

POST MORTEM

NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

by **Jean Jones**

Edited and with an Introduction

by **Scott H. Urban**

Word Salad Publishing

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Post Mortem: New and Selected Poems

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ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: AN INTRODUCTION

by Scott H. Urban

First of all, let me assure you: Jean Jones is alive and well and writing new poetry in Wilmington, North Carolina: a fact for which many can and should be grateful.

When I titled this new collection *Post Mortem*, I had several reasons in mind, one with my own too-smart-for-its-own-good tongue planted firmly in cheek and at least one quite decidedly serious and for which I intend no disrespect--yet all honor--to Jean and his family.

As regards the former, and more trivial, impulse: In 2007, I edited a collection of Jean's work entitled *The Complete Angel of Death* (Skull Job Productions). At that time, Jean had amassed an impressive *oeuvre* centered on the Angel of Death and her dealings, fatal and otherwise, with us poor mortals and our misguided propensity to decimate each other. During discussions with Jean, he indicated to me that he felt he had done all that he intended to do with the Angel, and he was ready to explore different themes, or at least treat the topic in a different mode. Even at the time I didn't think the Beautiful Pale One was quite finished with Jean (and time has proven me to be correct; Jean has since produced pieces such as the chilling ["The Angel of Death Checks in at a Local Motel"](#) [follow the link to see the video-poem directed by poet and cinematographer Kevin Dublin]). These poems, therefore, in the main, represent Jean's verse following those of the *Angel of Death* phase: *Post Mortem*, you see.

And as for the second, and far more serious, reason. . .

Taken as a whole, the poems in *Post Mortem* represent an arc that chronologically takes readers from summer 2009 to early spring 2010. The mid-point, or nadir, of that period occurred in November, when Jean's mother, Andry Ati Jones (1934-2009), died

unexpectedly. I do not mean to impart any special psychic powers to my friend, and yet months before his mother's passing, Jean was wrestling with questions of love and loss, as can be seen in lines such as these from "If We Are" – *be thankful, / be glad you are alive / appreciate your family, your friends* – and these lines from "Why We Do What We Do" – *one day ... / It's over ... / There's a coffin, a funeral, / bereaved friends and mourners, and family /and it all happened / one day .*

Jean's most direct statement of his feelings for his mother are contained in one of his most moving and poignant poems, "Andrea," included in the 2008 collection *Tornado* (Shakin' Outta My Heart Press, edited by J. David Capps). Jean only indirectly deals with the quite naturally traumatic and upsetting experience of his mother's death in the poems "For Two Wonderful Voices on the Phone" and "How Do We Deal With Death? Toward Acceptance and Appreciation." In the latter, Jean openly admits to his fears, his failings, and his hopes for his own family, and he admonishes himself (and his readers): *Why not choose to be / happier and more friendly, more / appreciative, and apologize / for [...] mistakes.*

I work in public education, a field fraught with more catch-phrases, buzz-words and acronyms than one can snag in an open dictionary. North Carolina teachers are charged with leading their students to consider *essential questions* – those questions which are fundamental to our human condition. For example: *How can we understand our existence? How do we know we're living the proper life?*

Jean's work has always dealt with these essential questions, and he's not afraid of tackling the largest, most metaphysical ones of all: *How can we put faith in a God Who seems indifferent to our suffering? If everything is transitory, what sort of legacy can we leave? If my enemies harm me, and I know I can get away with it, why shouldn't I kill them?* Jean's poetic explorations of these questions are lucid, heart-felt and quite frankly more philosophic than much of what you find in a college-level textbook. And speaking of textbooks, he's not afraid to be demanding. Included here are poems

dedicated to Pound, Celan and Keats; poems that ought to have you running for your bookshelves or pulling up the internet to catch what you might have missed.

Another key to *essential questions* is that they can never be definitively answered. There is no final resolution, no ultimate *So Mote It Be*. In these poems, you will see Jean waver between a solid faith, firmly rooted in Christianity and yet informed by his experiences with Islam, Buddhism and occult studies – and a questioning stance, as in “What If It Was All True?” He can go so far as to cynically depict a deity who puts de Sade to shame (cf. “How It Must Feel to Be God”), and yet he almost always returns to a steady, if perhaps agnostic, defense of what one can care for: a personal belief system, a love of family, and a devotion to friends.

