



REQUIEM FOR A DYING WORLD

by

Frederick Covins © 2002

(and you think this is a story?)

Prose and poetry

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IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning there was Chaos and within Chaos are the seeds and potentialities for all kinds of matter. Out of Chaos came Gaea, goddess of Earth, so beloved by Pantheists. Out of the union of Heaven (Uranus) and Earth (Gaea) came Pontus (sea) and the Titans, Cyclopes and Hecatoncheires. But before these Greek myths there was Osiris, born of Geb, god of the earth and Nut, goddess of the sky. Within the Osiris myth lies an example of the importance of the death and resurrection theme, so lately adopted by the Christian cult. Osiris was worshipped as a vegetation spirit that dies and is ceaselessly reborn, in association with an agricultural or vegetation cult.

Whilst Man moves in the order of things visible, tangible, measurable in reference to time and space and is subject to succession and change, corruption and death, his roots, or spirit, lie in an invisible and intangible world in which the myths form the outward symbols and metaphors for that inner world. It is only by finding our way into that inner world again that we will find our salvation, only by recognising our interdependence on and with the earth will we find peace.

“The earth does not belong to Man. Man belongs to the earth. Whatever befalls the earth befalls us. He did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. Should he contaminate his bed he will, one night, suffocate in his own waste.” So said Red Indian Chief Seattle:

*Imprisoned beings in the People
Battery farms of high-rise view.
Inhaling not the freshness of the
Morning dew, but leaden air
And stench of their own stew.*

The old ideas are dead; the symbols of man's dependence on the earth and its fruits have lost their meaning; Gaea and the earth as mother no longer

grips our lives or imagination. The natural rhythms of life are now confused and somehow altered. The ability of man to destroy his world is not matched with a comparative ability to

control himself; the future is threatening like never before. Plagues, wars, famines and floods have, in the past, created fear and suffering, but hope remained 'as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end'. Such consolation is gone, we do not know whether our world will become a rich inheritance for our children or a scorched desert, silently and without life moving around the sun.

What we are witnessing is the end of living and the beginning of survival.

'As it was in the beginning for now and ever shall be world without end'.....bang?

On the great day of His wrath

The earth will rip asunder in a frenzy

Of seething, smouldering rage, with

The Lord of Misrule screaming in our ears;

Bedlam broke loose.

A mighty shock wave will encircle the globe

And fire will engulf every living thing.

Man will become a dinosaur... extinct.

And the scorched earth will slowly circle the sun,

A corpse upon the road of night,

A night of eternity.

Poisonous gases, toxic waste, nuclear accidents, fallout, ozone depletion, CFC's, biological weapons, food contamination, BSE, CJD, burning rain forests, cancer, drought, floods... have we conquered nothing?

How inadequate is Man when he

Cannot express or spell the beauty

Of a hoar frost, a flower's petal,

A single feather of a swallow's wing

Or the perfume of a rose.

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There must be places where we can hear the unfurling of the leaves in Spring or the rustle of an insects wings. Where a chuckle of water giggles over a streamy bed and brings a smile in its wake; where we can hear the sound of the wind darting over the face of a pond, writing upon the waters like the pencil of a God. And the wind itself, cleansed by the morning rain and scented by the pine. Without these things we are no more than sweaty animals rutting in our own filth.

*A hawk stoops against a clear blue sky,
But the man with the binoculars
Sees only the girl in the bikini.
The sun emblazons the horizon in molten gold,
But the man sees only the sweaty flesh
Of his own desiring.
A nightingale swells the evening air with song,
But the man is plugged in to his
Battery operated Sony Walkman.
Wild dog-rose and golden vetch perfume the night air,
But the man smells only the vinegar
Of his fish and chips.*

What of the future? A dead world of pristine stone erected from man's mind, the earth's crust a ferro-concrete layer and seas a slowly heaving, turgid mass. Rain corrosive on the face, a prussic acid tear falling from an artificial coloured sky. No Nietzsche splendid predatory animal, red blood singing in its veins. No birds to greet this dawn, just the twittering electronic chatter of computer reliant humans; jellied legs petroleum decayed and button dimpled fingers soft. What will feed our souls? Inherited memory?

