

POEMS OF THE HEREAFTER, IN CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

(A Lifelong Query at 40-year intervals)

Frances Roberts

First Poem—Literally, 1929 age 6

What is it like up in heaven?
Candy and cake and ice cream!
What is it like up in heaven?
Just like a heavenly dream. (There was more, but I spare you.)

Second Poem, 1969 age 46 (Rev. 2010)

EVER AFTER

1.

I would like to take a balloon
To get to another time—

(Past an old Maine crow, gliding, surprised,
Through the crystal green air of a rain forest.)

Crookedly we'd wind-drift,
Silent under the painted silk...

(Blue, red, and yellow stripes,
Holding up the webbing.)

Behind us in the airstream would flutter
What we knew, in tatters cut away to fall,

Insubstantial wisps solemnly rocking
Toward some eternal cradle in the down.

2.

Goodbye, and goodbye, and fare us all well.
I sail pianissimo in this swaying womb,
I sail gran fortissimo into a new Dark Age,
Where crashing cymbals are as tinkling bells.
And silence is a blanket, covering, cold.

3.

The sky recedes, the sky falls,
But I bump along on the vacant steps of blue,
Eagerly waiting, eagerly watching all.
Salt tears stain the wicker rim. I am listening,
Listening, anxiously straining,
For the sound of a mellifluous voice singing
Beneath the whispering air.

But he of the beautiful voice
Stays stilled. From somewhere in the void
There comes a distant laughter
At my tiny, quavering hope.
Silent under the painted silk, I sail
To a time that is always past and always yet to come.

Third Poem, 2010 Age 86

“A Conundrum of Heaven: Questions about the Hereafter”

There are issues about the State of Heaven,
Things that may make you feel it's a place
You wouldn't want to be caught dead in.
First of all, there's the question of overpopulation.
If you think this planet is too crowded,
Consider the sum of all those who have
Previously left it, and imagine all of them
Crowded into one misty-heavenly abode.
They will make for strange bedfellows,
As well as for standing room only.

When I die, I believe I will try to avoid Heaven,
Because of this undoubted need for stringent
Crowd control, in spades, or rather, after spades.
For those who can't wait to die,
In order to be reunited with their loved ones,
Consider the odds of locating one soul
In thirty, forty, sixty God knows how many
Trillions that have passed the pearly gates
Before you slipped through.

If I were an angel floating about, looking for my Beloved,
(or Mother, Father, Dear Departed Friends),
What if I found my previous lover(s) instead?

They'd probably be embarrassed and
Want never to see me again,
Having floated into some new and sweeter
Relationship in the meantime of hereafter.

And what about marketing? Would there be flyers proclaiming,
"Lost, one husband, blond, gorgeous" that I could tack to
Telepathic phone poles? And since there would be
Everyone from every time, I can see a sandwich board
With "Will work for finding Chaucer" sported by an
English professor emeritus from Harvard,
Who was just dying to meet the ancient poet,
And is hoping to realize a lifelong, now eternal, dream.

Can't you just see a sign announcing Shakespeare's hangout?
Around it a huge circle of paparazzi and literary critics asking,
"Was it really you who wrote it all,
Or was it the Earl of Oxford-Hereford-Essex-Hampshire-
Leicester-Somebody else?"

And think of language barriers inherent in the place.
Can you see Australopithecus man trying to communicate
With Galileo? Or 10 million Bodhisattvas trying to find Buddha
Underneath the sacred tree? He, wishing to think big thoughts
In peace, and regretting, perhaps, the creation of so many
Adherents? Jesus—just think of Jesus! Where would he go
To hide from all the nutcakes who practice fraud in His name?

And Homo Sapiens! If I ran across him or one of his brethren,
And asked "Have you happened to meet my husband?"
He would answer, no doubt, in prehistoric pidgin,
Or perhaps in complex painted pictographs,
And we would stare at each other, nonplused,
In the deepest depths of cosmic bewilderment.
I could say, to no avail,
How much I admired his drawings at Lascaux, and
Suggest he should have used some varnish to preserve them
From the curious crowds that breathed out all their colors.

And, Oh, how I would love to be able to listen
As Margaret Fuller and George Sand
Exclaimed to each other again, "At last we meet!"

As for those 76 virgins supposedly awaiting each of the
Islamic suicide bombers blowing up innocent crowds,
I see 76 lovely young things lining up

To clothe those Faithful zealots in eternal burkas
Not even removable when they descend to Hades,
Which is where I now deploy them.

Perhaps there'll be a Central Clearing House for very lost souls?
I shall apply there, looking for my husband.
God knows where he will be found, but will God tell me?
Or will She turn a deaf ear,
As has so often been the case here on earth?

Questions, questions. What about all those beloved pets
We want wagging their tails at us when we've crossed over?
Do the dinosaurs get to play with them? Do the puppies
Get to careen about in heavenly chases,
Tripping up the elderly (lots of them there!) because
A local ordinance allows it? I suppose I'll want to take my cane.
Just when I figured I was well enough to do without.
But I forgot. "You can't take it with you."

All this only suggests the many technical problems posed by the place,
By the infinite crowds, the innumerable tangles of types.
Do we hope that God is a techie and will make it orderly
On some vast computer in the billowing clouds? But whom would God
Dial up to get user-friendly assistance on a chat line?

When all's said and done, I think, with some consideration,
You will see my point. It explains
Why I've always said of heaven,
"On the whole, I believe I'd prefer
Not to go there."

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