

Vernon Miles Kerr

Fiction | Rhetoric | Poetry | Criticism | Drama

Blog at WordPress.com.

Poetry | A Compendium

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As the banner, above, suggests, I dabble in several (non-exclusive) areas of the writer's art. But, during the time I have been posting to this blog, my poetry is the only area which has garnered "likes," comments and followers.

Which is amazing to me, because poetry is, and always has been a complete mystery to me. From even my teenage years, reading a good poem has always caused something deep within my psyche to resonate. A good poem had a mysterious, magical undercurrent—a sub-frequency—which elicited something akin to, but beyond, a feeling of harmony and completeness. When I view the perfection and harmony of a Japanese garden, or the painting of a master, I have a similar feeling. But visual art is internal harmony inspired by obvious balance and the juxtaposition of agreeable, contrasting material elements. Poetry, on the other hand, seems to create spiritual harmony within the psyche by subtle manipulation of semantically powerful words, words stratified with multiple layers of—sometimes conflicting—meaning. The choice of a single word in a poem, can make or break this power to enchant.

From the time of my youth, I yearned to be able to create such magic for others' enjoyment. As far as I know—now in my early seventies—I have failed. So far. Where you feel that I have failed, dear reader, please do me the honor and favor of pointing it out and recommending alternatives. "Likes" mean nothing; meaningful comment, even if negative, is gold.

Follwoing is a compendium of all the poems I have posted in the past three or four years.

PURITY

(c) 2014 Vernon Miles Kerr

Conceived to be read aloud to the tattoo of a military snare drum.

Down the WORLD of peace.

Up the WORLD of war.

Give us ALL the blood

And all the BRIGHT red gore.

Give us ALL the cash,

That our GUNS will buy.

Give us ALL the kids

And make their MOTH-ers cry.

Teach 'em IN the West;

Teach 'em IN the East.

Keep 'em CRAVing pure

Religi-OS-i-ty.

Trash their UG-ly Church;

Burn their Sil-y Mosque

Carve a SWAS-ti-ka

Upon the TEMP-le door.

Tell 'em HE said this;

Tell 'em SHE said that;

Tell 'em GOD's offended

And He WANTS 'em dead.

Write a PRET-ty song

With a DRIV-ing drum;

March 'em IN-to Hell

And wheel 'em BRO-ken home.

Praise 'em LEFT and right.

Pin on STARS so bright

Keep 'em PRAY-ing "Purity"

Through-OUT the night.

Let the GOLD coins gleam

In the BANK so clean

Let the BLACK oil flow

To feed the WAR machine.

Yin and Yang

© 2014 Vernon Miles Kerr

As do the black and white
Of the old Asian dichotomy,
The antipodes of Human Nature
Revolve in nauseating monotony:
Sumos exchanging brooding stares before the lunge.

The meth-addicted darkness
Rolls its empty sockets at the creative surge of the
symphony;
The holocausts sidle up to the the martyrs;
An alleyway's sodden sour garbage
Rubs against the flash of insight from a Dickinson poem;
The black tear of mourning
swirls against the white tear of joy.

Not that white could ever subsume black,
Or that both meld into dishwater gray...
But would that the black become ever grayer
And the white stay white.

Looking Over the Lake

An examination of the "survivor's guilt" felt by one enjoying all the financial benefits and beauty of America, while knowing the horror that rages elsewhere on Earth.

Tired, retired; living on the 401K so diligently saved;

Living the American Dream: looking over the lake by our apartments.

Year after year, I'm privileged to witness the Canada Geese negotiate

Their circumnavigations of the Continent.

A chatty V-formation of them fills my vision from periphery to periphery

As they barely miss the ridge-pole of our two story building,

Full flaps out, on the last few yards of their final approach into Denver,

Finally landing, splay-footed, water skiing to a rippling stop.

Then a moment of silence, before resuming their garulous honking conversations.