*I am Valium, of the second unit, third level, zero zero three, of Terra One.
I sit and stare at the blank, white wall.
They are correcting my mental deviation. And yet, even as the white light
Gently washes my cerebral cortex, I can still hear the steady plod of the
Great beast's feet and the jingle of the metalled straps.
I look inside myself again, but find nothing to match my dreams.*

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My memory fails the images. Nothing gives substance or meaning to my
 Strange hallucinations, if that is what they are.
 Something!... of ineffable grace, weightlessness and beauty soars into the
 Unpolluted air of my mind and sings a song of such sweet pain that I feel
 A physical stab to my heart. What can it be?
'A darkling thrush in blast beruffled plume'
 What strange words and yet what ecstatic sounds. The great beasts plod on,
 Steaming at their sides, powerful, but gentle beasts, singular, magnificent
 Creatures with heavy, hairy feet. More words come to haunt my brain;
'Hair soft lifted by the winnowing wind' How beautiful the sounds, even without
 Meaning. What is wind? Perhaps they are from some long banned video-tape.
 I know not. They said I should not have these thoughts. Counter productive and
 Socially regressive, they said. Adding that a period of correction would cleanse
 my brain. It has not. Somehow I feel that it never will. These things, images, sounds,
 Must have some purpose that I know not of. A perfume now assails my nose, pungent
 In its strength, but not unpleasant. More disconnected words, bread, fresh, the smell
 Is warm and comforting as of a... why does kitchen spring to mind? What is kitchen?
 What is bread? I know not these things and yet regret their passing, if passed they are
 And not prophetic be. I am soft-sift with many thoughts fallen from the outer space of
 Another time and another place. They have squeezed themselves into the capsule of my
 Being, without relation to the cold world of Terra One and I weep that I have not the wit
 To make them sense. What means now the smell of burning flesh that waters thus the
 Palate of my mouth and conjures tastes that tease the tendrils of a memory aeons gone?
'Soft caresses of a summer breeze' would seem to mean so much yet goes for naught;
 There is no summer in my world, no breeze or soft caress, we, they say, are perfection
 Reached. Processed with care from genesis to re-cycle time. Perhaps there lies a fault in
 me?
 A computer error in my genetic genesis? I know not. I know only that the things I now hear,
 See and smell have a quality and joy I tremble to imagine. True perfection is, perhaps, a
 Common thing we tread beneath our feet or carelessly destroy in searching for that very
 Virtue. Perhaps these things existed and we buried them behind white walls or beneath
 Vain-glorious monuments to progress and our own cupidity. If so... wither now?

What of religion? Is there hope there? Or is the church a charnel house of
 guilt, a faithless faith a-dying? Last year's right, this year's wrong, an
 ecumenical ping-pong. Protestant and Catholic kill to prove their way is right
 to God's most perfect peace. Muslim wars with Christian, everyone kills the
 Jew. The world has become a religious abattoir, "Love!" exhort the holy men,

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“Your enemy and neighbour”... ”Love them to death if necessary”. We’re drowning in the blood of love... doesn't anybody care?

*God isn't dead, He never lived, except in you and me.
He's the dead-eyed man in the labour queue,
The drunk in the park in the pool of spew,
And the cranky old woman in the loony zoo.
He's the whole farting shoot,
A scatological hoot, that we call humanity.*

*We're the gods, God help us,
The Olympian owners of earth,
The Zeus' and Daphnes' and Chloes',
The bringers of sadness and mirth.
We're it, Swift's shit,
The words and the turds of the world.
No-one else is responsible,
No-one else is to blame.
The whole bloody mess is ours,
Our triumph and our shame.*

We live in fear, in constant fear of our own environment, of storms, floods, lightning, volcanoes, earthquakes and of each other. In constant fear of the environment that they had previously loved for over fifty years, Hans (78) and Emma (76) Kabel, hanged themselves in their Bronx apartment, leaving a note that read; “We don't want to live in fear anymore”.

*Old Hans and Emma Kabel
No longer need to fear,
The cry in the night,
The drugged eyes so bright,
The screech of the whore,
The knock on their door,
The junkies, the drunks,
The mean tempered punks,*

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*The obscenities screamed,
The nightmares they dreamed,
Or the noose that they chose,
Their fear to enclose,
As they swing,
Side by side
In the night.*

The so-called 'savages', the native American, the Maori and the aborigine believed that we all breathe the same air, man, plants and creatures alike and that there is a balance to all things; as one dies so another is born. When all of one specie dies that balance is brought into confusion and without the creatures man will die of a great loneliness of spirit. Our answer, the so-called 'civilised' people is to hunt, shoot and destroy... for what? Sport? Fun? Or because some bureaucrat decrees it so...

