

# The Crystal Prison

*Poetry of Love and Loss*

David Muxó-McPherson

The Crystal Prison  
The Little Man  
Songs from the Heart



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## Preface to the Third Edition

Much has happened during the six years between the first edition of *The Crystal Prison* and this one. I continue to write poems for *Crystal* but have added *Songs of the Heart* which contains poems based on the titles of songs that I have enjoyed throughout my life.

My poetic philosophy has evolved over the years. I began as a youth imitating the subjects and style of the Romantic poets Shelly and Keats. When I went to college I read "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," by T.S. Eliot, and saw new possibilities for my poetry. The first poem in *The Crystal Prison* is an homage to him, written in my early twenties. What I left behind after those heady years was the use of literary references.

I began to formulate a poetic strategy which culminated in *The Little Man*. The key word was simplicity. My goal was poetry that everyone could understand and in which everyone could participate. In short, I wanted for the creation of the poetry to be a collaboration between the poet and the reader.

Actually that collaboration takes place whether we plan for it or not. When a reader interprets a poem "incorrectly", it is really a different interpretation based on a different knowledge base. It is unreasonable for 20th century readers of Shakespeare to have the same knowledge base as seventeenth century theater goers. That is why we have college classes on Shakespeare.

So, I determined to write with that in mind. If I do a good job, then the readers will always be correct, not

because they guessed what I had in mind, but because they helped to create the poem. I remember reading somewhere in Latin American criticism that once the author releases a work, it passes out of his control. It becomes a new work with each interpretation, just as each performance of a play is unique because the actors say the lines differently for each performance.

Along the way I discarded traditional poetic form, probably another consequence of reading modern American poets. It isn't that my poems don't have form, but they don't have traditional forms. Although from time to time I like to write a four-line stanza. I also decided to use intentional rhyme sparingly, divorcing it from form and using it for emphasis. And always cadence with Poe's raven on my shoulder. I might say that I write for sound. My poetry is meant to be read aloud. Most of it is predominantly iambic, and only sometimes pentameter. Line length is intentionally irregular and choppy, almost as though it doesn't matter what the poem looks like, but instead what it sounds like. Although in several cases the look adds an element to the poem, such as in "If I Could Only Be Like Bogie".

In the grand scheme of things my poetry seems trivial. Only lately has it become a tad political. Rather than treating universal truths, my poetry treats universal feelings. Many poems are short scenes, as though they were plucked out of a longer poem. Emily Dickenson may have influenced me there. In fact perhaps a case could be made that thematically I have moved from Keats to Dickenson. If I were good enough as a poet to

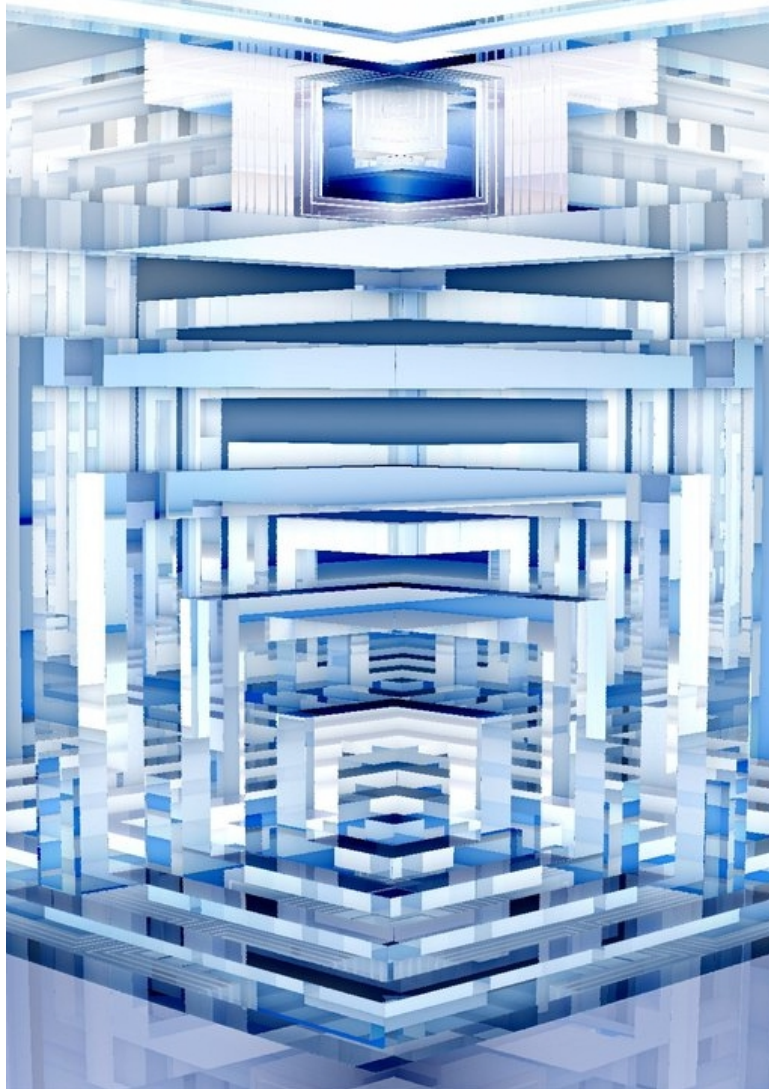
be famous, perhaps some graduate student might choose that as a subject for a critical paper.

I am no Keats, Eliot nor Dickenson. But I have done, and am doing, what I set out to do. A little rhyme here and there, a tear perhaps, a smile and sometimes the question, "Did I write that? Well done!" And the surprise at having written once again, the well not dry.

Dave Muxó-McPherson  
November 2022



# The Crystal Prison



## In the room

"In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo" - T. S. Eliot

Like standing stalks of corn they rustle  
In the wind, their words like silken fingers  
Reaching out.  
But there are panes of plexiglass  
Between them, keeping out and keeping in,  
A labyrinth of loneliness.  
They wander here and there with Pirandello on  
Their lips, crystal people  
In a land of mirrors.  
Who is real  
And who is duplication?

They reflect into infinity, eternal.

A winter wind, their words swirl down  
The hallways of my soul and try  
Each padlocked door.  
Indifferent to them I talk of time and space.  
Misunderstanding me they measure  
Circumstance.

