

14. *Ad Astra*

Speciosus forma prae filiis hominum diffusa est gratia
in labiis tuis; propterea benedixit te Deus in aeternum.

L'amour che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.

IN my frail frame immortal love doth dwell;
and in these lines with borrowed breath you live.
No skill can keep my body from death's spell;
what skill I have doth life forever give
to you and me conjoined in sounds that they
shall speak who never knew us, though they gaze
long through the window of this page, and say
with wonder how we loved, in our brute age.

And yet no words I write can e'er be true;
they all fumble, flunk, fall, deform, and fail
the infinite mystery that is you
and me, like calling minnow what is whale.

No lay can list to others what is ours
though yet these rimes might reach as far as stars.

Ad Astra: Latin, to the stars. The first EPIGRAPH is the last line from Dante's *Divina Commedia*, "the love that moves the sun and the other stars." Rumi wrote, "Love is the astrolabe of the Mysteries of God" (Baldock, p181) → «The Sun». The second is Psalm 44:3 in the Vulgate, 45:2 "You are the fairest of men; charm plays on your lips for God has blessed you forever." **Frame:** the human body, the framework of a poem (as Shakespeare used the term), or the case or structure for a window. A **lay** is a short lyric for a song; see the Frontispiece for the tune for this sonnet. The word is often a pun. The language, style, and theme of this sonnet imitates Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 (and others like 17, 18, 60, 63, 65, 81, 101, 107, perhaps also like the pair of 59 and 106), and employs the Renaissance convention that poetry, unlike flesh, is permanent. But this motif, that art survives the body, sometimes called the *monumentum* trope, is not an egotistical claim so much as a tradition originating with the classics, such as with Dante, *Inferno* 4.97, Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.41, and Horace, *Odes* 3.30, which Shakespeare seems almost to imitate: Exegi monumentum aere perennius — well, maybe some egotism. Some have compared Shakespeare's to Spencer's Sonnet 32 in his 1591 *The Ruines of Rome*, itself a translation from Joachim du Bellay, 1553 *Antiquités de Rome*. Some of the poetic devices «Ad Astra» employs are illustrated in the § Introduction to this book under ¶ 17. **Window of this page:** In *Of Grammatology* (1967) Jacques Derrida writes "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte," which can be understood as saying that context is unavoidable. This poem is paired with the following «Acropolis Canon».

15. *Acropolis Canon*

In fact, an absolute innovation in music cannot be anything else except discordant, because it would be unseemly to the general custom. Even in poetry and prose, that which is concerned purely with harmony and melody is almost not at all susceptible of innovation.

THAT sonnet I wrote you in classic form —
 each word joined, torqued down neat, precise, and tight-
 bolted, yoked, jiggled, braced, shimmed and shaped to norm,
 soldered smooth, fittings strong yet quite polite —
 would, if one tooth chipped, if one gear slipped, ex-
 plode! not passion, mere paroxysm, but
 detonation turning temples into wrecks;
 and balanced gods would shake and strut.

The engine of my verse I give to you,
 whose temple trains my spirit, tracked, a plower
 uncontrolled, yet embedded, motored true.
 Round column caliber rests rise with power.

On canon's rails I did a sonnet sire;
 in death I lie for love without desire.

The EPIGRAPH is from Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, October 9, 1821, quoted in Charles Rosen, 1997 expanded edition, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*. This sonnet, a palinode, is paired with «Ad Astra» and reacts against it to make one larger statement. It heavily uses the 17th Century “metaphysical” technique of the “conceit” with words used with multiple meanings. For example, in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129, he punned *spirit* which I use in this sonnet with “sprit” — “sprit” was slang for erect penis, derived from the sense of the etymologically related “sprout.” Another example: *canon* is (1) an ecclesiastical code, (2) a basis for judgment as the rules of poetry, (3) the body of literature considered the basis of a civilization or discipline, (4) a musical form in which a melody overlaps itself in different voices or keys; a “cannon” (suggested by *rails* and, in the line above, by *caliber*) is a weapon for firing projectiles, in phallic shape. The Parthenon, which survived two thousand years in good shape, was *wrecked* in 1687 by an explosion of the powder stored in it by the Turks when a shell from a Venetian army hit it. The couplet is discussed in the § Introduction to this book, at the end of ¶ 18.

16. *Just Try To Kiss Me*

Da mi basia mille, deinde centum

JUST try to kiss me once again, just try,
 or find out what I'm thinking, bother me
 for slick massage, or see a flick, or buy
 us dinner, take a walk, or make some tea,
 repeat to me my veil theology
 or politics or social views or art,
 or make and undertake a liturgy,
 or listen to you say what's in your heart.
 Just try, and see if I resist your touch
 or voice or gaze or pinch or your sweet smell.
 I yield already, and you know as much,
 if you should speak from heaven or from hell.
 And if you said that I should go away,
 my faith in you's complete — I would obey.

