

The Foolishness of God Inverse Wisdom in Verse

Doug Gwyn

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Introduction

The title of this book is taken from the writings of the apostle Paul (I Corinthians 1:25), where he concedes that the “good news” of a crucified Messiah is of course scandalous to his fellow Jews and folly to the Greeks. “But the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom.” You can’t get more ironic than that. But it speaks to my experience of God’s grace, always surprising my expectations and overturning my “wisdom.” Perhaps Paul’s phrase also connotes the foolishness of believing in such a God – all the more so in a rapidly secularizing society today. So perhaps the title of this book should be “Fool for God.”

I have long been an avid music listener and fascinated by the way the song-form combines words with music to produce a brief immersion into a unique space of thought and feeling. I was no more than five when I was drawn to the cool melancholy of Peggy Lee’s “Tenderly.” But I also enjoyed novelty songs such as “Purple People-Eater,” the Chipmunks’ “Christmas Song,” and Jerry Lee Lewis’ wild-man rave-up in “Great Balls of Fire.” Over the years, I’ve noticed that as rock innovators were lionized, we forgot the humor in their early song-writing and performance. But just remember that when EMI signed the Beatles, they assigned George Martin as their producer, whose main work up to that point had been recording novelty songs.

I began songwriting in early 1977, a difficult time when another tidy script for my life was falling apart. Both my parents were trained musicians, and though I had inherited little of their musical gifts, I had a drive to be musically creative in some way. The folk and blues revival of the 1960s offered song-forms simple enough for me. And the emerging punk explosion was all about raw expression and musical minimalism (as celebrated by the Adverts’ “One-Chord Wonders”). In particular, proto-punks Patti Smith and Graham Parker had galvanized me by this time. Meanwhile, the Rastafarian reggae of Bob Marley and others merged biblical and liberationist themes with compelling rhythms that really transported me. My songs didn’t sound anything like their music, but they fit my limited musical and financial means.

Anyway, the real action was always in the words. I wanted to use humor and irony to bear witness to my own experience of God, and perhaps help listeners recognize the surprising qualities of religious experience in their own lives. Just as Patti Smith and the Rastafarians were doing, I wanted to take secular, popular song-forms and let them express the emerging spiritual sensibilities of postmodernity. After all, many American song-forms had emerged from the life of churches. My approach was not to return to traditional religion but to revisit its themes at another level. Bob Dylan’s songs had often contained a theological undercurrent. In particular, I listened repeatedly to his 1965 album, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and marveled at his prophetic reading of those times, and the way he turned folk and blues genres to new purposes. As the introductions to the songs in this collection note, a number of my songs have been rewrites of songs from that album, from my own later perspectives.

From another angle, while I was a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York, I had become an avid student of the Bible, from modern, historical-critical and literary perspectives. I loved the Hebrew prophets, who chanted and sang their oracles in verse form. Social critique was integral to their message of religious reform. My songs are also attuned to the social and economic issues of the past forty years, as can be seen in the “Social” section and elsewhere in this collection. I also studied the gospels and learned how the parables of Jesus turned simple stories and similes from everyday life into ironic, paradoxical clues to the kingdom of heaven. I wanted to write songs that worked in a similar fashion. In his 1974 book on the parables, John Dominic Crossan suggested that “paradox is to story as eschaton [end] is to history.” Not only do the parables sensitize us to the irony of God’s interventions into our personal lives, but can also open our eyes to God’s larger purposes in history.

Finally, I had also studied the work of scholars who recognized the apocalyptic quality of some late prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible, as well as New Testament writers such as Paul. As the “Apocalyptic” section of this collection explains, at its root, apocalyptic is not predictive or speculative about a future end of the world, but a revelation of the true nature and ultimate destiny of present realities. These perspectives and intentions were also woven into my songwriting from the start, and have continued to this day.

It took me time to become proficient enough to perform my songs for friends. And I never did become a good guitarist, polished vocalist, or smooth performer. But there was a playful immediacy to my performances that engaged listeners well. In part, they were surprised that this friendly guy and Quaker scholar had this devious, deconstructive sense of humor mixed with an equally ambitious intention. I knew from the start that even if my performances were more polished, my songs were too religious for a secular market and too sly for a religious market. But I have always preferred to fall between any two stools I find. Besides, I prefer the more traditional mode of folk music, not as a commodity of fading commercial value, but simply as songs that arise from life in community, sung to that community. My songwriting was most stimulated by my my years in community at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study center near Philadelphia. Conversely, that community was my best audience.

By 1999, I began recording my songs, so that people could hear them without blunders and elaborated a little with over-dubbed backing vocals. I recorded under the name The Brothers Doug, a play on the Bee Gees (Brothers Gibb) and my over-dubbed multiple voices. I got steadily better at realizing my songs musically, and eventually added a melodica and rhythm box to the basic guitar and voice formula. But the recordings never seemed to connect as well as my live performances did. The recordings lacked the immediacy of performance. And they have never achieved the studio polish that has become standard over the years. But I didn’t have the money to achieve that. Besides, I felt that many good songwriters obscured their unique voice under the coats of varnish applied by professional studio musicians and producers.

So I finally decided to put this collection of song lyrics together in print as the record of an important side-bar to my calling to ministry as a Friends pastor and Quaker theological

historian. Again, the action was always mainly in the words anyway. I call these lyrics “verse,” not poetry, which would suggest more artistry than either my aims or my accomplishments. My verse is more rhetorical than poetic.

So this collection of forty songs serves as a left-handed complement to my more straightforward memoir, *Life in Gospel-Space*. It’s a fractured record of my long, strange journey in life. So, echoing the opening words of Homer’s *Odyssey*, another set of outrageous, picaresque tales told in verse-form, let us begin: “Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns, driven time and again off course...” (Fagles translation).

Doug Gwyn
Richmond, Indiana
January 2019

Autobiographical

The songs in this section have themes that overlap with other sections in this collection, but they are here because they focus more overtly on my life. Since I understand my life in relation to God's purposes, the autobiographical songs are also theological. And because my life experience has grounded my theological understanding, the theological songs are partly autobiographical.

"The Dude" (2017) was my nickname as a kid in the 1950s – long before the Big Lebowski. The song begins, "Legend has it, and so it goes." Like all legends, this song a mix of the true and the wishful to create a larger than life character. I did have a happy childhood, notwithstanding some difficulties. But at some remove from this world, as the song suggests.

"Knock-Knock" (1977) is my first song. It's not my best work, but I'm still fond of it. It's about my calling experience in 1968, alone in my college dormitory room. It is mythologized in country & western terms. With this song I realized I had an approach to songwriting that plays on the irony and surprise of our experience of God, something like a joke or a good one-liner. It takes off from the passage in Revelation 3:20, where the risen Christ says, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." That has been my experience, but often in surprising, even laughable ways.

"The Blues of Heaven" (2016): the refrain takes off from 1 Corinthians 2:9. The song reflects on the mysterious, modal power of the blues. I ran a coffeehouse in the late 1960s on the Indiana University campus and got acquainted with two legendary bluesmen who had recorded together in the late 1920s, Yank Rachell and Sleepy John Estes. I gained a deeper feeling for the blues through them. The song's title derives partly from an experience in 1989 when I was morbidly ill. After coming through an emergency surgery, I lay in intensive care and heard the most amazing blues, a sublime melancholy that seemed to be coming from the other side (which was pretty close to me for a few hours). The African American blues tradition sometimes seems to draw upon that source.

"Cheeseburger Deluxe" is another early song (1980). I have had a life-long penchant for the cheeseburger and fries. The reference to "Joe's" is to "Joe Junior's" diner on Third Avenue and 16th Street in Manhattan, near the American Friends Service Committee office where I worked part-time in those days. They still do a really nice CBD (not the health drink that has become a craze as I write). You wouldn't guess from the way the song turned out, but it takes off from Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone." His 1965 classic was about the world as one knew it falling apart (which happened to many in the sixties). My 1980 rewrite was at the threshold of the Reagan era, with commodity-consumer culture rising to new levels, and a new campaign in the war on drugs soon to begin. All these levels of addiction converge here in a juicy burger!

“Hair Envy” (1997): as a boy, my hair was so thick the barber’s electric clippers sometimes bogged down. But because our mother had a lot of bald uncles, my brother Mike and I saw our future early on. Both of us were sanguine about it: no comb-overs or hair replacements for us. Still, I do enjoy other people’s hair. This song bares my bald soul.

“Paloma” (2016) plays with my experience of the Spirit as feminine. While feminine beauty is initially a visual experience for a man, with Paloma it is in what she reveals in everything else, and how it leads us to others in her circle of influence. “We see her face in ours.” I sing the song with a Lou Reed, New York hipster intonation, just to complicate things a bit more.

“Am I Tragic Yet?” (2002) came to me in the slough of advancing middle age, at a time when I looked back regretfully at some wrong turns and bad decisions in my life. I was also studying ancient Greek tragedy, both for its resonances with the New Testament gospels, and as a lens for viewing early Quaker history. The ancient Greeks saw tragedy playing out through human flaws and inscrutable divine forces, but with ennobling effects emerging through all the devastation. Through tragic experience, the human condition may be raised to a higher, wiser level. So this song asks, am I there yet? I still find it a therapeutic song to sing now and then.

“Jungian Love Song” (2009) is an ode of sorts to my wife, Caroline. The “dorm” where we met was at Pendle Hill in 1994 (see the Quaker section of this collection) and we were in our forties and thirties respectively. I was surely smitten, but also old enough to ponder the deeper psychic and divine forces at play between us. As I wrote the song fifteen years later, the mystery was still delicious.