I, for one, am grateful that Jean continues to ask these essential questions and, for as long as he’ll let me, I’ll be reading the answers he comes up with.

Feb. 2010

LAST MOMENTS

Have you ever seen a picture that haunted you
of someone just
before she was murdered,
like those photos
of those women and children
at My Lai
before they were shot to death
their crying voices
screaming for help
to you
in the land of the living?

Yet there's nothing you can
do about it,
for in minutes
photos reveal
the dead bodies
where the women and children stood,
like that famous photo of
the dead girl
running with her murderer
beside her
her haunted eyes say to the camera,
"I'm trapped,
yet there's nothing I can do about it,
help me," and her body
is found days later,
brutally raped and murdered.

What are we to do
with such images?

Like the man from the Tet Offensive,
the mayor of Saigon
pulling out this revolver
and executing him on the spot,
blood spurting from his head the whole time,
or those films of that man

who gets his head cut off
courtesy of the Taliban
in Iraq or Pakistan
butchered like pigs before
our eyes,
some screaming for their lives
as the knife slits their throat. . .

What are we to do with such images?
Go back to church
and pray for God's will?
Rorschach, the madman vigilante
from the graphic novel
and movie *Watchmen*,
reveals to a prison psychologist why
he was known as Rorschach.
After discovering a missing girl's
bones being ripped up by the killer's dogs,
Rorschach proceeds to butcher the dogs
and the killer himself.
"God was not responsible," Rorschach mumbles,
"the killer was, and God didn't mind"
if Rorschach killed the killer as well.

To come to the realization, as murderers do,
that no one stops you from killing
but yourself and some lucky breaks
by the police is weighty stuff indeed.
Is there truly no God?
Maybe. Maybe not.
But if there is a God,
He seems unlikely to interfere
in the killing of one human being by another,
this same God who lifts no finger to save a fish
from a hawk, a mouse from an owl,
or me moving in to kill you right now.

IF WE ARE

If we are
born to die
and condemned to be free
then why do we
act the way we do
as if what other people
thought
mattered,
or since life
is short, why not
live life fully
every minute
in every day?
Be grateful, be thankful,
be glad you are alive,
appreciate your friends, your family,
for every good thing in your life.
People who have survived death
have appreciated the wind
blowing through their hair,
the sun warming their arms,
the sky on a cloudless day,
or the night sky
on a bright, moonlit night.
Why compromise yourself if your reward
is obscurity,
or to be buried in a nameless
grave for eternity?
Why bother?
Why not be completely who you are,
good or evil,
but honest.
Be the same when people are watching you
or not. What matters are your values
to yourself and no one else.
We need to treat others with respect
but why compromise ourselves all of our lives?
I understand compromise to survive, or to get along,

but not at the expense of myself.
If I do foolish things so be it,
because in the end, what will it have mattered?
It would have mattered to me, because it's my life
then and now, and as long as I treat others with respect
and attempt to love the people who love me,
I can die without "compromising my values"
if I can live up to a code that counts whether
anyone is watching or not.

HOW IT MUST FEEL TO BE GOD

for Scott Urban

I felt like God,
like God Himself tonight,
watching these fat flies
gather around my kitchen,
their legs attached to my cabinets,
and since I hadn't killed them in days,
they were relaxed, they felt comfortable.
Well, I couldn't stand those flies anymore,
so I killed them, one by one,
and their reactions were so pitiful,
flying aimlessly, trying to make sense of it all.
It made me think of my fellow humans,
how we react when people we know die.
We run around aimlessly, physically, or in our minds,
not prepared for the sudden death of someone we knew:
out of nowhere the hand of God
slapped our fellow friend (or fly) down
and the killing could continue, endlessly or possibly does,
until God gets tired
for now. . .

