

Clapping with One Hand:
Selected Poems

George W. Wolfe

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In memory of
Mildred Trivers

the poet of Twin Ponds Lane

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Preface

In 1985, I began attending a creative writing group that met weekly in room 401 at Brackin Library at Ball State University. The group had been organized Mildred Trivers, the “poet of Twin Ponds Lane.” Mildred was an elderly well-known Indiana poet who had published several chapbooks and was attracting a number of published authors. Known by the rather un-poetic name of “the 401 club,” many of the writers who attended were experienced poets who helped me refine my use of language and inspired me to explore new directions in my creative work.

Three years later, the group began receiving grants to hold an annual festival of poetry and art in Mrs. Triver’s barn. The festival became known as the “Humpback Barn Festival,” and was a popular event each October on a weekend when the fall colors were at their best in Indiana.

Approximately 30 poems by local writers were selected each year for the festival. Each poem was then given to a local visual artist who would collaborate with the author to create a visual artwork inspired by the poem.

Many of the poems in the following collection were the result of by interaction with poets in the 401 Club. Several also were poems selected for the Humpback Barn Festival.

It is often said that the various art forms exist for the purpose of expressing the ineffable or, what cannot be expressed in words. Yet poetry is inherently paradoxical in that the poet is using words to express what cannot be expressed in words. This is done through well-known poetic devices, such as metaphor, simile, imagery, symbolism, allegory and alliteration.

Poems have at least two levels of meaning, these being the literal and the metaphorical. The phrase “The eagles gaze,” for example, evokes an image that makes sense in a literal context. But if I say, “The eagle’s sharp gaze pierces the fog” I have added attributes that are no longer true in a literal sense. Likewise with a phrase like “The moon burns throughout the night.” An eagle’s gaze doesn’t literally “pierce” fog, nor does the moon literally “burn.” Yet poetically, these phrases I have illustrated above evoke imagery and convey great meaning.

Literalism has been called “day language,” while poetry has been said to use “night language.” Night language inspires us to “read between the lines.” It strives for ambiguity as ambiguous language encourages multiple interpretations. Indeed it often harbors a level of meaning which even the author is unaware. Hence it is said the “muse” is speaking through the poet.

Because poetry is inherently paradoxical, I chose for this collection, a title derived from the famous paradoxical Zen Koan “What is the sound of one hand clapping.”

While studying Hindustani music at the Ali Akbar College of Music in San Raphael, California, I discovered that Indian Philosophy speaks of two categorizations of sound: the “struck sound” and the “unstruck sound.” The struck sound is that part of the music we hear. But what is the “unstruck sound?” Applying this concept of unstruck sound to the Zen Koan “What is the sound of one hand clapping” has enabled me to view this koan in an entirely different light, because when one hand claps, there is nothing for the hand to strike against!

Indian philosophy teaches that creation was born from the Absolute, or as it is also called, the Unmanifest. The Unmanifest is a formless state for pure potentiality, beyond all multiplicity, and all duality. Creation manifests from this eternal source and then dissolves back into its unmanifest condition at the end of its cycle.

The symbol for the unmanifest is water, and in Indian philosophy, it is said that just before creation is born, a primordial wave arises on the ocean of the unmanifest. Because the unmanifest absolute is infinite, nothing from outside can strike it to give rise to this primordial wave (you cannot get outside infinity). The wave, therefore, is said to arise by its own nature, from its own awakened creative energy. It is thus an “unstruck” wave, and since sound consists of waves, this primordial wave as a vibration is the unstruck sound.

There is a story from India that after the Absolute that brought forth its creation, it was pleased with its creative work and wanted to express its joy. If one applies this story to the Zen koan mentioned earlier, it is as if the Absolute wanted to applaud for itself. But since it is undifferentiated oneness and beyond duality, it only had one hand to clap with. This story suggests that the “sound of one hand clapping” is the Absolute welling up into its own eternal wave of infinite joy. This unstruck wave is beyond the thinking mind and is so subtle it can only be experienced in meditation when the mind is silent.

And that I believe is the ultimate purpose of poetry, to lead the mind inward so the listener can enter a state of quiet reflection where he or she can hear their inner voice and extract deeper meaning from sensory experience. A person then begins perceiving from the level of the heart, and it is from there that the mystical experience of Oneness, which is inherently poetic, becomes known.

GW
Raccoon Lakeside Lodge
May 20, 2015

Chapter 1

*In the Shadow of the Sun:
A Portrait of India*

To
M.K. Gopaldaswamy,
My Friend
in
Bangalore

These descriptive images were conceived in New Delhi, Bangalore, and Calcutta in December and January of 1991-92. They are the result of my intense experience with India.

Within the text, numerous references are made to Hindu deities and passages in the Rig Veda. For those readers unfamiliar with Indian literature and its elaborate mythology, a list of explanatory notes is provided.

G.W.
San Francisco
February 22, 1992

I

New Delhi¹ wears a garland of shadows as
she stretches through the dawn still wrapped

in an age of sleep, reborn from the
rubble of conquerors who forgot

she was immortal. She lifts her eyelids
to a bulging red sun that tries to cleanse

the saffron-colored sky. I sit where my
mind can wade in streams of Vedic hymns²

as breezes coax incense through the temple
doors. My breath hovers³ with the fog.

I enter the womb a second time.⁴

II

I step between the mirrors of paradox
 In this land that sweats with meaning and gold
 traditions,
 Where women dress in celebration of silk and
 color
 And men urinate by the street,
 Where priests burn the sacred camphor⁵ to gods as
 old as light,
 And street fires mark the temples of the
 homeless.

A rickshaw takes me to an evening concert.
 My lungs quarrel with the fumes and dust-filled
 air.
 A leper petitions me with contorted hands.
 I step into his eyes, even as I walk away.

At the concert, a sitarist's raga lifts
 Me to a realm where thought disappears,
 Where timeless harmony awakens
 the primeval song.
 History slips beneath the plane of knowing.
 Antiquity and today fuse in a wave of
 omnipresence.
 I stop asking "Why?"

The applause jolts me back to a dissonant reality.
 I see myself again, as I try to preserve the
 silence of centuries.

III

A little girl races through traffic
to sell balloons bent into the
shapes of swans and flowers.

“Two rupees,” she yells, dodging
cars to reach me near the curb.

I point to the swan, and see within
her graceful smile a tomorrow
twisted and bound by the tether
of her rags. Yet there is no resentment
to wash from her eyes, no anger sleeping
beneath her words.

“Take 20,” I insist, and quickly move
on. She runs after me with my change—

loses the race.

IV

On Hailey Road a guard stands mounted
behind sandbags like a bronze war hero.
He sports a shawl of bullets, his face
lined with vigilant distrust. The embassy
he guards is set to receive diplomats,

adorned with barbed wire, political graffiti
and pictures of Khomeni. I pass by and wave
from a safe distance. My smile penetrates
his fortress. His third-world composure melts
into defenseless surprise, for a moment,

destroying his illusion. But my footsteps
synchronize with the rhythm of soldiers.
Instinctively he cocks his head and looks
away, wielding his gun with a grip as certain
as the next revolution.

V

My heart beats
faster than the
theka⁶ to which she
moves as she
spins in her dance⁷
a holographic dream,
the stars exploding
beneath her feet.

In her the planets
turn in perfect
synchrony while
the solar wind
longs to touch her
ink-black hair.

Her eyes grab
hold of my breath,
her face shines
with the Calcutta
moon.

I look away,
glance at her
feet, reach out
from beyond
the zodiac where
nobody sees.

VI

In Bangalore, sparks of flavor ignite
my palate as
Our hands gather what the women have prepared,
Hot curry served on stainless steel,
Royal hospitality in an unheated home.

My stomach churns like the pressing stones⁸
Purifying the herbs in metabolic fire.
I sense the rush of that sacred
Drink from which the poet and scripture
are born,
Surging upward with a naked brightness.
The gods are pleased.

We speak as if tasting the filtered moonlight.
Our words smack of Patanjali⁹, Arjuna¹⁰ and the
source of the Ganges.¹¹
I not to the host:
“More yogurt please.”

VII

At Agra fort, peddlers flank our tour bus
in a commercial siege of desperation.
Our guide marches us through their barrage
of glitter. Inside he tells stories of
harems, execution by crocodiles and deposed
royalty. A mile downstream, the river bypasses
the Taj Mahal with its intruding towers and
inlaid gems, where a dead emperor and his
wife are enshrined in their marble tomb.
The clattering of tourists makes it difficult
to hear. I become anxious to move on.

Two days later we visit a cremation site in
Delhi, where an unsteady flame blinks nervously
against the wind. I look for the peddlers,
the towers and precious gems but find only
a black marble slab littered with rose petals.
Here the immortal Gandhi is preserved in
the simplicity of his greatness.

People stare into the silence. Our
guide has run out of stories. I ask him
for more time.

