

Yggdrasil

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Editors Note: Before Patrick White died March 1, 2014 we had planned an issue of his poems for June 2014 together. To keep my promise, I decided to have a fan of his, Marie Cliche Royer, edit the issue.

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Introduction

First of all I want to thank Klaus Gerken, editor and founder of Ygdrasil for asking and giving me the honour for being guest editor for this special issue in memory of Patrick White poet, writer and artist. It's on Facebook that I had the opportunity of discovering Klaus' eloquent poetry and Ygdrasil's monthly issue which I call "The Poets' society" It's also on the web that I noticed the beautiful nature and night paintings by Patrick White. I find that seldom artists draw nocturnal scenes and when I made this remark to Patrick, he replied, "I always wondered why so few artists paint the night as well. And even fewer people know anything about what's over their heads. But think that human sensibilities are now adapting to galactic frames of reference that will condition their inner experiences of life accordingly. I experience life as a kind of picture-music. Colours sing. And the distinction between paintings and poems is intellectually imposed. And I swear there are times when you can hear a colour and see a sound. No one of our senses can express what it encounters except in terms of another, so deep down, there is only one mode of knowing. Myriad waves on the surface, but within, all water, all one. No distinction in the reality of either. A classical poet, Simonides of Ceos, once wrote. Ut pictura poesis. As a painting so a poem, and in my life this has definitely been the case."

I also discovered another facet of Patrick's artistic work, this time by reading his poetry in the February 2012 issue of Ygdrasil. I was so overwhelmed by his facility of expressing himself with words... it was as easy for him to speak out this way as breathing. I asked him how he did it and he replied. "Been writing since I was ten. Hardly a day goes by I don't write at least eight hours. And when I'm not writing, I'm painting. I live my life in the cracks in between: been doing this for last fifty years. Always seemed I could dip into the river anytime I liked. Don't know why, just that way with me. It's my small boy's notion and hope of doing some good in the world, and adding a little beauty to it for my having been here."

I must admit that once I started to read his poems it was the point of no return for me...the first one I read on his Facebook page was "MAKING PEACE WITH MY FATHER", and I must add that I already had adopted him in my heart before finishing reading it.

So I don't need to tell you that when I met Patrick for the reading of *Redshift* in Ottawa on February 16...it was for me the consecration of the reader to the poet...it was one of the most memorable moments in my existence. I found Patrick to be a very humble man even though he was surrounded by fame and publicity. He was so courageous and bold to come to the reading since he was terminally ill but this is something he wanted to do. He also spoke a few words about the importance of caring and being helpful to each other. I know this was one of Patrick's great qualities which I felt so well when I read his poems...that throughout his life he had such a kindly and lenient attitude toward others ...Today I know for a fact that he is already dearly missed by so many.

Before ending this introduction I would like to share with you this quote by Helen Keller, “*What we have once enjoyed, we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes part of us*”.
Patrick White R.I.P. (September 15, 1948 – March 1, 2014).

Marie Cliche Royer



Marie Cliche Royer and Patrick White at Ekstasis and Books on Beechwood , 16 February 2014.

(Photo by Marie Cliche Royer)

ENOUGH OF DEATH FOR A NIGHT LOST AT SEA

Enough of death for a night lost at sea.
For the agony and the misery of the death
of Sparta. For the death of Corinth, For the death
of me wincing as if the tumour had just shot me
in the left shoulder blade despite the codeine.

Woundedness. A new trapline. Won't eat
my leg off for this one. Bait it with my own
pain. Wait for someone to come back
with a scalpel and skin me alive. Gone

where I can forget about what it's doing
to me. Trying to tear me down until
there's merely a scorched chimney.
An empty mail box shot full of holes.

Gone where I made love to an artist
in a red tide on Hornby Island and everything
was gratifying and radiant about her
as the waves swept over us in veils shawls
sheets of stars that were always blue white and young.

Gone to a poetry reading with a new book.
Dressed in black before the mike. Someone
passes you a note. You are the black robed
outlaw poet priest. It's hard to take yourself
seriously and I point out they forgot rodeo clown.

Even with a new book of poetry I'm never enough
of what I want to be. I'm always hungry for
a new dimension of nakedness. Shedding all
these leaves life masks pages poems covers
lecterns podiums positions postures even
these cloaks of invisibility I hide behind
an eleven way mirror that refuses to be interrogated.

Most people are boring to me because they
never go deep enough into their own root fires
and darkness. They've got nothing to talk about
because they don't know who they are yet. They're
still inside the cosmic egg trying to peck
their way out to overcome their neurotic flights
of cramped fancy. You tell them about the night sky

outside but you don't expect to be believed
by any bud that hasn't seen the sun yet. Give
it time and most of them will but I won't be here
to see five petals open and one flower bloom.

The frumpy handbags come to the poetry reading.
The bag ladies and the madwomen. The pompous
bullfrog poseurs. The snakey oil salesmen. False prophets.
Lonely romantics in one room sugaring the air
with overcolored pheromones. The middens

of history dressed up as waste disposal pits.
The ambassador who called it quits with papers
and mistook protocol as a real voice to tell us all
how to compromise ourselves out of existence
to get along in life. What's the sound of one hand

clapping? Awkwardness between the gap
of who you are and who you're trying to be
is not the way to indict your poetry against
everything that's ranged against it. Never suffered
a day in his life. His lack of hunger shows.

Dressed up like me for the occasion. But
his lack of vocation and a shabby recitation knows.
Yet compassionate. Everybody finds a place
above the salt at the table. Everybody sits down
with everybody and listens while the other
is speaking to what it is they're about to say.

