

between  
black & white

short poems  
by  
michael r guerin

## Other books by Michael R. Guerin

Ghosts, Flames & Ashes

world thru a window

mind & machine

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"What is the art of living?  
Where there is division in us  
psychologically there must be  
conflict, and therefore  
disorder. As long as there is  
disorder, trying to find order is  
still disorder."

– J Krishnamurti



i.

red

"What would life be  
if we had no courage  
to attempt anything?"

~ Vincent





## mirage

beneath a field of wine  
speckled with fire  
the air cool and dry, weightless  
i swim in a sea of delights  
intoxicated by life  
how your skin holds the setting sun's flame  
and raven hair trails to cascade  
like vines down the side of your face.  
in midnight my spirit burns skyward  
climbing heaven's stair  
through layers of rarefied air  
to meet you there.

it passes you by

beneath cast iron streetlamps  
the red brick street glistens  
from cool drizzle  
and with each passing step  
my warm bar stool slowly recedes  
further into a yellowed past  
i can no longer imagine  
while somewhere up ahead  
her black front door  
stands barred  
against all strangers  
and neatly hung with a brass  
number plate i was never  
given to answer.

still shivered

there's never one reason for leaving  
(though mistaken heads nod  
in approval at fables offered up  
as truth) for crows will fly  
in any direction they choose  
(just ask van gogh)  
and the shivered tenor  
of a voice singing the blues  
so soulfully rendered  
in a singular moment  
and drifting through the pines  
as his song unwinds  
is executed for its own particular sake.

(for kurt cobain)

a self (in pending)

a self,  
in pending.  
bound by a web  
of whys from any  
given place all roads  
end in fate.

found between  
two poles  
of a self forever  
in transit, from what  
you've been and how  
you dream.

beyond  
absolution  
from those lesser  
gods of pleasure  
and pain, a self slowly  
burns in disguise.

sweat & steel

as one who has toiled in the fields  
borne of sweat and steel  
and labored beneath a yellowing sun  
under which all our colors run,

should you find yourself alone at last  
feet still planted in collective clay  
to yourself this singular question ask —  
to whom do you owe this day?

## a fan of summer

at the risk of sounding clichéd  
life flowed differently back then —  
on hot summer days windows  
would be flung open wide  
inviting any air to blow  
through rusted screens  
and carried on breezes  
the sounds of children  
playing outdoors, their screams  
of anger or delight  
mingling with bird calls  
and barking dogs  
along with the gentle rustle  
of green leaves dancing  
with each gust of wind. but  
that was before cable tv  
or central ac when rotary  
fans wobbled on table tops  
rhythmically spraying blasts  
of warm air from side to side  
into faces eager for any relief  
while dads smoked

and played pinochle  
as decks got shuffled  
and cards were dealt  
with our moms retreating  
into cozy living rooms  
spinning family yarns  
and taking turns  
talking intermittently  
amid bursts of wild laughter  
like so many passes  
from that old  
rotary fan.

still falling

still falling —

like a withered maple leaf  
from the tree outside your window  
or the first few flakes of snow  
on a cold december evening  
or the weight of salty tears  
when i left you like a stranger  
and the time we stood  
like statues for hours  
in the rain.

it's taken

too long to realize  
that there's nothing left to gain,  
and now the better part of me  
dares dream the sweetest  
life with you, together  
and still falling —  
calling out  
your name.



all a twitter

anger in any form is anger,  
naked and pure.  
righteous indignation is never righteous.  
indignation is nothing more  
than anger poorly  
dressed in finer clothes.  
when a wave of anger rises  
the masses smell blood  
demanding heads and vengeance  
which drowns out calmer voices  
beneath its roiling red tide.  
socially speaking  
we're not very sociable  
except when driven mad with rage  
as we wage another war  
communally justified.

(for jimmy kimmel)

## down route 113

i still remember drives down  
route 113 laying on the back  
seat staring up through  
a side window with the sky  
broken every now and again  
as power lines passed by.  
we drove in silence  
to a nameless hospital  
where words like "cancer"  
and "chemo" didn't mean much  
to a young boy's mind  
and once there i sat quiet  
and still in an antiseptic hall  
where people dressed in white  
would pass by and remark  
on how smart i looked  
or how well i behaved  
while i waited for my mémère  
to emerge from some mysterious  
place. finally we'd return  
to her home to be greeted  
with the welcoming smell

of homemade chicken soup  
and sitting at the kitchen table  
i heard her say "he's too  
young to see me like this"  
and my mom replied  
"it will make him a good  
man, ma" but lost in a game  
of cards or steaming bowls  
of chicken soup  
i had no way of knowing  
that one cold december  
morning and not long  
enough from then  
in the barest blink  
of an eye that world  
would forever  
be erased.