“Draped across My Mind” (2016): If the preceding song playfully celebrates my sustained love relationship with Caroline, this song is an immersion in the losses that came along the way. Not long after writing this song, I learned that Freud interpreted mourning as a process where the lost object of one’s love falls as a shadow upon the ego. The ego is formed in part out of its lost objects. My playful sense of humor notwithstanding, melancholy and mourning have been key factors in my spiritual formation.

“A Messenger of the Lord” (2016) took form during the jet-lagged last leg of a trip back to Maine, after teaching a short course for Woodbrooke (the Quaker study center in England). Something got me to looking back over my life in ministry. The song makes a bookend to “Knock-Knock,” the song about my original calling. Every verse of the song contains the ambiguities that attend even the most “spiritual” endeavors, but with the abiding impetus of the call to be a messenger through life’s many changes. Musically, the song takes some inspiration (appropriately) from the Allman Brothers’ “Midnight Rider.”

“Time Is like Wine” (2005) derives from watching my mother start to descend slowly into dementia. She finally died in 2018. But I had already thought of time as like wine, slowly overwhelming our minds with so many years of experience and memory, even if we are not stricken with dementia. Like wine, the song has the sustained bitter-sweetness of sorrow balanced with humor. I suppose you could call it a drinking song of sorts.

The Dude
(My Childhood Nickname)
(October 2017)

legend has it, and so it's told, that he was only six years old
when they first called him, they called him the Dude
his parents had named him Doug, but his older brother, Ace
told him to his face, man, you're the Dude
the Dude, the Dude, they called him the Dude
oh, he was the Dude

was he a mystic or a space cadet, the way he looked right through that TV set?
only one thing's for sure, he was the Dude
he made innocence a personal style, he faced the world with a quizzical smile
cause the one thing he knew, he was the Dude
the Dude, the Dude, they called him the Dude
oh, he was the Dude

Bridge:

all the experts all conclude, there's a boyhood beatitude
sometimes known as "the Dude"

he had mysterious ways with girls, he drew them into his world
they could see someone needed to help the Dude
more than any emotion or mood, it was a chimp-like attitude
that somehow seemed to exude from the Dude
the Dude, the Dude, they called him the Dude
oh, he was the Dude

Knock-Knock (January 1977)

it was the fall of '68 and I was down on my luck,
you could say my back was to the wall
I sat down to a plate of pinto beans,
a crust of cornbread and a slice of jowl
but I could not eat, I just hung my head and cried
I was so lonesome, I wanted to die
I said, where in this wide world do I have a friend?
where is one good reason to go on?
I heard a knock, knock, knock, knock knocking at my door
I shouted into the night, well who is there?
the answer came back, Jesus – I said, Jesus who?
Jesus Christ, why don't you open up this door?

clouds of glory filled that room, oh bless my soul!
I saw with new eyes, heard with new ears
I said, come on in, friend, and sup with me
I haven't seen such a friendly face in years
well, that night my poor shack became a palace so fine
and my poor vittels, a feast for a king
and my friend who came to dinner, why he's here to stay
and now my life is what you call a happening
so if you're down and out and feeling blue
like your address reads Box 212, Bottomless Pit
well, hang in there, friend, and listen for a sound
the next time you sit down to a plate of grits
you'll hear a knock-knock-knock-knock-knocking at your door
you shout out into the night, well who is there?
the answer come back, Jesus – you say, Jesus who?
Jesus Christ, why don't you open up that door?

knock-knock-knock – who's there?
is it a joke, or is it for real?
is it one or the other, or could it be both
it's sure hard to tell, until...

The Blues of Heaven

(September 2016)

there are troubles in this world, and none shall be spared
 and Lord you know, I've had my share
 some fall like pianos on our unsuspecting heads
 some we bring on ourselves instead
 but no eye has ever seen
 no ear has ever heard
 nor the human mind ever conceived
 the blues of heaven

in the realm of delusion, things may appear like magic
 then end up something more like tragic
 the beginning of wisdom
 is no illusions left to lose
 that's when you learn to love the blues
 but no eye has ever seen
 no ear has ever heard
 nor the human mind ever conceived
 the blues of heaven

Bridge:

Sleepy John Estes and Yank Rachell
 these men walked the earth in my time
 they sang and the lived, and they still give me hints
 of the blue sublime

I felt a great earthquake and I heard a mighty wind
 I saw a fire that had no end
 but the Lord was not in them, just a lot of such and such
 then came a deep, pentatonic hush....
 no eye has ever seen
 no ear has ever heard
 nor the human mind ever conceived
 the blues of heaven

Cheeseburger Deluxe (1980)

my name is Doug Gwyn and I've lost my way
a sheep that's gone astray in cheeseburger addiction
a living nightmare on a toasted bun
in coffee shops and on the run, this is my affliction
I go to a little diner called Joe's, when the feeling inside me grows
a last station for lost souls, I sit in the corner where nobody knows
this man with an emptiness that aches to be filled
out of the frying pan, and into the devil's tempting hand
first the man has a burger, then the burger has the man

then, sooner or later, along comes that waiter with the knowing grin on his face
but this time I think I'll order a chef's salad and mineral water, and see how it tastes
he says hello, and what'll it be? but it's only a formality
his eyes look right into me, it must be quite a sight to see
a man with an appetite but without any will
oh, wretched man that I am: the law of the flesh is my command
first the man has a burger, then the burger has the man

well, I know I could get my proteins
from the proper combination of rice and beans, and maybe some granola
but for just three or four bucks
I could have a cheeseburger deluxe, with fries and a cola
no, I don't care about all that grease, I ignore the synthetic cheese
I 'aint counting the calories, I forget about heart disease
as I look into the eyes of Mephistopheles at the grill
a consumer consumed in obsession
its the humor of human possession
first the man has a burger, then the burger has the man

Hair Envy

(August 1997)

friend, I hope you will not care
 if my eye begins to stare
 at your head and shoulders every now and then
 it's not that I mind being bald
 so's Sean Connery, after all
 but a head of hair makes me remember when...
 hair envy – is it all in my head?
 hair envy – no, it on yours instead
 oh, why do I love your hair?
 because it's there

brunettes and carrot-tops
 buzz cuts and dreadlocks
 all have a place in my heart
 golden streaks touched by the sun
 ponytails and tight little buns
 I hold them all in highest regard
 hair envy – is it so diabolical,
 hair envy – that I cherish your follicles?
 Oh, why do I love your hair?
 because it's there

Bridge:

I believe that baldness is a very special grace
 it's not that I am losing hair so much as gaining face

what's it like to have no hair?
 just run your fingers through the air
 and find out what it's like to be free
 no, there's too much hair gone down the drain
 to dream of paradise Roganed
 rootlessness has got the best of me
 hair envy – you've got hair and so be it
 hair envy – better there where I can see it
 oh, why do I love your hair?
 because it's there
 it's there, it's still there

Paloma
(May 2016)

Paloma tears the veil away from my eyes
and I see at last what's really there
Paloma is a beauty that mystery hides
but everything else is naked and bare
I'm a witness to what I've seen
I testify to things I've heard
I take the stand, I'm standing still
as I wait upon her every word

Paloma finds the broken place in my heart
and she lets herself in any time she please
she eases the existential ache I feel
as she comes onto me like a breeze
I'm a witness to what I see
I testify to things I hear
Paloma's the fire of a pure desire
a love that knows no fear

Bridge:

she whispers through the leaves of prophets and sages
she speaks through the cleft in the Rock of Ages

she leads me to her friends, the meek and the poor
the peaceful ones, the salt of the earth
her words pass between us, we see her face in ours
as she teaches us what heaven is worth
I'm a witness to things I hear
I testify to what I see
wherever I go, whatever I must bear
Paloma is true to me

Am I Tragic Yet?

(June 2002)

I go this way and that way, but they all lead deeper into loss
and every calculation underestimates the cost
and what looks at first like destiny turns out at last to be fate
and the moral of the story comes too late
tell me, am I tragic yet?
or do I still have more to regret?
will I grow wise, or just learn to forget?
tell me, Lord, am I tragic yet?

tell me, when does simple confidence become the deadly sin of pride?
and why does heaven's providence make me want to run and hide?
and as I plow through these long, strange years of middle age
is there enough to say about it to fill a single page?
tell me am I tragic yet?
or do I still have more to regret?
will I grow wise, or just learn to forget?
tell me, Lord, am I tragic yet?

no, it's not that I'm sensitive, it's not that I can't take a poke
it's just that after all these years, I still don't get the joke
meanwhile, heaven and hell are firing all these flaming darts
in a contest to see who can light up this old fart
tell me, am I tragic yet?
or what would it take to make this fool wise?
is all this ruin only grace in disguise?
tell me, Lord, am I tragic yet?
please tell me, Lord, am I tragic yet?