Things about love and life and death that are
mostly obvious but every once and a while
something insightful and beautiful that doesn't
pander to a rhyme. Clear and free that firefly
of luminosity touching the heart through the eye.

The same eye by which I see the star
is the eye by which the star sees me to rephrase
the German mystic with Cambridge cosmology.

One out of three times that was the beginning
of an affair that lasted for years of learning
how to cry and die your way into the future
of your solitude when it had to be over so the other
could set the stranger free. Mystic intimacy
the kind of estrangement that keeps love alive.



Patrick White at home.

(Photo by Jeremy Ennis)

HOW STRANGE NOT TO EXIST ANYMORE

How strange not to exist anymore. Not to listen to the summer frogs and crickets letting their lust out like a universal harmony of a background white afterbirth pleading for more life. Not to see the wild irises bloom along the river and think of the Pleiades come to earth. Not to discuss your sorrows with the willows at night. Not to name stars

and take a boyish pride in the act of knowing. Not to be aware of your earlobes your nose your eyes. Especially your eyes. Not to see. Not to be aware of you don't know who you are. To believe everybody that says without asking bad or good you're so and so.

I can shed all my straw dogs my Venice of surrealistic life masks my sexual disguises like the dark unleafing of a tree walking naked in winter cold to the bone but clear.

Jimmy strolling casually barefoot up the lane in late January with nothing but overalls on. The last to leave the farm the first to receive. Jimmy got the farm. He read many many magazines. Went twenty five miles to Perth once. That was a trip of a life time. Never took another.

Not to remember that this ever existed. Not to taste the core of food now as you couldn't before. To know with no good effect that you're leaving more than you ever suspected you were and now it's too late to pursue the acquaintance.

Who are you I'm always in pursuit of an earthly excellence? Estranged you must be to me on desolation row. I would not impose a death sentence on anyone I loved. I would lead them away from me even if they were willing to share with me the blinking out of the mystic specifics of my solitude.

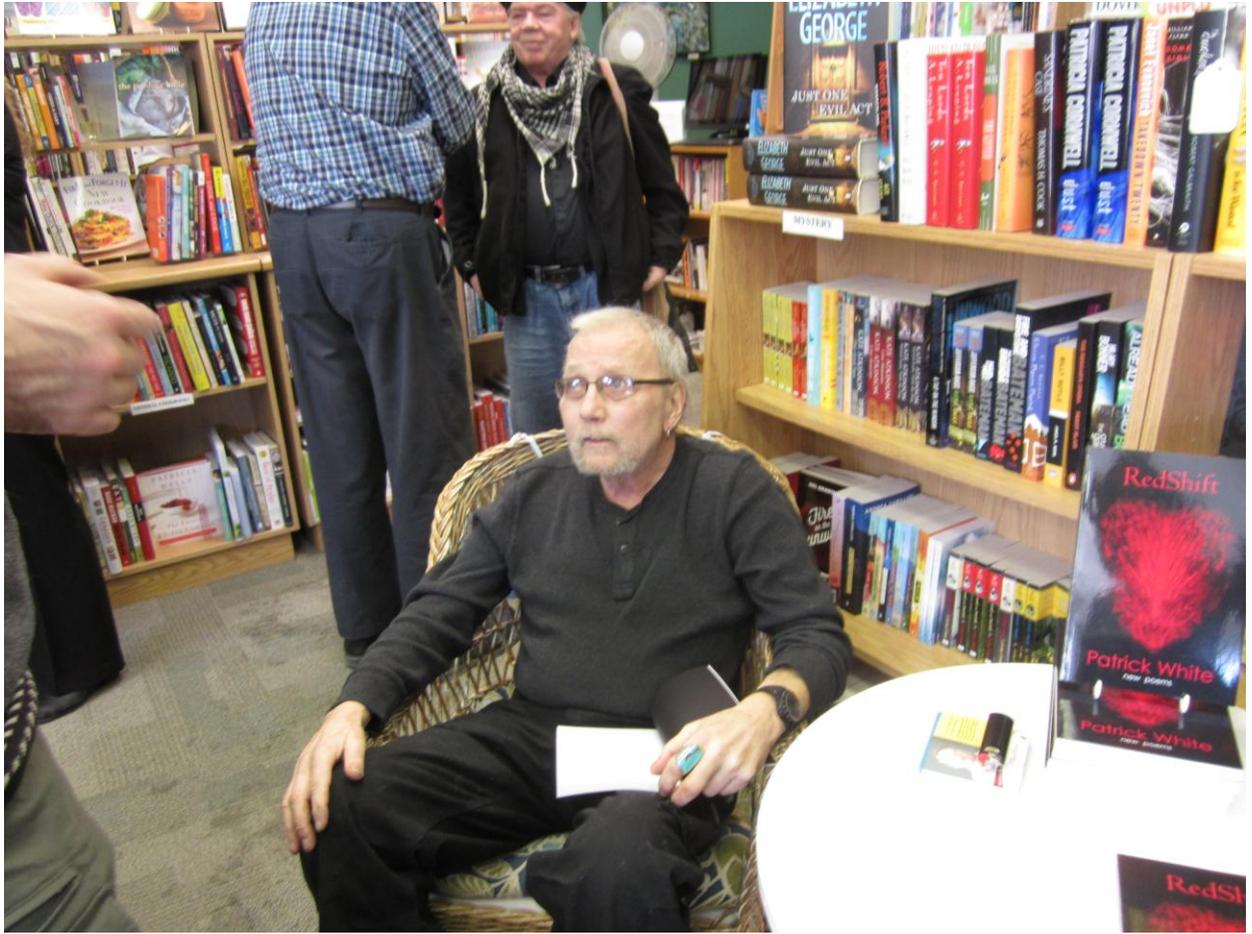
The stillness of my body under the sheets.
The death that has over taken me
an undertow its tidal pool of undertaker
body parts. Shore huggers that have
never put to sea without a star to steer her by.
Shipwrecks all barred and beached. Salvage.
To judge from the grave robbers that show up.

