

Faded Parallels

By Zahhar



Journeys Into Poetic Forms

Volume III, Series III: Villanelles & Related Forms

July 2006

Front Cover

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Acknowledgements

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Beyond Rhyme

In brief

During the two years I spent working with the ghazal, I adhered rigidly to its rhyme scheme. By the time that project came to a end, I felt very restricted by rhyme, especially as used by the ghazal. I felt that it should be possible to find and express some freedom within the confines of a strict poetic form by replacing its rhyme scheme with some alternative. As I began this project—villanelles and related forms—I resolved to discover and explore alternatives to rhyme, hoping to learn what the effects would be. Would the use of alternative schemes enrich the feel and impact of a strict form such as the villanelle, allowing for a more natural use of language, or would the end result ultimately be just as limiting as rhyme? In a way, I've discovered the answer can be both.

Overview

Rhyme is just one scheme of phonetic parallelism out of many. Phonetic parallelism, in this sense, is when similar word sounds occur within or between lines of poetry. Rhyme is a form of this parallelism. For instance, take any rhyming lines of poetry:

Where'er you find "the cooling western *breeze*",
In the next line, it "whispers through the *trees*":
—from *An Essay on Criticism* by Alexander Pope

The rhyme between “breeze” and “trees” here is a phonetic parallelism. Such parallelisms can occur between the ends of lines, within a line, between multiple lines, or even between stanzas or entire texts. What most people are familiar with, however, is the parallelism of rhyme between specific lines within a given stanza. In the example above this parallelism is referred to as end-line rhyme, because the parallelism is occurring between line-endings.

Below I identify some of the rhyme alternatives I've drawn from in writing the poems of this series. I tend mostly toward monosyllabic (single syllable) phonetic parallelisms, but I'll talk about disyllabic (two syllable) phonetic parallelisms as well since I've used them.

Seven basic monosyllabic schemes

Including rhyme, there are seven basic schemes. These are *alliteration*, *assonance*, *consonance*, *reverse rhyme*, *frame rhyme*, *rhyme*, and *rich rhyme*. Some of these terms may instantly be familiar to you, 'alliteration' for instance. Below is the excerpt from Pope's poem above with the second line modified to use end-line alliteration instead end-line rhyme.

Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze",
In the next it rarely "tosses golden braids".

As you may see, the effect of end-line alliteration is different from the effect of end-line rhyme, yet it still has a potency not unlike the potency of rhyme. And there is suddenly an entirely new pool of words to draw from just in using end-line alliteration. How much more so between all seven schemes?

In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, the article on “Rhyme” sets forth a schema by which these seven schemes may be recognized and understood. On the accented syllable of a given word, there will often be an opening consonant sound, a medial vowel sound, and a closing consonant sound. This is schematized as C V C, where the first C is the opening consonant sound, V the medial vowel sound, and the last C the closing consonant sound. The individual sounds within a word represented by the C V C schema are called phonemes or phonemic clusters.

The following table allows these schemes to be identified using C V C. The C V C part or parts which relate to a given scheme are underlined, followed by the name of that scheme and some illustrative words:

- 1) C V C – *alliteration* – “bat”, “boy”, “barge”, “binge”
- 2) C V C – *assonance* – “bat”, “cab”, “fad”, “man”
- 3) C V C – *consonance* – “bat”, “grit”, “spite”, “fort”
- 4) C V C – *reverse rhyme* – “bat”, “bag”, “ban”, “back”
- 5) C V C – *frame rhyme* – “bat”, “bait”, “bite”, “boat”
- 6) C V C – *rhyme* – “bat”, “cat”, “rat”, “flat”
- 7) C V C – *rich rhyme* – “vein”, “vain”, “vane”

Beyond a single syllable

These schemes can be extended beyond a single syllable, as I’ve hinted at above. The C V C schema can be made disyllabic by adding a lowercased v c to represent the unaccented second syllable when it doesn’t contain its own consonance, and a lowercased c v c to represent the unaccented second syllable when it does contain its own consonance. For instance, compare “sapping” (C V C v c) and “sapling” (C V C c v c).