I wait, within my crystal cave.  
These seven singing virgins  
With these seven youths  
Approach their sacrifice, and are consumed.  
Separately they pass away,

A silence hangs like tapestries  
Across the universe.

Alone, I dream the coming of  
my Theseus.

## A Coward's Lament

I think that I shall go away. No, run away,  
and think till I can think no more about you.

I shall be honest with myself  
and read the writing on the wall.

I dreamed you as I walked the corridors of adolescence.  
I caressed your hair and wrote a thousand lines.  
I made love to you long before I made love at all.

You were the friend I would have loved, the lover  
I would have liked, but you were young and far away.

You have had so many names. You were my Dulcinea  
and my Juliet. And now you come into my life,  
too late, too soon, and test the crystal prison  
which I built when life was not my friend.

You are the summer breeze which swirls the hallways  
of my soul and melts the faces that I labored long  
to mask my nakedness.  
Your name is Theseus and Juliet.

Yes, I shall run away  
and dream again.

### I am the waiting page

I am the waiting page,  
poetry unborn.  
From infinity  
you gather sounds  
to seed my waiting garden.  
Your love creates  
my lexicon.  
And as the gentle  
rains of inspiration  
fall to earth  
my universe is fixed  
in sacred imagery.

### A flower blooms

A flower blooms  
across the room.  
She was an actress  
at one time.  
She lived a thousand  
lives, a thousand  
tragedies, and  
still she smiles.

As if to speed my slow  
decay

As if to speed my slow decay  
I breathe more deeply,  
And hope I may  
Accelerate the wasting  
Rhythm of my life.

It was so long ago  
That I was young,  
And yet my eyes have  
Never been so clear.  
Last Saturday I saw a sail  
That for the mist  
The others could not see.

Last night I saw you  
just as clearly  
In my memory.  
We lay like sea shells  
On the edge of dreams  
And talked of our  
First tenderness.  
Your loving fingers traced  
A starfish in my palm.  
Long since the years have  
Struggled to erase that  
Sacred rendering.

And now,  
Too long a lonely player

On an empty stage,  
I dream the final curtain.  
The scene has lasted long,  
And still plays on.

### I walk along the beach again

I walk along the beach again;  
my eyes swim in the waning sun.  
They dance along the waves;  
a loving waltz, a ritual round  
to summon you to my side once more.  
And yet I stand alone, the music  
of the surf somehow not right.

I hum the tune we shared  
and try to feel your warmth once more.  
The gulls join in, but cannot  
save my dying song.  
The silence strains my ears.  
Alone again, walking on our beach,  
I am myself.

### Like lovers

Like lovers strolling on a quiet beach  
our words reveal their secret dreams.  
They hesitate, then glide around each  
other in a ritual round.

## It's funny

It's funny how our time goes on and on.  
The hands of grandpa clock move round  
So slowly, and yet it seems our time  
Speeds on as though it flies to win  
some all-important race.  
And we, small creatures that we are,  
forfeit all to keep abreast of time.  
And funny how we never really  
try to penetrate our logic.

## It is the quiet time

It is the quiet time, when evening  
shadows stretch like kittens half awake.

Rose-colored clouds announce  
the end of day;  
the resting earth begins to sigh  
and dreams remembered  
or imagined loves.

The sea recounts a thousand tales  
on myriad shores; an old man  
home from the wars with marvels  
on his lips.  
His whispers, hoarse with age,  
escape our untrained ears  
and disappear.

## And Love?

The scarce-felt brush  
of young  
and willing lips. Her  
Hand in yours  
and whispered words  
of praise, a  
Summer breeze though  
soft and  
flowing  
Hair.

A sigh to  
hide a hope of lasting love  
and then a  
Tear to  
streak her  
velvet cheek.

Yes love, as  
tender as a  
new-spread leaf,  
As true as  
Truth itself  
and strong,  
as  
right as life and  
sweet.



## The Telegram

Dear madame, we regret to say  
Your son has died today,  
Your valiant son has died.  
We've cried and cried  
(We'll bury him  
And heave a hollow sigh,  
And then we'll dry your  
Pleading eyes.)

We've cried and cried.

*Mother,  
I feel so light.  
Can I come home?  
Oh please, don't lock the door.  
I feel so light.*

Dear madame, we regret to say  
Your son has died today.  
(The earth around his grave  
Will cry for us.)

## How sad

How sad to lose a dream;  
to be a fallen knight  
upon the field of honor  
at the end of day.

How sad to try to mend a broken lance  
and know that it will never be  
the same again; not new, not terrible  
upon the wearied adversary's shield.

How sad to watch the daylight slip away;  
to have the chilly fingers of the night  
upon my heart; indifferent stars  
upon my eyes like mocking pennies  
on a lonely corpse.

How sad the darting fireflies around  
my head like chanting candle flames.

How sad to have no mourners at my last  
life's day; no friends to note  
the natural look upon my waxen face.

How sad it is to lose the only dream  
worth fighting for upon that lonely field;  
to lie alone and spill my blood  
upon the adversary's shield.

## The Postcard from Berlin

My brother sleeps just there,  
Beyond the wall.  
Helped on to that eternal rest by a frightened  
border guard in brown.  
He has reward enough I guess for a weary  
life hard-spent.  
I suppose he was a gentle man and loving son,  
a party man almost until the end.  
But I saw his democratic face before he died  
just there, beyond the wall.

He had the look of freedom in his eyes,  
(They said he looked  
just like himself, a freckled imp caught  
stealing grandma's cookies  
from a colored jar) and yet his crooked smile  
just there  
below his neatly trimmed mustache  
betrayed his democratic eyes.

I tried to shed a tear for him just now;  
instead a crooked smile  
came to my trembling lips. I understood  
his eyes, I liked  
his pinstripe suit, too small just here,  
too long just there,  
and I wished that I could sleep a hero's sleep  
beyond the wall.

## Buried Under the Wall

"Something there is that doesn't  
love a wall." - Robert Frost

If I were a better man, and  
had the courage to see the Wall,  
I would run my fingers over  
its smooth black surface.  
It would be cold,  
this world's largest tombstone.  
I would look for my buddy's name,  
and then for mine.