Jungian Love Song

(November 2009)

there's a woman missing from me who looks a lot like you
and as I look into your eyes, she's coming into view
oh, you could make this man complete, you and I could go so far
but it seems my dreams have to compete with those things you really are
there's a woman missing from me who looks a lot like you

our beginnings were modest – you were a girl from the dorm
but to my eyes you were the goddess, barely wrapped in human form
and I was your Dionysus, or so I thought for many years
until my mid-life crisis clipped my horns and stripped my gears
there's a woman missing in me, she still looks like you

Bridge:

and we're in the garden again, dancing an ancient waltz
a woman and a man, cleaving to cleavage and finding faults
there's a woman missing from me who's even more like you

honey, those lines forming in your face are a beautiful sight to see
it's there I see the trace of a thousand smiles at me
and in your dark eyes shining an ever-loving light
the hopes and fears of all my years are met in thee tonight
there's a woman missing from me and I'm lost in you

you and I are a mystery wrapped up in a Moebius bow
what's you and what is me, I may never know
but you and I belong to one in whom is where
the focal point beyond is neither here nor there
there's a woman missing from me, she's even more like you

Draped Across My Mind (May 2015)

there's a dear and lovely ghost that occupies my mind
 while the wreckage of our love still smolders in my heart
 through the gates of Eden, I trace our bare outlines
 while a flaming sword tears me apart
 oh, Sister, what was our crime? except to be born in time
 that changes everything it can find
 so I can only keep moving on toward a still receding dawn
 with your shadow draped across my mind

I drift through the decay of Palladian arcades
 where a woman's face appears at every window and door
 the brown-eyed beauty whispers, "my love will never fade"
 while her raven-haired twin shouts, "nevermore!"
 oh, Sister, remember us as your beauty turns to dust
 although I hope the years have been kind
 and I'll be forever haunted by all I ever wanted
 with your shadow draped across my mind

Bridge:

hope grows faint, and faith drags and drops
 but this love – it just won't stop

I'm a pilgrim through perdition, where north amounts to south
 a man possessed, a man condemned
 oh, let my right hand wither, let my tongue cleave to my mouth
 should ever I forget you, Jerusalem
 oh Sister, I'm getting old and the nights grow so cold
 but don't worry, Darlin', I'll be fine
 it's not that I'm so tough, but I'll be just warm enough
 with your shadow draped across my mind

A Messenger of the Lord

(March 2016)

some people make something of themselves, a thing they set their eye upon
some find fame, some find wealth, some teach right from wrong
but I never wanted to be a thing, whatever gain it might afford
I only ever wanted to be a messenger of the Lord

not that it was my idea – it came to me as a call
I was just nineteen years old, sometime in the fall
guided by a gentle hand, with no thing toward
a stranger in a strange land, a messenger of the Lord

and so began my homelessness, cut off from the herd
quiet in the wilderness, waiting upon the word
I admit sometimes I was lonely, I admit sometimes I was bored
but I was content to be only a messenger of the Lord

yeah, I had all the answers to questions nobody asked
I was an ironic romancer, in love with a pointless task
some friends were kind to take me in, their virtue was my reward
but I remained as I'd always been, a messenger of the Lord

the dispossessed are God's possession everywhere on the earth
there's no justice, only confession, when you know what heaven is worth
and that's where I feel most at home, that's where my treasure is stored
wherever strangers are welcome as messengers of the Lord

some may say my life's a waste, some days I might agree
but there's no turning back once you've had a taste of salt from the endless sea
and every word that I've received has cut like a two-edged sword
and so I'll die as conceived, a messenger of the Lord

Time Is Like Wine

(September 2005)

time is like wine, time is like wine, time is like wine, in a way
 you start taking sips slowly over the lips, and a little goes a long, long way
 'cause when you're young under the sun, eternity kisses each day
 and the wine is sweet, like the girl you meet, and the games the two of you play
 time is like wine, time is like wine, time is like wine, in a way
 and the more you drink, the more you think, tomorrow is another day

each year goes past faster than last, you take time in bigger swallows
 it's less about fun than getting things done, time passes and youth follows
 the kids are growing, your age is showing, you wonder where it all goes
 and in the gathering haze of so many days, your mind begins to wallow
 time is like wine, time is like wine, time is like wine, in a way
 "yeah, that was five – no, twenty-five! – years ago now," you say

life's final stage is a golden age, if you're still hanging around
 the wine of time is still very fine, and you're really gulping it down
 and now you're sloshed, completely awash, in all the time you've found
 'til some days you recall almost nothing at all, and sorrows are nearly all drowned
 time is like wine, time is like wine, time is like wine, in a way
 and for every ill, there's another pill, to take each and every day

when the new morning dawns, the great beyond is where you will discover
 if your eternity is destined to be clear and fresh and sober
 or if your eternal is more infernal, to be forever hung-over
 the question will hinge on whether time's binge made you a better lover
 time is like wine, time is like wine, time is like wine, in a way
 forever is there in the time that you spare to drink of me today

Apocalyptic

My calling to ministry in the apocalyptic year of 1968, when American society broke out in war against itself. Ever since, I have had an apocalyptic spiritual sensibility. I mean apocalypse in the root sense of the Greek *apokalypsis*, a revelation that takes the veil away from apparent realities. The year 1968 unmasked the darker powers at work in American society, while it stripped me of the life I thought I was to live, and turned me toward a new one. An apocalyptic spirituality might be called mysticism, except that mysticism tends to focus on individual experience, while apocalyptic finds personal experience in relation to social forces and historical processes. It is a distinctly biblical spirituality, in that it senses God's purposes playing out in one's own life and in history. It is the end of the world in the ends of God. Apocalyptic perspectives are implicit in many of the songs in this collection. This section is devoted to songs where those perspectives are foregrounded.

"In the Flow" (2008): the title derives from basketball, which I played (poorly) for many years and still enjoy watching. At its best, basketball has flow, and a player can find him- or herself moving in that flow at moments, both responding to it and helping to create it. There's a spirituality to basketball, and I borrow its terminology here to describe my own spiritual experience at its better moments. The bridge borrows from Arthur Rimbaud's great poem, "The Drunken Boat" (a half-submerged vessel), which evokes a remarkable sense of flow. While the song's first three verses are more individual, the fourth verse uses imagery from the Book of Revelation to emphasize the collective dimension, when together we know "we're in the flow."

"All Fall Down" (2010) is immersed in images from the Book of Revelation, perhaps the most challenging book of the Bible, even for Christians. A number of times I suggest that "I see" these images. Apocalyptic literature is less about literal seeing than revelatory *insight* into the reality below or beyond appearances. In that sense, images from Revelation have helped clarify my vision of myself and the world around me. In the first verse, the figure of Christ standing at the door and knocking is also found in my first song, "Knock-Knock" (see the "Autobiography" section). Revelation describes the elders and heavenly creatures falling down before the throne of God, not in cringing fear but in sheer, ecstatic awe.

"Standing at the Foot of the Cross" (2015): whereas "All Fall Down" stays mostly in the visionary realm, this song is grounded at the foot of the cross, that place where personal transformation takes place in Christ and the new visions come. It's grounded in the historical death of Jesus of Nazareth, which has turned the ages decisively. You can see it when you stand at the foot of the cross. The Quaker founder George Fox equated standing in the light with standing at the cross. Again, the apocalyptic perspective is not just about personal salvation but engaged with interpersonal relations, larger social dynamics, and the whole creation. Whereas the earlier song is couched in a timeless "I see," this song is more autobiographical: "I've seen."

“An Epiphany Waiting to Happen” (2010-11) starts out as something like an homage to Bob Dylan’s “Queen Jane, Approximately,” from *Highway 61 Revisited*. But it turns out to be God patiently waiting for us. “Come/turn ‘round and see me,” when we’ve seen enough folly and futility. God is present all the time, but we have to look past ourselves, our hopes, and fears to encounter God. It’s an invitation to the whole human race, but we respond individually.

“Babble on” (2015) is similar to “In the Flow” and “All Fall Down” in its use of images from Revelation and the emphasis that Jerusalem and other visionary realities are present in the midst of our mundane existence. But we babble on and don’t notice. Repentance is the key to the city, but only you can discern what that means in your life. To repent is literally to “turn,” which connects to the preceding song as well.

“Disorient Express” (2009) utilizes one of the classic subjects of folk and country & western songs, the train. In this case, it’s not the train that’s moving but the world. As early Quakers counseled, apocalypse, passage into the eternal realm, comes through standing still. You need not go anywhere to find it. Standing still disorients us from the world’s agitation, but it also puts us in some kind of conflict with it. Ephesians 6 describes the armor required for that apocalyptic conflict, and repeatedly calls us to stand firm. Let the world do the moving, the babbling on. It will present us with enough conflicts without our needing to go and look for them. This is the “mystery-history train.”

In the Flow (August 2008)

the Holy Ghost is burning me down to the ground
she's lighting me up as a sign to the lost and the found
my poor soul is the candle she lights
I'm alive to the Lord and dead to rights
good God – I'm in the flow!

the Alpha and Omega has taken me by the hand
leading me to and by way of the Promised Land
he's teaching me each of his Beatitudes
he's reaching beneath my bad attitudes
good God – I'm in the flow!

Bridge:

the love of God flows over my head
am I alive, or am I dead?
a drunken boat, I flow where I'm led
as the prophet said

the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world
has broken the seventh seal and the scroll is unfurled
and the silence in heaven is deafening me
to Babylon's babble on HDTV
good God – I'm in the flow!

the heavenly Jerusalem is my forwarding address
it's a riddle in the middle of this great big mess
and the river of life flows through the center
none but the pure in heart can enter
good God – we're in the flow!