This table shows some disyllabic renditions of the seven basic schemes:

1) *disyllabic alliteration*

C V C v c – “prices”, “prison”, “pruning”, “pretty”
C V C c v c – “painless”, “piglet”, “padlock”, “poplar”

2) *disyllabic assonance*

C V C v c – “flustered”, “bugger”, “lovers”, “mother”
C V C c v c – “manhole”, “lactose”, “tax code”, “backbone”

3) *disyllabic consonance*

C V C v c – “acorn”, “toucan”, “deacon”, “liken”
C V C c v c – “mandate”, “turncoat”, “sunlight”, “rainsuit”

4) *disyllabic reverse rhyme*

C V C v c – “batter”, “battered”, “batters”, “battery”
C V C c v c – “brainless”, “bracelet”, “brakeless”

5) *disyllabic frame rhyme*

C V C v c – “photon”, “fatten”, “futon”, “frighten”

C V C c v c – “mansion”, “mention”, “moonshine”

6) *disyllabic rhyme*

C V C v c – “maddest”, “saddest”, “gladdest”

C V C c v c – “pension”, “Kenyan”, “tendon”

7) *disyllabic rich rhyme*

C V C v c – “siting”, “sighting”, “citing”

C V C c v c – “headman”, “head-man”, “head man”

The C V C schema is really just a way to help make sense of and talk about phonemic correlations between words. Many words don't fall strictly under the C V C schema or its disyllabic extensions listed above, yet the schema can still be used to talk about such words. For instance, “at” and “bat” still rhyme under the C V C schema since the first C can be taken as optional to the scheme. Same goes for any of the schemes covered above.

What's neat about having the schema charted out in this fashion is that it shows how various schemes can be blended together for different effects. For instance, you can blend primary alliteration (on the accented syllable) with secondary rhyme (on the unaccented syllable):

C V C v c – “fasting”, “finding”, “forcing”, “fishing”

Or perhaps primary consonance with secondary assonance:

C V C v c – “random”, “tendon”, “founded”, “attendant”

Such schemes, so far as I know, don't have designations, but maybe a student or professor of English or linguistics will one day map possible extended schemes to new names so they'll become easier to talk about. Either way, the possibilities are endless.

Partial schemes

These schemes can sometimes be effective even when the phonetic parallelisms aren't precise. Whenever the phonemes of a scheme are only partially concordant, this can be considered a partial scheme. For instance, the assonant words “void” and “bode” represent partial assonance through the o sound. Full assonance here would be achieved by including the i sound in the second word to make it “void” and “coin”. Similarly, partial consonance is achieved between “bold” and “bide” because of the d sound.

There are many combinations of partial phonetic parallelism for each scheme, and over the past couple of years I have been exploring the effects of using them, or “fudging” on schemes like rhyme and alliteration.

Any of these schemes can be used in place of or in conjunction with the end-line rhyme scheme of a poetic form such as the villanelle, terzanelle, or—in the case of this chapbook—hybridanelle.

Associative parallelisms

Another thing I've experimented with is associative parallelism. This is a kind of parallelism that links words to one another within a scheme through their meanings rather than through their sounds. So instead of relating the word "fuel" with "duel" through rhyme, you might relate it with "gas" through shared associations.

During my exploration of this type of parallelism I've discovered that the possible associations between words are many, perhaps even limitless. Yet there are some common associations that can easily be discussed, such as synonymy (words similar in meaning) and antonymy (opposite in meaning).

Synonymy can be used in an extended scheme, like I've tried to use it in "On a Life Left Unfinished" (page 17) with the words *memories*, *remember*, *memoirs*, *reminder*, *memory*, & *mementos*. These words share a similarity of meaning in relation to memory. Antonymy on the other hand works best with paired schemes, as I've used it in "The Sophistry of Prophecy" (page 14) with the words *war & peace*, *hunger & bounty*, and *crime & faith*. Within a scheme, the synonyms or antonyms can be approximate and yet still create an enriching interrelationship within the poem.

As associative parallelisms become more involved, the more difficult they become to talk about. I've found myself delving into rhetoric in search of ways to discuss these relationships, some of which I already use intuitively, and have only discovered ways to talk about a handful of them.

For instance, when I used the words *hue*, *wane*, *stained*, *tinge*, *pale*, and *dusk* as an end-line associative scheme in "Burning the Flag" (page 12), I had no idea how I could talk about the word relationships, except to say that they're all descriptive or behavioral attributes of color. Now I can feel fairly certain that, in rhetoric, this might be defined as a scheme of metonymy, because the end-line scheme substitutes an attribute of the nature of color for color itself.

A lot of the associative parallelisms in these poems are related purely by concept, or connected only through shared properties. I'm still learning to define these relationships. An example of the first would be *twilight & darkness* in "Unbounded" (page 19). These words share associations with the concept of obscurity. An example of the later would be *thoughts*, *sense*, *understanding*, *perception*, *consciousness*, & *apprehension* from "An Invocation" (page 26). These words each present a property of mind.

There are more, and it will probably take me years to develop a solid enough grounding to be able to discuss them vividly. Though I'm not yet able to explain my use of associative parallelism in full, the effects are nonetheless striking in the poems themselves. It's been an enlightening experiment. And I hope you'll enjoy the wordplays used as much as the meanings conveyed.