*They are gassing the badgers in Devonshire,
In Avon and Cornwall and Gloucestershire.
It's the 'final solution'
By Ministry decree.
And somewhere, in an office,
Sipping tepid tea,
There's a Civil Service 'Eichmann'
Aryanizing wildlife
With British 'Zyklon B'.*

*I am the most wondrous creature
For I can destroy all others.
I can destroy environments,
I can destroy myself.
Clever, huh?*

Perhaps nature, Gaea, is proving that she can't be beaten, not by the likes of us anyway; what if she's taking it away from the intellectuals and giving it back to the apes? This world of ours is like a beautiful book, but in the hands of an

illiterate of what use is it? In Scandinavian mythology, Yggdrasil is an ash tree that binds together earth, heaven and hell. A tree that has its roots in the kingdom of hel and death, whose boughs overspread the highest heaven and whose smallest leaf communicates with its roots. The roots run in three directions, one to the Asa gods in heaven, one to the frost giants and the third to the Underworld. Under each root is a fountain of wonderful virtues. In the tree, which drops honey, sit an eagle, a squirrel and four stags. At the root lies the serpent, Nithhoggr gnawing at it, while the squirrel, Ratatoskr runs up and down to sow strife between the eagle at the top and the serpent. Who is today's squirrel, sowing strife between heaven and hell? Politicians? Scientists? Or the Church?

Some time ago my mother wrote a poem and when she gave it to me I said something totally banal like "Thank you, it's very nice". It struck me then as very simple and sentimental; which only goes to show what a pompous prat I was. It is simple and it is sentimental, but it is more than that, it's honest and it evokes a world that whilst it still exists grows ever more remote. Perhaps, along with the 'quiet places', this is what we are losing.

*Forget not the country
With its pink and white blossom
Dancing a tune to the wind.
The duck-pond, the brook,
Yellow catkins like Christmas-tree streamers.
Pale clumps of primroses,
Shy violets under the hedge.
Tiny house sparrows
Darting under the eaves.
Frisky lambs, the quiet cows,
Friendly people and peace.
Forget not our long, country lanes
Winding past fields
Of long, golden corn;
Hedges of bright, red poppies,
Foxgloves and honeysuckle.
Strong horses with white, hairy feet*

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*Ploughing the land
In long, straight furrows.
Beautiful butterflies winging their way
Through leafy trees and
Flowers of every hue.
The tawny owl,
Hooting all through the night.
Squirrel with his big, bushy tail,
Storing nuts in the old, hollow tree.
The leaping frog,
Badgers, you are lucky to see.
Sly fox looking for things that are not his,
Wood pigeon, whom all farmers hate.
Forget not our woods
With tall, stately trees.
Bluebells ringing their bells
In silent tune with the wind.
Wild cowslips making a carpet of gold.
Birds of every kind chirping and singing
All through the day.
Under the hedges clutches of pheasants
Nest peacefully and hope they are not seen.
Carpets of buttercups, as gold as the sun.
Tiny, white daises so peaceful and bright.
Pink dog-rose growing in confusion
All through the woods.
Forget not all of these.*

Dorothy Covins. 1976.

Are we all so preoccupied with fighting for our very existence that we have forgotten what it is we are struggling for? We cannot re-capture the rural idyll so beautifully evoked, but we can stop killing each other, fighting for *our* place in the sun and crushing that dream out of existence.

*The rut is very deep and very wide.
There are many people in the rut
And it is very noisy.
Now and then one gets a glimpse
Of some of those who have managed to climb out.*

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*The sun shines on them all the time.
They are free to run in any direction they choose.
They have space.
That is why they do not like too many people
Climbing out of the rut;
They stamp on the heads and fingers of
Those who try.
It is called autocracy, or meritocracy,
Or communism, or even democracy.
But the people in the rut call it something else;
And the name of Jack is invoked.*

The crystal skull of Lubaantum speaks with the wisdom of a lost age, even before the Mayans. It speaks as one but with many minds, the 'Mind of Oneness'. Whilst we seek separation the concept of Oneness escapes us and leaves us vulnerable to destruction by our own hand; a world without knowledge, a world without hope wherein the fires of destruction will reign. "When the time comes, it will be the duty of all those who seek spiritual knowledge to instruct others when the Earth moves from its axis". Thus spake the crystal skull through the mind of a seer.

