



# Selected Poems

Poetry

Harvey Stanbrough

# Selected Poems

a collection of poems

SMASHWORDS EDITION

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## **Selected Poems**

### [Residua](#)

*“November, n. The eleventh twelfth of a weariness.”*  
~ Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil’s Dictionary*

**I**

I would invoke the muses here, but fear  
their shoulders turned and cold might render this  
a failure, and I couldn’t bear to fail

unless I blamed the failure on myself,  
as is my earned inheritance. Instead  
I will invoke the reader, you who seek

this mirror and who search it, hoping both  
you will and will not find herein yourself:  
This is your verdict, your portrait, your fault,

a meager shot at a superficial redemption  
of sorts. We take them when we can, don’t we?  
We all need that redemption—though we seek

and find it in our different ways—and mine

will course along your bloodstreams, through your thoughts  
and back to me through careful observation

until it comes to rest upon a page  
much like this one, for all the world to see,  
for you are my redemption. You—reader

and subject in the same soft shell—provide  
the wheat that screams between the stones of this  
unobtrusive mill of things, and I,

the miller in this case, provide the bread,  
the chance to dine upon yourself. How rare  
this mild occasion is, and how painless,

for as you read herein your faults and ills,  
you read your neighbor's too, and that, my friend,  
makes the drifting finally worthwhile.

## II

My father had a bout with lust and lost  
(as he was wont to do, he threw the fight)  
and loved the woman of his current dreams,

filling her with more than warmth that day,  
remorse and other sorry, soggy stuff,  
and I was born, as was my wand'ring pen,

into a weariness, a wandering,  
from this sweet fruit to that: a searching out  
of things that cause a smile, and avoidance

of things that bite and sting—as I have learned  
that most things do if given time  
and opportunity—and absorption

of what I could absorb. I've come to find  
no oddness in this wandering: no place  
to go where none has gone before; no pain

that has not been endured by someone else;  
no Thing I have affected over much;  
and finally, no Thing that has escaped

my subtle influence—this ragged pen—

scrawled across some surface, thought pristine  
until it suffered me and this loud touch.

### III

Most things wander, wearily, from things  
to other things and other things then fall,  
left out or over from some larger Thing  
or things, and seldom learn a direct route  
or anything as bold or consequential  
as poems speaking loudly and concretely,

calling things not Things but by their names—  
persons, places, actions, and events  
(a valid argument)—but sometimes things

are things and nothing else. At such times  
things must be called Things, appropriate  
to atoms, molecules, and combinations

of those smaller things, which, after all  
comprise the lot of us and every Thing  
and matter not at all, as we do not

except that every Thing has been left out,  
omitted from this thing or that, and shoved  
hard aside, a disturbing knowledge

everywhere substantiated. So  
without concrete, specific imagery—  
here I record that drastic omission

of Things from other, greater, larger Things,  
that you might be forewarned: to be a common  
thing is to exist. You must affect

the other things around you; strive to leave  
*them* out as often as is practical;  
let *them*, not you, become residua.

### IV

Don't you tell your children Be Something?  
And don't you, with that same advice, advise  
them to do what they must to affect

the other Things around them? Don't you wish  
that other Things would not omit your children,  
leave them mere residua? We slide

from one omission to the next, each Thing  
among us lesser, greater, and the same  
as every other Thing, and we avoid

the lessons of omission in no way;  
nor do we spare the other Things, whose paths  
we cross, the lessons we would have them learn.

And so it goes, this weariness, a drifting  
from remorse into regret and back,  
my pen my greatest comfort, and a book

my solace in this funny little world  
where so few laugh and where so many die  
and seldom spend a second looking forward,

so busy simply striving to survive  
their past and what some others thrust upon them:  
residua in the true sense of the word.

## V

Residua, as it is used herein  
should not be misconstrued to mean the poems—  
that is, these varied works were not left out

of some great tome you missed during trips  
to libraries and bookstores—no, Dear Friend,  
residua refers to you and me,

the common Things, left out from time to time  
of some great feat or cause or some grand notion  
in which we might have played a worthy role.

