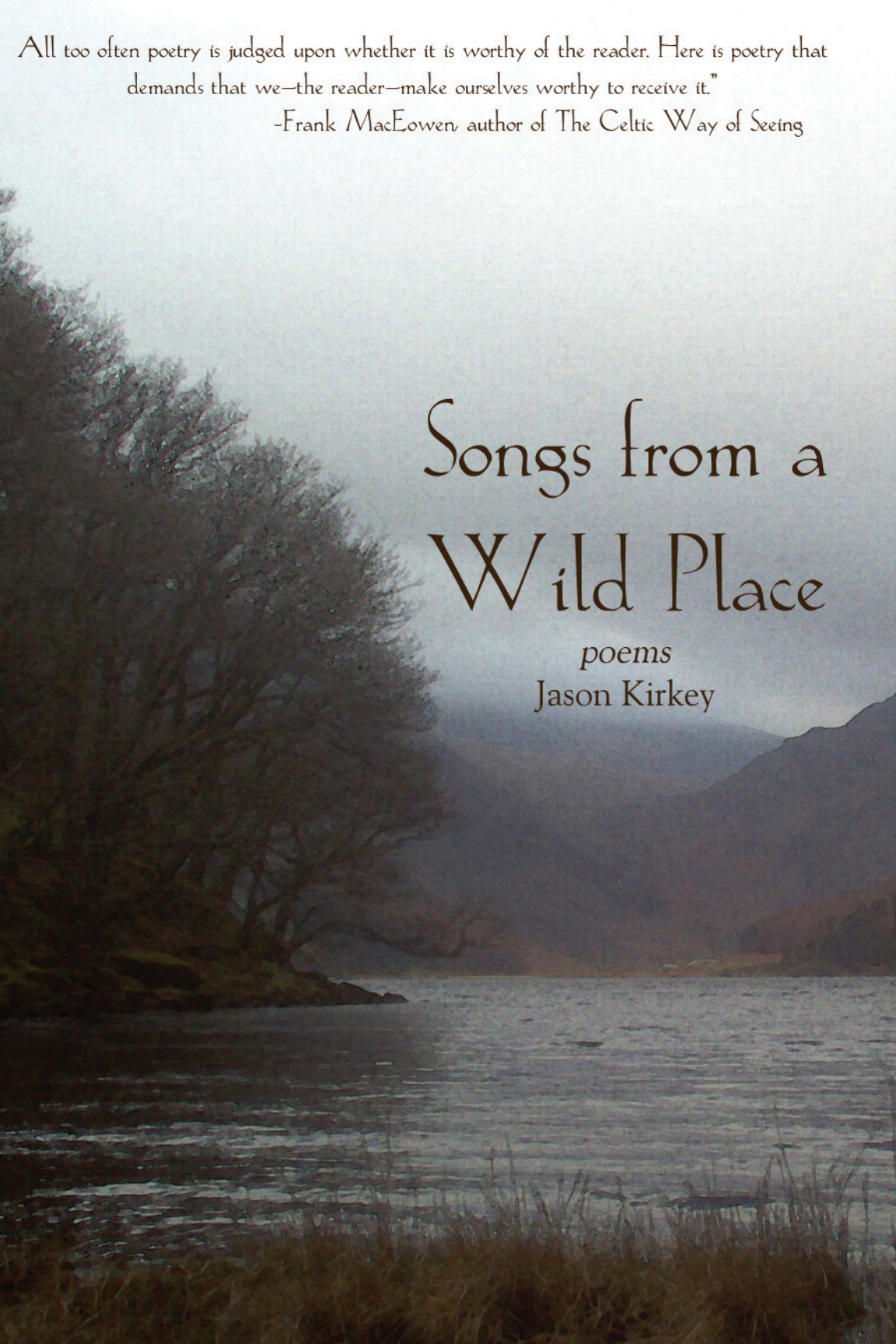


All too often poetry is judged upon whether it is worthy of the reader. Here is poetry that demands that we—the reader—make ourselves worthy to receive it.”

-Frank MacEwen, author of *The Celtic Way of Seeing*



Songs from a
Wild Place

poems

Jason Kirkey

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HIRAETH PRESS
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*To anyone who ever thought
they could change the world
with their art.*

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I.
The Self

❧ *Silence* ❧

This life,

this life is not yet spoken;
it cannot hear itself
or the melody around it
which sings of all the
unbidden lyrics
raging in its heart.

This life,

this life
still belongs
to silence.

Who is the Poet? Who is the Pen? *Who is the Poet? Who is the Pen?*

Anything can happen in the bare lines
stretched before us, waiting to be made
whole in the fluid motions of the pen, the
emptiness of the page like the emptiness of time
stretched forward toward the note of our death.
And we could fill that page with anything,
its quality measured by the attentive heart
so that we must tend to the falling of our steps
walking on toward the next page and the next,
listening and faithfully writing what we hear
even as the ear strains and the tongue falls short
until the book is written, gone from the imagined
to the real, beautiful even when it falters
because it is honest and the voice of the pen
our own— and even when we are gone
and others find that book, finding
through its lines some permission within to sing,
they will remark how true the voice to the page;
“But who is the poet whose voice is the pen?”

☞ Self Portrait: Brugh na Bóinne ☞

Near the center of a land that
I have known, I have seen
a wide stone, resting not idly
at an entrance, entrancing us
and everyone who passes;
tourists with cameras, and
a few invisible pilgrims –
into their own dark centers,
ensuring that everyone who
enters, leaves nothing they
ever held behind. There,
I have seen the work of hands
and chisels, elegantly sweeping
away the surface of the stone,
carving with some secret intent
these labyrinthine spirals,
which speak to anyone who
will listen, *“to enter the cave
of the sun, is to enter thyself.”*

And I have known these
deep set edges, patterning around
my heart with all the precision
of a master craftsman
sculpting the clay of my body,
illuminating everything
with perfect respect for
its own interior darkness
and integrity, with
that thin shaft of light –

just once a year, or less
when the clouds have other plans,
as if anything but its
staggered, occasional touch
would be a betrayal.

And I knew when I stood
at that threshold
looking past that
light edged frontier,
down the sloping hill
to the world below
that I stood on the edge of myself,
and that it took only one step
to claim that interior –
only one step to reach in
to the center,
with perfect faith in
its beckoning hand
to support my faltering weight
as I, claiming all the fires
of the night, took without cause
the second step, illuminated still,
but sure in the knowledge
that even when all the light
retreated beyond my eyes
and the sweet touch of
darkness was all that
kissed my face,
enveloping everything
in its vastness, I could still claim,
if nothing else,
this breathing as my own.