## a betrayal

in a millisecond  
you can feel it ring true  
that knowing without knowing  
in your gut or in your bones  
which communicates more  
than a million words ever could  
about the state of a soul  
in the barest glance of her clear blue  
eyes even before a single tear  
forms and eventually streaks  
earthwards under the weight of her world  
gliding down a porcelain cheek  
you were once given for kisses  
or the tremor in a voice about to break  
into tiny shards of shattered glass  
just before she asks  
you to leave and never come back  
and how your face  
flush with shame betrays  
you in ways your  
words never would.

open suitcase

too easy to leave  
one who's already lost  
but when love's the rage  
and nothing else matters  
and days run into endless days  
with betrayals exchanged  
despite any cost,

then how or when  
can a heart ever decide  
to cleave those final few ties  
which forever blind  
and with a pair  
of borrowed wings  
finally take to flight?

once upon a when

these feet once filled with rage  
prowled familiar streets and lanes  
in my dreams, in my drunken  
hours desperate for love's  
embrace or a simple touch given  
with meaning and deeply felt  
against another solitary night.  
was it madness that led  
to endless flights of golden fields  
armed only with brush and paint  
eager to transform the landscapes  
of my world, of my dreams while  
you slept on silently and with ease  
so exquisitely out of reach?

(for vincent)

ii.

yellow

"I don't know anything  
with certainty, but seeing the stars  
makes me dream."

~ Vincent





dreaming in yellow

when passion runs deep  
what bubbles to the surface?

behind each facade a face  
like any other in disguise.

to meet you i suppose  
from postcards left behind.

beneath each starry sky  
a soul can rattle its cage.

dried strokes on the page  
just a moment in time.

an august afternoon

in the distance a mower  
drones its low rumble.  
from my bedroom window  
all backyards seem the same.

a murder of crows land  
on my neighbor's lawn  
pecking at unseen bugs  
for their daily bread.

beneath this midday glare  
all thoughts run together  
bleached white  
by an unrelenting dread.

in the distance gray clouds  
gather on the horizon  
while i sit here quietly  
and pray for rain.

on a melancholy angle

early morning rays break the horizon  
with earnest anticipation  
of what might come to pass

while soft and subtle colors  
are bleached white when bathed  
in the harsh glare of midday light.

but late afternoon summer sunshine  
hangs reverently in warm air  
slanting sweetly through shivering  
silver-green leaves  
of towering poplar and beech  
on a melancholy angle.

(for emily dickinson)

late afternoon

sitting beneath a tangle  
of branches and grateful  
for their shade

a bird whose name  
i'll never know  
rested on a limb

and looking down  
for some response sang  
its song of life

or perhaps just a call  
for other birds to perch  
nearby just so

while cool autumn breezes  
kissed tall grass ready  
for a mowing.

## fireflies

as a little boy i'd wait  
for summer evening skies  
to be filled with fireflies  
and gazed in fascination  
as their tails lit up the night  
and running barefoot on cool grass  
would try to catch them in tiny hands  
and lucky enough to find one in my grasp  
would peek between gently clenched  
fingers to see its glow shine  
on these innocent palms  
yet to cause harm  
in this fragile world  
we reluctantly  
call home.

## lost little ball

that's just how it goes  
(i suppose)...  
say when right next door  
or way across town  
a life slips tragically away —  
and when a heart gets torn  
or relationships are sundered  
and a thousand painful things  
in between, yet bound  
as we are by the same  
space-time we're still able  
to sleep (and peacefully)  
while the world wobbles  
on like a lost little  
ball spinning  
much too fast  
on its own.

## a note from skógafoss

words fail us at nearly every turn.  
wrapped in a web of ideas  
about how things work  
and pushed to justify inherited beliefs  
which form the ground of our understanding  
is it any wonder that faced  
with unlacquered reality  
there's nothing left to say —  
and what would you offer anyway  
to a waterfall that has no need  
of your schemes as pure water spills  
downward from the very mountain  
which formed it when no one was around  
and how it will still stand strong  
in this place majestic and sure  
stretching out into a timeless  
count of tomorrows long  
after our bones have turned to dust.

like purest gold

a field of green dotted white  
with clover and the air alive  
with buzzing bees as they flit  
from flower to flower following  
something only they can see  
gathering up their gold. or the hand  
you gently hold as your daughter  
takes her first few faltering  
steps forward to face her fate  
moving towards a destiny  
she can't imagine yet  
as one like the rest  
but with a heart  
of purest gold.



## deep currents

bound within your walls  
and flash frozen  
like a fourth phase of water  
found under ice crusting over  
some siberian lake  
which hides darker currents  
still flowing fast and deep  
as they do when in sleep  
and the dreams you dare to keep  
that take you out of the present  
moment to land you on your feet  
in a world of make believe.

or those scenes burned within a heart  
which get replayed in your mind  
a thousand times a day  
when there's nothing left to say  
and there's nothing that you'd change  
and there's no one near to hear  
the secrets that you keep  
in currents running deep.

goodbye, my indigo

indigo fades into pale yellow  
moment by moment,  
degree by slightest degree —  
and beneath an empty firmament  
devoid of dreams  
perhaps you'll make your way  
through another hollow day  
wondering what it all  
might mean.

iii.

blue

"I often think that the night  
is more alive and more richly  
colored than the day."

