

world
thru a
window

short poems about life

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Books by Michael R. Guerin:

Ghosts, Flames & Ashes (2016)

world thru a window (2017)

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“Relationship, surely, is the mirror in which you discover yourself. Without relationship you are not; to be is to be related; to be related is existence. And you exist only in relationship; otherwise, you do not exist, existence has no meaning. It is not because you think you are that you come into existence. You exist because you are related, and it is the lack of understanding of relationship that causes conflict.”

J. Krishnamurti

The Mirror of Relationship

ocean city 5:27 am

salty waves crash the beach.

in the moonlight seagulls

fly past like ufos.

to the left an unseen

dog barks at ghosts

and on my right two

old women walk side by

side, their conversation

an incomprehensible

yawn.

the sea sparkles like

diamonds while a buoy

drunkenly flashes red

as fishing boats sail out

to horizon's edge

an hour before

dawn.

from a train, anonymously

from the train it's all backyards
of ramshackle houses
edged in rusted chain-link
fencing or tumbled stone
walls. with dusk fast
approaching most lots
are abandoned, save
the occasional
threadbare couch
or truck set on blocks.
and as we roll slowly past
the lone traffic light
flashing in this
anonymous town
a gang of shirtless
boys pantomime
making funny faces
as we pass
before a derelict station
which time has forgotten
now blocks them
from view.

beneath a winter's moon

you were unapproachable
so clearly out of my league
yet sweet and serene
as you strolled those crowded
halls from once upon a time
and looking back now it might
have been mid february or march
after my honorable discharge
when i ducked into tw's pub
on a random tuesday night
and there across the bar
with a flannel clad heavy set
guy sporting a grease-stained
cat hydraulic hat you sat
sipping a beer looking like
you'd rather be anywhere
else than holding together
the severed threads of some
conversation better left
unsaid when our eyes met
and in their desolate depths
i realized how even beauty
queens can stumble like

an angel tumbling down
from the dizzied heights
of grace to land in this place
beneath a cold winter's moon.

the old masters

he spoke of the old masters while
wind wildly whipped his silver hair

and i wondered what he found
so alluring in their choice of muted

tones, the cherubs with rosied
cheeks appearing chubby and much

too contented with themselves
or the world of men to be taken

seriously. maybe it was their study
of faces lost in reflection or serenely

composed, so many faces of those
long since passed whose stories

we will never know, anonymous
faces now immortalized on museum

walls which the masses pass by
without bothering to take note.

cruising mammoth road

i imagine every town
has that road you cruise
with your best friend
the tunes cranked
loud on the radio
heading to noplac
in particular as telephone
poles pass by your open
window mile after mile
and no other cars
or kids or cows are seen
for long stretches
at a time. for us

it was mammoth road
heading north long before
developers cut down
trees and planted houses
like corn in neat rows
where each one looks
just like the rest
except for maybe
the color of minivan

parked out front
or name painted black
on a white mailbox
by the road. but back

in the day it was ours
which we drove
and talked for hours
on end about girls
or plans for after high
school while the songs
kept rolling along
only now he's gone
and i've traveled
too far from home
to catch even a glimpse
of mammoth road
in my rearview mirror.

once again (divested)

“the word is not the thing”
he said
and of course
i had to agree (at least
intellectually)
but what else do we have
at our disposal
to pierce the darkness inside
or soar across those
empty spaces
which yawn between you and i
except for a meager handful of sounds
too fragile and unsteady
under the weight of feeling
with which we (sometimes) invest
in them and yet still
unable to do the job well
despite such careful construction
and here i stand before you
cut to the quick
and so poorly equipped
(once again)
unable to summon a single

thought worth relaying
with words divested
of all possible meaning
so let's let this awkward silence
wrap us both in its embrace
and stretch it out
to infinity.

word upon word

puff of breath.
energy and intention
suspended on the gossamer
threads of conversation.
modulation and tone.
thoughts honed
to a razor's edge
balanced on that fine
line of literal
and symbolic
meaning.

vibration and passion.
the ether moves between
us but can you feel
me from your side
of this great
divide? such dead
air brought to life
with fire which tugs
at the darkness,
word upon
word?

lost southwest of cagliari

while absentmindedly
strolling the rocky
shore as salty waves
kissed my feet
i caught you unawares
sitting in a shaded
alcove of stones
wanting to be alone
as tears gracefully
rolled down both cheeks.
and for one heartbeat
or two i stood transfixed
unsure if i could pool
with you by way
of a steady shoulder
or comforting arm
wrapped securely
around your waist
as you cried for love
lost or simply misplaced.
and standing there
as the hot august sun
burned my face it seemed

the distance was far greater
than crossing a mere few
feet of sand between us
so with a wistful
glance for a whole host
of what-might-have-beens
i left you lost among
the rocks hoping someday
one would come along
and finally set you free.