❧ *Wonder at the Edge of Morning* ❧

Every morning I emerge from the dark,
the invisible world slipping from my shoulders,
singing me home to the light
and if I am able to accept the first
sung note of this invitation to the world
then I will be full of lucid wonder,
and maybe, if I can keep, in my own step,
the harmony singing through the curtains
then I will not slink to the desk
and pray at the altar of all my burdens
but at the altar of tea poised at parted lips,
sitting on the porch in a flourish of birdsong,
cooling with my breath the hot liquid
of contemplation and prayer.

Waking is an art of wonder;
the mastery in taking the first
pure note of the day, and stretching
it across the measure of all the hours,
until it fills us, utterly and completely,
to the moonlit rest of evening,
shattering all our prisons,
until surrender claims our eyes.
The dreamscape of night holds
to its own interior song and rhythm
and we will only ever know it by
the brief echoes of its voice
in that first sung note of morning,
when wonder wakes the eye again.

Q Right Now Q

In a way we are always looking
for that first line to start a poem,
and the sureness which it builds
from the body of its sound;
it wants to find the voice in us
that cannot turn away from
right now. And,

Right now, the snow falls heavily
towards the certain ground, and I say,
“let the cold be an invitation to warmth.”

All our failures build around us
like some symphony of defeat,
and grind away the selfish edges,
so that all the places we thought we
could never go are free;
the first step is failure,
the second, creating secret
music from the first.

Right now, the one I love
is with another, and I say,
“wide is the circle of my faith.”

Once I was told that love
asks everything from us
without any promise of return,
and I think now that that
is the way of living fiercely

in this world, and that everything
that matters to the heart
would throw us away, simply
to see what we become when
finally we are abandoned.

Right now, the shadowed interior
of my heart is set ablaze, and I say,
“let it stoke the fires of the world.”

And in that abandonment, if we can
find some small glimmer of a seed
from which it came, if we can find
the hand or the heart that we so thought
had failed us, and with grace
accept the invitation to the circle
of its vision, then all the world
will hold us, and know us
and sing the first sweet notes
from which we could build a new self.

So right now,

I watch as every small,
brightly perceived but dim failure
and elegantly broken word
is turned gently, but not
without astonishment,
towards the harvest of revelation.

⌘ *When Lightning Strikes the Heart* ⌘

When lightning strikes the heart
there is no telling what
dark storm will take you
and carry you towards
some secret horizon,
what hard wood of the soul
will be rent in two
to shape a vessel
and hold the bright flame
of passion.

It rouses the heart
turning us toward the
life we have avoided,
opens our mouths to
the songs we would
never sing.
It is so much,
sometimes we don't
know if we should
laugh, or if
holding our hearts in
our hands,
we should fall to the ground
weeping
in the ashes of its descent.

When lightning strikes the heart
there is no telling what
new vitality will rise
from some hidden depths
to claim a life
you always thought
was yours alone.

∞ Migrations ∞

When I awoke this morning to the dawn,
thirsty from the long hours of darkness
through which I breathed, entangled
in the world that I had made for myself,
and saw the mirrored contours of my face,
etched hard with exhaustion, I spoke a
faithless prayer, admitting,
finally, the otherness of my life.

For too many days now, I have lived
speaking only with the night, trying to
sculpt from that enveloping darkness
some presence through which I might
catch some shadowed glimpse of the self
hidden away by so many layers of the world.

The streaming dusty light now pierces
the morning curtains of my heart,
and for the first time since I
took up that flame edged sword
of my mind, I breathed in the fresh
stillness of the day, as if in that simple
act of air penetrating the body,
I could absorb all the innocent qualities
of that morning sun, and all the anticipation
of complete and utter surprise.

I did not turn my back on the darkness
through which I came swimming
in that great ocean of the night,
but after years of dreaming
and sitting with my back turned to

the fire of all that I was offered, I suddenly
learned how to let my eyes be free.
The dark corners of the world never
leave us, they simply enfold within us,
making room for a more visible place—
a place where we can claim the fires
branching in our hearts.

For too long I have sat
with the world laid out at my feet,
probing the endless space of my interior,
searching for the word that breathed me alive,
sure that in its syllables and speaking
I would find the center of my question,
the quiet beat of an unspoken heart.

When you are exhausted,
you must fall to the ground,
let the movement of surrender
be the forfeit of the journey,
your passage to the promise land—
and you will not be too lost
to see the folly of the road
stretched out from your back;
the world was waiting only
for this falling toward the dust.
There is only one horizon
and we cannot arrive, it stretches on,
receding into the distance, concealing
itself beyond all other arrivals.

And I know the exhaustion in my feet
is no sign of the miles I've traveled,
but an assurance that some part of me
has secretly died, something which I refuse
over and over again. And I know
my refusal and its need to look away,
to build around me the walls of the
garden of delight, the walls of my
comfortable and familiar suffering.

But I know the blade of this conversation
is not sharpened on the smooth contours
of life, but edged by the turning grit
of my experience, however difficult and
however alone and full of grief and loss.

I have asked the same impossible questions
hoping to find an answer I could live with,
and only finding silence at the center,
a silence that threatens to make us everything
that we are worthy of, writing our names
in the wind, barely conceived, but faithful
enough to carry a migration of wings
pounding on air, moving worlds with
invisible ability. Gracious, the morning
is full of light and all our own vitality,
beckons with its slow and hopeful rhythm
the ease of all exhaustion, an invitation
to participate in this great migration,
to cease asking the questions,
and simply let the questions live.

II. The World

☞ *The Old World* ☞

There are stone walls here,
older than I.
They creep like the edge
of memory
though the places the paths
will not go.
They are low and do not fence
out the world,
marking a place that is here,
or not here,
but are of the world, and like a
circle of belonging
are songlines to the heart
of silence.

I am a pilgrim amongst
these trees
with no ambition
for arrival;
I will settle for a sinking in,
a coming home,
a shedding of old skin
for a body
made rightly out of clay,
or a new sapling
pushing through the earth.

I am a pilgrim toward
simplicity,
and I will cast my lot
in with
the wild geese on the water,
the sound

of the invisible wind
becoming
seen through its purpose
in the leaves.

I have found perfection –
so abandon the search
and I will put down my pen
for the poem has been carved
in the face of water and stone –
and the stone walls
are older than I,
and the perfect world
there across the pond
or traced through the
elegant lines of the leaf;
that world

that world
is older than the walls.

❧ *Song of the Center* ❧
for the Hill of Tara

I have suffered what will happen to the people of Ireland in time to come . . . they will lose their sense of their royalty. They won't know what Tara means. Their horses won't know the way to another way, to the perfect way, of seeing and knowing the world.

- John Moriarty

The gods are leaving this place
it is now only peopled by ghosts;
when the center is gone
where will you stand?

“We will stand in the East,”
I hear you say, “and shower
in the gold of our prosper.”
But I say,
not without sovereignty.

Time now to walk
naked and royal
to the perfect place
in the perfect way.

“We will stand in the South,”
I hear you say, “and dance
to the songs ours to be sung.”
But I say,
not without sovereignty.

Time now to walk
naked and royal
to the perfect place
in the perfect way.