All Fall Down

(2005, January 2010)

I see the true and faithful witness, the first-born of the dead
 the Alpha and Omega, like John the Revelator said
 in heavenly realms of glory, among candlesticks he walks
 and in every heart of darkness, he stands at the door and knocks
 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders
 all fall down before the Lamb and the great I AM

Bridge:

a man of constant sorrows, well acquainted with grief
 he came at first as a healer, he comes again as a thief

I see the child of the Queen of Heaven, swept up to the throne
 standing on Mount Zion, calling his people home
 and in that heavenly city there's no sun, moon, or night
 the nations walk together in peace by his eternal light
 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders
 singing holy, holy – worthy is the Lamb

Bridge:

to those in the struggle, there's a reason and rhyme
 sooner than today, later than the end of time

I see the conquering Lion of Judah, the ever-slaughtered Lamb
 on a seven-sealed scroll, he holds all times in his hand
 the stone the builders reject, the truth that frees us
 that sweet Rose of Sharon, I'm talking 'bout our good friend Jesus!
 ecstasy! oh, ecstasy!
 we'll be forever falling down before the Lamb and the great I AM

Standing at the Foot of the Cross

(January 2015)

I've been accused and I've been blamed
 I've heard praises sung to my name
 but in the end, it's all the same – standing at the foot of the cross
 'cause my Lord, you suffered worse
 you bore every kind of curse
 so I got no grudges to nurse – standing at the foot of the cross
 Lord, you paid my wages
 you turned my pages
 I can see the turn of the ages – standing at the foot of the cross

I've seen my habits laid in the dust
 endless love and worn out lust
 a golden thread running through rust – standing at the foot of the cross
 I've seen pride and hostility
 turn to sweet humility
 way beyond my ability – standing at the foot of the cross
 they nailed you for being so free
 but Lord, you were there for me
 so here I am, where could I be, but standing at the foot of the cross?

Bridge:

there's one who knows your pain
 who looks upon your shame
 and loves you all the same – come to the foot of the cross

I hear the constant cry for more
 like an angry open sore
 festering up into war – standing at the foot of the cross
 I see death in the desert sands
 to meet consumer demands
 I see Pilate washing his hands – I'm standing at the foot of the cross
 I see the ruin of great nations
 I hear the groaning of creation
 but there's a glimmer of salvation – meet me at the foot of the cross

An Epiphany Waiting to Happen (December 2010 – April 2011)

when everything you value comes with a dollar sign
and you find your soul in brackets or quotation marks
when your life in all its range turns to equivalence and exchange
and those unanswered questions circle you like sharks
when that swarm of electrons is buzzing 'round your head
and slavetothsystem.borg is your career
some will sit around and boast, but resistance is futile for most
locked up in a cell you hold up to your ear
well, you just might come 'round sometime and see me, my friend
turn 'round and see me

when the one you love has traded you in for an upgrade
and you've got tire-tracks up your back from bottom to top
when the world and all that it seems is coming apart at the seams
and the question arises, oh, where will it stop?
before the tragedy of whatever that was you meant to be
gives way at last to centrifugal farce
and the balance finally tips on your blithering apocalypse
and your life is a sentence not even you can parse
well, you just might come 'round sometime and see me, my friend
turn 'round and see me

I'm here, right here! just behind your worst fear
turn 'round and see me!
I'm here, right here! – right behind you in that mirror
turn 'round and see me!

Babble on
(May-June 2015)

Jerusalem stands like a beautiful bride, like a city set on a hill
with a slaughtered Lamb by her side, like a light that's shining still
her streets are gold, clear as glass, the sound of weeping is gone
this strange thing has come to pass –
 while they babble and babble on in Babylon

there's no temple, no church, no steeple, 'cause the Lord and the Lamb suffice
there's healing for all the people, in the leaves from the tree of life
as John the Revelator told us, the gates are open, the lights are on
but no one seems to notice –
 while they babble and babble on in Babylon

Jerusalem's a perfect sphere, with love flowing from the center
twelve gates are open here, but greed just can't seem to enter
you may be here a while, before it begins to dawn
you're standing there with a quiet smile –
 while they babble and babble on in Babylon

a river flows from under the throne, and it waters the tree of life
brother, this could be your home, you could be sleeping here tonight
you don't have to pay no rent, just meditate and act upon
what's meant by the word *repent*

Disorient Express
(September-October 2009)

the disorient express is known by its effects
it stops at every station of life
for a destination beyond this valley of despond
and that endless plain of hatred and strife
ideologies and party lines, like the posts of power lines
fly by like so many non-events
while media sensations, like the rise and fall of nations
chatter along like a long picket fence
it's hard to explain, but this mystery train
is going nowhere

this utopian line moves in and out of time
its center is at every point
of a universe so vast, the future and the past
are present in the marrow and the joint
there's a sharp, two-edged sword in the hand of the Lord
and it cuts as the hand discerns
between the mind's hidden art and the secrets of the heart
and the heart that's true also burns
and the truth that remains, like this mystery train
is standing still

the rails are two, blest be the ties that bind
this train runs through body and mind
and this train is bound where seekers may be found
and the meek inherit the earth
where the hungry may be filled and witnesses killed
for they all know what heaven is worth
'cause the ends are the means, or they don't mean beans
and death is just another way of birth
the world cannot contain this mystery-history train
it's going nowhere

Social

Apocalyptic spirituality is socially engaged through its sense of God's purposes working out in history. As Martin Luther King put it, "the arc of the universe bends toward justice." So I've written a number of songs over the years that engage with social issues, informed by perspectives from the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, Paul, and some Marxist thinkers. Each of these sources can help us move beyond the middle-class moorings of culture-war bickering that have stalemated social issues and political struggles in America since 1968.

"The Parlor of No Return" (2013): speaking of middle-class culture wars, this song looks for a way out of the Christian-humanist stalemate. The first song may be a bit crueler toward church-folk than I would prefer, but that's the way it came to me. In any case, in the humanists in the second verse come out no better when they use Christians as their rhetorical foil. You may notice an echo from John Lennon's "Working-Class Hero" at the end.

"Frigidaire" (1997) came to me at the end of a summer when I had spent too much time cowering in air-conditioned comfort. I wondered, what goes on in a refrigerator when the door is closed? I imagined it as something like our multicultural world today, where we're "all on the same menu." But our multicultural conversation takes place mainly among middle-class, college-educated folk. It's "cool." We keep talking among ourselves because subliminally, we're "afraid to go out there," where it's hot and the uncool people live and die. So we banter on, suspended between "apocalypse and slow decay." ("Frigidaire" was a brand-name of refrigerators when I was growing up.)

"As Common as Dirt" (2018) came to me at the end of another hot summer, where instead of air conditioning, I kept my apartment windows open and took my clothes off to stay comfortable. It gave me a whole new perspective. Nakedness keeps you in touch with your commonness with the rest of humanity and the earth itself. I reread the story of the garden of Eden with new eyes. We clothe ourselves with an endless variety of verbal fig-leaves that make us forget our common nature and destiny.

"Subjunctivitis (Woulda-Coulda-Shoulda)" (2010): our verbal fig-leaves often function in the subjunctive mood. If we look again at the story of Eden, the serpent introduces the subjunctive in his insinuation that if the woman and man ate of the tree of knowledge, they would become like God. That mood took over from there. The shame and blame of the excuses Adam and Eve offer God are implicitly subjunctive (i.e., "if you hadn't created that woman, or that serpent, I wouldn't be in this mess"). This song explores that virtual world always a step removed from reality, in the suburbs of the heavenly city. Attention to grammar can reveal a lot!

"Let the Captives Go Free" (2014): in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James Cone makes the connection between the lynching of Jesus and the crucifixion of African American men in a racist American society. This song looks at mass incarceration and the war on drugs as a systemic form of the same phenomenon. In 1659, thousands of

Friends were thrown in prison in England due to government fears of insurrection. George Fox commented that Quakers were being persecuted because “the hidden man in the heart” was still imprisoned within their persecutors. The same holds true today.

“Noah’s Anarchy (A Fable for the Nineties)” (1995): the 19th-century Quaker primitive artist Edward Hicks is known for his many paintings of “The Peaceable Kingdom.” He understood the animals in Isaiah’s vision as representing different human personalities. He also painted at least once the scene of animals entering Noah’s ark. This song imagines the animals as different human neuroses and personality types, all balking for different reasons at boarding the ark. It’s a fable for the 1990s, in that I watched Americans fracture into multiplying cultural styles and personal preferences as the economy continued to bubble – and as various social and environmental crises continued to deepen. This is my longest song. It was inspired in part by Bob Dylan’s long song, “Desolation Row,” again from *Highway 61 Revisited*.

“The Washington Zoo” (2002) reprises the fabulous “Noah’s Anarchy” for a new decade, this time as a zoo. With George W. Bush as “the jungle’s king,” all the imagery fell into place from there on down. With the serpentine “long green” of lobbies and PACs taking over, our earnest little letters to Washington felt increasingly futile.

“The Wreck of the Economy” (2005) takes on another classic folksong subject, shipwrecks. The satirical newspaper, *The Onion*, once called the Titanic a “giant metaphor,” and this song takes it all the way down. I wrote it well before the big financial meltdown of 2008, but it didn’t take an economist to see what was coming. Many believe that 2008 was just the initial shock in a larger collapse. The number 2023 came to me in a waking dream while this song was in process. I’m not one to make such predictions, but I decided to include it at the end, for what it’s worth.

“Higher Ground” (2007) reworks a Christian revival classic, to different purposes. It takes personal salvation, in its various religious and secular iterations, as the “besetting sin” of a society that can no longer find or even imagine its common ground. The opening lines ask whether the song is about climate change or the national debt. It seems to be about both, and the spiritual malaise that lurks below them.

“All along the Strip Mall” (2012) is a rewrite of Bob Dylan’s “All along the Watchtower” (1967) for different times. As the Federal Reserve’s free money policy helped revive Wall Street with remarkable speed, the rest of the economy sputtered and struggled. I had been living in the rust-belt town of Richmond, Indiana for part of that time. Many businesses closed and have not re-opened or been replaced a decade after the crisis. I have found Dylan’s mid-sixties tableau style of song-writing, with different voices speaking from different positions within a static scene, apt for exploring social dynamics and inter-relationships.