I would look for the America  
I knew before the music died;  
I do not think I would find it  
among the "A" names there.  
Like my fallen friends,  
like my innocence,  
this land, my land, from the  
purple mountains majesty  
to the California islands  
is buried under the Wall.

If I were a better man,  
I would turn to watch  
the children dance  
with flowers in their hair.  
They would not remember

my friends, or me,  
or my America,  
the way it used to be.

## I remember

I remember  
when the earth stood still  
for us,  
and when the night moved on  
to tell of love that time  
could not fulfil;  
To dim the warm light in your eyes  
and prove  
that time must govern each small heart  
and keep young love and love apart.

## When I look into your eyes

When I look into your eyes I see eternity.

I see a starry, starry Texas night in front of Grandma's house.

The giggles all died down, and on an old grey mattress-fort

we camped with Grandpa in the wilderness. Father showered us with

shooting stars. They fell into our eyes and danced into our hearts.

I loved the universe that night, and love it still.

And how I long to dance among the shooting stars again.

I hear the whispers of the trees. In the velvet hours they go about their sacred stewardship. They walk the hills with me

and talk of heroisms past. They can't resist a chuckle at some long-forgotten,

just-remembered joke they played. They

keep me safe along my way

and make my search for innocence

and love less lonely for a time.

I feel the breath of God move through the grove. He sits beside me

on a rough-hewn wooden plank and listens to my friends, who one by one

bear testimony. How proud He is of them, and caught in his joy He weeps,

for we are Zion's youth. And then a different tear.

I understand how much He misses us,  
and how He must console our Mother in their quiet  
times.

I touch a weathered photograph, my precious daughter  
standing in my  
shoes. So big that she can't walk, they anchor her and  
keep her safe.  
For me they're just as large. They're Father's shoes, lent  
to me for a time, and how I pray to fill them well.

I scold my darling little boy in church and take him out.  
He doesn't  
understand the meeting's reverence, and as he cries he  
fills me with  
his tears. I turn away. I would have him know how much  
I hurt to  
see him cry, and how I weep now as I write these words,  
but I'm his dad  
and must be strong until he understands.

I smell the blossom on the rose, and marvel how its  
beauty pales beside your smile. This is a special place  
and has the touch of  
Mother everywhere. I hear the swish of lace and satin  
as she moves.  
This is Her garden, and she has brought you here to  
make it yours.  
And when you bring your daughters to this special place  
they'll know  
that Mother loves them by her handiwork.

## In my loneliness

In my loneliness I think of you,  
and though I am far away (a million miles?)  
your presence dances in my eyes  
to light my memories.

(Sweet memories, fond words  
sleeping on a perfumed page  
until I wake them with my glance.)

I watch old movies and I think of you  
(as though they were yours and mine somehow).

I sigh a little when the hero rides  
into the sunset with his love.

I sometimes ride into that sun,  
and memories of you slip through my mind  
like loving fingers through my hair.

## Come . . .

. . . sit here with me by the fire  
and talk a while, and let the warm  
reflections fall upon your hair.

. . . remember yesterdays with me  
until the fire falls asleep with us  
before the coming winter dawn.

. . . sing a song of love now  
sealed upon the altar of eternity  
within these hallowed temple walls.



## Come Sit with Me

My love,  
come sit with me  
for just a moment  
and listen to my heart.  
It would speak to you  
for just a while.  
It's late, I know,  
and you have things to do;  
A list made out and waiting.  
But sit a while  
and listen to my heart.  
It would gladly give  
its life for love just now.

Have I told you how  
the light falls on your cheek  
just so, and how your eyes  
still sparkle  
in the evening shadows?  
Have I told you how  
my heart would sing for yours,  
and how my fingers long  
to touch your hair . . .

But go ahead, I'll wait.  
Some other time, when all the  
world's asleep, and your  
clock's not running quite  
so fast, my love.

## If I could only be like Bogie

If I could only be like Bogie,  
 love'em and leave'em  
 (Here's lookin' at you, kid)  
 instead of gettin' left at the  
 startin' gate.

If there could always be Paris  
 and the memory of you.

If I could walk away the hero  
 --just once,--  
 and not the fool  
 who declares undying love  
 to Miss Cantwejustbefriends?

(You'll meet the girl for you

```

          s
        s o m
      s o m e d
    s o m e d a y
      m e d a y
        d a y
          y
  
```

you'll see.)

If I could just once  
 keep to myself for a while;  
 mmmellowwww out (for sure).  
 Maybe I could wake up

just one morning and  
not have to shave with the  
light off  
(so I wouldn't have to look at  
[ F L E S Y M | M Y S E L F ]).

### To find a friend

To find a friend,  
a smile across the room,  
a shoulder  
when the world  
has been unkind.

To find a friend  
who lets me be  
a friend,  
who sees when I am  
blinded by myself  
and speaks the truth  
when I would hear  
a lie.

To find a friend  
who knows just when  
to hold me close,  
and when I would be free.

## How carefully

How carefully we speak,  
trying not to be too serious.  
And yet  
life is a serious business.  
Each second life and death  
a breath away.

How delicate the dance  
we call this life.  
How light the steps  
we learn  
at mother nature's knee.  
We would be graceful dancers  
in Swan Lake, but we  
have two left feet.  
A breath away eternity  
awaits, and smiles.

## I think of you

I think of you  
when you are far away  
upstairs, or in the study  
reading life  
between the words and lines  
of poetry.  
My thoughts tiptoe away  
in search of yours.

## Your smile

Your smile reminds me of a party  
from the secret corners of my youth.  
How awkward I must have been, and looked.  
How silly in a shirt too big (at least the collar was),  
my tie too long, though I had practiced  
in the mirror that whole afternoon.  
Of course my loafers squeaked.  
My socks were white, my hair slicked back  
(the wet head hadn't dried as yet, you understand),  
my fly unzipped (Melissa liked to see me squirm,  
and always found a way to tell me all the things  
my best friend would not tell).  
But I knew my mortal coil had shuffled off  
when Cynthia Smythe Hyphen Jones  
(be still my heart!) refused to dance with me.  
I sank into despair. Then, suddenly, there you were  
(your smile, you understand, not you)  
across the room. A smile like yours and I was  
Alan Ladd or Robin Hood, the frog transformed.  
Adventure waited while I held my breath.  
The rest is history.