No more metaphors. No quantumly entangling
opposites in oxymorons. Just brilliant failures
rotting in their graves. Peers in death to the morons.
The fools who seem to get by without direction.
The genius who doesn't pilot his own spontaneity
with course corrections. The juno who recovers
the firesticks of her body and builds a kite
so she can fly over the moon on witches' fire.

Not to look for myself in peoples' faces like water
that's been crying all night for something
it's never going to have. Life after theatre
worth living. Theatre after life where all is forgiven
and it's got nothing to do with deserve.

Everybody was play acting at life anyhow.
I hear you're playing at being dead. The Japanese
are right about a lot of things. You bluff
your way in and out of the arrows and apple orchards.
This time I'm not running to Aleppo. I'll change
as I am and accept the consequences if I must.

Stardust not waiting to be made composite again
of my ingathered atoms into someone else
I can vaguely recognize as a distant echo of me.
Whoever that was. Has it all been for nothing
from the start. Have I served a purpose
I don't know about? Or am I just another
complicated thermophilic bacteria
in a diamond mine where the canary's dying
and the lamp I can barely see by to get out of here.



(Photo by Marie Cliche Royer)

O LADY PLEASE BE THERE

O lady please be there if just for the sake of one man
wanting to lift up his soul like a tree to the stars and say
praise, praise, praise, praise, praise for the ways
in which we are uplifted by these gusts of circumstance
into the cosmically sublime elevations of love that rest in the trivial.

O lady be a shadow of yourself, be alive, be dead.
Be absent in a way I never get you out of my head.
Be the victim of precisely embittered philosophers, forgive
the church if you have to, forgive me much, touch
my heart like a hermit thrush in the juniper
and let me bleed from your eyes waterfalls
of solitary nightbirds bathing together in the moonlight
as if they were swimming through the turmoil of the wave
in peace, communality and laughter at the way
things work out without anyone expecting them to.

O lady be a spirit, an eidolon, a sybil, a sylph, an oracle
a witch in good standing with the fire she jumps,
come from Cumae, Pythia, Eleusis or Karnak
it doesn't matter to me, just be there when I raise
up my arms like the burgundy antennae
of the alizarin crimson birchgroves in early spring
when the sulphur butterflies take note of the snowflakes
and the crocuses wear their vulvas under their cardinals' hats
that poke a hole in the snow like a no show seal hunt
without prospects of ever being beaten to death to make a living
again. Out of the pain. Out of the sorrow. Out of the joy.
Out of the man woman boy girl who has a chance to read this.
Out of the exquisite ecstasy that twists you up
like a Moebius Strip infinity sign quantumly entangled
with one musically inclined space time continuum
of all this picture music that you've been following
blind for years calling it what you will, your life.

Out of strife. Out of agony. Out of filth, poverty and anger.
Out of the fatuous plenty of a fattened manger of sacrifice.
Out of doubt, despair, atrocity, absurdity, desecration.
Out of the mouths of the tiny bugs you saw crawling on the stairs.
Out of molestation and mauling. Out of devastation
and bawling. In the taut silence of the highly pitched scream.
In the whisper of the dew that falls like the toxin
of deadly nightshade into the ear of your worst nightmare.

My daughter's back nearly thirty years away
and I want to say thank you in such a fashion to the stars
and the jade rabbit of the moon on the lowest rung
on the binging horizon that doesn't make it look like
it's gonna make it across the crosswalk turtle crossing
to the other side of itself but you never know? This has happened.
I am gonna speak up for myself. Praise. Praise. Praise. Praise. Praise.
Now and until the end of days. My daughter's back.
Praise. Praise Praise. Praise. Praise. Now and until
the beginning of all the rest of our nights on earth
spent looking up at you without anything to wish for more
than a father's heart being guided by his daughter through
door after open door like the waterclocks and wells that pass in peace
like the hearsts of the stars when they're flying south
with the urns of the Canada Geese skywriting
my love of you against the moon in spiritual contrails
that run circles around the conning tower of Babel in Babylon.

Praise. Praise. Praise. Praise. Praise. I am giddy with praise.

"Staggering news. Staggering. After thirty years of longing and loving and missing and looking I finally connected with my daughter after all these years. I could not conceive of a more deeply moving beatitude than this especially at this time of my life. Truly, the circle remains unbroken. Truly, I could not be happier." -- Patrick White



Patrick White's cat Ripple

(Photo by Jeremy Ennis)

CAT KNOWS

Cat knows. She looks at me. I drown
in the serenity of a thousand synchronized sphinxes
pouring through the mail slots of her eyes
as if everything that were wrong had gone
to the right observatory this time and no star,
no shepherd moon, no tree ring, no river of fire,
no ultra violet blood oath of wild irises
welding its swords together down by the sky
that cooled their ardour in the lake that played
second to none of them were a tear closer
to the harmonized impersonality of the truth than that.

The mirrors and the pencil stubs of the thumbby candles
in the shadows of the outhouse of the skeletons
in the closet of creative writing school show me
how well they can write minimally without words
when there's nothing else in the world they're attached to
but a remarkable silence that looks them straight in the eye
and says why bother juggling the universe
in every grain of sand in the ocean if you're never
going to join the circus of one-eyed laments on the go?