The EPIGRAPH IS FROM Catullus 5. "Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred . . ." *Veil theology*: "God veils himself to reveal himself and reveals himself by veiling himself" — attributed, perhaps mistakenly, to the mystic Suhrawardi (1155-1191) or Ibn Arabi (1165-1240). One cannot see the sun by looking at it directly without harm because it is too bright. But if it is veiled with translucent film, it can be seen; optical aids enable viewing of even its flares and sunspots. Just so, reality is beyond direct human apprehension, hidden within every event, within every sight, sound, smell, taste, movement, thought. Nonetheless it is through such veils that Reality is revealed to be beyond our comprehension → «Interbeing». In Robert Cawdrey, 1604 *A Table Alphabetical*, "theologie" is described as "the science of living blessedly for ever." "Theology is — or should be — a species of poetry, which read quickly or encountered in a hubbub of noise makes no sense. You have to open yourself to a poem . . . Like the words of a poem, a religious idea, myth, or doctrine points beyond itself to truths that are elusive . . ." —Karen Armstrong, 2004 *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness*, 284. *Kiss*: The Christian mystic Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) wrote of various kinds of kisses as approaches to the Divine → «The Kiss». In *De speculo caritatis* St Aelred (1110-1167), English abbot of Rievaulx, who especially loved the young monk Simon, writes of "an intimate affection and the embrace of a holy love, someone in whom your spirit can rest, to whom you can pour out your soul, to whose pleasant exchanges, as to soothing songs, you can fly in sorrow . . . with whose spiritual kisses, as with remedial salves, you may draw out all the weariness of your restless anxieties" in Keith Sharpe, 2011 *The Gay Gospels: Good News for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People*, p105.

18. *Bed Position*

Non in mari tantum aut in proelio vir fortis apparet;
exhibetur etiam in lectulo virtus.

Kept wholly for himself alone,
there he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him.

She blew my nose and then she blew my mind.

YOU don't coax me to your bed, but say *This is where we'll spend the night: stay your side but first let's cuddle*. Curried, I don't miss a spoon, so close we are I think I've died and found a banquet, blessed beyond, where sex is not an issue, though I once blurt out (the word's not 'blurt,' but blunt, though with respects) "What would making love to you be like?" Spout

— that's the word. Nothing ever comes of it.
We sleep. My rest on knife edge makes straight space.
You serve me as I am, and, lo! I fit
your life, though in your bed, no crumb, no trace.

The fork of night lifts day; you juxtapose
and cantilever love and grab my nose.

The first EPIGRAPH, "Not only at sea or in battle is a man's bravery displayed; courage is shown even in bed," is from Pseudo-Seneca, *De remediis fortuitorum*, 6.1 (Seneca lived 4 BCE–65; Pseudo-Seneca probably dates from the 4th Century.) The second is from John of the Cross, "Ascent of Mount Carmel" 1, 13, tr E Allison Peers, 1953 *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, Vol 1, p59. The third, by The Rolling Stones, is from the popular song, "Honky Tonk Woman." **Spout** is an erudite pun = **sprit** → «Acropolis Canon». Other puns like **straight** and the euphemism **nose** are obvious.

24. *Passage*

For relationships . . . must be like islands, one must accept them for what they are here and now, within their limits — islands . . . surrounded and interrupted by the sea, and continually visited and abandoned by the tides.

I've come to this island where I don't care if you love me, though now I see your love runs clear through me. What was my total fare to this place? Well, I surrendered, above all else, my rank tattered ticket to where my clinging kept me from seeing who you are, a pit I could not climb out of, snare, delusions, dreams that never will come true.

We reach each other through the deep, through arm and inlet, mouth, sound, sump, cove, bay and bight. The rush and churn, the quiet sea brew's barm, the flood and drain are love's career and rite.

O, something deeper than the inflect sea tips, changes, sips, and bodies you and me.

The EPIGRAPH is from Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1955 *Gift from the Sea*, p109. And even David Brooks writes, "life comes to a point only in those moments when the self dissolves into some task [I wish he had added, 'or relationship']. The purpose in life is not to find yourself. It's to lose yourself" (*New York Times*, May 31, 2011). On the other hand, the complementary truth is that "If . . . I do not need another in order to complete my own identity, I can see the other for what he really is in himself rather than simply for what he is that correlates to my own needs." —Herbert W Richardson, "Three Myths of Transcendence" in 1969 *Transcendence*, ed Richardson and Ronald R Cutler, p112. And Tom Robbins, 2014 *Tibetan Peach Pie*, p126, writes "it's a *privilege* to love someone . . . ; and while it's paradisiacal if she or he loves you back, it's unfair to demand or expect reciprocity. We should consider ourselves lucky, honored, blessed that we possess the capacity to feel tenderness of such magnitude and be grateful even when that love is not returned." A **sump** is a kind of pool of water. A **bight** is a curve or bend in the bank or shore of a body of water, or the water thus embraced. **Barm** is the yeasty froth or head on malt drinks like beer.

25. *Wound Wick*

The fire of the body burns away its dross and, rising
in a flame of self-surrender, consumes its own microcosm.

I WILL not possess you, or try, for I
desire you fierce alive; we two are both
possessed by friendship's fires which purify
all selfish frames and fences. So my oath
to you is ranging love, not caged display;
the flames within us, tongued, not fused, were matched
at the birthing of the universe. Stay
with love's consumption, not to me attached.

The candle cannot possess the burning,
though the turning fire sits in the wound wick;
in dark, light is found, as love in yearning,
and spirits dwell, not owning, dick with dick.