From a story called 'THE KEEPERS OF THE STONES':

Long before the palaeolithic age heralded the first tentative gropings of Man, the earth was being formed from the massed energies of volcanic rock and melting glaciers. The melting ice formed rivers, lakes, seas and oceans and the earth moved, creating land masses. The first stirrings of independent life struggled from the water and the rock. Rock ground upon rock creating mountains and valleys and the earth itself began to pulse with primordial life. The rocks breathed in tune with the emerging rhythms of the earth and as Man freed himself from the shackles of the rock so were The Keepers of the Stones themselves given being.

Encircling the earth like an invisible net, magnetic lines of energy formed in grids of straight lines and gave life and energy to every living thing.

Points of intersection were formed by mountain peaks, hills and valleys, eventually by Man himself; driven by some primal instinct, cavemen set up rocks and cairns of stones and every age that followed added to the network.

Working away beneath the rocks and within the rocks are the Petra, The Keepers of the Stones. They maintain the pulse and rhythms of the earth, the earth's accord with the seasons, the fulcrum of the energy lines, and they encourage pothos, that terrible striving power to live, to break free, that dwells in every living thing.

The Petra are led by Eiddon, son of Caw. Their enemies are the destroyers and despoilers of earth; those who take from the earth and give nothing back. The Red Indian, the Aborigine and the Maori understood the earth, worshipped the trees, rivers and rocks, the sun and the moon. They recognised that everything was connected, that whatever befell the earth befell the sons of the earth.

The Petra believed that the earth was under sentence of death, that Man's pollution had become so great that it threatened the existence of everything. Earthquakes, floods and all the great disasters created by the movements of the earth had done nothing to quell the greed and quarrelsome nature of Man in his search for separateness. And so now, deep below the earth's crust, the Petra met in solemn council to seek a 'final' solution to the earth's ills.

Their Council Chamber was a vast cavern beneath the earth's tallest mountain. The council members had travelled their secret subterranean byways, around the rocks and through the rocks, from all corners of the earth. Huge stalagmites and stalactites glistened with a fluorescent light that emanated from the living rock and glowed with the light of the Petra within them.

"My Lords" began Eiddon, "The end of living and the beginning of survival is upon us. The time has come when we must consider the survival of the earth itself. It is not enough, it seems, to threaten mankind with local eruptions because no lesson is ever learned, nothing changes. Now we must consider blotting them out entirely!"

A gasp arose from the assembly, but any protest was stilled by Eiddon's raised voice, "Wait, my Lords, hear me out. Pollution is a creeping tide that will soon render all the rivers and seas useless, dead. Those waters that once washed away Man's filth and purified it will no longer be able to cope. Even as I speak the last great lake of fresh water is being poisoned; Lake Baical's self-purification process is breaking down as more and more toxic waste is poured into its depths. The once harmless cells of Fisteria that have lain in the primal ooze of the ocean beds for millions of years have been aggressively activated by pollution and are bent on the destruction of all living matter. Toxic waste is being buried deep within our world to poison, not today's inhabitants, but their children and their children's children. We have given warnings, we have caused the earth to crack asunder, molten rock to pour forth, tidal waves to wash away whole cities and still they do not learn. Their greed knows no limits, their evil no end and their hypocrisy no confines. Once, many aeons ago, the Petra were forced, by Man's intransigence, to wash the world clean with a great flood and the survivors swore by all their gods that they would lead a better life. How weak they are". Eiddon's voice sank to a whisper, "We, The Keepers of the Stones, must put an end to this living death".

"How, Eiddon?" cried many voices.

"They have themselves provided the answer", said Eiddon. "Their mighty explosions beneath the waters of the tropical seas have torn apart many creatures of the deep and troubled the undersea mountains, but, more importantly, they have opened the way to the Magma".

A huge gasp went around the assembly.

Two French pot-holers exploring the deep caves beneath the Himalayas paused as they caught what sounded like a vast intake of breath, "Mon Dieu!" exclaimed one, "What was that?"

The Petra chanted as one, 'The Magma, the Magma!'

"There it goes again!" cried the second pot-holer, "Allons! Let us go, come on!" Thoroughly frightened by the unexplained noise and fearful of a

rock fall the two pot-holers scrambled their way towards the surface, unaware of how close they had come to one of the greatest secrets of the earth itself.

“The Magma” repeated Eiddon, “The magnetic centre of the earth. With a little help from us the Magma will shift its centre and throw every magnetic line and field into confusion. Man’s toys, those things that mock the natural world will be lost. Man himself will wander the earth looking for direction and find none. Rivers will flow backwards, the sea boil in confusion and the very air seethe with discontent. All this will happen with the very next explosion”.....bang?