Delusions

I've always tried to explore my own thought processes in an effort to understand them as clearly as I may. In so doing I—not infrequently—find I must face my own delusions head-on and endure the resulting paradigm shifts. This personal practice may be part of the reason I sometimes become aware of similar in societal thought. So these poems represent delusional thinking in one form or another, from personal to societal.

Sunlight: When I met my soon-to-be ex-wife, I fell thoroughly in love. And the fact that my feelings for her aren't so strong today—after she's run me through an emotional slaughter-mill and had several affairs during our marriage—would seem a solid testimony to the delusional state I had to be in when I wrote this poem.

This isn't to say that I regret writing it. For a time I enjoyed my delusion immensely, and what seemed like true love. Or at least I think I did. Still, the pain of the experience has further reinforced my resolve to seek out personal peace of mind over finding a "perfect mate" or some other way to bliss out. These latter states invariably crash headlong back into reality, while the former I think is the result of actually coming to terms with the same.

Matrimony: Marriage has been a humbling experience for me. I always figured that if I married it would be for life, that I would face whatever came side by side with my wife—excepting extramarital affairs of course. And for some reason I didn't think she was the type. But there you have it; I wasn't thinking, obviously. There's not much to work with in a marriage when your significant other starts bringing random strangers home to the nuptial bed from bars whenever you leave town for a few minutes.

This poem was actually started around the time New Orleans took on water from Hurricane Katrina. But in the aftermath of Katrina, I found myself unable to continue the poem on its original mushy vein. So I scrapped the original a few lines from finishing it, keeping only a single phrase, and restarted it intent on creating a double focus, one for my newlywed wife, and one for the victims of Katrina. So at least one aspect of the poem is still valid.

Burning the Flag: It seems to me that if Americans actually respected what the American flag stood for, they'd pay it more respect. But the way I see this symbol of freedom and equality treated is nothing of the sort. So I figure it's a sort of delusion that brings people to sport the flag "in support" while at the same time allowing it to rot and fray. Which is more telling of a person's actual attitude toward what the flag represents? The fact that it's being displayed or the fact that it's being allowed to publicly crack, rot, and mold? Might as well just take it out to a Wal-Mart parking lot and set it on fire, right?

The Sophistry of Prophecy: One thing that makes a good prophecy popular is its interpretability. The longest lasting prophecies have been interpretable to correspond with every age and circumstance since their conceptions. Some of the doomsday prophecies are especially fun.

Sunlight

For Jenna

It seems to me the sunshine in your eyes
that burns away the glow of lesser stars
reflects the crystal moonlight of your soul.

Since our paths have crossed, I've never groped in darkness,
feeling my way by touch with uncertain hands and feet,
startled every moment contact serves as vision.

I feel the shadows fade before your gaze,
those blurred recesses deep where dreads are stored;
it seems to me the sunshine in your eyes

lifts an obscuring fog that would magnify my doubts
and cloud my thoughts with mist until I walked in quandary,
feeling my way by touch with uncertain hands and feet.

Your view illuminates my mystic core,
reveals a steady center in the storm,
reflects the crystal moonlight of your soul.

I've searched for eyes like yours, filled full of jasper mystery;
it often felt like folly; the hope would haunt my dreams
and cloud my thoughts with mist until I walked in quandary.

That dripping haze has drifted off my sight—
each day I wake beside your loving stare;
it seems to me the sunshine in your eyes

now lights the way before me, a path that once was dim,
concealed beneath the drizzle with slick unsettled footing;
it often felt like folly; the hope would haunt my dreams.

I feel the strength increase within my heart
because this narrow path beneath my stride
reflects the crystal moonlight of your soul.

So long as you're beside me, I'll always trust my heading;
you hold a gloom at bay that else would leave me blind,
concealed beneath the drizzle with slick unsettled footing.

Your smile clears a gray pall from my mind
and vivifies the world in which we stand;
it seems to me the sunshine in your eyes
reflects the crystal moonlight of your soul.

Your presence parts the clouds like gentle golden beams;
since our paths have crossed, I've never groped in darkness;
you hold a gloom at bay that else would leave me blind,
startled every moment contact serves as vision.

Matrimony

For Jenna

Alone we face the stripping winds of fate,
groping through disorder weak and blinded;
united we can brave the floods of chance;
amid the surging fear we'll learn and find our way,
bound together with resolve and braced against the storm;
this path is ours to walk, for better or for worse.

Union blesses us with lucid insights
that else evade our grasp and leave us lost,
groping through disorder weak and blinded
on dim uncertain plains where massive forces play,
striking terror in the soul, yet merged in mutual trust
amid the surging fear, we'll learn and find our way.

The world may shatter round us into ruin,
but joined as one we foster new potentials
that else evade our grasp and leave us lost;
a broken road before us wanders who knows where,
shrouded deep in mystery like alders steeped in mist;
this path is ours to walk, for better or for worse.