The ducks are having their own raspy domestic disputes over on the other shore,

While a bullfrog's deep, humming, self-promoting advertisements

Provide the bass line in rhythm with breezy, swaying cat tail reeds.

But my deep enjoyment of this, and even of my ritualistic semi-diurnal

Pilgrimages to the veranda

To witness morning's sky lighten in the East

And evening's reddened in the West

Are tainted by guilt.

Who am I, to be here surrounded by peace when others,

By mere happenstance, at this moment, quake in their
beds,

Waiting for a pounding on the door, a ripping from their
home

A quick severing of the head,

Or worse:

Being forced to watch a child's sweet head

Go rolling across grease-spotted, scarlet-smearred concrete.

Is this the feeling of those lucky but poor Jews

Who by stealth or flight escaped the Dachaus and the
Bergen-Belsens?

It must be.

"Who am I to deserve life, while innocent children's
gassed bodies

Sizzled in the ovens of Europe."

And, indeed, who am I to luxuriate in Nature's beauty

While, right now, a mother down South sits and counts
the Rosary

With shaking fingers, longing to hear her son's hand on
the door knob

But instead hearing the intermittent, repeated,

Distant pops of pistols.

All the while, here I sit, in my impotent desperation,

Looking over the lake.

The Wild Goose

© 2015 Vernon Miles Kerr

He's all business:

Guarding, grazing, chatting, leading the V.

No squirrely play; there's an order to his day.

She's all about eggs:

Laying, incubating, leading a queue of downy chicks;

Fiercely protecting.

They float: as effortlessly on air as on water.

When tied to Earth they are mortal, bickering, defecating creatures.

But when, with two or three slaps of their tails

They rise above the pond and form up,

They are gods.

What callous soul wouldn't thrill at the sight

Of the smooth aerodynamics

And the thunder of hundreds of wings

Flailing as one.

The Weaver's Loom

© 2015 Vernon Miles Kerr

The weaver's loom,

The weaver's loom.

Threads of color,

Warp and woof.

Shuttle flying left and right

Beater slamming , through the night.

Ceaseless.

Lady Liberty on the bench

Kicking the treadles

Like organ pedals.

With nimble hands,

She plucks the falling strands

Out of the air, tying them in,

Nimbly catching them as they come,

Tying them in without a thought.

Dare no one judge the finished cloth.

Its mottled gradient is her diary,

She recites every line, every thread.

She loves it as a child.

While others mock, she caresses the folds,
Then turns again to her labor of love,
Plucking at the floating strands.
Tying them in. Tying them in.
The beater, slamming once again.
Ceaseless.

In the Interim

© 2009, 2016 Vernon Miles Kerr

In the interim between dark and dark
We scrape, scratch and endure,
Assuming import.

As the interim narrows to a slit
we scramble to gather up
Shreds of legacy,
Hoping they will live on
In the interim of others.

Would that we rather leave
Shreds of relevancy.
But alas, those others'

Interms are narrowing too.

Force

© 2016 Vernon Miles Kerr

Forces are nothing.

All of them are nothing:

The strong nuclear, the weak nuclear, the electromagnetic,

Even gravity.

We can describe their effects but not their causes.

We can write voluminous pages of equations

Which predict the effects

Ever more accurately,

And we are smug.

We can discern the forces,

We can name the forces,

We can predict the effects;

But we cannot describe the forces themselves,

Nor their origins.

They simply are.

This is the bottom line

Of our mortal existence.

This is our supreme limitation.

This belies and ridicules our smugness.

Travels

© 2010, 2016 by Vernon Miles Kerr

When a provincial is called upon to travel

His luggage includes the place from whence he came.

He drags it along and holds it up as a ruler

Against every novel thing he sees.

But that's not bad.

It serves to avoid confusion

It makes him understand the uniqueness

Of places he visits.

BOSTON

For the Californian,

San Francisco comes to mind .

