

# Pieces Of Mind

## Second Edition

Dear reader, I am delighted for you to have this pdf version of *Pieces Of Mind*. Please read the introductory pages – they set the scene, and introduce you to Fred and Lucille who appear frequently throughout the book. Thereafter you can dip in anywhere, although I recommend that you scan quickly through the entire book first, so that you may become familiar with all the themes presented, and then browse at random.

*Pieces Of Mind* is ideally a coffee table or bedside locker book, that is, a traditional book that you can pick up, delve in at any point, read one or two paragraphs, and put it down again till the next time. The pdf format is not ideal, but it has enabled me to give free copies to many people. Here is a suggestion: when you have your computer or other device on for some other purpose, take an extra minute, scroll down randomly through the file, and see what you come across. There is some really good stuff in the book, even if I say so myself! And if it is not your cup of tea right now, don't ditch it; file it away until your situation or outlook changes.

I would be very happy to hear from you if you come across anything that means something to you. My e-mail address is woodmere@eircom.net. Please feel free to forward the book to anybody you think might enjoy it.

Best wishes and many blessings,  
Ken

**A book for your  
coffee table  
or bedside locker**

**extracts from the writings of  
Ken O'Sullivan**

*Pieces Of Mind - Second Edition*  
is a limited private edition.

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**E-mail: [woodmere@eircom.net](mailto:woodmere@eircom.net)**

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## **Dedication**

For  
all those I love  
especially my wife  
Carmel  
my four adult children  
Paul Barry Julie Alan  
and their loved ones

# Introduction

It is about four years since I realised that I had accumulated enough new writing to warrant a second edition of *Pieces Of Mind*. However, it is only recently that I summoned up the commitment to undertake the time-consuming task of trawling through the poems, stories, essays, reflections and two novels (one in draft form) to select suitable extracts for inclusion. Thankfully that task is now complete and what you have here are the three hundred items from the first edition plus three hundred and thirty new ones. I am pleased with the overall result and hope you will enjoy the selection.

*Pieces of Mind* is the sort of book you can pick up and just absorb a paragraph or two, so it's a good companion when you are not in the mood for a longer read. Equally, it is the sort of book you don't have to pick up at all, but seeing that I have gone to considerable trouble and expense to produce it and you got it for free, you might at least give it a try!

The material I have chosen is drawn from many home-produced volumes.<sup>1</sup> The source volume of each extract is given in brackets, wherein the absence of the word 'from' indicates that the foregoing piece is given in its entirety – usually a short poem. Some of the pieces are thought-provoking, some laugh-provoking, some – well, you decide. I have made no attempt to sort them into categories; they are printed at random. However, one concession to editing is the provision of a heading for each piece which encapsulates the theme.

A good few of the entries deal with spirituality in one form or another. May I ask that you keep an open mind on this matter? I use the word 'God' but feel free to substitute any other term with which you are comfortable: higher power, great spirit, supreme being or whatever. If, on the other hand, you don't believe anything at all, permit me to direct your attention to the Appendix where you will find a short essay entitled 'Memo From A Former Atheist.' This is a response to the book 'The God Delusion' by Richard Dawkins. The essay carries a simple message even if you have not read that book. I am blessed with a very beautiful spirituality, and that is what I have attempted to

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<sup>1</sup> Almost all of the home-produced volumes mentioned throughout the book were produced in small quantities, so that I do not have spare copies to give away. If, however, any of them particularly appeal to you, I can, with some exceptions, send you an online (pdf) version.

share with you in *Pieces Of Mind*. The Appendix also contains four other longer pieces. ‘Why Do Plants Blossom?’ is a fable about self-esteem. ‘The Contented Maverick’ deals with my offbeat approach to writing. Finally, for light relief, there is a ‘Fred’ story and a ‘Lucille’ Story.

I have purposely produced *Pieces Of Mind* in A5 format so that you will never have to travel away from home without your compact ‘Ken O’Sullivan’ to accompany you on those long train journeys and interminable waits at airports, or to have on your bedside locker in readiness for those lonely hours when you fall prey to insomnia. I have a good friend who keeps his copy of the first edition in the bathroom. After visitors depart, he looks to see at what page they have left *Pieces Of Mind* open, and he assures me that this gives him a valuable insight into their character. It’s a dubious theory, but you may like to try it if you cannot think of a better place to put the book!

A word about the front cover illustration. It is of Killary Fjord in the West of Ireland. This is a colour photograph, but the light was playing with the landscape in such a way on that particular day that the sea and the mountains looked almost monochrome. As well as writing, I love landscape photography, and I am thinking of constructing a website which will feature some of the writing and a selection of the photographs. I have not yet decided whether to go ahead with the project, but I have reserved a domain name, so do pay me a visit in a little while to see if I have managed to get the website up and running: [www.kenosullivan.ie](http://www.kenosullivan.ie).

Readers who are not familiar with Fred (my conscience or inner voice) and Lucille (my delightful Muse) may like to read the introduction to these cerebral inhabitants on page vi, so that the passages relating to them will make more sense.

The first edition of *Pieces Of Mind* in 2001 ran to 75 copies and was produced for family and friends. This edition is being printed in much larger quantities and I have no idea where many of them will end up. So, for readers who come across this volume and wonder who the hell Ken O’Sullivan is, there is a sort of offbeat, tongue-in-cheek, biographical note in the appendix which, whilst almost totally devoid of the kind of detail you’d expect in a curriculum vitae, tells you quite a bit about me. In this vignette, incidentally, I say that I greatly admire scholars with a genuine love of English. Prince among these was my English teacher throughout secondary school, Robin Atthill, to whom I have dedicated one of my home-produced volumes, *Grin And Bear It*. I am eternally in his debt for passing on his love of

language to me. To be fair to my reader, a more formal biographical note follows the lighthearted one.

Before I leave you to delve into the pages of *Pieces Of Mind*, I have two requests. The first is, if this book turns out not to be your cup of tea, please pass it on to somebody who might like it. (If you have received the pdf. version, please free to pass it on to family, friends, colleagues, indeed anybody you feel might enjoy it.) The books cost a bit to produce and are given away freely, and I would like them to reach people who will enjoy the content. If you do decide to keep it, perhaps you would pass it on to a new owner when you have no further use for it, rather than leave it to gather dust on your bookshelves. The second is to ask you to let me know if you come across any items that mean something to you; I would be very pleased to hear from you. My e-mail address is woodmere@eircom.net

Most of the the entries from *Perspectives* are complete in themselves. Almost all of the remaining items are extracts from longer pieces. If any of the these tempt you to see the whole piece, just e-mail me and, with a small number of exceptions which are too personal, I will be glad to send it to you; or if you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them. In case you are curious: why do I give these books away for nothing? I really like the scripture which says, 'Freely you have received, freely give.' Writing has entertained and nurtured me for many years, way beyond what I could have hoped for when I first put pen to paper. This is my way of giving something back. Indeed, it is almost twenty-one years to the day since I started writing, so *Pieces Of Mind* is a celebration and I am delighted to share it with you.

My heartfelt thanks to my wife, Carmel, for her painstaking proof-reading. I was going to say that proof-reading is a thankless task but seeing that I have just thanked her, it obviously isn't! Sincere thanks also to Liam Ó Broin of Mall Publications, without whose help this book would not have been produced ([www.mallpublications.net](http://www.mallpublications.net)).

Many blessings,

*Ken O'Sullivan*

13th July 2010

# Introducing Fred & Lucille

## fred

There is a permanent resident inside my head, a disembodied voice (except insofar as it shares my body – and without my permission I might add). It is probably the kind of voice experienced by all humans, and variously perceived as the conscience, the inner voice, the permanent indwelling commentator, or whatever one might call it, but which I call – with a sort of reluctant affection, I suppose – ‘Fred.’ As one might expect, he is highly unpredictable and I have a volatile relationship with him. The ‘Fred’ stories are (for the most part) over-the-top caricatures of the kind of conversations that go on in my head – God help me!

## lucille

Lucille is my Muse, the stunningly beautiful (though nearly three thousand years old) goddess who inspires my literary masterpieces. Mind you, it would be unjust of me not to admit that I also produce some utter junk which is not her doing.

It was only in writing a poem entitled *Amusing* which was penned on the spot on a radio programme a few years ago, that I discovered her name. Since then, our relationship has become a good deal more intimate – platonically speaking, naturally. Over time, I have come to rely on her for a good deal more than mere literary inspiration. Indeed, the perceptive reader may, at times, be liable to speculate that there is more to it than the good Plato had in mind but, of course, such suspicions would be purely in the realms of fantasy, since Lucille is merely a figment of my imagination. At least, I think she is...

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*Pieces of Mind* contains some short extracts from the ‘Fred’ and ‘Lucille’ stories, together with a full ‘Fred’ story and a full ‘Lucille’ story in the Appendix.

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# Pieces Of Mind



*Pieces of mind? When people read this drivel,  
they'll think you're out of your mind!*

**Something to think about - really think about**

God doesn't limit us.  
We limit God.

(Page 241)

## **Pity the reader!**

Yet could it be – though scarcely meet –  
That this is meant to be a treat?  
Oh well, if he's all set to share it,  
I s'pose we'd better grin and bear it.

(From *Resignation* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **Is competitiveness the way?**

In earlier life, I was as competitive – in certain fields – as anybody else. Now here is an interesting question: was it my nature to be competitive or was I conditioned by the society in which I live? More recently I have been seriously questioning the wisdom of the ways in which people have always pitted themselves – or have always been unwillingly pitted – against one another in competition, from a simple game of tiddlywinks to a full-scale war.

(From *Are We Meant To Be Competitive?* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Storing memories in a poem**

Enshrined, forever treasured  
In the mind – my store of miracles –  
I long to hold the memory  
Of this moment in a poem...

(From *Metaphor For A Memory* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **Do I have an open mind?**

Since I became aware, probably in mid-teenage, that such a condition was considered the mark of an enlightened human being, I recall having been exhorted in various ways and by various people and at various times to keep an open mind. On such occasions I would invariably say to myself: “But Ken, you *always* keep an open mind.” Now that I am literally bowed down with the weight of life’s experience, I can see that most of the time I had anything but an open mind. The moment somebody said something that triggered a prejudice or offered a perception that was at variance with my view of the world, or simply presented an appearance or attitude that I didn’t like, the shutters came down and I switched off. Alternatively I would make judgements on the speaker in order to make myself feel superior or protect myself from viewpoints that threatened my comfort zone. The only consolation I draw from this dismal, closed-minded performance is that I was in very good company, always assuming that one considers almost everybody else on the planet good company. In short, the man or woman with a truly open mind is a rare phenomenon.

(From *Minding The Open Mind* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Appearances deceive**

Though outwardly a full-grown man  
Who plays the adult best he can,  
With you can I discard this pose  
And in your arms the truth disclose:  
In fact, I’m but a child.

(From *Back To Basics* - poem in ‘The Substance Of Dreams’)



## **Don't keep me waiting!**

The wristwatch protests with persistent bleeps,  
Providing an unnecessary reminder  
(For I am fastidious about appointments)  
That you're late – very,  
And I shall wait no longer,  
For, restlessly I twiddle the fingers and tap the foot,  
And I have a marked distaste for finger-twiddling  
and foot-tapping,  
And, given that time, tide and yours truly wait for no man,  
Nor, as in this case, woman,  
I shall depart – forthwith.

(From *Abide With Me* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It')



## **A heart in the right place**

It's not so much what I do that counts. It's more why I do it.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Taking leave of a loved one**

Now I take a silent parting  
With a kiss upon your forehead,  
Knowing we will be united  
In a realm beyond all dreaming  
Where pure love's the only essence,  
Where the only thing expected  
Is acceptance of our happiness...  
And we'll just smile and acquiesce.

(from *Acquiescence* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Our problems in perspective**

I am an egg – a potential chicken, if you prefer – highly valued, so I'm told, in certain circles; but my lot is not a happy one.

At the outset of my brief existence, some feathered, flightless, overfed twit who passes herself off as my mother, forces me, willy nilly, through an excruciatingly tight orifice anything but adequately designed to afford an easy passage to my rotund dimensions and delicate structure...

But the ultimate insult comes when they condemn what is left of me to spend the autumn of my life with common household garbage. And you think you've got problems.

(From *An Egg's Lament* - story in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **How to be a spiritual contortionist**

On the one hand, do not limit God in any way but, on the other, have no expectations!

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Good is its own reward**

“What does that mean, Mum: good is its own reward?”

“In the world in which we live, my son, we are often falsely led to do things for other people only when it will benefit us. I suppose it's a fact that when we are kind to other people, we feel better about ourselves. In ways that I cannot fully explain, doing good purely for its own sake brings rich rewards deep inside us – the most important place. Everything outside us does not last.”

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **A prayer of appreciation**

You are:  
The light to see me through each day,  
The hope to keep despair at bay,  
The hand to guide me, come what may,  
And my companion across the desert...

You are:  
The earthly form my heart esteems,  
Though you are infinite, it seems,  
For you are substance born of dreams;  
And yet... the dreams are substance.

(From *The Substance Of Dreams* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **In every generation...**

Being a parent is not easy –  
The understatement of the era.  
My wife and I got no training,  
Beyond what we gleaned  
From our own dear parents,  
And they were just kids who had kids  
Who muddled along,  
Day to day, doing their best,  
A monumental blunder here,  
A piece of inspired parenting there,  
Repeating the age-old cycle.

(from the poem *The Age-old Cycle*)



## **Simplicity**

A few metres down the road, he topped up the petrol tank,  
assembled a simple picnic at the filling station shop, headed for  
the country and climbed a mountain that was sacred to him. He

sat on a rock, surveying the valley below, consumed his simple fare which tasted like a banquet, closed his eyes, whispered a heartfelt prayer of gratitude, then lifted his face to the sun, gave himself up to the healing of Nature and lived happily ever after.

(From *A Short Tale With A Long Tail* - story in 'Oh, My Head!')



### **Nothing is impossible to God**

You take faltering belief  
And make it knowledge;  
You take abstract illusion  
And make it reality;  
You take the scavenging vulture  
And make it a dove;  
You take all that there is  
And make it love.

(from *The Alchemist* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



### **Tough love? No thanks!**

The so-called 'tough love' type of therapy, friendship, teaching, mentoring or pastoring, where the well-meaning give me a piece of their mind or a portion of their potted philosophies or confront me with my issues (which, if the truth were known, are frequently *their* issues) 'for my own good,' is about as helpful as thumping me between the two eyes with a sledgehammer to cure a headache. But give me even a tiny dose of TLC and I blossom. And God save me from the well-meaning!

(From 'Perspectives')



## **A land of make-believe**

The distant land, of which I am about to relate, nestles high up in the mountains in a remote part of the planet, bypassed by the modern world and, because of the inaccessible location and the apparently alien lifestyle of the people, has been visited by very few outsiders. I am one such, and am greatly privileged to have been able to make the journey, for I learnt there one of the most important lessons of my life.

All the inhabitants are magicians. This is as natural to them as the green grass, the mountain peaks and the clouds in the sky. They would no more find it expedient to say to their neighbour, "I am a magician," than I would find it necessary to explain to a friend that I am a human being. It is their whole way of existence. In other respects they conduct their lives much as we do, practising various professions, bringing up their families, engaging in social activities and so on. The one major difference is that where we have to carry out a series of actions to accomplish a task, they merely weave a magic spell and *voilà!* At a very early age they are introduced to the simplest formulas, and their education proceeds from there.

(From *Back To The Source* - story in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Duty visits to relatives or friends**

Killed with kindness;  
Got to be nice,  
Guest of the family,  
Can't be alone,  
For one single moment,  
To gather my thoughts  
Or burp after dinner...

(From *Killed With Kindness* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **Gosh, but it's hard to change!**

Why do I fret  
When there is no need?  
Why do I get stuck  
And pay no heed  
To that which I've learned from the past?  
The reason is simple:  
The inescapable shift,  
The trying transition  
From the old to the new takes time,  
And the passage of time can be testing,  
With the changes that it brings,  
As old philosophies take wings  
And leave a painful vacuum.

(from *All Things New* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **Treasure deep inside**

A tear stole out of the corner of one eye and meandered slowly down his cheek. He always reacted in this way to the mystical. Because he experienced it on a moment to moment basis, he knew, without the slightest shadow of doubt, in a realm beyond the intellect and the senses, that this third layer was his spirit, at the core of which was an indestructible essence, and that it did indeed reach to eternity. Here was his limitless store of unconditional love - first received, then given. Here were his deep caring and compassion for his fellow men and women. Here was his profound yearning that every last soul could come to know the All-That-Is as he did. Here was the sublimely beautiful reality of which his surface layer was a reflection. Here, at the third level, was his true self.

(From *Beware The Ring Of Truth* - story in 'Oh, My Head!')



### **On watching a romantic video**

Simulation between spools,  
Placed on slowly turning tape,  
Bearing fiction to bewitch,  
Lures lost feelings from within,  
Born of dreams that feed the heart,  
Yearnings ushered by desire  
To emulate, encapsulate  
The rapture on the screen,  
Sensify, intensify  
A love that's never been.

(from *All Too Soon* - poem in 'The Dance Of Forever')



### **Impressions of a poetry masterclass**

In an innocent quest for new strategies,  
A composer of musical comedies,  
Mistakenly switching identities,  
Attends a symposium on symphonies,  
And, using incongruous metaphors  
In apt retroactive rebellion,  
Looks on in horror,  
And nameless foreboding,  
Awaiting, in terror,  
The cut of the scalpel,  
As self-styled physicians  
Perform major surgery,  
Without anaesthetic,  
On healthy embryos.

(*Anatomy Lesson* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Simple formula**

As is pretty well known, the best way to disarm one's critics is to agree with them.

(From *The Contented Maverick* - essay<sup>2</sup> in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Fulfilment**

In the moment when I have a peace that comes forth out of unconditional love and a freedom born of authentic humility, not alone will I have everything I need, but everything I want as well.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Seeing things differently**

When he grew up, as a result of schooling, religious formation and social conditioning, he was to be, for the most part, a conformist to the outer world but, as the years went by, he realised that he did not think like other people in so many ways. And it was only much later, with hindsight, he recalled that by the time he was six, he had a sense, albeit an incomplete one, that whilst he was like other children in all the usual ways – fun-loving, curious, mercurial and mischievous – there was something about the way in which he viewed the world around him that was different to his youthful companions.

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **Each person is unique**

A statement of the obvious that is often overlooked is this: the one thing – the only thing – we all have in common is that we are

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<sup>2</sup> The full essay is in the Appendix on page 251.

all different. A certain amount of conformity is necessary so that individuals might coexist as members of a society, but educational, political, legal, religious and philosophical systems have tried to press us into the same mould, to homogenise us, since the genesis of time. The result has been the limiting of the mind, the dulling of the senses, the stifling of creativity and the ‘religionisation’ of spirituality and, ultimately, the ignition of those powerful negative reactions that cause addictions, obsessiveness, bizarre behaviour, rebellion and anarchy.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **Yes, it’s all about change**

Pity, pray pity – enough is enough!  
A lifetime of fear and oppression and stuff  
Is more than sufficient for any one man,  
And, Oh God, I am doing the best that I can.  
Yet now comes the testing – the final frontier:  
To let go of yearnings, confusion and fear,  
Return to the wellspring and start life anew...

(From *And You Will* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



### **Stop the world**

My life’s just going round and round;  
Things cyclical are plain unsound.  
Oh, pray these circuits to repeal,  
And get me on an even keel.

(From *Gyrations* - poem in ‘Hang On!’)



## **Never give up**

So, lastly, here I'm lying,  
Bruised and broken on the ground  
And awaiting welcome death  
To release from earthly sentence.  
Then, when hope has almost gone,  
There comes a healing touch,  
The tender touch of Love...

(From *Angel Of Rescue* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **If only...**

“There I was, savouring my coffee and chocolate chip muffin, all – not through choice – on my own, when three beautiful women asked if they might share my table... I assented – naturally – but then, for some inexplicable reason, I proceeded to sit there, motionless and mute, somewhat reminiscent of Lot's wife who, if you recall, Fred, was turned into a pillar of salt – or was it granite? No, salt. I mean, I was totally tongue-tied, as if suddenly stricken with paralysis of the vocal cords. They prattled delightfully on, as females do, but I said precisely nothing, sat there like a stuffed walrus. *Sigh!* Another golden opportunity missed; a thousand curses on my reticence.”

(From *Proper Order* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **If you don't like it, lump it!**

I wrote a poem yesterday,  
And one the day before,  
And, in the days preceding that,  
I scribbled several more.  
    I wrote of this, I wrote of that  
    And a good bit of the other.  
    But there's always something new to say

So I think I'll write another.  
And what's the topic for today?  
And will it aptly fit  
The reader's firm and fertile mind?  
You judge; for this is it!  
What's that? 'Tis nought but third-rate crap,  
The sort you'd find in sewers?  
Well, I respect your point of view;  
But, just the same, up yewers!

(*Another Day, Another Poem* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Belief and doubt**

Abraham Low stated: "A belief is a thought and a thought can be changed."<sup>3</sup> It follows, then, that when I say I believe something it is not an expression of certainty. Belief, therefore, contrary to the widely held perception that it is carved in stone (particularly religious belief), clearly embodies a significant element of doubt. Indeed, belief can be synonymous with doubt in certain contexts. Knowledge, on the other hand, is based on experience, and experience cannot be denied. Thus, when someone says, "I have an unshakeable belief", it is a contradiction in terms. It is akin to saying, "I have an unshakeable, changeable thought!" or even, "I have an unshakeable doubt!". I imagine that people who meaningfully speak of unshakeable belief are, in reality, speaking of solid experience and are unconcerned with semantic accuracy. Where an experience is in doubt, it does not necessarily mean that the experience itself is in question, rather that it has not yet become solid enough to render the resulting knowledge unassailable.

(From *Beliefs, Thoughts And Change* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



<sup>3</sup> Abraham A. Low, M.D. (1891-1954), pathbreaking American neuropsychiatrist.

## **Another career?**

“... I mean, whilst I in no way judge such worthy mortals, I do not want to be one of those retirees who just lounges in his rocking chair on the verandah, smoking his pipe and having his slippers fetched by the dog, day in and day out until he snuffs it.”

“We don’t have a dog; not since you gave him away.”

“Shut up, Fred! That’s not the point. The point is that I want to do something useful with the time that is left to me, undertake some meaningful endeavour, give service to my fellow man, exert myself in some worthy cause and all that sort of thing.”

(From *What Now?* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **On meeting a friend after many years**

Don’t know his diagnosis,  
But he sure looks as distressed  
As I am feeling...  
My God  
But he must be in a bad way,  
The poor sod!

(From the poem *Appearances*)



## **Love and humility**

It is inconceivable to me that one could have true love without commensurate humility. They are two sides of the same coin.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Time travel**

“Now that I think of it, there is a part of me that is a child all the time. I become particularly aware of it when I look in the mirror and behold abundant lines and thinning grey hair and wonder how I came to be an adult with all these burdensome responsibilities... I’m quite happy, mind you, about this ability to time-travel in order to hobnob with the infant me; it keeps me young in spirit and open in mind...”

(From *Just Kids* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **Worth waiting for**

At last I’ve cast away the old  
That I might now be free;  
At last I’m graced to see the things  
I’ve always yearned to see;  
At last I am becoming the man  
I’ve always longed to be -  
And that’s the man who’s ne’er alone,  
And the man, at last, who’s me.

(From *At Last* - poem in ‘From The Cradle Of Eternity’)



## **Oh dear – such cynicism!**

Blessed are they  
Who accept everything that comes their way,  
Bounteous blessing or belligerent blight,  
Without question,  
For to them shall be granted  
A profoundly simple understanding  
Of the fact that you can’t win,  
As evidenced in the words of  
The sad but wise and age-old saying:

“Those who ask don’t get;  
Those who don’t ask,  
Don’t want.”

(From the poem *Beatitudes*)



### **Sadly all too common**

Impoverished city-dweller  
Cocooned in temporal possessions,  
Pampered by material wealth,  
Yet poor in spirit,  
His life permeated with fatigue,  
Feelings of frustration and failure  
And an absence of purpose for his life,  
His heart yearning for more  
Than the surrogate consolations  
Offered by western society

(From *Back To Nature* - poem in ‘Hang On!’)



### **Never take the book by the cover**

This was no ordinary fortune-teller, no mendicant gypsy at a country fair, no toothless hag sitting on an orange box at a street corner. She had consulting rooms in a fashionable quarter of town and a reputation to guard in her chosen profession which, as well as peering into the beyond, included several other therapies which enabled her to offer a more comprehensive service to her clients, as is the custom with many modern practitioners. All very respectable and awe-inspiring – the latter particularly so if those who applied to her for insight or solace were feeling vulnerable, as they usually were.

(From *Beware The Ring Of Truth* - story in ‘Oh, My Head!’)



## **There's always a silver lining**

And thus these thoughts my pen requite,  
For this is all I need to write:  
Though vagaries of life deceive,  
Yet bounteous blessings I receive  
That pain and fear and doubt dispel,  
For I am loved and all is well,  
Regardless of appearances.

(From *Regardless Of Appearances* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **How important is my spirituality?**

A single-cell organism says to its inner voice one day, "You know, my one and only cell is a very important part of my life." The inner voice retorts, incredulously, "That's bullshit! Your one and only cell *is* your life!"

Get the message?

(From 'Perspectives')



## **God's love and humility**

Since, as I have said elsewhere, love and humility are two sides of the same coin, and one cannot conceive of having one side of a coin without the other, it must follow that infinite love is complemented by infinite humility. The notion of the creator of all that is being infinitely loving has been with us for aeons, but the idea of his being infinitely humble as well is mind-blowing.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Fruitless search**

A jilted lover, distraught  
But in denial,  
Rakes through the embers  
Of the fire of her passion,  
Hoping against hope  
To uncover even a tiny spark  
Of the flames of ecstasy  
That once consumed her with bliss,  
And finds nothing but cold ashes.

(From *Betrayal* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



## **So much for philosophy**

An article in the morning paper had just reminded me that, at one stage in my varied career, I made a valiant attempt to study philosophy, but gave up in disillusionment after about ten lectures. My objective had been to emulate the world's greatest thinkers and become the soul of wisdom myself. I abandoned the idea, however, when I discovered that most of the world's greatest thinkers screwed themselves up with too much analysis, and that the few who somehow contrived to remain half sane continued, nevertheless, to concoct idiosyncratic hypotheses that can best be described as consummate hogwash.

(From *Philosophy Hands On* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **A tale from childhood**

The woodland occupied less than four acres but was rich in its variety of trees and undergrowth, notably a veritable galaxy of bluebells, for it was the time of year for these beautiful, wild perennials. Gerald was delighted, and his memory instantly transported him to that wood of his childhood where his mother

had brought him at every season of the year, as her parents had brought her. Each spring, she would stop with him and gaze long and wistfully at the new crop of bluebells, which reminded her of a lovely story her mother had told her.

She repeated it to Gerald each year: when their flowering season was over, legions of fairies would come and take each floral bell from the myriad stems, then they would ring the bell each day towards sunset until they found the love of their dreams. It was a fanciful story, but Gerald had always loved it.

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



### **In the eye of the beholder**

There is a beauty in the world  
That can never be denied,  
For it abounds on every side  
In tandem with the ugliness.  
The eye can see the loveliness...

(From *Beneath The Surface* - poem in 'Beneath The Surface')



### **Faith**

All is just as it should be –  
Intellect aptly suspended;  
Though sometimes I wish it but could be  
To my specification amended.  
Yet, if it were to be otherwise wrought  
Or altered or taught or transcended  
By God up in Heaven,  
It would be!

(*Faith* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **Famous last words**

So, I think I'll not fall in love again;  
It is a perilous pursuit,  
Defying understanding...  
For the capricious emotion  
Is a powerful potion  
That cares not a whit for the power of reason.

(From the poem *Bittersweet*)



## **Permitted decadence!**

“This is brazen self-indulgence at its most delightfully dissipated; no wonder the bath-loving Roman Empire fell asunder,” I remarked to Fred as we descended into the blissfully warming waters of the Jacuzzi...”

(From *Bubbling Over* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Time the healer**

A voice once in my head resided,  
O'er me with iron rule presided,  
Never, ever content with what was,  
Constantly dictated that which should be,  
And made me a slave to perfection;  
But the passage of time and reflection  
From its edicts at last set me free...

(From *Blossom Where I'm Planted* - poem in ‘From The Cradle Of Eternity’)



## **Easy on the Americanisms if you please!**

Much as I esteem our American brethren, their mode of parlance includes one or two expressions which always make me want to throw up, the most notable of which is, 'Have a nice day.' I am staunchly independent by nature and have an intense aversion to being told what kind of a day to have. I'll have whatever kind of a goddam day I choose for goodness' sake.

(From *Nice Day* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Could we but learn from Nature**

When winter calls to calmness,  
Each beast and plant and being  
Ought respond in right reposing,  
But we humans do not slumber,  
Perpetually in motion  
From the short day to the longest,  
As if there were no seasons,  
As if there were no reasons  
For the change of light and shadow,  
The departing of the swallow  
And the advent of the stillness,  
For the lessening of the brightness  
And the calming cloak of dark...

(From *Winter's Wisdom* - poem in 'The Power Of Light')



## **When life could be more**

It was probably that time of her progress through the various phases of the human condition. The change of life some people call it. In fact she was pretty sure that's what was causing the problem. Some women have a pretty rough time of it. Others get off relatively lightly. She wasn't faring too badly herself as

she had found a gifted healthcare practitioner who had guided her in the use of herbs and other natural remedies which had produced very good results. She had also been encouraged to consider meditation, yoga, holistic massage and a number of other wholesome endeavours but she hadn't tried those so far because of a reluctance that she found difficult to fathom. Be that as it may, and notwithstanding the good results from the herbs, she still experienced an unnamed feeling of discomfort, an intellectual insufficiency or a spiritual restiveness. She wasn't quite sure what label to assign to it, but it manifested in an uncomfortable, low grade anxiety – a sort of restless malaise – that was with her most of the time together with a feeling that her life could be so much more.

(From *Cheque Mate* - story in 'Oh, My Head!')



### **Attitudes**

“Whenever I felt uncomfortable in my skin, I used to look to left and to right, before and aft, to see who or what was causing it. And I always found out who or what was causing it, but it never made any difference. Now, when I feel uncomfortable in my skin, I look at my attitudes, and it always makes a difference – for the better.”

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 8* - Communications Lecture Notes)



### **What is good literature?**

“...where literature is concerned, quality is in the eye of the reader and the ear of the listener.”

(From *One Man's Meat...* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Just the first lines of a favourite poem...**

There,  
On the eve of Easter,  
At the back of the garden,  
Bordered by the pine trees and hedges,  
Blossoming in a neglected corner  
(Witness to wintertime and a reluctant gardener)  
Was a single, lonely bluebell,  
Like its beholder, an only child...

(From *The Bluebell* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Humouring the human condition**

It is unquestionably not my day,  
And I definitely do not feel like a laugh;  
Neither hilarity nor merriment are currently in the ascendant,  
Yet I ought to write something funny.  
I mean, people don't want sob stories, do they?

(From *Laugh And I Cry Alone* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **Birthright?**

In the spiritual realm, I am not so much learning as remembering what I always knew. When I was conceived in the heart and mind of God, outside the limitations of time and space, I was given everything I needed to know but, with my entry into the human condition and the cumulative effects of education and conditioning, I forgot or mislaid much of that given knowledge.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Keep it cool**

This morning, I lost it yet again –  
My temper, that is.  
The wretched thing discharged a paroxysm of fury  
That left my serenity severely unhinged  
And my nose seriously out of joint  
For the remainder of the day...

(From the poem *Boomerang*)



## **Banks**

“Yes, on your toes is where they keep you. Apart from the outrageous interest rates they levy, you never know what they’re going to charge you for next. New items keep appearing, unannounced, on my monthly statement like pimples on a child with rapidly evolving chicken pox. Here are a few examples for your enlightenment: ‘Asslip,’ ‘GBP,’ ‘Non Bank Fee,’ ‘Ref chg.’ I mean, what do they think I am – a hieroglyphics expert? The one that really gets me, though, is ‘maintenance charge.’ The only thing the so-and-sos maintain is my blood pressure at a high level. They make Shylock look like a fairy godmother!”

(From *Going Public?* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **No end**

We tend to think and talk in terms of beginnings and ends, particularly ends – like death. But where there is true love, there is no end.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **First fruits**

A new morn has dawned  
And I rise from the bed  
The prospect of breakfast  
Alone in my head.  
The day takes its toll,  
And I must get enough  
Multifarious intakes  
Of nourishing stuff...

(From *Breakfast* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Fact or fiction?**

The more I read and hear and observe in the world around me, the more I have become imbued with the perception that information (all too often delineated as 'incontrovertible fact') is capable of being manipulated to support or 'prove' vastly different – often diametrically opposing – viewpoints. Historical information, which is almost always written by the 'winners,' appears particularly vulnerable to falsification, fabrication, forgery and sheer fantasy.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **A meditation on the human condition**

That's it?  
Oh shit!

(*Brevity* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **A further meditation on the human condition**

So, it's this?  
Oh, what bliss!

(*Brevity Revisited* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Conditioning**

When I was an infant, a mystic voice said:  
"You'd better get it all right, or you're dead!  
Your actions may ne'er be with failure endowed,  
Perfection – with balance – is all that's allowed."  
So, I got it all right, and I ne'er got it wrong;  
'Perfection With Balance' was my battle song  
As I warred on my faults and made virtue my goal,  
And brought all of my appetites under control.  
Yes, I humbly submitted to early hypnosis;  
Now I find that I've screwed myself up in the process.

(*Sting In The Tail* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **A fairy tale romance**

But there was sufficient light for them to gaze deeply once again into each other's eyes as they rowed back from the island. He had never seen this woman before, nor had she ever seen him. He did not even know her name, and up to now she had been the only one to speak. And she could not possibly know who he was – just a passer-by, a trespasser indeed, whom she had mistaken for a boatman. They were still gazing intently at each other as the prow of the boat grazed gently onto the slipway. Neither made any attempt to move, nor did they remove their eyes from each other. At length, the young woman reached slowly forward and took his hands in hers. "Gerald!" she said tenderly.