## Twilight

Twilight.

I look into your eyes  
and feel  
the stirring breeze,  
a baby's breath  
light upon the breast  
of mother nature's  
son.

I feel the movement  
of the stars around  
the soul of time,  
a royal wedding waltz  
now scarce begun,  
now gliding free  
upon the water's face  
to celebrate  
a love new found.

## I Catch the Sun

In my eyes I catch the morning sun  
While in my heart I sing a song of love.  
I think of you and in my soul I harmonize.

The sun and you, warm as southern breezes,  
Beautiful and sweet.

I catch you both in outstretched fingers  
And hold you fast against my lips.  
I taste the honey of your laugh, gentle  
As the loving rays of life caressing me.

I am alive in you, and you are life in me.  
Like the sun, we shine for all eternity.

## I'm told

I'm told the centuries lie waiting  
in the bushes.  
Do I dare pass by?  
I've slept this way before, or crept.  
It didn't matter then,  
Nor should it matter now.

Creeping, sleeping,  
Sliding through the ages.  
I'll get there by and by.  
I'll meet you there.  
How wise you'll be for waiting,  
And older, too.

## Waiting for You

like waiting for the top of the hill  
when I can't see for the clouds,  
or having the sea breeze in my eyes  
when land is what I long to see

like having an itch where I can't scratch  
or a hunger I can't satisfy

like waiting for the shoe to drop  
or the water to boil, the grass to grow  
like watching for the sun to go down,  
or come up, or not move so slow

like tasting a word on the tip of my tongue  
or waiting for that perfect thought  
like hoping that the the love I bring  
will be enough to fill your heart

like standing in the rain all day  
waiting for the sun to shine

like watching through the window drapes  
as far as I can see  
to catch a glimpse of your sweet face  
before you can see me.



## Angkor Wat

Oh, to remember the tender feelings I had here,  
The peace, the mist, the still hanging light now dim.  
And yet the world intrudes, the sounds I hear  
Draw me away, hijack my soul, bind my mind, a sin  
Against my dreams.

The temple face looks back at me with the ecstasy  
Of peace, belonging, in the infinite family of time.  
The wisdom of the ages in a knowing glance I see  
Behind those half-closed eyes. Their stare combines  
Against my dreams.

## I made the music stop

I made  
the music  
stop, I know.  
I wish I were  
a violin.  
I could sing  
and perhaps  
my harmonies  
would move  
the strings of  
your heart  
again.

## I saw her pirouette

I saw her pirouette  
around the soul of time.  
When she turned her head  
her eyes locked on  
a point I could not see.  
It was not me she saw  
each time she turned  
her head. I think it  
was the love of dance  
she saw, the thrill  
of being perfect  
for an instant in  
the stream of life.

We mortals try to  
pirouette as well.  
Imperfectly we  
turn dividing time  
imperfectly. We miss  
the turning points,  
and fail to mark  
the stream of choices  
that we call our lives.

We see the ballerina's  
hard won pirouette  
a challenge undeniable.  
We would catch our  
turning points but are

untrained. And yet  
at life's last day  
our lives are  
precious still.  
Unmarked, our loves  
dance with us in our  
memories.

## Her whispers

Her whispers  
Touched my mouth as  
Lovingly as kissing fingertips.  
We lay together,  
The darkness covering  
Our silence as  
Mac Arthur Park caressed my eyes  
And ears, unseen, unheard,  
A hymn to love and loneliness,  
My soul's companion.  
Carelessly her lips brushed mine,  
Her tears flowed freely  
In my eyes, stained my cheek,  
Then fell to earth, and lightly,  
Gently, flowing deathward,  
Cast a sigh in my direction.

## On Randi's Death

I thought  
that I could  
will you into  
every leaf,  
see you in  
every glance,  
taste your breath  
in every breeze.

I thought that we  
would spend a  
quiet afternoon  
around the lake  
from time to time.

I thought  
that I would taste  
your tears  
in every drop  
of rain.  
But evening's  
sunset  
shows me once  
again  
that you are gone.

I cannot will you  
into life.

And each morning's

sunrise tells me  
that you won't be  
coming back again.

## Smothered by the Past 1

Like a wave  
silently  
behind me  
sneaking up  
breaking in  
heart beating  
blood pumping  
flood sneaking up  
behind me  
ready to smother  
another time  
again  
but new  
not again really  
then love  
a kiss  
a squeeze  
my hand in yours  
and not  
smothered  
by the past  
this time.

## Smothered by the Past 2

We dance  
around each other  
barely touching,  
lost in each  
other's thoughts.  
Gliding through  
a smile, a tear  
perhaps of joy,  
a nervous glance  
behind  
to make sure  
we aren't  
smothered  
by the past.

## Loneliness

Loneliness is silence.  
It's when you have to  
have the TV on, or  
music to remind you  
that you are alone.

Loneliness is sitting  
at a table with no one  
to pass the salt, no one  
to tell you no, you've had  
too much already.

Loneliness is talking to  
yourself just to hear a voice.  
And answering yourself to  
know that you are right, or  
wrong, or haven't got a clue.

It's when you're reading  
something so amazing that you  
want to share with someone  
who pretends to match your  
interest with a smile.

Loneliness is waiting for  
a call that never comes  
from those who say they care  
for you as much as you  
say you care for them.

Loneliness is sitting  
in the corner silent while  
the family children laugh  
and play and don't really  
care who you are.

Loneliness is when your opinion is  
unwanted, your voice is unheard,  
your stories have all been told  
before, and your taste in music  
is appreciated when you are  
alone.

## The Talking Head

The commentator shared  
that fit to share.  
The sound was off.  
His lips were moving,  
so I guess the news  
was not so fit to hear.

He saw a picture  
on the screen of nothing  
worth the seeing.  
It didn't say a thing  
to him; his face, some  
teeth, two lips,  
an ear hearing nothing  
worth the hearing.

So much space behind  
his teeth, an empty mouth,  
with nothing left to say  
that anyone will hear.  
They listen to him  
with the sound turned off.  
Nothing worth the hearing.



## The Weather Girl

The eight year old sits  
on a hill just west of town,  
watching giant cotton  
figures drift from west  
to east, a little faster  
than the sun but slower  
than the whispers that the  
wind makes in her ears.