VIII

The crafts emporium stays open
late. As I enter, the salesmen
perk up their ears and arch their tails,

“Could we interest you in a
saffire for your wife – at a
very good price?”

yet try to veil their predatory
excitement.

“How about a shawl that can
pass through a ring?”

They surround me with famished
eyes, as if sighting their
first kill in seven days.

“Or silk rugs that change
color in the light?”

“Let me see this carving of Lord
Shiva,¹² the destroyer of ignorance.”
But they were not followers of
Shiva, or Krishna,¹³ or even Allah.¹⁴
They worshipped the goddess known
as “Rupee,” progenitor of greed
and self-interest, daughter of
Babylon the Great.¹⁵

“We also have inlaid marble
plates, crafted in the
tradition of the Taj Mahal?”

“Not interested,” I reply. “The
people who make them are oppressed
and underpaid.”

They look at me like I’m a
strange sort of species.

IX

How can you sleep by the street old man
With the sun scratching at your face?
Do your eyelids ever close?
Have you not strength enough to
 brush away the flies,
 sigh with the wind, or
 drink your own tears?

I understand. You sleep in that
 dreamless realm
Where desires choke in a void of
 barren promises,
Where even the sun casts a shadow.
This walk of stone, once your bed,
 has become your crypt.
How long did you wait, old man, for
 Lakshmi¹⁶ who never came?

X

They gather for cricket¹⁷ with the thirst
of heroes – rich and poor, hungry for
more than rice, stepping off the world
for an inning or two. The rules never
end, neither does the laughter of the boys
to bat in the spirit of DiMaggio,¹⁸ but
there are no free bases here, and no
foul balls.

“Guard the bails,” they remind me, “and
don’t drop the bat when running the wickets!”

Spectators look on as the night sneaks
in behind us. Our bowler unleashes the
ball with the power of Indra.¹⁹ an unassuming
chap connects to score four runs. His
teammates cheer. They forget about the
caste²⁰ and empty stomachs.

XI

From within the cave of history,
 Hidden for millennia, the
 Pundits²¹ preserve their hymns as
 Custodians of the Veda, that gift
 from the rishis,²² the
 Primal sounds²³ of which Creation is
 the expression,
 From whom came the unspoken formulas²⁴
 Whereby the soul takes up wings,
 The lenses of the mind are cleansed,
 The Self unveiled.

In Belur,²⁵ we step behind the centuries
 Into the temple of Vishnu²⁶ moving
 amidst images woven in stone.
 There I witness the dance of chaos and
 divine order,
 Spiraling on its mobius journey²⁷ through
 the four yugas,²⁸
 Leaving in its wake a faint trace
 of meaning
 Seen only by the wise.

In time, the stream of Vedic utterance,
 Churning beneath the subconscious mind²⁹
 Breaks ground to flood the world with
 light,
 From which are born the fountains of
 redemption.³⁰

Then those who choose may partake of the
 Mystic marriage³¹ whereby

 suffering dies,
 duality is consumed in oneness,

And the cosmic body,³² once broken into
 bits of ignorance
 Is re-joined in the womb from which a
 new Creation is born.

* * *

Near the gate, the man guarding our shoes
Points the way to the village street.
There we are greeted by beggars, and the
passage of time.

NOTES

1. New Delhi: The capital city of India – depicted here as a temple goddess waking up from an age of darkness.
2. Vedic hymns: The hymns of the Vedas comprise the sacred writings of Hinduism.
3. Breath hovers: in meditation, breathing is naturally suspended when transcendence of nirbija samadhi is attained
4. Enter the womb a second time: The womb refers to “Hiranyagarbha,” the golden womb of Creation from the Rig Veda. In this image, womb symbolizes the experience of meditation where the yogi’s mind is absorbed in Brahman, the unbounded Absolute. As Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, “My womb is the great Brahman. . .” (XIV:3). As an extension of this womb metaphor, there is a “twice born” concept in Hinduism. The first birth refers to coming out of one’s mother’s womb; the second is a spiritual birth traditionally signified through an initiation by a spiritual teacher entitling the discipline to study the Vedas (Swami Nikhlanada, *The Upanishads*. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekanada Center, 1949, Vol. 1, p. 4). In the context of yoga, however, second birth is the result of the mind entering the womb of Brahman in meditation, and one day being born into enlightenment to enjoy the state of eternal freedom. The concept of second birth is also found in Christianity, most notably in the Gospel of John where Nicodemus asks Jesus how it is that one can “enter a second time into his mother’s womb?” (John 3:4). However, the similarities between second birth in Christianity and the Vedic image generally go unrecognized.
5. Camphor: Used in the performance of the ceremonial puja, the burning of camphor symbolizes the melting of the individual ego into the universal Absolute.
6. Theka: The basic pattern of drum strokes that identifies a “tala” or rhythmic cycle in classical Indian music.
7. Dance: A reference to kathak, a form of classical North Indian dance that utilizes spins and other dynamic movements.
8. Pressing stones: In this image the soma sacrifice of the Rig Veda is presented as a metaphor for digestion, the pressing stones symbolizing the breaking down of food, the heat of metabolism symbolizing Agni, the sacred fire, and the soma drink being the natural endorphins in the brain that make possible the experience of poetic inspiration and transcendental perception of reality.
9. Patanjali: Author of the Yoga Sutras.

10. Arjuna: A hero in the Mahabharata.
11. Source of the Ganges: A symbol for the source of truth.
12. Shiva: The Hindu god of destruction who, for the yogi, is the destroyer of ignorance.
13. Krishna: In Hinduism, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu.
14. Allah: An Islamic name of God.
15. Babylon the Great: Found in the Christian book of Revelation, here used to symbolize a society corrupted by worldly values.
16. Lakshmi: Hindu goddess of wealth, wife of Lord Vishnu.
17. Cricket: An English game, now very popular in India, similar in some ways to baseball.
18. DiMaggio: Refers to the legendary American baseball player, Joe DiMaggio.
19. Indra: Hindu god of strength. Also, the god of rain.
20. Caste: The system of social order found in traditional Indian society.
21. Pundits: Vedic scholars who pass on the Vedas through oral tradition.
22. Rishi: Seer of the Veda.
23. Primal sounds: In Indian philosophy, Creation is believed to be the expression of sound (i.e. vibration). Represented through speech, these sounds become the Vedic language (Sanskrit). In this sense, Creation can be said to be a manifestation of speech. The belief that Creation is brought forth through speech is also found in the first chapter of Genesis where God “speaks” to bring forth Creation, in Psalm 33:6,9 (“By the word of the Lord were the Heavens made. . . For He spoke and it came to be”), and in the well-known opening verse of the Gospel of John.
24. Unspoken formulas: Mantras used in yogic meditation imparted to disciples through personal initiation by a Guru or spiritual guide. Their effect is to lead the mind inward for attaining transcendental consciousness and subsequently Self-realization (Dharam Vir Singh. *Hinduism: An Introduction*. New Delhi: Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan Ltd., 1991, p. 117, 114).
Unspoken formulas for spiritual advancement were found in pre-Christian Essene theology, Greek Gnosticism, and in early Christian adaptations of Gnostic theology. They were used to guide the aspirant on the journey to enlightenment where one receives

the “vision of Knowledge” (John M. Allegro. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Myth*. Westbridge, England: Westbridge Books, 1979, p. 113). According to A. Powell Davies, the Apostle Paul is speaking of such sacred formulas in II Corinthians 12:3 when he writes of being caught up in the third heaven and hearing “unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (A. Powell Davies. *The First Christian*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957, p. 122).

In India, the esoteric formulas used for attaining Self-realization are sometimes referred to as “seed mantras,” a metaphor for the guru planting a “seed” within the disciple that, in time, will grow into the realization of the Veda which is often depicted as a tree with four limbs (representing Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva – the four books of the Veda in its written form). Applying this “seed” results in a fresh interpretation of the familiar parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15), where the sacred formulas are represented by the seeds of the sower, and the Essene “vision of Knowledge” becomes the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven.”

25. Belur: A city in southeastern India famous for its Vishnu temple dating back to the 12th century A.D.

26. Vishnu: Hindu god of preservation.

27. Mobius journey: From mobius strip – a three dimensional geometric form used to represent the universe curving in upon itself, any section of which has two sides, but when viewed in its entirety, is recognized as having only one side. The mobius strip symbolizes the paradox of duality and unity in co-existence, dualism being the result of Creation seen from a finite perspective, unity, the vision of life from the highest state of consciousness.

28. Yuga: The four ages in Hindu mythology: i.e. Kali-yuga, Dvapara-yuga, Tretra-yuga, and Sat-yuga. Their conception is somewhat parallel to the stone, iron, bronze, and golden ages found in Greek philosophy.

29. Beneath the subconscious mind: Here the author is presenting the reality of Vedic forms as part of the “collective unconscious” as postulated by Carl Jung.

30. Fountains of redemption: Spiritual revivals that have occurred throughout history. This phrase expresses the belief that Vedic knowledge, “churning beneath the subconscious mind” and revealed through enlightenment, is ultimately the source of all religions.