“Elizabeth!” he replied with equal tenderness.

They continued to look deep into each other’s eyes as if enchanted. All that could be heard was the rustle of the rushes caressed by a gentle breeze, the lake water lapping against the stern of the boat and the haunting call of the curlew on the lake. In this softest of semi-silences, Nature wordlessly witnessed the wondrous truth: they were hopelessly, irrevocably, eternally in love.

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Don’t just sit there, do something!**

I ought to have more sense,  
But I baby-sit the phone  
For some friend to ring and rescue  
From the pit of glum reflection,  
Where I’m wrapped in introspection,  
Yet no-one rings at all...

(From *Call Collect* - poem in ‘From The Cradle Of Eternity’)



### **Union with God**

Oneness (union) with God does not mean that I lose my individuality and become subsumed into a sort of gigantic, amorphous, spiritual organism. Rather does it mean that the unique personality and integrity which are God’s gifts to me find their ultimate expression and fulfilment when my will (my ‘way’ to use a term I prefer) is one with his/hers.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Keeping a low profile**

Uninspired and unsophisticated it may well be  
Not to yearn for public prestige and public prosperity,  
But, given the unenviable price of popularity,  
Long, please God – albeit unrewarded for my uniqueness –  
May I remain unambitious, unnoticed and unsung.

(From *Unsung* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Life's like that**

Monday happens once a week,  
There's no escaping that.  
Tuesday takes a hefty toll;  
By Wednesday I've gone flat.  
Thursday drags – my spirit sags  
'Neath heavy loads and vast,  
But all's not lost – and thank you God –  
For Friday comes at last.  
On Saturday I do my thing,  
Then take a rest on Sunday;  
But the good of it is all screwed up  
By another bloody Monday.

(*Weak End* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Which view of spirituality?**

The maze – or be amazed?  
The key question of life's journey.

(From *It All Depends* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **Browsing in an antique shop**

You were in the showcase  
At the vendor of antiques,  
Earthbound eagle ornamental;  
Wings spread static, fixed and firm,  
But alas forever flightless;  
Deftly crafted in black marble  
On a plinth of mottled stone,  
Speaking silently of style...

(From *Caveat Emptor* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It')



## **Hitting the nail on the head?**

“... and stop using fancy words Fred. I’m not that easily impressed. I’ll bet you don’t even know what ‘Hypothesis’ means.”

“Now that’s where you’re wrong,” said Fred, the corners of his mouth curling just a trifle, “it’s an illness contracted almost exclusively by economists.”

(From *Epidemic* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **No preaching please!**

Nobody will ever be brought into a personal knowledge of the infinite, steadfast, unconditional love of God by being preached at, taught, indoctrinated, coerced, or exhorted to have faith. The only way anybody can be brought into a knowledge of the infinite, steadfast, unconditional love of God is by experiencing that love for themselves.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Birds know the secret**

The curlews on the lake of Coole  
Call clearly in the cool ere night,  
And as I near, so swift take flight,  
Then *cur-lew* on in curious laughter,  
Cast all their cares upon the water,  
All irksome questions disallow,  
And give no thought to fore and after;  
Just free and in the now.

(From *Chill Out* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



## **A father gets it wrong**

My only daughter smiled lovingly at me,  
Late one evening, and asked if all was well,  
But I did not reply because I had a bee in my bonnet  
About some earlier infringement of the household rules.

(From *Parent* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Compulsion**

To safeguard my sanity,  
When the bug doth bite,  
I gotta write!

(From *When The Bug Bites* - poem from 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Whatever turns you on**

The answer to tiredness, the treatment for stress,  
The way matrimonial bliss to possess,

A shock to the system, but nevertheless,  
Is to take a cold shower.

(From *Cold Comfort* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



### **Miracles? Yes, definitely**

“Dad, do you believe in miracles?”

“My dear daughter, it’s time I shared a most important part of my life with you. Ever since early childhood, I had the most profound, often anguished, yearning for something that, as my intellect started to mature, I became certain, beyond any doubt, was utterly impossible – even to God. And yearning has to be by far and away the most intense form of asking because it is there whether one wishes it to be or not. Other requests come and go, but a yearning is virtually a part of who one is – a continuous, wordless request; and, in this case, one that never left me, but one that pleaded for something which could never, ever be. And I grieved. Then, out of the blue, when I was fifty years of age, my God – beyond the dreams of a thousand lifetimes – fulfilled my lifelong yearning and gave me my heart’s desire. Yes, Alison, I believe in miracles. More than that, I rely on them. Now let me tell you the full story...”

(From 'The Dance Goes On' - draft sequel to the novel 'Black On Magenta')



### **Familiar September lament**

September’s almost here again;  
I hate the very notion –  
It means the end of my parole,  
And drumming up devotion  
To the hallowed halls of academe...

(From *Back To School* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



### **Well, that's one way of doing it**

Never thought I'd do it,  
Plunge into Galway Bay  
On a chill and cloudy day  
Before the Ides of March;  
Me, a fair-weather, late-summer swimmer;  
But I felt as low as a body can go,  
And I needed some instant therapy.  
Salt water, ice-cold, did it!

(From *Cold With The Blues* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



### **Giving the reader a piece of my mind**

Look here, blasted reader, who asked you to interrupt? This is no time for getting technical and making yourself thoroughly disagreeable with all this unseemly scepticism. You can see how upset I am. I know bloody well that Muses don't have a physical presence under normal circumstances, but if you'd been paying attention to these chronicles, you would have learned by now that Lucille possesses a mystical ability to manifest in tangible albeit invisible form when the chips – my chips – are down. Now buzz off and leave me in peace.

(From *Leave It To Lucille...* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **Cheap at the price**

Lately, when I see a product that is unbelievably good value, I find myself thinking, "Who's not getting adequately paid here?"

(From 'Perspectives')



## **A paradox**

Once more,  
I climb the familiar slopes  
To the sanctuary of Máméan,  
As always with expectancy  
But yet no expectation.

(From *A Whisper On The Wind* - poem in 'The Power Of Light')



## **Living now**

After many years of a fruitless and wearying struggle to attain the unattainable, I have discovered that life is a process, not the attainment of some ultimate, distant goal. The secret of living a contented life, it seems to me therefore, is to let go of the illusion that I am in control of what each day brings, and simply do my best to enjoy the process.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 8* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Just some pretty colours**

From lavender to forest green,  
From midnight blue to softest cream,  
From dusty pink to subtle lime,  
From cherry red to misty wine,  
From silver hue to golden glow...

(From *The Colours Of My Rainbow* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **The desire to be in control**

One of the most distressing – indeed frightening – sensations in life is the feeling that we are not in control. ‘I must be in control of my life’ is a belief so pervasively held throughout the world that few ever seem to question it. Perhaps, even as you begin to read this essay, you will almost immediately find yourself thinking, “What the hell is he on about? Everybody knows that, in so far as is humanly possible, it is vital to be in control of one’s life. If I am not in control of my life, then I’ll be subject to the whims of every thing and every one and eventually become like the hole in the doughnut!”

(From *The Cult Of Control* - essay in ‘Beneath The Surface’)



## **Really living**

A voice inquires inside my head  
If I will live before I’m dead;  
Whene’er this question plagues my mind,  
No peaceful slumber can I find.  
Asleep, I dream of life eternal,  
But my concern is more diurnal;  
So tell me this, and tell no lie,  
D’you think I’ll live before I die?

(*Quality Control* - poem in ‘Grin & Bear It!’)



## **Sincerity**

“Sincerity only bears fruit,” she said, “when it is nourished by wisdom.”

(From *Eye Opener* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **A date before breakfast**

Come dance with me  
In the morning mist,  
A tryst at breaking dawn,  
Before the night is fully shed  
And the infant day is born.

(From *Come Dance With Me* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **The importance of perception**

How we perceive ourselves and each other has an enormous impact on the quality of our communication.

(From *Perception* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Another world**

Gerald did not intrude with needless questions and just waited for Elizabeth to continue when she was ready. He sensed that she was about to entrust him with details that she had rarely shared with anybody.

“It is like living in two worlds at the same time. My feet are solidly planted in this life, but the most important part of me is constantly in tune, in communion if you wish, with another existence – an eternal one – which, although completely separate, is paradoxically very close to us. Yet, sadly, most people do not perceive it. Moreover, many do not believe it exists and that is even sadder. It is a dimension that is more real than the one that surrounds us and it is stupendously beautiful – beyond my limited powers of description. The sense of what I can only call eternal presence never leaves me...”

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **All you can do is pray**

A sign of the way in which we use language but much more, I believe, an indication of the attitude we have to prayer is what is often said to somebody in times of trouble when all human means of help have failed: “All you can do is pray.” Now the denotation of this expression is very positive. “All” is an inclusive word which means that the prayer will cover everything. The connotation, which comes about through linguistic usage is something like this: “Well, all the effective remedies have failed, so there isn’t much left but prayer.”

The truth of the matter is that the *best* thing we can do is pray. Human means of help are, of course, employed because they are gifts from God, but they are much more effective when guided by the power of prayer.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **A writer’s great expectations**

A pencil that’s pregnant with promise,  
A notebook agog with awareness,  
For it senses from previous experience  
That apt words may flow onto its pages...

(From *Coming Unstuck* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **Sheep – or us?**

Gentle, inoffensive animals, sheep;  
Cuddly yet befuddled,  
Irresistibly endearing,  
Yet incapable of taking care of themselves.  
They must be led into the pasture,  
Led beside quiet waters,

Led through the darkest valleys,  
And led back to the sanctuary of the fold.  
Left to themselves they perish...

(From the poem *Comparison*)



### **Unhelpful advice re: fear**

Telling me that ‘fear is the absence of faith’ is about as helpful as taking laxatives for an ingrowing toenail. The fear only gets worse because I feel that I can never believe strongly enough to transcend it.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **Moan, moan!**

Today,  
I complained bitterly about the torrential rain,  
Went on about my excessive work load,  
And carped at the onerous tax bill,  
Moaned about those who understand me not,  
Wished the priest would stuff his boring sermon,  
And berated God for the pervasive evil on the planet.

(From *Complaints Department* - poem in ‘Who Do They Think I Am?’)



### **Frustration**

“... you don’t understand why my intellect perpetually gets itself into the kind of tangled knots that you’d expect from a delinquent boy scout, why my blasted emotions constantly execute spectacular impersonations of Mexican jumping beans

on a pub crawl, why my ageing physique is acting like a set of hinges that hasn't seen lubricating oil for about a hundred and fifty years, and why my spirit cavorts about the place like a knock-kneed giraffe on a trampoline.”

(From *Feeling Negative* - story in 'Life With Fred')



### **The writer's curse**

What new to write, what potent phrase,  
What thought not long since penned?  
What cogent verse, what language terse  
Can tedium now transcend?  
I've said it once, and twice and thrice,  
The frequency's deplorable;  
The themes are oft oblique or dull,  
Too plain or unexplorable.  
I've scribbled on through thick and thin,  
Reality ignoring;  
The truth is this (though hard to bear):  
I'm becoming stale and boring.  
But though I've said it all before,  
For better or for worse,  
I'll have to say it all again,  
For that's the writer's curse!

(*Condemned* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Of a particular kind of journalist**

I examined the undesirable-looking specimen that had manifested on my doorstep, and discovered that it was a species of journalist from one of those toxic tabloids (not the sort you read, of course) which currently pollute the planet. Provocative, pitiless and unprincipled, these pint-sized pestilences explicitly

exploit sex thereby living off immoral earnings, and, day in day out, make human sacrifice in order to gratify their insatiable appetite for maliciously manipulating the manifold misery of mankind.

(From *No Comment* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Poor me!**

The fog falls and fills my mind,  
Grey matter permeates grey matter,  
Then merges malignly,  
Fusing despite my resistance,  
Each surrendering its separate existence,  
Insidiously becoming a single substance,  
No longer fog,  
No longer mind,  
Just groaning, grey confusion.

(From *Confusion* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



## **Journalism**

I really don't know why I decided to attend the high-profile conference. Perhaps it was the fact that circumstances during the previous week had brought me more into contact with the media than usual, from the vast selection of nauseating headlines arrayed on the shelves at my local newsagent, to a particularly vicious week in the television news and current affairs programmes, to the proliferation of dubious information on the Internet which I unwittingly discovered whilst searching for something utterly innocuous. Then again, perhaps it was the free invitation, promising a sumptuous banquet after the day's activities, and I am very fond of a good meal. So I went. Actually, now that I come to think of it, it was the intriguing title

– *The Ethics Of Journalism* – that really attracted me. Given my strongly-felt sentiments on the matter, I found myself not understanding the term.

(From *Daily Bread* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



### **Just give me a good old-fashioned typewriter**

It has often been said  
That to blunder is human,  
But to screw things up proper  
And scatter confusion  
In frightening profusion  
You need a computer,  
And no one knows better than I.  
I got me a new one –  
I think 'twas late April –  
But I had to return it  
(I was tempted to burn it!)  
'Cause it wouldn't behave.

(From *Contrition* - poem in 'The Voice Of The Man-child')



### **Applies not alone to college...**

I will make an effort to get to know my classmates, be slow to judge, quick to support and encourage them. I will try to be tolerant of personalities different to mine, walk a mile in the other person's shoes. If I do this with a good grace, my college experience will be greatly enriched.

(From 'Studying - A Guide 2nd Edition')



## **The deadly disease of denial**

Dark summons her to a death  
That must not be;  
Light beckons her to a life  
She cannot see.  
Blind both to ailment and to antidote,  
She can contemplate  
Neither the jealous vamp of death  
That craves dominion  
Nor the jaundiced view of life  
That's her companion.

(From *Cruel Paradox* - poem in 'The Voice Of The Man-child')



## **Hands off!**

However, I have one fundamental rule,  
Relating to obliging my fellow man,  
From which I permit no dispensation,  
Namely:  
There are four things  
Which I *never* lend –  
My record collection,  
My car,  
My toothbrush  
And my wife.

(From *Boundaries* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Tears**

Tears are one of God's wonderful gifts. When I am in distress, tears give a release that nothing else can accomplish. It is no accident that he/she made them like water; they flow out taking with them some or all of the hurt, cleansing me in the process. If

there is residue of hurt to be dealt with, it is a lot easier to tackle when the tears have done their work.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **No place for a lady**

The sultry señorita,  
With an air of apt dejection,  
Looks down on pints of porter,  
Through a haze of cigarette smoke,  
From her vantage point over the till.  
Publican's import from the Costa del Sol,  
Callously wrenched from her natural habitat  
On a Spanish art gallery wall.

(From *Culture Shock* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **The simple life**

I recall, as a boy, that gifts rare were and spartan,  
And, whilst glad of the contents, I'd more fun with the carton.

(From *Bored* - poem in 'Hang On!')



### **Self-esteem**

In the moment when I *know* that I am loved unconditionally, I  
also *know* that I am a person of great worth.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Visiting the grave of a loved one**

I must go now, dearest one;  
I have further to travel, and...  
Pardon?  
What was it that I wanted to tell you?  
Oh, just that I love you;  
I always have  
And I always will.  
    But then,  
    You knew that already,  
    Didn't you?

(From *A Daisy For Alice* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **A chance encounter?**

There was a man waiting at the bus stop. He was about fifty years of age with greying hair, and when he saw Barbara approaching, he smiled and bid her the time of day. "Good afternoon; lovely day!"

"Good afternoon! Yes, it certainly is. Do you know how long the next bus will be?"

"About five minutes. All depending on the traffic of course. How shall we pass the time?" His speech, whilst distinctly English-speaking, did not betray any particular region by an identifiable accent, and he was soft-spoken.

In theory, Barbara should have regarded this perfect stranger as being rather forward, but she experienced the oddest sensation that the question was quite natural, even to be expected. "What do you suggest?"

"Well, I happened to notice you in the park a few minutes ago. You were admiring the roses. Do you like roses?"

"Yes," said Barbara, "I love them. I thought the dark pink ones were just beautiful."

"So did I. You know the meaning of dark pink roses, do you not?"

“No, actually.”

“Thankfulness. Be thankful for your gift of insight and follow it implicitly; it will never let you down.”

Barbara gasped. “How did you know about my...”

“Forgive me, I have to dash. I am not catching the bus; I was just waiting to meet you.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Cynicism**

Get it?  
All the world’s a stage.  
There is no other reality.  
So why not sit back and enjoy the show?  
You might as well,  
For, in living life as it is  
Such as it is,  
You have paid – have you not –  
A pretty hefty price  
For the ticket?

(From *Theatre* - poem in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



## **Enraptured**

And when I enfold you in my embrace,  
E’er enraptured by your charms,  
I behold all beauty in your face,  
And hold heaven in my arms...

(From *The Dance Goes On* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **Growing old gracefully - some of the time**

“That’s not funny, Lucille!”

The Muse of Muses was laughing heartily. “Oh, shame on you; where’s your customary sense of humour? The child only said ‘Look at the man with the white hair’.”

“My hair is not white, Lucille, it’s grey, and it’s taken me long enough to get used to that. The blighted infant obviously needs its eyes tested, probably its mother, too, because she said ‘Yes, dear.’ I hope she pushes his confounded buggy into the next lamppost.”

(From *Term Of Endearment* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **When inspiration fails me...**

My Muse reminds me of that pop song a lot,  
Ignoring my urgent appeal;  
The title is apt, but I wish it were not:  
‘You picked a fine time to leave me Lucille.’

(From *Bemused* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **Femininity**

A perusal of the dictionary for the meaning of ‘feminine’ is an unsatisfactory exercise because it gives the usual lexical interpretations: ‘female; characteristic of, peculiar or appropriate to, women or the female sex; womanish’ (The Chambers Dictionary). One has to go to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary to get a marginally more satisfactory addition to this list, namely ‘womanly.’ One fares somewhat better with Roget’s Thesaurus which suggests, among others, ‘ladylike, gentlewomanlike.’

However, in order that it become clear that, in writing this essay, I am motivated by a profound love, respect and esteem for

femininity as conceived by God, I needed something less lexical and based more on my personal understanding of this unique and precious quality. I remembered that I had written a light-hearted story on this topic, but based on sincere sentiments. Here is an appropriate extract:

‘Feminine’ is one of the most beautiful words in the language. It suggests sugar and spice and all things nice – everything that men are generally not in other words

(From *Femininity, Modesty And More* - essay in ‘Beneath The Surface’)



### **Transformation**

Spontaneously,  
I followed the ancient counsel.  
Though heavy with transcendent weariness,  
I contrived to raise my head,  
Looked heavenward,  
And was instantaneously bathed  
In a dazzling radiance,  
Illuminating my entire being,  
Suffusing it with love, healing  
And peace beyond my understanding.

(From the poem *Dawn*)



### **Not taking the book by the cover**

Macho Man tries to make the world his,  
But, under the surface, how fragile he is.

(From *Handle With Care* - poem in ‘Save Us From The Well-meaning!’)



## **Perfectionism**

When I was but an infant,  
Though no athlete in the making,  
They informed me, unequivocal,  
That I had to do the high jump,  
With the bar unfairly settled  
At a height that's nigh impossible –  
An appalling imposition...

(From the poem *The Demise Of The High Jump*)



## **Better not to consume liquids when travelling by car**

Regrettably, however, the “Penetrate pub, pay for pint, piddle and push off” strategy has, apart from the expense, one major drawback: it becomes repetitive. The pint I had consumed in order to answer nature’s call at our destination required evacuation at a similar looless township one hour down the road.

(From *Inflation* - story in ‘Homage To A Future Hero’)



## **Great expectations?**

Glad words my waiting heart oft hears  
When home from work my spouse appears:  
“Come here my pet, my koochie-koo,  
Come here and let me cuddle you.  
I missed you so, your fetching eyes,  
Those tender ways I idolise.  
I’m always glad to find you here,  
Your hearty welcome brings good cheer,  
And so I brought a little gift  
To heal our early morning rift.  
Poor thing, you’ve drained the bitter cup,

So this, I trust, will cheer you up –  
A beefy bone to lift the fog.”  
I wish I was the bloody dog!

(*Demotion* - poem in ‘Grin And Bear It!’)



### **Seamlessness of yearnings**

In an ideal world, spiritual yearnings and human yearnings are seamless not separate. Harmony is the goal, allowing the spiritual to lead and direct the human, realising the human desires that are wholesome and filtering out those that are not. I do not live in an ideal world, however, so I try to come as close as I can to this harmony.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **A sale bargain isn’t a bargain if you don’t need it**

Nobody’s perfect. Admit it: even you have your Achilles’ Heel. Mine surfaces each year around the onset of the January sales. You see, I never can resist a bargain, and my common sense has a habit of cutting loose from its moorings at this time of year, somewhat akin to certain people’s behaviour under the influence of a full moon.

(From *You Or Me* - story in ‘In My Write Mind’)



### **Doing my own thing**

No genius it takes to perceive  
That this verse is averse to strict discipline  
And strikingly lacking in structure;  
And, as those who peruse my production

Might say out of judgment or jealousy,  
That's pretty much par for the course.  
But that is the way it's intended to be...

(From *Doing My Own Thing* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Beyond language**

There are moments... when the sentiments of the heart... eclipse the limitations of mere words... and ask only... that they be experienced in that inner place where no language has ever penetrated.”

(From *Silence Is Golden* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **A question**

Is there anything more I can do,  
Anything more I can be  
That I've not done or been before,  
So that I might be complete?

(From *Waiting* - poem in 'The Power Of Light')



### **No limits on love**

Contrary to widespread belief, the capacity to receive and give love is not limited; it can grow without boundaries. Indeed it is self-generating; the more love we give out to, and receive from, those close to us, our wider circle of friends and acquaintances and the world at large, the more love we generate both within and beyond ourselves. We can say, further, that love must expand in order to endure. If we consciously limit love, there is a real danger that what love we have will shrivel rather than grow. It is

an unlimited and ever-expanding resource – the more love we appropriate and radiate the more love we create.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Poetically illiterate**

I can't take any more,  
I've got intellectual indigestion,  
So I abandon the many-writer reading  
Well before the planned conclusion,  
And head for my favourite café  
To administer the balm of caffeine and cake  
To my mind's affliction:  
I have intermittently suspected that I'm stupid,  
Now I am, in dismay, virtually convinced.

(From *Down To Earth* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Ploughing a lone furrow**

I have been wondering for a while if I am not being somewhat reclusive where my writing is concerned. Not to create an inaccurate impression, I should point out that I give the stuff away in bucketfuls and give it unconditionally; there are hundreds of copies of my home-produced books in circulation, and countless copies of individual pieces, but I do not immerse myself in the company of fellow writers or hobnob with the literati.

This evening, therefore, I made one of my rare literary sorties and attended the first night of a seven-night poetry workshop. It was very worthwhile if for no other reason than that it convinced me not to go to the remaining six.

(From *For Whom?* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Plato's view of women**

Scarce leave me for a twinkling,  
No more than just a moment,  
With that rare and seldom human:  
A warm and gentle, elemental,  
Non-judgmental woman,  
And all my thought is come to nought,  
And I am a lost cause.

Delightful creatures, women;  
But mark their awesome power  
And keep them at arm's length!

(From *Plato's Confession* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **First visit to a special place**

Early one summer, when David was ten, his parents brought him for the first time to the Moylinn mountains, about an hour's drive from Woodmere Grange and introduced him to a particular spot on one of the mountain passes. It had been for many centuries, they told him, a place where people came to pray, reflect and find a measure of peace. He did not know it then, but this spot was to become sacred to him.

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **Who can understand God's ways?**

No reply was your answer  
To my latest, heartfelt prayer,  
As to many prayers before,  
And I am cranky and out of sorts.  
These long silences are inexplicable

And beyond justification,  
Though I must acknowledge  
That my intellect is finite  
And cannot decode the divine.  
So, doubtless, you have reasons.

(From *Eloquence* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Understanding women**

“But Dad,” he wailed in exasperation, having just returned, vanquished, from a skirmish with his latest ladylove, “I mean, she was totally irrational.” He said no more, but looked at me enquiringly, pleadingly, hungry for information which would lead him to a solid understanding of the female of the species...

Fortunately for him, he had applied to the one source that could supply him with genuine enlightenment. I explained to him, with gentleness and compassion, that many men had spent lives entire seeking to fathom the mysteries of womanhood – a search which brought all of them, without exception, up against a brick wall of despair.

(From *Wisdom* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **True love**

...for you love me,  
Truly love me,  
The very way you love me,  
The only way to love,  
From the cradle of eternity  
To the last day of forever.

(From *Endless Love* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **The human mind**

The cosmos brooks no finite realm,  
No bounds may be defined;  
But there's a greater universe  
In the province of my mind.

(*World Without End* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Those diets**

I want a decent cup of tea, or some coffee better still,  
And a batch of fresh-baked scones with jam and cream.  
But all that I'm permitted is big bottles of cold water,  
And a menu that would scarce sustain a flea.  
An awful bloody diet, but I have to bloody try it  
Since my health might well depend on its success...

(From *Do Or Diet* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



## **Who Am I?**

Here you have it: by far the most burning and troublesome of all  
existential questions: "Who am I?"

The answer, for me, is simplicity itself. "I am who I  
am," or put even more simply, "I am." This answer satisfies  
me absolutely

(From 'Perspectives')



## **The limits of intellect**

I was given a finite, human intellect to deal with finite, human  
issues. When I overstep its boundaries and try to force it to give

me an understanding of the infinite, I remind myself of the amoeba who decided to study for a doctorate in microbiology in order to understand its origins and its destiny.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 1* - Communications Lecture Notes)



### **Comment on the media's pursuit of a scandal**

If only the whole sad affair  
Could be left  
To rest in peace.  
But that, my dear realists,  
While there are cesspool minds to be filled  
And rich spoils to be harvested,  
Is much too much to hope for.

(From the poem *Enough*)



### **Finding the right word**

“I say Fred, have a heart for goodness’ sake. Can’t you come up with anything better than ‘fascinating’?”  
“Sure,” said Fred, “how about ‘bullshit!’ ”

(From *Fascinating!* - story in *Life With Fred*)



### **One's own business – not always the best choice**

The official orchestrated exhortations  
And tantalising tax incentives  
Promise a land of plenty,  
And the effervescent entrepreneur succumbs  
To the irresistible temptation, the seductive glamour  
Of setting up his own enterprise.

He opts for an innovative eating house,  
His infectious enthusiasm  
Matched only by his blissful ignorance  
Of the restaurant business.

The opening is spectacular,  
The atmosphere magic,  
The food atrocious,  
The service abysmal,  
The prices outrageous,  
The closing precipitate,  
The creditors stunned,  
The public intrigued,  
The bank ruthless,  
The bankruptcy hearing scandalous,  
The gutter press unrestrained,  
And the suicide tragic.

(*Entrepreneur* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **Accepting compliments**

A compliment is a gift. When I refuse to accept a compliment that is sincerely given, or only respond to it half-heartedly, I am saying to the giver, "I don't want your gift."

(From *Compliments And Self-Esteem* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



### **Beware**

Alcohol dulls the ache  
But sharpens the pain.

(From *Job's Comforter* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



## **The end of an era of (relatively) safe driving**

Our city fathers have, in recent years, and in their benevolent indulgence, provided a multitude of roundabouts where the normally sane motorist is permitted, even encouraged, to go berserk. At an early stage of the planning process, exemption from on high was sought and obtained from the Rules of the Road for all who would summon up sufficient courage to enter these flat substitutes for the wall of death.

(From *Roundabouts* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **When a search is not a search**

For many a year I searched,  
Unrecognised by my heart,  
For what I already possessed,  
And felt the quest an anguish...  
Yet 'twas neither search nor anguish  
For there is no fraught condition,  
But a deep and soulful yearning  
For more of what I'd found...

(From *Eternal Flame* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **The healing hug**

You see,  
The truth of the matter is,  
And not to beat further around the bush:  
I badly need a hug.

(From *Heal Me* - poem in 'Hang On!')



## **On toxic religious teaching**

...For the empty regime on this artificial summit  
Will sustain these wretched innocents  
As caringly and effectively  
As a baby's bottle spiked with arsenic.

(From *The Evangelist* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Procrastination**

And have you noticed? It's certainly true of my use of language anyway. Whenever I say 'I must do this sometime' or 'I must do that sometime,' it really means that I am going to put it on the long finger or, more frequently, that I haven't the slightest intention of doing it in the first place. I'm sure you know the sort of thing: you meet a casual acquaintance in the street and, at the conclusion of the meaningless small talk, one says 'must meet for a coffee sometime' and the other says 'yes, let's.' Neither is the slightest bit interested in the rendezvous and it never takes place. I can claim no dispensation from such displays of social hypocrisy; my life is literally strewn with unachieved 'I-must-do-that-sometimes.'

(From *Keep Your Distance* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Keep trying**

"... if I had a tenner for each of the many antidotes to the human condition that I have tried already, I'd pay off the bloody mortgage and buy a Lamborghini or two with the change."

(From *Watch It!* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **Overload**

Everybody's at it this winter:  
My eldest is doing his degree,  
My second is doing his diploma,  
My daughter is doing her leaving cert.,  
My youngest is doing his junior cert.,  
My wife is doing her insurance exams...  
And I am doing my nut.

(*Everybody's Doing It* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning')



## **Contentment in the ordinary**

"I wanted excitement in my life most of the time, and went to considerable lengths in pursuit of it, eventually to discover that excitement comes but occasionally, and that the obsessive search for it left me frequently in a state of frustration and depression when my high expectations weren't met. It was only then that I stumbled on a truth that was so obvious I almost missed it: by far the greater part of my life is composed of ordinary things. From that realisation, it was a simple but vital step to accepting that if I can learn to be content with the ordinary things in my life, I will be content most of the time!"

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 8* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **I doubt if I'm alone in this...**

To live quite content in the moment,  
No longing to dwell in the outcome,  
Is a process I rarely can master...

(From *The Process* - poem in 'The Power Of Light')



## **Say no more**

Listening is *the* most important communications skill.

(From *Listening* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Worth waiting for**

Then I know  
The healing in my heartache  
The beauty in my brokenness  
And the mystical in each moment –  
And the miracles multiply.

(From *Extra Ordinary* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **Sense versus feeling**

I have noticed that when I say, “I have a sense that...” I am speaking of an insight which is at a much deeper, intuitive level than mere feelings. My human emotions are volatile and can often be unreliable indicators of reality, but the ‘sense’ comes from that place where the spirit emotions reside...

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Down to basics**

“... You quite distinctly said that there is *nothing* we have to do.”

“You’re wrong,” returned Fred, unruffled. “What I said was, ‘There is nothing we *have* to do’. There are always things it might be advisable to do, requests of us and demands on

us to which it would be wise to accede, obligations to the brotherhood of man and so on, but I still stand by my assertion: there is nothing we *have* to do.”

(From *It's All In The Emphasis* - story in 'Life With Fred')



### **A future career maybe...**

“How would you like the hotel business?”

“Don't know, Dad; the only hotels I really know are the ones where we stayed on our trips together. But it certainly seems like an exciting business and this seems like a really good company. They have a hundred and twenty-five hotels. Wow!”

“The reason I ask is that I have just been talking to the general manager, Paolo Gabrini, and he told me they are looking for staff for the summer months. Would you be interested? You told me that you'd like to find a holiday job this year. The hotel business is hard work, you would have to be prepared to turn your hand to anything, but there'd be no such thing as boredom and it would be good experience for you.”

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



### **Shelter from the sun**

I know where there is refuge  
From the torrid sun of noonday:  
A wondrous, mystic woodland  
Where a soul may seek apt solace  
And I've often sought its sanctuary  
For which now I set my compass.

(From the poem *The Faithful Paths Of Coole*)



## **The reading public's loss**

“And I thought that that literary agent chappie would have welcomed my collection of exam howlers<sup>4</sup> like a starving dog discovering five tons of Pedigree Chum. He kept it long enough to read it ten times, the blighter. I mean, doesn't he realise that I have painstakingly observed and assiduously collected a galaxy of the most delightful gaffes made over many years by hundreds of students, bless their little hearts? The great public out there would scoop them up like like a thirsty camel slurping up water, but he turned the opus down, damn him.”

(From *Off Colour* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Past and future**

To have no time for the past is to have no time for the precious jewels that are always embedded in it, is to place no value on the treasures that are always uniquely ours unless we choose to deny or ignore them. Likewise, to disregard the future totally is to walk blindly into quicksand.

(From *How Now?* - essay in 'In My Write Mind')



## **A father's prayer**

But I do ask  
That you will save them  
From all practices perverse,  
All evil pervasive,  
Temptations persuasive  
And abuse of their gifts,  
So that their travail may not be prevented

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<sup>4</sup> 'Fawltly Toorism' – another home-produced volume, November 1998, and the Millennium Edition of same, November 2000.

From accomplishing its primary, paradoxical purpose:  
To help them grow and mature,  
Day by day,  
Into peace of mind here,  
And peace of spirit hereafter.

(From *A Father's Prayer* - poem in 'Who Do They Think I Am')



### **Vigilance**

A pebble in the shoe generally causes more trouble than a  
boulder in the back yard!

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Great Gratitude**

"I have this burning question;  
Indeed, to tell you truly,  
It has bothered me for ages:  
How can I ever thank you?"

(From *A Feast Of Love* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



### **Volatile**

I'm feeling good,  
I'm feeling bad,  
I'm in between,  
I'm going mad.  
I'm on a high,  
It came so fast,  
And now I'm low,  
But it won't last...

And all of this is in the space  
(Oh, woe is me, a frightful pace)  
Of ten seconds!

(poem *Volatile*)



### **Filing Cabinet**

No eyes or ears, nor yet a nose;  
All mammoth mouths on trundling tracks,  
An oblong, four-jawed storage place,  
Revered but dated database.