“We will stand in the West,”
I hear you say, “and revel
in knowledge fit for the gods.”
But I say,
not without sovereignty.

Time now to walk
naked and royal
to the perfect place
in the perfect way.

“We will stand in the North,”
I hear you say, “and fight
the battle for all that is right.”
But I say,
not without sovereignty.

Time now to walk
naked and royal
to the perfect place
in the perfect way.

The gods are leaving this place
it is now only peopled by ghosts;
when the center is gone
where will you stand?

❧ Snowfall ❧

Waking brings with it the revelation
of snowfall, so that suddenly
all the world is turned toward
spaciousness and presence.
The grey sky clouds into emptiness,
stirs the longing for freedom
from the closeness of the air.

You will want to stay hidden
and elusive, to find some dark
cave in which you might hide,
hibernating until the storm passes.
And then those fractal shapes
fall toward the ground with such
sureness that for a moment it
seems that they are there only
to haunt you with their cold beauty
and revel in the dance of their descent.

But the snow reveals everything;
in its silence you can hear
the cacophony of voices
close behind, carrying the arrows
of change; it leaves all your muddy tracks
apparent, as if it conspired with
everything that wants to find you
and with a single arrow
slay your most selfish and frightened
interior. Its death will feed you.

There is always immense silence
which follows the blindness of

the most fierce and heavy snow;
you can feel yourself open
into the fresh and waiting world,
watch as you gain all the
courage to stop the faithless stories
erase all trace of line and color
from what you once called life,
and start again, the blank canvas
stretched over you, waiting for the
first stroke to paint upon the snow
some new dream to carry you
and illuminate your every vitality
toward the blossom
of your own eventual spring.

Q It's not the Spring, it's the Eyes that See it S

There is a silver edge to the light
this shining afternoon,
and my feet are naked cold
wet on the flagstone outside my door.

Sometimes I stand here,
the water dripping around me
and the snow melting
warmly and content
on the raw flowers.

On these slow days
I leave the door open
to remind me that
inside is just another way
of saying outside.

I have sat one hundred years
to see such simple beauty
as this spring, and maybe
once the sun has set tonight
I will sit one hundred more

just to catch a second glimpse.

❧ *Green is the Color of Awake* ❧

Today, I woke up from the winter
and crouching on the stones
rubbed my too clean hands
in the soft soil of the spring.

Today, green is a wonder of the eye,
and I, I am an eye for green;
we are lovers in spring and
marry in the slow summer,
the low golden sun is our
honeymoon, celebrating
our passion through the leaves.

Today, even my tea is green and warm
as I sit here celebrating
with poetry the astonishment
I find when I hear, as if for
the first time, that we
call everyday, "today."

❧ *A Study of Seasons, Abstractly* ❧

Autumn has come again; the trees are shedding their memories of summer in red, or yellow leaves. They fall softly to the earth to be covered, one cold morning, by the hoarfrost of arrival ... and then, Winter. Winter cannot be seen, covered as it is by the dark of our gestation, swelling like a belly, and soaked through by the falling flakes of sharp clarity. They play a game of contrast with Japanese brushstroke branches. Spring edges in slowly, but sure to one day lift its shining head of tender sprouts, up from its underworld of contention. Everything is born today in the arms of a cherry blossom on the breeze—the wind reminds us, even as the leaves stay, of impermanence. When Summer comes it is with a close sun, thunderstorms, and sweating brows. Aloof until the solstice of its own impending death, as night again wins over day.

Autumn has come again; the trees are shedding their memories of summer in red, or yellow leaves; and I, I am not just passing through, but too travel in the company of sun, and leaves, and falling snow.

III.

“There is an edge...”

∞ Hillwalking ∞

There is an edge;
I'll take you there.

Up the hills, kissed by wind and
the sure promise of aloneness,
the mist and rain gathered round
you like a dreaming cloak
surrendering you
to the hill's upturned face.
A silence you can taste
stops you, lifts your own face
toward the sun
hidden by the low clouds,
but articulated with ease
by the shadows stretched in patches,
softly bridging stone walls
cast out across the land.

There is an edge;
I'll take you there.

As dusk comes, the rain
hardens to sheets, wrapping
you coolly in that wet embrace,
quenching your dry spirit
and easing you into openness.
And though your legs ache,
and your feet are weary, blistered,
you can find no voice in you
that will dare sing of return.
You belong to the hills,
and the hills call you forward,

out and around the bend,
towards some secret cliff edge,
tall and limestone, written
across the land by everything
you hoped to avoid.

There is an edge;
I'll take you there.

There you can lean out,
hands braced on the hard stones
waiting for something to speak,
to rise out of the ground
or out from the recesses of
your heart, and there to
write a new word upon that wall;
waiting for that hand to take you
and hold you, out over the edge,
feet clinging to unfamiliar ground;
waiting for something that dispels
the faithless life behind you.

There is an edge;
I'll take you there.

Ready to see anything below
that cliff at the edge of your
own arrival into the world,
and the strength which pulls you forward,
frightened by that vast sea below,
but sure in the knowledge
that everything is waiting
and holding its breath

for the moment beyond exhaustion,
too weary and beaten,
too lost to the world and all its
shadows and cold
to ever be prepared for this:
the feel of your own shaking hands
grasping that cliff-edge with all
its hard won firmness
and casting your face over the edge
to see the blank stone canvas
of your life, waiting to be etched
with something you can not deny.

There is an edge;
I'll take you there-
to the horizon of dialogue
between *self* and *world*.

❧ *The Raven's Task* ❧

Sitting at the window I am
suddenly struck and moved
by the image of a raven
flying from one small
square corner of the world
to another,
framed by the grey clouds,
the soft, heavy flakes of snow
which fall and paint the world
with a quiet which belongs
as much to the raven as it does
to the world.

The raven is the perfect picture
of living at the liminal edge
where our identity is a shape of
and shaped by the world,
and the world a shape and shaped
of and by the body.
Black against the cold presence
of white, and the empty solitude
of beauty which it sings,
it has the same solitary choice
we all have if we wish the world
to find us:

to fly out, plumed in the color
of whatever the silence demands.

❧ *Civil Disobedience* ❧

I am thinking now of poetry
and the long nights, sitting
at my window
carving the fresh world through words,
and how alike our lives are to
the scratch of black ink across
the bare white emptiness of the page,
forging through our bodies a
place for us to be found.

Poetry is the creation of prisons
from which spaciousness can escape;
the limitation of words, the failure
through which beauty can move.

And I am thinking now of how
the writing of our lives, is like
the writing of good poetry,
the kind that can change a life
with the utterance of
a single arrow shaped word
stretching across eternity.

The world conspires to confine us
simply because
there is no spaciousness worth living
that isn't won
through the breaking of every law.