But not so hilly,

Walkable.

But bricks, bricks, red bricks.

Omnipresent.

We'd have 'em too except for ours

Being shattered and culled in epic quakes.

And so many Irish Pubs

And other old stuff.

“Benjamin Franklin was born on this spot.”

“Benjamin Franklin was baptized in this church.”

“Paul Revere rode through here.”

“Here, Alexander Graham Bell called for Mr. Watson.”

Those far-away mythical places in the Weekly Reader

Are real, afterall.

And there are the Red Sox.

You don't have to see them to sense their presence:

They are on everyone's lips:

The Red Sox doing battle against the Green Monster...

And against the Yankees, them damn'd Yankees.

ST. LOUIS

What on Earth can compare to the Arch?

No superlative is adequate.

Nothing prepares you for that first glimpse,

No travelogue, no picture in the Nat. Geo.

Soaring above the downtown skyscrapers,

Its satin-silver face reflects

The sky and clouds,

And the river,

That Old Man River.

Your first thoughts are

Who conceived this;

Who planned this;

Who approved it?

How many minds had to meld

For a city to accomplish this?

Millenia later archaeologists will theorize,

“Something significant happened here.”

Yes, but not so much “Westward Expansion,”

But more: human cooperation.

I stop at a signal light

And wait while a tidalwave of red-shirted fans

Crosses and flows toward Busch.

“Gotta support those Cards.”

One senses in St. Louis

A spirit of community, of egalitarian concern

For everyone’s pleasure, everyone’s edification:

The famed Zoo has no admission fee

Neither does the Art Musum

Nor the Science Museum

There are even free seats at

Forrest Park's Summertime Opera.

When the project ends, I head West on 70.

An elastic memory stretches out behind;

It won't break.

Someday it will yank me back to St. Louis.

BOULDER

Quirky, busy little Boulder

With its sprawling, yellow brick university

And Nineteenth Century business district,

Spread out at the foot of the Flatirons.

Those jutting stone slabs seem to grow out of Boulder

Not visa-versa.

They thrust upward beckoning the hikers,

Promising untold vistas higher up in the Rockies,

That backbone of North America.

The buskers and hippies along Pearl Street's Walkway

Chat and snigger at the weird plain people

From places like Des Moines or Bakersfield.

The visitors gasp at the neon sign advertising

A basement weed dispensary.

They playfully push each other toward the steps.

Most resist, but some descend

With a feigned resignation

And a hidden smile.

TOKYO

She is more than huge, she is blatantly contradictory.

She's American-ish, but Japanesey;

Familiar but exotic;

Traditional but wildly avant garde.;

Savoring but guzzling;

Giddily young but staidly elderly.

Near Shinjuku station it's girls in blue jeans

And tiny kimono-clad matrons popping into Starbucks.

This immigrant from Seattle sits amid metallic, glitzy
structures

And Times Square shaming electric signage.

There is no downtown but a dozen downtowns

Strung like beads around the circling Yamanote Line.

We jump on and off like locals, sampling each one.

Ikebukuro, Ueno, Okachimachi, Akihabara .

Later the bullet train pulls into Shin-Yokohama,
Long, low and unapologetically futuristic.
It's the 6:00 o'clock bound for Kyoto.

We grab a Mc Donalds before boarding.

A few blocks away, in a tranquil garden

A heron dips its beak

And sends the moon gyrating .

Sky Thoughts

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So, in the days of time gone by

The birdies sang and dusted the sky

With their feathery wings

While we kids watched and wished

That we could do the same.

We'd lay back in the clover scent

And argue about cloud pictures,

While a clock somewhere in the house

Ticked away the last seconds of summer.

And now, many summers away from there

My TV drones on, and the commercials shout

And the clock radio builds up steam

For tomorrow's too-early rout

And the car stands like a crouching cat

Ready to spring upon the Interstate,

Where miles and miles unroll beneath the roaring tires.