(From *Filing Cabinet* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning')



### **Beware the racing mind**

I was about to remonstrate with the Muse of Muses because a racing mind sounded like one of those socially unacceptable diseases that one doesn't mention in polite company, but she is usually remarkably accurate in her diagnosis of my various predicaments, so I reflected for a moment. "Hmm! The racing mind! Now that you mention it, only yesterday I was driving past the house of a friend who, sadly, had lost his wife to cancer a few weeks previously, when I became aware of the following stream of consciousness: heartfelt compassion for the grieving friend, reflections on the eternal happiness now being enjoyed by his beloved wife, the conclusion that spiritual values are the only enduring ones, the volatile situation in the Middle East, a longing for my childhood teddy bear, inappropriate thoughts about an inaccessible woman, guilt over the inappropriate thoughts about the inaccessible woman, a cup of tea and a jam donut would just about fill the bill, I must ask the doctor about haemorrhoids on my next visit, the controversy regarding re-siting the city dump, I forgot to floss my teeth last night, I must rethink my approach to

my work, what colour to paint the kitchen, wondering who came up with the idea of flavoured condoms, I need to get a potion of some kind for my headache, and a passing cocker spaniel reminded me of the one that we had which never got over its adolescent acne. And all this in about twenty seconds!”

(Adapted from *A Spot Of Psychology* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



### **Perfect ending to a busy day**

“David, it has been a busy day; most fulfilling, but busy. It is nearly sunset, but it is midsummer and there will be a long twilight, and it is the most beautiful evening, even though there is rain in the offing. I would like to suggest that we row out to the island and reflect awhile.”

“That would be a perfect ending to the day. Perhaps we might offer a prayer of thanks for so many blessings in our lives.”

(From ‘The Dance Goes On’ - draft sequel to the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **A yawn is catching**

A yawn is infectious – a fact that’s well known.  
In company, you never can yawn on your own.

(From *Yawn* - poem in ‘Hang On!’)



### **On finding a bunch of flowers on a river bank**

On a ramble down by the river  
In a cloak of clinging melancholy,  
Dusk’s mantle slowly falling,  
A glimpse of curious colour:  
Forlorn flowers floating at the water’s edge,

Freshly picked but forgotten.  
Jettisoned by a jilted lover.

(From *Forlorn Flowers* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning')



### **God is pure experience**

In late 2002, I was talking to somebody about matters spiritual and I forget his precise question, but it was along the lines of, "What is God?" to which I responded spontaneously and with enthusiasm "God is pure experience." He looked at me in a funny sort of a way and didn't say anything, but I am pretty certain, based on his later reactions in our conversations, that he was thinking, "poor misguided sap!" or words to that effect. I made no further comment because I was not there to teach him anything, but what I felt like saying was, "Is your relationship with your wife a set of principles, theories, rules and guidelines to which you adhere, or do you *experience* your relationship with her? Do you get up in the morning and consult the guide book on the principle of kindness in matrimony, or do you spontaneously bring her a cup of tea just because you love her?" I know what his answer would have been.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Definition of a good man**

I would rather be a good man with many flaws, than a bad man with one or two apparently outstanding virtues; for the good man's virtues, though imperfect, are solid and sincere, whereas the bad man's are illusory. That's if, at bottom, there are any bad men.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **On environmental conservation**

... For he who screws the planet  
screws himself –  
A grotesque case of incest.

(From *What About The Planet?* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **Picturesque and quaint**

I have just returned from a weekend visit to an old friend in one of those picturesque English villages that one sees in the travel brochures – narrow cobbled streets, rustic stone cottages, some with slated, some with thatched roofs, a village green with rosy-cheeked children frolicking hither and thither and, in one corner, a half-timbered tudor pub selling real ale; a horse trough, a working well, medieval stocks (no longer used I am glad to report!) and other timeworn artefacts; almost everybody at Sunday service in the 14th century church, if not for religious then for social reasons, and all the inhabitants speaking in a charming, lilting, regional accent – except, of course, for a few grateful refugees from the pressures of the big city who spoke with clipped syllables and hot potatoes in their mouths; flowers everywhere, notably roses of many varieties, ivy and virginia creeper partially covering man's handiwork, and night-scented stock accompanying one's reveries while gazing at the night sky. In a word, idyllic.

(From *If The Hat Fits...* - story in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **With love, one never knows**

This wasn't meant to happen;  
A platonic farewell handshake,  
At most, an affectionate parting peck on the cheek

Was all it was intended to be –  
No more, no less.  
Yet here am I, enfolded in your arms,  
Placing pent-up kisses on your upturned face.

(From *For Dear Life* - poem in 'Hang On!')



### **A time for silence**

Lucille, as I have observed before – purely objectively, of course – is gorgeous, elegant, gentle, appealing and very sexy, and I was on the point of suggesting what her forte was, but I bit my lip, quashed my disappointment and, with heroic restraint, kept my big mouth shut.

(From *A Little Of What You Fancy* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **One writer watching another in a coffee shop**

Unaware that I am watching,  
She hovers over a notebook,  
All alone at yonder table,  
Seeming pensive, undecided,  
Notebook closed and pen uncapped.  
Then comes a sense of purpose;  
Lifts the tea up to her mouth,  
Tilts her head to drain the cup,  
Then turns to work in earnest...

(From *From A Distance* - poem in 'Who Do They Think I Am?')



## **Peace of mind**

... the elusive grail:  
Quiet – a place of serenity  
Where everything is as it should be.

(From *Quiet* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **I don't want much really**

My dream, therefore – surpassing any tonic,  
Imparting feelings of transcendent power –  
Is to listen to the Berlin Philharmonic  
Whilst making love atop the Eiffel Tower.

(From *Lofty Ambition* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It')



## **At night on the mountain**

[The mountain] by night was a different place, although it retained the daytime sense of peace and safety. Some of the birds did not sleep, it seemed, and one could hear their calls intermittently during the night, but it was the way the breeze, at times a high wind, played with the rocks, the trees, the mountain ridges and the flapping tent canvas that fascinated David. During the daytime, when his vision and mind were occupied with all that was to be seen on the mountains and in the valleys, whatever messages were borne on the air often did not get heard. But, lying in the dark, alone in the dead of night, the voice of the wind held dominion and he was obliged to listen to it until sleep took him to its lair. The sounds varied with the intensity and direction of the wind, and he imagined them as voices speaking messages of love which invited him to decipher them. More than once, he became almost certain that he discerned a voice similar to the one he had heard in the wood as a six-year-old. 'David, you are not alone' would come softly and subtly on the

currents of air and, now and then, even, ‘I love you.’ But he knew that the combination of memory, fantasy, solitude and the night-time sounds could enable him to make whatever he wished of the wind’s vocabulary and that he had surely imagined it. At times, particularly around dawn, sheep came snuffling around his tent, but David loved the simplicity and innocence of these fluffy creatures and felt their presence a comfort. At daybreak, too, he would hear a distant cockerel announcing the arrival of the new day, and the cattle lowing in the foothills. On rising, he would bathe in the shallow part of the mountain lake and breakfast lightly before going back down the mountain, refreshed and fully alive.

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Far off hills are green – if you can find them**

I want to do something else,  
    But I don’t know what;  
I want to be someone else,  
    But I don’t know who;  
I want to live in another era  
    But I don’t know when;  
I want to go somewhere else,  
    But I don’t know where.  
I have a yen for a new belief system,  
    But I don’t know which;  
I want to break through this wall of unknowing,  
    But I don’t know how.

The fundamental problem,  
As should be pretty bloody obvious by now,  
Is that I just don’t know;  
And the ultimate frustration is:  
I don’t know why!

(Poem *Frustration* in ‘Save Us From The Well-meaning?’)



## **Doing battle with the intruder**

Having cleaned up the revolting aftermath, I hoovered the carpet, washed my hands thoroughly, repaired to the kitchen and brewed a pot of the best Costa Rican. Then, my frayed nerves rejuvenated, I relaxed my war-scarred person for the first time in what seemed like light-years in my now scum-free sitting-room and wallowed unrestrainedly in that indescribable feeling of self-satisfaction known only to those who, after suffering many disappointments, have finally triumphed, and rid themselves of the television.

(From *The Exterminator* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **The emptiness of religious ritual**

Somehow,  
Despite our best efforts,  
We seem to have lost sight  
Of the shepherd.

(From *Impaired Vision* - poem in 'Hang On!')



## **What do adults lose on the journey?**

What pearl of great price  
Did the infant possess  
That the adult has, unheeding, mislaid?  
What secret of vibrant presence  
Did the little child comprehend  
That the man has long since forgotten?

(From *Full Circle* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **Deterrent**

“I’m a failure,” I wailed dementedly... “I think I’ll end it all and throw myself into the docks.”

“Er... I wouldn’t,” said Fred, interrupting my dismal, melancholic monologue.

“Why not?” I pouted... There is nothing like an astute ‘why not?’ to throw the opposition into total disarray...

“Because,” he countered, not even needing to pause for thought, “...the water is too fucking cold.”

(From *Timely Intervention* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Examination of conscience**

Conscience, so we have been taught, is the inner voice that, at best, tells us where we have gone wrong and, at worst, informs us that we are a heap of shit...

See? We have been taught to take stock of everything that is bad about ourselves. However, in the normal run of things, most stockrooms contain largely good merchandise. I used to wonder what it would be like to have my conscience say on a regular basis something like: “I think you are a good man, wonderful and talented, and I love you!”

Now I know what it’s like! As a matter of fact my “conscience” has got very good at it.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Struggle to be honest with oneself**

“Beats me, Lucille. Life is very confusing. It is so difficult to be rigorously honest with oneself, isn’t it? I was just saying to a colleague this morning that I like the work I do, but I hate the stress it puts me under. Now that I review that conversation, I find that the truth is that I *don’t* really like the work I do at all.

Not any more, at least; I used to love it, but now it's draining my limited energies, and I no longer find solace being closeted with juveniles for hours on end, attempting to enlighten the young twerps."

(From *Vain Fantasy* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **I need my head examined!**

I am here, my dear professional,  
Because my neighbourhood guru  
Suggested that I arrange  
A tryst to talk with your psyche;  
Or was it to talk with your triste psyche?  
I don't rightly recall.

(From *Getting The Decimal Point* - poem in 'Oh, my head!')



### **God's into technology it seems**

I just got a brand new computer,  
It sort of came out of the blue;  
But that's just a bucket of hogwash!  
The fact is, it issued from you.  
So let me then use it,  
In the way that you choose it,  
To write and design all that's due,  
With talent suffuse it  
And care to infuse it,  
That our love remain fervent and true.

(*The Gift* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **An alternative to competition?**

And can one criticise any sporting and leisure activities that keep people – especially young people – healthily occupied instead of being drawn into the abyss of drink, drugs and other obsessions? Hardly, it would seem. But if the primary focus of these activities is to coach people to be competitive and win, how many who don't make the grade will be damaged in the process, thinking of themselves as inadequate or failures? And is involving people in competitive sport in order to deflect them from harmful practices, a case of engaging the lesser evil to combat the greater? Is there available to us an as yet undiscovered, even undreamt of realm of playing sport and engaging in other formerly competitive activities where the accolades would be for co-operation rather than winning out in competition?

(From *Are We Meant To Be Competitive?* - essay in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Lack of love**

“No greater lack of love hath any man than this: that he share his bed with a woman for whom he cares not a whit...”

(From *Love Is* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **Early morning tonic**

There is nothing like a poem,  
Penned at breakfast, to get going...

(From *Nothing Like A Poem* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Organisational growth causes isolation**

The great white chief was once capable and very much in control, admired, respected and approachable, his door always open to talk to his men, offer them leadership and encouragement; but, with the passage of many years and the the accrual of many burdens, he became ever more distant, ever more removed from the reality of the conflict...

(From *The Great White Chief* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Great loss**

How I long to tell,  
I yearn,  
To tell each soul on Earth  
In turn,  
To tell how much I'm loved,  
I burn;  
To say that life's no  
Random game,  
To say that you are known  
By name  
And say that you are loved  
The same.  
I long to tell what heights  
You'll scale,  
To say such love can  
Never fail...  
But you would not believe me.  
Oh, how that thought must grieve me!  
*Sigh!*  
Alas, the loss is yours.

(*How I Long...* - poem in 'The Power Of Light')



## **Steadfast love**

Steadfast love  
Knows neither time nor space,  
Considers neither good nor evil,  
Sees only, without condemnation,  
The object of its devotion...

(From *Steadfast Love* - poem in 'Hang On!')



## **Not living in the now**

Apart from a sprinkling of music, there's nothing to minister to the drooping spirit like a smidgen of poetry. One evening, whilst I was thus ministering, I decided to include Lucille in the proceedings: "*We look before and after, and pine for what is not.*"<sup>5</sup> Poignant words, pregnant with meaning, Lucille; weighed down with transcendent wisdom, don't you think? Oh, how we pine for what is not!"

(From *Wishful Thinking?* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Looking at a drawing my daughter had just doodled**

Your coy, come-hither eyes  
Call to me from the kitchen table  
And speak a wordless language of love  
That betokens a deepest yearning for life  
Beyond your ephemeral existence  
Of pen strokes on paper fibres...

(From *Girl On The Kitchen Tissue* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



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<sup>5</sup> Shelley - 'To A Skylark'

## **Healing droplets**

More eloquent than words,  
More wholesome than balm,  
More cleansing than water,  
More soothing than calm:  
    Tears.

(From *The Gift Of Tears* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **That's love**

Do you show me love, my love,  
By indulging me in foolish extravagance?...  
Oh no!...  
You show me love, my love,  
Displaying a gift lamentably rare,  
Just by listening.

(From *All ears* - poem in 'Hang On!')



## **Awareness a long time dawning**

It was only in my late fifties that I came to a realisation that God – a sense of spirituality if you prefer – has been important to me since I was a very young child. I wasn't 'holy' or 'goody goody;' it was just that I had an innate sense, albeit a very simple, childlike one, that there is more going on in the world than we are picking up with the intellect or the senses – that there is another dimension. How I acquired this sense is interesting.

(From *A Gift Restored* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Pain has a purpose**

“Oh! Look at that,” said Tomas pointing to a spot a few yards away.

“What?”

“Over there.”

“I don’t see anything.”

“That very pretty flower growing next to the rock.”

“Ah, I see it. Yes, it’s nice.”

“It is beautiful,” corrected Tomas, “but what do you notice about it?”

“Um... nothing in particular. It’s just growing there.”

“It is growing in a heap of loose pebbles and a tiny bit of earth that seems insufficient to sustain growth. Pretty rough on the flower, yet it is still blossoming most beautifully.”

David wondered what all this was about and just looked at Tomas.

“If we could but learn a lesson from that, our lives would be very different. Instead of seeing hardships as meaningless burdens, we could regard the pain they cause as the soil in which the miracles grow.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Perfectionism**

Perfectionism can sometimes be driven by the illusion that one is more or less perfect but, much more frequently, it feels like a life sentence we received in the unremembered past: “You must get everything right all the time – the reason need not concern you – and woe betide you if you ever get it wrong.”

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 1* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Dependance on God**

My dependance on God is not partial or relative, watered down by my humanity. My dependance on God is absolute. Unlike many human dependencies, this absolute dependency on God is one hundred percent wholesome and healthy, and it is this which gives me the only independence that counts, and that is independence of spirit, which in turn derives from my oneness with God. And the more I become one with God, the more I become truly the unique individual that is me. All of this looks very much as if it contains several contradictions, and wouldn't even make first base in a philosophical treatise; but, in spiritual terms, it is pure logic. Besides, who needs philosophy when you've got Perfect Love permanently residing in the core of your spirit?

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Do the Irish ever talk about anything else?**

Strange thing about the weather; have you noticed? It's always there. Most other aspects of life seem to come and go but the weather is always with us, pursuing some mysterious objective that escapes even the most incisive mind. That alone is cause for annoyance but what really provokes untold vexation is the moodiness of the damn thing.

(From *Weather* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **The benefits of putting one's conscience in its place**

There, that's much better!  
Worked like a dream, it did.  
I haven't heard from the pestilential arch-prick  
For quite some time.  
A blessing indeed!

Do you know something...  
All things considered,  
It's really rather nice  
Being imperfect!

(From the poem *Got It!*)



### **My taste in reading material**

A good friend of mine was telling me recently that she had a “misspent youth” reading nineteenth century novels. That makes two of us, although there are surely many others scattered about the planet. Where I differ from my friend, it seems, is that I – now in my early sixties – am still reading them! I fell madly in love with Jane Austen on reading *Persuasion* as a fifteen-year-old and the love affair continues. I have read all her books several times and own dramatised versions of them all on video which I watch regularly. I like some of Dickens’ novels (particularly *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*) and I also like the Brontës; indeed Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre* is my all-time favourite story. The most beautifully written book I have ever read is *Middlemarch* by George Elliot. Another favourite is supposedly a children’s book, which I didn’t read until my mid-fifties: *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri.

My constant companion is P.G. Wodehouse, probably the twentieth century's greatest humorous writer (he created the Jeeves and Wooster characters). What I love about his work is that he has no message for the world, no mission to convert the masses to some personal point of view, no controversial axe to grind. He simply purveys a wealth of good, clean fun. He wrote about ninety novels and I have most of them!

(From *Impression And Expression* - essay in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



## **Busy agenda**

“Fred, I am getting more and more frustrated as the days go by. I just can’t make any significant impression on my to-do list. For every item I tick off at the top, three new ones attach themselves to the bottom, and each more important than the other. How in heaven’s name did I ever find time time to pursue a full-time occupation?”

(From *Retirement My Arse!* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **A simple ditty from a thankful heart**

For goals achieved,  
For things assayed,  
I frequently endorse;  
I feel the glow  
Of sweet success,  
In failure, no remorse.  
I claim the strength,  
Through thick and thin,  
To, steadfast, stay the course;  
But since, of self,  
I have no power,  
I recognise the source.

(*Gratitude* - poem in ‘Beautiful In Everything’)



## **Humility**

Lucille said it all: “Humility, you know, is one of those paradoxical qualities; the more of it you think you have, the less you possess.”

(From *Mission Possible* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **When the desire to write is unfulfilled**

I'm in one of those moods – no doubt you've experienced the sensation – one of those seriously creative moods. I want, I crave, I absolutely need – almost as much as life-giving oxygen – I must write something. So, I sit here expectantly, hands suspended over the keyboard, but only a vague something or, to be more accurate, a frustrating nothing will come to my awaiting mind.

(From *Not Amused* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Boys don't cry – but it's high time they did**

But who rescues knights in distress?  
They do get distressed, you see,  
From, amongst many other things,  
Choking back socially unacceptable sobs,  
For loath are they to admit that tears can veil their eyes,  
Because of the traditional, onerous burdens  
Of the chivalrous spirit –  
A spirit born of sincerity but riddled with false values.

(From *Grief* - poem in 'Who Do They Think I Am?')



## **There is only One to turn to**

Oh,  
Whom should I turn to but turn to you,  
And whom should I yearn to but yearn to you  
For all the desires of my heart.

(From *Beyond the Illusion* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Achievement**

Last Easter,  
Unscheduled,  
I climbed to the top  
Of the holy mount of Croagh Patrick,  
In the face of good reasons  
Why I shouldn't or couldn't.  
Indescribable feeling,  
Though the mountain was shrouded in mist,  
For 'twas ne'er on my list of achievables,  
A far-fetched ambition for me;  
But I did it.

(From *On A High* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **Self-love is essential**

I must be kind to myself,  
Not self-indulgent, now;  
I mean just... kind;  
For if I am not,  
The kindness of others  
Will have little effect.

(From *Guess* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **What communication is**

Communication: the art of making sense to others but, more importantly, to oneself.

(From *Introduction* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Live and let live**

Of course, one must recognise that there are those... who will continue to categorise persons arbitrarily according to their particular decade. But, in the same way that we appeal for liberal thinking from all age groups for all age groups, so also must we accord understanding to those who seem constitutionally incapable of change, who are prisoners of their era-based worldview.

(From *Live And Let Live* in 'In My Write Mind')



## **The car rally's okay; the followers are the problem**

Vroom and screech and crunch!  
Of exhaust and tyres and clutch,  
As they flaunt their childish itch  
To catch the car in front  
When they scorch along the stretch  
At the entrance to the city,  
At twice the legal limit,  
As if this were Mondello  
Or the Monaco Grand Prix –  
The once-a-year invasion  
Of Hell's Angels on four wheels.

(From *Hangers On* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning')



## **Thirst for knowledge**

"Squid," he repeated, "stuffed; it's here on the menu. Most unusual, don't you think?"

"If you say so, Fred. Now if you don't mind..."

"... C'mere," he went on, "you're the trained caterer of the duo; how do you stuff a squid?"

... "Simple, Fred, old man, simple. You take the squid –

preferably dead – in one hand, the assemblage of breadcrumbs, garlic, parsley and so forth in the other, and you shove it up the squid’s arse.”

(From *Stuff It* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Cynicism**

The thought occurs that cynicism could more aptly be called ‘cynicitis’ because it is a disease – an insidious disease that eats away at people’s souls, robs them of spontaneity, childlike awe, joy and innocence, and causes them to see hidden agendas – mostly sinister – often where there are none, or at least relatively harmless ones.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Golden rule**

The golden rule of communication: keep it simple.

(From *Introduction* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **It’s all about trust**

That’s funny. I must have taken a wrong turning. I thought I was headed for green pastures, luxuriant forests and mountain streams, but I ended up in the goddam desert. It’s hot here, very hot; arid too, not to mention lonely. Pretty dismal state of affairs for a sensitive soul like me; and the longer I’m here, blundering on footstep after footstep, the weaker I’m getting... I don’t know how I got into this situation or why I’m here. I don’t know where I’m going or if I’ll ever get there. I don’t know what will become of me if I do; I don’t know what will become of me if I

don't. Come to think of it there is not much that I do know.  
*Sigh!* It's all about trust. I suppose.

(From *It's All About Trust* - story in 'Beneath The Surface')



### **Seeking Thérèse of Lisieux**

Were I a time traveller  
And journeyed to your era  
For the solace of your presence,  
It would have been denied me  
For you were then sequestered  
In the confines of a cloister.

(From *Heaven Knows No Boundaries* - poem in 'Till The Last Day Of Forever')



### **The limitations of intellect**

"I should have known!" said David somewhat ruefully. "You must have a very high I.Q."

"There you are mistaken. It has nothing to do with I.Q. which is anyway a regrettably inappropriate measure of a person's true worth. One of the greatest burdens we carry is the insatiable appetite of the finite human mind, seeking intellectual explanations for things that are countless light years beyond the capacity of even the most highly developed intellect. Those who believe that solely by the power of human intelligence will we attain desirable outcomes in the world are blind to history and live in an impoverished illusion."

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **Graphic description of an organisation**

“Oh! You mean *there*?”

“Yes.”

“There where the corporate sense of direction is akin to that of a cross-eyed camel walking backwards in a snow storm?...”

“...Where... the principal management tool is a large bucket of whitewash, and the only thing they know about motivation is that it’s a word beginning with ‘m’?...”

“...Where manipulation has about as much to do with physiotherapy as curried chips have to do with achieving an orgasm?...”

“...There where even the woodlice die for want of recognition, and the long-term inmates frequently petition the authorities to be released early for good behaviour?...”

“...Where, in short, the only realistic solution is a fleet of bulldozers and a generous supply of quicklime.”

“Absolutely,” said Lucille.

(From *Message Received* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **God is:**

The modern Scribes and Pharisees  
Who bind all our beliefs with rules  
Engaged, one day, a poet’s view:  
“What is God to you?”

He said, “God is pure experience  
That you can’t touch or concretise  
Nor yet define in finite words,  
But, heavens, you can feel it!”

(From *He Knew* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **A visit to the doctor or mind your health**

Having prodded, probed and stethoscoped, then interrogated me unsparingly on my lifestyle, he pointed out, somewhat in the manner of a schoolmaster admonishing a delinquent pupil, that the members of the corporeal ensemble were complaining bitterly about my abysmal treatment of them and were threatening to go on strike unless conditions improved.

(From *Organs Galore* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **If only it could last!**

Moonstruck,  
Oblivious to a world outside,  
Fingers intertwined,  
Looks interlocked,  
Lives, for now, interwoven,  
Hearts enriched by each other,  
Bewitched by each other,  
Enslaved by a passion  
That all but consumes them,  
The pathway to the future  
Paved with intoxicating dreams  
Of everlasting togetherness.

(From *Awakening* - poem in 'The Dance of Forever')



## **The only friend I need**

And then there was the psychic  
Who was highly recommended,  
But I asked myself, "now why pick  
Yet another wrong direction?"  
Besides, that stuff's not my kick

So I bypassed the suggestion,  
And instead I sought a sidekick,  
A companion in my suffering,  
A true friend to bear the burden  
And to lead me in the right path,  
In the way I'd always hoped for...  
And I found that friend in You.

(*Higher Wisdom* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



### **A writer's frustration**

Blast and damn, I'm here again  
Wondering what to write, and then  
Cursing in frustration when the pen will not produce  
The gems of wit and wisdom meant my reader to seduce.

(From *Hidden Agenda* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Iconoclast**

A number of years ago, a courageous – some would say misguided – radio presenter invited me to participate in a live, hour-long discussion with one other writer and three artists. He decided to open the proceedings by trying to create, as I saw it, a bit of controversy: 'What would you say to those who assert that poetry is remote and inaccessible?' Presumably, with a view to entertaining his listeners, he was hoping to provoke the righteous indignation of the poetic soul. The strategy failed, because I smirked and responded, in a tone of levity, 'I'd say they're right!'

(From *Bemused* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Stop digging**

It has required the cream of your expertise  
And praiseworthy dedication,  
But it has borne fruit at last,  
For now I plainly see:  
It all began when I was three...  
A mountain of material for my memoirs,  
Valuable data to bequeath to my grandchildren,  
A veritable volume, to wit, of my history.  
Yet there remains one crucial, unsolved mystery:  
    That was all about *then*;  
    But what the hell am I to do *now*?

(From *History Lesson* - poem in 'Oh, My Head!')



## **Bemoaning the possession of a stiff upper lip**

I'm conservative, much too conservative. My parents, poor souls, were obliged to abandon their native soil and depend on the largesse of the neighbouring island for a livelihood. I, as a consequence (though reliably informed that I was conceived on a fine summer's evening in Ballybunion), made my debut in the shire of Surrey, suitably equipped with a stiff upper lip. This component was rendered even stiffer by a solid British education which left me with a strict self-discipline that even teenage repatriation to the land of my ancestors failed to diminish. The fact that I never got around to sowing my wild oats will amply testify to the rigorous self-control imposed by my conditioning. I mean, not even one single oat!

(From *Kicking Over The Traces* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Everybody has a weakness**

The parish priest esteemed his flock;  
In fact, he loved them dearly,  
And never failed, each Sunday morn,  
To tell them so quite clearly.

They loved him too, but did not know  
He had a secret passion,  
Which caused him pain and even guilt  
(Though guilt's now out of fashion).  
He tried for years to change his ways,  
And switch to lager shandy,  
But failed, for drank each single week  
A case of Cherry Brandy.

(From *Holy Spirit* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning')



## **Just one message**

If I were at the end of my life and was asked if I had *one* message to leave to posterity (bearing in mind that I currently have no desire to teach anybody anything), based on my experience of the Divine during my lifetime it would be this: keep asking the God of Your Life to let you experience deep inside you, in that place where nobody else can access, the reality, the knowledge, of his/her infinite/steadfast/ unconditional love for you. When that takes place, nothing else will really matter and most of your questions will be answered or disappear. You will continue to be human and have pain and moments of confusion and doubt, but at the deepest level *all will be well* in the fullest meaning of that phrase.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **The value of willingness**

If I can instal the word ‘willingness’ (particularly the willingness to change) firmly in my psyche, I can achieve many realistic goals which I previously believed impossible.

(From *Perception* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **A fable about early influences**

The jackal lived on the great plains which adjoined the rain forests. His father had been an antoholic which, as most people know, is a termite disease, and he had to travel almost incessantly to feed his habit. To make matters worse his mother was a compulsive rambler. For these reasons his parents were rarely at home and he had been raised by a nanny – a species of neurotic goat – who had treated him and his sibling pups with much cruelty.

(From *Jackal And Hide* - story in ‘Oh, My Head!’)



## **Baby rules okay!**

The mite emits its loudest yell,  
Of decibels unknowing;  
Egocentric, all ignoring,  
And the focus of attention,  
Wants it’s bottle, willy-nilly.  
So they strap it in a high chair,  
And proceed to pay it homage  
In the timeworn way of parents,  
All oblivious to the din.

(From *Homage To A Future Hero* - poem in ‘Homage To A Future Hero’)



## **Beware of the fallout from what you read**

Mine was always a carefree, easy-going personality, happy-go-lucky you might say until, one fateful day, I did one of those self-administered psychological tests that one finds now and again in the Sunday newspapers. I was appalled; for the first time in my life, and to my utter dismay, I discovered that all was not well.

(From *In A Nutshell* - story in 'Oh My Head!')



## **No comparisons please**

Provoked by well-meaning  
Relatives and peers,  
A question has plagued me  
For years and for years:  
Am I more like my father  
Or more like my mother?

...But the truth is –  
Which took me a lifetime to see –  
That the one that I'm most like,  
And most want to be,  
Is me.

(From *Homecoming* - poem in 'The Dance Of Forever')



## **Faith and trust**

Faith is a conscious decision whereas trust is an intuitive response.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Unorthodox antidote**

I had dearly wanted to express myself in the coarser idioms of my native tongue in order to dispel my anguish and frustration. There is nothing like a couple of well-chosen, four-letter words to cause an existential crisis to beat a hasty retreat...

(From *Lucille To The Rescue* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **No turning back**

I've come too far, I can't go back;  
I've seen beyond, I've known no lack,  
    For the road I chose is you  
Whose steadfast love e'er draws me on,  
Who makes it clear the past is gone  
    And there's nowhere to go back to.  
And so, beguiled, I'll run the race  
Till I am safe in your embrace,  
    For that's what love must do.

(*Home Sweet Home* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **Life is...**

"I was browsing through the bookshelves in my study last night when my eye fell on a tome that I haven't had occasion to pick up for some time. I don't how I could have forgotten it, but the first three words in the book enunciate one of the greatest truisms ever written or spoken and also represent the understatement of this or any other century: *Life is difficult.*"<sup>6</sup>

(From *Life Is Difficult* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



<sup>6</sup> M. Scott Peck - 'The Road Less Travelled'

## **A different way of seeing**

“... there are incredible riches to be found in the seeming emptiness that is all around us. But you must look with the eyes of the heart.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Love affair with a mountain**

No urgency there is to descend;  
The spirit of the mountain bids me stay,  
No other promise save that of love,  
And I, for these rapt moments,  
Am safe and at peace,  
One with the mountain,  
Enraptured with Connemara,  
My enduring passion,  
And in love with its Creator.

(From *How Lovely On The Mountain* - poem in ‘The Substance Of Dreams’)



## **Management**

Management, at its core, is about communicating your goals and your enthusiasm to others in such a way that they become their goals and their enthusiasm.

(From *Introduction* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Some advice for writers**

So, you want to be successful as a poet?  
There's but one way, and now you're going to know it:  
Kiss the God of Humbug's ample ass,  
Make, at all apt editors, a pass,  
Checking first their sexual orientation,  
Since a snub could well delay your elevation...

(From *How To Be A Successful Poet* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Early years**

Born in London in April 1942, in the middle of the second world war, I was an only child. After me, my mother had three miscarriages and a stillborn child. Therefore I never had the rough and tumble of siblings to help toughen me up. Coupled to this, I was a sensitive child and was afraid of my father.<sup>7</sup> I don't know why this is so, as my father was always kind to me. There was no support or counselling available for my mother in those days and I later drew two conclusions: 1) these losses must have caused her great grief; 2) Being a sensitive child, I probably picked up on her pain. That's certainly the way it felt in later life.

(From *Ken's Story* - a short account of aspects my life written for my four adult children)



## **The Muse Of Muses**

"I was just thinking, Lucille, what an amazing life you have had. Faithfully and professionally, you have ministered to around one hundred and seventy writers, giving them inspiration, encouragement and – in my case – much more besides. In

<sup>7</sup> The information in this sentence came from an aunt in about the year 2001.

addition you have weathered the monumental changes in language, culture, anthropology and technology for well nigh three thousand years, and managed to stay on top of nearly all of it. What's more you have participated in your divine duties with fellow deities with exemplary wisdom and fortitude, patiently tolerated generations of the misinformed who have described you and your family and colleagues as 'myths' and still come up smiling. Quite extraordinary really. Of course one expects such exalted things from a goddess, and you have never failed those who love and respect you. You deserve an achievement award..."

(From *Bless Us* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **Being unloved**

The most distressing sound in the universe is the anguished cry of the man or woman who dies without ever having been loved.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Simple prayer**

On mountain peak, in deepest dale,  
In sunlight's glow, in shadow's vale,  
No matter what my heart is feeling,  
Whatever hand my life is dealing,  
I choose, from thousands in my head,  
The only word that need be said:  
    I call your name.

(From *I Call Your Name* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Living in a crazy world**

I live in a crazy world, but I don't have to live crazy in the world...

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Writer's block**

My mind is in unruly mode;  
No word, no thought, no notion,  
No fruit of inspiration  
Can be brought to right expression.  
Then, there's nothing I can write of  
This meagre, muddled morning...

(From *How To Catch A Rebel* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **The joy of writing**

I believe, to get real joy out of writing, that's all we have to do – say what *we* want to say, not what we think others might like us to say, or that of which the critics might approve. For me, it's a question of writing my truth based on what I observe both inside and outside myself, and this can range from the hilarious to the romantic, from the offbeat to the despairing and from the carnal to the spiritual. Once I have the kernel of an idea, I rarely wait to find out what the truth of the moment is, but put pen to paper and simply let the writing... tell me what it is. I didn't plan this way of doing things; it just evolved.