Just Like Amber

I remember you sitting
cross-legged in a white
low-cut cotton dress
speckled with tiny blue
flowers, the sweet sounds
of happy unseen children
playing someplace outside
drifting into your room
on gentle, cool summer
breezes. Maybe it's too

much to ask from time
for any one moment to
remain fixed and frozen
like a butterfly forever
suspended in golden
amber, only surfacing
years later from some
subterranean tomb
to eventually emerge
into the light once
again. It's certainly true
that all of life seems

a perpetual letting go —
whether in grand funeral
procession style, or
more simply still, like each
dried autumn leaf that one
by one drops from its tree
to get lost with the rest
once the wind begins
to blow cold. So please

pardon the analogy
if I choose to treasure
this sole memory of mine,
snatched from the stealthy
clutch of time like a shard
of amber kept securely
in pocket and held
in ready reserve, just
for nights like these when
the moon hangs low in
the eastern sky casting
long shadows across
my mind at the end
of another day spent
alone in silent
separation.

the heron's cry (for iulia mitiashova)

somewhere beneath
the thick morning mist
and sailing calm blue waters
on lonesome lake
you can hear them clearly
but only if you listen
closely, leaning
into the wind
before the world of men
wakes another day
with its thundering sound
of naked triviality.

i don't know
where they'll fly
once the sun breaks high
above the tree-lined
horizon
burning away
the last traces of fog
and there's
no place left
for herons to hide.

to a lesser god

we drove along a nondescript
country lane
until the bus stopped
in a gravel parking lot
and we all got out
with cameras slung
around our necks
while the hot sardinian
sun beat us down
and scrambling up a rocky
path we passed an old
farmer plowing his plot
of land
as it had
been done for centuries
the simple wooden wedge
cutting black soil
while he and his donkey
didn't bother
to look
as we made
our way over a low hill
to finally catch view

of clear blue
waves crashing against
the granite shore
and as our guide
led us further down
the route
we came to an ancient
rock wall and through
the narrow gate
was a field of boulders
scattered about clearly
unfit for farming
(or much else)
and looking around
i spied small red
ceramic pots
with white rocks
holding their lids in place
and over the sound
of sea waves
doing their best
to erase all traces
of human history
she shared
that we were standing
in a late phoenician

cemetery where women
once sacrificed
their first born
child to some unknown god
and how each pot
held the ashen remains
of their eternal
sacrifice
and maybe it was the heat
or the long walk
to that spot
but my head began
to swim with fear
and dread as i wondered
how such a place
could exist and how
even the gulls shied away
as if the ground
itself was so obviously
cursed and yet here
we stood with cameras
at the ready
filled with idle curiosity
and gawking like school
children beneath
the unforgiving

summer

sun.

true north

there are words we hurl
against the fabric
of coal-
black night,
words that scaffold
our crumbling sensibilities
and designed to force
some equilibrium once more
into antiquated senses
of self
like limbs broken
or as a sailor too long at sea
walks drunkenly
from dock to shore
until his (or her) balance
gets restored.
and yet those oft-repeated
phrases too pale
and worn
do little to warm
a soul fed solely
on borrowed hand-me-down
notions and choked

full of memories
better off
let go.

morning in santo tomás

my first thought
was that pigeons were back
for a morning stroll atop
the rusted roof

of this particular
shack, and my need for sleep
such easy prey caught in their
domesticated talons.

but it was rain
instead, another deluge of more
wet on wet as thick drops
splashed with pregnant

possibilities, shot
through this hot and humid air
hung like damp cheesecloth
without a breeze.

by noon the nuns
would return to clear away

the empty bottles of *cerveza*
and lug in fresh

cases, too, and
i wondered what their thoughts
might be once they surveyed
the scene of

another late night
lost here in purgatory (or so
it seemed) before my last day
and ready to

leave, yet still
hollow inside like holes in my
mosquito net which made me a
nightly feast for bugs.