Since first we met, I learned to let you go;
yet in my wick the flames you gave still grow.

The EPIGRAPH is from Dag Hammarskjöld, 1964 *Markings*, English, p166. That book's own epigraph is from Meister Eckart: "Only the hand that erases can write the true thing." Rumi writes, "It is the burn of the heart that I want. It is this burning which is everything — more precious than a worldly empire — because it calls God secretly in the night." —Rumi/Star, p152 → «The Sun». **Birthing of the universe**: "This universe, which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or man, but it always has been, is, and will be an ever-living fire, kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures." —Heraclitus fragment 30. **Candle**: "A candle in the thighs / Warms youth and seed and burns the seeds of age . . ." —"Light breaks where no sun shines," 2d stanza, Dylan Thomas (1914-1953). **Yearning**: Compare the hadith → «Al-Fatiha + The Purpose of Sex», "I was a hidden creature and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures in order to be known by them" with this passage from Episcopalian priest Carter Hayward, 1984 *Our Passion for Justice; Images of Power, Sexuality and Liberation*: p49: "In the beginning was God. / In the beginning was the source of all that is / God yearning / God moaning / God laboring / God giving birth / God rejoicing / And God loved what She had made / And God said / 'It is good' / And God knowing that all that is good is shared / Held the Earth tenderly in Her arms / God longed to share the good Earth, / And humanity was born in the yearning of God . . ."

29. *Shakespeare's Fair Young Man*

For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Shakespeare, abandonnant du coup Ophélie
Cordélia, Desdémona, tout son beau sexe,
Chantait en vers magnificents — qu'un sot s'en vexe —
Le forme masculine et son alleluia.

I READ and feed on Shakespeare's handsome verse
of love and verge toward you and feast. I know
his relish matched with appetency worse
than death, though on his friend he could bestow
an immortality, so that I ask,

*Would I prefer to greet the Bard or meet
his young male friend, behind time's wordy mask?
These two: who made the sonnets ripe and sweet?*

If even in the smallest way, his friend
and you are like, then let me meet this youth,
carousing you through him, since you now wend
away from me, like shifting hope to truth.
Unmeasured love with lingual palette knife
is diced and cooked and dried by passion's strife.

The first EPIGRAPH is the couplet concluding Shakespeare's Sonnet 29. Later sonnets complain of the youth's faithless, shallow, narcissistic character as Shakespeare also examines his own faults in the relationship. The second EPIGRAPH is from Paul Verlaine's "Ô Ne Blasphème Pas," translated as "Shakespeare, forsaking Ophelia, Cordelia, Desdemona, all that beautiful sex, sang to man's form (though it may vex stupid critics) many a Hallelujah" by J Murat and W Gunn in the 1979 *A Lover's Cock and Other Gay Poems*, p20. Puns include **relish**, **meet** and **unmeasured**. **Wend** is now seldom spoken, but Shakespeare used it to mean go, as in proceeding or pursuing a path. **Diced** is a term used in food preparation and gambling. A **palette** is a painter's board for mixing colors or an available range of something, and the **palate** is the roof of the mouth. **Cooked**: "A successful exercise in shacking up need not necessarily be any more improbable than a successful vichyssoise." —Episcopal priest Robert Farrar Capon, 1982 *Beyond Noon and Three*, p6.

30. *Shakespeare's 73 Redux*

THAT time of year thou mayst in me behold
 when daffodils sing zeal to greet the sun
 whose muscled, sweating rays make time more bold,
 and rouse the gardened loins where glory's spun.

In me thou see'st the playing of such day
 as brings the birds to greet in themes of cheer,
 lifts beasts from slumb'ring earth to groom and lay,
 and makes the humblest hiker a vizier.

In me thou see'st the burning of such fire
 as promises a blaze that sizzles awe,
 a sacred consummation of desire
 constrained by courtesy and holy law.

This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
 and made old me now young with sursum song.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 73:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
 Consumed with that which it is nourished by.

This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Lay can be a vulgar term for sexual activity. A *vizier* is the title given to a minister of state in some Muslim countries. *Sursum*: sursum corda, "Lift up your hearts" — a part of the Eucharistic Prayer, sometimes chanted.

39. *Carpe Diem*

Tu ne quaesieris, scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi
finem di dederint . . . Dum loquimur, fugerit invida
aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.

SARGON'S name lives on, but who knows Sargon?
He's dead, though deeds still make us who we are.
Except for you, I'd be like Babylon.
And even you, immortal friend, time's star,
will fade as time so finely mixes all
flesh back to dust, and light compacts and falls
into itself, Big Crunch, Big Bang, time's wall
against itself, which beautifies, then mauls.

Ere then to know you full is my desire,
in all your loveliness and grace and power,
you showing resurrection, whole, entire,
each wound healed, transformed, soiled seed to flower.

Dance, then, Shiva, dance! consume me with your play!
Let your release, not rot, end this brief day!