(From *God Loves A Trier* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **How shall I say it?**

“... I said that there are over six hundred thousand words in the English language. If anybody had asked me to guess, I would have said about thirty thousand at the most. But here’s the bit that bothers me: despite access to all this verbiage, of late I am coming across situations much more frequently when mere words are totally inadequate to express what is in the mind, the heart or the spirit.”

(From *Lost For Words* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Red herring**

Philosophers counsel to live in the present,  
A state that seems childishly simple,  
Yet prudent and apt for patrician and peasant;  
But I seldom, if ever, can do it.  
Ha! You were expecting that I would dispatch  
A rhyme in the fourth line with ‘simple’ to match,  
But I am a rebel, a rampant eccentric...

(From *An Iconoclast’s Dilemma* - poem in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



## **Personal stocktaking**

Not taking regular stock in the inner storehouse of experience, knowledge and wisdom reminds me of the student who, desperately needing to pass his exams, carried the best text books around with him at all times, but never read them.

(From *Listening* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Identity**

Once, when I gazed in the looking glass,  
I saw but an ageing me  
With a frightened three-year-old inside,  
Till you gave me sight to see.  
    Now, when I gaze in the looking glass,  
    I see your reflection sublime,  
    And when my bewildered face you behold,  
    It's your love you see, not mine.  
For I am all a reflection of you,  
And more am I destined to be;  
And when this perception goes deep in my heart,  
Only then am I truly me.

(*Identity* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **Be wary of what the adverts say**

A German acquaintance of long standing, for years a frequent visitor to my ancestral homeland, had eventually decided to give the Teutonic rat race the push, and had transferred his allegiance to the Land of Saints and Sinners. He had selected as his permanent abode, not many leagues from my own humble dwelling, a charming period residence standing in its own grounds which, as any good estate agent will tell you, translates roughly as: a derelict cottage on two acres of prime rock.

(From *Double Up* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **A poet's problem**

I've got this problem, see:  
I have a tendency  
To write my poetry  
In regular lines,

To make it worse, you see,  
There's my propensity  
To foster symmetry  
With copious rhymes,  
And then, for all to see,  
I like up front to be,  
Not cloaked in mystery  
Or strange designs.

(From *If At First You Don't Succeed* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **No matter what happens in this life...**

...Spirit, on the other hand, is what I call the 'indestructible essence' at the core of my soul. It is that part of me that is eternal, that comes from God, that ultimately becomes one with God, and is the wondrous, inexhaustible source of what animates me here and hereafter. It existed before my assemblage of cells came into being and it will be there after it has stopped functioning. Consoling thought indeed.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **You just can't trust it**

The body gets us in a fix  
When, now and then, it plays mean tricks.  
Of all the pranks that aggravate,  
The quirks that most exasperate –  
Like wispy hair that won't lie flat,  
And wishing thin, then waxing fat,  
Like itchy parts one cannot reach,  
And sudden burps that manners breach,  
Like freckles brown that won't unite  
And fake a suntan overnight,  
Like feet that smell like rancid cheeses,

The twitchy nose that won't make sneezes –  
Its favourite tease, its cruellest dart,  
Is the shame of an unscheduled fart.

(*An Ill Wind* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **On being spoiled**

When parents spoil a child, in the sense of giving him/her things that are not good for his/her well-being, we refer to the child as being 'spoiled rotten'. God, however, in his/her extravagant generosity, spoils me all the time. But there isn't a bit of it that is not good for me. Everything he/she gives me nurtures and enlivens me. It must be that I am being 'spoiled beautiful.'

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Letting go**

Stop seeking God - that sounds perverse,  
But he'll his covenant keep;  
For him the search is in reverse –  
The shepherd finds the sheep.

(*Let Go* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **Professionals don't have all the answers**

In one corner of the extensive and beautiful gardens, stood a forlorn little sunflower in an earthenware pot. The season for it to blossom was well advanced but the rains had persisted for far longer than usual and the sky was filled with leaden clouds during most of each day. The result was that the sunflower was now seriously lacking in the elements it needed for healthy growth and long life.

The gardener, a highly qualified man with many years' experience and greatly respected by his peers, was much concerned for he cared about all the plants in the garden. So he decided to take remedial action, and transplanted the sunflower into a larger pot with a different kind of soil. The following week, he loosened the surface and added some peat moss. A few days later, seeing no improvement, he tied the sunflower to a wooden stake to give it temporary support; of this at least the little flower was glad for its strength was fast failing. Thereafter, at intervals, the gardener fed it with liberal doses of a strong fertiliser and frequently prodded around it with a garden fork in order to aerate the soil.

Sadly, the sunflower continued to deteriorate alarmingly...

(From *The Little Sunflower* - story in 'Oh, My Head!')



### **Language is so inadequate**

Six hundred thousand words comprise  
Our language, so 'tis said,  
And ample portions of this sum  
Are stored inside my head;  
    But though the inner lexicon  
    I daily search and plunder,  
    There isn't one that apt describes  
    Your beauty and your wonder.

(From *Infinitastically Superblative* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



### **Responsibility**

... "There is a strong vein of belief – bordering on a cult – in modern society that states 'I can do whatever I want.' Regrettably, many people do not discover the other half of this

philosophy until it is too late: ‘providing that I am willing to take the consequences.’ Even the tiniest pebble dropped into the greatest ocean creates a ripple. Every word I utter, every action I take has a consequence.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Of a friend going through a bad time in a relationship**

“No doubt about it, they are magnificent creatures, gracefulness the very essence of their make-up. Did you know that swans are amongst the very few species in the animal kingdom that mate for life?”

“Stupid bastards!” he said.

(From *Swan Lake* in ‘In My Write Mind’)



### **Late vocation**

“Now that you’ve moved on,” he said,

“And shed your former lifestyle,  
How *do* you fill your time?”

“I like to write a rhyme,” I said,

“Or perhaps a touch of prose.”

(From *In My Write Mind* - poem in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



### **No controversies, but...**

“We have spoken today of different scriptures, different beliefs. Some of these and others claim exclusive rightness, or at least some of their adherents do. Is there any path that can claim...?”

“David, mark my words well: of all subjects, *never* engage anybody on this one. You will only make enemies and add to the controversies that have raged for centuries and thereby do more harm than good. Allow each person the freedom of his

or her beliefs without comment. But I will give you a very simple answer that is for your ears only, my dear friend, and it is this: many rivers flow into one sea.”

(From ‘The Dance Goes On’ - draft sequel to the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Worth waiting for**

A laugh is more than wisdom to the wise,  
A gentle smile no fear or hate can own,  
A tender touch means more than all advice,  
A single word can say, ‘You’re not alone.’  
A laugh, a smile, a touch, a single word:  
Firm evidence of love – its human face,  
But love will bide its time and, in the end,  
All evidence of love with Love replace.

(In *The End* - poem in ‘Yearning For The Horizon’)



### **Gratitude**

“I have learned, with advancing years, my dear Lucille, to be grateful for what I am still able to do physically rather than moan about that which is now beyond my capabilities. Without appearing to give myself credit where none is due, I suppose that one might call it wisdom of a sort.

(From *Hands Off!* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



### **Respite in Coole Park**

To take a needed respite  
From a world obsessed with doing,  
Where the doves are softly cooing

And the curlews call to prayer  
In the sunset's ebbing light,  
Just before the fall of night.

(From *In The Cool of Coole* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



### **Compassion**

If all the tears I've ever cried  
Could fall to earth as rain,  
And animate the lifeless soil,  
I'd cry them all again.

(From *Compassion* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **Recipe for writing**

I take my writing very seriously, but I am not serious about my writing. Seriousness is far too great a burden for me to carry, and I have only one specification for each piece that I write: it must nurture me. I must enjoy both the process and the final outcome. By this, I mean that I apply myself with earnestness and enthusiasm to what my pen produces, but I rarely allow myself to become concerned with the validation of others, with measuring up to the artificial standards of the literary establishment, or permit myself to become preoccupied with publication.

(From *The Maverick* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **There is more...**

You are not of this world, Jenelda,  
For you are the spirit of unconditional love,

And when I am with you,  
Time stands still  
And we are together in eternity.

(From *Jenelda* - poem in 'The Dance Of Forever')



## **Understanding**

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding.*

(Proverbs 3: 5 - NIV)

The real wisdom of not leaning on my own understanding came to me when I finally realised that I understand *nothing*. At best, I have a fleeting acquaintance with apparent facts and apparent situations. Very sound advice, therefore, not to lean on that which does not exist.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Perhaps you'd write me a poem**

If it came from you, my love,  
What joy 'twould bring,  
Your words, not mine,  
Your thoughts, not mine,  
Your heart, not mine,  
Your love sublime  
Enshrined in the lines,  
In the substance and signs,  
Of a poem.

(From *Je t'aime* - poem in 'Till The Last Day Of Forever')



## **The consequence of a bad decision**

When the appointed time came for him to speak, a sort of chill malaise crept over me born of what, with hindsight, now seemed the misguided decision to appoint him as the organisation's mouthpiece...

He commenced his address...

The beads of perspiration started to trickle down my brow, over my eyelids and into my eyes, the stinging sensation causing me to blink rapidly...

(From *New Experience* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Morning prayer**

Battery's pretty low this morning,  
Sweetest One.  
Finding it difficult to get up and running;  
Perhaps you'd give me a kick start  
With the jump leads...

(From *Kick Start* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **Materialism versus spirituality**

The worldly quest is based on wants that are never satisfied. Spirituality, on the other hand, is based on needs that are always met, as long as I do not demand that they be met according to my specification.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **The folly of exclusive rightness**

If I am right, who is wrong? Nobody! Not necessarily that is. In the secular world in which we live, I perceive that almost every time a person claims to be right, that claim is accompanied by an overt statement or a thinly veiled implication that somebody else is wrong. Politics, religion and philosophy are particularly prone to this ‘folly of exclusive rightness.’

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Where Love resides**

But me, I know you intimately,  
Since the genesis of my history,  
In the essence of my being  
Where the fullness of your love  
Dwells in soft and beauteous mystery.

(From *Knowing* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **On having to cut down a tree in my garden**

Twenty years a-growing  
In my garden, near the window...  
Oh, I loved its many contours  
And its leaves and subtle colours...  
The lovely eucalyptus,  
A simple gift of Nature.  
It was ever green,  
Now it’s never green...  
And I miss it.

(From *Lonely For A Eucalyptus* - poem in ‘Beautiful In Everything’)



## **Yearning**

Could we but endow this yearning,  
This long-evolving desire  
To melt into the arms of each other,  
With reality beyond aspiration  
And timelessness beyond understanding.

(From *Yearning* - poem in 'The Dance Of Forever')



## **Do we ever really grow up?**

“I have never admitted this to anybody before,” I confided to Fred in a somewhat embarrassed and diffident manner, “but often, when I look in the mirror, I am amazed to find myself gazing at what appears to be a mature adult of the late middle-aged variety, yet when I look deep into the eyes all I see is a three-year-old little boy – and a frightened one at that.”

(From *A Sheep In Wolf's Clothing* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **Privacy**

“Well, it’s like this, one doesn’t want to broadcast one’s... er... fantasies – if that is what they are – to the general public, does one? I mean, one is at pains to safeguard one’s privacy and one’s reputation, is one not?”

(From *Fred The Volatile* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **Be yourself**

“David,” Tomas concluded, “you have been placed in this world because you are very beautiful. Just be who and what you

are. Do not try to be anything or anybody else. Thus will love grow within yourself, and thus will love be passed on from you to others. I very much like the proverb that runs, ‘If I am going to be like him, who is going to be like me?’ Be, therefore, like David and nobody else. In what you may have to face in the future, it is from your inner environment that you will draw the resources that you need.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Where does my writing come from?**

In truth, my stuff is childlike,  
And emanates unstudied  
From the part of me that’s...wildlike,  
Unpretentious and unfettered  
By inscrutable convention  
And all rarefied modernity...

(From *Long May It Continue* - poem in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



### **Indecision**

Though I make the wrong choice, it is better far than prolonged indecision, for indecision paralyses, whereas I can always turn back or take a new direction if I am on the wrong road. In that there is no shame.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **What me – a poet?**

I remember the first time somebody described me as a ‘poet.’ I nearly fell off my perch in surprise. I knew that I wrote what

might vaguely be described as poems if one were in a generous frame of mind, but for some strange reason I had never considered myself a poet. The word sounded just a bit too highbrow – even pretentious – for me. Much more to the point, I knew precious little about poetic convention and cared even less about it. There were two reasons for this iconoclastic attitude. Firstly I found that a good deal of this convention, as I put it in one of my poems, *shackles the spirit and governs the mind and leads one to write in a manner confined*. Secondly, I perceived far too much humbug in most of the literary circles with which I had come into contact. It reminded me somewhat of the arrant, toffee-nosed nonsense people used to go on with about wine until market-led demystification finally permitted people to admit without shame that they were happy with a bottle of the house plonk. And most house plonk, they have discovered, is pretty good stuff. And most ordinary poetry (ordinary being defined as that which doesn't measure up to what the poetic establishment considers of acceptable quality) is also precisely that – pretty good stuff.

(From *The Nonconformist* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Prayer is...**

We often speak of love, my love,  
In a language without livery,  
Neither syntax nor semantics,  
With no finite words to fathom,  
No tone nor tuned inflection  
Which can mould misunderstanding...

(From *Love Beyond Language* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



### **Emotional intelligence**

“The concept of measuring intelligence has been with us since 1905, and more's the pity. How many of us either suspect or

have had ‘confirmed’ that we have a low ‘I.Q.’ - a contrived yardstick which, in my view, ought now to be discredited. Most of us have spent between the ages of four to eighteen in primary and secondary school - a period I have heard one enlightened expert describe as ‘a benevolent open prison,’ at the termination of which, we are measured on 14 years’ work by being closeted in a room for approximately 18 hours without reference to any outside source - a situation which we will rarely encounter in the real world. The result is that many of us emerge with a poor exit performance in state exams, and a correspondingly low view of our ‘intelligence.’ And, as if we hadn’t had enough, those of us who get enough ‘points’ deposit ourselves in third-level education and subject ourselves to more of the same!

Thank God for scholars like Daniel Goleman who are highlighting the concept of ‘Emotional Intelligence’ which acknowledges the immense worth of humanness, communication, empathy, caring, intuition, humour, creativity, persistence and common sense. Personally, I value these qualities infinitely more than sheer brainpower. One example doesn’t make the case, but I have an acquaintance who acquires degrees like my windscreen acquires squashed flies on a hot summer’s day, but hasn’t a bit of what the Irish call ‘cop on.’ (*common sense*) Oh, give me cop on any day!”

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 2* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Nature nurtures**

If it’s love that you profess,  
To behold a love that’s bliss,  
To possess its tender kiss,  
Let the countryside caress,  
Feel the warmth of its embrace;  
Let the landscape speak of love...

(From *Love Is All Around* - poem in ‘The Voice Of The Man-child’)



## **Trusting a higher power in times of crisis**

The best way to hang on,  
It seems,  
Is to let go.

(From *Paradox* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Try again**

I just wrote you a love poem,  
But I threw it in the waste bin  
'Cause it didn't work at all –  
Too contrived and manufactured,  
When I wanted it spontaneous  
And directly from the heart...

(From *A Love Poem* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **Yearning and pining**

Yearning enlivens and keeps hope alive, whereas pining deadens, and eats away at hope. It is well for me, when I identify an intense inner desire, to determine whether it is a yearning or a pining.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **No problem**

“One cannot afford to be too fastidious about language, can one Lucille? It is changing all the time and what is common slang to one generation becomes a generally acceptable mode of expression to the next. In recent times, for instance, even I have

been known to describe things as ‘cool’ or ‘iffy’ when circumstances demand. But there is one linguistic quirk widespread particularly among the younger generation that I just cannot abide, namely the habit of responding to one’s ‘thank you’ with a ‘no problem’.”

(From *No Problem...* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



### **One sided**

We’re having a lover’s tiff,  
You and I –  
At least I; not you.  
That’s not your style.  
But that won’t stop *me*!

(From *A Lover’s Tiff* - poem in ‘From The Cradle Of Eternity’)



### **The power of love**

There is so much love suffusing me,  
At times its power confusing me,  
That, in truth, it oft is painful.  
My body cannot sustain it,  
No earthly vessel contain it.

(From *Love’s Circle* - poem in ‘From The Cradle Of Eternity’)



### **The price of success**

So I moved to the big city and was offered, almost immediately, a top job with a large multinational corporation. The net result was that, over the next three decades, I acquired a host of things that I badly needed: a big car (the company was image-

conscious), a sumptuous mansion with the right address, status in vast quantities; loads of upmarket friends who loyally came to consume, at great personal inconvenience, my lavish supply of whiskey, Champagne and château-bottled wines at my weekly cocktail parties; membership of the best clubs, a holiday villa on the Algarve, a cleaning lady, a valet, upgraded computer, upgraded stereo, upgraded television and video, an inlaid cabinet full of Valium and blood-pressure tablets; and, finally, those three supreme symbols of success: the man-of-the-year award, weekly consultations with a psychoanalyst and a triple bypass operation.

(From *Progress* - story in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **The promised land**

For the promised land is not a geographical location,  
Not a country, nor a province,  
Not a church, nor a temple,  
Neither a collection of possessions,  
A string of titles,  
Nor the adulation of men;  
Rather a state of mind which springs from the heart,  
Nourished by the spirit.

(From *The Promised Land* - poem in 'Hang On')



### **Daily bread**

I cannot live on yesterday's miracles. I need one today.

(From 'The Dance Goes On' - draft sequel to the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **Rest a while**

Today December's solstice,  
Centre of winter's stillness,  
A moment of needed respite.  
Time for apt reflection:  
Review the road pursued,  
Ponder the path ahead,  
And give thanks for the journey...

(From *Love's Journey* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **Trouble brewing within...**

I gave it to him straight: "... there is a strong possibility – bordering on absolute certainty, loath though I am to even contemplate it – that I, er... you, that is to say we, have a badly split personality, to such an inordinate degree in fact that, frequently, the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, if I might make so bold as to borrow a biblical metaphor. And while I'm on the subject of biblical metaphors, the same respected tome, unless I am very much mistaken, warns of the perils of a house being divided against itself."

(From *Divided We Stand* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **No retirement**

Why they call it 'retirement' I cannot surmise.  
'Refreshment' would be more appropriate,  
Or perhaps even 'renaissance',  
For there's so much I want to be doing  
And I surely will need ten lifetimes  
To achieve the desires of my heart....

(From *Lupins* - poem in 'Three Four Five')



## **Our personal identity - just a bunch of labels?**

There I was, sitting on the edge of an unknown river, gazing disconsolately into its deep waters, contemplating my sorrowful condition, wrapped in self-pity. Thousands of miles from my own country, I had been robbed of all my possessions, including my passport, so that I could not now even prove my identity - no longer a person with a label, just a blob of lost humanity crouched on a nameless river bank.

(From *A Cautionary Tale* - story in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **The power of music**

Each note, each bar created,  
The key changes and the cadences,  
The sheer delight of music  
Clears the mists of my mundanity,  
Stirs the softness of my soul  
And I'm no longer in control...

(From *The Magic Of A Melody* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **The humility of the writer**

Of course, all this accounts for the fact that I'm not famous. I simply will not pay homage to the God of Humbug, who then refuses to admit me to the poet's hall of fame. However, you may be amongst those of my readers who will assert that the real reason I haven't made it big is that my stuff is a load of garbage. Well if that is what you think, so be it. I fully respect your right to hold and express that view. Indeed, your opinion could be spot on and I might do well to reappraise my philosophy of writing, perhaps even going so far as to overhaul my entire *modus scrivendi*. There you are, you see. I'm not sensitive; well able to admit the possible validity of a critical evaluation of

my work, then consider that evaluation objectively. And the thought of telling you that you're too stupid to recognise genius when you see it or that you're an illiterate asshole never even crossed my mind.

(From *The Nonconformist* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **A heavy responsibility**

“I am trying to correct these examination papers... what I am doing is fraught with world-shattering importance. Young people's futures could depend on my deliberations and pen-strokes.”

(From *Correction* - story in 'Life With Fred')



### **Growing up**

A part of every full-grown man  
Will always be a boy  
Who trusts the world, as does a child,  
To bring him nought but joy;  
But he must live – there is no choice –  
The life the real world deems  
Best fitted to an adult man,  
And shed his childish dreams.

(From *The Man-child* - poem in 'Oh, My Head!')



### **When in doubt**

“... knowing what I now know, how is it that I ever doubt at all these days?”

“Doubt is as much a part of life on Earth as the changing of the seasons; but the time must come in the course of our

evolution when we learn to deal with doubt rather as we might treat an insignificant head cold. Just take a simple remedy, then let it run its course.”

“A simple remedy? Meaning what, in this instance?”

“Surrendering to higher wisdom, David. When you do this, no matter how troublesome the doubt, the trusting will be done for you until your situation returns to normal.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Not controlling other people, things or situations**

Could I but learn...  
In all my life,  
That that which I would most dearly keep,  
I must be willing to let go.

(From *A Wing & A Prayer* - poem in ‘Hang On!’)



### **Pro life**

How describe orchestral sounds  
To friends who cannot hear,  
To them who lack the sense of touch,  
The trickle of a tear,  
To folks whose lips are ever sealed,  
The joys of conversation;  
To eyes that never see the light,  
A visual sensation?  
But even though one find the words  
The senses to adorn,  
There is no way to speak of life  
To babes who won’t be born.

(*Senseless* - poem in ‘Grin & Bear It!’)



## **Fixed opinions?**

I notice that, of latter years, I have a fixed opinion on hardly anything, only perspectives that are valid for me in the present time. In addition, I do not feel the need to express my opinion when in company anything like as often as I used to. Most people don't want to hear it anyway; they only want a forum to express their own points of view. So, usually, I stay quiet and do most of the listening. This is a very great freedom.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Staying young**

When I move on from age to age,  
I leave a piece behind  
That grows no more.  
What went before  
Stays static in my mind.  
So now that I'm in autumn years,  
The most of me is younger...

(From *Man Of All Ages*- poem in 'Voice Of The Man-child')



## **Off course**

Adrift in uncharted waters  
In the dreaded dead of night,  
I am naked, cold and all alone,  
And countless miles off course,  
No longer in delusion  
That I'm in the right direction  
And where I'm meant to be.

(From *Mayday!*- poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Posthumous fame**

“Indeed, I was remarking to my daughter, only the other day, that she would have all these writings to show to her children and grandchildren, to whom they will probably give pleasure – even if only because they were penned by an ancestor – and they, in turn, will very likely pass them on to future generations. I reckon, Lucille, that I could – in the fullness of time – finish up with a substantial following, though I will have to savour most of the complimentary remarks from a higher place!”

(From *Follow That* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **There is always hope**

In the black of night,  
No hope, no light,  
When I’m sure there is no You,  
I still reach out  
Despite all doubt,  
For that’s what love must do.  
And Love will see me through.

(*Beyond Belief* - poem in ‘The Power Of Light’)



## **I’m not always up front**

In a significant number of my pieces, all of them relatively simple, there are messages encoded which I understand but which I would not wish others to be able to comprehend, usually because the encoded message deals with astonishingly beautiful spiritual ‘perfumes’ which would lose their fragrance if exposed to the air... The prime example of this desire to preserve the encoded message intact is the autobiographical novel I am currently working on, *Black On Magenta*. It is autobiographical because I wish to tell my story, and a novel in order to protect my

privacy by camouflaging the story heavily, making many of the facts indistinguishable from fiction, so that only those close to me will be able to decode them relatively accurately. In this way, my story is told, but my perfume retains its fragrance.

(From *Now You See Me, Now You Don't* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Judge not**

When I spontaneously judge people – based on their appearance or actions in a given moment or over time – I cut myself off from the possibility of being of service to them and greatly reduce my receptiveness to what they might have to offer to me.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Good start**

In the solitude of dawntime  
Before the world awakens,  
Be still for just a moment  
To take in the room around you,  
Then let your soul surrender  
To a simple contemplation.

(From *Morning Contemplation* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



### **A song to the rescue in Kew Gardens**

Rambling in these wondrous gardens,  
Far from home,  
Oblivious of time,  
My aching spirit rejoicing

In the abundant offerings of nature,  
Like the thirsting deer that finds  
A stream of cool water,  
Yet feeling alone,  
Wishing only that you were with me,  
When the words of a popular song  
Slip softly into my consciousness:  
'When I need you,  
I just close my eyes  
And I'm with you.'

(From *Visual Eyes* - poem in 'The Dance of Forever')



### **A writer's yearning**

Now comes a due dilemma,  
Or a problem to provoke me,  
But a restless writer's wrangle  
Whatever way one views it:  
I long to lend more leeway  
To the pearls my pen composes,  
    A pathway for the poems,  
    A sortie for the stories  
    And an exit for the essays,  
    To say nothing of the novels...

(From *Moving On* - poem in 'Voice Of The Man-child')



### **A sacred place**

We climb the path to the pass at Máméan,  
And the clouds gather in greeting,  
Promising their protection,  
Moving ever lower to encircle us  
As we approach the hallowed ground.  
Then, the mountain enfolds us in its mists,

Temporarily closing its portals  
To grant us needful solitude,  
Leaving the world of illusion outside,  
And, in the wafting wind,  
Whispers its sacred secret,  
Unspoken for a million years,  
That here, in this elevated sanctuary,  
Resides the Spirit of Creation  
In whom all things are one.

(From *Mystical Union* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



### **Tell it like it is - to God**

In prayer, there's no place for bad taste or profanity;  
The language should always be elevated;  
But surely that's just sanctimonious vanity  
Where the truth's been perverted and relegated.

(From *Up Front* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



### **My all**

My very breath,  
My every thought,  
You're all I do  
And all I ought;  
You are my need,  
My whole desire,  
You block the cold  
And light my fire...

(From *My All* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **Muses have it easy; pity the writer**

“It’s all very fine for you, Lucille; you just sit there, day in day out, and intermittently toss out unheven chunks of inspiration. It is I who have to exert myself to chisel and fashion them into articulate pieces...”

(From *The Goddess Of Affirmation* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **Another way of being**

There’s harmony in my community,  
In my commune is no disunity,  
    Nor can there be,  
    Nor will there be,  
    Nor has there ever been...

(From *My Community* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **Who cares as long as it makes money?**

“A month ago, Lucille, I was absolutely incensed by the lunatic ramblings of a so-called journalist, in a so-called newspaper. He took cheap pot-shots at my favourite poet – apart from myself that is – Brendan Kennelly. These pen-toting parasites who inhabit the columns of our various journals get paid, I believe, by the inch (of text that is, lest there be any absence of clarity on this point), and, being short of income that week, the blighter chose an easy target.”

(From *Better Late Than Never* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **Never alone**

When I weep, you weep with me  
In kindness and compassion,  
And we kiss each other's tears;  
    When I laugh, you laugh with me,  
    In freedom and festivity  
    To wear life's garment lightly...

(From *The Mystical Touch* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Out of touch with spiritual reality**

For yours is a higher calling  
Which demands a frenetic pace  
In a hermetic place,  
That keeps you too busy being Christian  
To be Christian.

(From *Out Of Touch* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **A sense of expectancy**

It was lunchtime and the café was very busy. Luckily, she spotted a table in a quiet corner, and ordered a pot of tea... When the tea arrived, she had a few sips of the warming brew to refresh herself, then took the sealed envelope from her handbag and, as people are wont to do, looked at it on one side, then on the other, but did not open it immediately. She was savouring the sense of expectancy that had been placed in her heart. She would open it in a minute or so.

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **On being betrayed**

All rats will leave a sinking ship;  
One sees why they curtail their trip.  
'Tis sad, though, you're a copycat,  
For I'm no ship, and you're no rat.

(*Abandon Ship* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Elusive peace**

In respite from the daily round,  
I slip into my study,  
My temporary hermitage,  
To spend a time of quiet  
With the Love of all my life;  
But domestic peace and stillness  
Are such seldom found phenomena,  
For ours is a noisy household...

(From *Never a Dull Moment* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It')



## **Redemption**

He bid me come into his sphere  
Above all earthly preconceptions,  
Transcending all my imperfections,  
And did, in silent solace, tell,  
Through life's illusions, all is well.  
A trust in one who dwells in light  
I found beyond the stars that night.  
    Religion left me in the lurch;  
    Now the night sky is my church.

(From *Star Struck* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **Why certain places are special**

“What is it about this place, David? I always find a peace here that I can get nowhere else, and I know you do too.”

“I wish I knew, my love. I have often pondered the same question and have finally come to the conclusion that it’s probably beyond human understanding. There is what I can only call ‘a sense of presence’ here. Maybe it has to do with the wonder of Nature, who makes her nurturing especially potent in certain places, through, as here, a fusion of mountain, water, the wind, the birds, the vegetation, and the trees at the lower level. Or perhaps it has to do with people from earlier generations who have left their spirit here in ways that we cannot comprehend. Or perhaps it’s a combination of all these. Who can tell?”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Expectancy**

I’m sitting here at breakfast,  
Sipping my French coffee,  
Hovering o’er my notebook,  
My pen held at the ready  
And waiting on the impulse...

(From *A New Millennium* - poem in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



## **So that’s progress, is it?**

So much has changed. The horse and carriage are no more. One can travel to the far side of the world in twenty-four hours and a device called the computer dominates almost everything. It

is sad, my love, that here in what is called the west, the standard of living has never been better and the quality of life never worse. We have evolved a society of instant gratification where people want everything now, heedless of the cost to individuals, the fabric of society and the ecological balance of the planet. In order to indulge this unwholesome desire, life gets faster and faster, whizzing by like a blurred landscape seen from a high-speed train that daily gathers momentum and nobody seems able to stop it. The sole objective of this mindless exertion appears to be to satisfy the slightest whim whilst, elsewhere, millions die for want of a cup of water. And they call it progress. Oh dear!

(From *Of Love And Timelessness* - story in 'Beneath The Surface')



### **Control or no control?**

The notion that we are in control of our lives is pure illusion, tenaciously held in youth but relinquished with the passage of time. We can, at best, decide what our next thought or action will be – which may include planning for the future. But to assume that we have control over the outcome is to live in a world of fantasy. It has long been my perception that those with the most contentment in life have the ability to live in the now.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 1* - Communications Lecture Notes)



### **God keeps his promises**

For when God says  
It will be so,  
It *will* be so.  
Take heart!

(From *Take Heart* - poem in 'Oh, My Head!')



## **It's difficult to change**

All too often I feel trapped  
In the prison of my attitudes  
That will not yield to treatment,  
The therapy of change,  
Because I'm too entrenched,  
In the pit of the familiar...

(From *New Pasture* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Once bitten...**

Beware of tantalising snares:  
I got my fingers burnt with shares,  
The lure of easy lucre;  
Seductive,  
But unproductive  
Since they slumped,  
Never to be bumped  
Up to former heights,  
And I lost a goddam packet.

(From *Never Again!* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



## **Good news?**

I was visiting a town not too far distant from where I live recently... and noticed that there is a small Christian book shop called "Good News 4 U" on one of the principal streets. The most arresting item in the window was an electronic display transmitting, in bold colour graphics, to the window-gazer, the following message:

*Are you in fear and trembling at the coming judgment?  
You should be!*

So, that's the good news, is it? I wonder what the bad news is!

(From 'Perspectives')



### **I don't like being where I can't speak the lingo**

I'm sitting, drinking tea with milk  
In an Amsterdam café...  
All around they're speaking Dutch,  
As one might well expect,  
Just single in variety,  
Though it might as well be double  
Since I grasp not what they say  
Save the odd word here and there.

(From *No Dutch* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



### **Cart before the horse**

When the administration function of a large organisation becomes a self-perpetuating entity, the death-knell of its primary purpose has sounded.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Serenity**

Serenity is a place  
Where everything is as it should be...

(From *Serenity* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



### **No limits on God's love**

My spirit discerns  
That my slightest concerns  
Are matters of moment to you,  
No small thoughts too many,  
But worth scarce a penny  
You give them the care that is due,  
For you place no limits on love...

(From *No Limits On Love* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



### **Not impressed with this professional**

Now, see here, dear practitioner,  
You cannot impregnate me  
With your prejudiced convictions,  
Nor pollute with preconceptions  
Nor infect with your opinions  
Born of intimate agendas  
Of your own.

(From *No Invasion* - poem in 'Oh, My Head!')



### **Visiting my father's grave**

It's been a pleasant visit,  
Nurturing nostalgia,  
Honouring precious memories,  
Acknowledging lessons learned  
And many gifts received,  
Knowing nothing's wanting;  
A balmy summer's evening,  
No regrets,  
No sadness;

Only one more thing to be said:  
Thanks, Daddy; heartfelt, soul-felt thanks.

(From *No Sadness, No Regrets* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



### **Psychoanalysis gone awry**

Trendy, new-age therapists,  
Self-appointed saviours to the sick psyche,  
Bolstering their bank accounts with blood money,  
Unearthing non-existent obscenities  
In the inner recesses of troubled minds,  
Wielding their petty power  
To plunder the memory of vulnerable clients,  
Subtly transmuted sensitive half-recollections  
Into destructive myths.

(From *Image* - poem in 'Hang On!')



### **Thankfully, it didn't stop at this**

When seven pieces I had writ,  
I said unto myself, "That's it!  
No further thoughts to be unfurled,  
No burning message for the world."  
And I had hoped to be a writer –  
Oh, poor, misguided, artless blighter!

(From *Numbers Up!* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Up optimism!**

"He who expects nothing shall never be disappointed," sighed  
Fred, betraying a pessimistic worldview.

“Cut it out, Fred,” I chided. “That’s a sad, worn-out, old cliché and it’s just not true. The universe is an extravagant giver, a place of much and plenty. Consider, my longtime crony, the opposing and much more realistic saying, ‘Those who do not ask do not receive.’ You must always expect the best, the most, the optimum; then life will shower great abundance upon you. I hope, Fred, my dear old friend, that you will take these positive thoughts to heart.”