“Mall Story” (1990): speaking of shopping malls, this is an earlier song, inspired by watching how TV ads use a brief romantic storyline or some other warm-fuzzy motif to sell a product. The song explores “the converging credit lines of love.”

“Grandma Was a Klingon” (1999): speaking of romance, I’ve always appreciated how science fiction uses alternate worlds to explore problems on this planet. One day I was rubbing my forehead and musing on my prominent supra-orbital ridge. I wondered, “Could I be part Klingon?” This country & western talking song unfolded from there, exploring the issues of youthful alienation and the healing wonders of inter-galactic love.

“The Gun” (2018) is immersed in the ever-expanding crisis of gun violence. The gun “has a logic, but no reason.” But its logic overwhelms human reason.

“These United States of Grace” (2017) closes this section on a hopeful note. It’s about the states of grace we recognize in a wide variety of people, with their different backgrounds and beliefs. This is the binding force of society, more than human laws or their enforcement. This perspective partakes of a form of anarchism. It’s the experience and conviction that the Spirit is working among us in more and better ways than we can ever imagine or plan. This is a theme I explore from a different angle in another song, “Jesus Anarchist,” in the “Divine” section of this collection.

The Parlor of No Return (November 2013)

I went to the church, the people were nice
 the body of Christ came by the slice
 his precious blood was poured out over ice
 we met for lunch in a member's home
 we all had the same color chromosomes
 and that sweet churchianity chilled me to the bone
 the way we talked, Jesus was white
 and he preached the gospel of being polite
 I was stuck in the parlor of no return

I escaped to the meeting of the humanists
 and over and over we did insist
 that we were not one bit like those dumb Christianists
 we met in a well-furnished home for tea
 it seemed like we all had advanced degrees
 and that political correctness made me weak in the knees
 the difference we claimed was hard to discern
 it was mostly more good manners to learn
 I was still in the parlor of no return

Bridge:

we're the people of moderate means
 the means to an end to what it means
 to come to an end, do you know what I mean?

is there a mystification so deep and vast
 as the discreet charm of the middle class?
 that passes the time 'til time is past
 but Jonah changed his tune inside the whale
 and in the street Lazarus tells a different tale
 of a pearl of great price that's still not for sale
 but this one great horizontal plain
 is like being in Kansas all over again
 there's no place like home in the parlor of no return
 so equal, entitled, classless, and free
 we're peasants as far as the eye can see
 in the one great parlor of no return

Frigidaire (September 1997)

Calvin the cauliflower, he prophesied and he warned
and we all listened to him, I guess it made us feel warm
he quoted from *The Joy of Cooking* and he called us to repentance
but when he mentioned judgment day, he was stopped in mid-sentence
when suddenly came a blinding light and a warm blast of air
and a mighty hand took Calvin away, and left us all here in the Frigidaire

Chico the chimichonga was normally a bold Tex-Mex
but he shivered in the dark and said, which one of us will be next?
and Renee the French rosé suddenly turned stone sober
she wondered aloud, is this what it means to be left over?
Jesus said, one will be taken and the other left in that day
you can go one way or the other, apocalypse or slow decay

Chan the Chinese take-out said, I've just about given up hope
I love Gloria the Chilean grape, but it's clear we cantaloupe
free trade brought us together here on the bottom shelf
now she's going cheap and I'm going bad, I'm so ashamed of myself
we're living in a global village, we're all on the same menu
the world's got so much smaller now, and darker and colder too

Bridge:

we come from many cultures
but we're together here as one
except for those fuzzy tomatoes
now that's a culture we all shun

Pietro the pasta alla pesto, he claimed to come from Roma
and when he flipped his lid -- phew! -- we all took on his aroma
man, get yourself some boundaries! we shouted with one accord
you're packing enough garlic to start the next world war
and on and on and on it goes, the banter and the despair
the more were different the more were the same, afraid to go out there
Frigidaire

As Common as Dirt (September 2018)

“Madam I’m Adam” he said to Eve in an innocent palindrome
a naked man can be believed when he’s standing in his garden home
now Adam’s just a proper name for dirt, but that’s no reason for shame
When you’re not wearing pants or even a shirt, it’s a perfectly suitable name
and innocent Eve could never deceive, wearing neither a blouse nor a skirt
she had no cards hidden up her sleeve, they were both as common as dirt
ashes to ashes and dirt to dirt
can you tell me the worth of the earth?

so what became of that primeval blessing, to fall to the state we’re in?
it surely has more to do with dressing than all of our subsequent sin
they jumped in the bushes to cover their tushes the moment they heard God call
and so began the fig-leaf excuses when Adam blamed Eve for it all
once we gained a taste for knowledge, we learned how to tailor our words
and once we found our way to college, we forgot we’re as common as dirt
ashes to ashes and dirt to dirt
can you tell me the worth of the earth?

we take from the soil food and oil, and anything else lying around
and squeeze the value from human toil, with no thought for our common ground
with no idea of our sacred trust, or tender thought for our home
blind rage and commodity lust have mutated our chromosomes
this song I’m singing I’m singing to you, you may think that I’m mistaken
but you will find what I’m singing is true when you listen again naked

Subjunctivitis
(Woulda-Coulda-Shoulda)
 (July-August 2010)

I wouldn't do what those people do
 and they shouldn't do it either
 the more those people do what they do
 the more I feel this fever
 the Good Lord tells me not to judge
 the truth is not propositional
 but that doesn't budge the sweetest grudge
 that makes the human condition conditional
 woulda-coulda-shoulda

subjunctivitis is hypothetical
 it bites the mind that feeds it
 subjunctivitis is hypocritical
 you indulge it, then you need it

now, if my parents had got it right
 I'd be so much more sane
 the fruit that tastes so sweet to bite
 turns the stomach to shame and blame
 well, Adam blamed it on that woman God gave
 and Eve blamed that snake in the tree
 playing woulda-coulda-shoulda to the grave
 in a fabricated world of ought-to-be
 woulda-coulda-shoulda

the truth is prepositional
 it's in us and for us for ever
 but this mood is suppositional
 it's no one, it's nowhere, it's never

what moves across my TV screen
 is an endless projection of shadows
 the truth lies trampled somewhere between
 Bill O'Reilly and Rachel Maddow
 but in that heavenly city
 there goes a timeless proverb:
 those who sow the subjunctive
 shall reap eternal suburbs
 woulda-coulda-shoulda

Let the Captives Go Free (October 2014)

two million men behind cold steel bars
 let the captives go free
 they might as well be living on Mars
 let the captives go free
 some are captives of the war on drugs
 some of the new Jim Crow
 what a nation can't face about class and race
 it forces into the shadows

forced confessions and planted evidence
 let the captives go free
 and another man goes to live at government expense
 let the captives go free
 someone's gotta pay, it might as well be him
 lock 'em up and throw away the key
 I guess it's better that justice be satisfied
 than let an innocent man go free

Bridge:

standing at the foot of the cross
 I can see that lynching tree
 where the guilty offer up another sacrifice
 for the sins they can't bear to see

among us stands one we don't know
 let the captive go free
 fear and dread keep him locked in the shadow
 let the captive go free
 how many more men and women, O Lord,
 will we lock up where we can't see?
 till the prisoner within comes again
 and we let the captives go free

Noah's Anarchy
(A Fable for the Nineties)
 (1995)

the earth was filled with violence, all flesh lived in vain
 God's hand dealt a royal flush, and soon it began to rain
 now just one human family was in on this awful plan
 in the dark they built an ark, a boat of gigantic span
 God said to Noah, "if you build it, they will come"
 and two by two they came, but these animals weren't dumb...

Mr. and Mrs. Chihuahua, they shook from head to tail
 all stricken with terror, for they had never sailed
 they said, "please, Mr. Noah, can you guarantee this boat
 has never sunk or capsized, or been treated with creosote?"
 Noah scratched his head and said, "won't please just come on board?
 you see, I've never sailed either, we'll just have to trust the Lord"

Mr. and Mrs. Ostrich were up to their tail-feathers in denial
 they said, "there's really no problem, it just rains hard once in a while
 and all this talk of last days and God's mighty hand
 really sounds pretty silly now our heads are full of sand"
 their Silicon Valley brain implants jiggled as they walked
 but they packed five hundred gigabytes of baloney as they talked
 oh, Lord -- looks like stormy weather
 hey, Noah -- better get your ship together

Mr. and Mrs. Giraffe looked down from their lofty height
 at the motley crew assembling and said, "this is not our plight
 we reserved a master cabin, anyone know where it might be?
 and could you take these bags for a small gratuity?"
 and that was just the beginning of their gratuitous remarks
 as they lugged their luggage to and fro, deciding not to embark

Mr. and Mrs. Earthworm cringed at crawling on board
 everyone looked so important and they felt so inferior
 they said, "we can't go up there, who cares about little old us?
 not a patriarch like Noah, maybe we can take a bus"
 well, they cloyed and resented till they were all in a muddle
 and the rain kept on coming down till they drowned in a tiny puddle
 oh, Lord -- looks like stormy weather
 hey, Noah -- better get your ship together

Mr. and Mrs. Grizzly Bear arrived all in a rage
 they took one look at Noah's Ark and called it Noah's Cage
 they said, "you can walk up there, you dim-wit husbands and wives

but get it through your furry skulls, he'll never take us alive!"
Mr. and Mrs. Sheep said they thought that Noah was divinely led
that remark was so unbearable they bit off both their heads