Carpe diem. "seize the day," is a phrase in the last line of the 11th poem of the 1st book of the *Odes* of Horace (65-8 BCE). The EPIGRAPH is from the beginning and ending of the poem, which warns against Babylonian augury. The Latin quoted can be rendered, "Don't ask (taboo to know) what the gods have planned for us. . . . While we chat, jealous time has slipped away. Grab each moment, counting on little to come." **Sargon** seized the throne of Assyria in 722 BCE, captured Samaria, suppressed a revolt in Palestine, and defeated the Egyptians. He was murdered in 705. He took his name from a Babylonian king who ruled about 2,000 years earlier. Our world might be quite different if he had not lived. One theory of the universe proposes that matter will eventually fall together into something like a "black hole" from which even light cannot escape, the **Big Crunch**, followed by an explosion, the **Big Bang**, and expansion. (Another theory proposes that the universe expands forever.) **Shiva** → «Ahimsa» is one of the most important Hindu gods. One favorite image of him is as Nataraja, Lord of the Dance, surrounded by a ring of fire, suggesting cosmic cycles of creation and destruction. **Play:** → «Thanks for Noticing».

58. *The Plan*

Whoever can evade the Self transcends
The world and as a lover he ascends.

Dein ist mein Herz und soll es ewig bleiben.

THOUGH you are far and in another's arms,
my love will never flicker, pale, or fade.
The sun may dim and disregard all charms
and earnest prayers, but I cannot be swayed.
The sky itself with all its stars made black
would stop the bend and dance and wave of space,
God's brightest heaven turned to blindest lack
before my love would vanish or debase.

This habit I have formed of loving you,
of saying Yes to that On light you are,
inflects the Power from which the cosmos grew,
as you've become for me an avatar.

These forty years the flame you lit flares still
as darkness yields to love, and always will.

The EPIGRAPH is from the 1984 Afham Darbandi-Dick Davis translation of *The Conference of Birds* by Farid ud-din Attar (1145?–1221?). The second, Yours is my heart and so shall it remain forever, is from the poem "Ungeduld" by Johann Ludwig Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827), and whose son, Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) advanced the study of world religions), used by Franz Schubert (1797-1828) in his song cycle, *Die schöne Müllerin*. **Stars made black:** Some cosmologies anticipate that stars will eventually become black holes. In Hinduism, an **avatar** is a manifestation of a deity in flesh. **The sky . . . space** plays with Einstein's theory of General Relativity which predicts "black holes," the bending of light and the curvature of space-time by gravitational fields, and time dilation. **Forty:** four is the largest number most people can perceive without counting; ten is a base that multiplies that sense of size; forty is used by Abrahamic writers to mean many but finite, as in the forty days and nights of the Noahide Flood, the forty years of Israelites wandering in the desert, the forty days Jesus fasted in the desert before his temptation, the forty days designated as Lent, forty-day fast in the cave of Muhammad (pbuh), and the reckoning that Muhammad was forty years old when the revelations from God through Jabril (Gabriel) began.

63. *Conversion*

When I make myself known to you
 beware of my torment in your limbs —
 have hope for a doubling of my favor in honor of you.

WHICH life was it in which we had that fight?
 So equal was our match that bets were made
 we'd kill each other in the swaggering night —
 both sweeping, patching, pounding as we prayed.

They wagered winner and the length it'd last,
 till from one spot we stretched at least the field;
 with our own groans we tilled the crowd that massed.
 For death they watched, or one of us to yield.

This life, in grip and age unpaired, we greet,
 though I still spy your biceps, now benign,
 and gambling's gone, compulsion to compete
 expired, your soul converted to a shrine.

Now I admire what once I feared and fought,
 and photograph the spirit that I sought.

The EPIGRAPH is from *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*, #67, The Standing in the Presence Chamber and the Letter, by lesser-known Sufi Muhammad ibn Abd al-Jabbar ibn al-Hasan an-Niffari, probably an Iraqi, died in 965 in Egypt, 1996 *Early Islamic Mysticism*, tr Michael A Sells p296. **Biceps**: Alas, Kenneth R Dutton seems largely correct to conclude his 1995 *The Perfectable Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development* by noting that "Unlike the centuries of widespread religious faith, when the developed body could symbolically point to a transcendent reality, our own age has retained the paradigmatic language of physical perfectability but without any intimation of a higher reference" p375. The Chinese collection at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, MO, includes a pair of fierce-looking earthenware wrestlers or acrobats from the Wei Dynasty.

65. *Poetic Failure*

At non effugies meos iambos.

THE sole true problem that presents to sleep
with you is that my splendid verse
about your smell, dark hide, the way you keep
me close, pet-pull me near, in night immerse
These phrases pile up, crunch, they fade, and vanish
in every movement of each moment's charm;
new pleasures break old wordings and soon banish,
a library ruined when you shift your arm.

Instead inscripted in my head is where
and how we cuddle, mudras made from your mute touch.
Each breath you take I cherish as my prayer,
each twitch a ritual ordaining much.

All metaphors real presence overtakes:
no poems remain as morning light awakes.