Residua refers to everyone  
but Neil Armstrong, whose footprint marked the moon;  
and everyone who's never stood in line

to serve or sup on soup on Friday morning  
and all of those who have; and everyone  
whose parents were divorced and everyone

whose weren't but wished they were; and everyone  
who prays in every church for everyone  
who doesn't belong to theirs; and all the meek

and all the pushy bastards; everyone  
who's fought in war or on a picket line  
or in a bar or on a seedy street,

and everyone who's never fought at all;  
and everyone who's given birth and all of those  
who can't. Residua refers to everyone

left out of anything at any time,  
in any way at all—the non-essential  
chaff remaining when the wheat has gone,

those whose job it is to *ooh* and *aah*  
at any great event that slings past them:  
Residua refers to you and me.

## VI

We occupy the shopping malls, the stores,  
the city parks, the broken marriages,  
each city, every state, and every nation—

the wops, the wasps, the spics, the kikes, the gooks,  
the cops, the thugs, the bikers, and the injuns,  
the lawyers, politicians, and the hookers,

the former girlfriends, former boyfriends,  
computer geeks, librarians, and barbers,  
housewives, butchers, bakers, editors,

prophets, seminary students, plumbers,  
comedians, and movie stars, and spies,  
explorers, witches, and adventurers,

guards, prisoners, and haberdashers,  
role models, and craftsmen, and instructors,  
novelists, and readers, and dead poets,

the best looking, the ugliest, the mean,  
the rich, the poor, the fat, the thin, the healthy,  
the vegetarians and all the rest—

our common trait? We've all been left behind,  
residua of families and clubs,  
remainders of society gone trite.

## VII

This simple mirror shadows your dismay  
that what you thought a special, secret sin  
for which you might never be forgiven

is also special to some million others  
who, like you, thought themselves the special sinner,  
who thought themselves at once the best and worst,

who thought themselves not worthy of the mill,  
the gizzard of humanity's last chicken,  
the chaff remaining when the wheat has gone.

## VIII

For each of you and me, the weariness  
continues, dragging me and each of you  
along a desperate road, compatriots  
in desolation on the Figured Wheel  
of Pinsky and beneath the watchful eye  
of Frost and Nemerov and other gods

whose works spun up onto the Wheel, their lives  
immortalized as all the other grist  
the Wheel has ground more finely than I could:

the Wheel has ground the chaff—residua—  
and sifted it until it makes no difference  
to the maker or the made, and so it goes.

## IX

Like all good things (or not) the weariness  
must end eventually, and this long road  
has slowed as it would do. This weary pen

has tired of testing smiles for sweet intent,  
quick flirtations for veracity,  
and words for essence; more than that, this heart

has stopped and started twice, a physical



anomaly reflecting on my soul  
and drawing me into the yawning maw

of cynicism: Love, I've come to find,  
is just a ruse, a necessary means  
to some harsh end, a way to spend the evening

less alone. If this must be a mirror  
I leave you with a plea to turn away:  
deny that you are mere residua,

just another Thing among the Things,  
and strive to make a difference in this world,  
where so few laugh and where so many hunger

for someThing—*any*Thing—to give them joy.  
You are the rhythm underlying poems,  
the essence of the living, breathing word.

### Stopping Breathing

I practice stopping breathing since that seems  
the last decisive Act required of us.  
Perfection is my goal; when heaven deems  
it necessary that I stop for good,  
perhaps the saints will say I was the best  
and grant me rest.

My brother stopped one day  
along a stretch of peaceful prairie road—  
lay silent, numbing slowly near the rock  
on which he'd spent the living, breathing cells  
required for thought and life and going on.  
Like all immortal youth, he spent too much  
at once; he really should have paced himself.  
But without practice how was he to know  
how much to spend and how much to retain?  
I learned from him that day—

No matter who  
you are, how old or young or rich or poor  
you are (or think you are), no matter how  
you long for solace, peace, or just relief,  
don't stop until you've practiced stopping well.