31. Mystic marriage: Union with Brahman, the Divine Reality. On the journey through enlightenment, the mystical experience, as described by Evelyn Underhill (*Mysticism*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1911), includes the stages of “illumination,” the “dark night of the soul,” and finally “union.” In the context of yoga, illumination is the clear and permanent experience of the transcendent Reality (cosmic consciousness). The dark night is a metaphor for the condition where the unbounded Self is experienced as the

infinite source of Creation, yet distinctly separate from the relative changing universe. In Indian philosophy, the Self without Creation is represented as the “night of Brahman,” or Creation as it would be in its dissolved state between cycles of manifestation. This awareness of separation of the Self from activity in cosmic consciousness is an unsettling duality in need of resolution. As the journey continues, the doors of perception open to the experience of subtler realms of Creation. In time, the transcendent Reality, which dawned during one’s initial illumination, is realized to be all- pervading, fully infused throughout the relative or manifest field of Creation. The unbounded Self, at first experienced only as within, is now found without as well. It is known on the most intimate level of experience, subject and object forever joined in the state of unity consciousness.

This journey into enlightenment is depicted in a variety of myths and epics as a drama of marriage, separation from spouse, entry into the finer strata of Creation, and reunion. In the epic Indian poem *The Ramayana*, Rama’s wife Sita is kidnapped while in exile with Rama in the forest. Eventually he slays Ravana, the demon king that abducted Sita in an aerial chariot, and is reunited with his bride. In a classical Greek myth, Orpheus’ bride Eurydice dies after being bitten by a serpent on their wedding night. He then goes into the underworld to seek out Hades (Pluto) for the return of his beloved. Finally, a New Testament parable depicts the Kingdom of Heaven as a wedding feast given by a king for his son, open to all who accept the invitation (Matt. 22:2-14). This parable is rather elaborate, containing several messages. From the perspective of the mystic, however, the wedding represents the state of unity while the feast symbolizes the fulfillment of the senses when the infinite fullness of the Self is enjoyed in the objects of one’s perception.

32. Cosmic body: A reference to a Creation myth in the Rig Veda where Purusha (soul) is depicted as a giant primeval man who is dismembered by the gods (Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty. *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. London: Penguin Books, 1981, p.29). A variation of this myth was a central feature of Greek Gnosticism. Here the “prototypical heavenly man,” composed of light, is broken up by demonic forces of darkness, a particle of light becoming the innermost self of a person born into the terrestrial world.

Eventually, God was to incarnate himself to gather together the sparks of light and restore the heavenly man (A. Powell Davies. *The First Christian*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957, pp. 120-121). Another reference to this myth is found in the parable of sheepfold in the Gospel of John. While this parable carries with it several different messages, the general image is a metaphor for the breaking up and restoration of the primeval man as represented in the Gnostic myth. In this context, the sheepfold is the original unified collection of souls. The wolf represents the demonic forces that “scatter” the primordial body (break up the light). The “Good Shepherd” then comes as the Redeemer to gather the sheep back into one “fold” which is the unified body of the primeval man.

Chapter 2

Verses Re-Versus

Introduction

Many years ago I became intrigued with a duet by W.A. Mozart entitled *Canon Inversus* which I recorded on my compact disk, *Lifting the Veil*. This composition is unique in that the second half of the piece is the first half played backwards with the parts reversed. In addition, if you take the entire piece and turn it up side down, it turns out to be exactly the same piece!

In June of 1997, while staying in a cabin in Brown County State Park in Indiana, I awoke at 4:00 AM from a dream with the idea that a similar technique could be used in composing poetry. The result was the invention of a new form of poetry which I call *Verses Re Versus*. This new poetic form is constructed so that the second stanza of each poem is the first stanza with the words arranged in reverse order. And although the words are read in reverse order, the text still maintains its integrity as a poem.

I view Mozart's *Canon Inversus* and poems like *Verses Re Versus* as metaphors for the fact that Creation can be viewed in opposing ways and yet still make sense. We can, for example, view Creation from the classical perspective, asserting that the Universe is a product of a divine creative act, that all things have a purpose in the Creator's design, that the imperfection in Creation is due to human ignorance and the transgression of divine law, and that the primary goal of each person should be to realize and fulfill in his/her life, the Creator's intentions. Or we can view Creation as the result, not of a divine creative act but of a primordial explosion, and as evolving over billions of years through unfolding random processes, with human life resulting more from chance than any predetermined design. Rather than being guided by a Creator's love, Creation, from this evolutionary perspective, is viewed as driven by natural selection and the "survival of the fittest."

The remarkable feature about these virtually opposing views is that both models make sense in the context of their respective domains -- the former being that of theology, the latter being that of science. Both have served as useful paradigms for explaining the human condition, both lead to meaningful insights about life, and both leave questions as yet to be answered. Like Mozart's *Canon Inversus* or my *Verses Re Versus* poetry, we can look at Creation in vastly different ways and yet perceive with amazement the "wondrous order" of the universe from either perspective.

This supports the most recent model of the universe drawn from microphysics and referred to by theorists as the *holographic paradigm* -- that Creation is an illusion, that matter is not "material" at all, but rather interfering waves of energy interacting within a null dimensional vacuum, and that our brains interpret these interference patterns holographically to "construct" space-time continuum we believe ourselves to experience. From my perspective, the perfection and beauty in this illusory Creation is what makes it

possible for people to look at Creation in vastly different ways and still perceive what I call the "wondrous order."

I hope you enjoy *Verses Re Versus*, and will be inspired to try your hand at this new approach to writing poetry.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#1**

(Note: the second stanza of each Verses Re-Versus poem is the first stanza with the words written in reverse order).

Thoughts intruding
subdue tomorrow's distant loves,
watch time lingering in
memories haunting the
wind's endless cry.

* * * * *

Cry endless winds!
The haunting memories
in lingering time watch
love's distant tomorrows subdue
intruding thoughts.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#3**

Hummingbirds saw stillness
in eyes drinking her
light from dawn.

* * * * *

Dawn from light,
her drinking eyes in
stillness saw hummingbirds.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#4**

Suns burning into time
whisper secrets. Their
universe, violent yet silent,
the gripping forces restrain
visions orbiting through Stars.

* * * * *

Stars through orbiting visions
restrain forces gripping the
silent yet violent universe.
Their secrets whisper
time into burning suns.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#5**

Flags wave.

We reason the war is over.

Is night forgotten? Our

loss, our celebration?

Painful parades, our

lessons unlearned.

* * * * *

Unlearned lessons?

Our parade's painful

celebration, our loss,

our forgotten night is

over! Is war the reason we

wave flags?

VERSES RE VERSUS**#6**

Estranged friend, my ego,
storms through wandering
moods churning like
gray, dark clouds.

* * * * *

Clouds, dark, gray,
like churning moods
wandering through storms.
Ego, my friend estranged.

VERSES RE VERSUS

#7

Eyes staring
through darkened years,
frail, with quivering lips,
shatter memories
frozen in wilted words.

* * * * *

Words wilted in frozen
memories shatter
lips quivering with frail
years darkened through
staring eyes.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#8**

Winds straining through piercing
mountains, kiss stars chilled with
lonely nights. Endless sky, sterile
and hollow, repels thoughts in
flowering meadows. Settled in mind,
my eyes, cheerful and silent, seek
spirits weightless over climbing mists.

* * * * *

Mists climbing over weightless spirits
seek silent and cheerful eyes. My
mind in settled meadows, flowering
in thoughts, repels hollow and
sterile sky. Endless nights, lonely
with chilled stars, kiss mountains
piercing through straining winds.

Rocky Mountain National Park

July 12, 1998

VERSES RE VERSUS**#9**

Words trailing from hikers distract
children from hiding bullfrogs, debate
meaning with chattering streams.

* * * * *

Streams chattering with meaning
debate bullfrogs hiding from children,
distract hikers from trailing words.

Rocky Mountain National Park

July 13, 1998

VERSES RE VERSUS**#10**

Skies, frigid,
greet starlight with warmed
faces, harmonize rhythms while
blending souls. Hearts beating
beneath heated breath, sensing
stillness with scented candles, hide
shadows moving in anxious
passions. Her summer, lingering
through ripened love.

* * * * *

Love... ripened through
lingering summer. Her passions,
anxious in moving shadows,
hide candles scented with stillness,
sensing breath heated beneath
beating hearts. Souls blending
while rhythms harmonize. Faces
warmed with starlight greet
frigid skies.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#11**

Children, hopeful for castles and legos,
promising Santa they're good! It's now
time for asking... and remembering.
Anxious are parents where debts bury
dreams in forgotten miracles.

* * * * *

Miracles, forgotten in dreams
bury debts where parents are anxious,
remembering, and asking for time.
Now it's good they're Santa, promising
legos and castles for hopeful children.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#12**

Twilight ripening
into dawn, chasing
sky-piercing jets
streaming upward,
the sound spilling
through drifting clouds
torn in ruptured silence.