The future looms a cloud of ghastly prospects
as nimbus doubts swoop down to numb our dreams,
but joined as one we foster new potentials
that beam defiant hope throughout the crushing gray,
germs of possibility that sprout within the stream
amid the surging fear; we'll learn and find our way.

Existence seems a whirl of deadly signs,
cyclones whipped to fury by delusion
as nimbus doubts swoop down to numb our dreams,
besieging peace of mind with long chaotic bursts,
and though we slog through rising water bent in grave distress,
this path is ours to walk, for better or for worse.

Stricken with the blight of self-importance,
alone we face the stripping winds of fate,
cyclones whipped to fury by delusion;
united we can brave the floods of chance,
buttressed against the gales that sweep with savage woes,
certain our affinity will hold and keep us fast
amid the surging fear; we'll learn and find our way;
this path is ours to walk, for better or for worse.

Burning the Flag

Cracked and faded in the sun,
spotted emblems lose their hue,
unretired and weather-torn.

Exposure to the elements betrays
emotional and mental negligence
to burning disregard for heritage.

Bumper stickers age too soon;
paper pride is left to wane,
cracked and faded in the sun

on well-kept pickup trucks and long sedans
beside some slogan spouting malcontent;
emotional and mental negligence

flies atop the roofs of cars—
sooty clown-ears deeply stained,
unretired and weather-torn.

Support is shown as mere velleity,
a symbol posted like an afterthought
beside some slogan spouting malcontent,

just another brittle sign
taking on a dirty tinge,
cracked and faded in the sun.

What shone for Francis Key one failing night
is treated now like any corporate logo,
a symbol posted like an afterthought.

Freedom flails on autumn winds,
half-remembered, growing pale,
unretired and weather-torn.

Abandoned to an apathy's pollution,
the dream Old Glory strives to represent
is treated now like any corporate logo.

Banners rip on plastic stands,
unsaluted dawn to dusk,
cracked and faded in the sun,
unretired and weather-torn.

As mildew rots the fabric of the States,
exposure to the elements betrays
the dream Old Glory strives to represent
to burning disregard for heritage.

The Sophistry of Prophecy

when was there never famine, never war,
no bloody battles fought for real estate
with every nation harmonized in peace?

when have the heavens paused like polished stone,
motionless across the prism of space,
to pass a single year without a sign?

what season never yielded plague nor blight,
with all the divers cultures steeped in bounty,
no bloody battles fought for real estate?

what age has seen the quaking earth hold still,
her ever-changing contours locked in place?
when have the heavens paused like polished stone?

which hour never saw men gaunt with hunger
nor ever shook men from their chosen path,
with all the divers cultures steeped in bounty?

when have conditions failed to vex the soul,
and terrors slept enchanted with the grace
to pass a single year without a sign?

what creed has never suffered purblind wrath,
nor punished those who hold a different faith,
nor ever shook men from their chosen path?

where has the climate never loosed a storm?
what river never leapt beyond its base?
when have the heavens paused like polished stone?

what people never felt the touch of crime,
no greed nor malice wasting human hearts,
nor punished those who hold a different faith?

when have diviners ever granted sway,
allowing humankind some minor space
to pass a single year without a sign?

since time began to crumble written thoughts,
when was there never famine, never war,
no greed nor malice wasting human hearts,
with every nation harmonized in peace?

was there a time impostors never sought
to stage themselves as some important face?
when have the heavens paused like polished stone,
to pass a single year without a sign?

Modes of Departure

In the past my sister has pointed out that I seem to have a morbid fascination with death. I suppose it could look this way to someone from the outside, but I disagree. We live in a society where death, various modes of departure, are hidden from the public eye, and made tidy as possible. Cemeteries are green and manicured, plots arranged in neat rows and marked with pretty stone sculptures. Mortuaries are pristine and clean, and we pay the undertakers well to make death look as pleasant as can be managed so we won't be forced to ponder the dread realities surrounding it.

Perhaps I'm just less afraid than most to ponder the various modes of departure. Maybe it has something to do with my more animistic way of looking at the world. Maybe I've suffered enough loss in other ways that this form of loss has lost its power to faze me. So, when someone passes and I'm moved to write on the matter, I find I'm not so willing to pretty it up and babble on about human hereafters and heavens; I just look at the actual loss and ponder the new rift that has opened up in my life, or in the life of others.

On a Life Left Unfinished: Del was a man who took me seriously as a poet. We met at an online poetry forum and struck up an instant rapport. Over time I came to consider him a close friend. When he let it out that he had serious health problems, I made it a point to drive down to Tucson, Arizona to visit him during the Spring of 2005. It was a good thing I did because if I waited any longer I would never have had the chance. Del worked most of his life as a show-horse trainer, and he felt connected with the natural world. He was just about to send his second book of poetry to print when he passed.