(From *Great Expectations* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



### **Despair**

Valiantly I have struggled  
To keep the boat afloat  
For what seems like an eternity  
But my strength is now exhausted,  
My purpose all extinguished,  
No dream to fire my spirit  
And my hope’s abandoned ship.

(From *On The Rocks* - poem in ‘Oh, My Head!’)



### **Self-love**

Self-love, far removed from selfishness, is the essential foundation for loving others.

(From *Fancy That!* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



### **Enjoying the now**

The act of creation,  
No distant fruition,

Is complete in itself;  
So I pen the next word  
And compose the next phrase,  
And delight in each one...

(From *Outcome* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Now that's a compliment**

Lucille blushed a most delightful shade of pink. "Er... um... that is... I'm almost ashamed to ask; perhaps I ought not, but – well – I will; and please tell the truth, won't you? Am I... am I really sexy?"

"Lucille, my treasure," I responded without hesitation, "you are the Muse with the mostest. You combine an intoxicating earthiness with a dreamlike eroticism, drawing on a provocative and beautifully contoured body, sylph-like choreography, full sensuous lips, a come-hither look in your deep, hazel eyes, a face that Leonardo da Vinci would have given his eye teeth to paint, and a voice like the peal of silver bells. Add to that your caring and gentleness, your warm, affectionate nature, and you get the full picture. In terms of sexuality, and in summary, you are the cat's pyjamas."

(From *Tell Me More* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **Do not throw your pearls to pigs (Mt. 7:6)**

One day, many years ago, a good king granted an audience to a well-known aesthete and received him most courteously, as indeed he received all his people. The visitor proceeded to expound at length on his sensitivity to and appreciation of the beautiful things of life, and told his royal host that his dearest wish was to be granted the privilege of seeing the crown jewels which the monarch kept safe in a vault deep in the bowels of the castle. He had never shown them to anybody because they were

too precious, but he allowed himself to be swayed by his visitor's avid enthusiasm and apparent expertise and commanded his guards to go to the vault, take out a small selection of the finest pieces and place them in the castle courtyard for inspection.

The visitor looked at them for a few minutes without saying anything, then spat on the jewels and kicked them around violently, covering them with grit and dust, and breaking several of them.

(From *Prudence* - story in 'Beneath The Surface')



### **Keeping fit and well**

I've been for a brisk walk on the prom,  
Terrific for the constitution,  
Gets the endorphins up and running,  
The benevolent little buggers;  
Then a bracing swim in the sea,  
Nothing like it for clearing the mind  
Of its whims and preoccupations...

(From *Out Of Date* - poem in 'The Voice Of The Man-child')



### **Learning from Nature**

"Look, my dear friend! A group of withered foxgloves, but in the middle, one blossom in full bloom. Now isn't that amazing?"

... "Yes...um, foxgloves. Some are withered but there is one in full bloom. So that often happens, right? Plants grow, then fade and others come up to replace them."

"True, David. But when do foxgloves blossom?"

"Generally June to August. Around here, they are mostly gone by late July" David still had not grasped the significance of what Tomas was saying.

“And what is the date today?”

“November 4th... Oh, my goodness! That’s impossible.”

Tomas’ familiar pattern was to remain silent for a while before finishing what he had to say. This occasion was no exception. He allowed just the correct amount of time to elapse for the import of what Nature was teaching to dawn on his young companion, then placed his hand on David’s shoulder. “Nothing, my dearest friend, is impossible.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Love is blind**

‘Tis well said that love is blind,  
And all would be well if blindness were to endure;  
But what is to become of us when, at last,  
Sight is restored  
As, in affairs of the heart,  
It always is?

(From *At Last Sight* - poem in ‘Hang On!’)



### **More than one way**

“Contrary to popular belief, there is more than one way of seeing and, in like manner, there is more than one way of knowing and more than one way of understanding. All will be revealed in due season...”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Solitude is not what it seems**

Solitude  
Is no place of isolation,  
But a state of congregation  
Where my spirit's inner essence  
And my spirit's closest friends  
May mingle in affection...

(From *Overwhelmed By Love* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **Types of trust**

Trusting God because of circumstances is understandable;  
trusting him despite circumstances is courageous, even heroic;  
but trusting him regardless of circumstances, now that's a gift –  
a gift that comes only from the one trusted.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Thérèse of Lisieux**

She knows my every thought,  
Knows my every heartfelt yearning,  
The very selfsame burning  
That she herself has known,  
To reach the far beyond,  
Touch the nearness of reality,  
And reconcile disparity.

(From *Paradis Sur Terre* - poem in 'Till The Last Day Of Forever')



## **When experience is a drawback**

“... a practical frame of mind is unquestionably a major drawback when studying economics. The entire discipline is composed of theories, theories and more theories and, lest there be any doubt about it, even more theories. One has to be able to soak them up like a naïve and impressionable infant. If you question anything from a pragmatic standpoint, you’re screwed; and I did, and I was, so I threw in the towel. I simply couldn’t take any more theories. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of the bods who teach the subject even look distinctly theoretical.”

(From *Epidemic* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Two types of silence**

There are two types of silence:

1. Anguished silence, where nothing is spoken and nothing is heard, or where the speaking takes the form of a question or a plea from me but the response is – or appears to be – zero.
2. Eloquent silence, where nothing is spoken and nothing is heard but everything that needs to be said is expressed in perfect eloquence and with perfect articulation, but this is accomplished in a language beyond language – the wondrous, wordless language of the heart and spirit.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Patience**

Just bought this notebook, see;  
Now it must earn its fee,  
Or else th’expense would be  
Unjustifiable.  
But, though I strive to write,  
All that comes out’s pure shite,  
And each successive verse,

Howe'er I try, gets worse.  
The only attitude  
Is one of gratitude  
To my reclusive Muse  
And give her leave to choose  
    When she'll appear;  
Then have no expectation,  
Just pray for constipation  
And wait for inspiration.

(*Patience Is A Virtue* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Eternal love**

All human life's constrained  
But *our* love can't be contained.

(From *Reaching Out* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



### **Self esteem**

But now that you've brought me  
These many long miles,  
As clear as the stars, I can see  
That, far from the second-rate being I thought,  
And farther from third-rate ideas that I bought,  
The pearl of great price is me.

(From *The Pearl Of Great Price* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



### **Dealing with denial**

"I have always had considerable respect for that saying *When the pupil is ready the teacher will appear*. It embodies, it seems

to me, a universal truth about denial, namely that there is little point in tackling an issue until a) one is aware of it, and b) one is ready to deal with it...”

(From *When The Pupil Is Ready...* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



### **Listening to the heart**

The weather is kind of changeable  
And I was going to do the chores,  
Clean the bathrooms, sweep the floors,  
That sort of domestic thing;  
But I felt a familiar nudge  
In the place deep inside me that knows  
The appropriate thing to do,  
Saying, “Take to the mountains instead.”

(From *For Me Alone* - poem in ‘The Power Of Light’)



### **No go guilt!**

“It strikes me most forcibly, Fred, that, of all the available emotions, and there are, you will admit, a hell of a lot of them, the most useless and destructive is guilt.”

“Hmm...” said Fred.

“Yes, definitely, useless and destructive is what it is; downright depressing into the bargain. I think it ought to be made redundant, given early retirement, shot at dawn, hanged, drawn and quartered or earmarked for some similar fate. I mean, what the hell does it think it is, mucking us around like that?”

(From *Guilt Trip* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Pervasive guilt**

Guilt, O Guilt, where is thy sting?  
Where showest thou thy face?  
Thou comest forth in every thing  
In every time and place.  
Thou knowest not thy rightful role,  
Nor where to call a halt;  
Thou stick'st thy nose in every hole,  
Thou stick'st it to a fault.  
Thou hast no right to spoil my fun,  
Thou hast no rights at all,  
Yet see'st the harm that thou hast done:  
How oft thou'st made me fall  
Into the pit of deep remorse.  
With thee, I've twigged, all's sin;  
All things dost thou with shame endorse,  
With thee, one cannot win...

(From *Super Glue* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **More on guilt**

Guilt has been described as 'toxic guilt' – rightly in my view since it poisons our souls and destroys our peace of mind. For example, well-meaning people have said things like: "Our anxiety is in direct proportion to our distance from God." This may suit some, but for most, that kind of thing is about as helpful as an ashtray on a motorbike. It creates guilt, giving a false message that if I'm anxious it must be my fault. But putting guilt in its proper place does not mean that it has no function. Its sole purpose is to alert us to where we're in error. Thereafter we relinquish guilt and set about righting the wrong.

(From *Getting The Balance Right* - Communications, Lecturer's Notes)



## **When God is silent**

I hate these situations,  
These one-sided conversations,  
Where I do all the talking  
And you the shutting up;  
And when I cease my clatter,  
Put my muddled mind on hold,  
And try my best to listen,  
The silence is quite deafening.

(From *The Perfect Conversation* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Reality and illusion**

I have often written, particularly in my poems, about this world being illusory and spiritual reality being the only reality there is. This could give the impression that I have lost my marbles and am floating around with my head in some kind of pink cloud of make-believe, totally out of touch with the 'real' world. Sad really! I mean, have I never had toothache? That's real, isn't it? My wife and children are real, aren't they? The comfort I get from a cup of tea is real, surely? The computer I am sitting at is real, isn't it? And so it goes on.

Time for some serious clarification, I perceive!

(From *Reality And Illusion* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Spiritual nutrition**

Air, water and food will keep my body functioning, but I need a dream to keep my spirit alive.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Listening**

When I have lost direction,  
And my heart is in confusion,  
As I move through light and shadow  
To my final destination,  
I repose awhile, then sharpen  
Every sense but, most, my spirit,  
So to listen for your guidance;  
And I hear you in the stillness...

(From *Perfect Eloquence* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Slow down**

One evening after dinner, my good lady wife posed the following question, "What are you doing this evening?"

"Nothing!..."

"What do you mean 'Nothing'?"

"What I mean, light of my life, is that I propose to sit here, comfortably ensconced in my favourite, reclining armchair, for the duration of the forthcoming p.m., and actively do absolutely nothing. My objective in so doing – or, more correctly, in so not doing – is, for a few hours at least, to establish in my life a blissful, fantasy-like state of just being, and relinquish my enslavement to activity, performance and the achievement of goals."

(From *Interlude* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **To be or not to do**

Doing comes out of being; it is never an end in itself.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Endless Love**

Love was born in the cradle of eternity;  
Yet it had no beginning and can have no end,  
For Love will endure in every heart,  
In every soul, through trial and grace,  
Beyond the realms of time and space,  
Until the last day of forever.

(*Perpetual Light* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **Confusing isn't it?**

"The older I get, Fred, and the more knowledge I acquire, the more I realise I don't know. This perplexing paradox, I have discovered, has much if not all to do with the apparent reality that for every opinion there's a counter opinion, every argument a counter argument, every philosophy a counter philosophy, every unshakeable belief a counter belief of equal unshakeability and, increasingly, it seems, for every piece of research counter research."

(From *More Information, Less Knowledge* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **Winter beauty**

Luxuriant trees stripped winter bare,  
Each trunk, each main and minor limb  
In silhouette against the sky  
Both touch my heart and catch the eye...

(From *Winter Trees* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **The person in the mirror**

A quirk I've discerned in practitioners,  
Whose mission is things of the mind,  
Is a frequent, peculiar blindness  
Where insight I ventured to find;  
Namely, having deduced their conclusions,  
(I merely observe, not condemn),  
They inform me what's wrong with yours truly,  
But it's usually what's wrong with them.

(*Poor Reflection* - poem in 'Oh, My Head!')



## **Doubt**

"Me? Doubt? Never! Well hardly ever. That is to say, sometimes. Oh, Tomas, you know how it is. Even the greatest saints had their periods of doubt, so what hope is there for an ordinary Joe Soap like me?"

"Yes Joe," said Tomas, with an inscrutable smile, "I know how it is."

"But I am very fortunate. Life is not without its times of pain and turmoil, but I am a very blessed man."

"Yes, you are, David."

"I could not have got this far without your help, you know."

"None of us can do this alone, David. What I term 'the philosophy of self-propulsion,' which is largely, though not exclusively, a product of western industrialised society, is alienating people from reliance on their fellows, and the original concept of community has largely been lost. But, by now, you have become aware of the value of your connection with your fellow men and women and have also discovered inner resources, which come from a power beyond you."

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **The need for One beyond ourselves**

... love, as mankind understands it,  
Is not enough  
To sustain life.

(From *Love Hurts* - poem in 'Hang On!')



## **Self-esteem versus self-confidence**

Self-esteem is fundamentally how I feel about myself as a person and my state of being, how I relate to and think about myself – in other words, my inner environment. Self-confidence, on the other hand, is how I feel about the way in which I relate to other people and external situations and about how I utilise my particular attributes in the world at large – in other words, my outer environment.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Freedom**

A prisoner of time  
My body yet may be;  
Yet, in paradox sublime,  
My spirit's been set free.

(From *The Power Of Love* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **I'm not judgmental but...**

"I know I'm no expert, Lucille," I said, as the reading concluded, "but if that was a poem, I'm an astronaut. I didn't

understand a single word of it. I mean to say, why is it that some of these early 20th century bods throw up stuff for general consumption that would take a hieroglyphics expert to decipher, and then only with the concerted assistance of my mother-in-law (she is brilliant at cryptic crosswords, I hasten to add by way of clarification)? I don't know why they just can't call a spade a spade."

(From *Faux Pas* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **That's life**

Issues, bloody issues!  
In the thick of them,  
I am sick of them.  
Like the fabric of tissues  
They have no substance,  
But look at the trouble they cause!

(From *Prayer Of Frustration* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



### **A vehicle for gratitude**

"You know, Fred," I observed, easing the family vehicle into top gear and heading for the open road, "I really appreciate my car. I don't know what it is, but every time I sit into it, I actually feel grateful for being the proud owner of this machine. There are even occasions – not infrequent I might add – when I feel like patting it affectionately on the dashboard."

(From *Whoopee!* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **Simple recipe for writing**

My golden rule for writing,  
Indeed my sole rule for composing,  
Is to take my pen to paper  
And scribe thereon the first thoughts  
That will surface in my mind.

(From *Prescription* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Power corrupts**

It is said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. I think not. Certainly power corrupts but power is relative not absolute. Thus, military domination is only that until a stronger military power emerges. Intellectual primacy is only that until a brighter intellect comes forth. Today, it would seem, who holds the most information holds the most power, but only until another acquires even more information. There is one exception to this pattern of relative power: love. Love is the only absolute power, and only one possesses it absolutely - God. And God is incorruptible. We can rephrase then: power corrupts, great power corrupts greatly, but absolute power is incorruptible.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Time**

“Time is a slave-driver, Lucille, a despicable tyrant!”

(From *Time The Tyrant* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Looking back**

For many years, I have entertained the notion that I only became ‘complex and analytical’ after a life-changing experience in 1976 – almost exactly thirty years ago at this writing. Last night, however, I came across some long-forgotten, personal notes which were very searching and reflective, but which date back to 1971, predating that period, therefore, by five years. This discovery, in turn, triggered memories of conversations with a good friend when I was at college in 1961, in which I shared what were, as I can see in retrospect, deeply reflective views on the importance of spirituality in my life.

(From *Reflecting On Reflection* - essay in ‘Beneath The Surface’)



## **Love found through nature**

What joy I found you...  
Oh, I ask your pardon,  
The prettiest flower in all my garden!  
‘Twas you found me and quick enchanted;  
Now we are one and can’t be parted.  
‘Tis thus no secret to construe  
That you love me and I love you,  
The you to whom I’ll e’er refer  
*As La plus jolie de toutes mes fleurs.*

(*The Prettiest Flower* - poem in ‘Till The Last Day Of Forever’)



## **One grows attached to pets**

“... at one point I would gladly have parted with a princely sum to anybody who was prepared to kidnap the canine quadruped, and give him a good home, preferably light years away from mine. Yet, several moons later, and notwithstanding a period of

denial on my part, I have become quite attached to the little fellow and he to me.”

(From *Familiarity Breeds...* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



### **No new year’s resolutions**

Since every new year’s road to hell  
Is amply paved with good intentions  
And I’ve no wish for hell’s dimensions.  
    Then, all temptation I shall damn  
    To seek reform *ad nauseam*,  
    And simply stay the way I am...  
    Just better.

(From the poem *Progress Not Perfection*)



### **Ban music in coffee shops**

“Now look here, Lucille, it’s not like you to be so argumentative over something so petty. Anybody in their right mind can see that coffee shops are primarily talking shops and background music is as appropriate to talking shops as a pickaxe is to a neurosurgeon performing a delicate brain operation...”

(From *Talking Shop* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



### **Oneness**

Separate paths will bring no rest;  
Then sacred harmony is the quest.

(From *The Quest* - poem in ‘From The Cradle Of Eternity’)



### **Silly question**

Come close my love eternal;  
I have this simple query:  
Do you know how much I love you?  
Oh, ask a silly question!  
You do, you do, of course you do,  
For if you know not,  
Then no one knows...

(From *A Question Of Love* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



### **An autumn leaf?**

An anguished autumn leaf am I,  
Cruelly cast from the parent tree,  
An expendable fair weather bauble  
To summer-decorate its majesty,  
Now thrown to the wayward whims  
Of every whirling wind that blows,  
Hither and thither, here and yon,

(From *Reawakening* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



### **The condition of conditioning**

I quite often speak of my 'conditioning' particularly when referring to my spiritual education. It's interesting that conditioning has the same root as 'condition'. It is even more interesting to note that the original meaning was 'a formula of agreement between two persons.' However, it has come into modern English as 'a requirement imposed on one person by another.' Thus when I was conditioned, people imposed conditions on me. The bizarre paradox is that I was told by the conditioners that God's love is unconditional. They then spent

the next five decades telling me what all the conditions were!  
Painful stuff.

I have gratitude beyond my ability to express that the  
God I now know loves me *unconditionally* in the absolute sense  
of that word.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Changing one's mind**

Contrary to popular belief, it is actually okay to change one's  
mind.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **On lecturing**

“I, as you know, my precious Muse, always get stage fright  
before every lecture, and a major attack thereof before I meet a  
new group for the first time. Extraordinary, after nearly ten  
thousand lectures, wouldn't you say? You'd imagine I'd have  
got used to it by now, but no, the knot in the stomach persists –  
unpleasant overture to one's labours, don't you think? They do  
say, though, that all the best actors get stage fright before a  
performance, and I certainly give performances. Occupational  
hazard, I suppose.”

(From *The Non-Directive Counsellor* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **One way to wake up**

The kettle's not yet boiling,  
So I open up my notebook  
And unlock my morning mind,

And put my pen to paper  
To see what notion emanates...

(From *Regardless Of Appearances* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **Pride**

It is no coincidence that the first of the seven deadly sins is pride. Most human faults emanate from that starting point, and it seems to me that pride has two faces: active pride or arrogance, and passive pride or vanity. Arrogance attacks, vanity absorbs.

There is, however, such a thing as righteous pride. For example, keeping oneself neat, clean and healthy, keeping one's home in good order (in other words pride in one's person and being house proud) are wholesome expressions of pride if done for the right motivation. And the right motivation? Thankfulness to the giver demonstrated by taking care of his gifts. Another way of saying, I suppose, that being proud of God because of who and what he is, is really not pride at all but gratitude.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Visitors**

A transient colony of wasps,  
A queen and her resolute followers,  
Saw a hole in the eaves near the door,  
And selected my home for their dwelling...  
Just creatures of Nature, like me,  
Requiring a roof o'er their head

(From the poem *Remorse*)



## **Understanding and knowledge**

“In worldly affairs, there is no understanding without first acquiring knowledge. It is not always thus in the eternal realm. You can verify what I am about to say for yourself: you have an inner understanding of the eternal – in itself an inadequate and misunderstood word – which bypasses all knowledge; and since it is purely intuitive, it also bypasses all language. So I cannot explain it further than to say that it is an understanding beyond understanding – a state that even the greatest intellects can *never* even begin to approach. Indeed, the intellect can positively hinder the attainment of this mystical comprehension – this enlightenment if you prefer, although that is another word that is often seriously misunderstood.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Home is where the spirit is**

But whither shall I go?  
Some near or distant Mecca...  
Oh, what need have I of pilgrimage  
When my home is holy ground?

(From *Holy Ground* - poem in ‘Grin & Bear It!’)



## **In good company**

I sit in soothing solitude,  
Sole occupant of the family seat,  
Enjoying the very best of company –  
My own...

(From *Private Audience* - poem in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



## **All I need is patience**

How long does it take to cast off the old,  
The ill-fitting and the outworn?  
How long does it take for a soul to erase  
The echoes that sound from the past?  
How long does it take for the new to install  
And nurture the human condition?

(From *Restoration* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **True happiness?**

“... I have always assumed that there is a direct correlation between happiness and one’s life experience at any given moment. In other words – lest I fail to make my meaning clear – when the prevailing experience is good, one is happy, and when bad, unhappy.

“Well, that makes sense; pretty obvious, as a matter of fact.”

“And so I firmly believed for decades, my friend, but I was mistaken. It doesn’t make sense at all; neither is it obvious - pretty or otherwise. The truth is so simple that I very nearly missed it, to wit: there are no bad experiences, only bad attitudes. Everything depends on one’s attitude.”

(From *With Knobs On* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **The road less travelled**

I was walking on the highway  
With a throng of goodly people  
When you came and softly whispered,  
All affection – but seductive –

And bid me take a turning  
That the others could not see.

(From *The Road Less Travelled* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



### **Personal responsibility**

The modern "Liberal" school of thought ridicules those whom it condemns as conservative, square, old-fashioned, prudish, puritanical, even religious. The trend is to reduce moral thinking and behaviour to the lowest common denominator and induce guilt in those who might otherwise combat what is often held out almost as a god: the so-called right of individuals to do whatever they like, and the denial of personal accountability for their actions.

(From *Ethics* - Communications Course Notes)



### **Not to worry!**

This issue is a bugbear  
And it's almost done my head in,  
So that I am near demented  
And afraid that I will weaken  
To the point where they'll commit me  
For the passage of my lifetime.

(From *See, It Works!* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



### **Boarding school**

Like so many other Irish people, my mother and father had emigrated to England in the late nineteen thirties. I was born in Surrey during the second world war and we lived in a

comfortable home in a charming London suburb for the happiest days of my younger life. At eleven, however, I was despatched to a boarding school in Sussex. My mother had been ill since I was three and I used to spend much of my time with her rather than going out to play with the other children, and had become part carer at an early age. My father felt that this wasn't healthy for a growing boy – and an only child at that – so off I went.

(From *Seeing The Bigger Picture* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



### **Antidote to arrogance**

It's good for me to remember I have *nothing* that I wasn't given.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 5* - Communications Lecture Notes)



### **The power of light**

A little while ago, I heard this interesting analogy of light versus dark: imagine a room is completely darkened, doors and windows are blocked up, no chink of light coming in anywhere. Somebody in an adjoining, brightly lit room gets a sledge hammer and breaks a large hole in the wall of the darkened room. Simple question: does the dark rush in and engulf the light, or does the light flood in and dispel the dark? The latter obviously and – equally obviously – because the light is so much more powerful than the dark. However, in those moments when I find myself in the completely darkened room, the darkness is absolute. That's why it can create the illusion of being more powerful.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Acceptance my arse!**

I'm here in the endless desert, God,  
And I am practically delirious,  
'Cause I've lost my bloody way again,  
Only this time it's more serious:  
I've lost the compass,  
I've lost the map,  
The camel's fled,  
No well to tap,  
All hope is dead,  
The sun is high,  
My skin's raw red,  
And death is nigh.  
The vulture gloats  
At his coming meal,  
You'll have to admit  
It's a damn raw deal  
(For me not him!);  
And the worst of it,  
(I tell no lie),  
Is that *you* have left me  
High and dry.  
A question, then:  
For fuck's sake, why?

(*The Questioner* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Gratitude**

... But just to say this, lest the moment I miss:  
Your bounty, it seems, has no boundaries,  
And this poet is filled with gratitude.

(From *A Poet's Gratitude* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Keep it complex?**

“I say, Fred,” I pleaded, wilting under the pressure, “have a heart for goodness’ sake! That’s the kernel of the whole problem – I just cannot be simple, and I’ve really been having a hard time of it, and for so long. I think I have microscopes where my eyes should be for I continually examine everything – particularly things of the mind – far too meticulously, and that causes a lot of harrowing and unnecessary pain.

(From *The Proof Of The Pudding...* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Following fashion**

The fashion show’s a multitude  
Of women who, in habitude,  
Buy garments priced in magnitude,  
Not covering with exactitude  
The relevant female portions.

(From *Servitude To Fashion* - poem in ‘The Voice Of The Man-child’)



## **There is another way**

The tradition in which I grew up placed paramount emphasis on having ‘faith.’ Whilst I accept the need for faith at particular times in one’s life, the way in which ‘faith’ has relentlessly been presented or, more appropriately, misrepresented to me has caused me an enormous amount of heartache. Never, to my recollection, was more than a fleeting reference made to God’s faithfulness, much less the potential to *know* God as opposed to believing in him/her. Thankfully, there is another way.

(Adapted from an introductory note to ‘A Light In The Dark’)



## **Finding empathy in nature**

I behold the single dewdrop  
On a lovely flower at daybreak,  
Trickling slowly down a petal  
As, upon my cheek, the teardrop  
That bears witness to my sorrow...

(From *She Weeps* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Life's not all a bed of roses - even for a Muse**

"I think I might like to have been a star of the silver screen," said Lucille wistfully; "or perhaps a famous opera singer – a coloratura soprano maybe, or possibly even a great leader – like Boadicea, Cleopatra or Margaret Thatcher. Musing is all very fine, as far as it goes, but it has its drawbacks."

(From *Where Credit Is Due* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **But I must speak of my dreams**

You know what they say, don't you,  
Sweetest One?  
    "Thou shalt not this,  
    Thou shalt not that,  
    Thou shalt not pretty much everything!"  
Or so it pretty much seems,  
And, thus, one pretty much deems  
That it's best to say little about one's dreams...

(From *Silent Solution* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



### **Back on an even keel**

I have no need to sort me out  
'Cause I'm already sorted:  
I am me, just plain ol' me,  
Vain notions now aborted.  
Alas, it was not always so,  
I've ne'er been this upclued;  
Indeed, the most part of my life  
Was spent in state upscrewed.

(From *Therapy* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



### **Nature always surprises**

In the high slopes of the mountain,  
In a small but sheltered enclave,  
I come across some foxgloves  
In the middle of October,  
All withered since the summer;  
All, that is, save one  
Which still is in full bloom,  
A miniature miracle.

(From *Simple Pleasures* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



### **No self-propulsion**

The truth is the awareness  
That, in you, I am just everything,  
The precious and the very thing  
I was always meant to be.

(From *Now Isn't That Something!* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Enough is enough**

“... I’ve just given up on all those popular psychology books that I’ve been reading. Full of sterling stuff, no doubt about that, but sooner or later they nearly all inform you that parents have inflicted permanent damage to their children's personalities by the time they’re three months old, so that every time I tick off one of the kids, even with the greatest justification, I go on a colossal guilt trip. I mean to say, Fred, I need that kind of thing like a hole in the head.”

(From *A Lesson In Logic* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Mission statement**

Now, somehow, this all too familiar rings:  
Once more to unreachable fancies he clings,  
As if wishful thinking could make them take wings.  
But he’s not been given a daydream enchanted,  
And he’s just seen a way he’s been taking for granted:  
To blossom and grow in the place he’s been planted.  
So that now, when he has a song, he just sings,  
A kind word of comfort, a soft kiss, he brings,  
To touch those around him his heart ever springs,  
For his mission is found in the everyday things.

(*Everyday Things* - poem in ‘The Power Of Light’)



## **Euphoric recall**

“The bloke in the coffin up there, or what’s left of him now that his spirit’s done a bunk, was a no-good reprobate – sex maniac, wife-beater, drug-peddler, car thief, forger and drunken bum, and they were amongst his nicer characteristics. But to hear the man on the altar talking, you’d swear he was the greatest saint that ever lived, and the assembled mourners are all nodding their

heads in sombre approval. The whole thing's thoroughly sickening. Why is it, Fred, that we humans have a penchant for glorifying even the greatest assholes once they've bitten the dust?"

(From *Departure* - story in 'Life With Fred')



### **The better course**

... except where an issue is critical, it is almost always better for our own equilibrium to excuse rather than accuse.

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



### **No renunciation**

I read recently where medieval philosophy had a dictum that every choice is a renunciation. Wisdom indeed! Most choices, when one comes to think of it, involve many renunciations. When I marry one person, I renounce all the others whom I might have married. When I choose to have and raise a family, I renounce many other things that I could have done with the commitment, energy, time and financial resources. Even when I choose to have a cup of coffee, I renounce the tea, hot chocolate and herbal infusions that I could have had. No wonder making even simple choices is often so difficult. No wonder, equally, that we bring that kind of thinking into our relationship with God, that is, when I choose God, I renounce all sorts of things. What we think we have to renounce will depend on our religious conditioning, formal education and upbringing. One of the stupendous realisations for me in recent years is this: in choosing God, I renounce nothing, but gain everything.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Desire for oneness**

When you sing and I hear not,  
You must tune me to your singing;  
When you play and I list not,  
You must tune me to your playing;  
When you speak and I heed not,  
You must tune me to your speaking,  
For I go daily out of tune...

(From *The Singer And The Song* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **A writer matures**

Most fledgling writers will identify with the perceived need to have their work validated by outside sources – friends, teachers, workshop leaders, critics of one sort or another and, if publication is the objective, the reading public. Perhaps rare wordsmiths do exist who know from day one, line one, that the only validation of the work that counts is their own, but I have never come across any of them. In my case, the transition from needing outside approval to becoming honorary president and the entire (almost!) membership of my fan club has been a gradual process.

(From *The Semi-Detached Writer* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Responsibility without blame**

To blame our parents or others for the way we are now leads to the kind of thinking that is destructive for us. But it is wise to recognise the learned responses from the past, so that we can unlearn the ones that are hurting us in the present.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 2* - Communications Lecture Notes)



### **That's telling him!**

“Pray why,” enquired the angel,  
On observing my demeanour  
Which was plainly less than sunny,  
“Though the past was disappointing,  
Will you not consult another  
In the field of fit professionals?  
Perhaps you’d find it helpful,  
And ‘tis said God loves a trier!”

“Because I am not willing,” I said,  
“To prostitute my spirit  
To a secular philosophy  
That simply does not get it,  
Nor to bend the knee to ‘teachers’  
Who project their own convictions  
As being valid for the masses.”

(From *A Soft Serenity* - poem in ‘Beautiful In Everything’)



### **Most of what we need is within**

“Aided and abetted by the codependent society in which we live, I have frequently sought direction for my life from outside sources: religion, teachers, television, health professionals, self-help books, vitamin tablets – even the Internet! It eventually dawned upon me that, whilst all of these may well have a role to play, most of what I need is within; all it takes to find it is for me to have the courage to look.”

(From *Introduction* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **The truth at last**

But those who seek my solace,  
Seek my love without condition,  
Find a joy beyond their dreaming  
In the midst of tribulation;  
And I have to say it grieves me  
That this pure and beauteous message  
Has so long been misinterpreted...  
But now you know the truth.

(From *Still Around* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Music & metaphors**

I was ensconced one evening recently in the quiet backwater of my beloved study, listening to some haunting melodies on the hi-fi. "Where would the world be without it, Fred," I said wistfully as my favourite piece drew to a conclusion. "Music is balm to the soul, calm to the heart, catalyst to the mind, coolant to the heated brow, oil on troubled waters and a can-opener to every conceivable emotion." With hindsight, I can see that I was waxing pretty lyrical with the metaphors till I got to the can-opener, but I couldn't think of any other way to put it.

(From *Striking The Right Note* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **Beyond language**

A language you speak,  
With no phrases to seek,  
That I understand.  
    I speak a tongue,  
    With no idioms among,  
    That you understand.  
Inert credibility

Brings love in tranquillity,  
No speech to profess.  
    Flawless inflection,  
    Unerring connection  
    In silence, no less.  
Yet my verse is in vain  
For I strive to explain,  
But no words can express...

(*Superlanguage* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



### **Success?**

To me, the only meaningful measure of 'success' is the degree to which my will (wish) is one with God's or – the way in which I prefer to express it – the degree to which my love is in union with his/hers. In the finite world, however, I perceive that entities or concepts can only be measured in relation to their opposites. Therefore, one can only judge something to be successful if one is of the opinion that there is the potential for failure, however measured. God, in complete contrast, neither measures nor judges me and, in his/her eyes, there is no failure. With infinite love and compassion, he/she sees me fumble and stumble and fall, but not fail. This being so plainly the case, 'success' is a redundant concept.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **If one waits long enough...**

There are wonders in my life  
Which I once believed impossible...

(From *The Price Is Too High* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **The only way**

In anguish as, at times, I am,  
Indeed when all is rosy,  
There is no other option  
But an absolute surrender  
To your unconditional love,  
Infinite, unchanging –  
Though inscrutable.

(From *Surrender It Is!* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **A potential controversy...**

“Lucille,” I commenced, “I fear that, historically, a great injustice has been done to men. Popular belief would have it that woman is the romantic of the species and man the inconsiderate clod who has to be prodded into displays of affection. As time goes by, however, it strikes me increasingly that the reverse is the truth...”

“Now, hold on a sec...”

(From *Balancing Act* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Yearning**

To know your very essence  
In the wonder of your presence  
    Is my yearning  
    And the substance of my dreams.

(From *Love Is The Essence* - poem in 'Love Is The Essence')



## **Saying yes to love**

The expression of my life,  
The sole possession of my life,  
Is the essence of your presence  
In the presence of my essence  
At the heart of my existence.  
And the essence of your presence  
Is pure love;  
And the essence of my love  
Is acquiescence.