* * * * *

Silence ruptured in torn
clouds drifting through
spilling sound, the
upward streaming
jets piercing sky,
chasing dawn into
ripening twilight.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#13**

Spirit ... ailing, an echo within and
away, slipping time through twisted
seasons, endlessly calls us beneath
cracked and choking earth. Our eyes,
roving with quietly placed steps, watch
clouds passing amidst grazing elk.

* * * * *

Elk grazing amidst passing clouds
watch steps placed quietly with roving
eyes. Our earth, choking and cracked
beneath us, calls endlessly. Seasons
twisted through time, slipping away
and within, echo an ailing spirit.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#14**

Moon, deceptive, crisp,
that wildness with brittle
alluring light, receding into
time, turning cold, forgotten,
still...now passions with
restless rays, hiding love.
This is romance, fleeting,
like passing starlight.

* * * * *

Starlight passing like
fleeting romance. Is this
love, hiding rays restless
with passions, now still,
forgotten, cold, turning time
into receding light, alluring,
brittle with wildness? That
crisp, deceptive moon.

VERSES RE VERSUS**#15**

Water, dark within images, coloring
thoughts, nurturing streams searching
inwardly. From there spring ideas
pristine, darkness unveiling mystery.

* * * * *

Mystery unveiling darkness. Pristine
ideas spring there from inwardly
searching streams, nurturing thoughts,
coloring images within dark water.

Brown County State Park, Indiana

June 17, 1999

Verses Re Versus

#16

Tea at Three

Meaningless flattery with covered lace.
 Words, tempered in quietly steeping
 tea. Faces powdered with
 feelings wear socially-accepted
 smiles while crumbling crumpets. Three
 at tea with gossip-sipping, bridge-playing
 ladies. Dainty pinkies curled
 around clinking sentences wandering
 through strolling afternoons. They're
 oblivious to all.

* * * * *

All too oblivious,
 their afternoons strolling through
 wandering sentences, clinking around
 curled pinkies. Dainty ladies
 playing bridge, sipping gossip with tea at
 three. Crumpets crumbling while smiles,
 accepted socially, wear feelings
 with powdered faces. Tea
 steeping quietly in tempered words
 lace-covered with flattery, meaningless.

Chapter 3

Early Poems

An Acquaintance

We met once, years ago,
the night of Halley's return.
Seemed like we'd been friends
forever. Five minutes and our
thoughts were braided, our lives
aligned in elliptic synchrony.
We said letters would keep us close.
Rare encounters deserve more than
one sleepless night.

The weekend passed quickly. We
tried to find the comet, our only
chance in seventy years, but it
slipped unseen through muddy skies.
So we traded pieces of rainbows
as it escaped from behind the sun,
a conversation renewed, not begun,
a melody unbroken, close enough
to be heard again.

Last I knew he was living in D.C.

Epiphanies

They flirt wearing
 neon jewelry,
tease the eye
 as they wink at the wind,
awaken latent
 nighttime urges -
impulsive fireflies
 setting off sparks within me.

Hot Air Balloons

Seldom do we speak of our
lighter-than-air fantasies

that lift us above the world
beyond the reach of bank

accounts and deadlines. Yet
we swarm madly along tangled

highways, trying to cut loose
painted thoughts moored by

the weight of cynicism as we
cling to a barefoot childhood.

The Master Remembered

His words were the alchemist's gold,
strung on a thread connecting minds and
mesons. When he spoke the vacuum
trembled, for a moment unveiling

the timeless. Arrowed pines split the
moonlight as he sat in quantum
stillness, listening between thoughts
to the One applauding itself.

"Revelation," he explained, "is a seed
without a cause, an impulse through which
the universe sings. Anticipate its
appearance and it will elude you."

Then I perceived as one imprisoned
by atoms. Now his words are collisions
within the silence, through which the
light-years pass.

* A class of sub-atomic particles

**A reference to the Zen koan "What is the sound of one hand clapping."

The Kite

Her dad was explaining why it wouldn't fly, the kite my mother gave her a month before she died.

"There's no wind," he said. "You have to have wind to fly a kite."

"Where did the wind go?" she asked, gazing with the spacious mind of a two and a half year old.

How her grandmother loved to see my little girl, arms raised, chasing that kite like a leaf scrambling to get off the ground. Those days had vanished though, almost as suddenly as she was conceived, swept into the timeless sea of memory.

"It's not that the wind goes anywhere. The sun heats the air, the air moves creating the wind," her dad explained, hoping to snare her intellect with his chain of logic. But it was he who saw through the glass darkly.

"You mean it goes back to the sun?" she asked.

He shook his head bewildered, wondering what thread of wisdom his mother would have used to respond.

Then he thought again...

"That's right Esther, that's right."

The Black Curtain

(for Monte Gates, in memoriam)

His family was hardworking, honest,
the kind politicians immortalize. He
was smart, handsome and obedient,
but never a football hero. In
sixth grade I longed to be with his
sister during recess, to sleep in her
smile, near the fence where the moss
grew. Back then, only the bell
interrupted our lives.

By 1970 Vietnam had soured our
dreams. We were of age, old enough
to be gambled with but not to vote.
Uncle Sam's instant lottery. He won
the trip, all expenses paid. Months later,
the night escorted a visitor--a man in
uniform--the kind young girls dream
about but that mothers fear.

In D.C. my hands tremble as I touched
the memorial--a black curtain drawn,
the drama over, the sets removed. Once
a year now a preacher prays, a
senator speaks, and the guns still
pierce the cleansing sunlight. His name
is there, inscribed forever
on America's wailing wall, too high for
memory to fade or moss to cover.

For Veteran's Day, 1990.

A Cappella

The doors were heavy, hard
for a six-year-old to open. I
stared at the gray floors as my
mother led me to class. Inside, I
was dodging shadows, hiding
from hallways, trying to
bury my fears of separation.

Miss Young welcomed me to the
first grade. I couldn't see her smile
through blurry eyes. That year
she'd teach me to read and to add,
to play dodge ball and write
my name, but it was my mother
who taught me to sing.

In spring the two would stroll among
the iris, Mother's words coloring the
light with evening moods. Miss Young
could name every blossom, like the
children in her class. My dog and I
rambled through the garden. I'd throw
a ball into the neighbor's yard for him
to fetch. We weren't interested in
flowers.

As the years passed the shadows
grew longer while her memory
wilted. Mom finally sold the house.
But her song still lingers, even
without a beating heart.

The Quest

Time began turning circles,
scrambling the days and hours
into existential moments
without color or purpose.

That was the end of Eden, Truth
fallen, nothing permanent. My
brother always said I was an
accident. So where it is, that Ptolemaic
center, where Man is supposed to dwell?

We attend a football game. The
Popcorn's stale. Can't see the pompom
Girls. "Strike three!" the referee calls.

Somehow it doesn't make sense—
this spinning galaxy, wherever we
are, floating on this weightless world.

The long-haired saint, that bearded
man in the empty cave—he must know.

"Why do you search?" he replied.
"Infinity has no center. The middle
is everywhere."

Now he tells me.

The New Arrival
(for Esther)

How silently you slipped through
that microscopic door,
From there to here
As a sliver of sunlight enters
a shaded room.
Simply in becoming, you have taught
us why we are.

Curiously you stare while we
admire your cloudless mind,
Hoping to glimpse beneath
those bubbles of smiles and tears
The innocence that frees us from
tomorrow.

Cause and consequence, the cycle
extends beyond our days
As the years blink away.
Swiftly we pass from here to there,

no less a milestone
no less a miracle,

We close our eyes to see what our
vision in life obscured.

How silently you slipped through
that microscopic door,
Unassuming and without blame,
May you one day discover who you were
before you had a name.

The First Dawn

She awakens at 6 AM, less
than seven months old, reaching
for the goldfinch that flew
out of her dream. There she lies
laughing with the sun, as if
to know creation's riddle. She
never feels funny about clapping
with one hand.

We stroll to the convenience
store where her smile is
heard above the radio. Even the
caffeine-faced clerk responds,
thawing his lips enough to
break up the freeze-dried look
in his eyes.

Life is simple now. No shoes to tie
or teeth to brush, no sins to
repent or dualities to wrestle.
Day and night are but theaters for
different dreams, personal identity
an enduring myth.

"I am everything..."
she exclaims with featherweight eyes.

But today something has changed. We are
no longer one. Her smile says it
all, how she sees the distance between us.

The Web

The spider's handiwork was
barely visible, a homespun
fishing net for gnats.
Anchored across the path, it
caught the corner of my eye.
The slightest nudge triggered
her attack, from repose to capture –

faster than thought.

The pond nearby trembles.
Insects scratch its surface,
distorting inverted shadows
sinking into morning.
Wide awake, I let desire
slumber, perceiving with an
infant's reflective eye, a predator
of moments, poised on a quivering
thread of connectedness,
seizing each moment in the

web of becoming.

