



PORTRAITS OF BEAUTY  
*poems*

Jason Kirkey

# PORTRAITS OF BEAUTY

*poems*  
JASON KIRKEY

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*To my family for their support in my work  
even if they don't always understand.*

*To my friends for their gentle caring and guidance.*

*And to Ireland where my poetry awoke.*

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# I - VOYAGES

## ☞ *The Only Thing I Know*

I stand, looking out  
the glass door of my home  
down at the earth  
quenched by the autumn rain,  
soaked through but glistening,  
leaning,  
arm against door,  
resting the weight of my life  
on the firmness of  
the vision before me.

Sometimes I wander  
through the aloneness of this  
house  
touching its contents  
to remind myself  
of this life,  
feeling with flesh  
what the heart  
can no longer live.

I rest  
ragged and weary  
on the floor,  
with the knowing  
of firmness  
which doesn't surrender –  
the ground of my being.

Sometimes the day spent  
just confirming  
the solitude of  
my experience  
through silence,  
reminding myself of the  
body through breath,  
and the simple evidence  
of sensation –  
is enough;

enough to know that  
*something is there.*

Sometimes the old wounds  
simply won't stop bleeding,  
won't slow their impersonal  
mission of opening  
even enough for me  
to find sleep,  
but always enough  
to confirm  
the risk of being awake  
is worth the reward.

I left home too long  
to remember;  
the distance has claimed me,  
and every drop of blood  
on parched lips  
screams to return  
to safety,  
to turn my face back  
towards the known;  
but I do not.

Something unseen before me  
pulls me forward,  
something which secretly carries on  
a conversation with my depths;  
and my depths are speaking,  
telling me of beauty at the battle's end,  
of the paradise through the desert's sands;  
and I trust my depths because they  
do not scream like the  
world behind me,  
but whisper softly and secretly,  
confirming my dialogue with  
the earth outside my door;  
and I know the direction

is right  
because the man I was  
yesterday  
is gone today –  
and the man I am  
today  
will be gone by morning,  
as each day brings me closer to freedom.

The battle has already ended,  
already claimed my life;  
the sands are turning to soil,  
have already absorbed the  
spilled blood of my outworn  
heart,  
and I am left with nothing  
but the bleeding  
and the hope for resurrection.

And standing at that door,  
looking down at the earth,  
and the way that  
the grass is grass  
because that is all it knows, and  
the rain is rain  
because that is all it knows,

and how everything works together,  
and everything casts blessings  
on everything it touches  
simply by being nothing but itself;

and how it coaxes me out my door,  
out into the cold and dark  
terrain of the unsure,  
hoping to find tomorrow,  
hoping to find the man  
I will become,  
because it's the only thing I know.

## ☞ *This is the Path*

What did you expect  
when you drank the  
bitter  
elixir of Truth  
from Cormac's cup?

whatever it was  
it was not this...

And now as the  
One Wound  
breaks you once more,  
the Mahasiddha  
stands offering  
you the  
genuine heart of sadness

and you will know  
from your weeping  
that it is  
time again to  
kneel  
before your altar  
offering only  
prayers in your tears.

Knowing that as  
the jaded  
fragments of your  
old tarnished armor  
that wrapped your  
heart like a  
hard tomb of denial,  
drop away  
you will open yourself  
to tenderness.  
Tenderness is the path  
that takes  
fearlessness  
to walk.

It is the place  
of lightening and hail  
that dashes the  
false head of selfdom  
on the rocks  
of awakened living.

When you open yourself  
to this seemingly  
quiet storm  
you awaken to the  
fierce wound that  
afflicts us all

and there are some  
wounds  
for which all  
we can do  
is weep  
because they show us  
that we are awake.

## ☞ *The Mountain Beyond Your Old Life*

This grim resolve to  
live outside the  
shelter of certainty  
sets you walking,  
barefoot and alone,  
down the twisting  
paths  
away from your  
old life,  
but towards one  
greater and uncertain  
future.

This is the life  
you have grown  
to love,  
a house containing  
all that you  
have ever known,  
and the crackle  
of the flames  
which you set,  
whisper  
of the new life  
that awaits you.

The flames remind you:  
“You are not beyond  
the need to belong,  
the one first need  
beyond and before  
all others.”

And though the trail  
you walk winds  
deeper into darkness  
empty of any shred  
of light;  
and though many times

you look back  
across your shoulder  
to the distant  
roaring flames;  
you will push on  
up this great  
mountain of grief.

Now as the  
dawn sun  
rises over hills  
you turn  
looking for the  
flames that have  
gone out.

There is no  
turning back now.

The green valley  
below  
is now all  
that you can see,  
and leaving your  
bags of precious gems  
at your feet,  
you start down.

You do not  
look back again,  
but a quiet  
and now turned  
strong  
whisper  
escapes your open lips:  
“I choose life,  
shape me as you will.”