The EPIGRAPH, "You won't escape my verses," is from Catullus fragment 3, used here with double irony. In Biblical usage, *sleep* may mean resting in death and *awake* may mean revived from the dead. *Sole* is a pun. *Issue* is sometimes used to mean "problem" or "dispute"; but its primary meaning is putting forth, as in providing supplies or publication; it can also mean the produce of sexual union, as a child or an artistic or spiritual effort. *Mudras* are sacred gestures. *Breath*: Breathing is often associated with the sacred. "Are you looking for me? . . . You will not find me in stupas, not in Indian shrine rooms, nor in synagogues, nor in cathedrals. . . . You will find me in the tiniest house of time. Kabir says: Student, tell me, what is God? He is the breath inside breath." —Kabir (1440-1518, whose writings appear in the Sikh holy book, the *Adi Granth*) in Stephen Mitchell, 1989 *The Enlightened Heart*, p72, tr Robert Bly. Related is *spirit*, which in English and many other languages is etymologically related to breathing, as in inspiration. "*Ritual* . . . is the place where meaning occurs. Saying 'I love you' to an intimate other is indeed a ritual, but it contributes more than we imagine to maintaining the meaning of the intimate relationship, just as the ritual of reciting the Lord's Prayer reiterates the meaning of our worship of God. These ritual moments don't tell us anything about specifics, but they remind us of the whole in which all specifics make sense. In an information culture, where only what is new and what is useful is interesting, ritual is incomprehensible." —Robert Bellah, 2006 *The Robert Bellah Reader*, p493-4. *Real presence* refers to the doctrine that Christ is truly present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist. "What is clear and concise can't deal with reality, for to be real is to be surrounded by mystery." —Attributed to James Joyce in John Cage, 1983 *X: Writings '79–82*, p54.

68. *Meridian*

Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust.

THE King of Days will dance before my throne.
 We both are regal but of different realms.
 The heart I rule, and he commands the bone,
 this ship of being ordered from two helms.
 His stately dance turns frantic and I spin
 to see him grappling with the wheel of time.
 It starts and stops, a compass to begin
 again go tacking to and fro to prime.

Exhausted, he leaves me thus spent and flees.
 (In hiding kings must sometimes secret go.)
 When he returns, with health or with disease,
 his dance may honor me or overthrow.
 Is he at fault? No, him I love complete:
 so fascinating are his fitful feet.

The EPIGRAPH, "Two souls, alas, dwell within my breast" is from Goethe's *Faust (Part I)* as Faust converses with Wagner as they walk outside the city gate on Easter Day. The **dancing King of Days** refers to both to Mahakala, a Tibetan Buddhist form of the Hindu god Shiva → «Ahimsa» combining a sense of time with death. Here he is homologized with the wrathful Yama who holds the *wheel of time* or the "wheel of life," a mandala of samsara depicting the twelve co-originations and the six karmic regions in Tibetan Buddhist thought. Buddhist deities may be understood more as psychological tendencies or capacities rather than objective entities existing apart from the mind. The **helm** is the device by which a ship is steered. A **compass** is a navigational device for finding direction; like a wheel or mandala, the device is usually round; the word also means perimeter or scope; it is also an instrument for drawing circles. **Tacking** is the directing of a sailing vessel with reference to the wind. Among the many meanings of **prime** as a verb and a noun is the prime **meridian**, 0 degrees longitude, which, with its opposite, divides the world into two hemispheres; the prime running through Greenwich, England, by which a system of international time reckoning was established in 1884.

82. *Easter Morning*

και ταχυ πορευθεισαι ειπατε τοις μαθηταις αυτου οτι ηγερθη
απο των νεκρων, και ιδου προαγει υμας εις την γαλιλαιαν,
εκει αυτον οψεσθε: ιδου ειπον υμυν . . . και ιδοντες αυτον
προσεκυνησαν, οι δε εδιστασαν.

I — CALLED atheist by those who love hate
(although they claim that they alone are heirs
to Resurrection, say I desecrate
their own faith when I make embracing prayers) —
see Easter glory! I'm a witness! Watch
the promise raveling in spring's wet ground!
in wind! in sun's bright sky! and juice's crotch!
These tales eternal, soil and soul, astound!
Disciples scattered, some afraid to show,
now gathered, warmed from mourning, love from woe,
the power of sin and death itself reversed,
redeeming history's night of its worst.
Through time a wonder, God or not, has stood
when even evil will ordain the good.

The EPIGRAPHS are from Matthew 28:7 and 17: "He has been raised from the dead and is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him. . . . When they saw him, they fell prostrate before him. . . ." **Atheist**, like **God**, is a multivalent term. Here it means the denial of a Supreme Being. For many mystics **God** can mean simply Reality, as suggested by the Sanskrit term *sat* (truth, reality), the Arabic *al-Haqq* (the Muslim mystic Hallaj was killed for blasphemy when he applied the term to himself), the Hebrew *Yahweh* (I am that I am, or I will be what I will be, understood by some to be a personification of all that was, is, and will be), the *Infinite* of Cusanus, akin to the *Interbeing* of Thich Nhat Hanh and the *Dharmakaya* (truth-body, reality) of other Buddhists out of which the Buddha appears, and even the *Ground of Being* of Paul Tillich. Such views are much closer to Process theology (Whitehead, Hartshorne, even Teilhard) than God as a Super-Douper Entity. **Easter** morning accounts in the four Gospels vary. Easter is the spring Christian celebration of the risen Christ after his crucifixion and death. John Shelby Spong writes that Matthew (and Paul) view the resurrection as "an act of lifting Jesus from death into the meaning of the living God, not as an act of resuscitating Jesus" in his 2002 *A New Christianity for a New World*, p103. The word Easter appears to derive from Old English *ēastre* and related to east and the German pagan goddess Ostern; *estrus* from the Latin *oestrus* may be a similar formation. The usual rime pattern is replaced by couplets in the third quatrain. (Shakespeare's 126 is all couplets.)