Grammar's World

The railroad tracks lie rusted,
winding beneath thistles and chicory
as if to be looking for a destination,
or an escape from the place where
Grammar lived still caring for the
house tucked away in her in what memory
was left, and for her five surviving
children who were old enough
to watch her mind wilt away. I was too
young to understand the time she
mistook my kite for a tablecloth.
Grammar's world was different than ours.

She enjoyed our Sunday drives through
the changing seasons, the family
picnics amidst mountain laurel, until
the day we left her behind hospital
doors. Soon our visits would become
routine. Each time we'd call to her,
trying to find a passage into her
prison, or move our mental screens into
her line of focus, knowing that her
heart still spoke its silent language.

I'd smile when we'd say goodbye,
believing that she heard me.

Prodigy

Her performance time's never posted.
The critics stay away, writing instead
of beauty in a bottle, locked in
language, corked and defined by age.

But she still sings, perched in her
crib, her chirps erupting as if from
the earth's throat, rising and gliding
on the currents of her moods – no
gap between impulse and utterance.

I regret the day she learns to speak,
the day expectations tie her hands,
the day meaning sets its fences,
creating the cognitive hurdles critics
jump, but which turn sky-colored melodies
like hers into the babel of words.

Miracle Megan

(in memoriam)

She could never stay long enough,
four hours of Barbie dolls and dress up,
yet they still wanted more. But I
knew deep down Megan would be
leaving soon. She was a medical child
protégé of sorts: at the age of one
she had the heart of a five year old.

When I was a boy my Dad and older
brother transplanted a maple tree. It
had hardly any roots. Dad never
thought it would live, but it flourished
anyway and we took comfort in its
embrace. I learned to climb that tree,
even built a small tree house in it from
where I could see above the clouds.

Miracle Megan I called her. Seeing
Esther and her together made me forget
tomorrow. But then the veil of mourning
descended, blotting out the dawn, the rhythm
of life heard no more.

That afternoon I reminded Esther that
Megan had slept over at our house
only two weeks before she died.
"But Dad," Esther cried, "Two
weeks is a long time."

Dear John

Reading her words he abandons
pretend reason in a grammar of
mumbling flesh, melts in sacred lust
as he listens to music that kneads
the silence, savagely stroking her
letter with memories he can't let go.

Pastorale

How quickly they vanish, those
 tranquil moments of September,
As uncertain moods lurking on the
 horizon
Threaten settled twilight hours,
Stirring the atmosphere and the
 imagination.

We cross the dying field where
 earlier swallows played,
Skillfully slicing the air.
Now distant lightning shears the
 evening sky,
Splitting the approaching darkness.

Listen, my father told me as a child,
To the devil in his chariot rattling
 bridges in the heavens,
Unable to subdue his raging horses.
Nature dreams wildly tonight, avenging order,
Severing to the extent it can what God
 has joined.

Gone now is the assuring sky and
 visions of better days.
We wait, huddled in the barn
For the swallows to play again and the
 storm to pass,
Weighing the extent of its anger
 and our hidden fears.

Chapter 4

Haiku

1

Morning listens for
a song waiting to be heard. . .
The cawing of crows

2

Never ending spring,
Time meanders through meadows,
rivers seek their source.

3

Lightning splits moonlight,
charges into inner space,
illusion dispelled

4

Blue heron ascends,
the placid lake suits my age,
the sun sets slowly

5

An eagle surveys,
taloned eyes seize the twilight,
The sun stares through clouds

6

My dog rambles while
a fox keeps her watchful eye,
the stillness lingers

7

Swallows sweep over
fields where insects labor. The
berries need picking.

8

Dreams drift without end
I run to love's blind embrace
the frost is melting

9

Diamonds dance with time.
Playful waves scatter sunlight;
the lake awakens

10

A sterile sky peers
through canopies of color
the leaves keep falling

Chapter 5

Interfaith Psalms

Introduction

Since well before the time of Homer, poetry has stirred the human spirit, singeing the soul with its metaphors, images, paradoxes and allusions. Well-known are the much loved psalms of David, recited weekly in synagogues and churches throughout the world. Older than both Homer and David are the ancient hymns of the Rig Veda, passed down to the present day by the Vedic pundits of India. It is the Rig Veda that speaks of poetry as emanating from “Soma,” the mystical plant and elixir of immortality, stolen by the gods and brought to earth from heaven by the Sunbird. Soma is said to inspire the sages, bestowing on them that contemplative state that accompanies spiritual vision. It is this vision that has been expressed through the poets and prophets who have served through the ages as guiding lights to spiritual seekers in the great world religious traditions.

This “somatic state” of consciousness, as I refer to it, is the essence of the mystical experience. Contrary to what some writers have proposed, the somatic state is not a drug-induced or altered state of awareness. Rather it is a natural condition of quiet inner reflection experienced when the poet is settled into a state of awareness from which poetic vision and language spontaneously flow. The voluntary nervous system, from which we are able to exercise our individual will, and the involuntary nervous system, through which is manifested our inborn nature, become synchronized, aligned in a condition of heightened integration. The resulting streams of thought are not perceived as our own, but recognized as emanating from a universal source deep within the mind, what the Greek poets attributed to the muse.

It has been said that art exists for the purpose of expressing that which is ineffable. Poetry is unique among the arts in that, paradoxically, it uses words to express that which cannot be expressed in words. This paradox is resolved when we realize that the language of poetry is processed intuitively more than intellectually. The saying “a picture contains a thousand words” is as true for a poetic image as it is for a painting. It is the meaning contained “between the lines,” processed in the silence between words, that carries the message, analogous to the way the mind completes the missing lines in a Gestalt diagram. In this way, the language of poetry can trigger the joyful realization experience that awakens the listener so as to taste the nectar of the somatic state.

From this deep level of reflection, reality is not perceived as logical or scientific. Rather the temporal physical world comes to be recognized as illusion, a realm of mere appearances. Only that which is imperishable is found to be real, those treasures one lays up in heaven “where neither moth nor rust consume and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt.

6:20). And these treasures include archetypes that form the basis of myth, ideas so rich in meaning they can only be expressed through paradox, symbolism, imagery, and the various literary devices utilized by the poet.

Inspired scriptures from all religious traditions are filled with such poetic language. Consider, for example, the following passages:

Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Matt. 6:28, 29)

...I came into the world so that those who are blind may see, and that those who see might become blind. (John 9: 39)

...you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters fail not. (Isaiah 58: 11b)

He attains peace into whom all desires flow as waters into the sea, which though ever being filled, is ever motionless. (Bhagavad Gita, 2: 70)

The simile of God's light is like a niche in which a lamp, the lamp in a globe of glass, the globe of glass as if it were a shining star, lit from a blessed olive tree neither of the East nor of the West, its light nearly luminous even if fire did not touch it. (the Koran)

Water, ever-yielding, can wear through the hardest of substances. (Tao Te Ching)

The psalms in this collection incorporate ideas drawn from Zen, Taoist and Indian philosophy, as well as from Hassidic, Islamic and Christian mystic traditions. The opening line of psalm #2 is a type of koan or riddle (“When God said ‘Let there be light,’ what language was spoken?”) to which the remainder of the psalm speaks. Some of the psalms are written using the voice of the seeker addressing the Divine (“I marvel as I witness the vows of heaven and earth...” - #5) while others are composed as if God or the higher Self is speaking to the poet (“I began singing the moment Creation breathed...” - #6). All the psalms are written using inclusive language, even to the extent of including the neuter in psalm #3 (“In Him, by Her, and through It the universe lives...”).

In addition, ideas from modern science are often used to give more tangible expression to abstract theological concepts. The book of Genesis, for example, depicts Adam as being formed out of dust. Interfaith psalm #2 expands on this image to include the planets being molded from formless cosmic dust, and further describing God as re-forming us as if from “the vapors of burnt-out stars.” Psalm #3 evokes the law of conservation of energy: “...that energy...which can neither be created nor destroyed.” Psalm #6 speaks of the “endless curve of space” and to that pulsating rhythm which is closest to us (the heartbeat), and most distant from us (the quasar). Finally, psalm #7 refers to the “holographic dream overflowing with time.”

One obvious use for these interfaith psalms is to recite them during interfaith worship. In this context they can be read either by the minister leading the service, or responsively as indicated in the text, the lines in bold italicized type to be read collectively by the congregation. Another application, however, is for the minister to read slowly a specific psalm during a guided meditation.

Individuals can also select specific lines from the psalms to entertain mentally during meditation. Those lines best suited for this purpose are ones that contain metaphors or paradoxical meaning. Following are examples of lines that I recommend for personal meditations.

