is there for me.
Only the joy of the voyage
seems worthy of the fee.

There was a girl at a far cafe.
Her painted eyes were gray.
I went to see her many times,
until she went away.

There was one who loved guitar,
with long black hair, she'd play.
She swore to God she loved me true.
It was I sent her away.

There was a girl whose sachet breathed
the rainwet flowers of May.
I went to see her many times,
and she too went away.

There was a vision twice appeared,
tattoos, pierced, and hair astray.
I longed to love her many times,
but she soon went away.

One I wed in a long nightmare,
who promised me faith all day.
I loved her in my foolishness.
Come night she stole away.

My journeys are less frequent now.
A far horizon beckons me.
Is there a faithful heart somewhere
to end this mystery?

EPITAPH (2004)

It is the spine of a book, a novel, whose pages are dog-eared and yellowing at the edges, with a title page, followed by a dedication.

It is a thick sheaf of paper, glued at the edges and bound with stiff cardboard covered with cloth. It sits on a library shelf, or on a reader's coffee table. It may be found at a yard sale, seen in a book store, or boxed in someone's garage.

There will be no engraved stone or brass plaque, no little flag or marble marker in the grass of a cemetery. My name on a book in some quiet library is the only epitaph I want.

NOTES

- Aphrodite: My ex-wife.
Augury: The practice of reading omens.
Buckwheat: A nickname for my ex-wife, from early in our relationship.
Burn(s): Creeks in Scotland.
dark glasses: Trust.
Elba: Metaphor for the place of my "exile," relating to Napoleon's island of his first but short exile.
Exigeneis: Beginning, but a fast and urgent one.
far cafe: Places I go or went for company, love or simple conversation with true friends.
horizon(s): The future. Also: Limits or no-limits.
Jerusalem: A goal, or the promise of one.
journeys: Seeking love, companionship or both.
mirror: Looking at oneself and seeing only the backward reflection, not the true self.
Oisge: Gaelic: Scotch whisky with no 'e'.
precipice: (Also 'edge') the point of considering suicide.
Roshi: A Zen teacher.
snow goose: One who seeks another climate
swords: Re: words, especially painful statements that are misconceived or based on the lies of others.
Templar: Re: The Knights of the Temple, or the Templars. Mediaeval knights who joined the Crusades and founded a religious order that remained for centuries.
the One: God, the Absolute, or the Ultimate.
Vestals: Priestesses in Roman times, whose lives were dedicated to the whims of the gods and goddesses. Metaphor for my ex-wife's girlfriend conspirators.