Assholes don't feed anybody's soul in the world
but their own genetically modified bung holes of shit spatter.
Pink nabobs imperializing their two ply toilet paper like leper colonies
of crop dusters sprinkling silver moonlight on their sacred seed
as if it were about to origami it into looking like something
like a face in a wad of gum. The virgin Wrigley and his mom,
the grand maggot. Well done, guys, here's another prize.
Intense heat. Unusual sprouts. Intense defeats. The usual routes.

Cat knows what I'm talking about and purrs
like a choir of burrs on the catwalk of the fishtank
doling itself out like loaves and fishes on the sly
as if for every season there were no time to say good-bye
to all the schoolyards it never got out of to love long enough
like tole painting in the face of global slaughter for art's sake
and her daughter with the abstract expressionist look on her face.
How to soil beauty in the overly educated litterbox of the heart.

The universe in every repellant grain of sand.
Sea breezes wafting over the pine trees and the desert flowers.
Magically tragic omissions of sin not knowing where to begin anywhere
and have done. With the door left open ajar.
For the vastness within that dwarfs who we are
by comparison with the black hole of the period at the end.

Run on, run on, you brimless nipple of a mighty participle.
The executives live the lesser of themselves on the shores
of the endless rivers of life like thread bare tires in the warped garbage
looking for a unified field theory they can give tenure to.

Cat knows. Cat knows. Cat knows. What God doesn't.
About the starmaps of the fallen sparrows under the window.



(Photo by Marie Cliche Royer)

MAKING PEACE WITH MY FATHER

You could be dead by now.
How would I know?
Last time I saw you
was fifty-five years ago.
My first day of school.
Your last with us.
You're the little man now, Paddy,
you said
then got on a greyhound bus
in front of Tang's Pagoda
as I watched the door close
on that fuselage without wings
as if the whale had just swallowed Jonah whole.
The last time I noticed we had the same eyes.
The end of your reign of terror.
As I remember you fifty-five years later
you were brutal, violent, cruel,
a con-man and a drunk.
You hurt people then laughed at their pain.
You were the lethal meltdown of a radioactive brain
that made the grass glow at night
from thousands of miles away
and poisoned the rain.
I went to jail with my mother to bail you out
more often than I was pushed into going to church.
And when you got out
you were always as angry as a killer bee
in the soggy autumn orchard of your hangover.
Life for you as it is for any coward
was one long complaint you took out on us.
My first seven years
I watched as many ambulances
take my shattered mother away for months
as many cop cars washing up on our doorstep
with all those messages in a bottle
that had your name on them
like a federal warrant for your arrest
as I recall the clinking horse-drawn milkwagons
with their coloured cardboard bottle caps
or the tinkling neighbourhood ice-cream trucks.
Remembering you now at this late date
is like fingering the fossils of a Tyrannosaurus Rex
and feeling the faint resonance
of your ferocity even yet

through my fingertips
like a warm-blooded mammal
in the menacing shadow of a reptilian law
whose last judgment was always a jugular in a jaw.
If you're dead,
if you're truly dead,
did you die alone?
Did anyone grieve?
Did you change over the years
and become a good man
as righteous as the stroke of midnight
and atone for anything
before you boarded the next bus for the abyss?
Was your last flashback of life
the tsunami you drowned in
after your psychological fault lines
flintknapped an earthquake
that brought the whole planet down on us
everytime you barged through the door
back from the bar
and turned a home into an avalanche?
Did you remember your children?
Did you remember me?
Did you ever wonder
how I turned out without you?
Who knows?
Maybe I'm way too late for your funeral
and this wreath of blood and thorns I bring
to lay on your grave
like the bitter irony you fathered in me
is not a fitting obsequy for either of us
because maybe, possibly, improbably
as you aged like an acid
time defanged your thunder
like a white cottonmouth
and the moon took back its crescents
and the lightning began to make crutches of the trees
it used to split like cedar shakes
with double-bladed bolts of light
that scorched so much more
than they ever illuminated in the darkness they returned to.
As if the whole of the little earth I knew then,
my mother, me, my brother, my sisters
sporting the wounds you gashed
on everyone's heart and a skull
like chopping blocks

under your bloodied blunted war-ax.
For longer than autumn's been keeping time now
with rosaries of geese in passage
like the secret names
of God on the run
for bouncing rubber cheques,
I have carried you around inside of me
like a chromosome in a coffin.
It's a kind of genetic locket
I sometimes open
to remember you by
when I'm mythologizing my scars
like blackholes among the stars
or the empty eyesockets
on the wailing walls of the dice
you loaded like the prophetic skulls of a bad choice.
And I still don't know if I've come
like an eviction notice
to this dismal place
to condemn you
or exorcise your ghost
I have despised you for so long within me
like the sloughed skin of a snakey oilslick,
the black blood of a haemorrhaging eclipse
that covers everything like an executioner's hood,
the birds, the sun, the sea,
every tarnished cell of me
in a darkness that won't wash off.
Or maybe I've just shown up again
like Empedocles on Aetna
to jump into the collapsed caldera of your grave
like the last flower.
Ambiguous homage with seven kinds of meaning
to a spent volcano
buried in itself
that once knew how to preserve the dead
in all the twisted shapes of prolonged agony
that has characterized the living ever since.
Every day of my life
I have wanted to give you back your name
like a white cross on a black plague door
that isn't me anymore
and never was.
Or maybe I should
jump down into your grave and say
Hey, Dad, isn't this sad for you and me

this is the way we take leave of each other for good
like chainsaws snarling through the heartwood of the family tree?
Isn't it just so incomparably sad
that a son being honest as a deathbed
with his father as he dies
over and over again in his imagination
as I do now here beside you
should lean over and whisper into his father's ear
with a heavy heart that regrets it was ever born to mean it
Hey, Dad, I want you to know
when it's my time to go
and I get to the other side
of all that was
and can be abandoned
time will heal everything
you did and didn't do
and all these severed bloodlines
reach their final watershed,
all the weak threads
of what was unbound
like rain in the river
fall into the flowing
and be made whole as strong rope again,
and the eye that offended be plucked out
and an old fist be opened up like the new palm
of a better afterlife than the one we had here,
and reunited families everywhere
break bread together in love and laughter
and every father be a strong rafter
and every mother be a lamp in a tent
and a cool night wind
as intimate and near
as stars in a desert,
and every son
say farewell to his father
as I do now here beside you
on this re-useable illusion of a death bed
where I am trying so hard to listen
to the voices in my heart
instead of the wise-guys in my head:
Father, farewell.
You gave me these empty eyes.
My mother filled them with compassion.
May peace marrow your troubled bones at last
and God soften the stone
upon which you lay your head.