Unbounded: I've listened to Coast to Coast AM off and on now for many years, and as a result I've learned a little about the life and inner workings of Art Bell, the show's host. When I turned on the radio one night in January, Mr. Bell was airing for the first time in several weeks. He was describing the events leading up to and following the sudden death of his wife of 30 or so years. It was a sudden massive coronary attack. The broadcast was incredibly moving, and I couldn't help but write something in response.

The Dimming: I developed an acquaintance with Suzanne over time at an online poetry forum. Late last year or early this year I learned that she had lost one of her daughters to suicide. Knowing how our society shuns the topic of death, and knowing how important it can be to be able to talk about such a loss candidly, I offered my ears. We had long talks online about her loss, and I learned a great deal. When she asked me to write a poem in memory of her daughter, this started me on a personal journey in which I had to decide for myself whether or not there could be hope for a suicide, including my father.

Recurring Nightmare: One reason I don't live in Los Angeles is because I've been having dreams about it getting nuked since I was twelve. The last dream I had of this sort was so vivid that I could feel the blast hit me and sear off my skin—for that instant it took to do so. I was twenty-one then, and left Los Angeles shortly thereafter. I haven't had such dreams since.

On a Life Left Unfinished

*In Memory of Del Warren Livingston
(1944 — 2005)*

A full life's never ended; it merely passes on
new inspirations wrought from memories
like stardust filaments that weave the birth of suns.

Your time had come to shed the mortal dream;
although you wake beyond our veil as if from heavy slumber,
your remnants ripple through our half-lit realm.

And if you find yourself reflecting where you've gone
on all you've left undone, well just remember:
a full life's never ended—it merely passes on.

We who float within your wake can hardly help but wonder;
we guess and grope for answers to our loss
although you wake beyond our veil as if from heavy slumber.

Despair would not become you despite your waning moons;
you strove instead to leave creative memoirs
like stardust filaments that weave the birth of suns.

The mystery conceals you like a shroud;
now left with only memories of all you planned to do,
we guess and grope for answers to our loss.

You chanced that every evening would reproduce the dawn;
unfinished projects bear the keen reminder:
a full life's never ended; it merely passes on

a sense of oak leaves newly formed and foals of chestnut hue
to those who valued more than just your presence,
now left with only memories of all you planned to do.

The minds you've touched remain to bear the human trance,
yet still your essence drifts in memory
like stardust filaments that weave the birth of suns.

Your intuitions leave prospective imprints
and phase from tangibility as cloudscapes phase from view
to those who valued more than just your presence.

So long as breath sustains, your friends shall hold within
the insights you have offered as mementos;
a full life's never ended; it merely passes on
like stardust filaments that weave the birth of suns.

The blood that fueled your living form returns to join our roots;
your time had come to shed the mortal dream
and phase from tangibility; as cloudscapes phase from view,
your remnants ripple through our half-lit realm.

Unbounded

*For Mr. Bell
In memory of Mrs. Bell*

Sagebrush murmurs fill the midnight air;
the Colorado ripples in the darkness,
reflectionless beneath the moonless stars,
where creosotes sing ancient roundelays,
dreamtime songs as subtle as the sound
of shooting stars that drift across the skies.

Long remembered eyes reflect the twilight
and close against the nascent touch of dawn;
the Colorado ripples in the darkness
fade until a wide unbroken glaze
reflects the windless cold of morning light
where creosotes sing ancient roundelays.

Nothing stirs within the rising dusk
as silhouettes break free from indistinction;
and close against the nascent touch of dawn
a presence lingers lovingly behind
to fill a dreamless sleep with gentle thoughts
of shooting stars that drift across the skies.

Sunrise casts a bold array of shadows
that shift like flames within the memory;
as silhouettes break free from indistinction,
the shock of transformation slowly fades
until the mind can sense a subtle touch
where creosotes sing ancient roundelays.

A treasured presence slips from clarity,
seeming insubstantial as the winds
that shift like flames within the memory;
yet breathing freely in the depths of night,
her vital essence glides within the wake
of shooting stars that drift across the skies.

Like echoes of an unseen remnant force,
sagebrush murmurs fill the midnight air,
seeming insubstantial as the winds;
reflectionless beneath the moonless stars,
throughout the open landscapes of the wild,
transcendental traces fill the void
where creosotes sing ancient roundelays
of shooting stars that drift across the skies.

The Dimming

*For Suzanne Smees
In memory of her daughter Nicole Vance
(March 1989 — October 2005)*

Clear waters meditate on hidden sounds;
a silver sickle sinks into the twilight
as fallen leaves are scattered by the wind;
bright eyes search the heavens for distant hints of hope;
bare feet wade through shallow waves in silence
where oaks and tamaracks extend their fading hues.