88. *Love Locket*

Omnia vincit amor; et nos cedamus amori.

. . . Idem homo et saluatur ex parte et condemnatur ex parte

THIS loud and too large love I have for you
 I now reduce to this small, silent space,
 and set it in a locket, safe from view,
 and wear it to confine you to a place.
 You overran my life and skinned my soul;
 my strong physique became a bag of woe;
 your gravity made me a damn black hole;
 you made my moil a comic video.

When rapture judges with the trumpet's blare,
 and when Maitreya stirs within my breast,
 when Emperors will bow to South, aware,
 or when Messiah comes and gives us rest,
 this locket forged on anvil from pure ire
 will melt from love within, and God's desire.

The EPIGRAPH, "Love conquers all; and we must surrender to love," is from Book X of the *Eclogues* by Virgil (70 BCE-19 BCE). The second is from *Commentary on Psalm 118*, 20, 58 by Ambrose of Milan (340?-397): the same person is at the same time both saved and condemned. A **black hole** is often described as a space-time region so dense that gravity prevents anything, including light, from escaping, although recent theories suggest that information can be recovered. **Moil**: drudgery, trouble. Some fundamentalist Christian eschatology posits a **rapture** in which when the "dead in Christ" and those "who are alive and remain" are "caught up in the clouds" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) to be eternally united with Christ in his kingdom. In ancient Confucian thought, society would be set right by imitating the reverence of the **emperor** honoring the gods by bowing to the South where they reside. In some Buddhist eschatology, the bodhisattva **Maitreya** is regarded as the future Buddha. My favorite image of Maitreya in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, MO, is a nearly life-size Gandharan phyllite sculpture (3d Century). In some Jewish eschatology, a **Messiah** will establish the rule of Israel to bring peace to the world. **Judges**: Judgment Day → «Postmodern Faith» is the time when the soul's deeds are measured for reward or punishment in some religions, including Judaism (Rosh Hashanah yearly, or at the end of time), Christianity (the Last Judgment), and Islam (the Day of Reckoning). The third quatrain can be compared and contrasted with Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 which concludes, "So, till the judgment that yourself arise, / you live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes."

93. *Thin Veil*

All the world's a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players;
 They have their exits and their entrances;
 And one man in his time plays many parts

We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on, and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep.

Qual portento mi richiama la mia mente a rischiarar?

IT is so thin, this veil between the dream
 and what, deceived, we call our waking state;
 unconscious, we paint flats, we fabricate
 (from fear and wish) an organizing scheme,
 a pattern to make sense, a common theme
 to comfort and explain what some call fate
 in politics, career, and how we mate,
 though Will, the free mind's mantra, reigns supreme.

So I met you, loved you, constructed you
 within my lone streamed soul; but now I scream
 — Crap! who or what will I next dare create? —
 and worry how to right what is askew,
 how this fouled friendship's story to redeem
 from evil done by both our dreams, and wait.

TWO EPIGRAPHS are from Shakespeare, first Jaques in *As You Like It*, 2, 7, then Prospero in *The Tempest*, 4, 1. The third is from Handel's 1735 *Alcina*, who bewitches those who come to her island. When freed from illusion by a ring, Ruggiero sings, "What magic can have returned the light of reason to my mind?" in 2.1, tr Harriet Mason. **Veil**: → «Just Try To Kiss Me». A **flat** is a (usually) rectangular wooden frame covered with canvas painted to portray a backdrop scene as part of a stage setting. A **mantra** is a sacred phrase for chanting to raise or center one's awareness; in a secular context, it is sometimes simply a commonly repeated word or phrase, and sometimes implies shallowness of thought. **Fabricate** has two common meanings: making and lying. This sonnet uses a Petrarchan rather than Shakespearean rime scheme with a total of only three end-rimes.

99. *Fact or Fancy*

Ay me, I fell, and yet do question make
 What I should do again for such a sake.

Love often doesn't arrive at the right time
 or in the right person. It makes us do ridiculous
 and stupid things. But without it, life is just a
 series of unremarkable events, one after the other.

IF I find out you've used me all the while,
 I'll cry and grieve, all cleft, but own my fault
 I'll not deny, to take for love your smile
 in place, in time, in heft. I slay, assault
 myself, not reading signs' misprision, you
 excused because your past still pains. Of course
 mine twists and ruins a fresh convergence, too,
 and residue adds piles to worn remorse.

But are you are large enough for you to see
 that I, this fool, will love to love's extreme?
 For my sake measures through infinity
 to master even *maya*, the full-scale meme.

If fact or fancy, scatter me in space;
 and let your scheme be shown as my disgrace.