The self-destructive nature of mankind is as slow and painful as it is inevitable, but coupled with the awesome power of nature it could all end in the blink of an eye. Simple statistics give us some idea of the power that could be unleashed: The core of the earth consists of molten iron at a temperature of 6,200C; 1,000 degrees hotter than the sun and roughly the size of Mars. The earth’s crust, or mantle, is formed of large plates that constantly move. Colliding with each other to produce earthquakes or splitting to allow the molten mass to escape. Although made of solid rock the plates upon which the European and the American continents stand are separating at the rate of 1” every year. Literally splitting Iceland in two and moving, or flowing like liquid, due to the immense heat and pressure on silicates, like olivine, that fracture and change shape. The heat from the core rises in plumes producing, over thousands of years, changes in the earth’s magnetic field and driving molten lava to the surface. In the cretaceous period one plume drove enough lava to the surface, in the Deccan Traps area of India, to cover the whole of the USA to a depth of one kilometre!

Another such plume split Greenland from Europe and created Iceland, itself buoyed up by the same plume.

Scandinavia, once depressed and covered by an enormous ice pack, is now re-bounding at one centimetre per year.

When Mount St. Helens, in Washington State, erupted it lost 1,300 feet from its summit. Twenty-five miles away trees were snapped off and washed away by 60' high mud slides. Twelve miles away a coffee pot melted and the sap boiled in the trees. Two hundred and thirty square miles of forest were devastated. A mushroom cloud of ash rose 12 miles high; two days later ash fell in New York; inside two weeks it had circled the world. Another eruption in Iceland melted a glacier and six billion tons of water flowed in a river 6 miles long by 2 miles wide into the sea; it melted the ice at the rate of 6000 tons **every second.**

Even the plates of earth upon which we stand and which separate us from the molten core are being eroded. Every year some 25 billion tons of top soil are washed or blown away, mainly because it is being exhausted by over farming or because trees that bind it to the ground are cut or burnt down. A single inch of soil, which can take a thousand years to form, can be eroded away in a few years.

Ten million bolts of lightning strike every day, each one hotter than the sun and carrying a charge of up to twenty million volts; the most powerful electrical force on earth and killing thousands every year. Even in this scientific age it remains a mysterious and fascinating phenomenon. Ironically it was probably lightning that triggered the first life on the planet - a chemical reaction that created the amino acids and the first amoebas. Forty percent of the world's natural fertiliser, nitrates, are created by electrical storms, i.e., lightning.

Meteorites that arrive at constant intervals (I pause to wonder who and how they calculate these things?) - like every 10 million years and, allegedly, wiped out the entire population of dinosaurs - the next one, based on these figures, is due next week! Or every 4 million years that take out a large slice of the Urals - this one's due next year! Or every one thousand years that leaves a crater the size of New York State - that's due later next year! All in all the next two years are going to be 'interesting'. See you in hell.

When hurricane 'Mitch' hit Honduras it left 11,000 dead, 13,000 missing and five million homeless.

The bottom line, whether these figures are accurate or not, is that we live in very uncertain times and *very* uncertain climatic conditions; made all the more uncertain by our own behaviour towards each other. Perhaps if we all worked together a bit more, supported each other instead of reaching for our weapons every time we felt threatened. Took a more circumspect and rational approach to our so-called natural disasters, i.e., looked seriously at the earth's fault lines - much as we do the joins between the plates of our skulls - and built away from them instead of burying our heads in the sand and hoping it doesn't happen to us. Or arrogantly thinking we can build to withstand them - like the architects in Kobi, Japan; boy, did they get it wrong! Then perhaps we could live less fearfully and longer?

The scientists talk glibly about global warming and how we, in Britain, are going to enjoy a Mediterranean climate. Despite our rain and winters we enjoy an equable climate, made possible to a large extent by the Gulf Stream - that huge current of warm water that caresses our shores and ensures our 'equable' climate.

There is a slight flaw in this idyllic calculation: global warming is also melting the ice cap in the arctic and an increasingly large body of icy water is pushing southwards to meet and eventually dilute the gulf stream. Far from enjoying a Mediterranean climate we may be freezing our protruding bits off in a mini ice-age!

They work in mysterious ways their blunders to perform. The only problem is, they could prove fatal.