~ Vincent



## bittersweet and blue

without a single word  
your clear brown eyes  
reach out across this distance  
and cut me to the bone  
and lay my falsehoods bare  
in ways  
bittersweet and blue  
which leaves my spirit empty  
and hungry  
to hold some truth.

i doubt if you remember  
such a slivered  
slice of time or space  
and i wonder what you're doing  
and how your life has been  
in the silent  
traces of an hour  
filled with recollections bold  
and blue as my sun  
sinks into rust.

for all the life

we see what we want to see  
at a traffic light  
or by the beach  
or cruising eighty miles an hour  
down a dusty highway  
in the middle of nowhere  
with nowhere to go.

and it comes as no surprise  
that each comparison  
pulls us further and further  
from any hope of truth  
and each judgement about the world  
just another nail  
in our future coffin.

you ask what i'm thinking  
while the tv drones on about some war  
or toxic waste between commercials  
for beer and tooth paste  
but not in a million years  
do i dare share

thoughts which perpetually  
pass through this mind of mine.

stray from the track trodden  
down by centuries of blind faith  
and be labeled —  
mercilessly.

but for a sensitive soul  
your sensible world  
seems more and more senseless  
each passing hour  
each passing day  
and for all the life left in me  
i can't call your sanity sane.

## a letter

your words have finally reached me  
from out of the cold  
and out from the past  
and it's more than i could  
have hoped for and more  
than i ever knew  
and as the years melt away  
between us i'm able to see at last  
how nothing that's true  
ever passes for a heart  
that's willing to ask.



## last night

her last words hang heavy  
in the air as your car door slams shut  
and through its open window  
you watch as she walks steadily  
up a gravel path to her front porch  
lit by two yellow bulbs buzzing  
with a cloud of moths and mosquitoes.  
she fishes a key from her purse  
and without a pause or glance  
back in your direction unlocks  
the door and slips inside  
her darkened home. behind  
drawn curtains the muted glow  
of a lamp greets the night  
and from memory you imagine  
those slow barefooted steps  
toward a back bedroom  
as her dress slides  
off silken shoulders  
and comes to rest on  
the wooden floor.

## the tolling bell

wrapped in grief's embrace  
never sweetly felt  
what lingers deep inside  
to rattle a chest cold as ice  
while reason wanders past?  
and lost in darkness  
blackier than night  
without a path to guide  
how can a soul  
truly rent apart  
ever find its weary  
way back?

(for fanny brawne)

(triptych of grief, i)

the colors that i seek

shall any aspire to measure  
the beat of a broken heart  
or dare weigh such depth  
of feeling between  
two rendered souls?  
and yet as so often happens

far removed by time or space  
the masses shoot dull arrows  
from a worldview hung with rags  
as if dead words might matter  
to echo love's hidden truth  
revealed thru spirit's passing  
along its hallowed path.

(triptych of grief, ii)

it comes like ice

behind your tears which flow  
and those stuck frozen as ice  
unshed upon a cheek  
unbled upon a soul duly rent

is a feeling felt with reason  
unable to gain release  
of a thought held fast as fact  
of what won't come to pass

and an ending of a dream  
you'd rather not let go, or surrender —  
like the fatal blossom's kiss  
you cannot unremember.

(triptych of grief, iii)

as it echoes

i'm not naïve  
enough to believe  
that a well said word  
if properly heard  
makes a damn bit of difference  
in the end. but as a deeply felt  
note can split the night  
the only choice left  
is to cast your voice  
across the endless waters  
and let it echo into void  
for its own particular sake  
even if no one ever bothers  
to stop or listen.

no denial

maybe it's strange how life  
worked out this way like  
how i can't deny your face  
burned into my brain  
with razor sharp precision  
or how most starry nights  
lying atop my tiled roof  
wrapped tight in anonymity  
i watch each exhale trail  
upwards as warm vapor  
only to get lost in cool air  
as the next fall breeze  
blows past my best laid plans  
and how most days now  
it's a fight to keep these eyes  
focused on the task at hand  
without seeing your face  
burned into this brain  
white hot like a brand  
across the pages  
of my memory.

a late october night

beneath yellow streetlamps  
damp oak leaves glisten  
stuck on pavement  
like confetti.

summer parties long over  
we walk in elemental silence  
where everything worth saying  
hangs by a thread.

each step pulls us further  
from your empty home  
shuttered to meet  
the impending cold.

up ahead a pickup truck  
speeds down the narrow lane  
with high beams  
blinding both our faces.

my exhaled breath lost  
without a trace.

dying embers

a cold drizzle  
sheets bare branches  
hung like copper wire  
and devoid of crows.

three straight days of rain  
have transformed  
my lawn  
into an impenetrable bog.

with a wrought iron poker  
i rake gray ashes  
hoping to catch  
the last few logs.

embers glow.  
and from a warm cup  
of coffee i take  
a long, slow sip.



“Freedom and love go together. Love is not a reaction. If I love you because you love me, that is mere trade, a thing to be bought in the market; it is not love. **To love is not to ask anything in return, not even to feel that you are giving something -** and it is only such love that can know freedom.”

— J. Krishnamurti