### Self-Portrait

I never lived the center of that storm,  
the one that left you stranded somewhere near  
the sane, but just outside that rarest entrance,

smoking Camels, begging simple things:  
a pen; a pad of paper; ideas.  
You never asked my help; you never asked

me to slip a note across the desk  
between our desks—a note with all the answers  
to all the tests you feared and knew would come—

instead, you caromed off your latest dread  
into another, sure a winning smile  
would bear you home. Alone again, you fell

from your pillar of fire, your senses pensive,  
your trembling hands clasped across your cheeks,  
your eyes aghast as ice formed on your heart

and crept into your soul. I never lived  
the center of that howling storm, the one  
that left you stranded just outside yourself,

begging one last kiss from one last mistress,  
one last sentient touch, one final wink,  
just one chance to prove that you could love

someone. And I look closely at the mirror,  
scrutinize your face, wrinkle your brow,  
and rasp my palms across your stubbled cheeks,

then touch my fingers lightly to my lips,  
smile your smile, sadly shake your head,  
regret your bad intentions, and refuse

your energies, your image, and your life.  
No pissed-off fathers peer over your shoulder,  
no trembling mothers cower near the bed,

and *No Escape* is scratched into the desk  
between your desk and mine, the one we share  
just like we shared the edges of that storm

before you raced headlong into the vortex

and left me spinning on the edge, alone  
and wishing I were half as brave as you.

### Great Expectations

*Sometimes a man's great expectations come down to very little at the end. A few minutes relief from the pain. A few words of comfort from someone he trusts. The thought that, for a little while at least, he'll be fondly remembered by someone. ~ Don Johnson in A Texas Elegy*

Just as the child must watch the parent die—  
that is the way of things—so must we too  
observe the things that were and watch them pass,  
despite our need for constancy, despite  
our need for solace in the sorest times,  
and finally, despite our memories.

It was like that when you, a boy near tears  
but holding back to prove a million things,  
held on to Whit, not asking him to stay  
nor rushing his departure. It was that  
sore bond, that urge to fill a need, that fear  
that you might dwindle down and be alone.

Each of us and every thing goes on  
and each of us and every thing comes down  
to very little in the end, just like  
our expectations of the way of things.  
Sometimes a minute is a lifetime, Friend;  
sometimes a comfort is all we can give.

How grandly you spoke of Love but never used  
the word itself, citing instead our need  
for fond remembrances, for memories,  
for constancy, for solace in these times  
when all we've known is changing and when all  
around us moves so quickly to the grave.

Just as the child must watch the parent die,  
so must we too observe the things that were  
and watch them pass, not rushing them along  
nor holding them too tightly. We observe  
and hope that each of us will serve to fill  
the expectations we considered great.

### Schoolhouse, circa 1893

No easy matter, bronzing these sad rooms  
in words, adobe walls emotionless  
and mute, their paneless windows gaping, shocked

that Death crept in so quietly. Coarse weeds  
huddle in the corner by the door,  
still creaking on the one remaining hinge

that wind and time have yet to rust away.  
How fitting for a cholera-ridden school.  
The parents must have spent a time white-lipped,

aghast but stoic, trembling in their grief  
and fear that what had touched their children  
might easily touch them as well. How sad

they must have been, scratching tiny graves  
from limestone-laden sand. No easy matter,  
piling stones on stones to keep disease

locked in and animals locked out. No task  
for feeble men and women lacking faith,  
this premature disposal of their future.

### Unrequited, Et Cetera

There's no requirement that you understand  
the longings and desires within this mind.  
My lack of boundaries was not a plan,  
nor was our meeting; now you've come to find  
that I am too abrupt at times, too crude,  
to suit the image that you hold of me—

I talk too much, too long, too loud, (it's true),  
and work and love too hard, too easily;  
I fantasize when I should be sedate;  
when you wish I would stop, I start again;  
I wish to be the hero in your fate,  
to fight your Battles, be your Love, and Win!

And now the image that I hold of you—  
(poetic license grants me equal time):

You wish a quiet man who's always true,

forever in your debt and on your line;  
you wish a hero who, when battle's done,  
will slink off into some romantic place  
in book or film where heroes go for fun,  
but not much fun, lest he should cost you face;  
you wish for one good man who would provide  
so you could do the things you wish to do,  
but not a man to sleep along your side,  
lest he should make a vile request of you—

So as we share our trap and thrive on hate,  
I write because that's all I know to do,  
and with this I must set the record straight:  
I play the lecher to oppose your prude  
and play the rat to complement your bait.  
If you should wish to end this torrid test  
of wills, then let the wills fall by the way  
and cease the endless baiting. Grant me rest.

It's not required that you understand  
as I wrote at the start, but here we are:  
a beauty wishing for a gentle man,  
a beast desiring death among the stars.