## œ The Pilgrim's Road

It begins with  
dreams  
and old companions  
on the  
pilgrim's road,

gives way  
to that  
slipping beneath  
the still pool  
of darkness  
where the ferryman  
awaits.

He speaks:  
"You will travel  
no further  
on this road,  
without showing me  
a symbol  
of what you fear  
that you will  
find."

This road is never  
safe  
for those who  
have not  
fought  
the true battle.

This road is never  
safe  
for those who  
don't know the  
sound of  
their own  
voice.

This road is never  
safe  
for those who  
haven't made  
*that* promise.

For those  
this road leads  
only to that  
thundering revelation  
of what is  
true and  
what is not.

An owl flies  
overhead  
screeching death  
as the approaching  
shores  
swallow you.

And soon it will be  
your turn  
to walk the  
knife edge of  
death

to find your  
voice

and make the  
promise  
you will use it.

## ❧ Leaving

Tonight  
the spirits crowded close  
once more  
and spoke  
in their hushed  
voices made of wind  
and hail.

Long before,  
when your heart  
had closed,  
and you prayed  
reverently  
for spring  
they told you,  
*"Give us  
what you love  
the most."*

And now that  
debt  
must be payed.

You know  
that this is  
the work of the  
owl,  
as you bury  
the stone of your  
heart  
in the mountain's  
womb,  
waiting for the  
blossom  
of your new life  
to grow  
from the  
burnt soil  
of the life  
you have now left.

This must be  
the sword  
that has been  
waiting  
to slay you.

From here  
there is no turning back.

From here  
there is only  
the cold path  
beneath your feet  
and the sureness  
of another birth  
into the next  
and waiting  
world.

From here  
there is only  
the sound  
of doors  
closing and opening  
against  
the steady beating  
of your heavy heart.

From here  
there is nothing to do  
but wait for resurrection.

## ☞ Arriving

This is the moment  
of arrival  
when you will wake  
before dawn  
in the quiet  
threshold of night,  
when the  
watchful  
spirit of the  
turning heart  
wakes you  
and pulls you  
from the womb  
of sleep.

*This is the night*  
that can promise  
nothing but the  
eventual morning  
and the fierce  
defeat  
of your tired  
uncertainty.

*This is the night*  
in which  
all the world  
can ask of you  
is to keep  
your breath  
in the surety  
that this terrible  
moment  
on the threshold  
of arrival  
will soon pass.

*This is the night*  
for listening  
to the whispered  
voices that linger  
in the background  
of silence;  
these voices  
will be  
your only companions  
on this  
lost night  
of release.

Everything else  
is only a dream  
waiting  
for you to awaken  
to the brilliance of day.

And only now  
in the grey-light  
of dawn  
when you find  
the long  
untrod path  
leading from  
one dream  
to the next,  
more awakened life,  
do you understand  
that

*This is the morning*  
you were born  
to wake up for.

## œ Vision-Seeking

It can happen at  
any time.

When silence  
and the still motion  
of your arrival  
overcome the  
terrifying descent  
into the underworld  
of your unconscious.

This is the time  
for seeking vision.

You'll know  
when it happens.  
It will stop you  
cold  
in your tracks,  
your mouth gaping  
open in astonishment  
of what you've always  
known in secret.

It is the kind of  
night  
that sends you  
out into the rain  
walking  
for miles  
down the road,  
just to feel  
the wind brush  
across your face.

The kind of night  
when the doorways  
of vision  
swing open.

The kind of night  
you came here for.

It happens when the  
wind  
knows your name,

your *true* name,

and calls you with it  
leaving you  
with that one word  
to repeat  
over  
and  
over again.

That is when  
you will know  
the gift  
that was placed  
in your hands  
at birth, waiting  
until the moment  
you learned  
the sound of your voice.

It happens when  
you finally  
shed the tears  
of loss  
and hold at  
your altar  
an offering of your  
self.

It can happen at  
any time.

☞ *Turas*

This poem  
has been waiting  
patiently for the new  
coincidence of your  
arrival  
and the unfolding  
of the bare lines  
of ending  
which carry  
secret treasures  
from a stoney  
old beginning.

Your *turas*\* through  
the terrain of soul  
and landscape of  
a waking heart  
has carried you  
on beds of soft moss  
back to the  
valley of your dreaming,  
where each vision  
is an invitation  
towards renewal  
nestled in the lap  
of beauty.

The twin-laked  
valley is  
effervescent with the  
fertile explosion of  
life,  
each breeze  
a memory of an  
ancient belonging  
that sprouts from  
the softness of your  
invisible gaze,  
and rests in the  
fixed eyes of beauty

that sees the contours  
of everything we carry  
in the innocence  
of its seldom embrace.

Beauty is the  
breathing of the world  
that suffocates in holding  
and enlivens in the  
reverence of occasion.