The EPIGRAPH is from "A Lover's Complaint" (321-322), printed with Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in 1609. The second is from Meghan Austin's 2015 April 2 "Modern Love" essay, "A Forbidden Relationship, From the Other Side of the World" in *The New York Times*. **Disgrace**: see Shakespeare's sonnets 33, 34, and 59. **Maya** is a Sanskrit term used in Hinduism and Buddhism; *maya* is described in many ways, including the illusory world created by our desires and projections upon what is really real; we are deceived as if by a magician, but we do not know we are deceived. A **meme** is a theme, image, idea, style, or behavior imitated, reproduced, and sometimes modified by personal transmission through cultural means, analogous to genetic selection and mutation. The term, related to *imitation* and the literary term *mimesis*, is thought to have originated by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*. Now itself a meme, the term is widely employed in sociology, political analysis, and other fields.

101. *Jesus Would Have Loved This Man*

I take for my love some prostitute—
I pick out some low person for my dearest friend

When a message from the LORD came to Hosea,
the LORD told him, “Go marry a prostitute”

YOU hustle me on Main Street and I say,
“I don’t buy sex.” You want to talk with me.
We sit as you tell stories. So I stay
relaxed with danger, crack, insanity,
your tries to get my cash. Yet I admire
your work, a kind of research which reveals
how others like their sex; your love for hire
displays their secret being, and it heals.

But I don’t buy. You ask me to your place
to spend the night, I say, “No sex.” We fix
your window, stuck. We cuddle, close, and trace
our tales. You wake. Say you, who pleased six
times fifty women, men a thousand three:
“I cannot sleep if your skin touches me.”

The EPIGRAPH is from the 1860 edition of Walt Whitman’s *Leave of Grass* → «Relaxed». The second is from the Biblical book of Hosea 1:2. **Their secret being:** “The ambiguity of the erotic vocabulary of tantric literature cannot be too strongly emphasized. . . . Nevertheless, *maithuna* [sexual union] is also practiced as a concrete ritual. By the fact that the act is no longer profane but a rite, that the partners are no longer human beings but ‘detached’ like gods, sexual union no longer participates in the cosmic [mortal] plane. The tantric texts frequently repeat the saying, ‘By the same act that cause some men to burn in hell for thousands of years, the yogin gains his eternal salvation.’” —Mircea Eliade, 1958/1969 *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, p263. **A thousand three:** Whether the hustler was knowingly echoing “mille e tre” from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* was not clear.

104. *Repair En Route*

When a man can occupy himself with counting syllables,
 either he has not yet attempted any spiritual climb,
 or he is over the hump.

A perfect poem owes its perfection to sounding the voice
 of the heart and the melodies of the conscience"

POETRY'S perfect once you gain control;
 I can do almost anything in verse.

I know each rime and foot that measures soul,
 expansive canons and expressions terse.

In life you won't surrender to my lust,
 but in each gadget I make love to you;
 and while my yearning soon will inform dust,
 these lines will stay and prove that I am true.

But all my skill won't fix my wretched car
 or get the parts it needs when it breaks down,
 or transport me to you when I am far
 in miles and meditation from your town.
 I'd give this perfect power I have away
 for one deep kiss from you I could obey.

En Route is a borrowing from the French that means along the way. The EPIGRAPH is from W H Auden, 1964 Foreword to the English version of Dag Hammarskjöld's *Markings*. The second is from Fethullah Gülen (1941-), 2010 *Speech and Power of Expression: On Language, Esthetics, and Belief*. A *foot* is a unit within a line of poetry; it is also called a *measure*. A *canon* is a standard for judgment, a standard collection of texts, and the part of the Mass which includes the Consecration of the bread and wine. *Gadget*: W H Auden calls a poem a "verbal contraption"; see this book's § Introduction ¶ 19. *Skill*: "The skill taught by God to the silkworm is a learning beyond the reach of the elephant" —Rumi/Star, p176 →«The Sun». *Poetry*: "The common prejudice that love is as common as 'romance' may be due to the fact that we all learned about it first through poetry. But the poets fool us; they are the only ones to whom love is not only a crucial, but an indispensable experience, which entitles them to mistake it for a universal one." —Hannah Arendt, 1958/1998 *The Human Condition*, 2d edition, p242 n81.

146. *Monastic Exercise*

For I impair not beauty being mute

HE teases pious time with luscious porn.
 He favors smiles and bodies ripe with drive,
 though even in repose with nothing worn
 there is a beauty promised to arrive.

Why porn? His muted life is in one cell,
 companions gone and none — not one — to come
 and offer some relief; though he can swell
 like all those lads who think age burdensome.

The oratory of the monk for prayer
 or chapel or a shrine to find one's God
 is where the soul, uncumbered and laid bare,
 can contemplate, commune, and shoot its wad.

While others to this practice offer scorn,
 like prayer or holy icon, he lauds porn.