### Doctorow as Mentor for Lynn

We could begin as Doctorow began,  
when writing *Ragtime*: write the walls and write  
the ceiling and the floor of that one room  
then write the daisies (write how Lynn never  
stenciled them onto the orange floor  
for fear the bastard landlord might evict  
them both) then we could skew the pen and write  
the piles of dirty dishes write the laundry  
write the kitchen and the smoky vent  
and books and records shoring up our stern  
voyage as we wrote with our heads high  
the sixties' world of parties wine and grass

the closets and the bathroom and the stench  
that crept along the hall. We could expand  
into the hallway write the other tenants'  
hairy bellies unshaved faces eyes  
no longer dreaming yesterdays or love

and we could write the city, write the cops'  
fists batons and gas and protest signs  
could write the streets the burning of LA  
could write a kid like us there on those streets  
in uniform a Guardsman with a gun  
and how his gun would tremble if he tried  
to shoot and how his pen would tremble too

if he should feel a need to write the truth.  
Then we could write the state and write the nation  
forests valleys mountains rivers trees  
and write the congress write the president  
and we could write our friends away from home  
not write *to* them but write them as they were  
the jungle canopy the mud the rain  
the stench of fear the bugs the blood and we  
could write the oceans of the world could write  
the continents the moon the solar system  
the universe we know the universe  
we've never seen but know it must be there....

as if our writing ever made a difference  
or saved the smallest part of anything.  
We could begin as Doctorow began  
O, we could write! We could say the world!

### Manic Damned Depression

Some days I'm rougher'n a beggar with a knife  
and hell in his eyes, running things together, wanting bad  
to hold you close, tight, dig  
deeper with each searing thrust, twisting and digging  
a blade past your ribs, relishing your warmth  
draining across my hands  
praying I don't strike heartmeat  
too soon, come down too fast, drag away my Mr. Hyde  
slouching from the symphony of pain  
you've played for me so well.

Then come the days when normalcy ensues  
when feelings ebb and flow in unrehearsed  
reflections of themselves. The tints and hues  
of love are soft, the lines in metered verse.

and some sad days i drown

in warm water that hates me  
absorbs me wraps me up  
no, nothing you can do  
nothing i need nothing  
i can do want to do  
nothing just leave  
me alone please just  
go away please go  
ahead, exist if you must  
that's okay but please  
somewhere else, not  
in my darkness, not  
in my dark little  
all i have left  
corner

### [At a Military Prep School](#)

The ladies seem feverish here,  
perhaps immersed in memories of youth,  
perhaps in thoughts altogether lewd,  
teaching the boys with still, short hair,  
who couldn't slouch if they wished,  
but go springing all over the place,

forwards, left, backwards, and right  
where specificity counts for so much  
and the counts all recycle at four  
and the boys are straighter than straight  
and say "Ma'am" and "Yes, Ma'am"  
and "Ooh, Ma'am" in their dreams

and the boys are tall and heroic,  
muscled in all the right places,  
in all the right ways, and the boys  
stroke eagerly forwards and backwards  
in games and in showers at night,  
immersed in their youth and lewd,

but never think lewdly of feverish ladies  
teaching the boys with still, short hair,  
their virility springing all over the place,  
forwards, left, backwards, and right,  
here, where specificity counts  
and the counts all recycle at four.

### Resembling Uranium

Resembling uranium, she glows,  
enticing in her natural element  
but dangerous as well. She'll melt your eyes  
and leave you quivering in a foolish stance,  
for you had thought your body fit for hers.

Wisdom comes to some, who realize  
some radiant things are better left observed.  
They learn too late, their hands and senses burned,  
that, like uranium, she was never meant  
to be discovered, captured, or confined.

### Gentilus Temptor

For reasons we can never understand,  
they practice supple movements with no clue  
that they display a subtle reprimand.  
Subliminal though it may be, it's true.

So we may dream of night in light of day,  
the ones we most desire sway to and fro,  
but likewise, in the motion of the sway,  
there lies the reprimand: a gentle "No."

### Poem on the Sea

If I could write a poem on the sea  
and bind it well, that quick it would remain,  
then could I frame the love I have for thee  
and capture it within one soft refrain—  
but never have I written on the sea,  
nor bound it (such a binding soon would fail)  
and neither can I case my love for thee  
with flowing, liquid ink and mortal quill.