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

We get up in the morning, commute, go to work
hoping we don't get in an accident,
don't get a traffic ticket,
don't arrive late for work
hoping everything
will turn out okay
and most of the time
it does,
and we then go on
to the next day
and hope everything
will come out okay
and most of the time it does,
but then,
someone does not get to work,
someone does not
come home
and we find out,
there's been a horrible accident,
a call from the hospital,
and the news travels fast,
"Oh no," you exclaim,
not "so & so," and people
from the church get together
and pray
and people might stop by the house
to comfort and what are we to say,
what are we to think at such a time?
That life is a lottery,
most of the time it goes by uneventfully,
then one day
your number comes up
and while you're talking on the cell phone,
you forget to notice that truck
in your rear view mirror
you go left, the truck honks its horn,
you swerve, the car in front beeps its horn,
and it's over.

There's a coffin, a funeral,
bereaved friends and mourners, and family
and it all happened
one day,
one ordinary day like today,
and the light
came
suddenly.

THE PATRON SAINT OF DINOSAURS

If no God protects me from things that devastate me, what can I conclude?
Is God a sadist, testing me from time to time with pain,
and when I feel good about myself,
something out of nowhere cuts my legs off.
Why? Is there a God?
Certainly not someone who doesn't wish for me to suffer.
All I see is myself with the help of some friends climbing out of this hole.
Where was God then?

Who was the patron saint of the dinosaurs by the way?
Obviously he or she didn't get concerned enough
or God forgot the cries of those dying raptors and concentrated on humans instead.
What about those humans? The greatest creation of God?
Made in the image of God? Rapists? Serial killers?
Somehow the Creator escapes the blame for His creation even though His creation
is less than perfect.

So is there a God? What if no one is there?
What if we opened the door to the pilot's cabin
and found no one sitting at the controls,
just a programmed set of instructions.
What would we do then? Get off the plane?
Or could we? What a day of reckoning that would be.
A Day of Judgment indeed.

CHOICES

A woman who was kidnapped when she was eleven
came back to her family a young woman.

She had two children by the man who kidnapped her,
but she was alive.

He chose not to kill her.

Her situation, just like all of our situations,
reflects the choices we make,
or what others make, nothing else.

Jean Paul Sartre claimed that we were "condemned to be free,"
and what he meant by that

was that no God watches over us, or does anything for us,
all we have are the choices we make, which we have complete control of.

Sartre claimed we hated this freedom, that we wanted to give it away, to God,
religion, Government, anyone except ourselves,
because the idea we were the ones responsible for our lives, and no one else
was too much to bear for most people.

There might be a God alright, a clockmaker Deist God who sets the rules,
and winds up the clock of evolution after causing the Big Bang,
but cosmic rules set the stage for our lives: Try as we might,
each time one of us jumps off the Empire State Building
we will more likely end up dead
no matter how many times we get up and try again.

That's just a rule of our world, *per se* gravity.

They say evolution is just a theory, but it explains much.

And if God is a clockmaker, He certainly believes in freedom,
because that is what we have, more than we can handle.

I and no one else am responsible for my children.

My mistakes with my children will be that, my mistakes.

No user guide was provided to me at birth.

I did it the best way I knew just the same as my parents did.

Was I wrong? Were they wrong?

Perhaps, from time to time, but I've come to appreciate their trying
more than anything else.

They could have abandoned me, but they didn't.

I could have been beaten, but I wasn't.

We need to acknowledge this freedom and learn to forgive more often.

After all, there is no user's manual, no matter how many claim that it is the Bible.

We learn as we go along, making mistakes every step of the way.

If we're lucky, the mistakes aren't so bad, but on the other hand,
some horrible mistakes could and have been made.

And no one stopped that person. No one stopped
that man from kidnapping the young girl,
but someone tried, riding a bike following, calling, "Call 911!"
But that girl is still alive.

Because her rapist did not kill her.

Choices.