She fills her lungs and  
plans the weather for the  
day. A little rain in town,  
some wind along the lake.  
The checkered fields will  
welcome sunlight strong  
and warm all day. Her bees  
will navigate the blossoms,  
and then will dance into the  
hive.

Her fingers open up the  
breakfast mother made at dawn,  
and as she eats she changes  
figures in the sky to suit  
her whims. The sky is hers,  
the wind and rain and sun  
obey her will. The flowers  
greet the day because she  
is the weather girl.

## A Book

To hold it in my hand,  
to feel the weight of wings  
upon the page, wonderful  
mental shadows roaming through  
the leaves bound tightly,  
stitched and glued between  
the covers front and back.

I pause, lids shut tight,  
images created behind my  
eyes by letters transformed  
as if by magic into words.  
Thoughts which fill the  
space between the sounds  
which could be heard  
if anyone were speaking.

Between the covers first  
and last the King has died.  
A love so strong has listless  
grown beneath the jeweled sky.  
A mother's tear of joy slides  
down a youthful cheek and stains  
the ivory leaf between the  
covers first and last.

A magic box could not so precious  
be. The wonders of the book can  
steal into our hearts as silently

as wisps of smoke into our eyes,  
and leave us memories of things  
that we have never done, of places  
we have never been, and images  
of things that we will never see.

## Between Two Galaxies

Perhaps it's time to take  
the pictures down.  
Move on they say,  
but not to where or when.

Last night I viewed the  
final episode, a TV show  
of which I've seen two hundred  
episodes, a lifetime  
on the screen.

Move on I say, but not  
to where or when.  
I miss those made-up characters  
as though they were my flesh  
and blood, or my life-long dream  
now dead.

Floating in the space  
between two galaxies,  
I'm in a lonely place  
to be alone.

Time to find new family,  
new episodes to fill  
the void  
between two galaxies.

## Old Friends

Now and again  
the old songs  
visit our hearts  
with tenderness,  
like old friends  
whose absence is  
compressed by  
memories come to  
life in a smile.

Melodies heard  
again, not quite  
the same because  
our memories are  
dimmed by years  
apart. It matters  
not, the feeling  
lives the same.

A love long lost  
is felt anew within  
the melodies that  
filled our hearts  
so long ago. Our  
arms recall embraces  
felt and stored  
so lovingly within  
the songs we loved.

The notes remind us  
of the impish grin  
she wielded  
shamelessly,  
the nervous pressure  
of his hand upon her  
waist when dancing  
in the gym in socks.  
Love and music were  
much simpler then,  
and innocence was  
sweet.

Our music and our  
memories walk hand  
in hand along the  
paths of life. They  
live for each other,  
friends to help in  
time of need,  
companions in our  
joy, siblings in  
our sorrow.

## Why him?

He doesn't know why the world  
has been unkind.

He planted paper flowers in a vase  
and put them in his living room.  
He talked to every one each day.  
The flowers didn't grow.  
He even watered twice a week, but  
the color ran and formed a brownish  
puddle underneath which stained  
his imitation marble table top, the  
one the polyester-suited salesman  
with a bad toupee told him would  
never stain.

He doesn't know why they didn't grow.

When He got out of school he bought  
a spiffy new guitar and case.  
He ran his fingers over every string  
a hundred times, polished the wood  
until it shone like a beacon  
in the dark, bought every guitar how-to  
book he found and read it twice.  
But the guitar never played a note.  
Just sat there for thirty years  
and mocked him with it's silent stare.  
He doesn't know why it wouldn't play.

He married young and went to work,  
came home each day and watched TV

until he went to bed.  
His wife abandoned him and took the kids,  
left him in the dark without a meal  
or clothes to wear or even a good-bye.  
She found a better man, she said.  
The shrink he went to wouldn't give him  
meds, and she abandoned him as well.  
She said he didn't know what love can be  
but he knew that she was wrong.  
He doesn't know why his wife and children  
wouldn't stay.

Some day he'll have the time to  
think this through, but not today.  
He has his Facebook things to say,  
baby pics and loving dogs to like  
before he flames their owners for their  
errant views on politics.

Someday the world will change its mind  
and figure out it doesn't have to be  
unkind to him.

He doesn't know why the world  
has been unkind.



## The Wedding Dancers

Smoothly She glides  
not touching the floor,  
as elegant as He is handsome.  
The Wedding Dancer, in her  
gown of white, her veil a  
trane, a wisp behind her  
dancing as well two steps  
obediently behind.

Regally she sits in honor's seat,  
a velvet voice to calm the fears,  
the troubled looks around the  
room. The words are wisps of smoke  
devoid of substance filling every  
eye with witchery. She crushes a  
rebelious thought with gentle smiles  
which follow obediently behind.

Confidently she strides into  
the room, in charge at once  
among the vassals all now  
seated, now hanging on the  
words that she would say if  
there were any need. Her command  
is in her steely stare, the  
wave of her hammered scepter  
following obediently behind.

Slowly she walks the garden path  
and waves to distant puzzled stares,

a royal empty wave, now floating  
directionless upon the breeze  
like distant smoke upon the trees  
on yonder rolling hills. Her thoughts  
intrude, a fleeting moment of the  
past which now remains obediently  
behind.

On the lonely bed that death has laid for  
her, she lies so still that one would  
think her life had gone. But even now  
upon that ancient visage lies the hard  
won will of iron forged in fires of  
adversity. With patience little shown  
to others of her lofty state the fabled  
reaper waits obediently behind.

In another bed another wedding dancer  
lies so still that one would think her  
life had gone. Upon her visage rests the  
undiminished beauty shared with each new  
loving soul she bore; a happy payment for  
a life well-loved. And as her children  
hover round, death reverently awaits  
the dancer's time.

## The other side of the door

Through my mist of memory  
I see your face darkly, yes,  
but deeply nonetheless.

Suspended in forever you see me  
as well, but clearly as though  
through glass, on the other side  
of time looking in.

Prisoner of time, I await  
the summer wind beneath me,  
the sighing of the mountains  
blue and green.

You are the timeless whispers  
I can barely hear, murmurs  
floating in a sea I cannot leave.

I saw your eyes on someone else  
sometime between a yesterday and now.  
She didn't know that she was you,  
and looked an apprehensive look at me.