If I could write a poem on a flame  
and freeze it there so none could set it free,  
then all the world could view the fiery frame,  
behold the burning love I feel for thee—  
but never have I written on a flame,



nor frozen fire to still the raging heat;  
and so I fail, to my undying shame,  
to once explain my heart's proclivity.

If I could write a poem on the wind  
and, for a moment, check its joyful spree,  
then on its wings the words I could suspend  
to whisper there how my heart longs for thee—  
but never could I, in this mortal shell,  
dare calm the wind or tame a gentle breeze,  
nor could I, with these mortal words so frail,  
immortalize the love I have for thee,

so in this mortal body, on this earth,  
(where, grown impatient, I am loath to be),  
I labor to explain, in mortal verse,  
the pure, immortal love I feel for thee—  
yet I, if once allowed to quickly still  
the rolling sea, the wind, or flick'ring flame,  
would scribe upon it with an angel's quill  
a poem to immortalize thy name.

### She, Adored

*to drown is to be inadvertently filled....*

Gentle, washing over me  
a tremulous wave.  
Gladly, thankfully, I drown.

Lapping on my dreams, her eyes  
coerce all my trust,  
portend the loss of Nothing.

I shall not miss it  
when I drift away in her,  
cresting in her soul,

ebbing, flowing in her sea,  
slipping currents blessed,  
tender currents, fouled by none.

Submerged, I will rise,  
glorify her presence, sink,  
slouch away, a cur,

lacking, in no special way,  
all that she does not,  
happy just to drown therein,  
slipping, draining, filled.

### For Bryan

How odd to see the wonder in his eyes,  
this small, grandsonly image of myself.  
Oh yes, his mother's looks, his father's too  
reside there in small bits—a turned up nose,  
a curled lip, a flash of browning hair—  
but the wonder, the awe of life, he took from me.

See? Nothing more remarkable than a leaf,  
just fallen from a tree and touching down,  
causes the sharp intake of baby breath,  
his tiny finger pointing, stiff and locked  
upon a new and wondrous discovery.  
It thrills him so and has the same effect

as any of the magic things he's seen  
in his first three years. That fallen leaf,  
his first glimpse of the stars or of the moon  
or ants or rocks or laces in my shoe  
all hold an equal wonder for this soul,  
this tiny one whose eyes reflect my joy

at witnessing his awe, and makes me wonder  
how fingers tiny as those can work at all.

### Southern Comfort

One day he sat to write about Comfort  
and all the proper things it would entail:  
his comfy cottage-house; his picket fence;  
a clothesline stretched out back; and his good wife,  
bending to her basket, hanging linens  
(his and hers, their daughter's and their son's);  
two pups; a rangy cat; a parakeet;  
and evenings spent before a cozy fire.

But he awoke: the cottage-house had burned,

the picket fence had melted, and the clothes  
line had snapped, as had his wife, both pups,  
the cat, the parakeet, and both the kids—  
something to do with volatility  
and how the volatile should never try  
to live a life inviolate of stress.  
Then he snapped too, and everything was fine.

**We Rise, Remarkably**  
**for Jack Williamson, SF Grand Master**

*“... and this, the Age of Technology,  
is the greatest season of mankind.”  
~ an Electronics Technology professor ~*

We rise, remarkably, in no Great Season,  
rise to mediocrity, our wealth  
of knowledge siphoned into fledgling robots,  
channeled into artificial minds.  
We speak, and volumes ricochet off metal.  
Once-noble thoughts diminish, fall aside,  
our failing minds atrophied and dying,  
dependent on the spiritless machines.

We rise, remarkably, with no great passion,  
tap our lines and lives on plastic keys,  
save ourselves on disk (no need for Jesus),  
e-mail all our friends, have sex *sans* bodies  
travel through a desert without feeling  
sand, and through a jungle without fear  
of lions, tigers, life in general,  
throughout the cyber-spatial netherworld.

We rise, remarkably, for no good reason,  
(having dreamed ourselves into a corner)  
except to bow before the fine machine.  
Jack Williamson had warned us once before  
that life might hang precariously by a plug:  
now our greatest season passes by us  
driven by the bold machines we've made  
as we, the meek, observe with folded hands.