The turas  
is the pathway  
to this beauty  
without finality,

just like this  
poem  
begins with an ending  
and ends in the new  
beginning of the  
blossom of  
your heart.

\**Turas* is an Irish word for a pilgrimage or journey. There is an old tradition of making a circumambulatory pilgrimage around the center of Ireland with your left shoulder to the sea.

## ❧ *In the Winter of Your Heart*

Sometimes when it is  
summer on the land  
you must stop and sit  
and stir the rhythm  
of your heart once more,  
to find within  
the barren scape of winter.

And sometimes  
when you have traveled far  
to reach that summer,  
through every darkness, and  
been broken in every way,  
you must do everything  
to speak your name  
saying,  
“I am here. I am alive.”

Give me your brokenness,  
your sharp and jilted edges  
and I will take you to the river  
and there we will pray  
to the water  
and the flowering  
of cherry blossoms.

Sometimes you will feel  
that you do not have  
the strength  
to keep fighting  
your way to love;  
and exhausted from  
the sheer beauty and  
struggle of living  
honestly  
you will stumble  
collapsing in exhaustion.

No one ever said  
you would never  
fall.

No one ever said  
you always had  
to be the strong  
pillar of faith  
you imagined.

No one ever said  
that being free  
was easy.

You are permitted  
to fall, and sometimes  
looking towards the sky  
to let loose your grief  
and simply weep  
into the softness of  
the earth beneath you.

Whatever else happens  
the ground beneath  
your feet  
is solid  
and immovable  
and will never let  
you go.

Something is always working  
for us  
and in us  
that does not require  
our faith or belief  
because it is simply  
too basic.

In the winter of your heart  
it is a great joy  
to know that no one  
expects anything from you  
that you cannot already give.

When the tears have dried  
on your broken but  
beautiful face  
it is time once more  
to raise yourself  
back onto the summer  
of the land.

The winter always does  
its work in secret  
until one day  
spring comes  
bursting  
with every hope  
from which we  
never imagined  
to see the fruit.

## II - BEAUTY

## œ Portraits of Beauty

I write in the  
rapture of beauty  
to bring forth  
small and flickering  
images  
as gifts from the  
depths of listening,  
to be wrought  
and tempered  
by human hands  
to paint portraits  
in prayer  
to the fragile  
breath of beauty  
in the subtle  
touch of our  
brief awakenings.

## ☞ *Haunting Beauty*

There is  
a rare beauty  
in these  
faltering moments of  
imperfection  
that  
haunt  
our humanity and  
lull us into  
the dream of  
forgetting.

They have a way  
of making us  
believe  
that we are alone.

I know

I have seen  
life's  
terrible beauty  
held forth in  
hands  
of lightning and  
the rising sun  
of dawn

and I have closed  
my eyes to it  
and turned  
my back,  
throwing stones at  
the promises  
I once held  
sacred.

But that is the  
beauty  
of such  
faltering moments of  
imperfection

they provide us the  
pathway  
to return again  
to the moment we  
fell in love  
with our existence

and with the  
haunting  
beauty  
in which we are  
invited  
day after day  
to commit  
our lives to.

## ☞ *Homage*

Beneath this flowing  
subterranean water  
that emerges from  
the damp  
closeness of dreams  
you can let yourself find  
another time,  
or a remembered world,  
or a familiar song,  
or a bright vision  
that pulses with  
the ancient rhythm,  
and denies us  
our selfish transgressions  
against life and  
the spirit  
of our becoming,  
to unwrap the  
small fragile self  
from the cocoon  
of its frightened  
interiority  
revealing the bright  
and fiery elegance  
of the eternal  
heart ablaze.

Here beneath this  
ancient  
flowing  
spirit of a thousand  
watery sounds  
that echo like  
music of these hills  
and call our secret  
passions  
to catch and drink life  
in the basin of  
her mossy cupped hands,  
turned from the pouring

of beauty from  
hidden worlds  
to wash over the  
senses  
and disperse it  
with infinite grace  
and generosity,  
giving in the sure  
knowledge  
of its own fertile abundance.

Here let us stop  
to pay homage  
to the sacred gifts  
recieved in the enfoldment  
of beauty  
and the simplicity  
of this watery dance  
on the stone altar  
of earthly listening.

Here the water  
demands only one  
motion from your  
hands,  
and one sound  
from your  
poised and parted  
lips.

The demand is simple  
throw away  
the coins of  
your desperate  
blindness  
and take up the  
new melody  
of your voice.

The demand is everywhere  
you will find it  
wherever silence  
meets the sounds  
of pure  
presence.

## Words

I am always surprised  
by the words  
on my page  
as if expecting old friends  
and finding the  
unsure face of strangers  
in hope of hospitality.

Let this poem  
be the warm greeting  
of their arrival.