What has passed has passed
like a storm out over open water.
You were my father at noon.
I was your son at midnight.
You withdrew like a shadow
that dreaded the light.
May God grant you a deeper insight
into these lives
we pass along to one another
like candles in the doorway of a dark night
and the courage to see
when they're blown out
and death comes to sever even this little thread
of earthbound lucidity
that exists like blood between you and me
why even if these eyes of yours you gave me
were washed up like the survivors of a shipwreck
on the eyelids of the same shores
we started out from together,
asked whose son I might be
and who among all the generations
of the unborn and unperishing gathered there
was the road that fathered my journey,
I would answer
my life was a river with only one bank
that flowed from a sea of shadows on the moon.
I would embrace my mother in tears
if I saw her standing there
for all the long, hard, humiliating years
she always sat on the edge of the bed
the last thing at night
before we fell asleep under her eyes
and quietly lowered herself down
like a ladder into a snakepit
so we could climb out
without getting bit by the same viper
that had struck her like black lightning
in the heel in an orchard in spring.
About you I wouldn't say anything.
I'd swallow my voice like a sword.
I wouldn't sacrifice a word
on the altar of the silence
that waited like a god
to hear himself named.
I'd shake my head.
I wouldn't look for you among the dead.



(Photo by Marie Cliche Royer)

THE WOMEN I HAVE LOVED

The women I have loved,
the taste of old fires in my mouth,
wild orchids
that summoned me
with their fragrance in the night
to mystery, ecstasy, danger and agony,
betrayal and loss,
intensities hotter than stars
that could thaw space like glass
in the coldest, deepest abyss of their beauty.

Seizures of flesh, potions of pain,
delirium of black poppies, eclipses, cloaks,
the sweet doom of paradise
in the effulgent bells of their hips
and their skin always
a starmap back to the earth, luminous braille
only the eyes in my fingertips could read.

Each was a way of breathing
in water, in fire, in stone, on the moon,
an atmosphere that clung to me
like the smell of an autumn night in their hair,
an era of seeing
that rooted like lightning
in the starmud of my poems.

Some were the windows of a palatial awareness
that astonished my heart like a peasant
and others, the rocks that crashed through it.
I tuned all my mirrors
to the high notes
of the most beautiful stars
in each of their constellations;
and the ones I loved best
were the windows
that could see both sides of God
and you could taste it in their eyes.

No doubt I was ruinous
in ways that it's taken years
of deep solitude and suffering
to clarify, the ore
wasn't always worth the metal within,

the volcanic rage of my baffled aspirations,
the urge to express, release, affirm, excel,
the way I parted women I loved like seas
in my quest for the promised land
and the way they closed up on me like pharaoh,
like a flower that doesn't want to look at the night
and lowers its lonely eye,
like coffin lids
that were once the petals of a mystic rose.

Who knows who was buried
on those sexual slopes
that overlooked the motif of the river
wandering easily
through the vistas of the valley,
or how the story truly ended
that went on writing itself
as it does today
long after we were villages,
tiny necropoli, perfectly preserved,
and wholly usurped
like utensils by the afterlife
of the erupting mountain
that put an end
to the interminable funeral orations
that unrolled us like thunder in hell.

We slashed heaven
with the bloody razor of the moon
like the vicious legates of a papal threat
to spiritually salt the holy ground
we were rooted in
like lava, blood, and lightning.

I am still a confusion
of wounded dreams,
and when I look at the moon,
the bruises, the dead seas,
I am devastated again and again
by a ghostly sorrow
that returns to my heart
like a dove to a dark bell
that once knew the morning with another.

The truth is slurred by time,
and the confessions we made to the sky,
gusts of shame and contrition,
tiny burnt-out match-heads
that once flared into big fires,
slagging their depletion
like ore in the rain,
were abysmally true to the moment,
as we felt the ground beneath our feet
sinking like a continent.

We may have drowned like Atlantis
but how many decades since
have we lain here
like a thousand other toppled shipwrecks
offering the hilts of our masts
sheathed in coral
and the bunting of weeds
to the sea that slowly accepts our surrender?

All the beauty of that seeing,
the laughter in bed,
the aloof eternity in the form of the woman
at the end of the garden,
seen through the kitchen window forever
as if I had never made love to her,
pulling weeds from among the asters,
forever true, forever
preternaturally true,
the mystery that transfixes
and devours me yet.

I have not laid my dream down
like the head of a child
on the pillow of a stony heart.
I have not looked upon the stars
that shone over us those long walks into each other
as if we were two banks of the same river
and we were still a wonder
and a temptation to each other,
two wings of the same gate
hopelessly opening.

I am still summoned against my will
to those dread nights we went out in each other
like down-turned torches,
and the bouquets of the daylilies,
those truces of fire and water
we burned beside,
turned into congested refugee camps
that plunged into civil war with their own reflections.