*Last night, as in a dream, my heart
Was filled with pain
And to that heart a bitter winter came.
The morning brought a blanket,
Shrouding the world in white.
Cold... silent... still.
Like my heart in the night.*

We cheat ourselves on an almost daily basis, we kid ourselves that it can never happen to us, that the people who threaten us are somehow subhuman

and we do it by categorising them, they're 'bourgeois' 'bolshevist' 'capitalist' 'nigger' 'pig' 'imperialist' 'racialist' 'Taliban' 'al Queda' - but it's a confidence trick. The one so labelled may be reviled, imprisoned, tortured, killed or exiled because he is no longer a human being, he is a symbol; he does not bleed when pricked, his heart does not cry out in the night. By this conjuring trick conscience is made to disappear. It is, perhaps, the profoundest corruption of our time.

*He's not a man, he's a nigger.
He's not one of us you see.
He's a spade, or a spic, or a jew.
He's different, he's one of a few.
He doesn't belong, he hasn't the badge,
The suit, the tie, or the hue.
So what do I do
If we both have the same point of view?
How can I point at a mirror and say,
"That bastard's like you".
They're Protestants, not people,
Catholics, not you or me.
They're dikes and kikes,
Rockers on bikes,
But we never invite them to tea.
You can kill a 'pommie'
Even a 'commie',
But you can't kill the man next to you,
He's real, he's a person,
Unless, of course, he's like you..*

Are we heading for an apotheosis or renaissance? Removal to another world or rebirth in this one? The earth moves beneath our feet, it breathes, its heart beats in tune to the primordial rhythms of the earth and we ignore it at our peril.

*Sun trickling into darkest places,
Creeping into cold corners,
Green grass spotted with awakening daises,
Plantain roots anchored in some deeper world.
Fallen leaf, curling in the warming sun.
Midges, scribbling random circles of confusion.
White pebbles still wet with night's perspiration.
Roses beneath my dangling feet,
Striving with an awesome pothos
To encase me in a thorny cage of beauty
Ere a thousand years can pass, yet
Within a time-warped moment.
Tiny legged spider pioneers my hairy arm
As through another planet.
I am here, not here.
There, not there.
I am near the exit gate of life.*

The more we strive, it seems, the closer comes the necrotising shadow of death, not just of us, but of our world. Alongside pothos, death's bright angel, Azrael hovers.

Osiris would have us constantly re-born, a never-ending cycle of death and resurrection. But where there was once one now there are many, from whom are they resurrected? Or are they, like the seeds of the flower, new-born? In Milton's 'Paradise Lost' he says "Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep."

There are more people alive today than died throughout our history and we have the great distinction of being the blackest generation throughout that same history. In India women spend 12 hours a day fetching and chopping wood, walking twelve miles to do it and diminishing the greenery at an alarming rate just to fire their cooking stoves. Increasingly they use child labour leading to more children and ever greater demands upon the environment - the vicious circle is complete.

Trees from Sarawak are felled and transported to Japan at the rate of 2000 square miles every year; Japan preserves its own trees because

they have a 2000 year old history! And yet fossil fuels are directly responsible for ozone depletion.

The creatures of the earth we treat with contempt, when we're not eating them we're throwing them away like the dolphins caught in small mesh nets and thrown back dead into the sea. Manatee in Florida are cut to ribbons by speeding powerboats. Animals are tortured alive in Taiwan markets for pleasure and/or profit. Rhino horn is being hoarded against their extinction (do they know something we don't?). The elephant is caught in a vanishing habitat and at the same time being poached for profit. Those we are not destroying, for pleasure or profit, we're turning into mutants; Brunel University has discovered that every single male roach that they put into British rivers showed signs of turning into female - testes turned into ovary tissue! Pairs of male gulls nesting together around the coasts of the USA have been found to have grown female fallopian tubes. Turtles in Florida have turned into hermaphrodites. Dog whelks around the British coast have developed male sex organs. The bottom line is that what we are doing to the creatures, especially those that are a part of our food chain, we are doing to ourselves. Human sperm counts have fallen by half since World War II; in Scotland, for example, they are still dropping by 2 per cent a year. Scientists blame a series of man-made chemicals that mimic the female hormone, oestrogen, for feminising Nature and possibly endangering humanity. This chemical is only part of the deadly cocktail of substances with which we are polluting our own world.

Incredible as it is to believe, we're destroying potential cures for some of mankind's major ills; cancer, aids, arthritis... the list is endless and all being destroyed along with the rain forests that protect our climate and environment... what colossal arrogance and stupidity.