(*Surrender To Love* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



## **What is an open mind?**

... After due consideration, this is what I came up with:

*Keeping an open mind does not mean that I accept everything; it means that I make a conscious decision - and a persistent effort - to be at least willing to consider everything. However, since an open mind can absorb anything and, even after careful consideration, there is a real possibility of soaking up ideas that are unhealthy for me, I need to post the sentry of wisdom at the entrance.*

(From *Minding The Open Mind* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Now that's rain!**

It was pouring with a vengeance, as if the sky wanted to exhaust its entire supply of H<sub>2</sub>O before lunch; the wiper blades could scarcely keep up. That alone wasn't really cause for concern

because, with the more usual, vertical rain, he could rely on the protection of the trusty golf umbrella which he kept in the boot for the purpose. On this occasion, however, the stuff was bucketing down in tandem with a force eight gale and the net result was water coming at all angles, and the umbrella would be about as effective against the maelstrom as trying to stop a heavy armoured tank with a peashooter, so there was no escape.

(From *A Short Tale With A Long Tail* - story in 'Oh, My Head!')



## **Summer**

Ah, the sweetness of summer,  
The season of splendour  
And soul-stirring wonder...  
And all is well.  
How blessed I am,  
How blessed.

(From *The Sweetness Of Summer* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Meaningful lines from an old hymn**

It just struck me recently how beautiful and simple are two lines from a hymn I knew many years ago:

Take me as I am,  
I can come no other way.

God accepts me just as I am, so that's the only way I need to be. I am reminded here of a Yiddish proverb: "If I try to be like him, who will be like me?"

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Acceptance**

Let it, let it be.  
Strive no more to discover  
The meaning of life,  
To decode the inscrutable,  
Change the immutable,  
Courting complexity,  
Worthless analysis  
Which leads to paralysis  
Of psyche and soul.  
What human profanity,  
Intellectual vanity,  
To think I could fathom  
The essence of truth.  
In the interests of sanity,  
I'll have to surrender,  
Accord to engender,  
And just let it be  
And let life find me.

(*Let It Be* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Tears heal**

The dam has burst,  
And waterfalls of tears  
Tumble down my cheeks.  
Oh, let them flow without ceasing,  
Absolving, releasing  
The anguish of years,  
Till all fears are flushed out  
And carried away  
To a far distant place,  
Sequestered by grace,  
Whence nothing returns,  
Where fear has no latitude;  
For so my soul yearns

For freedom,  
And so my heart burns  
With gratitude.

(*Tears* - poem in 'The Substance Of Dreams')



### **Save us from pomposity**

The emerging intelligentsia of the university's prestigious English department were already elated by the intoxicating power the year's studies had conferred upon their absorbent minds - that of analysing and questioning virtually every item of knowledge presented for their enlightenment. Nothing, they were informed by their lecturers, should be accepted at face value, lest they be considered naïve by their peers and mentors – the ultimate insult, apparently. The pinnacle of academic satisfaction, therefore, was derived from systematically dissecting the works of others, and consigning them arbitrarily to the intellectual grave or placing them upon the pedestal of genius, depending on the prevailing school of thought, the fashionable notions of the epoch and the personal quirks of self-styled experts.

(From *Dissection* - story in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Freedom of spirit**

“Have you ever seen an eagle in flight, David?”

“Only on television.”

“Amazing creatures, eagles... They are amongst the most powerful birds in the air and their mighty wings could bring them anywhere they wish to go. But do you know how they attain the dizzy heights at which they have been found?”

“No.”

“They just fly gently across the sky until they find a rising current of warm air, a thermal as it is known, then they simply open their wings and let the warm air bear them upwards.

When one thermal runs out, they drift across to another and go even higher. A Rüppell's Griffon, a member of the eagle family, has been recorded at thirty-seven thousand feet."

"But that's impossible. There is hardly any air at that height."

"Nevertheless it is a verifiable fact. Potent symbol, is it not?"

"Yes it is but, much and all as I am loath to point out the obvious to one of your undoubted perceptiveness, I regret to say that I cannot fly," said David, laughing.

"You can in spirit."

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



### **There is more**

When in doubt, at times bewildered,  
I must pause a while and ponder  
And ask this simple question,  
"Is there more to life on Earth,  
More than e'er has been avowed?"  
And the answer comes, and clearly,  
From a source that's deep within...  
There *is* more.

(From the poem *There Is More*)



### **Telling somebody to get off my back**

So, realign your strategies,  
Adjust your bow and arrow  
And select another target!

(From *No Way, Baby!* - poem in 'Voice Of The Man-child')



## **Growing up!**

... Anyway, be that as it may, I have I believe, at the half-century, finally acquired the requisite dose of humility to confess that there is really only one essential pearl of knowledge of which I can be one hundred per cent certain, namely that I know absolutely nothing. Which, now that I come to think of it, is a very great blessing. Sort of takes the pressure off me, if you know what I mean.

(From *Knowledge* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Emotions can be troublesome**

When emotions get too hot to handle – ask for help. Don't let misplaced pride force you to bottle it up. Remember: “No man is an island...” A significant internal shift takes place when we admit to ourselves that we are up against a brick wall, and reach out for help.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 4* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Femininity**

A feminine woman,  
All gracious and gentle,  
The gift and the wonder  
Of mystic formation,  
So loving and tender,  
Yet still elemental,  
Is the brightest jewel  
In all of creation.

(From the poem *The Tip Of The Iceberg*)



## **A noisy generation**

“People today don’t seem to be able to tolerate even a modicum of peace and quiet. I have come to the conclusion that they just can’t stand the sound of silence. Why do you think this is, esteemed Muse – a sign of the times perhaps?”

Lucille’s wisdom is often simple but sublime. She thought for a moment and then came up with an answer which took a couple of seconds to sink in: “I suppose,” she said, “it is because it’s too loud for them; blots out their ability to keep running from themselves.”

(From *The Sound Of Silence* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **No words for love**

My heart’s desire is so intense,  
‘Tis far beyond expression,  
And framing it in finite words  
Could give a false impression.  
‘Twere best, then, dwell in love sublime  
And language all abort,  
And that is why – ‘tis plain to see –  
This poem is so short!

(*Too Wonderful For Words* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **High-class problem**

“Blasted tear-off desk calendars! They give all these marvellous quotations, but rarely mention the source, and even when they do, they don’t say who or what the person is. You know the sort of thing, Lucille: *People who go to psychiatrists ought to have their heads examined* - *Hyacinth Glossup-Fosdike*. The unfortunate

daily calendar-tearer-offer, though delighted with this philosophical gem, is left wondering who the hell this Hyacinth Glossup-Fosdike is, thereby consigned by the wretched people who publish these things to a state of intellectual impoverishment.

(From *In Search Of Excellence* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **Reflection on a meddling subconscious**

I ne'er could live in a haunted house;  
'Twould fill my heart with dread.  
Imagine my consternation then,  
When I found I'd a haunted head!

(*Too Close For Comfort* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



### **Not good at small talk**

I know from experience that it is of fundamental importance to my well-being to observe the precept, 'live and let live.' Therefore, let me be clear on one point: I am in no way judging anybody who gets a buzz out of meaningless, party small talk. Indeed, I will go further: I fully accept that to be serious all the time is unbalanced, and the light, bright and trivial may well be a pleasant break from the tedium of earnestness for many people. But, whatever the arguments in its favour, I have a marked distaste for such shallow prattle. I find my own relief from excessive pensiveness in other ways, many of them unconventional. But then, although generally thought of as a conformist, I have always been something of a maverick.

(From *The Time Traveller* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **The cult of competition**

In the bar they're watching football  
On a giant TV widescreen,  
And the crowd erupts in thunder,  
In a dearth of sporting spirit,  
As their team defeats the rival,  
For the only goal is winning.

(From the poem *Topsy Turvy*)



## **Depression**

A never-ending nightmare,  
A nocturnal and diurnal horror movie,  
Permanent, pitiless performance,  
In which many of the scenes are replayed time and time again:  
The terrifying teasings of the unseen torturer.  
A nightmare...  
From which there is no awakening.

(From *Way Down Under* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Worthy legacy**

"I see, Tomas. I have often wondered if all that has been in my life will end with me – apart from the gift of insight which goes on from generation to generation – and I am very glad to learn from you now that part of my journey here is to pass on the indescribable blessings I have received so that they may bless others in the future."

(From 'The Dance Goes On' - draft sequel to the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **Living external lives**

We live in an age of information saturation, excessive stimulation and sensory overload. Hence, our brains, emotions, nervous systems, indeed our entire beings are over-energised to the point where many folk cannot be still or left too long with their own thoughts. The result seems to be that, although it might appear desirable in theory, the simple life is unattainable, and there is precious little possibility for true peace of mind. The quest is frequent excitement and the idea of developing an inner life may be dull and boring. Such a shame and a loss to the world. The inner life is where the real and permanent and life-giving excitement is.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **True love means...**

If I love you and you love me,  
We must... but heavens, no!  
True love does not mean holding on;  
True love means letting go.

(From *True Love Means...* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



## **Seeing the best in others**

"Fred, it is not good for your own psychic well-being to think so ill of a fellow homo sapiens. Positive thoughts attract positive feelings. If you will but exert yourself, even a trifle, my dear old cerebral companion, you will be able to perceive, beyond the mist of this man's repulsive persona, that he has many sterling qualities."

(From *Capitulation* - story in 'Life With Fred')



## **God seems arbitrary, but...**

The truth, at last, I comprehend,  
That your ways are not mine;  
You love us all with like intent,  
But not the same design.

(From *Uniqueness* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Grief - the best way out is through**

Grief is not an evil or some kind of disease. It is a normal part of healthy living, a safety valve for me to use in times of loss. So I will give myself permission to shout and cry for as long as it takes to get through it, and find relative peace at the other end. And I will avoid, like the plague, those well-meaning but often dangerous people who think that my problems are the result of a Valium deficiency!

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 4* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Matchmaking**

See, you're the perfect catch  
For the human likes of me;  
And, though I'm not a patch  
On your heavenly perfection,  
We're still the perfect match.

(From *Uno* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **The Infinite and the unconditional**

The more I live, the more I see  
That God can reach to you and me;

He puts no limitations on the ways that he's perceived,  
Grants countless permutations in the ways that he's received,  
And then the grace sublime, to wit:  
*He* does the searching. So be it.

(From *Tunnel Vision* - poem in 'Hang On!')



### **If only my emotions would behave themselves**

My emotions are all over the place  
Like sheep without a shepherd.  
Nothing new in that, of course,  
Only this time they are taking defiance  
To new heights – or is it new depths? –  
And steadfastly refuse  
To be gathered into the fold of reason.

(From *Up The Rebellion!* - poem in 'Beautiful In Everything')



### **Let's be more up front**

You've possibly never looked at it this way before but, mostly,  
we treat our fellow humans with absolute contempt – for all the  
best reasons, naturally. We never like to hurt their feelings,  
because we want to be thought of as 'nice,' so we continually  
lavish insincerities upon them.

(From *Transition* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



### **Those self-help books...**

I had been going through an extended and extremely difficult –  
albeit very beautiful – period spiritually. A trusted friend with

whom I shared my journey said, “I’m going to lend you a book.” I thought, “Oh no, not another book! Almost everybody I speak to at more than a superficial level recommends a book to sort me out!”

(From *The Dark Night Of The Soul* - review in ‘Beneath The Surface’)



### **No sex please!**

“At times,” concluded Lucille, “Sex brings us the indescribably heightened awareness of being one – body, mind and spirit – with another being and, at others, engenders feelings of total rejection. The challenge we face, then, is to strike a balance but, even more importantly, to determine what attitude to have to sexuality in those poignant moments when it seems more of a dilemma than a delight.”

(From *Present And Correct* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



### **On the last day**

My Sweet, it’s plain to see,  
That since your love is unconditional,  
No judgment can there be.

(From *The Last Day* - poem in ‘From The Cradle Of Eternity’)



### **Simple recipe for writing**

The heart creates, the head refines.

(From *Modus Scrivendi* - poem in ‘When The Bug Bites’)



## **Lavender teaches a lesson**

“Okay. So, a sprig of lavender?”

“Yes. Lavender blossoms are very pretty in their own way, and have a delicate pastel colour, but one would hardly describe them as exotic, and one cannot smell much, if anything, when one passes them by. However, if you apply gentle pressure to the blossom it leaves the most exquisite fragrance on your skin. Lavender has always been my favourite.”

Robert squeezed the blossom then raised his fingers to his nostrils. “Mmm! You’re right. Lovely. I wonder why it does that?”

“I very much doubt that botanists would agree with me, but I rather imagine that it interprets the firm touch as love and then responds in love by giving off this lovely perfume. Incidentally, in the language of lovers, lavender symbolises constancy and devotion.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **The way of tears**

In the trauma and the turmoil,  
In the sacred and the sensual,  
In the earthbound and the ecstasy,  
    The real and the ethereal  
    And oft the two in tandem,  
Mine is the way of tears  
Since the earliest of years,  
And, for the world,  
I would not change it.

(From *The Way Of Tears* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **Why is God the way he is?**

But, you protest, why in heaven's name did the shepherd's original master plan so design sheep that they are obliged (if they know what's good for them) to trust him without understanding what he does or why he does it? Ah, now there you have me. I'd really like to give you a scholarly, logical and convincing answer, and I ought to be able to because I'm very intelligent. But the trouble is that I'm stuck with this finite human language, and my human intellect – which is also decidedly finite it seems – gets very confused and frustrated when I try to use it to unravel the infinite. Makes me feel a bit stupid actually.

(From *Shepherd & Sheep* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **We need laughter**

We need laughter, my love,  
As gentle as the new-born rain  
That falls to earth in spring,  
To wash away glum winter's gloom  
And soften our demeanour.

(From *We Need Laughter, My Love* - poem in 'Oh, My Head!')



## **Perseverance**

When I'm in pain,  
To reap the gain  
I must endure...

(From *Impatience* - poem in 'Oh, My Head!')



## **Live now**

... In absurd anticipation  
Of some future inspiration  
When I will pen the masterpiece  
To ensure my immortality  
In the poet's hall of fame  
Long after I have died;  
Before I've ever lived.

(From *Expectations* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



## **There's a helpline for everything nowadays**

I could scarcely believe my eyes, but there it was, advertised in the morning paper: a help line for depressed and anxious people, funded by some billionaire philanthropist. It started in America, of course – they are always first with that kind of thing, but now, through a low cost phone number, they were extending the service to my homeland. I was feeling pretty depressed and anxious at the time, so do you think I could resist calling? Not on your nelly!

(From *What A Way To Go!* - story in 'Oh, My Head!')



## **Guiding force**

In each moment I am guided,  
In each moment I am minded,  
In each moment I am loved  
    Beyond all explanation.

(From *In Each Moment* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **What to write?**

Pray tell: what mode is in my line  
Of flowing prose or measured rhyme?  
A thought or notion to propose;  
Though rare, a secret to disclose;  
And then might come a cryptic dream  
Or p'rhaps of fantasy a gleam;  
At times a project to unfold,  
More oft a story to be told.  
My line can surely but impart  
What's in my mind and in my heart.

(From *What's In A Line?* - poem in 'Voice Of The Man-child')



## **What is grace?**

Up until fairly recently, I had a woolly idea as to what grace is and how it manifests in my life. I think I assumed it to be one of those ineffable gifts God sends our way in times of need, but would have been hard pressed to describe it beyond that. If it means God's love, why don't they say so? Since they do not, at least not that I have read or heard, it presumably means something else.

Now, however, I have become clear. Grace is God's *empowering* love or, to put it otherwise, it is God's love manifesting as empowerment in specific areas of my life. God loves me unconditionally at all times, but when he/she expressly channels his/her love to empower me to do or be what would be impossible for me to do or be on my own, then that is grace.

Incidentally, what is it, in my experience, that God empowers me to do? Everything!

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Language is so limited**

I wonder if you have noticed: there seems to be an interminable number of ways in which to say ‘Yes.’ The version used by the co-occupier of the steam-room, which I had entered a minute earlier, was particularly enigmatic if that’s the word I’m looking for. It left one not knowing if one was making progress in trying to establish diplomatic relations or not.

(From *All Steamed Up* - story in ‘Homage To A Future Hero’)



## **Where dreams come from**

It’s time to tell this sorry squad  
To take their harsh, synthetic god,  
Their rigid, Pharisaic fare,  
And stuff it firmly you know where;  
Then veto all their sordid schemes,  
And follow all my precious dreams –  
The ones my yearning heart allures,  
For they, my Love, are surely yours.

(From *Whose Dreams?* - poem in ‘Beyond The Illusion’)



## **Living in other people’s emotions**

When they’re up, we’re up. When they’re down, we’re down. So we endeavour to control others, to fix them so that they will behave as is good for them (our version). We become “people pleasers” i.e. we’ll do almost anything to make people like us. We find it almost impossible to say ‘No.’ We try ever harder and harder to keep everything and everybody – especially ourselves – on an even keel, but only get more and more screwed up emotionally – and often physically too.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 3* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Gentle surrender**

The turning point came  
When you broke my delusion,  
Enfolded me in your embrace,  
And showed me that I am loved without limits  
And my life is surrounded by grace.  
How soft I surrendered then my way to yours,  
To your gentle and loving design;  
And the thought comes that since I've no way of my own,  
Then your way must surely be mine.

(From *Whose Way?* - poem in 'From The Cradle Of Eternity')



## **Relationship with self**

Too long I shunned my other self  
That I might be beguiled  
By peace of mind, that ne'er I found  
Till we were reconciled.

(*Alter Ego* - poem in 'The Voice Of The Man-child')



## **Great love**

At times my love is so intense  
It simply will not yield,  
With satisfactory reverence,  
In idiom's finite field,  
To song or verse or prose.

(From the poem *With A Rose*)



## **God's ways are not our ways**

“I suppose, you are probably on the point of saying, my dearest Lucille, that I am being rather short-sighted in this crucial matter. Doubtless you are about to point out that God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, and that the fact that he seems silent for such a long time is not evidence of a lack of caring and love. Rather, you suggest, must he restrain his own compassionate desire to have a warm and close relationship with me just now, in order that I may learn from the many human circumstances of my life – which he has painstakingly arranged in minute detail – so that I might grow and mature into oneness with him later. Hmm! Now there’s a thought...

“You will, I am sure, also be quick to emphasise that the pain of separation, even the excruciating and mind-blowing anguish of the recurring suspicion that he doesn’t exist at all will, in the fullness of time, render all the sweeter the ineffable joy of eternal union with him and all his people. No doubt you will highlight the timelessness of eternal life and the fact that all former experiences – particularly painful ones – will pass away and be as nothing in the new scheme of things. When the sun breaks forth and the gentlest zephyrs caress our cheeks, we quickly forget the raging storm, as it were.”

(From *Now, That's Inspiration* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **A sense of purpose**

My sojourn here must yet attend  
To unfinished business,  
Fulfil the purpose for which I came:  
    To think the thought  
    And do the deed,  
    To touch the heart  
    And fill the need,  
    To write the word  
    And pray the prayer,  
    To let your strength  
    Pierce every layer –

Till all is accomplished  
In accord with a plan  
That is grounded in love.

(From *Yearning For The Horizon* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



### **A touch of Italian**

Quante volte ti ho cercata,  
Tutti i giorni,  
In ogni momento,  
Amore mio;  
Ma quante volte ti ho perduta,  
Cioè, ho così spesso creduto  
Nell'illusione della mia vita –  
In apparenza un'esistenza  
Senza di te.  
Oh, che dolore!

(From *Quante Volte Ti Ho Cercata* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



### **A touch of French**

Tu vois, je n'arrive pas  
A exprimer un amour  
Au delà du monde connu;  
Mais, au moins, je peux te dire  
En l'amour les mots s'envolent,  
Vu que toi, t'es sans pareil,  
Avec toi mes rêves s'éveillent  
Mais ma voix oublie son rôle;  
Chère Thérèse, tu me conseilles;  
Je te cède, donc, la parole...

(From *Je Te Cède La Parole* - poem in 'Till The Last Day Of Forever')



## **A touch of German**

Ich denke an dich mit Rücksicht  
Und schätze dich aus Fernsicht.  
Ich folge dir mit Umsicht,  
    Und frage mich wohl warum?  
Zu wissen ist die Absicht;  
Die Antwort kommt aus Nachsicht;  
Und braucht nun keine Aufsicht:  
    Ich liebe dich vor allem.  
Eine Frage kommt aus Durchsicht  
(Ich bin zwar dieser Ansicht):  
Was wäre dann die Aussicht?  
    Ich weiß nicht; also Vorsicht!

(Poem *Vorsicht!*)



## **When love is a decision**

“What...I have learned, Robert, is that romantic love is absolutely wonderful, indeed essential for bringing a couple together and it is important that it always be present in some measure. But in a mature relationship, love is ultimately a decision.”

“That sounds a bit cold and clinical.”

“Yes, it does. But it isn’t. Take all the people in your life that you love. You always love them, right?”

“Yes, of course.”

“But you don’t always feel loving. In fact there are times when you could happily give them a piece of your mind in a manifestly energetic manner.”

“You bet!”

“But even in that moment of desperately wanting to slosh them between the two eyes with a wet sandbag, you still love them, right?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“You know so.”

“Okay, I know so.”

“Then you love them, but you don’t *feel* loving. In that

moment, love is a decision. It is a decision born of a deep commitment to this person that goes beyond the emotion of the moment to an appreciation and an acceptance of who and what they are, just as they are, right now, and the knowledge that you are in this for the long haul.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Attachment to outcomes**

So much of our human thinking, bolstered by education and social conditioning, hinges on attachment to outcomes. I, for example, had a management training the primary focus of which was to predict and achieve outcomes. This can result in a marked tendency to live in the eventual outcome rather than dwell in the undertaking of the moment. So, we can largely miss out on the nurturing of now and are greatly disturbed if the outcome does not manifest as planned. God’s way does, of course, include the using of the gifts he has given to us to plan sensibly for the future, that is, take courses of action that have desired outcomes, such as arranging life assurance policies to protect our loved ones. ...His way, I believe, is primarily to be present to the current undertaking, as well as we are able, and leave the outcomes to him.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **Surely that’s impossible**

“That is right, David. Standard issue human bodies cannot walk through doors and walls. ... I have not explained *how* this is done, simply because human language and intellect would not suffice. But now you know that it is not impossible and that it is certainly not only you who have witnessed this phenomenon. Countless people have done so throughout history.”

(From ‘The Dance Goes On’ - draft sequel to the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **What is poetry?**

Well, what is poetry? A considerable number of moons ago, it would not have been necessary to ask such a question. If it didn't rhyme and follow a recognised metrical pattern, it would not have been deemed worthy of the appellation. Now, however, with the virtually universal acceptance of free verse or *vers libre*, anything goes, and one has rather more difficulty in determining precisely what the stuff is. One of my favourite authors, P. G. Wodehouse, in his customary humorous vein, has this to say:

Who can say where this thing will end? *Vers libre* is within the reach of all. A sleeping nation has awakened to the realisation that there is money to be made out of chopping its prose into bits.

(From *What Is Poetry?* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Do we need a new way to pray?**

“Give me the grace to do what is rightful.”  
That sure does sound holy and good and insightful,  
For that's what's prescribed, and I learnt it of old,  
To pray in the trapped and traditional mould...

(from *An Adult Child's Prayer* - poem in 'Beyond The Illusion')



## **Dream the dream**

But when I am in darkness  
And cannot dream at all,  
Save only the nightmares,  
The single thing that matters  
Is to issue from the shadow,  
Whatever the exertion,  
And get back to that place,

Enlivened by grace,  
Where, be there no outcome,  
At least I can dream the dream.

(From *Dreaming The Dream* - poem in 'The Power Of Light')



## **Jealousy**

“You see jealousy is a potent cocktail of four other emotions, each one of them individually a force to be reckoned with... Firstly there’s resentment which is, in itself, one of the most ruinous emotions in existence. The word comes from the French *ressentir* which means to feel again and again and again. So, when we hate somebody for doing or not doing something to or for us, it becomes like rust, eating away at our piece of mind... Secondly we have anger and you know the trouble anger can cause, especially if one can find no way to express it healthily. It either transmutes almost immediately into depression, or else it explodes often with dire consequences. Thirdly, there’s self pity - ‘how dare they treat me like that!’ and oh how we like to wallow in it at times... [and the fourth ingredient] Desire to control other’s responses: ‘they *should* love *me* or whatever’.”

(From *Happily Ever After* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **When all else fails...**

The walk sure didn’t do it,  
And the talk sure didn’t do it;  
Neither did the swimming  
Nor an hour of meditation,  
A session with a counsellor  
And the best of medication.  
The fresh-brewed cappuccino  
Gave me temporary relief  
But the cake that I had with it

Gave my poor digestion grief.  
Also thinking positive  
Has failed to do the trick  
And repeated affirmations,  
Hackneyed clichés, made me sick.  
A Nobel prize for effort, though,  
For I could do no less;  
But all, alas, was fruitless  
Coz my life's still in a mess.  
See, nothing stills the raging storm  
That blows inside my head,  
Nothing stems the abject fear  
That fills my heart with dread  
    No, nothing saves the day...  
    I think I'd better pray!

(*Saving The Day* - poem in 'The Power Of Light')



### **There is always hope**

If grim travail were mankind's lot,  
Pervasive evil all he'd got;  
If then, from all this cosmic blight,  
A single good thing came to light,  
There would still be hope.

(From *Never Say Never* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



### **Freedom**

In the natural order, every freedom brings with it a corresponding responsibility and the greater the freedom, the greater the responsibility.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 2* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Beware of credit cards**

You see, the thing is that the frightful plastic things are so awfully addictive. I see something, want it, can't afford it but... I always have my credit cards. It is but the work of a moment to sign my inheritance away and then wallow in guilt until the account arrives. I have tried my utmost to combat my compulsive spending habits, even attending several meetings of Cardholders Anonymous, but to no avail.

(From *Flexible Friends* - story in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **The (symbolic) meaning of the crucifixion**

Seen in isolation, the crucifixion was a tragic defeat, a meaningless sacrifice, a pitiful waste of a life that could have done so much more good. But the whole point of the crucifixion was the resurrection – Jesus conquering death. When I see a crucifix I see not the crucifixion but the resurrection. The cross, then, is a sign of victory, not defeat.

On a more whimsical note, it occurs to me that the reason that a cross has long been the symbol of Christianity, is that an early graphic artist suggested to the disciples' design committee that it would be very difficult to come up with a simple but convincing logo representing the resurrection. Pity.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Sexuality is more than sex**

The view that sexuality finds its only true expression in romance and sexual intercourse is as limited as perceiving a pen sketch of his mother that Leonardo da Vinci did at nine years of age, as the pinnacle of his genius. Our sexuality is at the very core of who we are as human beings – male and female, and, despite

considerable study by psychologists and social scientists, is still little understood. Personally, I can't help feeling that we'd be better off not to try to understand it – just live it.

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 5* - Communications Lecture Notes)



### **Hereafter**

For there is God, and there is man,  
And the sundered twain shall truly meet  
In his domain in union sweet  
For ever and ever;  
No state better, 'tis said.

(From *Never The Twain* - poem in 'Grin & Bear It!')



### **Fondly remembering an old 'family retainer'**

She had always been old; always needed to be because she was one of a dying breed of old family retainers and old family retainers are, of necessity, always old. But somehow she never got any older; she was always, well, just old...

We never exploited you, as was oft the case in those days. You were looked after as you wished to be looked after. Looking back, I know now that we loved you dearly and wanted more for you but money, conditions short working hours and plentiful perks were not your motivations, didn't turn you on to use a modern idiom. Indeed we used almost have to push you out the door on your day off, for all you asked of life was the liberty to serve as you wanted to serve, for as long as God would grant you the strength. Self-indulgence and clock-watching were about as alien to you as an overall suntan is to an Eskimo.

(From *Old Lena* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Why did I start writing?**

“I can’t imagine why I started to write – ‘creatively’ I suppose one might call it if one were in a generous frame of mind. Right up to the time I composed line one, poem one, I never much liked the stuff myself and, as far as grasping the fundamentals of metre, poetic convention and so forth is concerned, suffice it to say that my English teacher was tempted to resign in despair. In fact, not to put a tooth in it (which is a most appropriate expression, since I have just learned that a single crown is about to cost me the outrageous sum of four hundred quid), I am more or less poetically illiterate.”

(From *One Man’s Meat...* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **A manifestation of the human condition**

I s’pose I’ve gone and got it wrong,  
Though I thought I’d got it right.  
I tried to soar on eagle’s wings,  
But landed in the shite.

(From *Wrong Turning* - poem in ‘Save Us From The Well-meaning!’)



## **Responsibility for decisions**

The way of a secular world – particularly the business world – is to blame the decision (hence the decision-maker) when the outcome is unsatisfactory. In matters of the heart and spirit, this type of thinking is seldom valid. A poor outcome does not necessarily invalidate the original decision since the heart and spirit operate in a realm that has little to do with secular logic.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Teach religion?**

I have, over the years, heard it said, that religion should not be taught to children rather let them decide for themselves as they grow up. This sounds okay in theory, but if they have no grounding in religion, what might interest them in searching further afield?

In virtually every other major facet of life, we do encourage children to follow their own paths, but only after we have given them a solid grounding in the basic disciplines, for example reading, writing, mathematics, and imparting a sense of self-esteem, a social conscience and a healthy work ethic. Children who do not receive this grounding or who receive a very inadequate one frequently struggle in later life.

Why, then should the spiritual life be an exception? Possibly because we have seen the havoc caused by religious extremism, and so we conclude that all religion is suspect or even dangerous. And, let's be honest, there is more than a modicum of truth in that view.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Belief**

But, in the world of humankind,  
Nothing is absolute:  
There is no faith without disbelief,  
No disbelief without despair  
Yet no despair without renewal...

(From *Looking Up* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Good self-esteem**

The only writers' workshops I have ever been to that nurtured and enlivened me were the ones I used to present to others over a

period of years. They were designed mostly for beginners or relative beginners and were offered as a module in a wider course on communications. Regrettably it was physically impossible for me to be a participant at my own workshops or else I would have been the first to sign up!

(From *Writers' Workshops* - essay in 'When The Bug Bites')



## **Materialism**

“Whilst goods and possessions were never my first priority, I have discovered that materialism is insidiously incremental: the more I acquire, the more I desire. If, in time, I learn to want less, it is not because I have enough, but because some external or internal catalyst has caused my key priorities to change.”

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



## **Materialism gone overboard**

For the wealthy elite and steadfastly earthbound,  
Christmas takes place all the year round,  
Money but the servant of the self-indulgent upper crust,  
Passport to the gratification of every whim,  
And the provision of superfluous plenty,  
Even the catalyst of scandalous squandering,  
Encompassed by woeful want and manifest misery,  
From which they are protected by privilege,  
Or to which they are blinded by egotism.

(From *Christmas* - poem in 'Hang On!')



## **Personal wholeness**

“Too long, far too long, have I considered myself a random collection of cells, thoughts, emotions and experiences, both good and bad. Only now can I perceive the myriad components of my existence as the notes of a profound and beautiful composition, an opus of melody and harmony in many movements – some slow and ponderous, others lively and exciting, but each sublime in its own way. Thankfully, there is still time to play – and rejoice in – the symphony of my life.”

(From *Getting The Balance Right, Part 8* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **When love transcends language**

The Guardian of our world these yearnings knows;  
To Him I pray our purpose to uphold,  
In commune sweet our confidence repose,  
Our deepest thoughts in silence to unfold.

(From *Gift To A Loved One* - poem in ‘Save Us From The Well-meaning!’)



## **The complaint that hotel managers dread**

“Look here,” I said to the customer services manager, “My son and I stayed in your blasted hotel last night and, whilst the general standards and service were up to scratch (if, in the light of the information I am about to impart, you will pardon the play on words), I didn’t sleep a wink. You see, I was bitten alive by a flea or fleas – at least that, in the absence of any other explanation, is the only conclusion I can come to, as scorpions, mosquitoes and similar parasites are thankfully rare on this part of the planet. Nevertheless the incumbent little monsters must have mastered the technology of tunnelling since I last encountered their machinations in my far-distant youth, because my entire body is, as of even date, punctured with small holes.

Despite a relentlessly pursued campaign, based broadly on the tactics employed by the elite of the world's best-trained commandos, I was unable to ascertain whether the little blighter(s) was/were in the singular or plural and my attempts to apprehend and exterminate it/them met with abysmal failure. Your kettle and help-yourself sachets provided a temporary palliative but fell short of providing surrogate slumber. Indeed the frustration-induced quantities of coffee that I consumed between skirmishes only served to exacerbate the absence of a solid, comatose relationship with the mattress...

(From the story *Once Bitten...*)



### **The dubious delights of fame**

...I'm just a minor poet who  
Daren't hope to make it big...  
But all things come to he who waits;  
I know inside my head,  
In fifty years, I'll be renowned,  
And also be quite dead.

(From *Aspirations* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **Heart's desire**

... I have a feeling in my bones that we are on the threshold of an era when he [God] will no longer permit his limitless power to be shackled in this way, but will pour out his healing love in unprecedented abundance. May that day come soon, for the weary world has never been more in need.

(From *The 'If' God* - Essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **The value of surrender**

“We have two choices it seems to me” I philosophised to my cherished Muse who had, as is her wont, just dropped into my right hemisphere for a chat. “Either we accept all the circumstances of our lives just as they are, or we continually struggle to impose our own will on the general scheme of things. Our materialistic society, being decidedly a cult of achievement and a proponent of the supremacy of the individual, strongly advocates the latter approach. I, on the other hand, having punched in a goodly few decades on the planet, and having gradually garnered a smidgen of wisdom - if that’s what one would call it - am more inclined to the former strategy. A lot easier and less corrosive on the system, I would say, which, ... is a state of affairs devoutly to be desired...”

“Perhaps you wish to infer,” suggested Lucille, “that surrender, particularly surrender of the heart, mind and spirit, is an ineffable paradox which brings liberation rather than defeat, and that the difficulty in explaining the apparent contradiction arises from the fact that one must have the courage to let go before the mystery unfolds. Comprehension, therefore, is empirical; it comes from experience rather than from any persuasive power in the theoretical expression of the philosophy.”