That's when the fullness moved and
 the One gave birth to the many,
 When Truth became the vision of Knowing,
 shining through the realm of Becoming. (#1)

* * * * *

The great "I AM,"
 That part of me which is and is and is... (#3)

* * * * *

Listen deeply, I am quieter than silence.
 Look deeply, I am closer than the I. (#4)

* * * * *

Meditate deeply, and you will know me, as
 a sightless newborn kitten knows
 its mother. (#4)

* * * * *

Surrender to Me, the One hiding within you. (#7)

* * * * *

To the One without a cause, the Self-existent,
 Who lives and breathes before all else,
 Who brought forth time and space as a
 spider brings forth its web from within itself...(#10)

* * * * *

Since the birth of light, I have been waiting
within you,
My image as vast as day,
My spirit as polished as Truth. (#13)

* * * * *

There find vision without form, sound without name,
Beauty without cause, kindness without reason,
awareness without "I." (#18)

However one chooses to apply these psalms, it is my hope that they will help usher the earnest interfaith seeker along their path, so they may come to know by direct experience the Truth so eloquently spoken by Sri Ramakrishna: "The lamps are many, but the Light is One."

George Wolfe
July, 2003

Interfaith Psalm #1*

In the beginning was the sacred seed,
Suspended in the catalytic embrace
of Divinity,
Warmed by the primal energy breathing
within itself.

**Nourished in the womb of mystery,
awakened by the flame of speech,
It opened and became the universe.**

That's when the fullness moved and
the One gave birth to the many,
**When Truth became the vision of Knowing,
shining through the realm of Becoming.**

Within the seed, the Law slept like a
dormant gene.
**Awakened, it guides with gyroscopic precision,
Steering a course through the ocean of mind
and the mobius bending of space. ****

Governed by paradox, life multiplies by dividing,
survives by dying.
**As a grain of salt, dissolving in water, loses its
form yet not its taste,
So all is consumed in Oneness when the Infinite
rediscovers itself.**

* If psalms are read responsively, congregation reads the bold italicized text.

**Möbius is used to represent non-duality. The reference here is to a Möbius strip which consists of a piece of paper twisted one half turn and connected end to end so that it only has one side.

Interfaith Psalm #4

Listen deeply, I am quieter than silence.
Look deeply, I am closer than the I.
 Dream deeply, and you will perceive my veil.
Sleep deeply, yet I remain awake.
 Breath deeply, and I will settle your mind.
Sing deeply, and you will know my heart.

Turn away from the senses so I can draw you near,
 absorb you into my Being.
**Meditate deeply, and you will know me as
 a sightless newborn kitten knows
 its mother.**
 Drink deeply, and I will extinguish your thirst,
**For I am wellspring and ocean, and the primal
 waters from which new creations are born.**

Try to confine me and I will escape from
 my tomb.
**Ascribe me a name and divisions will arise
 among you.**
 For I am the Lord beyond name and form,
**The everlasting source of sound and light,
 of thought and breath,
 Quieter than silence, closer than the I.**

Chautauqua Institution
 Chautauqua, New York

Interfaith Psalm # 6

I began singing the moment
Creation breathed,
Whirling unceasing melodies
Set to the meters of heartbeats
and quasars
Heard only when the ego sleeps.

I began singing before there
was darkness,
While time still slumbered between
the future and the past.
My drone is the first partial and
the endless curve of space.

Come,
Sing with me.
Close your eyes and lips
and follow my song
To its sacred source
Where sound and light dance
together
Beneath the golden rays of knowing,
Trying their best to awaken you
from history's dream.

Interfaith Psalm #7

Surrender to Me, the One hiding within you.

**Awaken to behold this holographic
dream, overflowing with time.**

I am that spark which ignites the stars.

My body is broken into many colors as I
pass through the prism of mind.

**My blood stains the glass through which my
glory shines.**

By My light the eye sees, the mind perceives,

By My will the heart beats, the breath is drawn.

I am the Light that makes matter conscious
and thoughts visible,

**Like a mirror without flaw, my reflection
cannot be distinguished from its source.**

Follow not the fate of Orpheus, who doubted
the presence of his beloved,*

But trust that I am with you,

Womb of every impulse,

witness to every thought.

Look back and I vanish.

Lakeshore Interfaith Institute
Ganges, Michigan

*In Greek mythology, Orpheus charmed Pluto with his lyre to secure the release of his beloved Eurydice from the underworld. He was told his wife would follow him out of the underworld if he did not look back. But doubt tempted him and upon looking back, his beloved disappeared.

Interfaith Psalm #8

If we are to love our enemy, we must love Death.

**In my youth, you were the bringer of darkness
and doubt,
Who told me life was meaningless and tempted me
with illusion.**

As a parent I feared you as Lilith,*
**The one who invades the cribs of infants and
steals away their breath.**

In middle age, you are blamed for robbing us of
our prime,
**The one who saps us of strength and dampens
the flame of passion.**

But in old age you become a friend who mercifully
removes pain forever,
It is you who sanctifies life as the autumn leaves
glorify the fall,
**Who fulfills the sacrifice, as Christ was made
perfect on the cross.**

Now I embrace you as the one who transforms,
for your opposite is not life but birth.
I walk without fear through your shadow, welcome
you to my table
**And drink joyfully from the cup that was bitter
in my youth.**

* A demonic female spirit in Jewish mythology who was believed to steal or strangle infants. In ancient times, this myth may have served to explain childbirth disorders such as strangulation by umbilical cord or sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Interfaith Psalm #9

Clouds drift through the mind's gaze, nudged
by the sweet scent of nature's breath.
**They change the landscape of the
kaleidoscopic sky.**

A chorus of color modulates to a new key.
**It paints the silence as space unfolds with
majestic arms, embracing everywhere.**

God let Creation go, setting motion within stillness,
**Propelling images passing through the Spirit's
timeless eye -- an eye that never blinks.**

Interfaith Psalm # 11

Morning seeps in through the crevice of dawn.
**It lures the mind toward the sun, dispelling the mists
of fearful dreams.**

I witness the sparrows sing praises to the Divine Mother
**As light is reborn from the night's mystery, and the
wind accompanies the orchestral flight of geese.**

Tomorrow vanishes from her lap. I slip into her silence
and bathe in a meditative joy for which there are no words.

**The orbit of time spins its reel
Projecting a cinema of seasons that flow in her
unending stream of miracles.**

Interfaith Psalm #13

Since the birth of light, I have been waiting
within you,

**My image as vast as day,
My spirit as polished as Truth.**

It is you who sought joy in temporal treasures,
**Your prodigal soul, trapped by the senses,
weighted down by the millstone of matter.**

It is your sight that obscures your vision,
Your hearing that drowns out my voice,
Your taste that hides my nectar,
Your touch that veils my presence.
Your memories cause you to forget the now
Where time leaves no trace.

My song is in the child's smile,
My face in the dawn,
**My heart soars through twilight,
My dreams are in summer storms.**

You will seek me endlessly until the
endless is found,
**And there you will find my image
beneath the currents of your mind.**

Sleeping Bear Dunes,
Michigan

Interfaith Psalm #14

Listen to my symphony of solitude.

**Sing the aria of evening as leaves shatter in the
wake of your stride,**

Their rhythm is in step with the hills.

**They tango with twilight, courting the shadows creeping
across the fields.**

Let thoughts flee their shoreline, gliss across the pond
as the wind bullies its way through the forest.

**Hum with the fireflies while darkness presses inward,
surrendering its presence to the moon.**

Make a fallen oak your altar.

**Lay upon it the sacrifice of speech, of breath, of
time and of thought,**

Speak without sound, reach without moving,
feel without touching,

**Remember by forgetting yourself in a radiance that
flows like the mercy of muted strings.**

St. Gregory's Abby
Three Rivers, Michigan

Interfaith Psalm #15

Rhyme sweeps away time,
 scattering darkness as the
 poet blesses language with
 the sacred breath.

**The fountain of soma-light
 ascends to flood the mind --
 a naked brightness untamed.**

Leave behind sight and sound.
**Wrap your words in sandalwood
 carved into the silence where
 wisdom speaks unchallenged,
 stirring the slumber of sages.**

The Hermitage
 Three Rivers, Michigan

Interfaith Psalm #16

Sunlight sweeps across Florence Lake as
 she's christened by naked air,
**A refuge for herons and humans married in that
 solitude where words reveal distance.**
 Freed from the prison of language, the heart is
 heard across treacherous channels.
**It feasts on fasting, knows without learning,
 sings within silence,**
 It harbors an island formed before light and
 darkness parted ways.
**My breath hovers with the seagulls, my
 mind praises the eternal noon.**
 Forget not the power of this earth and the
 resonance of nature's tone,
**For it endures beyond the babble of those
 who strive for bread alone.**

South Manitou Island
 Lake Michigan

Interfaith Psalm #17

("In the spirit of Zen")

With patience, draw back the will
to follow the archer's path,

**Take aim to penetrate the sky
with your melodies of silver
that warm the silence and still the
quivering breath.**

Let go of becoming,
ask without words,
**seek without longing,
knock without sound,**

Wade through streams of time into
the sanctuary of Being,
**and there, wait for the arrow of insight
to slay all you think is real.**

The Hermitage,
Three Rivers, Michigan

Interfaith Psalm #18

Breathe the breath of serenity, dream in the
womb of Pacific salt.