FOR POUND

"il miglior fabbro"

for Ron and Joe

By sheer force of personality
you demanded court and asked others
to listen to your proclamations
whether they came from the newspaper
or from whatever else you were reading.
Everything was a lecture to you,
you were Pound the teacher at
"Ezuversity" and you held court there.
James McLaughlin was spellbound by what you
proclaimed: Jefferson economics,
or Mussolini, the benevolent
dictator, who was going to lead
Italy out of this usury
mess, this problem with the Jewish
bankers who ran the whole show-- You were
tired of it-- That was why you were
in Italy in the first place.
But then World War II happened:
There were your broadcasts, and then there were the
camps; something you never would have guessed--
Facism died along with Benito
and you were imprisoned in a cage
and you were contemplating your fate--
You expected to be hanged--
And then there were your *Pisan Cantos*:
"the ant's a centaur in his dragon world,"
"what thou lovest well, shall not be reft
from thee, what thou lovest well. . ."
And what did you discover about
yourself as you contemplated death?
What you love, lasts. As the Apostle
Paul once wrote, "Love never dies."
You were prepared for your fate.
And what was this fate? What was coming to

you? Something you never could have seen.
A mental ward. St Elizabeth's.
As friends visited you, they could hear the
screams near your cell everyday. It was
torture, but like all things you bore it well.
And you cast it as judgment against you.
Instead of execution, you saw now
that all they saw was an idiot.
You were really a political
prisoner. Now, Amnesty would have
listed you as a prisoner of
conscience. But you believed their lies.
You became silent. You said nothing.
In the end, they broke you, which is what
they wanted from the beginning.
You are an Orwellian hero to
me, part of a new generation
that picked up your banner and cried out,
"Study. Learn. Before you write, know what you
are doing. And remember those before
you. They wrote for a purpose. Recall it!"

THOUGHTS ON DEATH

My wife told me that our neighbor died during the night,
we weren't sure where,
he was staying at a nursing home,
and yesterday, at work,
I found the obituary of my Aunt Lucille,
lived up to the ripe old age
of 92,
outlived all her siblings
including my dad,
outlived her husband
and even one of her sons.
She was born in 1917, and like many
of her generation,
the Depression and World War II
changed the way she looked at things.
But even she
in her ripe old age
is dead, and all this
made me think of those lines from
Little Buddha: "What is impermanence?"
"See these people, all around you? In 100 years,
they won't be here. That is impermanence."
Do we live our lives knowing we are impermanent?
Buddhism not only teaches that, it states we are interdependent.
Everyone's needs are connected with one another's.
How are we to live in an impermanent and interdependent universe?
The Buddhists teach people to be kind to one another.
Christians say love your neighbor as God loves you.
Christianity teaches not to be afraid of death
for Jesus conquered death at the cross.
Dying is going home in Christianity
but not many Christians I've met feel that.
Death is an unknown fear.
I'm frightened by it,
mainly because I don't know what's there.
I suspect there is nothing there,
a vast void,
so I run away

from it
as much as possible.
Perhaps I and many others
live our lives
like the characters
in the Edgar Allan Poe story,
"The Masque of the Red Death."
While the Red Death raged outside,
people inside
Prospero's castle acted as if
there were no such thing.
There were continuous parties
and celebrations.
Then the clock would sound,
and everything would stop
until the clock
stopped tolling.
One night,
the Red Death appeared,
disguised,
and killed everyone in the castle.
Are we like those revelers,
pretending death does not exist? I wonder.

"ONCE IN A LIFETIME"

Everytime I hear that song by the Talking Heads, it takes me back to a time around 1984 or 1985 on my 21st birthday and my girl friend at the time threw a party for me with the Doors playing "Road House Blues" in the background

I remember Sam imitating David Byrne and all his movements from the movie *Stop Making Sense* and it has a nostalgia for me-- When I was 20 I'm 45 now and back then seems so long ago. . .The Talking Heads and another band, Frankie Goes To Hollywood takes me there all over again. . . I yearn for the past back then.

Times weren't great then. I wasn't exactly happy. But music from the past creates this nostalgia, real or imagined making me think I'm in a Dan Fogelberg song: "Same Old Lang Syne."

Life is not that romantic.
But music makes it seem that way,
and I start crying for nothing.
How I would like music to savor now.
Because now is all we will ever have.

FOR TWO WONDERFUL VOICES ON THE PHONE

I can't approach some things without crying or bursting into tears
but I can talk about how your voices carried me through the day.

I felt as if angelic wings, one to my left, one to my right,
carried my sad body above the ground, and away to heaven.