(From *The Convert* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **They’ll be the death of me**

Expectations beget offspring  
Which then furtively unite  
And transmute into a temptress,  
Seducing with unreachable dreams,  
The progeny of fantasy,  
Denying all achievable hopes,  
The children of reality...

(From *Expectations* - poem in ‘Grin & Bear It!’)



## **The real and unreal God**

The God I have come to *know* is soft and loving, tender and compassionate, and gentle and gracious beyond measure. The God who is a hard taskmaster, drives me to perfection and keeps me on edge simply does not exist. That ‘god’ is an unwelcome and troublesome but utterly fictitious residue of misguided formation and skewed conditioning

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **Analysis**

The pain of life is like a giant onion,  
Its rueful sting concealed behind its sheath;  
I peel away one tearful, irksome membrane,  
To find another lurking underneath.

But folks like me are nothing if not stoic,  
Endure all things to get beyond the strife;  
So I strip away each sad successive layer,  
To find, one day, I’ve peeled away my life.

(*Sob Story* - poem in ‘Homage To A Future Hero’)



## **Keeping it simple**

Earlier in my sojourn on the planet – during a period of time that was, regrettably, far too long – I was inexorably drawn to the complex and rarefied. Indeed, had my parents been endowed with the foresight to give me a name which would reflect my later character, they would undoubtedly have called me ‘Analysis’ – ‘Aly’ for short, probably. This tendency had a variety of interesting effects on my psyche, the most noteworthy of which

was that I became totally screwed up. Having now largely managed to subdue this facet of my personality, I flee from analysis and complexity like a startled hare from a greyhound.

(From *Right Hand Woman* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **The problems of a cat owner**

Our cat is snow-white. In colour not nature I hasten to add, as will quickly become evident. At the appropriate age he was thoroughly vetted if you know what I mean, yet he continues to defend his manhood, that is to say cathood – male variety, as if it had never been subjected to the scalpel. The trouble is that, all too frequently, he is to be found locked in mortal combat, even in broad daylight, with a coal-black, feline foe of uncertain origin and no fixed abode, whereas his predecessors in the family ménage were quite happy to perch high up on the shed and watch, with total disdain, the rest of the neighbourhood cat population battling it out below.

(From *Puddy Tat* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



### **Pessimism**

Another day is in recess;  
'Twas yet again a bloody mess.  
Good night, let all your cares be sparse;  
'Twere best to stick them up your arse,  
For morning, with the selfsame grit,  
Will doubtless yield the selfsame shit!

(*Repetition* - poem translated from the German in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **A type of poor listener**

... and finally, the most dangerous listener of the lot: The Mr./Ms. 'Fix-it' listener. As soon as they think they understand what the speaker's problem is, they assume they know the solution and proceed to 'fix' him or her without being asked. In most cases, the speaker is well able to fix him/herself, and either becomes resentful at the listener's interference or else becomes overly dependent on the listener, which is an unhealthy situation for both parties.

(From *Listening* - Communications Lecture Notes)



## **Learning compassion**

His entire being and the law of the forest told him to attack and reclaim his rightful property. But, inexplicably, he could not bring himself to launch an offensive. The longer he perched on the branch contemplating the injustice of it all, the more he found his spirit troubled with the strange idea that, perhaps, right should not always manifest in might.

He struggled with this evolving awareness until his birdbrain eventually comprehended the reason for his reluctance to wreak vengeance. With his physical eye, all he could see was the usurping cuckoo comfortably ensconced in the once neglected nest that he, the sparrow, had so carefully tended and had come to treasure so much. But the eye of his heart penetrated beyond appearances and perceived, beneath the squatter's unruffled feathers, a deeply wounded creature.

(From *The Sparrow* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **The power of love**

Man has pierced the mysteries of the universe,  
Plumbed the depths of the unfathomable,

And thrust his knowledge to far frontiers...  
Then casts all things to the winds,  
Laying bare his vulnerability,  
With a willingness almost wanton,  
All for the love of a woman.

(from *Achilles' Heel* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



### **Getting the wrong end of the stick**

“Fred, why is it that sheer black tights are such a turn on?”  
“You amaze me,” he retorted, “I didn’t know you wore  
sheer black tights. You must slip them on when I’m not  
looking.”  
“Not me, you ass; women...”

(From *Fred The Volatile* - story in 'Life With Fred')



### **Those butter substitutes**

Some scholars declare that butter is lethal,  
Whilst others say surfeits of marge can be fatal,  
And this is a blend of the two, for God’s sake –  
Twice the potential to shake my good health.  
In future, I’ll opt for one or the other,  
And since I’ve a strong predilection for butter,  
That’s what I’ll put on my bread.  
That way, at least, I’ll end up half healthy...  
Or half dead!

(From *Half Measures* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Dying to diet**

I have to confess that it's all totally beyond me. I just can't keep up with the vacillating humours of the almost daily journalistic endeavours to educate health-conscious consumers in matters of nutrition. Today such and such is bad for you, tomorrow it isn't. What cures today, it seems, kills tomorrow, and conversely - for those who may be having difficulty following my drift - what kills today, cures tomorrow...

... Unhappily, I had to attend the sad funeral of a close friend. For many years, he religiously, obsessively, followed the dictates of every dietician who had ever put pen to paper, dutifully abstaining from everything that was bad for him, never deviating, for even one little treat, from the straight and narrow, and eventually, poor chap, martyr to the cause of scientific knowledge, died of starvation.

(From *Eat, Drink & Be Merry* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **I am not what I seem**

I am host to many and various:  
A prestigious education in my intellect,  
A strict code of discipline in my training  
A respected occupation on my CV,  
A traditional religious ethos in my conditioning...  
Deep romantic whirlpools in my heart,  
An extraterrestrial yearning in my soul,  
A wandering minstrel in my fantasies,  
And a caged panther in my spirit.

All in all,  
I am not what I seem.

(from *Residents* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **Railway nostalgia**

“... but it’s not like the good old days of the steam train. These modern diesel locomotives just don’t have what it takes. Somehow, rail journeys aren’t the same without the hiss of steam, the cloud of smoke, the shower of soot, the clanking of wheels and pistons. And the steam engines were so imposing - each had its own character, its own impressive name on a big polished brass plate. And you always got a friendly wave from the driver plus a grimy smile from the fireman... The crowning glory, the thing that used to send shivers of excitement down my spine, was that incredibly thrilling sound, gathering momentum towards a magnificent crescendo, namely, the powerful ‘puff puff’ of the engine as it pulled majestically out of the station.”

(From *Choo Choo* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Living in harmony**

“Robert, do you remember, on your last visit here, I pointed out the small spiders on the lake.”

“David, have a heart; this is no time for a lecture on Nature.”

“On the contrary, the timing is perfect – and it’s not a lecture. So, do you remember?”

“Oh, if you insist. Yes, I remember.”

“What were the little creatures doing?”

“They were all scurrying across the water without breaking the surface.”

“Interesting isn’t it? Water is their natural habitat and they live in perfect harmony with it but don’t invade or intrude. It’s not the perfect analogy, of course; there are times when we have to create ripples to deal with the unacceptable. But, generally, if humans followed these spiders’ example, we would have a lot happier planet.

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **On the move**

Of late, I'm wondering where I'm at,  
For, striving to be free,  
I left the 'here', in search of 'there'  
(Wherever 'there' might be).  
I know not, therefore, where I am  
Nor whither I should go.  
I only know I can't resume  
The former status quo.  
And since I'm neither here nor there,  
That can but one thing mean:  
(In being, not location, thus.)  
I'm sort of 'in between.'

(*In Transit* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It!')



## **Expectancy versus expectation**

I saw these two terms used in the same sentence in a book I was reading recently, and the author assumed that the difference was clear. It wasn't, which left me to figure it out for myself, although I did have some sort of wordless intuition that I understood what was being said. Expectations, beyond the most fundamentally realistic ones, can be dangerous and I have written a number of pieces on this theme.<sup>8</sup> If expectations are unfulfilled, disappointment, disillusionment or even despair can follow.

Expectancy, on the other hand is merely a simple recognition that something is going to happen, and in every situation I encounter, something always happens! However, it may not always be what I expect. Put in a positive context, based on the knowledge that nothing in God's world happens by accident, expectancy is synonymous with hope. I can, therefore, aspire to go into every situation with hope but without

<sup>8</sup> For example, the poem *Expectations* in 'Grin And Bear It' and *Five Second Saga* in 'Life With Fred.'

expectation. I say ‘aspire’ because I cannot always implement this sagacious strategy. But I am doing the best I can, pretty well as a matter of fact, and, as always, it’s progress not perfection that counts.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **One day at a time**

Religions, philosophies, self-help books and twelve-step groups advocate living one day at a time. Cynics and the worldly-wise ridicule such a notion, saying that this is an absurd way to conduct one’s affairs. Of course, they are absolutely right. A twenty-four hour period is far too long; the best I can manage is to live my life one moment at a time. Often, not even that. That’s when I have to be carried.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **The cheapest therapy available?**

Soothing – that’s the word for it; getting my hair cut, I mean. The ‘clip clip’ of the scissors has always lulled me into a state of serenity where the senses tingle in cosy satisfaction at every snip, placing around me for a brief interval a sort of protective, therapeutic aura, shielding me from the outside world.

(From *The Barber Of Civil* - story in ‘In My Write Mind’)



### **When criticism is an inside job**

“Why and for whom,” queried Fred, one day when he had nothing better to do, “do you write all this ‘stuff’ - if you’ll pardon my calling it ‘stuff’? Don’t you think your allocation of

our brain cells has considerably better things to be doing than churning out the substantial quantities of the naïve and time-wasting drivel with which you occupy yourself all too often?”

(From *Pushing His Luck* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



### **Two levels of feeling**

My spirit has deep, steadfast feelings which have little or nothing to do with my ordinary human emotions. The human emotions are volatile, like new shoots emerging in spring one minute and autumn leaves tossed about in a storm the next, but the emotions of my spirit come about as an intuitive, a profound and lasting response to the experience of God’s unconditional love. Sometimes, however, my spirit emotions get buried under an avalanche of human emotions which can temporarily deceive me into believing that all is lost. These are my darkest hours.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **Even lecturers have an off day**

Fred did his very best to keep my motivation at its hitherto elevated level: “Go on... continue to pursue your high calling to plant pearls of wisdom in their impressionable young ears.”

“Knock it off, Fred,” I said, acidly. “Right now my preference would be to plant my size eleven boot solidly up their impressionable young arseholes and shove their half-baked, sketchy notes of my painstakingly prepared lectures down their impressionable young throats...”

(From *Exit* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Of a bygone age of lamentable innocence**

Padraig was fully conversant with the reproductive mechanisms and time schedules of the animal kingdom, by which I mean to say that the process is all pretty predictable. With the objective of increasing your herd, you took the cow to the bull, or vice versa and, after only one session of hanky-panky, Bob was your uncle if you get my drift.

So when, somewhat late in life, he took unto himself a spouse, it never occurred to him, and nobody ever told him, that his newly-acquired wife might productively perform, so to speak – and with no disrespect – according to a different timetable to that of his prize heifers.

(From *The Cycle* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Oh dear!**

The Father gave us all free will  
Without a trial run,  
But took the risk we'd screw things up,  
And that's just what we've done.

(From *Patience* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **To be avoided like the plague**

My poignant gist you're doubtless gleaning,  
My hidden message deftly screening:  
God, save us from the well-meaning!

(From *The Tightrope Walker* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **A perennial family dilemma**

A while ago I took a household inventory, and can reliably inform the reader that the capacious linen bag located at the bottom of our hot-press (alias airing-cupboard) contains a total of two hundred and seventy-one odd socks (odd, you understand, in the sense of unmatched as opposed to eccentric).

The whereabouts of the missing partners has baffled me and my spouse, not to mention countless social scientists, for many decades, virtually indeed since the introduction of socks.

(From *The Great Sock Mystery* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Valued for who we are**

... Must I compete in this sophisticated cattle-market simply because my womanly instincts and human desires to embrace the most important profession of all – wife, mother and homemaker – have been cruelly manipulated and cynically devalued?

... But what I want, what I need is choice, choice between home and an outside career, or a blend of the two, where one is at least as valued as the other and where, in either case, I am valued for who I am, not as a competitor in a male world but, above all, as a woman.

(From *The Essence Of Identity* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



## **I've had enough!**

So that's the sum of where I sit:  
To scant subjection I'll submit.  
In short, I'm taking no more shit.  
So be it!

(from *Alliteration To The Rescue* - poem in 'No Rest For The Wicked')



## **Parents in a time warp**

For the moment is precious,  
The little child is an angel,  
A bundle of joy,  
And they are blissfully unaware  
That little children have  
a disconcerting habit  
Of growing up.

(From *Evolution* - poem in 'Hang On!')



## **Valuing myself**

My aspiration is not to value myself by my possessions, my performance or my achievements, rather to see these things as largely incidental to my life and not the centre of my self-worth. My contentment is to be found in being an ordinary human being, unconditionally loved and valued by One far greater than me.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **A place of serenity**

“Perhaps the reason that I find Col des Reclus so peaceful is that it has been considered a holy place for many hundreds of years, and it has some inexpressible quality that confers a feeling of serenity. People still visit it for what they find here, particularly during the summer months. There is a well from which visitors may take away water or they just sit a while on the rocks nearby to reflect or pray. I go up there often. I usually bring a small bottle of the water back down with me – to have a part of the place in my home in the valley. As I sit on the rocks near the well, I can see down into the countryside below me, the lake beyond my village, St. Jean-de-Valers itself which nestles in

the embrace of the valley, the trees on the mountainside, and I am always in awe at the way the light plays with the landscape. As I behold all this, my thinking often becomes temporarily suspended and, for a while, I am one with Nature. Thus you will understand why I find this mountain pass so special.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Now that’s romantic**

He searched the reservoir of his heart,  
Discovered therein a boyish, romantic notion,  
And, drawing on the observed skill  
Of one whose expert hands  
Had once recovered the locked-in keys  
From his own unyielding vehicle,  
He gained secret entry to her car  
On the moonlit, commemorative night,  
Placed on the dashboard  
A brief, for-her-eyes-only note  
And a ruby-red rose.

(From *Anniversary* - poem in ‘The Dance Of Forever’)



### **Start again**

... It is popular, on such occasions, to exhort the Church to get its act together and propel itself meaningfully into the late twentieth century. I have an alternative suggestion: let us go back to the Source and start all over again. Maybe, second time around, we might have some hope of getting it right.

(From *The New Pharisees* - essay in ‘Beneath The Surface’)



## **Things**

Once I have enough, more material things only clutter up my spirit.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Murphy's family laws - some examples**

The sign 'Wet Paint' attracts young fingers like jam attracts wasps.

It takes at least 21 years to teach children to say 'Please,' 'Thank you' and 'Pardon,' and approximately the same length of time for parents to graduate to 'Huh' and 'What.'

Whilst salary-earning parents are satisfied with supermarket runners, the penniless youngsters cannot survive without cool foot gear that costs a king's ransom. A sub-clause of this law applies to virtually every bloody thing.

Breast-fed babies frequently turn to the bottle in later years.

(From *Murphy's Family Laws* in 'In My Write Mind')



## **Spiritual directors?**

I have firmly believed for quite a while that nobody is capable of acting as a spiritual director for anybody else, even though this term and the attendant practice are widely used in religious circles. More recently, I have been reading how Saint Teresa of Ávila was caused grievous anguish by the well-meant but grossly misguided instructions given by many of her spiritual directors.

What I can aspire to is to be a spiritual companion to somebody. By this I mean that I may accompany a man or woman on his/her spiritual journey and, far from directing them in any way, simply offer the experience and insights that I have reaped from *my own* journey. They are then free to take what

suits them and leave the rest aside, and I am freed from carrying the onerous burden of believing that I am to direct them in spiritual matters. As Teresa of Ávila so rightly said, “We ought not to insist on everyone following in our footsteps, nor to take upon ourselves to give instructions in spirituality when, perhaps, we do not even know what it is.” Amen to that!

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **Of a beloved former colleague**

With more than a hint of a tease, we used to call you “The Army Chappie.” You didn’t mind did you? With your sense of humour and open-mindedness, of course you didn’t. Even if you did, you’ve got the last laugh, haven’t you? You’re high up in God’s army now, whilst we’re still down here slogging it out as recruits. Put in a good word for us, won’t you? Not too sure when we’ll be taking up our seats. No point in speculating though, for – as you so rightly said – the best way to make God laugh is tell him your long term plans!

(From *Ray Of Light* - appreciation in ‘In My Write Mind’)



### **Another view of death**

For those who see beyond the horizon  
There is no such thing as tragic death,  
Only tragic consequences  
For those left behind...

(Adapted from *Tragic Death?* - poem in ‘No Rest For The Wicked’)



## **Explaining myself**

Whilst I respect the sincerity of those who genuinely want to know why I do what I do, say what I say, or view things the way I do, I now rarely feel the need to explain myself. I know my own motives; they suit who I am, and I take responsibility for them.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Fred in pessimistic mood**

“Who wouldn’t be pissed off? All is misery and melancholy; devastation and depression everywhere. Every news bulletin spews out nothing but reports of massacres, murders, rapes, robberies and worse. Man’s inhumanity to man; woman’s too no doubt. There is no hope, none. The planet is fucked, and so is everybody on it.”

(From *Now That’s Pessimism* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **Trying - in vain - to cheer Fred up**

... “and don’t forget,” I went on, keeping the telling phrase to round off my words of wisdom and encouragement, “behind every dark cloud...”

Fred got there before me: “...there’s an even darker one.”

(From *Now That’s Pessimism* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



## **The spiritual and the secular**

“The English poet, John Keats once said, ‘Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced.’ How right he was. Nowhere is this truer than in the realm of the spirit, where

intellectual prowess and scientific study are worthless, and there is no substitute for profound personal experience. However, at an alarmingly rapid rate, people are being drawn to the secular belief that the realm of the spirit does not exist. And if they hold that it does not exist, it will be impossible for them to allow themselves to search in that realm and discover the awesome wonder of the ultimate reality. This reliance on self and denial of higher values will turn out to be one of the greatest tragedies mankind will ever have witnessed.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **Guess who doesn't like football**

“Olé, olé, olé, olé...”

“Shove a sock in it, Fred, will you.”

“What do you mean?” said Fred, offended.

“The world cup hasn't even started yet, and I've had it up to the teeth with all this unsavoury, money-grabbing hype. You'd swear something important was happening.”

(From *Olé* - story in ‘Life With Fred’)



### **God's absolute rightness**

The fact that God is absolute truth and is therefore always right does not mean that I am always wrong. This is either a self-evident observation or a contradiction in terms, depending on one's perception.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **No easy job, parenting**

So much of what we read and hear and see and soak up like sponges from the influences and energies that surround us

pierces us with needles of self-reproach about what we “should” or “should not” have done for our children. A never-ending stream of newspaper and magazine articles and books apprise parents of what they “should” or “should not” have done for their offspring, on a minute-by-minute basis since the very moment of conception...

(From *All For Love* - essay in ‘In My Write Mind’)



### **What is good music and literature?**

I am increasingly wary when I see certain music or literature (indeed any art form) described as ‘good’ or ‘great’ in such a way that this view seems to be prescribed for all of us, the term ‘canon’ often being used to denote a list of literary or artistic works considered to be permanently established as being of the highest quality – established, presumably, by those ‘in the know.’

For me, *good* music or literature is that which entertains or enlivens in a wholesome way. *Great* music or literature touches the soul, and the *greatest* music or literature is that which connects me with the divine. However, each person’s experience of what constitutes good, great or greatest in this context will be unique. Hence, if each person’s spiritual and intellectual integrity is to be honoured and respected, there can be no universal canon. For example, I find the score to the movie, ‘Sense & Sensibility’ to be good and Beethoven’s 6th symphony to be great. However, some of the romantic songs rendered by Julio Iglesias are sublime and are much more powerful in putting me in touch with the Divine. I find P. G. Wodehouse’s writing to be good, Jane Austen’s to be great, but it is mostly my own writing that puts me in touch with the Divine. In short, I have my own canon. Thank God!

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **It gets better and better**

... That all sounds depressingly negative and introspective, doesn't it? Navel-gazing they call it nowadays! But it's not all bad news, not by any means! Apart from the heavy stuff, I inherited a light-bulb sense of humour which can switch on in the darkest moments, love and compassion for my fellow human beings (which I discovered was greatly amplified by my own experiences) and many other gifts which modesty prevents me from itemising here! What's more, lest I appear to espouse austerity, spartan living is decidedly not my thing! ... I like my creature comforts. No mud hut and iron rations for me!... A rich inheritance indeed! As a matter of fact, in many ways my life is a miracle.

(From *Rich Inheritance* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



## **Just for fun**

Each year, apparently, The Washington Post's Style Invitational asks readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing one letter, and supplying a new definition. Here are two examples from 2003's winners to give you the idea:

1. Intaxication: Euphoria at getting a tax refund, which lasts until you realise it was your money to start with.
2. Foreploy: Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of getting laid.

I decided to have a go myself, just for the fun of it. Here are some of the results:

Talcaluation: computation done whilst sprinkling oneself with fine powder.

Missgivings: generous young lady.

Gratitube: thankfulness at not being late for work because of missing the subway/metro.

Laftermath: hiccups.

Pignificant: adjective describing important member of the swine community.

Acropolis: Greek farmer's hat.  
Maelstrim: chaos caused by men on a diet.  
Gasshole: malign proprietor of a petrol/gas station.  
Bumbril: vehicle for bringing assholes to the gallows.

(From *It's All In The Letter*)



### **Oh, to be back in Eden!**

... "Make haste, O God, the world is drear;  
We'll never stick the pace out here!"

(From *Adam Laments* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It!')



### **Unity of prayer, meditation and contemplation**

In almost all of what I have read on the subject, even in texts that are very meaningful to me, prayer, meditation and contemplation are treated as separate and discrete aspects of our spirituality, to which specific time and effort is allocated.

For some years now I have not been at all comfortable with this view simply because I do not experience these things in that way. Although I have been somewhat aware of the explanation, only recently has it become fully clear to me: prayer, meditation and contemplation are not separate facets of my life but integral to it.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **My nature**

I noticed recently that when I identified some undesirable trait in my character that seemed virtually unshiftable, I found myself saying, for example, "it's my nature to keep struggling." Not so. It's my *pattern* to keep struggling. My nature is pure and

unsullied, founded in My Beautiful One.<sup>9</sup> My nature is to let go and let God. The trouble is that my nature often gets buried under a heap of patterns. Even then, I do my level best to let go.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Have I found my niche?**

I feel more at home in a graveyard than at a party. My companions in the graveyard are at peace and no longer jockey for social position, indulge in character assassination or talk bullshit.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Ouch!**

I was recovering from an appendectomy,  
When a friend passed by, and gave the beck to me;  
“C’mere,” says he, with a sympathetic cough,  
“I hear you had your appendage off.”

(*Cruel Cut* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning')



### **Doubt**

“...no matter how enduring or profound our inner awareness, occasional doubt is integral to each person’s continuing experience.”

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



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<sup>9</sup> Term of endearment I use for the God of my understanding.

## **The question that comes to everybody sooner or later**

“I don’t want to sound like a frustrated existentialist, Dad, but when all’s said and done, what the hell is life all about?”

“You know, Greg, a friend of mine asked me that very question only the other day, and it came to me just how well my childhood catechism put it: *God made me to know him love him and serve him in this world and be happy with him forever in the next.* See the wisdom? We can’t love somebody until we know them, and we won’t, unless obliged by circumstance, want to serve if we don’t love. More recently, I heard an Eastern teacher put it more succinctly in a way that really appeals to me, and mirrors my own journey: *The purpose of human life is to experience one’s oneness with God.* There, my dearest son, you have it in a nutshell.”

(From ‘The Dance Goes On’ - draft sequel to the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Feminism?**

Q. Am I in favour of feminism?

A. I am in favour of a society where there is no need for it.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



## **It’s not every day one gets asked a question like this**

“Have you perchance, dearest Muse, in your long, varied and illustrious career, ever tried to drag a claustrophobic rhinoceros into a telephone box?”

(From *Message Received* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **How to start a scandal in one easy lesson**

I entered the town’s most popular public house, and surveyed the mass of imbibing humanity, searching the crowded room for the

girl I had to come to meet. Would she be there? Would I recognise her? Then I espied her at a cosy table in the far corner, waiting patiently for me. Relieved, I waved in obvious enthusiasm and, in my pleasure at seeing her, called out loudly – but, in hindsight, unwisely: “Gosh, you look terrific; I hardly knew you. I don’t know what my wife would say; that’s the first time I’ve seen you with your clothes on...”

(From *Dressed For The Occasion* - story in ‘In My Write Mind’)



### **Denial?**

Poor, fuddled fool, you remark?  
Take care lest, in cosy complacency,  
Gazing with condescension and derision  
Upon one who built superficial life-structures  
On foundations of sand,  
You fail to discern that the abject figure  
You are contemplating so patronisingly  
Is your own reflection.

(From *Mirror, Mirror...* - poem in ‘Grin & Bear It!’)



### **Why I’m so sensitive**

Why do I feel with such intensity  
As if ‘twere deprivation?  
I’ve twigged, although it makes no sense to me –  
And scarce a consolation –  
That others have a shield-like density,  
But I’ve no insulation.

(From *Sensation* - poem in ‘Homage To A Future Hero’)



## **Love lives on**

... So do I, in the vacuum of my loneliness,  
And the stillness of my inner place of silence,  
Listen for the sound of your voice,  
Which comes as the softest whisper  
Wafted on a gentle spirit-like breeze,  
Uniting us mystically,  
Desire of my heart,  
Across the unbridgeable abyss  
That separates us.

(From *Longing* - poem in 'The Dance Of Forever')



## **The music of love or the love of music**

The temptress, music, softly calls  
When joy is nigh, when grief befalls,  
Beguiles me with alluring strains,  
Transported by a gentle breeze  
That whispers low in apt intrigue,  
A haunting, sweet refrain of love  
To charm my wishful, waiting ear;  
Enchantress playing a wistful air  
On magic lute and harp and lyre  
That weaves a spell around my heart,  
That sets my very soul on fire.  
I strive to stem the sorcerous wave  
Before all's lost and I'm her slave.  
Too late, alas! My mind's unhitched,  
No sense to see,  
For I'm bewitched!

(*The Music Of Love* - poem in 'The Dance Of Forever')



## **My first conscious experience of Lucille's gifts**

“... It was one evening five years ago... I decided to get down on paper some issues that I needed to deal with. But neither the customary clarity nor the necessary cues from the intellect and the emotions nor the appropriate words materialised, and I struggled to write the piece that was subsequently to become the foundation stone of my collection... I doodled aimlessly for a while then tried to put stuff into rhyme but nothing would rhyme, then tried straight prose but the prose wouldn't stay straight. But, amazingly, I was about to give up in frustration when I experienced what I can only describe as an intuitive nudge, and the words started to flow onto the paper as if somebody had just turned on a magic tap.”

(From *In The Beginning...* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



## **Appearances can be deceptive**

People think I'm organised,  
Perfection's special treat,  
And cite, as one example,  
How I keep my things so neat.

Oh, what a false perception,  
For little do they guess  
The outer show of order  
Only hides the inner mess.

(*Camouflage* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It')



## **Attachment to material things – and people**

Spiritual writers have, for centuries, written about the grave dangers of attachment to material things, even to people. If we swallow this view whole, we can regard things and our fellows as an evil to be avoided, beyond what is absolutely essential, and

asceticism in semi-hermitic poverty as the only existence worth espousing.

A far more balanced, sensible and nurturing view is that material things – and other people – are gifts from God. It is the *nature* of the attachments which renders them healthy or unhealthy for us.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Some alliteration!**

“... For starters, will you deny that you have secretly succumbed to the secular sacrilege of having sickeningly excessive sex with six successive seductive secretaries?”

(From *No Comment* - story in 'In My Write Mind')



### **Nature points the way**

Nature will love you, entertain you and tell you most of what you need to know – or she will guide you to where you can find it when you simply remain quietly in her presence.

(From the novel 'Black On Magenta')



### **In praise of chairs**

Omnipresent rear-end repositories,  
Inanimate objects, no emotions perhaps,  
Yet one cannot but feel sympathy for their plight,  
And a desire to offer reciprocal support.  
Let us, then, call for many cheers for multiple chairs,

For one is obliged to admire,  
Regardless of who occupies their flatness or curvature,  
Their unenviable vocation of bumming their way,  
In meritorious subservience,  
Through what passes, for them, as life.

(from *Chairs* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It!')



### **Think no evil**

... I was much too preoccupied with my joints, all of which had now seized up from fifteen hours of inertia on the floor – and equally preoccupied with the talented ministrations of the pretty young co-participant who had just happened to be squatting next to me and who was now in the process of massaging them. This, I hasten to add, was all completely above board because she was a physiotherapist. At least, that's what she told me...

(From *In A Nutshell* - story in 'Oh, My Head!')



### **Basic and profound**

God is; therefore I am.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Hypocrisy?**

Many readings I attend  
Where there is a disconcerting absence of applause  
At the culmination of the poet's delivery.  
Displaying neither lack of courtesy nor silent disapproval,  
It simply does not dawn upon the audience  
That the piece has reached its conclusion.  
It terminates in the poet's mind, one assumes,

But not in the untutored perceptions of the listeners,  
Who – with the studied affectation of aspiring literati –  
Pretend to be suitably impressed  
By the elevated sentiments and linguistic finery,  
But haven't the foggiest idea what the poem is about.

(From *Mystique* - poem in 'When The Bug Bites')



### **Pet hates**

Like most people, I imagine, I have a number of pet hates. I find the ones that bug me most frequently are a) people who don't do what they say they're going to do, and b) the mindless noise, alias background music, that infests so many places of business these days. It seems that, increasingly, people can neither keep a promise nor stand the sound of silence. Oh, and one more: the once friendly homeland which now returns my greetings with hostile stares that wordlessly proclaim I should be locked away to protect the public from the ravages of my civility, and leave it to wallow undisturbed in its new found alienation.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Could we but learn from the animal kingdom**

... Whilst the heron's rare serenity  
Derives from his ability  
Just to be,  
Dispassionate and free.  
Oh, happy creature he.

(From *The Heron* - poem in 'Save Us From The Well-meaning!')



## **Nothing lasts forever - or does it?**

“Lucille, a morbid and disturbing notion has been presenting itself to my mind for reflection in the past few days, and morbid and disturbing notions are never my first choice when I’m in the mood for a bit of reflection. But this particular notion was most insistent, so I had to reflect on it or it would have annoyed me until I did. I’ll give it to you in a nutshell: in due course, I shall pen my last line, cash in my chips, and kick the proverbial bucket. Snuffing it is inevitable of course but, being steadfast, ever faithful and hopeful of a blissful hereafter, one accepts the inevitable with a sort of resigned and cautious optimism, does one not? However, what really causes me sorrow and chagrin is the thought that you, my esteemed and devoted goddess, will simply move on to your next assignment, and I will become but a fading memory, but a little-known writer who, for a few years, provided a humble vehicle to fulfil the requirements of your high calling, but one further addition to your long tally of authors and authoresses. This, my dearest Lucille, is a most depressing thought.”

(From *Prelude To Paradise* - story in ‘Life With Lucille’)



## **Love at first sight**

Arriving at the registration desk, I beheld this stunning vision in a yellow mini-dress. She smiled at me, greeted me most graciously and, although I was a little late, made me feel completely at ease by her pleasant manner. There and then, I was a lost cause.

(From *Time To Tell* - story in ‘Beneath The Surface’)



## **Credit where credit is due**

Endless hours seated at my trusty word processor,  
Creating all these literary gems,  
Purely for my own personal enjoyment, of course.  
Yet really, they deserve – I deserve – a wider audience.  
The great public out there is ready for me, and I for it.

(from *Micawber* - poem in 'Grin And Bear It!')



## **Abandonment**

Contrary to what I perceive to be widespread belief, the only ones who are capable of abandoning us are ourselves. Ultimately I am the only one who can abandon me. This is true in life as a whole, but particularly so in the spiritual realm...

(From 'Perspectives')



## **Speak no evil**

I write primarily for my own enjoyment but if you find one or two pieces in this collection that give you pleasure, that will be a welcome bonus, as will your restraint in keeping it to yourself if you think it's a load of garbage!

(From the Introduction to 'Homage To A Future Hero')



## **Knowledge and understanding**

Knowledge and understanding are not the same. Knowing something does not necessarily mean that I understand it. I can know I love somebody but not understand why. If I have never studied science I may still know, as an item of general

knowledge, that new plant growth each spring has to do with sun, water and soil nutrients, but not understand why. I know electricity provides me with all sorts of essential and nonessential services; all I have to do is harness it, but I don't understand this strange energy at all.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **All's well...**

"It's just not possible to feel this bad," I groaned to myself, head buried deep in hands, bewildered and disorientated to an unprecedented degree, tears – scarcely withheld – stinging my eyes...

... I felt sure that it must have been a trick of the mind, aided and abetted by a deception of the senses, because... I was in the room by myself, but I could have sworn that... I felt a comforting arm around my shoulder, a hand gently stroking my hair, a soft pressing sensation like a kiss on my forehead, and the warmth of an invisible closeness... "No, no," I said, banishing the foolish notion from my head, "It's just unthinkable.... It couldn't possibly be her; she's just a figment of my imagination – a happy contrivance admittedly – but just a device I use for writing, nothing more... Isn't she?" Curiosity, inevitably, would have its way: "Lucille?" I said, tentatively.

"There, there," she whispered, "Lucille kiss it better."

(From *There There* - story in 'Life With Lucille')



### **Allowing nature to nurture**

Savouring the wonder of a woodland walk,  
Feet and mind meandering,  
Now weary from the many winding paths,  
I rest in a glade,  
The sanctuary of the shade,

The balm of a breeze,  
The tranquillity of the trees,  
And watch the lilting leaves aloft,  
Silhouetted against the noonday sun,  
Dancing kaleidoscopes on a carpet of clover,  
The ever-moving pattern of minuscule lights and shadows  
Flickering before my eyes like playful will-o'-the-wisps.