**I long for birth in an ocean unending,
where horizons escape the eye.**

The umbilical flow of life, lapping between
heartbeats,

Nourishes the moment where Divinity overflows
and washes me into the present,

**That shore where time wades playfully in the
sun's wake.**

There find vision without form, sound without
name,

**Beauty without cause, kindness without reason,
awareness without "I."**

Oahu, Hawaii

Interfaith Psalm #19

Skeletal hemlocks, their bodies brittle from time,
some no longer scaring the sky.
Limberlost Valley, living in the shadow of
death, where worms and serpents burrow
the logs and dust to till the earth,
**its moans concealed by the belligerent falls
ripping through Jurassic rock.**

Without comfort of rod and staff,* fear remains
**in that part of me blighted by age and disease
which can never enter Eden.**
I ponder the day I surrender to the falls,
seeking the still waters between heartbeats
**as I pass over into evening like retreating
twilight, never to thirst again.**

White Oak Canyon Falls
Shenendoah National Park

*A reference to the Biblical 23rd Psalm where it says "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

Interfaith Psalm # 20

Rain breaks through leaves and pileated crows
troubling the waters in obedient streams.

Its companion footsteps pelt our path through
forest treasure, leading to the Lord of Life.

**There miracles accompany minnows born in the
spawning of spring.**

Out of the fog climbs the sun, rising like an eagle to
transfigure the day,

Reining in a glory that rivals butterflies.

We sit beneath white oak and ash listening to light
suspend time,

**As we witness our prayers take flight in a recital
of serenity.**

Cecil M. Harden Lake
Rockville, Indiana

Interfaith Psalm # 21

At last I see you face to face, O Lord of chaos,
**Carving channels with savage power, as
Michaelangelo freed the slaves from stone.***

You throw dice into the recesses of mind,
through currents of dark urges
into a whirlpool that siphons off primal waters
barreling through prejudice fortified with fear.

**Yet the lilies stand their ground near your
plummeting ribbons of wrath that seem
blessed by the evening light.**

You tempt the foolish to ride these falls
to defy death, that our dark glass may be cleansed,
**freeing our sight from the hovering mist
so we may at last behold your lotus of love.**

Niagara Falls

*A reference to Michaelangelo's famous sculpture depicting men struggling to free themselves from stone.

Interfaith Psalm #22

I am the forgotten One, hidden beneath currents of
thought and mood, wrapped in a blanket of solitude.

**I am That to which forest streams pray without ceasing
while adorned with color and passing leaves.**

I speak the language of the river, whose syllables
rhyme with the phases of the moon,

**whose rapids are the songs of shamans trying
endlessly to heal this world.**

They wash hate from the shores of humanity, and cast aside
the silt of history from which sprouts the rice of renewal.

**I am the center, the circle is my dream. Remember as you
listen for tribal voices calling you to My sacred home.**

Mounds State Park,
Anderson, Indiana

Interfaith faith Psalm # 23

I drink the bleak of winter, embrace the darkness
from which time was born.

**I breathe in the chill of solitude as sparrows feast
on seeds unsown.**

Moonlight breaks through a brittle sky, exposing
naked forests sleeping in death.

**The flame of being within me expands, kindled by
kindness, nurtured by silence.**

In the Master's cave I am recreated as I climb
out of pure existence into the realms of becoming.

**Illumined by light unending, freed from the
shadows of thought, I embrace my Source, my Maker.**

Pokagan State Park
Angola, Indiana

Interfaith Psalm # 24*

The treasure was beneath us, pressed into sandstone,
preserved in shale memories darkened by the eons.

**Remnants of life far older than the Vedas, immune to
the corruption of time.**

A treasure unending, revealed by sacred currents

Cleansing life chiseled free by the left hand of God.

I wonder how many have passed here without seeing,

**Distracted by self-set goals, blind to what the moment
yields,**

That golden moment beneath our feet, glowing with
antiquity,

Offering riches only the poor and mindful come to know.

Clifty Falls State Park
Madison, Indiana

*...on discovering fossils at Clifty Falls.

Interfaith Psalm #25

He carves in the morning while impatient roosters coax the
sun to ignite the dawn,

**A master disguised as a night watchman, listening between
thoughts as his visions take shape in mahogany.**

Caribbean music sways with the sea, blessing the moonlit night
now fading.

**Palm trees clap in the breeze, a warm reception for a simple sage
free from the curse of ambition.**

Saint Lucia rains blessings on those who sow seeds of love,

**A secret whispered deeply in her forests, too softly
for the powerful to hear.**

Pastoral Care Center
Castries, St. Lucia

Interfaith Psalm # 26*

Twilight's blessing highlighted its silhouette,
nobility incarnate,

**A sharp-eyed witness surveying the lake's troubled
waves while ignoring our intrusion.**

Our thoughts soar with anticipation, riding the
currents of silent sky,

**Wings stretch to spread wonder as the Spirit
lifts us to the eagle's realm.**

Unveiling the power of its determined flight, its
white crown pierces our vision

**As we are raised up on wings we never knew
we had.**

Cecil M. Harden Lake
Rockville, Indiana

*Reflections on Isaiah 40:31 on seeing a bald eagle soar near Raccoon Lakeside Lodge.

Interfaith Psalm # 27*

I wander the desert-quiet of unknowing,
**A nebulaic cloud where fire sings inner space
and thoughts incubate like sleeping stars.**

I peer into the night where epiphanies ring deep,
Igniting mind-filled oceans with embryonic thoughts
that sudden the soul.
**There the solar wind winds through light years
warped by the gravity of human failings.**

I seek the wisdom whirling from the edge of the
silent Self,
**Striking the eye with light that propels us to the
realm of never-ending day.**

Listen between breaths and enchanted hymns,
**Wait for the Word heard in that pristine dawn
ages before forms were given names.**

Crystal Mountain,
Michigan

*Inspired by photos from the Hubble Space Telescope, this psalm likens epiphanies and the realization experiences that accompany them to the birth of stars in the vast dark clouds of inner-galactic gas and dust.

Interfaith Psalm # 28

In becoming blind I saw,
light laser deep, darkness cleansed.

It tripped the circuit breaker, evaporating thought,
 a bolt unrestrained an arm's length away,
**Raw power, concentrated as the mind of one
 fused with Being.**

Seizing the moment by the throat, it captured
 infinity with a single strike,
I stumble over words, as if to speak in tongues.

I am not twice, but thrice born, jolted into
 a realm without a past,
Speechless, nameless, forever awake.

Interfaith Psalm # 29

A crystal spirit possesses Irene,*
A lake untouched by the footprints of commerce.

She rests in her own beauty, reflecting a pristine image,
**Gathering the mountain slopes into her bosom
 as if to cradle her children as they tower her shores.**

I accompany wildflowers singing praises to the sun,
Their myriad colors play tag in the breeze.

My heart beats a path to the edge of heaven
 where the air is fed with perpetual hope,
**and thoughts seed the morning meadows welcoming
 the messenger of spring.**

Rocky Mountain National Park

*Irene is also the middle name of the author's wife, who is the mother of five children.

Interfaith Psalm #30

Be grateful in your solitude, rich in slender moments.
**Make time for the timeless, that you may recognize
illusion and harvest all that is real.**

Be grateful in your simplicity, wealthy in what you can let alone.*
**Propel your silence to shatter the noise of random
thought.**

Be grateful for idleness, joyful in your Sabbath.
**Witness the seasons swirl through the hemispheres
without birth or memory.**

Be grateful for the child who teaches us why we are,
**Who lives in the youth of our secret self, whispering
innocence to the wayward heart.**

Be thankful for forgiveness that lifts the weight of guilt,
**Offering its grace with the promised touch of a
Kitten's paw.**

Be blessed in your emptiness, treasure serenity.
**Still the sacred breath as you stretch awareness
into rapture.**

* a reference to the line in *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau: "Man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can let alone."

Interfaith Psalm # 31

Ancestral mists grace the valley, clothe the surface
of a nearby pond,
**They warm the past from which they are now set
free.**

Tread lightly as you approach the cemetery, each step
releasing memories of who they were, and who you are,
**Images, smiles and tears that were never buried, which no
grave can hold.**

Honor the moment and those whose love is
never lost.
**Hold them even closer now that the body is gone,
and you will learn the essence of letting go.**

Interfaith Psalm # 32

To be wealthy is to be whole,
To be whole is to embrace life and empty oneself.

I am charmed by a colorful snake basking on a leaf.
**I reach carefully, slivering through thorns on serpentine
paths seeking**

**berries amidst briars,
treasures amidst talons.**

To savor the fruit I rub against life, scratching without
drawing blood.
**But can we extract the nectar while untouched
by pain?**

The Hermitage Community,
Three Rivers, Michigan

Interfaith Psalm # 33

Oh Womb of Life, Oh Source of Becoming,

Clothe me, that I may not go naked in this hostile world.