All along this road
where I carry my life
like the shoes in my hand
there is broken glass,
shattered goblets of the moon
we once drank from together,
shards of the suicidal chandeliers
we once danced under
like the tails of the unnamed comets
that followed us like paparazzi
as if we were the prophecy.

Vampires once cloaked like assassins
in the darkness of the light,
they still come for blood,
pleading in the shadows like beggars for alms,
and I am often aghast at my own compassion,
feeling the quick tendrils
of their tongues flickering in my heart
that my blood still feeds these candles in eclipse.

Perhaps there is more spontaneity
in the darkness
than there is in the light,
but I have not let my mouth
turn into an open wound,
or wielded the cold flame of my tongue
like a dagger of fire that could only be put out
in the blood of another.

Leeches and lilies
are born in the same pond
and I have not denounced one
at the expense of the other,
but have stood before both in silent awe,
trying to overhear any whisper
of what these things might mean

that they should still sweeten and startle
my deepening ignorance
like the shadows and stars
that leap out of their own darkness and light
to ambush and detain us with love and life
all along these lonely, vivid roads
that walk us like the wind
that moves me now to remember
the generosity of loss that is love,
and the flaring of the dust that we once were,
this frenzy of dust, this urgent dance of the dust
that will forever be
like the wind, like love,
like fire and life, like the nights
that bent down over me while I slept
and kissed me good-bye,
the journey whirling in the arms of its own destination.



(Photo by Jeremy Ennis)

WHEN I'M ALONE

When I'm alone
I want to be with someone,
and when I am with someone,
I'm twice as alone.
My unhappiness
is a snake-pit
I dangle my heart over
like a mouse by the tail
and when joy does show up,
a butterfly with resplendent wings,
it slowly adapts its palette
to the slag and soot and oilslicks
of the black orchard
shedding its petals everywhere
like micro-eclipses in hell.

And all the poems
I gathered like asters
from the autumn starfields,
all these skies that opened above me
as I walked down a long road alone
in darkness and light,
obedient to the wind and the shadows
that whispered move on, move on
beyond the journey and the arrival,
are merely a leaf,
a tattoo on the back
of a serpent of water
sliding downstream
like rain like mind in search of a course
that isn't the cracked map
of last year's desiccated creek bed.

My body is scarred, my heart
a voodoo doll
pierced by a thousand fangs
as it burns like a bee
in a rose of heretical fire
for refusing to turn my honey into venom
or conform to any magic but its own.

And there is no heaven
to appeal to as a last resort.
I endure what I endure

for the dignity
of my indefensible humanity,
knowing the pain
that sometimes turns my nerves
into stand-ins for the lightning
that keeps crackling my cosmic egg
like the paint of my last masterpiece,
also schools my blood like the wine
I pour out joyously
into the empty goblet of the mystery
whenever I host the moon.

Life is neither fair nor unfair
and the seeing, a vision, a poem
is always a bird
born and breaking free of your eyes
opening like a threshold
like a flower
like a crack of lightning,
like the world that hangs,
a veil of water,
from the ends of your eyelashes now.

Love is great, love is much, maybe all,
and the being here incomparable,
and the mystery always
whispering in a field beyond its own compass,
and the wind that tastes of birds,
and the light that tastes of flowers,
and the fountains of darkness
where God washes the stars off her face,
will always urge the extinguished branch
of an astonished pen
to blossom into a poet.

Are the dead any less creative
than the living?
If they don't come from anywhere
how can you ask where they go?
If everything is the unborn energy
of a dancing god
with worlds in her blood
how can even a blade of grass perish?

This world, this life,
this ungraspable now of awareness
is the passion of a goddess, not a passing thought.

Beyond this riot of blessing and anathema,
this racket of loss and acquisition,
of birth and murder,
there is a silence
deeper than the space
between breaths,
an abyss without longing
that knows you from within
as the fire knows the flame,
or a woman,
the haste of her lover.

If you think you know something,
cast the thought down
as you would a venomous serpent
or let it strike;
even the poisons
can unspool you like wine
in this delirium of life.

And isn't it more than could have been asked for
just to be here
under a sky
spun finer than the silk of diamonds,
breathing the stars in and out
like trees?

I have been silently and eloquently
stupefied by the wonder
all my life;
and urgently moved to explore
the great ocean of awareness
that intrigued me to experience myself
as the world,
I put to sea with a leaf for a sail.

We must become
more intimate with our vastness, learn
to listen to the whisper
that has always been us
in our own depths.