# III - BECOMING

## œ The Breath of Night

Down in the tangled  
ruins  
of the life you once lived,  
there are broken walls  
of stone and moss,  
dark pools of  
rain  
falling softly like  
ashes to the ground.

In this place  
water is the sacrament,  
a nourishment  
that seeps deep  
within the dryness  
of your soul.

The damp leaves  
upon the stones of rest  
will be your guides  
this night

in their decay,  
is a poem  
calling to the  
poem of your death

These autumn leaves  
fall away  
with the fierce  
unspoken knowledge  
of their perpetual rebirth  
growing deeper  
in relation with  
the tree of your soul.  
You will want to believe  
that there is  
a going back -  
that there is  
a return to slumber -

that there is  
a falling away from grace –  
that there is  
another drink of this  
draught of forgetting -

but there is not.

There is only  
the steady  
sound  
of your breath  
against the  
breath of night  
and the slow yearning  
for another way  
to live.

Beyond  
there is a cave  
shut fast by the  
heavy  
door of denial.

Your pale, ghost-like  
hands  
waver in reaching  
to throw open the door.

Here, your life is forfeit.

Here the only draught  
that you will drink is  
death.

Here, you can only turn  
towards decay

you watch as your  
dreams  
fade into the night  
and your prayerful tears  
fall to the soft  
earth  
beneath your feet.

There is nothing  
left now

but waking up.

## ☞ *The Forgotten*

Strange to think  
how easy it is  
to forget our  
most basic goodness  
and  
how like a great weave  
we are all human  
together.

Away from the busy  
streets of blank  
and desperate faces  
hardened by the fierce  
cynicism of exile  
is another world  
that is both first  
and last  
on the ever turning  
spiral of becoming.

When you see  
those haunted  
faces  
staring up at you  
expectantly  
wishing  
only to be heard  
and seen  
and known for the  
wisdom they still  
hold for us  
in trust  
crying out  
with the bitter  
wails that come  
with being the  
people of  
the forgotten fire,  
it is enough to break  
your heart,

and make you  
cry out in your  
own fearful voice  
that's turned now  
to quiet strength.

It is enough  
to make you  
pray  
to be taken back  
into the arms of the  
forgotten  
and reminded of  
the beauty of  
who you *really* are.

## œ The World's Becoming

I want to write  
about life

but every  
labored word  
holds the bitter  
consequence of death.

Those who have  
left us  
pass beyond  
our fragile touch  
to wait for  
our own arrival  
through the  
invisible doorway  
of *another*  
more hidden life.

They want us  
to carry  
their past  
in the hushed  
words that  
grow from our  
grief  
to be planted  
in the rivers of  
memory.

I want to write  
about love  
but often  
cannot see  
its hard-won beauty  
until grabbed  
by the hands  
of loss.

To know such  
fierce untamed  
passion  
is to know  
its eventual defeat  
in the passing  
of forms  
that await all things.

I want to write  
about joy

but have never  
known it  
without the cold  
breath of grief  
haunting the  
ocean shores  
of the longing  
from which it  
rose.

You see,

the world keeps nothing  
for itself-  
but sacrifices everything  
to the symphony  
of its own bright becoming.

## ☞ *The Place Where Things Dissolve*

It is like this:  
the tide swells  
perilously  
to shift you  
from the firm  
stone on which  
you stand,  
and the blue-green  
depths  
know your name  
and sing to you  
in the most alluring  
voice;  
asking for nothing  
and offering everything.

Whatever your desires,  
the waves can grant them -  
their form: beautiful,  
painting pictures  
which dance with  
the shapes  
of all the  
ten thousand things  
granting every wish  
and every pleasure  
true.

They keep the price  
hidden:  
close your eyes,  
even for a moment,  
and your name  
becomes another wave  
in the sea of  
cowardice.

The fearless way of heart  
requires open eyes,  
and our casting  
of petals of wisdom  
as offerings to the deep  
to use as stepping-stones  
across the waters of  
false form,  
to the place  
where things dissolve  
in the expanse of our depths -  
to a life without limit  
taught by the treasure  
of love without limit.

## IV - THRESHOLDS

## ☞ The Cross-Roads

Here at the  
edge of your  
soul  
is a place  
that will ask you  
all the questions  
you've never  
asked yourself

a hidden crossroads  
where the only  
sign  
that you will find  
is the  
hushed sound  
of your breath  
pulling you  
on the path ahead.

If you follow  
that quiet trail  
of breath  
like a string of  
pearls  
through the heavy  
burning ruins  
of your  
tired and hollow life  
it will lead you  
to *another* road  
that you never  
knew was waiting.

On this path  
you will find  
all the choices  
you've ever  
left behind  
the choices that  
have haunted you

the choices that  
have filled you  
with both  
love and regret

the choices that  
you thought would  
open you to life  
but only  
really ever  
closed your heart  
to the world.