Mr. and Mrs. Wood Tick were eaten up with greed
with a ravenous compassion for anything that bleeds
they said, "we'll go if you go, and we'll stay if you all stay
but let's all stick together, it's friendlier that way
but one thing's got to go, those cursed little fleas
they'll make itch and scratch to death, and they spread so much disease"
oh, Lord -- looks like stormy weather
hey, Noah -- better get your ship together

Mr. and Mrs. Hyena let out a cynical laugh
they thought the whole scene was hilariously daft
they said, "no way in hell would we be so uncool
as to climb on board that funky ship of fools"
they quoted some Friedrich Nietzsche and told some Noah jokes
while they sipped their cappuccinos and finished a pack of smokes

finally, Mr. and Mrs. Serpent arrived and casually curled
they told the crowd, "hey, take your time, it's not like it's the end of the world
with so many unanswered questions, we must not be abrupt
yeah, the forty-day forecast calls for rain, but the Dow-Jones Average is up!
and do you really want to be all in the same boat?
no, you don't really want to be all in the same boat"

The Washington Zoo (May 2002)

have you ever wondered whether the letters that you wrote
ever went to the ones you sent to office with your vote?
Well, once inside the great divide of the Beltway's concrete moat
they all wanna become the fauna of the Washington Zoo

up on a hill, two houses filled with apes in exaltation
from this and that habitat all across the nation
swing on vines of party lines and call it legislation
oh, there oughta be a law in Washington Zoo

what's long and green and twice as mean as a junk-bond billionaire?
it's free for all to see in the reptile pavilion there
it swallows whole any soul that wanders to its lair
but still deeper lurks the keeper of the Washington Zoo

next in sight is a house that's white where all the big cats play
and among the pillars secret killers stalk the easy prey
while in the wings the jungle's king sleeps the day away
but he's the best that money gets in the Washington Zoo

more creatures are featured in the military-industrial complex
all mutations and variations on Tyranosaurus Rex
and there's no telling what those boys down in the lab will come up with next
but there's no pain without gain in the Washington Zoo

so stand in wonder of what the plunder of public funds can do
and be amused or feel abused as the many feed the few
what passes for representation depends on your point of view
in the managed menagerie known as the Washington Zoo
and keep those letters coming to the Washington Zoo

The Wreck of the Economy

(February 2005)

the good ship Economy, big as the world
 sailing so majestically, all her flags unfurled
 a gale of goods and services billowing her sales
 and captains of industry standing at the rails
 moonlight shining bright, but fog upon the sea
 and looming up in the night, cold reality
 badaboom-badabing, Economy

now this thing called reality, we nearly all got wrong
 we only knew commodities, we'd been on board so long
 oh, the crash came sharp and sudden, we wondered what it was
 some turned sad and sullen, some felt quite a buzz
 when she listed to port, we all filled with fright
 and thinking to save ourselves, we shifted to the right
 badaboom-badabing, Economy

the share-holding passengers all blamed the working crew
 but none of them could agree what the hell to do
 while down on the lower decks the wretched and the poor
 those below the waterline, first to know the score
 up on the bridge the President, hand on the helm
 flanked by the G8, looking overwhelmed
 badaboom-badabing, Economy

Bridge:
 whirlpool, whirlpool

“well, I just can't decide,” said the ghost of Karl Marx
 “if this is epic tragedy or only grand farce.”
 but the ghost of Adam Smith just waved a hidden hand
 still confident in the myth of supply and demand
 Liberty the figurehead cried “full speed ahead!”
 “this is what it means,” she said, “better dead than red – or green.”
 badaboom-badabing, Economy

we tried all arrangements of the main deck chairs
 some in small circles, for those who wished to share
 but most sat facing forward, to watch what seemed
 like a disaster movie on a giant screen
 and the band played on so sweetly, as we sank into the sea
 ‘Nearer My God to Thee’ in 2023

Higher Ground (April 2007)

the waters are rising, I wonder why
is it national debt or that hole in the sky?
but one thing's for sure, the broad, fruited plain
is quickly becoming a bounding main
well say what you will about human rights
all power is theirs who command the heights
and the prayer of millions, all milling around
is "Lord, plant my feet on higher ground!"

now health care goes boom as the nation goes bust
the stock market zooms as factories rust
the media feed our commodity lust
and the dollar bill smirks, "In God We Trust"
the poor tread water as common sense teaches
preyed on by sharks and all manner of leeches
while middle-class folks stand by and frown
praying, "Lord, plant my feet on higher ground!"

Katrina was just a toe in the water
wait til it gets a little bit hotter
when some die of flood while some die of drought
and Washington keeps on messing about
and the President swears with one hand in the till
while millionaires sit up on Capital Hill
and the electorate votes yet one more round
of "Lord, plant my feet on higher ground!"

some say the bell rings from the church steeple
to sell opiates to desperate people
but the drug that works on the ninety-nine sheep
just won't seem to put that last one to sleep
'cause you cannot cheat that one honest soul
so ask not for whom that bell sweetly tolls
the Son of Man came for the lost and the found
to plant all our feet on common ground

All Along the Strip-Mall

(August - October 2012)

all along the strip-mall the padlocks told the tale
 and papered-over store windows said "not too big to fail"
 when you've gone clear underwater, it 'aint no use to bail
 padlocks told the tale
 two were minding their stores, one was taken and the other left
 so this must be the Rapture, said the watchman under his breath
 but which one should we hope for, they both look like death
 the deal's gone down, the day is done

this used to be a cornfield, now it's covered with tar and rock
 the boy who grew up in that farmhouse got himself blown up in Iraq
 but you know, it's all good – good for the petroleum stocks
 covered with tar and rock
 but the truth has its own economy, simple as a promised kept
 and the shortest verse in Scripture is, "Jesus wept"
 and the only recovery we're gonna see comes in twelve steps
 the deal's gone down, the day is done

Bridge:

forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
 'cause in a sea of debt, the wet should know better than to judge

like an aging porn star, you could say we're over-built
 observed an investment banker, with no admission of guilt
 and like his Armani suit, he was smooth as silk
 yeah, you could say we're over-built
 deals beyond all reason, schemes beyond belief
 the Lord said, "I'm coming – coming like a thief"
 and the only bargain we're gonna strike is the third stage of grief
 the deal's gone down, the day is done

the tragedy of an empire's vainglorious rise and fall
 is told here in the farce of a honky-tonk shopping mall
 where the fantasy of desire makes no tall tale too tall
 rise and fall
 in this brave, new millennium, we're freed from every creed
 only to find ourselves the victims of every kind of greed
 where the only harvest we're gonna reap is corruptible seed
 the deal's gone down, the day is done

Mall Story (1990)

I saw her at the mall just the other day
so innocent and sweet – had she lost her way?
but as I followed her around an hour or two
I discovered a heart that beats so true
at the department store she bought some French perfume
with just one splash she enchanted the whole room
then she bought a thing or two in lingerie
it was then I felt my heart slip away
as she bought these things that dreams are made of
I asked my lonely heart, could this be love?
no you can't buy love, but if you love to buy
fall in love with the one who buys the things you love
'cause credit cards, not distant stars, reveal the secrets of our hearts
in the converging credit lines of love

at the candy shop she bought some chocolate --
the very brand my mother always bought
at the shoe store, she almost let me down
but she bought those pink pumps instead of brown
at the jewelry store, I finally made my move
I caught her eye but first she was aloof
then she fumbled with her purse and something dropped
and to her waiting feet I nimbly hopped
as I lifted up that Gold-Card Visa
I asked, could this be yours...Lisa?
No you can't buy love, but if you love to buy
fall in love with the one who buys the things you love
and this I guarantee, that each commodity will be touched with the magic of love

Grandma Was a Klingon (January 1999)

when I was a boy, I asked my Dad, "where did I come from?
I'm not talking about birds and bees, I'm talking about aliens
with my bumpy head and hairline, and my voice so deep for my age
could I be part Klingon, or am I just going through a stage?"
Dad looked up at me and said, "I knew this day would come
some kids have to grow up fast, that's just the way it is, my son
so let me tell you the story that I have long waited
to explain to you the reason why you feel so alienated
yeah, your Grandma was a Klingon, and a saint if you ask me
she and your Grand-Dad had a love this planet rarely sees
people said it was perverse, but they didn't seem to mind it
'cause she and Grand-Dad understood that love is where you find it
Grandma was a Klingon, you might as well know it now
that explains that bony place on your head, just above the brow

now, intergalactic marriage was frowned on in Grand-Dad's younger days
folks said to him, "can't you at least keep it in the Milky Way?"
but your Grand-Dad saw the universe as an endless field of play
his Mama cried when they beamed him up and the Enterprise sailed that day
well, Grand-Dad sowed his wild oats, he had a girl in every port
but when he met your Grandma, he retired from the sport
they met one day on the captain's deck, introduced by Scotty
he liked her angry Klingon eyes and she scanned his human body
next thing you know they tied the knot one day after work
in a simple ceremony performed by Captain Kirk
then they had so many children they had a team of baby-sitters
yeah, I was one of seven – that that was just the first litter
Grandma was a Klingon, you might as well know it now
that explains that bony place on your head, just above the brow

they came and settled here on earth, but she had trouble with his folks
trouble with neighbors, trouble at work, and those damn Klingon jokes
and when I had trouble at school she'd shout and her eyes would flash --
"there's good humans and bad humans, and then there's just plain Earth trash!"
she'd say, "remember Sodom and Gomorrah, and those three aliens?
if they understood that story here we'd all be best of friends
but as it is, the only thing between them from certain doom
is that God must know, like I do, they're only human"
Grandma was a Klingon, you might as well know it now
that explains that bony place on your head, just above the brow

so remember what your Grandma said whenever she took off her hat
she'd look people in the eye and say, "What are you looking at?"
so hold your head up and say it loud, in a voice deep and muddy
I'm one-quarter Klingon and proud – you got a problem with that, buddy?