STORIES

©2016 Vernon Miles Kerr

As a writer, I agonize over stories.

What shall I write about?

How shall I make it engaging,

Captivating,

Even perplexing?

I dig deep into the dustbin of my mind,

Unraveling old wadded up balls of memory,

Looking for the right story.

There are multitudes in there, some I didn't write

But have read—works of other writers.

There are stories told to me by my parents,

My siblings, my friends my mentors, the Bible,

Movies—good and bad—and finally,

The prejudicial and agenda-driven media.

Come to think of it,
Whether or not of my own authorship,
Or even acquiescence,
All these stories define me;
They rule me.
They dictate my attitudes,
My beliefs about the unseen,
My hopes—and my despair.

But without them I am not human:
I am as the animals, whose stories, at best,
Are the sequential memories of events in their own lives,
Silently locked in their minds,
Never to be related to others.

I obsess about relating it *all*—about contributing.
But will my stories enrich that shared river
Of human experience—or pollute it?
Even if the latter, the obsession is not mitigated.

I forge on,
Blogging, tweeting,
Emailing blindly,
Scattering my crumbs along the forest path
To prove that someone once passed by.

My Calloused Brain

(c) 2017 Vernon Miles Kerr

The ebbs and flows of bi-polar disorder. This was written during an ebb tide.

Others meditate

And claim inspiration:

“Relax; focus on your breathing,

Wait for enlightenment.”

I’ve waited...

And waited...

But nothing—

Except embarrassment

For failing at their game.

I view the magic in Nature,

Knowing that I should feel awe,

Be inspired,

Well I am,

Intellectually.

But there’s no real feeling of awe,

Just a curious amazement,

A curious mundane amazement.

"The spirit world is real,"

They say.

"You can feel it."

I can't feel it,

I have a calloused brain.

When they rise in the air

At the last trump,

I will stay behind.

My mundane, calloused brain

Will watch them ascend,

In curious, mundane amazement.

Louis xvi

© 2017 Vernon Miles Kerr

There's smugness in those

Who've attained absolute power,

Blindness to history,

A misplaced egomania:

"I'm so unique and great

I'll be the first to avoid that fate."

His wife said "No bread? Then call for cake,"

More in ignorance than disdain,

But still, she later viewed the torches

Through her leaded window pane.

The elastic can only stretch so far

Before it snaps back.

It's a law of Nature more inviolable

Than that which propelled Newton's apple.

We First-Worlders proclaim Democracy,

And some of us smugly laugh

At strutting white-sidewalled despots

Who hurl threats and pathetic junk

From behind the parapets

Of tiny, impotent kingdoms.

While we—oblivious—are strung

Like marionettes, to a devious despot

Far more to be feared

Than a Louis, an Adolph or a Jong-un,

Who has captured the Gates

Of Medicine, of Sustenance, of Fuel,

And even Governance,

And now exacts a toll when we pass through,

Which we gladly pay in gratitude

As our purchases assuage our certitude.

He's a puppet master of our own making,

A Frankenstein's Monster stitched from

Parts of a cadaverous economic order,

Yet walking, but streaming a gagging stench—

Presaging death—behind.

The elastic can only be stretched so far

Before it snaps back.

Louis was downed by a hungry ragged rabble,

Powered by the Grapevine,

But be encouraged:

Our monstrous ruler shall be

Hanged from a virtual yardarm

By a connected, savvy rabble

Powered by the Internet.

All That Is

© 2017 Vernon Miles Kerr

I have concluded, or nearly so,
That Intelligent design
Is in the Universe, or Universes,
Stacked one upon another
In some frequency-variant
Set of substrates of reality—
Ad infinitum.

Not because of
That random-seeming
Toss of thousands of millions of
Galaxies within the limits
Of our feeble techno-vision,
But in the in-our-face,
Daily confrontations
With Earth's own
Panoply of Life
Animal and Vegetable,
Micro' to macroscopic:

The fractal whorl
In a cauliflower head,
If you'll look.