Here at the crossroads  
of making  
and unmaking  
are all the *other*  
lives  
that you have  
never known  
were anything  
but shadows;

and those lives  
are waiting  
for you  
to plant their  
seed  
in soil of your  
heart.

## ☪ Religion

Sometimes  
religion  
is nothing more  
than silence,  
the steady reflection  
of your face  
in the stillness  
of your tea,  
and watching the  
falling  
snow  
beyond the shining  
candlelight  
on your altar  
of remembrance.

## ☞ Faith

One night they asked,

“Do you know  
what  
faith is?”

I looked through  
the open window

listened to the  
rustle of leaves  
on the  
quiet wind;

looked to the  
stirring of ripples  
on the  
once-still surface  
of the pond;

and watched the sun  
setting orange-gold  
below the steady  
clouded  
mountain peaks.

I nodded,

“Yes, I know  
what  
faith is.”

## ☞ Prayer

I pray now  
to the ones  
gone but not  
gone,

to the gentle  
embrace  
they bestow on us  
even as we turn  
our own backs  
to the ever-patient  
world,

to the way  
they show us  
how to fill  
emptiness  
with  
presence  
and  
blindness  
with  
vision,

to their silent  
immovable  
love  
which we can  
hear if we  
listen  
carefully  
to the way  
the wind  
speaks in  
the softness of  
night.

To these ones  
I pray  
by the simple  
act  
of holding  
their memory.

## œ The New Apprenticeship

I dreamed that I  
was swallowed by a  
deep cave and  
crushed  
into the flesh  
and bones of the  
earth.

It stole me from  
my black grief  
and the dark,  
solitary  
edges of my  
mind.

From those  
depths  
I was given only  
the small  
flickering  
light of a single  
glowing candle.

This was the place  
of the second  
arrival  
after the first  
broken attempt of  
learning to walk  
in truth.

The chamber was  
filled with  
a thousand  
candles  
and the musty  
smell of incense  
dancing in the  
temple hall.

Somewhere beyond  
the statue of the  
goddess  
was the sound of  
water  
trickling from  
some dark place  
unseen  
shrouded  
maybe  
by our inability  
to hold too much  
beauty  
in such a single  
fleeting glance.

The night can only  
hold our hearts  
so long,  
soon it must  
give way  
to the dawning  
presence  
of light within  
the day.

One year,  
I spent,  
on the  
spiral of change  
falling  
and sometimes  
diving  
into the depths  
of the dark soul  
which forces our  
hearts  
to take the  
night-sea voyage  
seeking

new bodies  
with which to build  
a shrine to  
the soul of  
life.

That first, fierce,  
old apprenticeship  
taught the  
true meaning  
of  
fearlessness  
and  
tenderness  
and the way  
one grows  
from the other  
like the way  
moss  
creeps up  
the spine of  
the ancient oak  
in a new marriage  
of life.

I want to tell the  
world  
that I am alive  
and risen from the  
remains of  
the body  
dedicated only  
to blindness.

I want to say:  
“A new candle  
has been lit  
in my heart

to push away  
the crowding  
edge of dark.”

I want to say:  
“I pray now  
to the gentle  
new apprenticeship  
on the path  
of the  
tending heart”.

Instead I say nothing  
but relish the  
healing silence  
I have found  
waiting in the heart  
of night  
to be carried  
as a sacred vessel  
into the new  
and waiting  
day  
where I will  
speak that  
singular patient  
word that  
I've avoided  
all these years.

## ☪ *Where the World Touch*

As the slow mists  
descended on the  
hills  
so too did that  
quiet voice of  
vision  
that haunts my dreams  
and asks me  
in terrifying  
words  
the same unanswered  
questions  
over and  
over again.

Rising from sleep  
I climbed until the  
green land below me  
turned to the elusive  
white  
slithering strands  
of the afternoon mist.

Words howled  
like the bansidhe  
on the wind,  
asking for just a few  
more labored steps  
before setting down  
the heavy weight of  
my life  
by that old  
stone wall now  
taken over by  
the damp  
and fertile earth  
of a new vision.

Here,  
where the worlds  
touch  
and the land  
becomes your  
name,  
and  
the wind  
becomes  
your breath,  
is one last  
frightening moment  
held in the deadly  
embrace  
of an old wise crone  
before  
that *other* crowd comes  
to carry you  
on hidden trails  
back to the waiting day.

Now let my voice  
join with the voices  
on the wind  
as I let that tiny  
but pure and golden  
word  
leave my lips for  
the first time,  
and watch as the  
mists part  
for just one  
almost  
impercievable moment  
of relinquish,

enough only  
to let the vaguest  
reflections of the sun  
upon the crystal surface  
of the sea  
meet the softness  
of your eyes

enough only  
to guide  
your tired  
feet  
on the long  
light-bathed path  
towards home.