Whispered prayers rustle unseen boughs
like spirits moved to trembling in the darkness;
clear waters meditate on hidden sounds,
the rise and fall of cricket-song crescendos,
the muffled sobs of anguish, alone and undiscerned;
bare feet wade through shallow waves in silence.

A sort of vision quest for understanding
unfolds between a chapel and the night
as fallen leaves are scattered by the wind
and falling stars leave traces of promise in the skies,
now powerless to dissipate confusion—
the muffled sobs of anguish, alone and undiscerned.

Dawn breaks pale on Erie's inland sea;
the great blue heron lifts to meet the half-light;
clear waters meditate on hidden sounds,
a rapid ringing tap that echoes clearly,
the rosy call of grosbeaks sifting through the woods,
now powerless to dissipate confusion.

A troubled psyche left our world to wander
among those planes that phase amid the shade;
as fallen leaves are scattered by the wind,
gentle spirits join to keep a subtle wake—
the Chagrin River shares a song of mourning,
the rosy call of grosbeaks sifting through the woods.

Colors pale before the nearing winter;
a phantom half acknowledged walks the shadows;
clear waters meditate on hidden sounds
as fallen leaves are scattered by the wind;
yet still within the dream-space of the living
bright eyes search the heavens for distant hints of hope;
the Chagrin River shares a song of mourning
where oaks and tamaracks extend their fading hues.

Recurring Nightmare

I've seen the City of Angels struck with pain,
her superstructures shattered from the sky,
her creatures flashed to shadows etched in stone.

I've seen flesh run like liquid from the bones,
screams vaporized to whispers in the throat
as burning cinders burst from countless frames.

Cloudscapes dissipated from the air;
a ruthless ring of fire seared the land,
her superstructures shattered from the sky.

Shrieks of terror sizzled on melting lips,
reduced to coals that sputtered in the heart;
I've seen flesh run like liquid from the bones

to bubble with the asphalt on the ground
beside the scorched remains of human forms;
a ruthless ring of fire seared the land,

blasting through neighborhoods and urban woods,
consuming all who ran or hid their face
as burning cinders burst from countless frames.

Cars twisted into myriad molten shapes;
the charred debris of towers rained down slag
beside the scorched remains of human forms.

Mothers pressed small babies to their ribs
which turned to embers in their futile arms;
I've seen flesh run like liquid from the bones

of fathers bent in vain across their young,
cremated by a lethal burst of light;
the charred debris of towers rained down slag

throughout the ardent ruins of brick and steel
where dead ambitions fumed upon their backs
as burning cinders burst from countless frames.

How could I smoke such visions from my mind?
I've seen the City of Angels struck with pain,
cremated by a lethal burst of light,
her creatures flashed to shadows etched in stone.

Don't try to tell me these are merely dreams,
just troubled thoughts that haunt my sleeping brain;
I've seen flesh run like liquid from the bones
as burning cinders burst from countless frames.

Inspirations

I'm pretty sure that every poet throughout history would agree with me when I say that some poems are just inspired. These hybridanelles are highly structured poems, so it might seem like an oxymoron to refer to one, never mind five, of them as "inspired". In fact, not all of them started off this way. The first three were half-written through brute uninspired force when inspiration struck, which meant scrapping the original effort and starting over.

An Invocation: One thing I've been missing throughout my work with poetry, right from the beginning as a fourteen year old, is an invocation of inspiration. Since I was probably twenty or so I have had it in mind to eventually get around to writing my invocation, but you know how life is—took awhile. So, about fifteen years later I sit down to research how past and present poets have approach writing their invocations of inspiration, only to learn that not many of them have, at least not that I could find. I did learn that Homer and Virgil have invoked the Muses, inspiration personified, in their epics. But I hadn't yet read them when I began to ponder the notion as a twenty year old. So I'm not sure where I got the idea from. Maybe it came with me.

Oak Dream: There is a black oak tree west of Ukiah off Orr Springs Road that overlooks a lovely contoured canyon. About a week and a half before I drove this road for the first time, I had a dream in which a large black oak was the main centerpiece. The dream itself is too long and involved to describe here, but suffice it to say this is the only dream I've had of being part animal, raven in this case. When I later drove Orr Springs Road I instantly recognized this tree as it came into view round a bend in the road. Instantly! And I've been taking time out to visit this location ever since. This poem has been inspired by these visits, and the dream. Note that I avoid humanizing the tree.

Anima Cantus: The title basically means "psychic melody", or "mind song". As a fourteen year old I wrote a poem, three octets long, titled "The Emotion's Song". By the time I was twenty-one this poem was lost to me. In memory it stands out as my best piece of writing as a teen, and I've often wished I could review the original for revision. Though "Anima Cantus" is my long overdue rewrite of that poem, its focus is very different, and heavily influenced by Jungian psychology. This *is* how I see the psyche, or at least *my* psyche.