The heart breaks free, like so many
waterfalls descending in a rush
of sound and reflected light,

and sings of its secret source
deep in the mountain dark,
like so many prayers to everything
that remains hidden, but still flows
in fluid pilgrimage from its center
hazarding itself in the world of light.

You must do everything that the
coward within you cries out against,
and like the outlaw in the forest
outwit everything that wants you
to stop the blossom of your depths;
and then, as if to test your hand
against it, and against everything
that wants to stay hidden
you must let the world find you, and bring you
to the prison of the narrow heart,
and there you must break free
and set the world aflame with
the waters of your creation.

Why I Pray to Trees

The true conversations are the
ones that happen without words,
the true depths of listening,
the listening to silence.
That is why in my aloneness
I will wander, the sound of
my footsteps, the language
of this erupting dialogue
amongst trees and bracken.
Every stopping-place on stone
or river's edge, cooling my tired
feet in the currents of its own
carried conversation with the shore.
The circling hawks and the wide
presence of the mountain, opening
to a horizon no one could ever have
imagined alone, sets the world free,
raising us up if only until the storm arrives,
shouting with all the sky's fierceness
that sometimes the world is *not* for us.

This is why in my aloneness I
pray to trees, or any passing cloud
or bird, and the cold spring of
water emerging assuredly from
the mountain's breast:
only the trees reach perfection
when they say "yes" to heaven
without need to ever leave the earth.

❧ *Some Pure Everything* ❧

There was a moment
where poised on the edge of
something wholly unfamiliar
I found myself lost between
the breathing years, out on
some threshold where I could
hear the labors and losses of my past
calling to the new voices of arrival
that now came carried by wings
with all my frailty and failures – the wind.
It was as if for a moment I could turn
and looking back across the threshold,
see out towards the horizon of what I'd left.

As if I were an immigrant
crossing the loud sea,
with all the loss and all
the anticipation wrapped
close around my shoulders,
one not distinguished from the other.
And then like a landing I came
to the place where beginnings and endings
melted into the fires of longing.
And as if in that moment,
poor with all my absence
but the loves I carried with me,
I knew my wealth. And the world
suddenly turned toward belonging.

And all the while the voice of Bacchus
raged around me, as if to tempt me away
from the visions of triumph and failure,

away from all the things left undone,
and all the words which still
were raging in my heart, waiting
to be born; all the faces of all the ones
that I could not be with, all the ones
that I could or could not love.
And then I felt it, the sharp
blade of the new year, balanced
below me, cutting through me,
and everything I thought I was.
One brief moment of grief, and then
nothing, or rather the emptiness
that comes one fragment of a
shadowed second before we resume
our hollow task of naming all the
ten thousand things, and suddenly
the world was turned toward potential,
the sword of that turning now made
of the essence of change.

And with it, all the world
transformed from regret into the
shimmering blue sky of a clear lake,
its clarity interrupted only by the
ripples of the easeful clouds,
and the geese returning home,
singing the songs of arrival,
and with it I was moved from that edge,
moved to some pure blissful and
terrifying uncertainty, some pure
faith in my steady breathing;
confident in my conversation with
some pure everything.

Q The Places that Are S

Tonight I have closed too many doors,
stood facing the metal frame of
entrance into my open world
and looked upon the familiar faces,
now seen almost for the first time,
perhaps even for the last,
and watched the door close at
their backs and my face,
closing on a world,
a shared world, growing as we did
into the men that we have become,
backs and faces full of laughter
that I have called friends
and the sometimes silent,
sometimes boisterous noise
of our fierce confrontation
together with the world.

Over how many bottles of wine,
and white froth over dark beers
have we sat in conversation,
confronting our places in the world;
the places that are,
and the future places we will make
for ourselves with breath,
sweat, and the strong labors of love
by which we live, embracing the world
in our own rhythm and step,
finding our own cadence in the conversation
our own swing in the dance of earthly living
tempered by this divine beauty of embrace.

You, my friends who I have known,
you with whom I have done the hard work
of saying goodbye, the harder work
of tempering the mind and body
to do the true work of awakened living,
the work we are meant to do,
you who I have shared nights of
poetry, laughter, and food with,
who I have tended the old fires with,
grown distant from, only to find that
finally there was never a distance not closed
by the sure and sometimes silent
conversation of friendship.

We have spent years growing together,
gone once from community to the
celebration of aloneness,
gone now again from community
into the unknown depths of whatever
life we'll find, waiting to be made—
for ourselves, for each other,
for all the waiting world;
waiting for the wisdom born forth from
our conversation, for the wisdom
of our separation, from our having said
that we have known one another.

What it Means to be Seen

In the warmth of late winter's sun,
the kind of day that heralds spring,
go out the door, down past parking lots
to the fence that edges out the wild –
and humbling through to get on your knees
offer yourself, and find the shore
of your own entrance to the world,
and there sit with the melting ice,
clinging with memory to water's shore.

I know that I have been away too long
from the rough texture of the world, and
so like the salmon must come home
and with the painter's hand
deftly unveil the colors hidden in
the canvas of my body,
feeding this new creation with
every past failure or triumphant
moment spent quietly or arrogantly
admiring the well made work of this life.

Behind the clouds the sun shines
yellow-grey, illuminating the water's
faithful ripples, teasing dim shadows
on all the surface of the world,
which dulls and brightens all at once,
turning stones and ravens
to a silhouette of mind.

And we could carry on like this
forever, practicing with the water,
finally abandoning whatever prisons
we chose to conceal our voice in,

slowly uncovering the freedom
which we were made for,
enraptured and set aflame
by the solitary choice left
by our saying yes;
no longer in need of looking down
at the tension of a surface
that we do not need to know
will hold us.

And our faith,
not in what can't be known
but in what must be approached
is all this body needs
to be carried on the
surface of the water.

And there to be glimpsed,
standing with all my weight
held by the currents below;
seen praying with silence
to the place the water edges
seamlessly to shore, where the
trees know the intimacy of moss,
and dry leaves marry the ice
into some new presence.
Seen held by the vibrancy
of belonging, and nothing
in the vision out of place;
not the waves or welcome grass,
or the birds glimpsed by ears,
nor the solitary poet,
pen in hand, scribing the world
exactly as it sees him.

IV. Haiku

Blades of grass
snow falls
into my cup of tea

The mind is the mountain's
dark shadow
disappearing in the night

Lost in mountain fog
the sheep
seem to know the way

The black raven is not
surprised
he has faith in the wind

The path is no path
the wind
has blown it away

The rough mountain
gazes upward
still silent in awe

Trees know the way
to heaven
through their roots

Wind plays the leaves
one falls
and everything stops

V.
Orpheus Revisited

Canto I
‡ *Invocation to the Muses* ‡

Sing Muse,
sing of the self,
and sing of the world,
sing for me of truth and lies,
and through them lead me deeper,
deeper into the dreaming cave of the mind.

How deep goes the well of our heart?
The Eurydice of culture has died;
time to sing her alive
like blossoms sing the spring –
but first we must have winter
and so ourselves must die.