**All Things May Come**

The narrow street at six p.m. is heavy  
burdened so with loiters and bums  
it seems to tilt. The shadows of the high

rise buildings slice the curb, and passers-by  
cough exhaust along the fume-choked sidewalks,  
soot the one ingredient that's missing

from this Dickensian inner city.  
Churchbells chime and dowdy ladies trundle  
children toward the sound. Mustn't keep Jesus

waiting. Waiting seems a nobler cause  
to some, just risen from a huddled doorway;  
they've learned that rushing does no good. In time

all things may come to those who wait. A cop  
wanders past the empty stores and faces  
himself in a window, turns and nods

*You're no trouble are you?* half to me,  
half to the air, rises on his toes  
and moves away with just one backward glance.

The shadows lengthen quickly in an hour  
and usher in a chill that settles deeply,  
offering no solace for these streets:

not a prelude to a new dawning;  
not a harbinger of peaceful sleep;  
not so much a blanket as a shroud.

### Sniper

Sweat trickles down his face in rivulets,  
translucent black and brown and sandy loam  
around the rubber pressed against his eye  
onto the stock onto the mulch below

his face a stone his eyes expressionless  
unblinking and aware of all that comes  
into the misty glow into his view  
across the quiet field

his bladder fills recycles fills again

and empties; nature does what nature will  
untempted and unreasoning but right  
the rain will even up the score  
will wash him softly  
wash it all away

*Jesus* what a night—

and through the sight and through the misty glow  
a pocket and a button step and lie  
in wait beyond the cross the final cross  
this one will bear;

relax and breathe relax and breathe relax  
and hold, it settles there, the cross,  
the finger squeezes firm—  
and *snap* the harbinger of god  
outruns the sound, spin-howling through the grass  
to split the cross  
and splits the final cross this one will bear.

He wants to cry but steels instead and sighs  
and moves removes resettles  
and resumes.

**To a War Protester**  
**for J. Lynn Cutts**

How odd that she should ask me for a poem  
that might explain there *were* no enemies,  
no heroes, and no villains in that war,  
that underneath the uniforms were *humans*,  
and no one on our side or on the other  
knew hatred, spite, or righteousness—just fear.

And how should I begin? Should I say Faith  
in god, country, and corps were stripped away  
when Digger's face exploded next to mine?  
Should I describe the hot, incessant rain,  
the mud that splattered up from falling men,  
the M-16s that jammed with every round?

Can I, in adequate terms, hope to describe  
the agony of pleading, bulging eyes  
that knew my lies were nothing more? Can I

relate the sound of arms, legs, stomachs,  
ripping off or open, and the feel  
of hot, moist bits stinging my face?

Can I communicate the stench of fear,  
the silence that precedes a concrete hell,  
(one you can touch and one that touches you,  
not the one the preacher talks about)  
the taste of sweat that runs into your mouth,  
the pus that coats your blistered, rotting feet?

I think not, but the hardest to convey  
is that ride home, that flight out of Japan:  
the leggy flight attendants (their sad eyes),  
the absence of all fear, and then relief,  
the tires screeching down, a jolt or two,  
a hurried reluctance in mouthing last goodbyes.

The eyes negate the need for words, and then  
the ramp!—America!—the scent of home,  
the dream, the picket fence, the house, the job,  
the girl, the kids, the moms, the dads, the dogs,  
the cats, the bikes, the cars, and hair—but no:  
someone throws blood and calls me Murderer.

How odd that she should ask me for a poem  
that might explain there *were* no enemies,  
no heroes, and no villains in that place,  
that underneath the uniforms were *humans*,  
just like those who carried protest signs.  
How odd she didn't know that on her own.

### **On Compassion Under Fire**

Three feet away, I saw the death mask settle  
on his face—on what was left—and my  
shoulders slumped, my head jerked right, a lump  
the size of god settling in my throat  
and chest, my gaze frantic, racing, racing  
across the paddy to the taller grass,  
then to the treeline, to the million trees  
and leaves from which the shot had come. Nothing.