Cocoon: As a fifteen year old I ran away from the Los Angeles Juvenile Court System, my legal parent, and hitchhiked all around the Western States. If not for the kindness of a park ranger stationed along the Bright Angel Trail in the Grand Canyon, I likely would be very dead right now. After failing to get me to admit my status as a runaway (intuition no doubt), he gave up and handed me a previously confiscated subzero sleeping bag, which made it possible for me to survive over the next two years as a vagrant teen.

Surrender: My most recent poem. You may notice that there's a missing end-line scheme. I figured that in such a tight structure, a missing scheme could be a scheme in and of itself. This poem is inspired by the recent grief, loss, and hardships surrounding my divorce. There is a saying in the twelve step programs: "Turn it over." I've been learning a lot about this notion lately.

An Invocation

O grant me rain from out the sounding clouds,
and flash against the backdrop of my thoughts
an inspiration wrought by subtle minds.

Dissolve the souging haze that clings to all my dreams
and wraps confusion round my spinning soul.
Unveil the primal light obscured in stellar dust.

Release creative flow like prised floods
that sweep stagnation from my standing sense.
O grant me rain from out the sounding clouds.

Lift the heavy doubt that cowers thick and close,
a fog that saturates in vapid shades of gray
and wraps confusion round my spinning soul.

Reach through this cacophonous mental din
and seed within my harried understanding
an inspiration wrought by subtle minds.

Sweep a translucent wind throughout my psychic planes,
infused with temperate airs to clear the cotton mist,
a fog that saturates in vapid shades of gray.

Defrost the ice and snow from all my fields,
the winter-scapes within that numb perception.
O grant me rain from out the sounding clouds.

Return decayed ideas to elemental drift
so they rise again as notions nursed on cosmic breath
infused with temperate airs to clear the cotton mist.

Connect me to the place where light is born,
from where it swells to crest in consciousness
an inspiration wrought by subtle minds.

Part confusion from conceptions fallen dead,
and draw its suffocation off my faculties
so they rise again as notions nursed on cosmic breath.

Restore the waters of my inmost lands,
so that my springs will flow with apprehension.
O grant me rain from out the sounding clouds,
an inspiration wrought by subtle minds.

Sing to me invention, and help me learn to heed.
Dissolve the souging haze that clings to all my dreams,
and draw its suffocation off my faculties.
Unveil the primal light obscured in stellar dust.

Oak Dream

random weaves of rugged bark
writhe against the phasing skies
that drift beyond capricious leaves

roots extend throughout a dozen worlds
winding deep into the plane of dreams
to brush the wayward mind like strokes of wind

weathered plates of charcoal gray
shift and slide into the air as
random weaves of rugged bark

tendrils cleave the mists from drought to draught
driven to explore domains of light
winding deep into the plane of dreams

vapors breathe against the moon
raising plumes within the void
that drift beyond capricious leaves

solar cells fan out as emerald lobes
along dynamic conduits of growth
driven to explore domains of light

mosses clothe erratic limbs
climbing toward inconstant heights up
random weaves of rugged bark

colors dance across elusive grains
in gradual pilgrimage through subtle realms
along dynamic conduits of growth

russet rustles greet the stars
when cloud-breaks split the stormy nights
that drift beyond capricious leaves

like ripples cast by gentle drops of rain
rings expand through time as branches reach
in gradual pilgrimage through subtle realms

stardust rises from the earth
to sing across the depths of space on
random weaves of rugged bark
that drift beyond capricious leaves

beneath the spread of tangible mirage
roots extend throughout a dozen worlds
rings expand through time as branches reach
to brush the wayward mind like strokes of wind

Anima Cantus

There is a song that echoes in the soul,
silent swells of melody that crest in foaming chords
or fade to ripple lightly through the mind.

Set adrift in consciousness like souging winds
that play the reeds on distant lakeside marshes,
timbres merge and blend, reflecting every mood.

Vague emotions range across a scale of subtle tones
like deep harmonic waves within the sea,
silent swells of melody that crest in foaming chords.

Inward temperaments are scored in every mode;
dynamic sounds emerge in sundry measures,
set adrift in consciousness like souging winds.

Conceptions fluctuate as psychic tides
sweep essential overtones of meaning through the void
like deep harmonic waves within the sea.

Moments aggregate in streams of cheer and gloom
till rivers sing their way through astral motions;
timbres merge and blend, reflecting every mood.

Dreams irrupt with vital force from black foreboding depths
as rich divergent strains of vibrant hue
sweep essential overtones of meaning through the void.

Indistinct impressions resonate within
like woodwind solos etched against the moonrise,
set adrift in consciousness like souging winds.