Beneath the earth,
beneath the heart,
beneath the mind:
there are terrors,
and its too late
for turning back.

So sing self,
sing of the world,
sing us to the surface,
and we asleep will sing alive,
full of the Orphic melody that lives inside.

Canto II
‡ *The New Eurydice* ‡

Beautiful as she was, it was
the snakebite which killed her.
And what of Orpheus, weeping
as he did, upsetting worlds
and bringing even the gods
to compassion? What love
raged in his heart, to bring him
to the mouth of Hades?

Beautiful as she was, it was
us who killed her, culture,
killed her with our hard ways
and bitter loss of eyes.
It's hard to hear, but there
has been a rape.
Eurydice, what have we done?
We made eyes at the earth and
for a moment truly loved her,
before we took her and
laid her on the rack to confess
to things she never knew she knew.
And in that moment, did she say
what we wanted to hear?
That she was ours to do with
as we pleased?

That was the day that culture died
and though I never saw it
I can still hear her cries;
our culture is the earth.
I can still see the stains of tears
with every rough shod foot fall

and every time that something
simple is turned to a religion,
with every violence towards
what it means to be a woman,
and every desecration of
what it is to be a man.

Like Orpheus I have wept my tears,
sang so hard through them that
my song became everything
religion should be;
the touch of what is beautiful
and no need to give it name.

So I invoke the poet's heart
so that we, born to taste beauty,
might sing a new song,
and descend into the terror of
what lies in the underworld
of our mind. Down past the
surface of what is safe –
the new Eurydice awaits.

Canto III
‡ *Descent to Hades* ‡

There will be no sky tonight,
it's time to learn to navigate,
not by stars but by poetry.

I hear a voice at the gate,
“to enter is to go within,
the center of the earth is
the center of our heart.”
And I will hold the heart
for ransom, and squeeze
from her the fangs of snakes,
a secret poison in our minds.

The darkness of this cave
will oppress the gaze of our
stride and awaken from within
the contradictions of our mind;
if you are afraid then turn your eyes
not away, but towards—
compassion is the heart of tension.

Inside the mind the taut rope of truth
is growing stronger, so it sings.
Its melody is not of opposition,
swinging from angel and demon,
from sword or from word
but of feeling through the tension
to the rope that holds the center—
you do not have to choose,
but like the moon embraced by sky
become a blossom of totality.

With so much inside we become
what we deny. And still
the ancient delphic words will
guide us home: *know thyself*.

We, the contradiction,
and I the wounded man,
must find the inner fire
where we will understand
that its time to learn
to navigate, not by stars
but by poetry, inherited
from the sky, and there to sail
in what we now recognize
to be the body of the earth
living in the belly of our mind.

Eurydice, our culture
you'll know me by this song.

Canto IV
❧ *Contradiction, Beauty* ❧

It was written across your face
since the day before you were born
echoes through what is in you
all the light and all the darkness
and all the tension born in that
clay soul, a beauty to behold, to
conceive in one being,
one time – eternal.
Blessed darkness born of light,
who am I if not the
Contradiction, Beauty?

Time to raid the silence
and the deep well of our sea
whose waves, crashing,
carry its immensity
to the fragile shore of
Contradiction, Beauty
raid the silence, be silence.

I want to reach out and touch
the otherness before me,
the otherness within me
mirrored in our one heart.
We are the eyes of the earth,
and I want to know what we will see;
Contradiction, Beauty.

Within and without is
the song raging in the heart
longing to be sung
with tension balanced,

the dancer's feet
move across the beam;
there is no time left to hide
the morning is now
the place is here
and with nowhere left to go
Contradiction, Beauty
tell us what you know.

Thoughts arise but I return
to the breath
the constant tide of this tension
life between inner, outer,
dissolved in the movement
of my lungs,
the breather gone, between
inner, outer ... rest.

If you have healed yourself
then you must heal the world,
Contradiction, Beauty
the road ends here.

Time to learn to navigate,
not by stars but by poetry.

Canto V
‡ Chasing the Light ‡

There is calm like candlelight
dreaming through my heart.
Not a star in sight
but poetry rings in my ears;
There is a light ahead,
its pale glimmer across the walls
invites, seduces onward,
toward Eurydice maybe,
or another challenge rising
where the darkness finds its end.

Faceless I carry forth,
too absorbed in the
simple pleasure of placing
one foot before the next,
and how each step, as if
without effort, leads to the next,
too lost to know that
I have lost my name.
Who will I be when
the darkness recedes?
Panic rises out of
the ground, the dance
now become the dancer
the singer, the song;
who am I *without* an I?

I chase the light,
each step bringing me
closer, bringing the
darkness further into
its reaches, and the light

plays my game, always in
sight beyond the eye.
And I have been chasing the light,
hoping to reach its end,
it has felt like years and
I cannot remember
what it means to have a name,
but still I pray for a glimpse
of what illuminates the night.

And the song rages on inside my head;
“Who are you before you are a name?
Time to learn to navigate,
not by stars but by poetry.”

Canto VI
‡ *The Eye Illuminated* ‡

I do not want to see myself clearly
like staring in the mirror
under the lights of my own
too-harsh gaze.
I do not want to see myself dressed
in anything but these
penumbral shapes
casting shadows across
my face and chest, claiming
all the best parts of me
and all the worst parts,
together.

No name for this interiority;
neither for the vulgar
inconsistency in which I live
and never for the invisible
nature which I have always been.

There will be no lights here.
Nothing but the flame of your eye
which sees the luminosity –
it is dimmed and betrayed
by anything beyond a glimmer
of the fire circling your heart.

Let it be my nature,
my unsung depths
whose voice has never
raised above a whisper,

let that be my true name,
and so I beg you,
do not name me.

When God spoke to Moses
he told him “take off your shoes,”
shod as he was in too much
of himself; he could never
hear God without that
touch of the earth beneath him;
Heaven being so close
as the sand between his toes.
There is a burning bush
inside the heart that calls
for us to do the same;
take off your shoes,
you *are* holy ground.

Orpheus, they called me,
and when it left I thought
I’d disappear, but now
I know who I have always been;
silence is a name stronger
than any I have ever made.

No, I do not want to see myself clearly.
So I will lower my eyes,
and it will be enough, to catch,
in the space between moments
a single glimpse of
a shadow as I pass,
forever casting a flame
to illuminate my eye.

Canto VII

♪ Sing of the Self, Sing of the World ♪

Sing self,
and sing of the world,
sing for me of truth and lies,
and through them lead us deeper,
deeper into the dreaming cave of the mind.

Now is the time for rejoice in mourning.
The passing of our story
marked as it was, by fire and floods;
the autumn leaves have already gone
and winter claims the heart tonight,
so mourn for the death of the misguided heart,
but rejoice in the coming of spring.