## ☪ *Where Earth Meets Heaven*

I left my house  
to search for treasure  
across the old miner's  
road  
where cold stones  
of the heart  
were worked  
to reveal the glitter  
of precious jewels.

Shuffling across  
the path  
I encountered the  
unexpected and  
frightening motion  
of my laboured breath.

Between each breath  
was an invitation  
of the liminal  
like where the earth  
meets heaven  
to request our surrender  
in a tone that refuses  
our sure denial.

Those who come  
seek it in  
the ever widening  
distance  
of the far-away  
that retreats with  
the unwelcome  
penetrating gaze of  
our approach.  
It was only when  
I finally  
kneeled down  
in defeat  
upon the coarse

trail of gravel,  
arms outstretched,  
face laid flat upon  
the earth,  
my tears like  
damp messages  
of silence  
to that land  
beneath the land

that I saw buried  
beneath the dust  
of my tired feet  
a tiny shining  
glitter of  
a pilgrim's coin.

I did not take it though,  
but left it where  
it lay in the  
quiet knowing earth.

Such is always the  
way of pilgrimage:  
treasure hidden  
where it takes  
surrender to  
show us.

Heaven is never far-  
it was here all along,  
it was right here all along!

## ☞ *The Meadow of a Thousand Dreams*

Last night

    a small door opened  
to a dance of light  
and the herald of thunder's storm  
slowly escaped from silence,  
carrying heaven's breath towards another dawn.

Last night

    I prayed for the mountain pass  
and found myself drinking  
deep draughts  
from the well of remembrance  
staying to weep with the fullness of night.

Last night

    I wept for the  
beauty and terror of this encounter,  
seized by the sacred  
etchings on ancient stones  
echoed in the symphony of becoming.

But that was last night.

Today

    I stand before you, within  
the meadow of a thousand dreams  
walking beauty's footsteps  
out into the awakened world  
of light.

V - PRESENCE

## ☞ *The Texture of Days*

The beckoning tone  
of light  
calls me outside,  
tea in hand  
to converse with  
a golden evening.  
Gentle is the storm  
overhead,  
quiet, its wind  
a soft carress of  
cool evening air  
that bears longing  
like the broken hearted.

It is the texture  
of the day which  
arouses the senses  
to dance dreams  
from the tedium of sleep;  
each sound is a blessing  
carried by birdsong.

But, it does not come  
with effort  
it only emerges  
through the labor of breath  
and the silent conversation  
we carry with the center  
which calls us to answer  
the question of dawn  
each day.

The answer is that  
which we make  
with our body's presence,  
in the casting of  
life's bright shadow.

The answer is perfectly simple:  
awaken.

## œ The Invisible Presence of Silence

In this haunting,  
invisible presence  
of silence

grief  
breaks across you  
like the chanting  
ebb and flow  
of ocean waves.

In this place  
your tears  
are the  
breaking of glass  
and the  
coldness of this  
threshold  
your doorway to  
death's enduring  
presence.

Here, the keening women  
wail of what you  
believed to be  
your defeat.

In this place  
nothing can ease  
the tightening of  
your throat  
around the tears  
of that bitter loss.

But in this haunting,  
invisible presence  
of silence  
-behind the shattered  
mirror  
of your life-  
you can finally

see the  
falseness  
of your  
aloneness.

you can finally know  
how blood  
calls to blood  
and the swinging  
invisible  
doorway  
you once tightly  
pressed shut  
and closed your  
eyes to,  
opens up  
as the mist  
draws back  
slowly,  
to reveal  
the rising sun.

The silence  
goes so deep-

you can hear  
inside it  
the breathing  
of the dead.  
In this haunting,  
invisible presence  
of silence

the land  
of the living  
ancestors  
is closer  
than the fragile  
weight  
of your grief.

In this place  
it is enough,  
to know silence  
and the  
immovable  
and  
invisible  
embrace of devotion  
where the dead  
are still close.

It is enough  
for you to stand  
face to face  
with the image  
of your loss  
and hear the  
voices of the dead  
speak softly  
in your ear.

They speak of death  
as life  
and the threshold  
of passing  
as a coming  
to the place  
of truth.

Here, we are not  
alone  
but sheltered  
by the embrace  
of the ones  
who will not  
give up  
on tending the  
shrine  
of our hearts.

Here, the true  
devotion of love  
and the forgiveness  
of our human  
folly  
cannot be severed  
by the  
passing  
from  
the *visible*

to this haunting,  
silent presence  
of  
the *invisible*.

## ☞ Part I: The Forge

Incredible this gift  
cast in the fires  
of some unknown forge  
hidden in the empty crevasses  
of a shadowed heart,  
coaxed shape from iron  
cooled and hardened by  
the kiss of that  
liquid cool blue flame  
of water  
that eases form from  
formless  
and births a new  
waiting spirit into the  
world or words.