Perceptions cantillate in shifting shades,
airs that shimmer half concealed or surge into awareness
as rich divergent strains of vibrant hue.

Feelings blend like cellos played in midnight woods
where hidden hills resound their phasing movements;
timbres merge and blend, reflecting every mood.

Welling up from karmic mists beyond our apprehension,
there is a song that echoes in the soul,
airs that shimmer half concealed or surge into awareness
or fade to ripple lightly through the mind.

Orphic intuitions pluck the thoughts and guide
with themes of never-ending transformation—
set adrift in consciousness like souging winds,
timbres merge and blend, reflecting every mood.

Cocoon

For a Park Ranger encountered on the Bright Angel Trail

It was like a dream, a nightmare spanning years;
I drifted through a world of predators,
my larval soul awash in rapid fears.

One day I passed your station; you stopped me on the way;
you asked me where I went to and why my eyes were closed,
then handed me a sleeping bag and wished me well.

So with your gift, this orange coverture,
I found peace in the night, but in the day
I drifted through a world of predators.

My life was filled with terror behind impassive walls;
my thoughts were pumped with poison, then once I fled those cells,
one day I passed your station; you stopped me on the way

and questioned me with care—I would not sway;
you could not know what I had just escaped from;
I found peace in the night, but in the day

my blood was mixed with shadows, turned into serum-waste—
you listened to my answers, yet sensed what I withheld,
then handed me a sleeping bag and wished me well.

Your simple gift permitted me to travel,
to mend the fractured crystal of my mind;
you could not know what I had just escaped from.

I fled my own destruction into the fearsome world
to chance uncertain highways before my fate was sealed;
one day I passed your station; you stopped me on the way,

my fourth day on the asphalt running blind
with nascent pupal hopes yet undiscerned
to mend the fractured crystal of my mind.

Perhaps my eyes revealed the weight of iron woes;
you somehow glimpsed the quandary that I could not expose,
then handed me a sleeping bag and wished me well.

Those fibers offered metamorphosis...
it was like a dream, a nightmare spanning years,
with nascent pupal hopes yet undiscerned,
my larval soul awash in rapid fears.

In time I learned to fly erratic on the wind,
my dusty wings capricious upon the windblown fields—
one day I passed your station; you stopped me on the way,
then handed me a sleeping bag and wished me well.

Surrender

I've learned a song that echoes through the mind
and permeates the waters of my soul
like whale-song echoes through the teeming seas
release came sifting down through redwood hues,
a mantra made of incandescent light,
a prayer: "God, what can I do for you?"

It whispers even now within my chest
dispelling many harbored pains and doubts
and permeates the waters of my soul
with rays that shimmer on the motes of mood.
Soft as hidden webs cast on the wind,
release came sifting down through redwood hues.

My will was petrified beneath the strain
of heavy fears, imaginary needs.
Dispelling many harbored pains and doubts,
an understanding settled soft as dew
and kissed the nape of my uncertain neck,
a prayer: "God, what can I do for you?"

A life of loss, betrayal, emptiness
has fixed in me a shattered ego full
of heavy fears, imaginary needs.
How many times I've carved the night with pleas,
yet in the torment of my last defeat
release came sifting down through redwood hues.

An ever-present message bearing failure
in undulating waves of resonance
has fixed in me a shattered ego full
with dreads that haunt a realm of inner gloom.
Yet inspiration works to free me through
a prayer: "God, what can I do for you?"

With nothing left to lose beyond my breath,
I've learned a song that echoes through the mind
in undulating waves of resonance
like whale-song echoes through the teeming seas.
Let go, resounds an answer through my heart,
abandon all despair who enter here—
Release came sifting down through redwood hues,
a prayer: "God, what can I do for you?"

Closure

It sometimes seems impossible that I've managed to write enough of these difficult poems to prepare a third volume. Working within a poetic structure for an extended period can be every bit as frustrating as it ends up being rewarding. The most frustrating moments have come from feeling trapped in the form, as if I could never possibly find a new way to word things. Yet I've learned a great deal about English and methods of expression and depiction through this process, more than I ever could have if I "just wrote what I feel, man". But more importantly, I've *naturalized* much of what I've learned, which has been the goal all along.

Volume IV will include villanelles and terzanelles again. I have no idea how long it will take for me to generate the material for it. But once I do, and I have prepared and published the chapbook, I'll consider this project concluded, at which point my next project will begin. In fact, I've already started generating material for the next project, which will deal with various types of segmental syntheses within triadic forms.

I hope you've enjoyed reading or browsing this chapbook. Its poems span one of the most interesting chapters of my life. A chapter which has taught me more about myself and the world I live in than perhaps I've ever learned before. Ironically, this is partly what these study projects are all about, learning about myself and the world I live in.

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