Today I saw an apple blossom;
what fruits will the autumn bring?
Today I saw a person blossom;
what fruits will the heart bring?
Tomorrow, I know, the sky will blossom
with poem-stars to guide us home;
what fruits will that journey bring?
Eurydice is just ahead
I can smell the apple blossom in her hair
and hear the compass of her heart.

We have used our power to destroy
and with it set our house on fire,
so I invoke the power to create
and with it set our house in order.

Time to learn to navigate
by the stars reflected in the water
and so bring down the light
before to be within us.
If you are awake then
I invoke your heart;
and if you sleep
then rest assured that
dawn is growing ever nearer.

So, sing self,
sing of the world,
sing us to the surface,
and we asleep will sing alive,
full of the Orphic melody that lives inside.

Canto VIII
& Sirenum Scopuli

There's a touch of ghosts tonight
keeping me from sleep.
They come when the end
of the road is dead.
A voice calls out:
"Here is what you are looking for,"
and it is nowhere to be found.
I sit on a hard stone,
a stone of my mind.
"Here is what you are looking for,"
and its nowhere to be found.
I sit on a hard stone,
a stone of my heart—
we are not made for such hardness.
"Here is what you are looking for,"
and it is nowhere to be found,
but that itself is the mystery
everything worth having is already found,
and mad Han Shan tells it like it is:
no path goes all the way.
It is not a matter of where we go
when we reach the end of the road;
it is who we become when we must
let the road abandon us,
and no longer define ourselves by
the surety of its travel.

"Here is what you are looking for,"
and it is nowhere to be found,
nowhere to be found but here,
here in the center of everything.
Eurydice was a sham,
our culture is the earth –

Eurydice could be truth
if our culture returns to the earth.
And here, here at the center of everything
I am not a road but a song,
and I sing the song of the land,
the song of the sea and stars;
here in this place,
I am the new Eurydice.

There is a touch of ghosts tonight,
my ghost and the ghosts
of what we have been.
They follow me, the specters
of Eurydice, and this time
like all other times before,
looking back means death.
It means the death of what I am
for the life of what we were.

And so I climb, forward-looking,
guided by the stars of poetry,
the stairs of our becoming
the stairs of Eurydice my heart,
and all the while the old songs follow
reminding me of another time
when feeble, I glanced back
and my world faded around me.
So this time I climb,
climb until the day-lit earth is above me
a silhouette of light against the
dark and fecund mind of night –
this time, sure as I am in this new song,
I climb without the need
for looking back.

Canto IX
❧ *Caduceus* ❧

And I could stand in this doorway forever
with a back full of shadow
and a face full of light,
stand here, a contradiction or frontier.
And I could taste this silence forever,
neither speak nor sing again
but let the weeping heart of the truth
I've seen be soothed by the water in the well
of this, the soul of everything.

So sing self,
sing of the world,
sing of all you've seen
and everything that we've become.

And I will take this step
through shadow to light
let my voice echo through the valley,
and I will find the closest town
because the inner revolution has begun
spreads on the wings of birds to
be carried to every corner of the world.

So sing self,
sing of the world,
sing of all you've seen
and everything that we've become.

And I will let my broken heart still weep
let it be the soul of the song that we sing,
when you hear it your heart too will break.
I am not sorry – this is what it takes,

for beauty to awake within the eye
and see these poems written in the sky,
because we can't navigate when we're so blind.

So sing self,
sing of the world,
sing of all you've seen
and everything that we've become.

And I invoke your heart;
 I invoke the light in your eyes.
And I invoke your art;
 I invoke the breath between the words of your song.
And I invoke the earth;
 I invoke the water of our life.
And I invoke the past;
 of who we are and what we've been.
And I invoke the future;
 of who we are and what we could be.
And I invoke every voice of every time who sings this song;
 I invoke those who do not yet know the words.

 And I invoke the Muse;
 because it's time to learn to navigate,
not by stars but by poetry.

VI.
In Praise of Love

❧ *Song of the Broken* ❧

Broken is the vase of
your life, its vast interior
an echo of memory
you once called your own,
which shaped the vessel
and held the dark contents
of your heart.

Give up your duty
to those broken fragments
and take off your shoes;
let your feet be washed
in sunlight and damp grass.
Forget the obligations of your
ghost, your need
to keep plunging in desperate
prayer into the dark waters of
your wounds;
the scars will *not* heal—
shouldn't,
they are your voice and honor,
the ground from which you rose,
announcing with your
body's presence
the strength with which you
fought for this life.

Pick up your broken pieces,
they will never be reassembled.
Use them to create a new whole,
something born only of you
and your skillful hands,

tempered all this time
through the struggle;
something without the pretending
falseness of the old vessel—
then place it on the mantle
of your broken heart.

A broken heart is beautiful;
it shelters the tenderness
of our fragile form,
the bruises and burns which we
earned through living fiercely,
without looking back
toward the troubled
voices of our past failures,
to attend to the solitary
quiet voice—the one
that knows our name
and dares to speak it
into the winds of the world.

I love your cracks and
hard edges, the sure
lines of all your defeats
and battles lost, and there
is no line I would not dare
to trace with my finger.

I have my own jagged edges,
my own contented shards
where life has claimed a place
within my body,
laying in the ruin of my heart.

The wounds we hold are seeds
and must be allowed to grow
to rise from the rich
underworld of our being.

How long will it take
to stop tearing mercilessly
at the soil, to stop trying
to assemble the broken vase,
before allowing a new
creativity to shape another
waiting vessel—
waiting in the wellspring of
your being—and praying
before the stones, dip it
into the deep well of your heart,
and there to take a draught
of the sweet liquor that
calls you to come home,
filling the new
interior darkness
with the waters of resurrection.

Q *What Will it Take?* S

What will it take
to find yourself walking,
alone, and sure or unsure,
down the road you swore
to never tread?

What promise must the world make
before you will dive or fall,
with some hidden knowledge
somewhere in your depths
that the water below
will provide a new home?

And what will you believe
in that terrible moment
falling towards your belonging,
falling towards the life
carved by your presence,
towards the one word that matters?

You will want to believe
that you have been betrayed
by everything that drew you in
and all the promises that were made
lost upon arrival, a poor man in
a new land, foolish to have believed,
in all it offered and never gave;
betrayed by this beckoning hand.

But walking that rough path,
a wry smile sculpted by
your firm arrival to life,

you will know too much
to ever believe in betrayal again –
know that the hand
which brought you here was yours.

What will it take to bring you alive?

It will take only the loss of everything
you ever loved, without the loss of love.

❧ *Why Should I Not Rejoice?* ❧

Why should I not rejoice
that the garden was not made for me?
That after all the struggle
I have found only defeat in my hands?

What can I overhear that
I have not said?
What failure can I entomb
in a poem, that I
have not yet discovered?

And
why should I not rejoice
at this face, and all its signatures of loss
and the grief written in lines
inscribing my world with all the sorrow
and all the beauty I can claim?