I didn't have visions of God, but I saw sunlight, and I felt above the clouds
for a minute, and your wings sustained me, your voices sustained me,

and for a minute, I was back to Sunday, speaking to my mother,
and she was saying, "Same time next Sunday, right," and I was nodding,

"Yes, I'll see you next Sunday," and the phone calls from the nursing home
and the emergency room hadn't arrived yet, and I could still feel at peace.

For a moment, your voices brought me back to that day, and I was happy
all over again, except that I didn't know it, didn't know how lucky I was

how lucky we all are since we never know, when we wish someone a good day,
or that we love them, or that we plan to see them, we don't know

whether we'll see them, we don't know if we'll meet them again,
because all you have is that moment between the two of you,

the moment that I choose to call eternity.

REPEATING MYSELF

Even though I seem to repeat myself
over and over and even though
all I seem to do is the same thing
again and again, there is some sort of
purpose through all this: It's not just
mindless instinct, or some Buddhist sum of
karma totals: There is some purpose
through it all, although the Buddhist
explanation is a good one
I feel I am doomed to do everything
I've ever done over and over
again and it seems that all I am is
a series of repetitions
but sometimes it all makes sense: Tonight,
I started with lyrics I liked
and shared with my friends on email
and yet, by the end of the night,
the words "only the strong survive"
were ringing in my brain, and I
discovered them to be the lyrics
from an Elvis Presley song that
I never knew. How strange is that?
Does it not make some bizarre connection
throughout our lives? We are creatures who
repeat the same acts over and over
and yet, there is some purpose through it all.

THE BEAR

for Scott Urban

"A bear killed two militants after discovering them in its den in Indian-administered Kashmir, police say. Two other militants escaped, one of them badly wounded, after the attack in Kulgam district, south of Srinagar. The militants had assault rifles but were taken by surprise -- police found the remains of pudding they had made to eat when the bear attacked."

This reads like one of your poems, Scott--
our AK-47-carrying friends making some pudding,
putting their guns down
and *look out!*
A bear attacked them,
killing two of them,
leaving a third badly wounded.
Remember how you laughed at *The Happening*
and I took it as gospel?
Perhaps the planet itself is rising up to kill us,
tiring of our stupid attempts to eliminate one another,
all in the name of peace.
Now the bears are coming out of their caves to kill us
and with good reason now too.
We bring nothing but death;
do we not deserve it?
In time, the planet itself will rise up against us,
perhaps that is what the Mayans were looking forward to in 2012.
The aliens will not come back
but this planet, this earth,
will wake up,
and like a dog
coming out of a bath,
will shake its fur clean
eliminating all of us fleas on this planet.
The consciousness of one will overshadow the consciousness of us all
and like a boy waking from a dream,
the earth will change direction and all hell will break loose.

TEMPERATURES CHANGE

Temperatures change from
August to November.
What appeared hot and stifling
is now cold and chilly at nights
and in the early morning.
Overhead, the stars spin
in their orbits, galaxies
whirl as our planet spins through space.
Poets live their lives and die,
some remembered, some unremembered.
Most unremembered.
This pattern has remained the
same since the times of
the Preacher in the Old Testament.
Everything is vanity
and everything changes in due time.
We live purposeless
lives in search of a purpose:
For a God, for a passion,
for poetry, but the
stars spin in their orbits,
galaxies whirl as our planet
spins through space.
This pattern has remained
the same since the
times of the Preacher
in the Old Testament.
Temperatures change from
August to November.
I see the beauty
in my son's face.
My daughter gives me a hug.
I met some poets, have
felt like a poet on several
occasions, work an easy job.
Life has been good to me.
I won't get published
in a *Jargon* anthology

but who says that
I deserve it or want to be?
I'll accept what I have
right now, from
the smile on my son's face
to the hug of my daughter.
I'll take whatever
life has to offer,
smile about it
and continue on.
After all, it's all
life has to offer
anyway.
The sun rises in the east,
sets in the west
and the temperatures
change from
August to November.
Everything is vanity
and everything
changes in due time.
This pattern has remained
the same since the times
of the Preacher in the Old Testament.