One day this butterfly will leave its  
sleep in time, spread its wings and  
fly to you above the  
mountains blue and green.  
I will be your Cheshire cat  
and you will be my somewhen queen.

## I hope that when I die

I hope that when I die  
I hear the songs we loved again.  
Perhaps a tear or two and  
memories of who we were.

To think that all we've been and done  
will pass away is more than we can bear.  
That must be why we cling to life  
much longer than we feel the need.

I don't believe that dying is the end  
of anything. Another life, another  
place, another time is where we'll be.

But I hope we have old songs to be  
our well-worn sweaters gathered close,  
as soft and warm as winter socks  
before a crackling fire.

## Disposable life

Too young, too old  
of no use to anyone any more

kill the young, too much trouble  
for the modern woman  
just tissue anyway, not life  
fingers and toes, a beating heart not life any more  
disposable in a disposing world

kill the old, more trouble than they're worth  
sick and old, taking up the space we need  
the food we eat and air we breathe  
call it assisted suicide  
throw them out with the garbage  
disposable in a disposing world

and in the middle, waiting for them to come for you  
too tall, too small, not right in the head  
not politically correct any more  
coming for you next  
disposable in a disposing world

who will watch your back when no one loves you  
any more

# The Little Man



## 1

The little man stands  
in the corner gathering  
colors with his camera.  
Like a spider leaving webs  
he weaves his shadows  
everywhere.

He is invisible  
because he wants to be.  
But if you look askance,  
he is the movement  
you just miss,  
that which you  
could have seen,  
had you looked  
an instant earlier.

All day he steals  
the colors in the room,  
until at last he  
brings the night,  
and suffocates us  
into sleep.  
We lie transfixed with  
pennies on our eyes  
until the dawn  
drives him away  
for just a little while.

And then when  
we are safe  
he comes again,  
just out of sight,  
just out of mind,  
just in the shadow  
in the corners  
of our lives.

## 2

The little man stands  
in the corner gathering  
colors with his camera.  
Tenderly he guards each shade,  
each tinted shadow  
a treasured token of the light.  
And when he dreams he adds  
his technicolored tones  
to our fantasies.



3

The little man sits  
in a darkened  
hall watching  
dancing images.  
He shares his popcorn  
with his girl and  
life is good.  
He marvels  
at his colors  
on the screen.  
He will make  
his movie too,  
and call it  
The Little Man  
and Jan.

4

The little man  
stood in the corner  
gathering colors  
with his camera.

She could not see him,  
though she knew  
he must be there.  
She wet her lips,

and looked her  
Mona Lisa look  
for him.

Almost finished,  
he filed her lips away  
and then her  
pretty blues.  
Her lashes were so long  
they almost  
didn't fit.

She moved  
without a sound,  
a breeze  
almost unfelt.  
He could not  
look away,  
but caught  
the moving air  
and held it close.  
He could not store  
it in his camera.  
Their souls  
embraced again,  
a loving velvet  
hand in glove.

Separately  
they sighed  
and went

their separate  
ways.

They did not  
say goodbye.

5

The little man stands  
in the corner gathering  
colors with his camera.  
The sacred mechanism  
purrs and then  
is silent once again.  
He strokes it tenderly  
and then they slip away,  
two kittens prowling  
into dreams,  
not here, not there  
but somewhere in between.

6

The little man stands  
in the corner gathering  
colors with his camera.  
He spies the woman  
with the dancing eyes.  
Waving her hand  
she dismisses his love  
so carelessly  
that his heart sinks,  
losing all hands.

7

the little man  
stands in the corner  
capturing colors  
with his camera.

just yesterday  
he held his breath  
and stepped into  
the light.  
she smiled a  
different smile  
at him,  
at least he  
thought she did.

he clicked  
and whirred  
and tried to  
capture her.

now she hides  
her pretty blues  
behind those  
mile-long lashes,  
then with a  
slow and sumptuous  
tango-glide she  
slides away.

she did not smile today

## 8

The little man  
lies in the dark  
and dreams again.  
and as he dreams  
he fills  
the universe  
with colors  
from his camera.

he sees the woman  
with the Mona Lisa smile.  
a little girl,

she walks the sky.  
her toes kiss  
every blade  
of grass  
as though  
she knew them  
every one.

she dances  
through the night  
and touches  
moonbeams with  
her outstretched  
fingertips.  
her upturned  
lips caress  
the stars  
as though  
she loved them  
every one.

child of  
the moonlight,  
the woman  
sleeps among  
the movements  
of the trees.

the little man  
awakes and she  
is gone again.

## 9

The little man  
sits at a table in the corner.  
He listens to the  
symphony of nouns  
and verbs and  
dangling participles.  
What do they mean?  
They have no shade  
no tint, no hue.  
How do they live  
without the glue  
that binds the  
universe together?

The people  
swirl around the room.  
They move their mouths  
but there is no color  
in their sounds,  
no understanding  
in their discourse.

They babble like a brook  
who seems confused,  
and can't remember  
what she thought  
to say.

## 10

The little man sits  
in the corner.  
He would rather be  
collecting colors  
with his camera,  
but today,  
head down  
looking at his knees  
he contemplates.  
His eyes are empty,  
his mind is still,  
his heart is barely  
stirring.

*To capture  
what I cannot see,  
how wonderful  
that would be  
if only that could be.*

But no,  
beyond his fingertips  
the voice of God  
dissolves again  
into the colors  
of the breeze.  
The promise  
of another when,  
another where,



is whispered  
in the trees.

## 11

The little man  
sits in the corner  
with his camera.  
The room is dark.  
There is no sound  
except the beating  
of his heart,  
keeping time,  
measuring the  
pulsing stillness  
of the air.

She didn't  
come today  
nor yesterday.  
How many heartbeats  
has it been?  
Could it be  
it was her smile  
that made his  
camera sing?

## 12

The little man  
stands in the corner.  
He wants to gather  
colors with his camera.

But something strange  
has happened, something  
hanging in the air  
not right, the light  
not colored for a  
morning such as this.

The room is lonely,  
there is no sound, and  
yet it is not sound  
his camera needs  
so desperately.

It is the yellow morning  
light it craves.