A copious cloud covers the celestial spotlight,  
The curtain falls on the dappled dance of nature,  
And the matinée performance of creation's cabaret concludes.  
I linger wistfully awhile  
To contemplate the ineffable beauty of simple things,  
Until, refreshed in body and spirit,  
I am fit to embrace the forest path anew.

(A *Woodland Walk* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **Written for the sound of it**

I cannot hurt forever,  
Always grieving;  
You said you'd never leave –  
Love once conferred –  
And I, believing,  
Took you at your word,  
As if such sly deceiving  
I'd never heard  
Or seen before.  
But, finally perceiving  
That truth's not your endeavour,  
I could not be deterred  
From taking leave  
Of my naïve flirtation  
With your absurd caprice,  
That I'd chosen to ignore,  
For scarce did I abhor  
This 'trial of love,'

Since I was in denial,  
Self-deceiving to the core,  
Till scales fell from my eyes,  
Released me from your subtle lies,  
My heartache to relieve.  
Now, I will grieve no more.

(*No More* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **Complexity and analysis versus reflection**

This experience enables me to be clear... on the difference between complexity and analysis on the one hand and reflection on the other. Complexity and analysis are products of the finite mind whereas reflection is an outreach of the eternal spirit.

(from *Reflecting on Reflection* - essay in 'Beneath The Surface')



### **The pain/joy enigma**

"... but something is puzzling me. Can I run it by you?"

"Sure."

"As a younger man I thought one had to be either happy or unhappy. Now it seems that one can be happy and unhappy at the same time. Is that possible?"

"Not alone is it possible, it is often desirable because, in our own joy, we retain active compassion by identification for those who have little or no happiness in that moment. It is however a happiness, or joy if you prefer, which is not generally understood by the world. Simply put, it comprises a knowledge, in one's deepest heart, that fundamentally all is well regardless of appearance or circumstance. Sometimes, incidentally, we can mistake pleasure for joy. Pleasure and joy are two entirely different concepts. Pleasure is linked to material or physical stimuli. Joy, on the other hand, can be experienced even when

the outer circumstances appear pretty dismal. This circumstance tells me that joy is internal but it is not trawled up from my own finite resources. I call all this the pain/joy enigma.”

(From the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



### **What is a mystic?**

As a younger man, as far as I can remember, I thought that a mystic was a rare sort of human being, possessed of esoteric spiritual gifts unavailable to most people and to whom lesser mortals might look for spiritual guidance or even enlightenment.

Now, I am convinced that a mystic is quite simply a man or woman who is irrevocably, passionately, ‘hopelessly’ in love with God.

Using this definition, one may conclude that there must be hundreds of millions of mystics, spread all over the world.

(From ‘Perspectives’)



### **A place for everyone...**

(Volkswagen means ‘people’s car’)

Startlingly stunning Japanese girl,  
Sitting in the back of a run-down Beetle –  
She static and comely,  
It stationery and crumbling –  
Gazes, guileless, fetching-eyed,  
Through the outbreath-misting window.  
Rare oriental pearl  
In an obsolete European insect,  
Bulbous bug for carrying the commonplace,  
Rusty relic of a curious cult;  
Unfit receptacle for one so beautiful,  
No vehicle to flatter loveliness.  
A paradox that demands redress,

Yet right and proper nevertheless,  
For though it is the ugliest object in sight,  
And she the prettiest thing by far,  
She is but a person  
In a people's car!

(*Folk's Wagon* - poem in 'Homage To A Future Hero')



### **God is a giver**

A friend lent me a video entitled 'River Of Love' - about the life of Amma... a Hindu mystic. Her first words on the video were: "God doesn't need anything from us. He is a giver. He gives like the sun. The sun doesn't need light from a candle." I was profoundly moved. I have never heard it put so beautifully.

(From 'Perspectives')



### **Back to the future**

I was talking to a friend recently who is actively involved, with others, in his parish. They had been engaging in methods to increase church attendance, such as having guest speakers and – to use his own words – 'using a bit of marketing.'

I sat with my lips tight shut until he eventually asked for my opinion. Having asked him if he really wanted to hear it, I said that, instead of looking for new ways to attract adherents to the impoverished existing doctrines and rituals, I believe that the entire people of God should get down on its knees and entreat him/her to restore the pearl of great price that we possessed at the outset but have lost en route. Sadly, I don't think my friend knew what I was talking about.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **The sights and sounds of autumn**

I hear the whisper of the breeze  
In the summer-losing trees  
And the leaves' crispness crackles.  
Submissive to the sequence of the seasons  
They, wrinkled, tumble, crinkled,  
To the ground around me,  
Weaving aerial patterns  
In the winding of the wind  
That gathers then quickly scatters  
In seeming meaningless caprice.  
A certain something beckons,  
Through the mists of time and space,  
To discard my many decades  
And revive a guileless custom  
To child-kick the transient piles  
Of amber, russet and gold,  
Rejoicing in the rustle  
With a gleeful, boyish giggle,  
Then, sentimental, reminisce,  
Rapt memories reawakening.

(From *Autumn* - poem in 'Yearning For The Horizon')



## **Last laugh - almost**

He who laughs last, laughs longest, and he who laughs longest  
gets hiccups.

What do you mean I don't know my proverbs? It seems to me  
like the pot's calling the kettle a stupid bastard.

(From *Cockeyed Sayings*)



## **Last laugh**

One afternoon towards the end of the summer term, I was queuing in the canteen for a Mars Bar to get me through the last lecture of the day, and witnessed the following exchange between the student in front of me, who was surveying the vast array of snacks with an air of pre-exam bewilderment, and the canteen lady, who was surveying the student with an air of impatient enquiry.

*Student (scratching head):*

“Have you got any normal crisps?”

*Canteen Lady (to the accompaniment of a mirthless laugh):*

“Don’t you know by now that there’s nothing normal about this place?”

(From ‘Fawlty Toorism - Millennium Edition’)



## **Plea to a favourite author - Jane Austen**

Could I but yet persuade thee, Jane:  
Pray, take me to a higher plane  
To write in style refined, like thine,  
Though blended with apt shades of mine.

(From *Persuasion* – poem in ‘Homage To A Future Hero’)



## **Pray anyway**

“What will you do? Simple. Pray.”

“Sorry, Dad, I know how important this is to you, but when I see what's going on in the world, I just don’t believe in all that God stuff any more.”

“Greg, what in heaven’s name has that got to do with it? I didn’t ask you to believe. Just pray!”

(From ‘The Dance Goes On’ - draft sequel to the novel ‘Black On Magenta’)



## **Restraining oneself**

Normally, it is my practice to observe protocol and decorum,  
But, right now, I would like to wring your elegant little neck –  
Metaphorically, of course...

(From *Mixed Feelings* - poem in 'Who Do They Think I Am?')



## **Something to think about - really think about**

God doesn't limit us.  
We limit God.

(From 'Perspectives')



## **All good things...**

Normal mortals have some fears,  
The writer too, it oft appears,  
The worst of which is going dry,  
And writing naught howe'er he try,  
For even genius hits a low,  
(Cause human beings ebb and flow);  
Though typically a brief sensation,  
At once replaced by inspiration;  
But -  
The final nightmare comes to stay,  
When there's nothing... nothing... left to say.

(*The End* - Poem in 'Hang On!')



**My all-time favourite piece of writing**

He is the love of my life,  
The passion of my existence,  
The reason for my being,  
The cause of my seeing  
The star in the night sky.  
From deep within me,  
The essence of me,  
He honours me,  
The beloved,  
The only one.  
He finds no fault with me;  
She sees no wrong in me.  
She dances with me,  
My beautiful one,  
Romantic and tender  
To my gentle surrender;  
Enfolds me in her embrace,  
Loving me from darkness into light.  
She shelters me from harm,  
Rejoices in me,  
Delights in me,  
And leads me in the dance of forever.  
I lose my self in him,  
I find myself in her.  
They encircle me with angels.  
We are 'hopelessly' in love.

(The Dance Of Forever - Poem in 'The Dance Of Forever')



# Appendix

### **Fred's at it again!**

Fred had been giving me hassle all day. He was in one of those infuriatingly nitpicking moods and wouldn't let me get away with anything, and by the end of the day I was badly Fredpecked and tense all over.

(Page 253)

## **Memo From A Former Atheist**

(Re: the book 'The God Delusion' by Richard Dawkins)

*There are only two ways to live your life: one as if nothing is a miracle, the other as if everything is a miracle.*

(Albert Einstein)

Examine history. Time and again it has been more than amply displayed that highly developed intellects, skilled in rhetoric and adept at manipulating facts and ideas, can appear to prove or justify virtually anything. The outcomes of such efforts, which are heightened where the audience is impressionable, are often bizarre and sometimes tragic, not least in the province of organised religion as Richard Dawkins points out. On this point we are in agreement. Indeed, "nothing so masks the face of God as religion."<sup>10</sup> Thereafter, however, using arguments that are seductive but vacuous, he merely follows in the rhetorical, manipulative tradition, but his thesis is based on a false premise. The existence or non-existence of God *cannot* be proved by the intellect, no matter how articulate, learned or persuasive the reasoning may be. The most one can reasonably expect from the unaided intellect is a superficially plausible rationale as to why one might believe in God or why one might not, but no proof. We possess finite human intellects to deal with finite human situations and when we attempt to press them into service to decipher – or, as in this case, deny – the infinite (the divine if you prefer), we indulge in the bizarre behaviour to which I have alluded.

Most things in the material world that are not self-evident lend themselves to the provision of a proof that is acceptable to the general populace. Not so in matters of the spirit. Knowledge of God comes from beyond the boundaries of the material, the intellect, language or the senses, in other words from profound personal experience in the spiritual realm, and each person must find his or her own proof. Nobody else's will convince. The poet John Keats said, "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced." Since Dawkins and his fellow atheists do not accept the existence of the realm of the spirit, they are highly unlikely to seek it and experience the ultimate reality for themselves. Well, their loss.

Perhaps I am doing the author an injustice, but it seems to

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Buber (1878 – 1965), Austrian-born, Jewish philosopher. The quotation is to be taken in context, not as a blanket condemnation of all religion.

me that the book's dominant motif can effectively be summed up in one sentence: "Because I have not experienced it and/or it will not – despite my studied efforts to show the contrary – yield to scientific investigation, it does not exist." Anybody who has ever fallen in love could easily counter that proposition! Dawkins is by no means the first atheist to take this or a similar position, and if you want to spend money and time on this latest treatment of an old and hackneyed theme, go ahead. Alternatively, you might consider yearning for and then seeking something infinitely more precious and enduring than atheism.

In keeping with the thrust of this piece, I have no desire to win you over by means of intellectual argument. Therefore I shall simply proceed with a question based on a pertinent quotation: "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance – that principle is contempt prior to investigation."<sup>11</sup> And now the question: have you given a *genuine, sustained* and *unbiased* trial to the realm of the spirit? If you have *truly* exerted yourself along these lines and found the process fruitless, I have nothing further to say beyond suggesting that a renewed quest might well produce a different result. If you have not, what have you got to lose by making an honest endeavour to verify if there is something to be discovered, the existence of which you have hitherto believed to be impossible? Nobody else but you has to know that you have embarked on this inner journey. The only thing you may need, after an appropriate period of time, is the humility to acknowledge that your previous position is no longer tenable. For a couple of years in the early 1990s, I believed absolutely nothing; worse, I was certain that there was nothing to be believed. It all turned out to be a pernicious illusion which was replaced by a stupendously beautiful awakening to a divine presence beyond the dreams of a thousand lifetimes. That sounds like an exaggeration but it is not. And this presence has never left me since then. For this reason, I can assure you both from experience and from the heart, that admitting one has abandoned old views, no matter how strongly held, is a small price to pay for the incredible wonders you will find. Try it! Not willing? Permit me, then, to pose two further questions: why do you wish to cling so tenaciously to a worldview which offers little or no enduring hope? And how would you regard the scientist who refused to perform a certain experiment lest it prove his pet theory wrong? Think about it.



<sup>11</sup> Herbert Spencer, 1820-1903, British philosopher.

## **Why Do Plants Blossom?**

(Or: the roots of self-esteem)

Well, why *do* plants blossom? I haven't heard it in recent times but when, as a younger man, I might ask such a question, my listener would often give a facetious response and follow it with, "Ask a silly question and you get a silly answer!" The apparent thinking here is that the listener is adequately equipped to determine what is and what is not a silly question and, equally, is entitled to proffer a flippant answer which derides the question and hence the questioner. Whatever the merits or demerits of such a philosophy, the question, "Why do plants blossom?" is, in fact, not silly at all. Stay with me and all will become clear.

I do not have a scientific training, but I have great respect for scientific endeavour and have no doubt that botanists would consider the question in no way foolish, offering rather an explanation based on soil nutrients, water, photosynthesis and perhaps other elements and processes that I do not understand. That is fine as far as it goes. However, I am reminded that I have had cause to comment on several occasions about the decidedly finite nature of the human intellect, and scientific debates, researches and conclusions are, of necessity, products of the intellect. No matter how far science evolves in the future, therefore, and no matter how successfully scientists force Nature to reveal more of her secrets and then produce greatly enhanced explanations, I find myself able to project my reaction to such future developments as being precisely the same as it is now, namely, that is fine as far as it goes.

Those who disagree with this view might, amongst others, quote Albert Einstein: "The intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, and the solution comes to you and you don't know how or why." This, however, merely refers to the process of discovery. Thereafter, science (unless the whole nature of science is to change) is interested solely in that which is observable and measurable, and ultimately confers its seal of approval only on that which is empirically provable.

It is for this reason that scientific explanations can never satisfy me. To find an answer that responds to my deepest yearnings, I need to move from the restricted territory of the

intellect to the domains of the heart and the spirit, particularly the latter. Regrettably, many scientists will assert that the domain of the spirit does not exist. That perception is beyond my minimal field of influence, of course; but, for this reason, from now on we are going to be speaking a language that many either do not understand or do not accept, or may regard as fanciful and childish. Well, their loss – and I say that with no disrespect.

Several religious traditions, particularly the one on which I was weaned, teach or imply that all things, and particularly all humans, are designed and made by the Creator to give service. Thus, it is common to hear it said that God made all the plants to give nourishment, to be converted into various useful products or to bring visual enjoyment to his people. Flowers, trees and shrubs blossom, doing so in stunning variety and profusion, to serve us and give us joy. In my case, thankfully, they impart this joy in very great measure.

The natural consequence of this belief is that for years, when I used one of my favourite expressions about my purpose in life, namely “Ken, blossom where you are planted,” I automatically assumed that this meant that my *primary* duty was to give service in the environment in which I found myself at any given time, and never to count the cost. Now that I have been accorded the priceless gift of understanding the infinite and unconditional nature of God’s love in a dimension that is way beyond the intellect, I have come to see this matter in a totally different light.

So: why do plants blossom, then? They blossom, dearest reader, for the sole purpose of expressing, unashamedly, the intrinsic wonder and beauty of their own existence. That’s it; full stop; no obscure interpretations of this state of affairs, no hidden agendas, none. Let us take this conception into the realm of fable. But first, an observation: my scientific friends, the secular ones at least, would probably scoff at the notion of a plant having thoughts and then giving them form in human language. To accept this possibility, one has to be willing to take a completely different – effectively a mystical – view of things. Permit me to illustrate.

Out for a drive in my beloved Connemara<sup>12</sup> one delightful morning in the month of May, I reach a favoured spot, park the

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<sup>12</sup> Rugged but beautiful region in the West of Ireland.

car and stand out to take in the magnificent view. The landscape is ablaze with myriad, magenta-coloured rhododendrons. Spontaneously, I gently touch one growing near the roadside and ask, “why are you blossoming?” It is taken aback at the question but, after a few moments’ quiet reflection, answers, “I am blossoming because I am very beautiful. I am blossoming because the Creator made me to appreciate my own beauty and then to express that beauty just by blossoming. I mean, what other reason could there be?”

On hearing this response I am in awe, as you will readily understand, but I decide to continue the conversation and tell the rhododendron how much joy it brings to so many passers by and what sterling service it is thereby rendering to mankind. Once again, it is taken aback, but eventually responds, “Oh! I didn’t know that. I thought the Creator only told me to appreciate my own beauty and then blossom – and, in truth, that was the substance of his original message to me. Indeed, I have cousins in remote parts of the planet that have never been seen by anybody but they still just blossom most wondrously. But now that you mention it, he<sup>13</sup> did say something to the effect that if I simply blossomed, I would be a powerful expression of his love, and that – almost a reflex action as natural as breathing is to you – I would reach out to others with my beauty – with his beauty. Service, he said, would then be a spontaneous response to love rather than a burdensome duty. I have been appreciating my beauty and just blossoming ever since I was a tiny sapling, so I had forgotten all about that. Now I understand why countless motorists have stopped to look at me over the years and have gone away with smiles on their faces. Hmm! This has been a fascinating and enlightening conversation, and I am very grateful to you for reminding me of my sublimely simple purpose in life. However, it has also been very tiring since I am not accustomed to all this thinking and talking, so you will have to excuse me. I have quite a lot more blossoming to do – and even that I don’t do all the time; only in my season, you know. Then I rest.”

I thank the lovely rhododendron for what it has shared

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<sup>13</sup> I use the male form purely for linguistic convenience. As I have recorded elsewhere, my God is both 100% male and 100% female. I wonder what science would make of that – if, that is, it were willing to concede the possibility of the existence of God in the first place!

with me and travel further into the Connemara mountains. On the way, I stop in a small lay-by on a country road, sit on the ledge of the open boot, pour a cup of coffee from the flask that I have brought with me and unwrap a chocolate chip cookie. As I sip and chomp contentedly, I notice in the hedgerow one of the ugliest weeds I have ever seen. Its leaves are more a faded, pimpled yellow than Nature's wholesome green, what passes for its flower is sort of brown and gooey and looks like you know what, and it is covered in black, spiky things. With more than a hint of disdain I make the same enquiry: "Why are *you* blossoming?" It is taken aback at the question but, after a few moments' quiet reflection, answers, "I am blossoming because I am very beautiful. I am blossoming because the Creator made me to appreciate my own beauty and then to express that beauty just by blossoming. I mean, what other reason could there be?"

I am overcome with shame and shed a silent tear, appalled that I could have been so prejudiced and so pitifully limited in my perceptions. The scales fall from my eyes and I am instantly cured of the peculiar blindness that it has been my burden to carry for far too long. I touch its blossom with the utmost tenderness and speak spontaneously from the heart: "Oh, yes! You are indeed very, very beautiful. I simply cannot thank you enough for teaching me one of the most important lessons of my life; how could I have not seen it before? I hope we shall meet again." The weed smiles – the loveliest smile that touches my very soul – and says softly, "Look inside yourself, appreciate the beauty that you find there, regardless of the form in which it manifests (for, in the Creator's eyes, we are perfect in our imperfection) and then just blossom. In that way, we can meet in each moment."

### *Epilogue*

The American poet, Walt Whitman, once declared, "I exist as I am, that is enough." It looks like he had discovered how to communicate with the the flowers, the trees, the shrubs – and the weeds. And to learn from them.



## **The Contented Maverick**

Whilst I had written a very small number of pieces in earlier life and had won two prizes for an essay and an extended poem at school, I only really started writing, quite by chance, in 1989. I was away on business and was spending the night in a small hotel in an Austrian village. For no reason that I can put my finger on, I spontaneously decided to take out my notebook and try to consign to paper a problem that had been causing me considerable bother. This exercise was certainly helpful in sorting out the components of the issue. However, a few months later, when I looked again at what I had produced, it occurred to me that it seemed to be a good piece of writing in itself. So, in the months that followed, I set about writing a few short pieces, mostly poems.

When I had completed these items, I began to feel that writing could become an absorbing interest for me. I contacted a number of friends that I considered to be ‘in the know,’ some of whom were noted, published authors, and asked for their advice. They gave it willingly and in abundance. The knowledge they imparted was supplemented by intelligence gleaned from books, writers’ workshops and the comments of well-meaning acquaintance. The outcome of this research was a bewildering blend of advice which was enlightening, uplifting, esoteric, erratic and conflicting, and which would have taken even the great Bard of Avon ten lifetimes to absorb and implement. I am very happy to report that I ignored almost all of it, not from misplaced pride but from the swift realisation that these people were telling me how and why *they* write, very little of which suited me. Hence, I adopted one or two gems of wisdom from writers with a soul and jettisoned everything else.

Free of encumbrance, therefore, and donning the tailor-made mantle of a maverick in matters literary, I went on to evolve how and why *I* write and create my own corpus of poems, stories, essays, reflections and, at this writing, an embryonic novel. I recognise, of course, that ‘experts’ – however one might define that term – could well, on examining my total output, maintain that it is precisely because I ignored the good advice I was given that my stuff is a load of garbage. In so contending, they would be overlooking two vital facts, one of

which is obvious, and the second of which needs elucidation. The obvious one? Whatever they say is only *their* opinion. And the second? *I* think my work is good and, since I follow the dictum cited in the introduction to my forthcoming, home-produced book *When The Bug Bites*, namely to write primarily for *me*, my opinion of my work is the only one that counts. Purist literati, however, incensed by such egocentric anarchy, will be quick to assert that, no matter how cogently I argue my point, this present rhetoric is but a blatant attempt to endow my idiosyncratic, go-it-alone strategy with rationale and respectability. As is pretty well known, the best way to disarm one's critics is to agree with them. So: were they thus to assert, they would be absolutely right! This is rampant self-justification on my part and I am savouring every moment of it, for which I shall make no apology. It is all part of the joy of writing!

The net result is that I produce a wealth of material that does not, I can imagine, satisfy the critical norms (whatever they are), that most editors would look at askance (because it won't make money) and has a very limited audience (because all too often genius goes unrecognised!). But I love it. What else matters? Well, I suppose I should add that, judging by the comments I have received over the years, a good number of other people appear to get much from my writing also. Such commendation, however, is but a welcome bonus, never the underlying motivation for the work.

That is why, seventeen years on, every single line I write still nurtures me. It nurtures my mind by giving vital expression to the treasures that are to be found there. It nurtures my body by helping me to unwind and relax. But most of all, it nurtures my spirit by keeping me in touch with the wondrous beauty of the Eternal. Had I tried to take on board and implement even a small measure of the advice that came my way in the early days, I believe I would have laid down my pen long before now.

In short, I am glad I did it my way. Indeed it would not be going too far, dearest reader, to say that the hand that writes these words belongs to a very contented maverick.



## **The Last Laugh ( A 'Fred' Story)**

Fred had been giving me hassle all day. He was in one of those infuriatingly nitpicking moods and wouldn't let me get away with anything, and by the end of the day I was badly Fredpecked and tense all over. Eventually, towards evening's end, I managed to stow him below decks and relax with a favourite book for a while. A very short while. Half way through the third paragraph, I let out a hearty laugh, "Ha, ha, ha, ha... Oh boy, P.G. Wodehouse is the greatest! When I am in the trough of despond, there is nothing that can lift me out of it as quickly and effectively as one of his stories. He was the master, Fred. Other writers who, like me, have been influenced by him, even with their best efforts merely light candles at his shrine."

Here I was, beginning to relax at last, waxing lyrical about one of my favourite authors, in full flight indeed, and I should have had the common sense to leave Fred out of it. I might have known the resident bollocks would spoil the moment by being pedantic, but my enthusiastic tribute to the creator of Jeeves, Wooster and other immortal characters had been processed by the vocal cords before I could stop them.

"The expression, unless I am greatly mistaken," he said in the manner of an overzealous schoolmaster correcting an erring pupil, "is not 'the trough of despond.' "

"As if it mattered, damn you, Fred, you pest. I know it isn't, but only ever having seen the s-l-o-u-g-h of despond in print, I have never known – because of the caprices of English spelling and pronunciation – whether to pronounce it 'slou', 'slow', 'sloff' or 'slock'. So I do my own thing and call it the trough of despond, which could equally of course, in theory, be 'trou,' 'trow', 'troff' or 'trock', but t-r-o-u-g-h is at least commonplace enough for me to have learned, long since, that it is 'troff'. Anyway, you've spoiled the conversation now, also my read. My enthusiasm has waned. I'm tired and I'm going to bed; I suppose you have to come too, blast you, as if I hadn't already endured a surfeit of your company today. I mean, enough is enough."

"Which could, in theory," remarked Fred, "be 'enou', 'enow', 'enoff', 'enuff' or 'enock'! And, if I may expound

further on the caprices of English spelling and pronunciation, you will note that ‘ph’ is pronounced as ‘f’, in which case, and still speaking theoretically of course, the correct pronunciation of ‘enough’ could be rendered in writing as ‘enuph.’ ” He smirked smugly. Come to think of it, there is no need to say that he smirked smugly, is there? The ‘smugly’ is unnecessary because a smirk is, of its very character, decidedly smug, isn’t it? I mean, one cannot conceive of somebody smirking lovingly or smirking sorrowfully, can one? Anyway Fred, as I say – whether or not you agree with my semantic analysis – smirked.

And it seems superfluous to add, but I will anyway, that one would not need to avail of the services of a clairvoyant to find out why the indwelling pestilence had smirked, smugly or otherwise. He thought that he had a stranglehold on the last laugh, you see. But he hadn’t. I had. “Phuck ough!” I said.



### **All’s Well That Ends Well (A ‘Lucille’ Story)**

The grandfather clock in the hall sounded two bells, and slumber, as had become the norm of late, refused to enfold me in its embrace. So I languished in the bed, gazing wide-eyed and disconsolate at the ceiling. At length, out of frustration and impenetrable fatigue, I decided to apprise my faithful Muse of my hapless plight: “As the noted Scot, Rabbie Burns once observed, Lucille (no doubt, the work of one of your esteemed sisters), ‘The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft a-gley.’ I cannot speak for mice, of course, but – given the recent tendency for the slings and arrows of fortune to behave in a significantly more outrageous fashion than usual – the best laid schemes o’ this particular man have ganged very a-gley. Nothing I plan works out as I had hoped, and nothing I hope for works out as I had planned. Life, I am fully convinced, intends henceforth to spend its time plotting cold-blooded ambushes at frequent intervals along my rocky path, which is pretty uncivil of it. I am rather inclined to think, precious one, that the mice may well be faring a good deal better than I, and that’s a bitter potion to swallow, given that man is supposed to be the superior creature on the planet.

“The worst of it all is that I have these endless fears that things, in the future, will gang even more a-gley than they have ganged already. It’s like living constantly under the sword of Damocles – or was it Socrates? No, Damocles. I mean, whatever is going to happen next? I project unceasingly into the future, have a persistent knot in my stomach, induced by all sorts of unnamed apprehensions, and I can scarcely ever sleep with all the worry, tonight being as good an example as any. Oh for a good night’s sleep! I’ve forgotten what it’s like to drift into a peaceful reverie.”

I had little hope that Lucille would be able to administer any balm. Fear of the future, as is fairly well-known, is well nigh immovable. Indeed, I was virtually certain that even her considerable powers of expression would fail to produce anything in the shape of a palliative to my – literally – fearful dilemma.

“As the noted French essayist, de Montaigne, once observed,” said Lucille quietly, “A man who fears suffering is already suffering from what he fears.”

“Yes, I appreciate that, but, but...” I returned weakly.

“And Quintus Horatius Flaccus,” she continued equally quietly, “once made the following insightful comment: ‘Drop the question what tomorrow may bring, and count as profit every day that Fate allows you.’”

“Yes but, er, that is, in my case...” I bleated.

“And Samuel Langhorne Clemens once remarked that his life had been destroyed by a series of catastrophes most of which never occurred.”

“I er, yes... well, I mean to say...”

“And it was no less than Jesus himself who counselled – and I quote –” proceeded Lucille, “‘Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.’”

I realised that I had failed to reckon with Lucille’s archival memory, and her awesome ability to come up with the right word at the right moment. “Out of the mouths of babes...” I murmured reverentially. I was unable to recall the rest of the appropriate lines from a respected text, but had a vague idea that it had something to do with good things emanating from unexpected sources.

“Less of the ‘babe’ stuff, if you please,” said Lucille with a grin.

I told the knot in my stomach what to do with itself, stretched unconstrainedly, yawned expansively, and grinned gratefully back. “She may be nearly three thousand years old,” I mused dreamily, “but I know jolly well that she’s rather chuffed at being referred to as a ‘babe,’ and – *yawn* – what’s more, I have no doubt but that er... were her circumstances otherwise and I... er... um... er... zzzzzzzzz!”



## **A sort of biographical note**

As his father (Kerry) and mother (Limerick) had been obliged to emigrate to the neighbouring island to earn a living, Ken made his first appearance in the shire of Surrey during the war (though he's not saying which one). Unexpected teenage relocation from a quiet London suburb to a small town in the land of his ancestors was a culture shock from which he has never fully recovered, although he will now readily concede that Ireland is the place he wants to be. Former hotelier, he took early retirement from his post as a lecturer on topics ranging from ethics to effluent, and is now a freelance whatever-takes-his-fancy; possessor of many gifts which he gratefully acknowledges, for to deny the gifts would be to deny the giver; permanent owner of an acute sense of humour; has strong workaholic tendencies but is endeavouring to become lazy.

Writes primarily for personal enjoyment and therapy but likes to share the resulting 'pieces' - as he calls them - with anybody who will humour him. Has had a small amount of work published but discovered that it didn't make him one bit happier, and now gets much more enjoyment out of putting together home-produced volumes. Almost incapable of grasping the fundamentals of rhyme, metre and so forth but contrives, nevertheless, to write in a style that might be described, if one were in a generous frame of mind, as vaguely poetic. A late vocation to iconoclasm, he has scant regard for poetic convention, despises the humbug that he perceives to pervade much of matters literary, and is well aware that a) nobody gives a shit what he thinks, especially those immersed in the humbug of matters literary, and b) his views may well be born of ignorance, jealousy or both. That said, he greatly admires scholars with a genuine love of English.

Favourite authors: Jane Austen, P.G. Wodehouse and, of course, Ken O'Sullivan - not much point in producing all this stuff if he doesn't get a kick out of it himself, is there? Greatest blessing: a loving wife who stoically tolerates his idiosyncrasies. Second greatest blessing: four wonderful, adult children who do likewise.

Could be considered a bit of a dreamer but once wrote of his pieces, 'I am in fact my only fan' which shows that he's a

realist. Strange mixture of rebel, conformist, tough outer shell (well, kind of), soft-as-putty interior, foreground music lover, background music hater, raconteur, linguist and coffee shop addict; dislikes television and just about tolerates the Internet; complex thinker but a lover of the simple life; often feels as if his body resides in one dimension and his spirit in another which can be pretty uncomfortable; in love with nature and all the gifts of the Creator; once spontaneously described Connemara as his ‘spiritual home’. Hopelessly romantic and oversensitive which, as he says himself, is a wonderful asset for poetic composition but is damn all use in daily living.



### **A more conventional biographical note**

Ken’s father and Mother had emigrated to England in the late 1930s, and he was born in Surrey in the early 1940s. In 1956, the family returned to Ireland and purchased the Central Hotel in Ballybunion in County Kerry. Sadly, his mother died only a few months after their return.

He pursued the four-year course in Shannon College of Hotel Management, and took over the direction of the hotel (later renamed Ambassador) in 1966. In the late 60s the company embarked on an expansion programme to enlarge the hotel from 27 to 130 bedrooms, a new ballroom/conference complex and a shopping mall. However, instead of the rapid growth in tourism forecast for the late 60s and early 70s, there was a sharp decline because of the Northern Ireland situation and the business was forced into liquidation in 1974. Apart from running the hotel, Ken actively marketed the business in Europe and the United States

In late 1973, he took up a position as lecturer in Marketing and Communications in the Hotel School of the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, later serving as Head of The Department of Hotel & Catering Management for over five years.

He started writing stories, essays and poems seriously in 1989 and gave many writing workshops and readings during his career as a lecturer in the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology,

from which he took early retirement in 2000. The workshops were designed to encourage rather than instruct, and he was often amazed at what students subsequently produced for him. Towards the end of his career in GMT, he was writer in residence on the Galway Bay FM Arts Show for nearly three years and regularly broadcast poems, stories and essays. He has had a small amount of work published in anthologies and newspapers. He also derives great fulfilment from bringing out privately-produced books of his writing for giving to friends and anybody who might express an interest in his work. There are over fifty different titles and there are nearly two thousand of the books in circulation. He is particularly fond of *Life With Lucille – Muse Of Muses* and *Life With Fred – Inside My Head*. The former tells of his close relationship with his Muse, nearly three thousand years old but still gorgeous! And the latter relates of his volatile, often hilarious, relationship with his inner voice or conscience. Each book contains over one hundred stories. Another favourite is *Pieces Of Mind*, a coffee table collection of three hundred short extracts from his writing – now in its second edition with over six hundred items.

Brendan Kennelly, one of Ireland’s best-loved poets, said of his work, “I really enjoyed your writing. Your voice is unusually fine, people should hear it.”

Ken is married to Carmel Costello and they have four adult children, Paul, Barry, Julie and Alan, together with six grandchildren, Lara, Matthew, Finn, Seán, Ryan and Léa.



## **Bless you, dear reader**

May  
Each pain bring its learning,  
Each hurt its discerning,  
Each memory its healing,  
Each joy its revealing,  
Each day its providing,  
Each moment abiding  
    In One who's all caring;  
        And love before all,  
        And love within all,  
        And love after all.



I hope you enjoyed *Pieces Of Mind - Second Edition*. I am currently working on the third edition which will contain over 2200 entries – the 630 items from this edition plus nearly 1600 new ones. Naturally, there is a lot of work to be done, compiling, editing and formatting, but I am hoping to have it ready sometime in 2015, all being well. The plan, at present, is that the entire profits from the sale of the first printing will be donated to charity.