The Gun

(June 2018)

the gun wants a hand to pick it up
the gun wants an eye to aim it
it wants a finger to pull the trigger
it has a logic but no reason
oh, woe! it's a gun

the hand is fidgety and idle
the eye has a tendency to roam
the finger suffers a terrible itch
the mind can always find a reason
oh, woe! he's got a gun

ingenious minds design the gun
and a factory will produce it
plenty of stores will sell the gun
and consumers will always buy
oh, woe! so many guns

now there's so many guns just lying around
and so many hands to reach them
and so many people to get in the wa
of any reason you choose
oh, woe! the earth is filled with violence

but the mind that made the human mind
reveals a different reason
and the one who created the many
never divides

These United States of Grace (April 2017)

there are people everywhere
who give themselves to loving care
they come from every faith and place and race
there are those of us who dare
pledge allegiance free and fair
to these united states of grace

we owe nothing but our love
to authorities who stand above
and order us to march in line and place
the Spirit blows and so we go
in patterns even we don't know
in these united states of grace

we're dead to power's charms
we answer not its call to arms
we seek the grace in every human face
and together, the shape we're in
reveals the only sovereign
of these united states of grace

so find the grace in a stranger
on the street or in a manger
the point is not to grasp but to embrace
so lend a hand and make a friend
there's nothing here to defend
in these united states of grace

our differences will not divide
as long as we don't run and hide
but let our lives entwine and interlace
and the fabric of society
is stitched again quietly
by these united states of grace

Quaker

The Religious Society of Friends, my religious home, has provided a lot of good material for my songwriting over the years. Fortunately, Quakers enjoy laughing at any good-natured poke at themselves. It's a sign of spiritual health, I think. Perhaps it offers relief from the strain of so much self-improvement, so many committee meetings, and struggles to mend the world's hurts. I've included four in this collection.

"Eighty-Weighty Friend" was written in 1993, around the time of a country & western hit by Billy Ray Cyrus, "Achy-Breaky Heart." I wrote and performed the song for the eightieth birthday of my friend Barbara Graves, valiant Friend, a coordinator of Quaker relief work in Germany for the American Friends Service Committee after World War II, and matriarch of the Strawberry Creek Friends Meeting in Berkeley, California. I was pastor of the Berkeley Friends Church at the time. She was to be celebrated by the AFSC and local Friends and she asked me to write something that would keep things from getting too "reverential." I used the song as an opportunity to reflect on the role of eldership in the Religious Society of Friends, which is a gerontocracy of sorts. With such radical reliance upon the Spirit's guidance, Friends rely on elders with the life experience to recognize the many ways we can deceive ourselves. Younger Friends may have this gift, and older Friends may still be foolish, but age and experience usually offer useful perspective.

"Yonder Stands the Quaker" was written in 1997 while I was serving as a Friend in Residence at the Woodbrooke Quaker study center in Birmingham England. It looks at Friends from an outside perspective, with a mixture of admiration and amusement. That's probably me profiled in the first verse.

"Pendle Hill Revisited" was written in 1998 during one of my stints at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study center near Philadelphia. The title was inspired by Evelyn Waugh's novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, in which the main character is enchanted by an English noble family and their great house. I have always been enchanted by Pendle Hill and its community, which has kept me coming back. The main character in the song is named Bill, only because it rhymes with Hill. The song's title and chord structure are taken from Bob Dylan's "Highway 61 Revisited." In my song, Bill keeps finding a way to stay on or return to Pendle Hill. The world passes away, and even Bill passes away, but as in the Eagles' "Hotel California," "you can check out, but you can never leave."

"The Blue Bonnet Inn" (2013) was performed to a raucous crowd during Pendle Hill's last Log Night in June 2014. It imagines what a Quaker gentlemen's club might be like. It is probably the first song of its kind. In any case, everything in the song from lap-dancing elders to lounging overseers seems to suggest squalid sensuality but ends up with prim spirituality. Musical inspiration for the song was taken from Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man," also from *Highway 61 Revisited*. But while Dylan's song was probably inspired by his experiences at Andy Warhol's Factory, mine is set in the Quaker demimonde.

“That of Odd in Everyone” (2014) is not explicitly about Quakers, but it plays with the familiar Quaker conviction that there is “that of God in everyone.” The uniqueness of a human personality participates in the oneness of God. “Oddliness and godliness can intertwine.” As we become more ourselves, less driven by emulation and competition, we become more like God, more filled with compassion for others. More like Jesus, “a real oddity.”

Eighty-Weighty Friend
Doug Gwyn, 1993

the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers,
question authority of every sort
they've even been known to second-guess their Maker
and protests and sit-ins are considered a sport
they don't care if you're dipped or if you're sprinkled
you can talk to them till you're blue in the face
but sometimes they'll listen to white hair and wrinkles
maybe it makes them think of the Ancient of Days

Chorus:

no, you don't have to be eighty, friend
to be considered a weighty Friend
but it helps, Lord knows it does

like a fine, aged cheese, all covered with mold
Friends get a whiff of something they call spiritual
when they come to know a well-seasoned soul
time is the next best cure in the absence of miracles
so if you're looking for a spiritual advisor
better look for a head with at least a few gray hairs
for the time-tested combination of older and wiser
look for a face that shows a little wear and tear

Chorus

they say that a thousand years are only an instant
in the infinite, eternal mind of God
they also say that the wisdom of the ages
is mostly buried six feet under the sod
so listen up good and take whole lot of notes
when you see an elder coming your way
'cause in this gerontocracy we call the Quakers
you may have to pass for wise someday

Chorus

Yonder Stands the Quaker
Doug Gwyn, March 1997

yonder stands the Quaker
the one with peace buttons on his coat
looking slightly confused
like he just stepped off some kind of boat
or like God promised to meet him there
quite some time ago
and he wonders whether God is dead
or only hopelessly slow
yonder stands the Quaker
quaint as a box of Quaker Oats

yonder stands the Quaker
the one with the placard in her hands
in the rush hour crowd
looking for a place to make a stand
she's standing for peace and justice
she's standing with the oppressed
a standing example to the upstanding
and a standing joke to the rest
yonder stands the Quaker
big as life and twice as right

yonder stand those Quakers
on the far side of the back of beyond
misfit mystics, a boil on the bum of Babylon
they're too few to make much difference
too peaceful to break many laws
an endangered species of spiritual life
practiced in the art of lost cause
yonder stand those Quakers
singing "We Shall Overcome"
yonder stand those Quakers
God help those poor fools carry on

Pendle Hill Revisited Doug Gwyn, May 1998

Bill woke up and said to his wife, honey, I've got to change my life
where can I find that higher path, with courses that don't require math?
his wife said, let me think for a minute, Bill
one thing will help (if anything will), try spending a term at Pendle Hill

Bill enrolled and had the time of his life, he finally got round to calling his wife
he said, my dear, I've found myself, it's drying now on the pottery shelf
his wife said, I'm so glad for you, Bill
come home for Christmas and review your will, then spend another term at Pendle Hill

next thing he knew, the year was up, joy overflowed sweet William's cup
he said, I've got to stay somehow, I'm on a roll, I can't stop now
his consultant said, there is a way, Bill
there's an internship here you could fill, and spend next year at Pendle Hill

the next year was almost as good, though Bill still could not pray too good
and underneath the rosy glow, he wondered, where does the time go?
a still, small voice said, hey there, Bill
full-time work is a bitter pill, but it's a way to stay at Pendle Hill

next thing you know, Bill joined the staff, he still found time to weep and laugh
while serving fifteen years to life, with conjugal visits from his wife
till a sheltered workshop was found for old Bill
then twice a year you could see him still, on the General Board of Pendle Hill

Bill's last years were in managed care, still trying to learn centering prayer
till death took Bill out on a date, and he met St. Peter at the pearly gates
St. Peter said, should I let you in, Bill?
Bill said, hell, do what you will, I'd rather be at Pendle Hill
and on moonless nights you'll find him still, along the path at Pendle Hill

**The Blue Bonnet Inn
(A Quaker Gentlemen's Club)
Doug Gwyn, December 2013**

down a lonesome highway, on a quiet stretch of road
there's a place that welcomes strangers who pull a heavy load
where they raise your desire to a plane so much higher
with a query that goes, what does truth require?
and if you're looking for sin, you'll get a patronizing grin
at the Blue Bonnet Inn

you walk in the door and sit down at the bar
and sip some herbal tea from a Mason jar
then up steps an elder from a very select few
and she sits in your lap and labors with you
up close and in your face, she'll put you back in your place
at the Blue Bonnet Inn

you walk on down the hall to a room that's in the round
with a sign on the door that says, Overseers Lounge
it's specially designed for those who like to watch
well I mean, of course, over the flock
and to those who surrender, they're so gentle and tender
at the Blue Bonnet Inn