The minutes-quick,
Brown engulfment of

A drop of honey
I've experimentally placed
On my countertop,
By thousands of tiny,
Persistent, damned ants.

Happy in summer
To ruin our chairs
Under the shade
Of the crepe-myrtle
With dripping sap
From their lovingly-placed
Vertical, aphid dairy-herd—

In winter
Their little scouts
Range across our
Private domestic surfaces,
Testing, tasting and twiddling
Their tiny antennae.

They must have
Some instant means
Of spooky communication
Back to the hive-general,

To be able to so quickly muster

A platoon of fellow soldiers

To my dollop of amber sweetness—

Or do they run back

And tell their fellows

The honey-news

In language formed

From pheromones

Set on the air?

Whatever the answer,

It seems beyond

Only a few billion years

Of random evolution—

As does the perfection

Of our eyes,

Which worked fine already

In the sockets

Of the dinosaurs.

I squash one

Of the miniscule interlopers

In hatred,

Tinged with curiosity.

Somewhere in the

Wreckage of that tiny

Machine is a computer,

With built-in software

Wired to the organs

Of locomotion,

And the sensors of light,

Touch and smell.

The twisted, broken legs

Earlier carried it along

In an impossibly smooth stride.

I've cut the poor thing off

At the trough, in mid sip.

The others scatter in alarm,

Some stream angrily up my arm.

I brush them into writhing capsules

Of chitin as well.

This is only one battle won

In a war between us and them,

A war that has raged

Since we left the caves—

Or maybe even before then.

As Burns watched the spider,

And wondered,

Maybe we watched

This little gnat-like species

Crawl the rock wall,

Concluding

Purpose—

Or nearly so.

Life Is...

© 2017 Vernon Miles Kerr

Life is a flute of champagne.

We are the twinkling bubbles

Streaming upward,

Spattering into oblivion at the top.

We are born,

We rise through life's events

Then we burst.

Gone.

Nothing.

But new bubbles always replace us,

For the moment.

Life is the tip of an ancient wave

In an ocean with no known shores.

How it started and where it crashes

No one knows.

Its lip is all the life that is

Its wake is all the life that was.

When all that was becomes all that is

The wave will be gone

Along with anyone to remember it.

The Bells of Filene's

© 2017 Vernon Miles Kerr

Any Boston afternoon,

Downtown Crossing's canyons

Surge with cars and shoppers.

Walk-Don't Walk,

Thousands of feet shuffle.

Screeching on Red,

Honking on Green,

Buses and Ducks

Trailing smokescreens.

A faint tinkle penetrates

The cacophony.

The City pauses,

Takes a breath,

And listens.

The Bells of Filene's

Fill the Washington Street gorge.

Scent of mown grass off the Common.

Waft of wok oil out of Chinatown.

Seagulls squawk above

Tranquility wrested out of chaos.

The Bells finish an Etude.

The action resumes.

Entropy

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The First Law of Thermodynamics:

The increase in the internal energy of a system is equal to the amount of energy added by heating the system, minus the amount lost as a result of the work done by the system on its surroundings.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics:

“In a system, a process that occurs will tend to increase the total entropy of the universe.”

The Third Law of Thermodynamics:

The **entropy** (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropy>) of a perfect **crystal** (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crystal>) at **absolute zero** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_zero) is exactly equal to zero.*

1.

Entropy: the system's heat

I cannot reach,

Useless energy

Whose fate is to deteriorate,

And drag the system down

To a quiescent state.

2.

But that which is quiescent,

Eventually quakes.

Entropy borrowed from elsewhere

Brings mountains down

To quiescent rubble.

It dictates the fate of everything tactile,

The Jenga tower's inherent future

Before its inevitable collapse.

Entropy commands

That which is organized, to chaotic-ize.

That which is hot, to cool.