HOW TO DEAL WITH DEATH? TOWARDS ACCEPTANCE AND APPRECIATION

The time period after a death is an interesting one. People want you to feel better and to help in any way they can. One woman, a friend of my wife's, came over bringing sandwich meat, bread, and cheese surprising my wife and me with her kindness. I got two calls from two women who really cheered up my day. Later on, the death was left alone. No one wants to ask, "How do you feel?" because of what I could answer: "I feel terrible. And the feeling lingers." What have I learned after the death of my mother? The old clichés: Appreciate everything. Nothing is certain. Nothing lasts. No guarantees. If you are happy enjoy it as long as you can, because there is no promise that it can happen again anytime soon. I am happy for my children, my friends, and my close friends: It's true we are born alone and we die alone, but there can always be friends. There's never enough time for friends. There is no substitute for my family, my wife and two children. And I appreciate everything even more: Being alive is no promise. Having things is no promise. Instead of being upset because I cannot get my way, why not accept what I cannot change? Why not choose to be happier and more friendly, more appreciative, and apologize for my mistakes. I'm sorry if I hurt you. I truly am. I have a big mouth. I am very selfish. But I am loyal, and I am appreciative.

I just wish everyone else understood that this world is ever-changing. Nothing lasts. But we can sure appreciate it while it is around, as I do, you.

WHAT IS IT?

When Orpheus asked his critics what they wanted from him, they all said, "Astonish us!"
Can you do that? Astonish your critics?
Robert Frost claimed that it was what "got lost in translation." And Sandburg claimed it was a sack "of invisible keepsakes." What is it to you?
I would claim that the key lay "in the hands, something in the hands, surely it must be that."
My friend, Andrea Young, asks me, "Are you reaching toward being a true poet?"
What is it, Andrea? What is it?
Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, regarding the true poet the following:
"The true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both."
My friend, Howard McCord, wrote to me and said, "Poetry is whisky. Prose is mash. DISTILL!"
I still wish to be astonished.

WHAT IS IT II

Ian Curtis claimed that among his gifts were the following: "pleasures and wayward distractions, this is my wonderful prize." What did he see?
I have seen it, on a drive from Wilmington to Charlotte, with just my wife and me in the car. It started with a hint of orange, and then peach, the peach mixed into red, mixed in with orange, until everything was covered in orange, everything as far as the eye could see, and I felt her presence, more than ever before.
What did Keats write? "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."
What does that mean? What do truth and beauty mean?
That smell of you, pale scent of hair on skin. ..
Why dusk filters? Why your eyes? I don't know.
It could be anyone else for me to meet, but your face, your shorts, your hair? I don't know.
I burrow inside your eyes to find fish, salt water caves, and unknown pleasures, my mouth and lips covered with your salt.

DEALING WITH THE GREAT ABSURD

Like revelers in some Edgar Allan Poe story,
we go to work, attend weddings, write poems
as if the whole thing is not absurd.
We may have grandfathers who died in front
of our own eyes, or mothers who died with
no reason or rationale, or fathers who died in agony,
but we act as if none of that is real,
drink like it doesn't exist, attend churches
like everyone there will live forever, or better yet,
meet in heaven somehow, when instead,
each of us will die lonely and unexpected absurd deaths
massive heart attacks, nursing homes predicting our
death in 24 hours, dying in a car crash after falling asleep
after a tour of duty in Iraq, dying in front of your daughter
and grandson, getting hit by a car, dying of AIDS in prison
because you stop taking half of your pills needed to keep you alive,
and we go on, ignoring funerals, wishing people the best,
nodding our heads when we hear people around us talking about friends
or family dying, "I'm sorry," we say, when we really don't know
what to say, after all, our friends and family are alive and well,
what can we say? If we live long enough, we get to know
the obituary page quite well, we notice less and less, our friends around,
we keep going to churches, nodding our heads, turning on the TV,
and like Rip Van Winkle, sleep through our lives until Death awakens us
one day or night, her tremendous giant white or black wings rising up
above our heads, and that white, alabaster face with red eyes, asks
us, "How are you doing, okay? How do you feel? Are you ready to go?"
And we fully cooperate, there's no denying Her will, and as we turn back,
looking back at this world, we wonder, "Was it all a dream?
Did I dream myself awake?" Perhaps you did. Perhaps we all do,
until one day, we awaken.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

I'm sick and tired of hearing people crying in my beer or my coffee,
or my ear, about how terrible and unfair their life is.