Bridge:

it's a beacon for the seeker and every kind of tweaker
looking for something he can't get at home
and if you live too far away, there's an easy rate you can pay
for Advices and Queries read to you over the phone

then you stagger on down to the process booth
for groups that grope together after the truth
there's sighing and moaning, but never any violence
and by and large, they carry on in silence
no one works up a lather 'cause they're totally gathered
at the Blue Bonnet Inn

as the end of your visit begins to draw near
you request a committee to get just a little more clear
and like a lamb on a spit, they hold you in the light
and keep you turning you 'til you come 'round right
'cause a friend in need is a Friend indeed
at the Blue Bonnet Inn

That of Odd in Every One Doug Gwyn, April 2014

there's something odd about every one
it goes with being God's daughter or son
it's there in saints, outliers and outlaws
it's in what's perfect, it's in what's broken
inarticulate or well spoken
it's where your genius meets your tragic flaw
you may suffer from being odd
but it's your one and only way to God
there's that of odd in every one I meet

is it a curse or is it salvation?
or just what comes with individuation?
that of odd in every man and woman too
oddliness and godliness can intertwine
'cause odd, like God, means one of a kind
it's a gift to all and not just a few
to be at odds with custom and fashion
is one good way to learn compassion
you'll find that of odd in every one you meet

yeah, there's that of odd in every one
so remember, it takes one to know one
there's more than six billion ways to be weird
you may think that you can judge
well, throw away that mental crutch
the truth is so much stranger than you feared
Jesus was a real oddity
and he promised, if you just follow me
you'll find that of odd in every one you meet

Divine

I count myself a Christian theist. The term implies that we understand God in part through reflection upon the person of Jesus. So the five songs in this closing section contemplate the divine by beginning with two songs about Jesus. Meanwhile, in a rapidly secularizing society, belief in God is evaporating all around. So this section ends with a song that extends as far as I can toward my non-theist friends, whose friendship I cherish and whose perspectives continue to sharpen my vision and elucidate my faith.

“Jesus Anarchist!” (2011): The Jewish Protestant sociologist Jacques Ellul made the case for the anarchism of Christian faith many years ago. This song draws upon his insights. It is a complement to “These United States of Grace,” which closes the “Social” section.

“The Magdalene and the Nazarene” (2011) explores the mysterious relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The gospels tell us that Jesus cast seven demons from her. There’s room for interpretation there. Meanwhile, the fact that all four New Testament gospels put Mary at the empty tomb surely suggests some privileged relationship with Jesus, and that Mary played a key role in perceiving and proclaiming Jesus raised from the dead. I’m not interested in the 2nd-century gnostic interpretations of Mary that pit her against Peter. But it seems clear that as a woman, and perhaps with the unique perceptions we often associate with mental illness, Mary understood some things the “official” male disciples missed. This song is an experiment, and based partly in experience.

“Sophia, Sophia” (2017) moves on to the feminine persona of God, drawing upon the Hebrew understanding of divine wisdom as a feminine figure (see Proverbs 8). “She’s a mystery to me,” I confess. The song began by playing around with Donovan’s “Mellow Yellow,” and ended up a rewrite of the old blues standard, “Corrina, Corrina.”

“Hi-Yo Yahweh” (2016) complements the preceding song by reaffirming the masculine dynamics that fold into God, or at least our interaction with the divine. This song is strongly in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, especially Amos, who insisted with savage intensity, “It’s over!” God’s patience with an unjust, hypocritical nation can be tested only so long. That’s how I perceive America’s favored status today.

“I Don’t Really Exist” (2003) came to me while I was Quaker Studies Tutor at the Woodbrooke. Nontheism is more widespread in Britain than the US, and my time there afforded me the opportunity to engage with the variety of nontheist outlooks, which vary almost as much as theist ones. After writing this song, I discovered a good quote from Kierkegaard: “God does not exist; God is eternal.” Either affirming or denying the existence of God, we’re thinking in the wrong categories.

Jesus Anarchist!

(April 2011)

who said, "blessed are the poor"? – Jesus Anarchist!
 who said, "make love, not war"? – Jesus Anarchist!
 who went the way of the heavenly dove?
 who lived his life by the rule of love?
 who gave the money changers a shove?
 Jesus Anarchist!

who had pity on the rich young man? – Jesus Anarchist!
 and invited him to come join the band? – Jesus Anarchist!
 the revolution's like a mustard seed
 it grows up to be a great big weed
 to get that joke you must be freed
 Jesus Anarchist!

Bridge:

the revolution's like a pinch of leaven
 it spreads on earth as it is in heaven

the revolution is like new wine – Jesus Anarchist!
 it bursts the bounds of yours and mine – Jesus Anarchist!
 who made people ready to share?
 who made the frightened ready to dare?
 who was Rome's worst nightmare?
 Jesus Anarchist!

Bridge:

the revolution's like a wedding feast
 that comes when you expect it least

and walking together in his way – Jesus Anarchist!
 we see the forms of the world passing away – Jesus Anarchist!
 but who's defeated when the plans get made?
 who dropped out of the church parade?
 who's the one we've all betrayed?

The Magdalene and the Nazarene (March-April 2011)

Jesus and Mary were lovers long before the descending dove
the Nazarene and the Magdalene – theirs was a mystical love
it was earth, wind, water and fire, it was body and it was soul
they had a love below and above that makes a person holy and whole
the Magdalene and the Nazarene were never a bride and a groom
but he drew seven beautiful stars, all from an empty womb

the Nazarene worked with his daddy, driving nails into wood
most people figured the Magdalene for some kind of damaged goods
she was promised to a man from Cana, collect on delivery
but she and the Nazarene escaped down the dusty roads of Galilee
while other girls made their decisions, carefully counting the cost
the Magdalene had these visions, but not every womb that wanders is lost

then came the twelve disciples wandering across the stage
each with a different script, none on the same page
they all thought Mary was crazy, called her stars her seven demons
Jesus whispered, “what do they know? their minds are clouded by semen”
but comments like that never made it into the Holy Scriptures
the disciples got most of the words, but the Magdalene got the picture

other women followed Jesus too, they gave those two no peace
the Magdalene said to the Nazarene, we’re surrounded by thought police
oh, the view from the foot of the cross was a devastating effect
she said to her sobbing sisters, “well, what did you expect?”
then she bade farewell to the Nazarene with a simple, desolate nod
she went home, locked the door, and then raised hell with God

seven stars fell from heaven, darkness covered the land
the sea was turned to solid glass, the mountains turned into sand
the endless void was opened, like a festering abyss
you know what I’m talking about, we’ve all seen something of this
but on the morning of the third day, as she groped the primordial gloom
the Magdalene drew the Nazarene, alive from an empty tomb

Sophia, Sophia (April 2017)

Sophia, Sophia – so much wiser than me
Sophia, Sophia – no one is wiser than she
they call her Lady Wisdom
she's the ghost in the system
oh yeah, she's a mystery to me

she was there in the beginning, foundation of the world
she set the whole thing spinning, the Lord said, you go, girl!
they call her Lady Wisdom
the ghost in the system
oh yeah, she's a mystery to me

Bridge:

she puts me to work in her garden
you may think you know what that means
well, if you do, I beg your pardon
it's not exactly that kind of scene

Sophia, Sophia – I'll be your fool
Sophia, Sophia – aw, take me to school
they call her Lady Wisdom
she's the ghost in the system
oh yeah, she's a mystery to me

Hi-Yo Yahweh (December 2016)

with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm
 hi-yo Yahweh
 with amazing grace and unearthly charm
 hi-yo Yahweh
 he's the stone-soul first and last
 his love is more than vast
 it's endless, steadfast
 hi-yo Yahweh – ride on!

his love flows forevermore
 hi-yo Yahweh
 to the dispossessed and the poor
 hi-yo Yahweh
 but woe to the downpressor
 to the lying word processor
 and the smug self-possessor
 hi-yo Yahweh – ride on!

notwithstanding vain imaginations
 hi-yo Yahweh
 he sets his plumb-line among the nations
 hi-yo Yahweh
 it reveals the cynical believing
 the conniving, the deceiving
 he's not coming – he's leaving
 hi-yo Yahweh – away!

things falling apart, people wondering why
 hi-yo Yahweh
 well, you don't miss the water till your well runs dry
 hi-yo Yahweh
 Republicans and Democrats
 singing "God Bless America," flat
 but he's been here, he's done that
 hi-yo Yahweh – away!

I Don't Really Exist

(April 2003)

I don't really exist, I'm just a collection of worn-out myths
 that try to explain how it comes down to this, that I don't really exist
 when you hear someone mention my name
 it may be in praise, it may be in blame
 but after a while, it all sounds the same
 when you hear some one mention my name
 so call me a human invention, or a set of social conventions
 or a process without an intention, or whatever you care to mention
 but I don't really exist, it's a fact that's easily missed
 I am that I am, but I still must insist, that I don't really exist

well, I may have a certain grace, moving through time and space
 and a passionate love for the whole human race, but who can prove the case?
 did I ever once stop a war? or convert a single carnivore?
 did I even help poor old Al Gore? so tell me, what am I good for?
 I am the incarnation of a dangling conversation
 the secret assignation of a vain imagination
 but I don't really exist, I recede into the mist
 I am that I am, but I must insist, that I don't really exist

Bridge:

oh, "he walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own
 and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known"

well, your mind must be free, 'cause "to be or not to be"
 is not the right category, if the subject – or object – is me
 but if you're a friend of mine, come walk with me along that line
 between eternity and time – but don't ask me for a sign!
 'cause I'll give you no sign but this, a cross-eyed vision of bliss
 and the moment you catch it is the moment you miss
 I'll give you no sign but this
 'cause I don't really exist, I linger among those worn-out myths
 that try to explain how it comes down to this – I don't really exist...