That which is cool to freeze.

That which is frozen, to melt.

That which has melted, to sublimate.

That which spins, to devolve to a stop.

That which is tall, to topple.

That which has toppled, to decay.

That which is planned, to surprise.

That which is permanent, to alter.

That which is worshipped, to disappoint.

That over which we obsess, to later bore.

That which is trustworthy, to lie.

That which is beloved, to die.

3.

But that which is true, is ever,

And that Love which is true, knows not

Entropy.

* <http://www.wolframalpha.com>
(<http://www.wolframalpha.com/>)

Cycles

© 2017 Vernon Miles Kerr

Insight into the life of a manic-depressive

Up

That poem needs work... but

What's happening on Twitter...

Mail? This early? Never heard of 'em.

Probably spam...but

Ohhh... a new type of pruning saw...

Might be good for the shaping our Maple needs..

Nah...I need to focus on the poem.

'Got a responsibility to get that out.

The world needs that perspective.

Open...Recent...BINGO! There it is.

OH! Better get some Pandora going

What'll it be? Bossa Nova, Strauss...

Strauss. Ahh hat's better...but

What's happening on AP?...

Problems needing solutions...

Let's see...Foreign Relations, Russia Policy...

Russia Policy! The solution is so damned simple.

Just a quick Tweet...

I dunno...maybe the pruning saw would be good.

Where was that site...

Down

Where's the damned coffee scoop...

If ANYONE would put things back

In the same place twice...

The weather looks sucky today

'Should stay in and watch TV...except

It has nothing but trivial crap going on.

Maybe read that poetry anthology...except

It'll just make me feel like such a hack,

What the hell is my perspective gonna add

To the world of Poesy?

It's all preaching to the choir anyway.

Who the hell reads poetry nowadays?...except

Effete introverts...like me, I guess.

The LANDLINE? THIS EARLY? Screw it...

If it's not a robocall they'll leave a message...

THERE's the friggin' scoop!...

Oh my God. In the fine silver yet!

The weather looks worse...

Maybe a nap...

Coffee's a bad idea...

Yeah, a nap.

We Are Conflicted Beings

© 2017 Vernon Miles Kerr

Viewed from afar, our Earth must appear

As an anthill run amok.

Swarming but disorganized,

Moving in a vague direction but with scattered knots

And lumps of deadly struggle raging,

Sparked by some inferred self-interest,

As the dis-interested hive-general flows around them.

Viewed from afar, our race must appear

As scattered, vast flocks of sheep without a shepherd,

Most bleating submissively,

But with the loudest, largest, most horn-endowed bleater

Leading the way—while the least of all bleaters

Or the out-of-sync bleaters—or those who refuse to bleat,

Are pushed to the edge,

So that Justice, with her quiver of elements and predators,

Can work her blind, emotionless magic

And return the flock to conformity.

But unlike sheep, each in *these* flocks harbors secret demons

Who whisper treasonous thoughts of self-worth,

Ideas of individual purpose,

Agonizing temptations to veer off.

“But the eyes of the flock are on me.

Without their support I am lost. I’d better bleat.”

So most bleat in sync, and follow the flow

Whether it lead to greener pastures

Or a lemming’s leap.

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The End—for now.

VMK

JUNE 2, 2017 VERNON MILES KERR
POETRY ABSOLUTE POWER IS FLEETING,
AMERICA'S MELTING POT, BI-POLAR DISORDER,
BOSTON, BOULDER, BPD, CANADA GEESE,
ENTROPY, EVOLUTION, HUMAN NARCISSISM,
HUMAN NATURE, INTELLIGENT DESIGN,
LEAVING ONE'S LEGACY, LIFE'S BREVIETY,
SOCIETY VS. INDIVIDUALISM, ST. LOUIS, STORIES
DEFINE US, SURVIVOR'S GUILT, TOKYO, TRAVEL,
WAR, YOUTH LOST