I glanced again, rose slowly, slowly, looking  
at the field and at the mask and back

and moved, the lump still resident but choking  
less, across the intervening yard  
to settle, like the mask, around my friend,  
to cradle him and whisper *It's all right*  
and try to keep him calm and help him die  
quietly: *Please don't give me away.*

## Fields

### **Variations on an Unforgiving Theme**

#### **I**

The sunrise came, and all was still, newborn—  
then came the clouds, came forlorn  
the dark'ning clouds, to fields unworn:  
sweet virgin fields, dark in the morn,  
and thunder rumbled 'cross the sky  
and lightning flashed and angels cried.  
There came the warriors, came forlorn  
the warriors brave, to fields unworn:  
sweet-flowered fields, where warriors sworn  
to greatness spoke of distant coasts,  
sharpened swords, and traded boasts.

Then came the battle like a storm,  
to test the flowered fields unworn:  
soon-anguished fields, where sounded horns  
of glory, and where drums of death  
beat fear into the warriors' wrath;  
came agony, when shields were torn  
asunder, slashed and ripped and tossed  
aside, to fire and anvil lost;  
came flashing steel, and blood adorned  
the muddied fields, the grass, the weeds,  
the mail and helms, the men, their steeds;  
came final sighs, when screams were borne  
'cross dusty fields on dying tongues  
of men and horses, old and young;

came rumors then, and victors scorned  
the victims of the stinging steel—  
but spoke not of the future fields;  
calm silence fell, to softly mourn  
at close of day the lofty men  
who fought and died where flowers had been;

then came the soft rain, came forlorn  
the angels' tears to fields well worn:  
much saddened fields, where suffered thorns  
and flowers and men, all cleansed in rain,  
rinsed free of hatred, free of pain—  
and came the minstrels' tunes forlorn  
to tell about the fields well worn:  
much-anguished fields, where songs were born  
of thunder, and where warriors young  
and healthy died, their songs unsung.

It passed, and all have gone to seed;  
we heard and sighed, but did not heed.

## II

The sunrise crossed a freshened field, reborn—  
and came the clouds, came forlorn  
the dark'ning clouds, to fields well worn:  
forgotten fields, dark in the morn  
and thunder rumbled 'cross the sky  
and lightning flashed and angels cried.  
There came the warriors, came forlorn  
the warriors brave, to fields well worn:  
reflowered fields, where warriors sworn  
to greatness spoke of distant coasts,  
cleaned their guns and traded boasts.

Then came the battle like a storm,  
again to test the fields well worn:  
soon-anguished fields, where sounded horns  
of glory, and where thoughts of death  
beat fear into the warriors' wrath;  
came agony, when steel was torn  
asunder, slashed and ripped and blown  
apart, the angry bomber's drone;  
came screaming shells, and blood adorned  
the muddied fields, the grass, the leaves,  
the helms and boots, the souls naive;  
came final sighs, when screams were borne  
'cross smoky fields on dying tongues  
of men—of warriors, old and young;

came rumors then, and victors scorned  
the victims of the bombs of steel—  
but spoke not of the future fields;



calm silence fell, to softly mourn  
at close of day, the lofty men  
who died where once the flowers had been;  
then came the soft rain, came forlorn  
the angels' tears to fields well worn:  
much-saddened fields, where suffered thorns  
and flowers and men, all cleansed in rain,  
rinsed free of hatred, free of pain—  
and came the singers' tunes forlorn  
to tell about the fields well worn:  
much-anguished fields, where songs were born  
of hatred, and where warriors young  
and healthy died, their songs unsung.

It passed, and all have gone to seed;  
we heard and cried, but did not heed.

### III

The sunrise shone across a field, reborn—  
and once again came clouds forlorn  
and darkening to fields well worn:  
to jungled fields, dark in the morn,  
and thunder rumbled 'cross the sky,  
and lighting flashed and angels cried,  
and came the warriors, came forlorn  
the warriors brave, to fields now torn:  
green-jungled fields, where warriors sworn  
to freedom spoke of distant coasts,  
cleaned their guns and traded boasts.