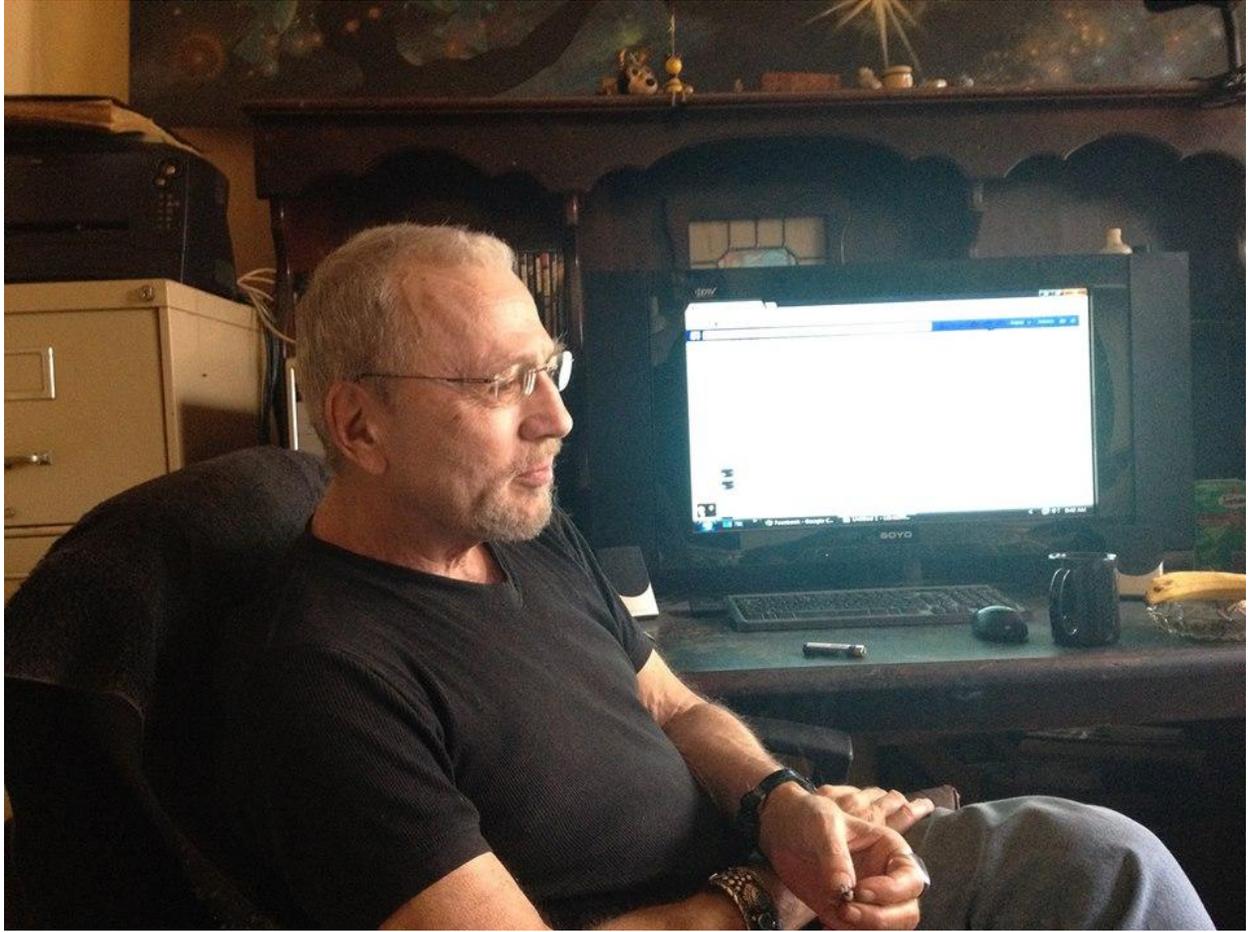
We have depleted our preludes of awe,
the spirit slags in the pit mines
of our complacent arrogance.
Our own creations
amaze and lull us away
from the sustaining abundance
of what was given spontaneously.

What do we know?
Why water?
Why stars?
Who is it that asks the question?

The fluid continuum of the mystery
is a waterclock
and every receptacle, an era.
And science can advance the shadows of life,
but the answers eventually fall like leaves
and no one knows how to account
for the stars that root in the duff.

What each of us sees
when we see deeper than blood
over the course of a lifetime
are the eyes of the goddess
when she looks at us.
What we are is our own creation,
curse and blessing alike.
You created heaven.
You created hell.
Experience is just the metal
shaped on the anvil of our hearts
into edges that kill like life,
the plough drawn from the stone,
not the sword,
or blades behind the door
that wound like serpents.

You can enlighten or eclipse
the iron in the ore
by pouring it
into a heart or a bullet.
You can make a nail
and build a house
or crucify a teacher.



(Photo by Jeremy Ennis)

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M HERE FOR

I don't know what I'm here for.
I just write. I just paint. Like breathing
in and out. Inspired expiration. I watch the rain,
blankly, sometimes for hours, washing off the dust
from the leaves of the trees in the traffic.
I stare at the comatose clouds through the grime
on the windows and wonder what the stars
are doing backstage. My skymind
unfolds like a star map and I disappear into it
like a nightbird with a message it doesn't care
is heard or not, because when I'm singing,
I'm not singing into a mirror. Verbal expression
isn't thinking, and I'm not spider enough
to hang suspension bridges between
my words and my thoughts to harmonize the web
everybody gets caught up in like packing tape
as my bodymind tunes me up like a guitar
to the electrical buzzing of flaws in my argument.

I don't know what I'm here for, but I often think
it's pathetically petty to go looking for a meaning to life
like the light going round and round trying
to catch a glimpse of the shadow it casts like a tail,
when we're the life of the meaning from beginning to last.
One meaning for everything? One size fits all?
The same collective death mask for every individual?

I fall asleep dreaming and wake up
like a mirage in the morning trying to sort out
the grain from the chaff, what's real from what's
merely the facts of the dark matter. But by the time
I've rubbed the crumbs of starmud out my eyes
and the lake mists still clinging like hungry ghosts
to my visions of last night have been exorcised
like lunar atmospheres, I can see clearly enough
I'm just the space all these thought waves travel in,
and as they say in Zen, the eternal sky
doesn't inhibit the flight of the white clouds.

What is space here for? Or light? Or water?
Or the colour, red? And what meaning for love
was ever necessary in the throes of it?
Should this long, dark, radiant firewalk
in our sleep along the Milky Way ask my feet

what the meaning of going anywhere is, why we're here
extrapolating ourselves back into the past
as if who we were yesterday is who we are today?
Evolution's given me a taste for the evanescence
of a self that keeps on shapeshifting like space and time
in the live-streaming dreams of a belated Etruscan
watching the river turn like smoke in the air.