Is it any surprise  
in the magic  
of the blacksmith  
working on the  
fine-edged sword of  
your own sculptured  
presence?

## ☞ Part II: Presence

Something about  
the way  
mountains and trees  
dance with the shapes  
of clouds;  
the symphonic echo  
of stillness against that  
steady relaxed drifting;  
the gentle waving  
beckoned by wind.  
Beneath it the lake  
answers back with  
portraits of clarity  
wrapped in the ripples  
of its own interpretation.

Presence is the  
spontaneous joining in  
of our own  
surprised voices.

## VI - ARRIVALS

## œ The Shape of Arrival

We who wait  
hold the space  
for those who travel far  
to find their home,  
walk a different pilgrim's  
road of silence and  
stillness, traveling  
not to some distant  
curve of horizon  
but to the depth of arrival.

We who wait  
shall know the cry  
of realization we hear  
the first time  
one pilgrim finds  
that entrance  
to the Promise Land  
asks for more than we thought  
we could ever give.

There  
we find only the dust of dreams  
that were too small,  
and the seeds  
to plant a new  
vision in the  
garden of our hearts.

## Part I: *The New Freedom*

Long months you have  
waited  
in the belly of this  
great winter  
all the while  
praying  
to the faceless crowd  
below the pierced vision  
of your eyes.

Tell us  
what it is like  
to lose the surety  
of your breath  
in the expanse of loss

what it is like to  
carry the burden  
of crumbling walls  
around your heart

what it is like  
to be awake  
within the fires  
of your own burning  
vision of hope.

Tell us  
what it is like  
to be alive  
and we will share  
with you  
our sorrow  
having chosen  
sleep  
within the dream  
hoping forever  
for that moment  
that will startle us  
enough to raise the dead.

Then you must  
give everything you  
ever knew  
to the darkness of the  
night,

you belong to  
whatever returns  
with the rising sun of dawn.

Long hours  
pass through night  
waiting for a moment  
draped in other  
spectral colors  
of remembered mornings.

Now  
walk out your door -  
out into this new morning  
where the stones are  
singing your name  
in the light and shadows  
that fall across  
their face  
and the water's  
edge invites you  
to a new horizon.

Walk out your door -  
out into the gracious morning  
where your world has come alive  
within the new freedom  
found beneath  
the weight of a newly  
opened gate.

## ☞ Part II: *Everything is Freedom*

I journeyed far across  
the pilgrim sea  
on a stone-grey wind,  
which whispered  
of tides  
turning to carry us  
away from the stale  
poetry  
dripping with the  
loss of youth and  
the haze of old  
remembered dreams.

Last journey past the  
old road of owl's flight  
and a new blood pact  
with every piece of  
you that stayed  
the coward's hand  
in battle  
through a hill-top night.

“Stay now”,  
said a voice,  
“for  
intoxicating is the  
vision  
of your ghost-breath  
seeking form  
through the tremble  
of unsure hands,  
reaching to  
tenderly  
place the last  
two stones  
from your heart  
on the mound  
of this poet's  
time now gone”.

Everything left with dawn  
but this lightning tongue  
afame with a new promise  
and the hope of keeping.

Everything is put to rest,  
and

Everything is freedom.

## œ The Breaking of Silence

When we find love,  
the world loves with us  
and steps in  
to test our body's presence.  
It wants to feel  
our soft edges  
as it runs the  
finger tips of truth  
across our skin,  
feeling our sure breath  
against the weight of love.

You can't turn your face  
away. Not this time.

This time the world  
holds you ransom  
to patience  
swaying between  
aloneness and a love  
you could vanish into.

When you are finished with dying,  
the world wants you to speak:  
to know silence when you hear it  
and the way it takes just one  
voice to break it  
and call it your own.

It knows that now is the time  
for breaking  
and the slow building  
of a new melody  
echoing soft hues  
of belonging.

And if you break that  
long and heavy silence  
which has been your

shelter and your surety,  
if your faith is placed  
in this emerging music  
then the world knows  
that life will dance to its sound,  
and demons and angels  
will answer her,  
testing our  
love and faith in  
whatever darkness,  
whatever light.

This time it only wants us to live  
into the breaking of silence  
with the only voice  
we can call our own.

## ☞ *The Sun*

One day the late  
August sun  
swept through my life  
clearing and illuminating  
everything,  
leaving nothing to shadow.

When it departed  
once more  
behind clouds,  
darkness spoke again,  
revealing the Otherness  
of light.

And now I work,  
walking this candlelight  
into shrouded corners  
of my heart,  
hoping to illuminate  
myself  
when finally  
the sun returns.

## ☪ Ithaca

*for Jenn*

Lately I have been conversing  
with departure and  
arrival, and  
braced between them  
they have shouted  
for my attention  
pulling me into the distance,  
away from myself.