amy says

she likes winter
she says
when the air is so cold
you can see your breath
and walking on snow
crunches under your boots
like a million tiny
diamond crystals.
she likes bunnies
too who hide
in their holes under a blanket
of pure white snow
once the air turns so cold
you can see
your breath.

today the late june sun
warms her face
as she steps barefoot
across our driveway
on tippi toes
to watch this year's
family of baby bunnies

out from their holes
and eating clover
by the edge
of grass
and pavement.

on elephant road

what hits you first is a liquid heat
which weighs palpably down
upon all your sensibilities
and next comes the crush
of strangers shouting
how they'll carry your bag
for only a few *taka* as they
push for position to close
the gap between you both
until my wife's uncle finally
arrives to part them like mooses
before a flooding red sea
and you're quickly whisked
to a waiting car outside
where another white-hot throng
shoulders forward despite
bamboo wielding policemen who
officially dole out punishment
with merciless precision
to force a narrow path so you
can finally pass through
the wrought-iron airport gates.
later in the day we go

to the money-changer's
place on elephant road
where we're forced to hike
along a busy sidewalk strewn

with the small brown bodies
of huddled children no one
seems to notice or want
as they shiver in the shade
their tiny prone shapes just
so many speed-bumps to navigate
while we talk about time-zones
and jet-lag which seems
insanely at odds with the scene
and my arms aren't big enough
to corral them all in
and my hands aren't strong
enough to hold them all tightly
so i survey as many as i can
and wrap them with love
to place in a box and bury
in my heart while i walk
with the rest to mr. choudhury's
office where tea gets served
and exchange rates are fixed
as if those buzzing city streets

never really mattered as if
nothing could be more normal
in all of this world until
it's time to hand over crisp cold
dollars for crumpled colored scraps
of paper littered with a language

i'll never understand and we
make our way once more
past those tiny angels lying
in dust by the side of some road
while tears find it impossible
to escape the rusted-shut
cages of these eyes.
back here we talk of love
as such a domesticated thing
like some cat lounging
in sunlight which streams
through the windows in one
of those brownstones along beacon
street and which offers such easy
comfort against the night
or serves as nothing more
than a personal rubber-stamp
of approval for our endless
trivial pursuits the white noise

backdrop (if you will)
for such empty little lives
while elsewhere in this world
a flood of unwanted children
sleep side by side and unseen
by the dusty edge
of some congested
city street.

a riff for ames

she sang to me
(and to more than
only me)
her voice hitting notes
reserved for
gods
(or in dreams),
and those unrelenting
waves conjured
up phantoms
of things better off behind
closed doors
like some endlessly
rolling penny heard
yet left
unseen.

we never met
(of course) but had
she and i
bumped each other's way
across some back
alley or moonlit

street
her eyes would have caught
mine captive,
lost in pools
of liquid night
and forever
unable to say goodbye
or
(wanting to) escape
back to what i
always already
knew.

and if life
is like a pipe
then some puff
of soul
drifts on (how terribly
cliché)
within those vibes
that keep rolling along
criss-crossing
both ether and web —
but most days
that simple truth
isn't enough

to save
me from dying a hundred
times from dread
and sliding inexorably
back into
black.

checkout time

no one dreams when they're young
of being poor
or becoming a drunk
standing in the checkout line
fishing through a bag of pennies
and counting them out
one by one
for the young blonde girl
who looks nervously
my way as you ramble on
smelling of booze and cigarettes.
i'll admit to stepping back
and keeping some distance
as you lean in
proceeding to invite me
into your world
through incoherent words
thrown around between hacking
coughs and waiting on my
reply which remains stuck
in throat so all i can
offer in return
is non-judgmental

silence. and as you
stumble away raving about
the holiday i'm left wondering
how life turned out this way
for you (and more than you)
while the checkout girl
whispers an apology
that doesn't need
to come.

the morning after

shaft of moon-beam,
cold light striking
cold tile
floors swept clean
of history
(at least for now).
he sleeps, oblivious —
another lost night
in town
down at the bar
swapping stories piled
high like crushed
beer cans
stacked precariously
along the dull brass rail,
just another day
of broken
chances and wasted
dreams. your bruises
will heal
(on the surface,
at least)
as tomorrow's dawn

brings along
one more monotonous
apology
that always fills
your ears
the morning after.