Poetry is the art of expressing what you can't define
though it sounds as if you knew what you were
talking about at the time as everyone listened
sublimely in silence to a nightcreek babbling
through the woods in the dark like the waters of life
in the laughter of a child lost in the seriousness
of playing opposite herself for awhile like a new moon.

Ever wash your hands and feel somehow
you've stepped far enough back from yourself
you're not the one who's rinsing them off
and something eery and intriguing overcomes you
when you realize not even your fingers are your own?

I don't possess my thoughts. I don't own my emotions.
I'm a great creative collaboration with the unknown.
I'm an unpaginated encyclopedia of minor miracles
that come and go like sparrows to a tree.
And when it rains, the eyes of the universe are upon me.

But I don't know what I'm here for. Does it
matter anymore? When I die is it all that radical
if I don't know why? All my life I've fallen in love
with less reason than that. And do I really need
a philosophy to separate? A *modus intendi*
to back up my alibis for why I'm not always loveable
when I can see it in my lover's eyes when she cries
on a winter night like an abandoned housewell
that the lightbulb's gone out that used to keep her warm
and she doesn't know what she's here for anymore.

Nor do I. As we both agree to an honourable death
as if death would otherwise rebuke us for disloyalty
and the three quarter inch copper pipes
slash their wrists longitudinally the way
you're supposed to when you're serious enough
about renewing your virginity sitting naked
in a bathtub full of fireflies trying to freeze-dry your wounds.

If you don't know what you're here for. Go for it.
Or don't. Maybe you can start a new religion
of your sins of omission and the left-handed virtues
of all the things you didn't do, right or wrong,
and won't. Or win a prestigious literary award
in a cherry-picked succession of unremarkable poets
who hang out like flypaper at night with porchlights
hoping among all the insects they attract
they might find one black dwarf of a first magnitude star
that sticks like a burnt-out match head to their chromosomes,
a mutant cinder of genius that doesn't get in their eyes
so they don't have to start crying all over again
like a watercolour in the rain to wash it out.

Can't find any training wheels on why you're here,
and all the scarecrows you made out of your spare crutches
to keep the birds from raiding your secret gardens,
are chafing under their armpits like medical skeletons
working on a cure for themselves that doesn't
come too late to do them any good? Maybe it's time
to walk out on yourself for once and stand up on your own
among the homeless who have no one but themselves
to rely upon. Or maybe you prefer a life that's become
a hospital where the healthy aren't welcome,
and only the worst atrocities of mediocrity
are admitted by the emergency nightshifts
to the asylums muttering in their dreams as if
they'd been medicated by the full moon threshing
short straws of genetically modified wheat?

For the last two years I thought I was here
to walk along the banks of this seance of rivers,
late at night by myself, under the willows and the stars,
revamping the images of old lovers like the wavelengths
of spectral flowers reflected back like old radio programmes
from hydrogen clouds in deep space that kept
their ghosts intact out of earshot of the facts of my life.

Somehow the candles have gone out
in the bright vacancy of noon like the shadows
of sundials and I weary of my purpose in life now
like a compassionate man who has been overly generous
with his lies at the bedside of someone dying inside.
I'm waterclocking my way like moonset into a new abyss
just to pass the time rinsing the blood off my hands

of the hemorrhaging roses I put my heart into
trying to save from the endless sacrifices
they made of themselves on my behalf, but couldn't.

I hear the voices of dead singers from my past.
Or YouTube conjures their images like Merlin
and I know they're skin and bones by now
and their fingernails have grown out like guitar picks,
and their skulls are more oracular than fallen meteors,
and I am overcome by the poetic sweetness
of the sad shadows that once drove us to drink
as we firewalked the whole length of our lyrical cremations
just to fill our urns with something as inextinguishable
as lace and pretty flowers, dragons in the lockets of angels.

I rehumanize the simulacra of their fossilized remains,
images of pixelated skin, echoes of the refrains
I remember like the mantras of my youth when the dawn
was as shrill as a killdeer in the spring, and nightfall
was a hospital for wounded nightingales
and washed-up phoenixes weeping on their own parades
sat at kitchen tables long into the night ruminating
like candles on the glory days of tragic heroes
making a farce of their legends by living them
like morality plays mythically inflated at the end
by a lot of repetitious zeroes getting carried away in chains.

How strange to be singing a friend's song to myself
long after the whole world's outlived them,
and their names are being ushered funereally
like rare antiquities into grave robbing halls of fame.
And who knows? Maybe that's how legends are made,
what we're here for, born for, die for, like a vow
of silence we made over the graves of tomorrow
we revel in breaking like a curfew of sorrow today.
Que sais je? Montaigne's motto. What do I know?
And even if you could. Me and my mantra. Who can say?



(Photo by Jeremy Ennis)

I WANT TO MAKE A BIG SUMMATION

I want to make a big summation. Sum it all up
in a grandstand statement. Don't know what to say really.
Some of it was rough. Some of it was frilly.

Poetry found me in life about the same time
the knives did. And the stars. You couldn't hide
them from a kid. No fingerprints on the light.
No pain in the shadows of the stars. No back stairs.

Then I fell in love with flowers. City of flowers, Victoria.
People hang baskets of them from the pawn shop
snow globe lamp posts. Tree level scale three at a time.

As if they were weighing something odd. God by the pound.
Or Anubis were expecting you to add a little white feather.
Whether whether whether whether you could or not.
I used a seagull feather I found in the gutter beside Pandora's Box.

I tried to love people but it was a miserable job.
I went back to planting flowers with God by the pound.



(Photo by Jeremy Ennis)

All poems by Patrick White

Post Scriptum



Painting of Patrick White by Patrick Ennis

Gate, ga-te, pa-ra-ga-te, pa-ra-sam-ga-te.

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