For too long I have been too
much of a self, face pressed against
the window of the world
as if I could consume it all,
and not heed the other voices calling
for their own tangled longings.

So
why should I not rejoice
at the closing of doors
and the slow way I finally
have come to see that
now, when it matters most,
as it has always mattered,
I can say that I have loved.

∞ Syzygy ∞

X.

This is not a love poem,
but I must reclaim what is mine,
these lost stars which forget the eyes
and the light between them dimmed
an allegiance to the half-truth of life
reconciled in infinity,
but here we are still the bodies once touching
still the bodies once breathing together
with the same moon and sun for our eyes.

Forgive me Father for I have sinned;
I have missed the mark of eternity,
and this is my confession.

IX.

This is not a love poem,
but I remember the first time
I spoke those words to you,
the first time they were met
with silence ever in their speaking
and at once, knowing I had spoke
too soon.

There is an importance to love
that can never be named
and those words,
those words are meant for silence
until the day they have been earned,
carved from the fresh stone
spoken slowly, methodically,
chewed over twice before ever
even allowing the breath

to penetrate the lungs on its
journey toward becoming words.

This is not a love poem,
but I remember our young romance
and the awkward way I clung to you,
needed the warmth of your life
pressed against me, the selfish way
at fifteen when I was too big for myself
that I placed my depths upon your surface,
needed you to be my symbol,
to be a me that I could not locate in myself.
And you carried it well, never flinching,
never handing it back to me
until...

VIII.

I remember the night it ended,
and the cold autumn bench beneath
my head, and I lay there looking
to the stars, feeling threads being cut,
feeling the lights of the sky exit my eyes,
and the weight of all I unfairly handed
you being given back to me.
I remember the way I wept with sadness
and the shame I felt of my own heart,
but feeling like the world
had abandoned me.

My error was a name – your name,
well worn by the tongue.
Who will take it when you've left?

VII.

Forget not the soul
in these mad eyes—
the breath will be our guide.
Clawing at the well walls
until the light goes on
and fire-lit faces
grandfather us back
to the earth.

VI.

You are my golden sun goddess
with soft eyes of courage—opening
me to the name that was mine,
all along hidden in the dark,
a solid door between you and me,
and you at the center of its room
whispering me into love.

And still, this is not a love poem.
It is sweaty palms and cherry blossoms,
touches in the night and passion
trapped in the glance of a smile.
How I could praise you, love,
unearned praise empty of terror
singing blindly with the voice
and void of the shadowed heart.

But we touched that shadow together,
grew so hard through each other
that in the end the sun had
left our eyes and we were left
with pupils blind without light.

V.

My life is yours—I cried on the mountain—
a different kind of goddess at my side,
with freezing wind and threatening rain;
it's a lonely pilgrimage back to the heart,
back to the center, back to the voice.

The sun rose and we made love,
and that's how I became a man.

IV.

This is *not* a love poem.

III.

You, my red blossomed beauty
a wild mare on the wind of my soul;
your voice dissolves all armor
leaving a bare and bleeding heart
healed by your touch—
the world that we could make!
But you won't have me, not yet,
you have other souls to touch
and I have other swords of poetry
to penetrate in unsuspecting hearts.
Until then I will bleed with joy
the perfection and the sadness
a single note in our one song.

II.

And that first night, that first wound,
so much of that night has entered
my heart, shaped the clay of
the man I have now become;
that first time my words met silence,
that first time my heart was broken –
not by you, but by me,
broken by a way I could no longer live.
And I know now that it was not you,
was not the world that abandoned me
but that all along the way
I had slowly abandoned myself.

And I know now that every
moment since, my path
has climbed mountains and
forded rivers, not once been
smooth or easy, but every
moment beautiful,
and I know that the path began
with you, and that perhaps
even if I told you,
you could never guess its route.
Since you I have loved, and
loved again; been broken
and broken again,
until finally the path beyond
all breaking, the path
beyond all selfish love
was opened up,
and I saw for the first time
what it means to earn those words,

that they should be given
with no regard for any return.
This is not a love poem;
it is a confession, a disclosure,
the thick clouds parting to drape
the storm drenched world in light.
The first time I saw you, I fell
in foolish love with you
and now,

now,

I have fallen in another kind
of love with the world,
the kind that stops me dead
in my tracks when the wind
blows the blossoms from the trees,
or when a patchwork of light
and shadows of cloud fall
on the face of the mountain.
That kind of faith is indestructible,
that kind of love is what I live now.

I.

She used to be a girl, really
all flesh and blood and emotive eyes,
now she's just an image of something
living between my eyes and mind.
Still the Maude Gonne to my Yeats,
and I still kneeling before you
terrified of your saying "yes."
I know that I do not write love poems,
but this is the cool ocean breeze
on a warm night,
the grass between toes in

the dry desert's dream,
and lightning fierce enough
that even stones will break
their hardness at its touch.
And no matter what
I will still have that gleam
in my eye, and you yours;
the sun and moon of our lives.
I still come here to the end
to find this,
 yes,
my love poem to you,
 a wild torrent of danger,
 a fierce giving of faith,
 abandoning all my rules
 of 'not writing love poems,'
 a confession, a disclosure,
that I, at last, have found the place
where sun and moon are one.

O.
This is a love poem.

❧ “Love until it hurts” ❧

*I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts,
then there is no hurt, but only more love.*

-Mother Teresa

So do not be afraid to lose;
loss is the forgotten sister of love,
as if you could possibly claim to
find beauty through women or the world
without first being stripped bare
to the muscle and bone
structure of your body and finding
there the unspoken breath of God –
that is where love is,
not in your need and desire
but right deep in your animal nature,
your Shiva and Shakti nature.

So do not be afraid to love;
for the steady grey of dawn
is being filled by the radiant sun,
the ocean waves are sweeping in with
salt kisses for the sandy face,
and thrushes are singing their hearts in abandon –
even the crows have left their aloofness
to join in the dance of surrender.

All the world is confirming you.

And if, by chance, against the evidence
this fear still weights your heart
then I will take you to the rivers
to see the faith of waterfalls

diving toward the stones
against their better judgment,
not afraid to lose themselves in the depths,
because the river will flow on, together,
with thunder enough to wake the world
in their living and traveling together
toward that great sea of arrival.

All the world is confirming you,
so let me take you to the world I know
and together, love until it hurts.

VII.
No-Self

❧ *Tao on the Green River* ❧

I imagine sitting in a low boat
floating down the Yangtze River,
my ferryman poles us along the shallows
his low straw hat shields the sun
as I look up in awe to the green
steepness between which we flow.
An autumn leaf pilgrim am I
at the whim of the green river
tempered by the quiet ferryman.
My heart is a beating question
and with each stone we pass
the question changes,
shifts into the shapes
of ten thousand things
before returning to its true nature.