another starry night

there's no way to know
for certain
what he saw
from that open window
one solitary night when he felt
moved enough to reach for his brushes
once again
so that his lone insight
could burst into life
through ten thousand swirls
and strokes of blue
upon blue punctuated
here and there with yellow
and white orbs of light
shining high
above some sleepy
little town which only existed
there in his memory
or imagination.

face to face
with his stunning expression
of a deep longing

for a world
that moves and flows
with the rhythm and harmony
of all that is good
and all that aspires to be
i'd like to think
that someplace
his soul
can finally take solace
not so much from a fame
as fleeting as summer rain
but rather for conveying
a truth deeper
than any words
which resides far beyond
our dawning horizon.

colorful jim c

he talked about the ultimate color
to thread thru his window on a world

and maybe you remember the jester
who once stood on a stage so grand

but it seems now he's become electric
as his soul burns thru both of his hands

pulling truth from the depths of spirit
making it manifest boldly on canvas

and maybe it's all just to free him
but if you ask it's according to plan.

soliloquy

you don't have to pull
as these words bleed
out and spill
on the page
to soak them in meanings
i can't yet understand.
but if i asked for a hand
it might simply be this —
please don't judge
them too harshly
once the finish
has
dried.

on huron street

on some summer afternoons
i used to kneel as if in
prayer by an open bedroom
window with my gaze fixed
on nothing in particular
as random sounds floated
in aboard warm breezes —
a buzzing bee bumping
awkwardly into the screen
or an unseen boy shouting
curse words in the distance
and the occasional car
cruising down my lane
on its way to someplace
grander than huron street.

occasionally i would view
a friend biking past or
camped on his lawn calling
for a game of catch and yet
i remained rooted there
despite two painful knees —
glued to the floorboards

of my room as if waiting
for some sign or omen
from god or mother mary
that everything would turn
out just fine in the end
for a shy little boy
with a head full of worries
and heart forever worn
on his sleeves.

just a preference

i preferred climbing trees
to endless games
of tag or war
played with silver
toy guns reflecting glints
of scattered summer sunlight
on hazy afternoons —
sitting high up near
the top of some thin maple
or stately oak
and perhaps just a tiny bit
closer to god
as warm lazy breezes
swayed those branches
to and fro
and me right along
with them as i sat there
perfectly perched
and lost among the leaves
while boys far below
shouted out their nonsense
to an unseen audience
of one.

zazen

sunlight breaks above the trees.
a time to sit (for
only a moment).
still the flow of images —
breathe (your heart beats, your heart beats).

a married man, listens

a married man
listens to his wife
(and a whole lot more
than she'll give him credit for)
mainly as one might
try to gauge the weather
before heading outside
by parting curtains
to survey a morning sky.
it helps to know
which of her moods might
be on display
and whether it's all sunshine
or dark grey storm clouds
are headed his way.
a married man
doesn't talk much
(but not that he
hasn't much to say)
it's just easier most times
to keep those thoughts
in mind
because what he craves

is a little peace
and quiet at the end
of his day.

north slope of varnum hill

on many a lazy
summer evening we
took the short hike
up to varnum cemetery
and our favorite spot
on the hill's north slope
where cool green grass
beneath the vaulted
cathedral-like ceiling
of sugar maples
and soaring white oaks
made it the perfect place
for gazing up at those
few bright stars
able to peek through
shadowy leaves swaying
slowly in the breeze
and for long stretches
of time we remained
quietly lost
in each other's
thoughts.

...

at times i wondered
what any stray ghosts
might think had they
awoken from their graves
and bothered to stay
long enough to watch
us mimicking a sort
of silent repose
lying on the slope
or if we somehow
disturbed their peace
with our discussions
on ee cummings
or death as a new beginning
given the eternity
of our souls
and so late into the night
only a few feet above
their final resting place
long after anyone
was left in the world
to care that they
were buried there.

of course we both
couldn't foresee

how ten years would pass
before your mom
laid you to rest
on that very spot of grass
when the wind blew cold
and no leaves remained
in the canopy above
saying how it felt right
without ever knowing
about our many nights
spent beneath the summer sky
on such hallowed ground
and where your granite
stone now marks the slow
passage of time like so
many others accumulating
dust while the essential
part of you flew
far away seeking
a firmer foundation to
resume the journey
all over again.