But still the sounds  
he cannot hear  
are whispering inside  
his ears like Siren  
songs calling him  
from rocky shores.

Unnoticed, his camera slinks  
away into the silence.

13

The little man  
stands in the corner  
without his camera.

Eyes closed,  
he listens for the  
sounds she makes,  
the tones and  
intonations  
that populate his  
new-found world.

He hears a gentle  
resonance of movement  
and she is there,  
a loving smile  
below her mile-longs  
just for him.

The little man  
steps out into  
the light.

## Songs from the Heart



## Songs from the Heart

Written from the soul  
the words slide across  
the page and mean more  
than what they mean.

Like brush strokes from  
calligraphy the meanings flow,  
and if we glance away we miss  
the text beneath the text.

Ink drying on a velum bed  
can sleep too soundly, and we  
miss the song which drifts  
into our lack of understanding.

There is a cosmic trick to see  
what others cannot see. It takes  
persistence in the numbing now  
to learn what others do not know.

Songs from the heart are sung by  
those who gather one by one  
the sounds not heard by those  
who only want to hear  
themselves.

## Sister of the Moon

The sounds of night surround her  
as she walks; the whisper of her flowing  
hair blends with the creature sounds.  
Pale moon glow lights her way, falls  
upon her upturned face, touches her body  
forming gleaming shadows, shifting shapes.  
She is the mirrored moon, a silver spirit  
who walks the night in silence.  
I hear her calling in my heart of hearts,  
My soul of souls responds to the rhythm  
of her breath, to the beating of her heart.  
I feel a pulse below my conscious world,  
a calling sense which draws me deeper  
into dreams,  
enticing me to lose myself.

Already I am lost. The moonlight fills me  
as I listen to that silent voice.  
I will walk the mountains of  
the moon, my footfalls echoing hers precisely.  
I will be sister of the moon.

## Nowhere Man 1

Who was the man who sat at dawn  
to break his fast in this old chair?  
Was he large, a boisterous laugh  
with dancing eyes or thinning hair?

Did a shadow cross the waning sun,  
a Clemens comet track the evening sky?  
Who knew the time or day he left  
or when he closed his aged eyes?

He was one soul among the restless crowd,  
an unknown heart among the heartless herd.  
His loss of little note, he's hardly missed,  
his name not spoken since his birth.

An unknown man, his foreign parentage is hinted.  
A two-line eulogy was all the paper printed.

## I'm Looking Through You

She said she saw right through me  
as if I weren't there.  
She saw the things I couldn't see.  
The things she couldn't bear.

A ghost, I moved in shadows deep  
transparent to her eyes.  
I did not care to see her weep  
remembering my lies.

## Nowhere Man 2

I saw a man hurrying  
to get nowhere,  
he hadn't a clue  
what to do  
next.

Not a plan, wandering  
quickly  
so as not to fall  
behind. How will  
he know when  
he arrives?

## Paperback Writer

He always wanted to be a writer  
but he didn't want to write.  
Too much effort for a guy  
like him.

Imagination is what he lacks,  
the great American novel  
not rattling around the emptiness  
inside his head.

But he can write a line  
and rhyme at times as well.  
Perhaps he'd write a book of poems,  
if only he could spell.



## Yesterday

I saw you in the mirror  
just yesterday,  
looking back at me  
a puzzled stare.  
Do you know where  
you are?

If I could turn back  
to yesterday,  
have you answer me  
when I speak,  
kiss me when I brush  
your cheek,  
I would.

But finding yesterday  
is not that easy.  
It is the secret place  
within my mind  
that I may never find.

## We can work it out

Talking past each other  
seeing what they want to see  
is what they do.

Ships passing in  
the night  
bright as lights  
in the dark,  
but they can't see  
each other's eyes  
behind the colored  
glasses.

Like molecules  
they bounce around  
their charged attraction,  
getting no where  
fast.

They like to think  
that they control their  
lives, decide who  
lives and dies  
or where they spend  
their status.

Walking past each other  
thinking what they want to  
think  
is what they do.

## Moon Shadow

Walking with you  
after dark  
your moon shadow  
next to mine  
somehow.

So quiet that I  
could hear you breathe  
if you were here.

I reach out  
but find only night  
where your hand would  
be,  
if you were here.

## Helplessly Hoping

The book on her lap,  
her eyes looking for  
the answer which is  
not there.  
Her fingers brushing  
lightly across the words  
which cannot tell her  
the answer which is  
not there.

## Daylight Again

A family divided, north and south,  
the cost of freedom very personal.

The graves whisper to us  
across the ages, freedom is  
not free.

Our blood is proof. And yet  
we think that we know more.

Meanwhile another grieving  
mother by her young son's  
fresh-dug grave cries out,  
her tears a final fitting eulogy.

## Judy Blue Eyes

She is the girl he should  
have married.

Distracted, he chose  
another  
and when that fairytale  
did not come true,  
he chose another  
once again.

She was a good woman  
but not his  
Judy Blue Eyes,  
the girl he should  
have married.

## Fortunate Son

I was not a fortunate son.  
Don't know who was.  
I went when my country  
called.  
Lost some, won some,  
died a little each time  
one of my buddies fell.  
Came home to wife and son  
and died a little more  
each day until no one  
was left inside but me.  
They say no one was home  
when the doorbell rang.

## Southern Cross

Standing by the weathered  
freighter's rail  
I listen to the whispers  
of the waves.  
I watch the moon as  
she travels with us  
southward.  
The Southern Cross  
accompanies her  
as she walks, guards  
her from the dangers  
of the night.  
My thoughts return to you,  
my heart yearns  
for your love once more.  
I walked with you  
until the last to guard  
you from the world outside.  
But in the end I could not  
save your life nor mine.  
And now, by the freighter's rail,  
I listen to the longings  
of your heart left with me  
by your whispered final breath.  
They are my Southern Cross,  
and guide me home  
to you once more.

## One of Us

We were two,  
east and west,  
so different and yet  
so much alike.  
We learned that  
we could be  
two silver dollar sides  
glinting in the light,  
obverse, reverse,  
standing on its edge.  
Two into one.  
A belted pair of pants  
floating in the sun.  
But all too soon  
north to south,  
light to dark,  
a rocky footpath  
through the park.  
The belt undone  
the silver dollar  
dulls and falls.  
One into two,  
one waited for that thing  
the other could not do.  
We are east and west,  
so different and yet  
so much alike.