The boat stops and the ferryman
is gone, replaced above by the temple
hidden through organic shape
by the shade of trees
rustled by wind, made real
by its articulation amongst nature.
Every stair to the temple
is a word of my question
and there are no doors
but only the darkness and
the fierce figures
disclaiming and confirming
all that it is which I love.

Slow eyes adjust to the
musty incense light and

I find the ferryman,
now a temple, now a monk
chanting wordlessly by the altar
dreaming the world through gongs
and plucked melodic strings.
I sit opposite his heart fire
which burns with silent prayers
to a low crackle, casting upward
shadows on his adamant stare.

Above him, carved on the rafters
the character for poetry,
word-temple,
where I have arrived by
accident or fate.
The monk grins.
I ask my question but only
breath releases from my mouth
and the fire blazes and the walls
pulse and writhe with life
of shadow and flame,
as if in response to my
unspoken words
the same poem written
over and over:

*green river
keeps on moving
through the mind*

And now the monk is gone
and I return from closeness to space
from incense to air,

and the temple of words is still silent,
and though I can speak again
I am silent, and drop
my question in the well
to be water for a thirsty pilgrim
knowing that the answer
has no questions
but is an answer
for the want of answers
and questions which only
shape around the silence
of words never spoken
because they burn the tongue.

And I know below me
the ferryman waits
with his low straw hat
and grin, waits
to ferry me home once again.

Uncharred

Poetry begins in the earth, emerges
in the clear dark water from the mountains,
so I, wanting to know the sunlight on my back
and feel the cool slap of water on my feet,
will take these strong spring currents and
weigh them against the steady words of the heart.

There is a moment that follows the writing
of every good line of poetry, the kind
with roots deep in the breath –
breath, that perfect invisible image of poetry,
dialogue is breathing, a conversation between
winds of air briefly adopted by lungs,
changed and reflected back to the world,
maybe to disappear but sometimes
to join in the currents of some storm
which blows in, changing everything.

Line after line the poem is forged through listening;
so take these words and weigh them against
the strong spring currents and maybe
catch a glimpse of them as they pass,
floating atop the buoyant power residing in the voice.

This is not the time for poems of happy love –
this is the time for poems to set the heart on fire
and in those flames reveal the uncharred remains
of what could not be burnt.

❧ *One Bare Line of the Heart* ❧

Sometimes a poem is
nothing more than a
frame which displays

the one bare line of the heart,

sheltering its immensity
and beauty with its own
broken perfection.

❧ *The Mountain of No-Self* ❧

Difficult task to navigate the jungles of despair
or sail headlong back from the island of the sirens;
what fights us always is the desire –
the soft comfort of an unchanging world,
or the riskless altars we make of ourselves,
daily and nightly.

I too have these cracks and sorrows,
broken places where I have felt life
move in with all its harsh beauty –
my broken dreams still weep from the heart at times.
And I love the simple joys I am granted –
tea steaming gold or green,
the possibility of a pen pressed
daringly to a new turned leaf,
and that fleeting touch of love
I am always seeking to find again.
Even the wind wants me to stay,
but imperfect I always go.

What faith can we find in the always changing world?
What safety? What presence? None without risk!
Abandon safety. Come dance on the mountains.

Because there, above the tree green horizon of loss
and the maritime sway of comfortable joy
there is a mountain of no-self,
and when we reach it – we will not disappear.
We will still stand among leaves and waves
following the breath through joy and despair,
and we will feel the world more strongly than ever

and not be moved, like water accepting a stone
without the circle of ripples for its trouble.

And that mountain is close –
a red needle through the wild,
pointing the way to a breathing body
content in the absence of self.

Wake the Stars

Back home is wasteland
but for the things which I love.
That is why I return
time and time again,
to taste that nectar, and
feel a familiar wind sweep
through my skin as my
legs become roots.
I come *because* it is a wasteland;
I come because I left to find a voice,
so anything but speaking is betrayal.

Name me a state of mind,
and this place too;
or name me the wind,
and you the leaves.

What is the sound of one place clapping?
The first sound ringing
through the eardrums of our
own percussive contribution to the song,
and it takes only one voice
to add a melody
but one thousand is one thousand more.

Somewhere under a blanket of sky
the stars are sleeping blind,
and if we sing together
then we can wake them,
and with a single sip
from the grail of that

light punctured darkness,
those stars
will become seeds in the sky,
planted by tongues,
imagined and made real,
grown into women and men
with shadows for mouths
and stars for their eyes.
And we will see them
there on the hills,
changing worlds with their words.
And here will be a wasteland
no more.

Q July Leaves S

If you would speak, then meditate;
if you would meditate then let that sitting
be the summation of your potential,
following the breath to its center
and there to find the waiting pearl of some
invisible and luminous strand that
doesn't want your name, or the fleeting
victories for which you have struggled;
no, it wants you to sing, like July leaves
trembling and riding the wind into wildness,
or pan pipes passed through the breeze,
just a few simple notes to birth a song—
and we are no different, resonant chambers
through which the wind of our wild presence
might resound, and break the silence of the old vows.
You too have been gifted with a voice
of words shaped around the air;
I am not speaking of *that* voice,
but the one you have, and are afraid to use.
If you would meditate, then speak;
if you would speak then know that the sound
of your breathing passed through the pure
silence of your body, and all the music that follows
is the freedom that we were born for.
The air is already rushing in to fill you.
What is the beauty that you will sing?

❧ *About the Author* ❧

Jason Kirkey grew up in Massachusetts. He is a poet and a student of nature and mindfulness practice. His poetry is influenced by ecopsychology, Buddhism, and his Celtic ancestral roots; through these he hopes to kindle a deep love of the natural world and a relationship with the creative spirit as a means of transformation. *Songs from a Wild Place* is his second collection of poetry after *Portraits of Beauty*. He can be visited at his website: www.jasonkirkey.com



Jason Kirkey grew up in Massachusetts. He is a poet and a student of mindfulness practice. His poetry is influenced strongly 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 two other collections of poetry, *Portraits of Beauty* and *The Ballad of the Sea-Sweet Moon and Other Poems*. His website is www.jasonkirkey.com.

Songs from a Wild Place is Jason Kirkey's second volume of poetry after *Portraits of Beauty*. Its motifs range from self-transformation, quiet revelations found in the natural world, love, and the re-imagining of culture and spirit; guiding the reader from the gnosis of personal identity through to the revelation of 'no-self,' and back to the world where we become beacons of deep love and transformation. It is a call to inner revolution, of finding the authentic voice and using it to create transformation in both the human and other-than-human circles.

July Leaves

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"Jason Kirkey ventures into the interior places of the heart and shapes both their wildness and tenderness into a lyrical radiance that illuminates the outer world and what he calls 'the places that are.' As we read these poems, we wake up to a beauty that surrounds us even in moments of fear and surrender."

-Tom Cowan, author of *Yearning for the Wind*