and it passed

she raised her head
like you raise a glass
to make a toast
and when our eyes met
in that specific second
i felt a dread
that grabs your bones
and shakes loose
every last shred
of artifice
until nothing false
can remain fixed
in place
your masks crashing
down around you
with a sound like
dirty dishes smashing
on an all-night
diner's tiled
floor. and maybe

now you're waiting
for a resolution

of some sort
or happy conclusion
as if she would
stand with arms
flung open to wrap
us both in a warm
embrace but why
does it only seem
to count when
there's this thing
to show or hold
rather than simply
letting it flow
like electric fire
which sparked to life
for some unknowable
reason in the blink
of an eye. and maybe

that's just how
it's supposed to play
itself out when
in a singular moment
frozen from the flow
of time two souls
connected across

a crowded bar
as she shone
with unpossessable
eternal light
burning brightly
through the darkness
one solitary night
in utrecht
and the choice
laid so graciously
at my feet
was for me
to let it pass.

a portrait of self?

it's not some photo pinned in a frame
that hangs by the door slowly collecting dust.
it's not found in memory from last we spoke
when you stormed out on us.

and not a face in the mirror
staring blankly
back at me.

lately it feels like swimming through
fog where all human senses are dulled.
striving to plumb subterranean motives
in the darkest depths of one.

despite all my searching it forever
eludes me piece by
subtle piece.

all in the cards

the weight of my world
was held in her delicate hands
as she shuffled the deck
and spoke in a language
which was easy to understand
despite coming
from the other side of time
and as i waited anxiously
cards began to spill out
landing on her table
somewhat randomly
but she only smiled
and picked them up one by one
to arrange in a pattern
that told a story
as if reading my mind
as if seeing my soul
with crystalline truth
and when she was through
it was all i could do
to hold those pieces
together.

recollections of...

some days it feels as if
i'm digging deep into the guts
of some intricate machinery
like an old grandfather clock
which stands silently in the hall
not having so much as chimed
for twenty years (or more)
elbows deep in dust and debris
to carefully rescue little bits
of this or that like tiny
cogs or gears and exposing
each one to the light
of day like some prize
or keepsake worthy
of a few minutes time
or attention in order
to admire their pristine
beauty (perhaps)
or well-crafted curves
and lines.

most days i'd rather rock
on the old white wicker chair

out front shaded by the eaves
as kids rocket past on bikes
or a family of finches play
another game of tag darting
from birch to plum tree
and back again lost
in the rhythm
of their pretty little lives
while i sit torn (again)
between this present moment
and one more silent
recollection.

it strikes a cord (for noémie lorzema)

the notes of her song
echo across
so much unfeeling air
between us
and maybe you'll
say it's just a vibration
of molecules
moving this way
or that
but what i feel
is some invisible finger plucking
silver strings
deep within stroking
cords lying dormant
from lack of use
perhaps
or simply forgotten
like some priceless
stradivarius cast aside
in the corner
collecting
dust.

...

as tears stream
down these stubbled grey
cheeks i recall
the words of my dad
who taught me
at an early age
that boys don't cry
as if somehow
our collective humanity
comes at a much
steeper
price for
holding it all
within.

with an angelic face
she finishes her song which
lifts me up
and what bubbles
to the surface
is a secret longing for a home
i've never seen
so far removed from
this place, and
if you'll kindly pardon
this momentary lapse

of weakness
don't take it personally
when i confess
(with abject humility)
how i'd rather be
planted there than
lost in this
space.

by a window, waiting

by a window —
she waits.
the sky slowly bleeds
from wine
to blackest ink.
lit by the cool
incandescent glow
of her phone —
she waits.
the city skyline
sparks to life
as apartment lights
flicker like
a swarm of fireflies
on a warm summer's night.
she turns
from the screen
and unfurls her thick
raven hair
which splashes on bare
pearl-white shoulders,
and with a long deep
sigh for another

sleepless night
she waits.

time zone

i catch the clock
on the wall mocking
me with each incessant
tickety tock
as the second hand
marches onward
step by determined step
and i do the mental
math to calculate
what time it must be
in your distant city
and imagine you walking
busy cobble-stoned streets
on your way
to some shop or café
sitting with unnamed
friends and sipping a drink
while i wait ever faithful
for a call or text
that's sure to never
turn up.