Monks are presumed celibate. Ignatius of Loyola developed the *Spiritual Exercises* (1522-1524) used by the Jesuits and widely adopted since. The EPIGRAPH is from Shakespeare's Sonnet 83. **Porn** in our culture is often controversial. It is widespread and much is available without charge. Some say it invariably exploits the model; others say it often benefits the model. What is erotic "art" to some is prurient to others. Some say it leads the user to make models objects for sexual gratification and atrophies the ability to make genuine human contact; it can become addictive and replace "normal" human expectations with extreme "kinks"; others say it can enhance sexual intimacy, and it is a good and safe choice for those whose health, capacities, conditions, or situations makes intimacy unwise or impossible. Porn users can feel shame, but — especially among young people — it can be an expression of joy and wholesomeness. Other cultures have portrayed gods and humans engaged in explicit sexual activities — genital, oral, anal, intercrural, solitary and group sex on temples and pottery, and in sacred literature and other artistic expressions indicating spiritual values through such representations. Obscenity is sometimes defined as that which arouses lascivious or lustful thoughts or desires; but the human race and many relationships would disappear without such desires. Our culture is affected by St Augustine's conception of sexuality whose holy purpose is not responsible pleasure but reproduction, a conception probably imported into Christianity from Manicheanism. Defenders of erotic material are unlikely to convince opponents even by quoting St Paul, "I am absolutely convinced, as a Christian, that nothing is impure in itself; only, if a man considers a particular thing impure, then to him it is impure" (Romans 14:14) or Shakespeare, "Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so" (Hamlet 2:2).

55. *Granada: Scale*

. . . And to admire
The satisfaction of all true desire.

Tantôt la coup ou la bouche et tantôt le vase.

YOU dance flamenco in my ass; *olé!*
You pause and pose, then furious in your love
you fuck me fast like castanets in play;
you consummate me, reigning from above.
Both, man with man, so fully male we know
just pride in yielding to divine desire;
we spin and spend, in naked vertigo,
this yearning as we burn with Spanish fire.

O my Alhambra! endless tended rooms
where God provisions intricate delight,
danced passion cast, reflected in these blooms,
scribed jewels by day, made sacred flesh by night.

O rhythm's root that turns me soaring wide:
You are the secret scale kings seek to hide.

The first EPIGRAPH is from English poet and clergyman, Anglican saint Thomas Traherne (1638?-1674). The second from Verlaine, "Sometimes in the mouth's cup, sometimes the vase," in the translation of "Ces Passions" by J Murat and W Gunn (and endorsed by Ned Rorem), 1979 *A Lover's Cock and Other Gay Poems*, p55. **Granada** is the city in Spain in which the **Alhambra**, one of the sprawling architectural and landscaping wonders of the world, was built. **Olé** is an Andalusian pronunciation corruption of Allah, the Arabic word for God. The paired last words of the first line constitute a interlingual paronomasia. **Fuck:** →«Holy Words». "The two who are loyal to the Eros of dialogue, who love one another, receive the common event from the other's side as well, that is, they receive it from the two sides, and thus for the first time understand in a bodily way what an event is." —Martin Buber, 1947/1965 *Between Man and Man*, p29, tr Ronald Gregor Smith. **Scale** has many meanings, a few of which are a device for weighing (as measuring the worth of precious metals), a progression or gradation, a miniature model or representation, a musical range, and an ascent (such as climbing a wall). **Flamenco** is a style of strongly rhythmic music and dance, often with clapping, foot-stamping, shouts of Allay! (another pronunciation of Olé) and, nowadays, with **castanets**, that developed in Andalusia and is often associated with the Romani people (Gypsies). Carlos Saura's 1995 movie, "Flamenco," captures the Spanish mix of fervor and form, abandonment and restraint.

124. *Destiny*

The young man looked at Jesus, loved him, and began to beg to be with him. . . . He spent the night with him, because Jesus taught him the mystery of God's domain.

. . . Let the primal fire be revealed in the body's games.

SUCK my cock, you young straight stud; suck it good;
and lick my balls to glisten in love's fire;
turn me to your purpose — O Brotherhood! —
and fuck me with a saint's precise desire.

Then I'll fuck you until you give me spill
again; I'll push you to the edge of bliss
and then beyond, your fervent butt will fill
us with satori, ringent with a kiss.

Then you will know what men as men can do,
and you and I will know what only God
can know about another's flesh, a clue
to soul's communion served from passion's prod.

My offer you accept. Now nude you stand.

You say this holiness is what Christ planned.

The EPIGRAPH is from *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, verses 8 and 12. The Gospel, probably used in Alexandria in the early years of the Second Century, was discovered in 1958. Its authenticity has been challenged but studies like those done by *Biblical Archaeology Review* 2009 Nov/Dec, Vol 35 No 6, suggest it is genuine. The text is included in *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*, 1992. The second is from Martin Buber, 1947/1965 *Between Man and Man*, p28, tr Ronald Gregor Smith. **Fuck**: → «Holy Words». **Nude**: "The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion. . . . Exuberance is Beauty" —William Blake (1757-1827), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. **Satori** is a Japanese Buddhist term for Enlightenment, the awakening from the cultural trance which prevents us from seeing reality as it is; "Satori is the perception of Reality itself . . ." —D T Suzuki, 1964 *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p 93 → «Don't Ask + Even Zeus + Libation + Relaxed + Sacred Play + Status». In *Scivias*, 2.6.14, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) writes that the **soul**, "which is invisible, invisibly receives the sacrament which exists invisibly in that oblation, while the human body, which is visible, visibly receives the oblation that visibly embodies that sacrament." While **passion** can mean sexual desire, in Christianity it can mean the narrative of Christ's suffering. **Holiness**: Many "churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular." —Martin Luther King Jr, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," paragraph 32.