It is not only in the major leagues of resource misuse: rain forests, water conservation, toxic waste and pollution that we are most culpable, but in all the little things that seem not to count. Computers that have been left on all night consume five percent of all the energy used in the USA. Americans, with five percent of the world's population consume 20% of

the world's resources. A recent survey by Environics International, Canada, of 27,000 people around the world found that in every advanced nation, save one, people were willing to sacrifice economic growth for a healthier environment; the exception was the USA. A growth economy over a liveable earth? The inmates really are running the asylum.

Some of our most precious plants and trees are dying, even the most minute rise in global temperature will utterly destroy millions of acres of forest and vegetation. All for the want of switching off a few lights or computers when they are not being used and reducing the heating levels in our homes and offices by even a couple of degrees. A small price to pay for a liveable environment.

In the UK alone up to 24,000 premature deaths can be attributed to the poor air we breathe; between 14 - 24,000 hospital admissions every year are directly linked to poor air quality.

There are two key pollutants: particulates*, sulphur dioxide and ozone.

* Particulates, also known as PM10s, come chiefly from motor vehicles, especially diesel engines, but also from fossil fuel power stations and factories. How many more of us have to die before we get the message?

Such is the level of pollution in the world that fresh water itself is in short supply. Giant dams and lakes are no longer sufficient, we actually have to mine for water. One sixth of the food harvest in the USA, which helps to feed one hundred countries, depends on a vast underground sea stretching under eight states and containing as much water as one of the Great Lakes. Each year pumping drops its level by some 4ft while only an inch trickles down to replenish it.

Today a giant sheet of Antarctic ice the size of Norfolk is breaking away from the 1,700 mile shelf named the Larsen B. More than 5,000 square miles of ice have already disappeared from the region. Scores more ice sheets are at risk with temperatures in Antarctica rising by 2.5C over the past 50 years. Patches of grass have started to appear at the South Pole plus a ten-fold increase in the number of flowering plants. The consequences of these events are that the food supply of whales, seals, birds and squid is under threat;

glaciers and land ice can melt into the sea more rapidly - raising water levels; cold, fresh water flowing into the South Atlantic could disrupt ocean currents and weather patterns. Scientists today say that the ice sheet is critically unstable and could 'totally collapse' within the next two years.



IS THE ANSWER A DOG CALLED JACK?

Jack was a black Labrador with the most noble head of any dog and the eyes of a sage; he knew everything and he understood everything and he was an ever present figure.

When he was taken ill he was living in Scotland, his owner was a doctor working in Sheffield. Jack was taken to a specialist in Fife and his owner travelled up to be with him. The owner's parents were visiting family in Bournemouth. That night, after retiring to bed in their motorhome, the father was visited by Jack who stayed for a cuddle and then vanished. In the morning the mother suggested they telephone their son to see how Jack was. The father's reply was, "Don't bother, Jack's dead." Later that morning the son phoned to say that Jack had passed away the previous night.

As this, it would seem, is not an uncommon story, it surely tells us that there is an extension to life as we know it and that death is not the gaunt, scythe-wielding figure of popular imagination. That there is a world beyond the world we all presume to be the 'real' world of you and me. A better world perhaps?

Jack's world was full of love and trust, a love and trust that he repaid in spades. Perhaps Jack had the answer, just love and trust and everything else will fall into place. It's a revolutionary thought.

Where does all this feature in the cataclysmic state of the world's physical dramas; earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, storms? Perhaps if we weren't at each other's throats so much we'd have time to deal with these things. Perhaps if we weren't so dependent on 'the gods' instead of on ourselves we might afford a little progress. Religion is a vested interest, it feeds on itself as well as us and serves no cohesive purpose other than to divide, to set man against man, to justify itself. It neither comforts nor consoles the spirit, only the weakness inherent in all of us.

It was Karl Marx who claimed that "Religion is the opium of the masses" and opium is a drug that robs us of our will to live in the real world, to act and take responsibility for our own actions. Lucretius tells us that "Nothing can be created out of nothing" adding, "Such evil deeds could religion prompt". And what could be a greater evil than creating gods where none exist, gods out of opiate dreams perhaps?

*In the churches, in the chapels - only Man I see.
In the Falls and in the Creggan - only Man I see
Man have I found beside me in every situation,
But in favour and in fortune - only Man I see.
In the Abbey and the Vatican,
In death and tribulation,
In every incantation - only Man I see.
In the missions, in the pulpits,
In the faces of the priests,
In the blank-eyed congregations - only Man I see.
Open-eyed I peer about me
And listen to the claims
Of Sufi poets, evangelists and
Allah's nine and ninety names,
But in all the faces staring back - only Man I see.*

Religious schisms pollute our lives; Protestant and Catholic kill to prove their way is right to God's most perfect peace - how ludicrous. Muslim wars with Christian, everyone kills the Jew. The world is a religious abattoir and we're drowning in the blood of love, doesn't anybody care?