It sure is unfair, but guess what?

It's unfair to everyone else as well.

We are where we are because we want to.

That's my response.

We are where we are because we want to.

If we're alone, for the most part, we choose to be alone.

If we want someone in our lives, we will do
what we need to do to have someone in our lives.

For some people, it's either this or that.

Well, then don't be upset if it's that.

No one owes anyone a favor.

The universe agrees with that as well.

No God owes you a damn thing.

That's true as well.

What you have is what you worked for, or strove for, or lucked into,
or stumbled into but if you maintain it, then you worked for it.

I'm heavy-set because I didn't work out enough, and
unless I work hard at it, I'll be heavy-set.

Crying out about it does me no good, lamenting my lack of friends is no good.

If I don't act like a friend, how can I expect to have friends?

It's not the "one" answer, but it's a good place to start.

We are where we are because we want to.

If we don't want it, then do something about it.

If we can't or won't, who are we to blame?

God? Our parents? Destiny? Life? The truth is,
we have no one to blame but ourselves.

WHAT IF IT WAS ALL TRUE?

for David

Yeah, what if it was? What if there were no aliens, no angels,
no 2012, no God, and Jesus was just a man?

Would I change? No.

I would still be on my church's rector council,

I would still help drive homeless or poor people to my church for a free breakfast
every Sunday, and I would still take myself
and my family to church.

Even if it were all true. Even if there was no God,
2012 was going to come true,

and we were all doomed. Even if I had come to believe
that Jesus was more a man than a myth,

and even if I had come to believe God was a myth,
I would still do what I'm doing now.

Why? Why not? Why not feed the homeless even if for only one Sunday?

Why not take my kids and myself to church, even if for only one Sunday?

Why not? Why not be kind to one another?

Why not dare to hope? Why not go even if you don't believe it?

So I can stay home and watch T.V.

and know that those suckers who go to church are fools,
that they believe lies I know are lies?

Would that do me more good? I will love as many people as I can.

I will try to help and care for as many people as I can.

As much as humanly possible.

I will still hate who I hate, and I will still find it hard, if next to impossible to forgive,
but I will try my hardest, to be neutral or show antipathy for "these people"

(Robert E. Lee never called them the enemy, just "these people") I have learned to hate.

Not for them, but for myself. It is too easy for me to hate.

I need to stop that. Not just not kill them, but to stop hating them for what it does to
me.

Would I still follow Jesus if he was only a man? Sure.

What a great surprise if he was more than a man,
but I would still follow him if he was only a man.

I don't need Jefferson to explain it for me.

I believe Paul believed what he believed and that he was no lunatic.

He really believed what he believed. And that is the hope of Christ.

And even if I'm not convinced I believe it anymore,

I will still follow the man. Paul's advice is good advice.

He advises us to love, to practice self control, and that is good advice for whatever reason.

Even if it's all meaningless, and so if it is, I will continue to love and care for who I can. I will still try to be good to those I can, even if I stop believing. And if I turn out to be wrong, so much the better.

FOR WALLACE STEVENS

I had a dream last night
similar to dreams I've been having
in which I've been watching how the mechanisms of life unfold.
I've had dreams of a city where a man who wants to be my lover
keeps following me to take my picture.
I pose for him to take a picture but I don't want to sleep with him
so he sleeps with a homeless man instead, the two of them a perfect pair.
I am content to see how the buildings unfold, where the doors go
and where the rooms in the building open up to
and above it all, the realization I'm one of billions on this earth,
an ant along with many other ants,
with my own group of friends and family, a part of this complex mechanism
called a world, how anything that would make sense makes no sense at all
and yet, this world has opened up to me, and given me a job,
shown me a purpose, given me an "Exodus" experience to remember,
how I was given this job, how I was meant to work with handicapped adults
instead of working the Men's Dept. at Dillard's, tripled my pay,
make as much in 24 hours as I worked for 40. There is some purpose for me
on this earth, among billions of ants like myself who call this world,
this country, this state, this city *home*, this place as Stevens put it,
some affluence, if only half-perceived,
in the poverty of their words,
of the planet of which they were part.