And I think of how  
quickly one became the other  
in their marriage,  
even as I lay awake  
grasping the shoreline  
and pulling toward me  
the receding tide  
of dawn.

There was something revelatory  
about this small room's  
first taste of intimacy  
the penetration of some  
profound dialogue between  
two passing hearts  
like the first light  
of morning  
pouring in through the curtains  
and illuminating  
the solitude of my experience.

Sometimes I must find  
the small pieces  
of memory which  
you left behind,  
to convince myself  
of that now distant  
arrival,  
coax myself back

into dialogue  
with anything at hand.

Your departure set the  
prairies aflame,  
and the moon stood still  
for nine days,  
and those fires still burn  
a line down through the  
center between us,  
masking us with smoke  
and heat,  
disguising our voices through  
the crackle of flames  
so that I wonder who  
it is we do see,  
wonder if the flames  
will ever die,  
or, if holding my breath  
I must be the one to  
take that leap of faith  
into another world.

But this is only the shouting  
of departure and arrival.  
Here, in the quiet corners  
of my heart  
everything is still as clear  
as the first time I looked  
into your eyes  
and knew those words  
I brought you here to say.  
Here, there is no fire  
but mine  
and yours  
and they burn all the  
brighter together  
and it is in that fire  
that I shall place  
my faith.

Though I have not  
left home,  
I travel far across  
the waves, like  
Odysseus or Maelduin,  
searching for vision,  
or that familiar shore  
where I can finally  
cast off this weariness  
and the outcome of  
my expectations,  
a shore which I can  
name “home”  
and kneel upon the sand  
with the swelling tide  
kissing my feet,  
let myself fall to the earth,  
before lifting myself up  
one last time and walking,  
naked and alone, as no one  
but myself,  
into the fierce fires of our

## ☞ *And the Song Goes On*

*(after Rainer Maria Rilke)*

Whatever the shape of your  
faithful vessel upon arrival,  
whatever lives or dies within  
through the fierce trials of  
the voyage,  
whatever your grief of loss  
or joy of love  
you will always have  
the singular pillar  
of breath to turn you  
towards the embrace  
of the one song  
you were born to sing.

The sun rises for another dawn  
and the geese return from their  
winter migrations  
announcing their arrival  
through the clear air  
and always the sure return  
of life moves in to claim us.

And looking back towards  
the dark voyage  
of an arrival we could never  
have anticipated,  
suddenly all our struggles are  
confirmed  
as we tracked the footsteps  
of our breathing to  
this moment of renewal.

Whatever our darkness,  
our brokenness,  
the longings lost to us  
to the unrelenting waves

the song will always go on,  
resonating in the dark  
and secret chambers of the  
hidden night of the soul  
– beautiful.

## ☞About the Author☜

Jason Kirkey grew up in Massachusetts. He is a poet and founder of Hiraeth Press. His poetry is influenced by the natural world, Buddhism, and his ancestral Irish roots; through these he hopes to kindle a deep love of the earth and a relationship with the creative spirit as a means of transformation. He holds an interdisciplinary degree from Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado and is the author of three collections of poetry, *Portraits of Beauty*, *Songs from a Wild Place*, and *The Ballad of the Sea-Sweet Moon and Other Poems*. He lives in San Francisco. His website is <http://www.jasonkirkey.com>.

*Portraits of Beauty* is Jason Kirkey's first in a collection of several books of poetry, including *Songs from a Wild Place* and *The Ballad of the Sea-Sweet Moon and Other Poems*. The poems in this collection have been written in and inspired by many landscapes; the forests of his birth place in Massachusetts, the mountains of Colorado, and the rain and mists of the west of Ireland. Divided into five parts—Voyages, Beauty, Thresholds, Presence, and Arrivals—this collection attempts to capture the quiet presence and the fierce passion within the human soul.

from *The Only Thing I Know*

And standing at that door,  
looking down at the earth,  
and the way that  
the grass is grass  
because that is all it knows, and  
the rain is rain  
because that is all it knows,  
and how everything works together,  
and everything casts blessings  
on everything it touches  
simply by being nothing but itself;  
  
and how it coaxes me out my door,  
out into the cold and dark  
terrain of the unsure,  
hoping to find tomorrow,  
hoping to find the man  
I will become,  
because it's the only thing I know.

Jason Kirkey grew up in Massachusetts. He is a poet and a student of mindfulness practice. His poetry is influenced by the natural world, Buddhism, and his ancestral Irish roots; through these he hopes to kindle a deep love of the earth and a relationship with the creative spirit as a means of transformation. He holds an interdisciplinary degree from Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado and is the author of three collections of poetry, *Portraits of Beauty*, *Songs from a Wild Place*, and *The Ballad of the Sea-Sweet Moon and Other Poems*. He lives in San Francisco. His website is <http://www.jasonkirkey.com>.



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