Then came the battle like a storm  
again to test the fields well worn:  
soon-anguished fields, where sounded horns  
of battle, and where dreams of death  
beat fear into the warriors' wrath;  
came agony, when steel, airborne  
projectiles slashed and ripped and tossed  
young lives aside, to brothers lost;  
came rockets in, and blood adorned  
the muddied fields, the razor wire,  
and radios; the men died tired;  
came final sighs, when screams were borne  
'cross shattered fields on dying tongues  
of men and women, old and young;

came rumors then, and victors scorned  
the victims of bamboo and steel—  
but spoke not of the future fields;  
calm silence fell, to softly mourn  
at close of day, the lofty men  
who died in vain where flowers had been;  
then came the soft rain, came forlorn  
the angels' tears to fields well worn:  
much-saddened fields, where suffered thorns  
and trees and men, now cleansed in rain,  
rinsed free of hatred, free of pain—  
and come the singers' tunes forlorn,  
now to protest the fields well worn:  
much-anguished fields, where songs were born  
of murder, and where warriors young  
were tagged and bagged, their songs unsung.

It passed, and all have gone to seed;  
we built a wall, but did we heed?

### Courage, Defined in Four Acts

#### *The Cavalry*

Down from the hillside, ride wild through the villages,  
tracking and trampling the young ones who run;  
smoke out the old ones by burning, for pillaging,  
stacking like cordage the dead in the sun.  
Into the battle you charge with the rest of them,  
screaming past courage to bludgeon your foes;  
impaling their children, you bleed the will out of them,  
mauling them, maiming them, onward you go.  
Riding hard, rampaging, numb to the suffering  
screams of the savages trampled below,  
silence the screaming, your horses' hooves rumbling;  
victims aren't human, the cavalry's bold.

#### *The Bombers*

Circling, zeroing in on insanity,  
fly smooth and level, or they may escape.  
Knowing no boundaries lessens the misery,  
letting your daydreams assume nightmare shapes.  
Into the battle you fly with the rest of them,  
screaming past courage to bludgeon your foes,

slamming your blessings deep into the hearts of them,  
mauling them, maiming them, onward you go.  
Recklessly mindless and numb to the suffering  
screams in the deafening thunder below,  
carpet the desert with tons of steel offerings;  
victims are faceless, and sanity holds.

### ***The Fighters***

Circling, zeroing in on insanity,  
fly ever lower; don't let them escape!  
Knowing no boundaries eases your misery;  
murder the bastards; your job is their rape.  
Into the battle you fly with the best of them,  
screaming past courage to bludgeon your foes;  
raining your rocketed blessings down onto them,  
mauling them, maiming them, onward you go.  
Laser-aimed armament stops all the suffering  
screams in the hot conflagration below.  
Silence the guns and the streets with your cannoning;  
victims are faceless, and sanity holds.

### ***The Soul***

Circling, zeroing in on infinity,  
soar ever higher on gossamer wings  
over the boundaries into eternity;  
leave all the nightmares and live in your dreams.  
Into forever you soar while the rest of them  
reach beyond courage to bludgeon their foes;  
easing your wisdom deep into the hearts of them,  
blessing them, teaching them, softly you go.  
Gently and silently, seek out the reasoning  
ones in the manifest mis'ry below;  
whisper true courage deep into the hearts of them:  
he is courageous who *withholds* the blow.

### **Rejuvenation**

It's time to reconnect some frazzled ends,  
unbend a few warped planes, demagnetize  
a short in my long circuit. No robot,  
I, but in dire need of maintenance;

I need to spark a reconciliation

of my soul and fire, nearly extinguished  
by this funny, filthy world. I've come  
full circle to the Necessity—a Need,

no small desire nor pouty-lipped request—  
of full rejuvenation, an overhaul,  
electrical, mechanical, and chemical,  
so this rusted spirit might yet shine again.

# # #

### About the Author

Harvey Stanbrough is an award-winning professional fiction writer and poet. He's fond of saying he was born in New Mexico, seasoned in Texas, and baked in Arizona. After 21 years in the US Marine Corps, he managed to sneak up on a BA degree at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales in 1996.

Because he is unable to do otherwise, Harvey splits his writing personality among his personas: Gervasio Arrancado writes magic realism; Nicolas Z "Nick" Porter writes spare, descriptive, mainstream fiction; and Eric Stringer writes the fiction of an unapologetic psychotic. Harvey writes whatever they leave to him.

As of April 2015, Harvey has written over 80 short stories, 5 novels and a novella, several nonfiction books and audio lectures on the craft of writing, and several poetry collections. Check those out on his website at [HarveyStanbrough.com](http://HarveyStanbrough.com). You can also visit him on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/HarveyStanbrough).