THE REFLECTION IN THE WATER
(At the Brown Coat 12/13/09)

for Keats

The reflection in the water. . .
The radiating circles. . .
The reflection of the trees in the water. . .
All my thoughts focus on you.
Quiet. I imagine nothing,
picturing nothing.
I see the circles
grow wider in the water.
I stare at the reflection of the trees.
All is quiet.
I am here.
The reflection in the water. . .
the radiating circles. . .
That is all I will ever know.
That is all I need to know.
Good night.

THE QUESTION THAT CAN NEVER BE ANSWERED

When one hears about a disaster
such as the one that recently occurred
in Haiti where perhaps as many
as two hundred thousand people died
it's hard to believe that there could be
a loving and kind God who cares for us:
and in the aftermath it seems that
governments and armies mean more than
any notion of God who might love us.
But for me, in my heart, when I ask
myself questions on what to do, well then--
It appears to me that someone other
than myself is answering me--
answers that I would not have expected,
answers coming deeper than myself.
If I listen very carefully, still
there is an answer, as Paul would say,
and the answer is more than, "Let it be."
When I am in need of counsel and I
listen very carefully I can
hear a voice older than time, speaking,
telling me to do the right thing, always.
Is this just the voice of my conscience?
Perhaps. Maybe. But it is also
the voice of reason, truth, and I think, God.
Now, a cynic (and I have been one too)
would say, *what about madmen? What do they
hear? What about their followers? What do
they hear and say?* My answer is this:
Does it make sense in your heart? What about
if you talked it over with your friends?
Would it make sense to them? Does it sound
reasonable? God strikes me as being
very reasonable. Really. Really.
What I hear is *do the best you can and I
will take care of you.* And I hear, *Trust me.
I will explain everything in due time.*
Conscience? Reason? It doesn't sound like me.

But I like what I hear. And I trust it.
Am I just talking to myself? Who knows.
I don't think so, but this is the question
that can never be answered by someone
other than yourself. A matter of faith?
It's ultimately what you can believe
and whether you can have faith in this God.
It's a question of what you can believe.

FOR CELAN

You wanted a word,
an apology from Heidegger
for the thousands upon thousands
of deaths at the mountain of death
but you received no answer:
No answer from God as well.

Why does golden hair Marguerite
have the stars all sparkling and
why does ashen hair Shulamith
shovel a grave in the air?

Why did the Germans shoot your mother?

Like Walter E Kurtz said in *Apocalypse Now*,

"Horror has a face... and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral
terror are your friends. If they are not, then they are enemies to be feared. . "

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TO THINE OWN SELF. . .
(WARNING AND ADVICE)

Guess what? Not everyone is here to help you.

Not everything everyone gives you is the truth.

Not everyone here cares about you.

Many people here are in it for themselves.

Many people here like your space to feel important.

Many people here suck air right out of you by their presence.

They neither give light nor appreciate it.

My advice: Depart. Leave. Get out.

If you sense people around you, not caring, sucking up your air by their presence, get lost, be gone, depart. They won't even notice your departure, your loss.

All they care about are themselves and the audience they feel they deserve for themselves.

"I hate them, I do hate them. . ."

If I could get away with it, I would kill them. If I had the smarts,

I would blow them up in their own cars, press the detonator switch, several thousand feet away

just to watch them blow up in front of my face.

If I could get away with it, I would shoot them, pick out weapons of my own choosing to kill them.

My favorite method would be to tie them up somewhere, soak them in gasoline, and set them on fire.

Their screams would soothe me.

But the law and morality stop me. It is not worth it, for me, to go to jail for their sake, so I just pray for the day they die and I hear word of it. It would give me immense joy.

Still what are we to do about such creatures? What can we do for people who deserve death at our own hands?

Not spend one breath thinking about them, being around them, or wasting time conceiving of their existence.

That is what I would say. Let the lack of access to our own energy slowly kill them, or allow them to die of their own obscurity.

Good night.