# Poems in Spanish



## Anoche

Anoche volvió el inmesurado llanto  
de mi juventud.  
De nuevo contemplé  
a mi Dulcinea.  
Su recuerdo  
me besó la frente.

Amaneció.  
Entre paralelos sueños columnarios  
caminaban sacros literatos.  
Discutían el destino  
de mi amor.  
Midieron pro y contra,  
y llegando al extremo de su lógica  
lo condenaron.

(Last night the anguish of my youth  
returned. Again I saw my Dulcinea.  
Her memory kissed my forehead.  
Dawn came. Between parallel column-  
ed dreams sacred literati walked dis-  
cussing the desiny of my love. They  
measured pro and con, and arriving  
at the extremity of their logic, con-  
demned it.)

## En el Cuarto

Susurran en el viento como tallos de maíz.  
Dedos sedeños, sus palabras se extienden.  
Fracasan. Lloran.

Láminas de plástico les separan.  
Previenen. Encierran.  
Perfecto laberinto.

Deorientados, se extravían  
personajes de Pirandello.  
Cristalinos entre espejos,  
se confunden con la realidad.

Como el cierzo  
sus palabras giran por los corredores de mi ser.  
Prueban cada puerta cerrada.  
Inútil.

En mi cueva cristalina les espero,  
las siete vírgenes  
y los mozos siete.  
Se aproximan a la muerte y los consumo.  
Uno por uno los suspiros se disuelven  
en la nada.

Un silencio colgado como tapíz  
a lo largo del universo.

Sólo, sueño con Teseo.

(This is the Spanish version of In the Room)

## aquí me afirmo

aquí me afirmo  
 rodeado  
                   por el círculo  
 metalinguístico  
   y mientras  
 se cierra cada vez más  
   como sogas  
 mis pies buscan tierra firme.  
 El signo se fractura,  
           se desintegra en mis ojos  
                   como luz que se disuelve  
 morimos juntos desmembrados  
 El segundo nivel se escapa  
   del primero  
 expandiendo y perdiéndose  
 la palabra que ya no es palabra.

(I affirm myself here, surrounded by the  
 metalinguistic circle, and while it closes  
 in, marking my neck like a noose, my  
 feet search for dry land. The sign  
 fractures, desintegrates in my eyes, like  
 dissolving light. We die together,  
 dismembered. The second level escapes  
 from the first, expanding and losing  
 itself, the word which is no longer  
 word.)

## Las Trece Mil Trecientos Cinco Respuestas

Erase que se era una maestra encantada  
que desde una torre altísima enseñaba  
los misterios de la vida  
y él amor al prójimo, y el  
subjuntivo y los pores y paras,  
y su majia y  
su trabajo nunca terminaban.

Se veía por las noches platicando  
con estrellas  
conversando de programas  
y ventanas  
al futuro; aconsejando  
a los príncipes y principiantes,  
los terminantes, los por fin  
salgodeaquies con la  
palpable prueba piel de oveja.

Erase que se era una sonrisa  
pegada dulcemente a lo Quevedo  
a un angel . . .  
Traía pues la salvación  
al pecador ignorante de lo serio.  
Traía pues la vida en los ojos,  
el ser de las cosas,  
y el estar de las almas  
y cuando la cosa y cuando el alma  
y siendo lo bueno y estándolo siempre  
adjetivamente  
por lo cierto.



## Poetry Notes

### A Flower Blooms

My first wife, Ana, was an actress before I met her, and she gave up her acting for marriage and children.

### And Love?

This poem was written as a demonstration. An artist and I were discussing the creative process, and he drew a portrait while I wrote this poem. It was written quickly and without revision.

### Angkor Wat

When I wrote this in 2000 it was the first poem that I had set out to rhyme since my high school days. Although I have been to Southeast Asia, I have never been to Angkor Wat.

### Buried Under the Wall

After submerging my feelings about my time in Vietnam for some thirty years, I saw *Saving Private Ryan* and had sort of a mini-breakdown. I created a website with pictures of my service, and found the 35th Infantry Regiment Association and my friend Jerry Heiser. At some point I wrote this poem, not having seen the Wall as yet, and not sure that I ever would. Several years later I did see it. The Wall was just as I had imagined it, except that it was hot rather than cold because my visit was during the summer. I have been there several times since then, and it is always an emotional experience.

## Come Sit With Me

Written in the style of "Andrea del Sarto" by Robert Browning, probably in my senior year of high school.

## Waiting for You

In the summer of 2013 I was engaged to Randi Riffkind in Los Angeles, and I wrote *Waiting for You*. Several months later she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. I retired to care for her until she died at the beginning of 2014. After her death I wrote *On Randi's Death* and *Southern Cross*. I left Los Angeles and decided not to return to the workforce.

## In the Room

The inspiration for this poem came from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot, who had a profound effect on my poetry from my college years on. Both Eliot's themes and his techniques became part of my experimentation, until I developed a style of my own.

## I saw her pirouette

Written for my friend Lee Wilson, retired ballerina and dancer on Broadway, upon the publication of her book, *Rebel on Pointe*.

## It's funny

As far as I remember, this poem was written when I was in high school. I still have the hand written version, stained by what probably was my lunch.

## Songs from the Heart

These poems were written in 2021 and 2022. Each one is based on the title of a song by my favorite musical artists; Paperback Writer, Yesterday, Nowhere Man, and We Can Work It Out by the Beatles; Moon Shadow by Cat Stevens; Fortunate Son, Daylight Again, Judy Blue Eyes and Southern Cross by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; and Sister of the Moon by Fleetwood Mac. Thematically only the song *Sister of the Moon* has any connection to the original song.

## The Postcard from Berlin

I liked the sound of the phrase "just here...just there" so I wrote the poem around it. It was probably written around the time of the fall of the Berlin wall.

## The Telegram

Written after I returned from Vietnam. I was fortunate that only two of my friends and squad members were killed during my year in Vietnam.

## When I Look into Your Eyes

This poem was written before my second wife and I had children. She loved the Bock Tower gardens in Florida, so I wrote about it, her, my two children from my first marriage, and memories from my childhood.