Clothe me with innocence, that I may refrain from judging others.

Clothe me with kindness, that I may not walk past those in need.

Clothe me with charity, that I may let go of possessions and freely give.

Clothe me with hope, that I may see the Good in everyone.

Clothe me with compassion, that I may feel the hardship of others.

Clothe me with Love, that I may reconcile the hearts of many.

Clothe me with strength, that I may bestow confidence on the insecure.

Clothe me with light, that I may reveal mysteries.

Clothe me with patience, that I may let go of time.

Clothe me with courage, that I may not fear being chosen.

Clothe me with joy, that I may uplift the lame-hearted.

Clothe me with silence, that I may speak to all who will not hear.

Oh Womb of Life, Oh Source of Becoming, wrap me in your reverie,

Harmonize my song that I may be raised with the Eternal Dawn.

Interfaith Psalm # 34*

In maturing I have become young,
The Spirit sings its lullaby, a well-spring
unrestrained.

**I am cradled by the Divine Mother,
She cleanses the heart, returns me to an innocence
before I knew my age.**

I rest without name, yet know her voice when she calls.

**Our future is married to the past, a straight line finds
its source, the circle complete.**

The Fountain of Youth
St. Augustine, Florida

Interfaith Psalm # 35*

The peaks are laser with clarity,
Imposing power, a triumph of earth over sky.

**A veil of snow highlights their glory,
It heightens my need to gaze at their nakedness.**

The valley cradles life, its song accompanied
by the spilling of streams gushing from cliffs of desire.

**The air is harmonized, the wind moves at a virgin pace.
Light surrounds me with joy, revealing the face of Olympia.**

Her beauty is plentiful on earth but rare in the cosmos;
O, that all could see how heaven is in our midst.

**I become steeped in mystery, savoring to this
sacred moment where
The divine name is synonymous with silence.**

Olympia National Park

Interfaith Psalm # 36

Dawn breaks her silence, speaks in placid colors.
**Waves from across the inlet embrace me,
vibrations from hymns that can only be seen.**

The stars have begun their retreat,
**Fish reach into the air, their spirits gasping from the medium
that holds them at bay.**

In an instant I witness the launching of the sun,
Its flame singes the water, upstaging all that has gone before.

I am humbled by its power to sustain, blinded by its offering of hope,
As it dispels dreams lurking in the deep.

Mission Peninsula
Michigan

Interfaith Psalm # 37*

Color flows over painted cliffs
Tainting the shoreline peppered with caves.

My mind is porous, my spirit penetrating.

I touch the heart of nature, the artist of loving radiance
revealing herself in random strokes of uninhibited Pollock sprays.

**She beats with the force of the waves,
trims back the shore of aging sand.**

I hear your pastel voice blending my thoughts,

Awakening me to the treasure you have buried within.

Painted Cliffs
Michigan, UP

Appendix

Images of Soma in Hindu, Jewish and Christian Scripture

One of the great mysteries in ancient sacred literature is the Vedic “soma sacrifice.” Numerous hymns (poems) are devoted to soma in the Rig Veda, a voluminous text sacred to Hindus believed to have its origins in Indo-European oral tradition dating back 4000 years.

In the ceremonial rite described in the Rig Veda, the soma plant, said to grow near the mountain tops, is gathered and sacrificed, with “pressing stones” being used to squeeze the golden juice out of its stalks. The juice is then filtered, mixed with water, and drunk to achieve a state of transcendent unity with a deity.

While in many Vedic hymns soma is referred to as a sacred plant, numerous other images are associated with soma, images that also are found in Jewish scripture, particularly in the book of Exodus. The Rig Veda likens soma to the “pillar of the sky” (O’Flaherty, p. 122); Exodus 13:21-22, refers to the pillar of smoke and fire in the sky that led the Israelites out of Egypt. Soma is equated with “milk and honey” (O’Flaherty, p. 122), symbols in the Rig Veda for fertility and wealth; Exodus 3:8; 13:5; and 33:3 describe the “promised land” as a “land flowing with milk and honey”.

The Vedic hymns also associate soma with the eagle (O’Flaherty, p. 129, 130); the same image is also found in Exodus 19:4 “...how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” The “Sunbird” or phoenix, which in the Vedic hymns is symbolized by the eagle, is said to bring soma as the “fiery juice of immortality” to earth from the heavens on its wings (O’Flaherty, p. 190, 191); the phoenix image is also used to describe the Messiah in the Hebrew book of Malachi “..the Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (Malachi 4: 1,2). Soma is further associated with the “whirlwind” and with the sage who heals (O’Flaherty, p. 121), images used also to describe the Hebrew prophet Elijah who healed the sick and was caught up in a whirlwind and taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kings 2:11). In addition, soma is said to be that inner source of poetry and scripture (O’Flaherty, p. 126-128) which inspires the seers (prophets).

While some researchers have become convinced that soma was an actual biological plant, a more thorough reading of the Vedic hymns and the many images surrounding the concept demonstrate that soma was not a literal substance but a metaphor for experiences associated with the internalization of mystical teachings resulting from spiritual enlightenment. In this case the sacred drink represents that teaching which has become part of one's being, absorbed, like food, into a person's system so one can spontaneously live and express the teaching in daily life. The Law becomes written on one's heart, as it says in the Hebrew book of Jeremiah. Soma may also have been the ancient way of poetically describing the experience of bliss during the contemplative state of samadhi or transcendental

consciousness, an experience which today is known to be accompanied by bio-chemical changes in the physical body.

According to Hindu tradition, the powerful, inspirational and prophetic influence of soma prompted the creator deity *Brahma* to banish soma to the outer regions of the universe, thereby allowing only the gods to have access to it. As a result, humans could only acquire soma through the Sunbird (phoenix) which flies to earth from heaven, dies, resurrects from its ashes, then ascends back to heaven, leaving the soma behind. Thus, in orthodox Hinduism, the soma sacrifice is believed to have been lost and is therefore no longer practiced. The concept of soma, however, has been kept alive in two other religious groups: Zoroastrians who include in their devotions the “drink of immortality,” and Christians who observe the rite of communion.

Early Christian writers transformed the ancient soma sacrifice using a clever play on words that bridged the languages of Sanskrit and Greek. For the word “soma” in Greek means “body.” Thus the “soma sacrifice,” while in Vedic Sanskrit refers to the sacrifice of a plant for its juice, in Christianity becomes the sacrifice of the Body (soma) of Christ, whose life, death, resurrection and ascension, reflects the life of the mythological Sunbird. Moreover, in the Christian Eucharist, the sacrifice is celebrated in a way similar to the description of the Vedic rite; i.e., juice is pressed from a plant (grapes), is mixed with water, then drunk to gain mystical union with the divine, which in Christianity is Christ's spiritual body (soma). The juice, however, is now red rather than golden to represent the blood Christ shed during the sacrifice of his “soma,” and the water the priest adds to the wine symbolizes the water (in addition to blood) that flowed from the side of the crucified Christian avatar.

Thus the ancient soma sacrifice, which Hindus believe was lost ages ago, was revived and given new meaning by early Christian writers, and somewhat ironically, is currently being practiced on a weekly basis in many churches around the world.

Sources: O'Flaherty, W.D. (1981). *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. London: Penguin Books.

About the Author

George Wolfe is Professor Emeritus at Ball State University where he served as director of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies from 2002 to 2006, and Coordinator of Outreach Programs from 2007 to 2014. He is a certified mediator and was trained to conduct interfaith dialogue at All-Faiths Seminary International in New York City where he was ordained an interfaith minister. In 1991, he was awarded an open fellowship from the Eli Lilly Endowment which made possible his first trip to India where he became interested in the nonviolent philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

Wolfe received his doctorate in higher education administration from Indiana University. As an educator, he frequently lectures both within and outside the United States on topics related to nonviolence, peace education, academic freedom, and the role of the arts in social activism. He has been a featured speaker in the Hall of Philosophy at Chautauqua Institution and has served as a panelist at the annual International Conference on World Affairs in Boulder, Colorado. He has also served on the advisory council of the Toda Institute for Peace, Policy and Global Research, and served as a visiting scholar at Limburg Catholic University in Hasselt, Belgium. In the spring of 2007, he presented peace education workshops in the island nation of Saint Lucia by invitation of the Ministry of Education.

Dr. Wolfe is also a classical saxophonist who held the rank of Professor of Music Performance at Ball State University. He has appeared as a soloist with such ensembles as the Royal Band of the Belgian Air Force, Chautauqua Motet Choir, the U.S. Navy Band Brass Quintet, the Indianapolis Children's Choir and the Saskatoon Symphony. He has also given recitals and master classes throughout the United States, as well as at major conservatories and universities in Europe, Central America, and the Far East.