The sort of love and trust that Jack earned and returned cannot cure the world of all its ills, would that it could, but it does point the way to a better deal for all of us. Unquestioning love and trust may be a revolutionary concept, but until someone comes up with a better idea it could be our only salvation. To love and trust each other long enough to work with nature and not against it, to put aside our differences long enough to see how we can live together in harmony, to sacrifice economic growth (greed) for a liveable environment for ourselves and our children. To enjoy the simple pleasures, like Jack, of companionship and well-being.

In Milton's 'Paradise Lost' we are told that '*Millions of spiritual creatures roam the earth / Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep.*' If the myriad experiences, like that of Jack, tell us nothing else, they tell us that those whom we loved and who loved us are still around and still keeping an eye on us. The other comforting thought is that no-one ever dies alone, there is always someone there to meet them, to comfort and show them the way to whatever lies ahead. It might be a loved one, a parent or grandparent, or a child - to be greeted by a 'lost' child must be overwhelming. No wonder some people radiate joy when they're dying.

But joy isn't reserved for the dying, we, each and everyone of us, have it within us to bring joy to another. Not just the joy or pleasure in receiving a present, a nice day out or an unexpected hug, but the almost unbelievable joy that transcends everyday pleasure, the sort of joy that lifts the mere mortal into the realms of the fantastic, into the memory banks of ecstasy itself. The sort of joy that is out of step with circumstance and expectation; the joy of Rumanian orphans being treated, for the first time in their lives, like human beings, of knowing human warmth and love. The sort of joy that the simple

kindness of a famous person can give to the unrecognised; that the unrecognised can give to those who, seemingly, have everything. The sort of joy that gives as much to the giver as to the recipient.

Why is it then that we are all so obsessed with, beset by, so many personal problems that we cannot see such a self-evident truth, that we cannot allow ourselves to give in order to receive. Are our lives so full? So rewarding?

It is such a little thing to pause in the forward rush of our lives to give a little of ourselves; not to the greedy and the calculating who wish only to use us, but to those whose expectations do not include hope.

In the film 'Sweet Charity' Shirley Maclaine found incomparable joy in the kindness of a famous film star and in the mutual needs of a member of the opposite sex. No matter that they were eventually found to be men without substance - Charity was lifted into that joyous realisation of self-worth and knew real joy, albeit short lived. To her friends she passed on the expectation of hope, even in the lie of her own circumstances. To them she gave joy in the knowledge that there could be a better lifestyle.

The simplicity of joy is so mind-bending that this becomes but a clumsy attempt to understand the complexity of such simplicity, it is like trying to encompass the vastness of a starry night, imagine 'time' or release oneself from self. It is like trying to visualise the joy felt by the unexpected visitation by Jack.

How do I make it happen? you may ask. If I say it's simple you might think that patronising, but it isn't because it really is simple. **Be** glad that you're alive, because you are and that in itself is a minor miracle. **Be** positive, if you want to be a great athlete, artist, writer or entertainer then go for it, don't ever have regrets over something you at least didn't try, i.e., never have left over dreams. **Be** happy, it isn't hard. Whatever your age you still have your whole life ahead of you and you don't want to spend it being a miserable git... do you? **Be** modest, nothing becomes a person more than lack of pretension,

there are five billion other people on this planet equally as important as you. **Be** honest, cheats and liars are always found out and despised. **Be** loving, it's the only way to being loved. **Be** encouraging, especially to those less fortunate and/or less talented, they will remember you with love forever. **Be** trusting, okay, so you'll get bitten once or twice, but in the long run you will be the better person. And, finally, **Be** aware, don't look back in anger or forward in fear, look around in awareness. See the world, see the creatures and see the people, but with awareness and compassion.

The Earth and Nature will obey its own laws, let us learn what those laws are and learn to live with them instead of arrogantly trying to control them. The theme of death and resurrection lies deep in the human psyche, even before the days of Osiris; harvest and seedtime, the foci for the continuing mystery of life and death and a matrix for all our speculation on human life

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
Are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.*

William Wordsworth.

THE END?

“Requiem for a dying world”

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