

SINGLE SENTENCE POEMS

WHEN I BECAME EIGHTY YEARS OLD on February 11th 2011, I decided it was time to show a dozen examples of my poetic efforts that might interest other persons in crafting some artistic images with words arranged in a single sentence, as a way to review certain experiences which have persisted in one's memory and from which we can glean -- if not poetry per se -- at least poetic residuals of recollections, perhaps including a few reflections of mystical moments and spiritual insights.

My selections here are arranged in two parts. The first is entitled DISTANT PASSAGES comprised of nine pieces written as souvenirs from several journeys to Japan and Peru:

Inland Sea

Miyajima

Ise

Kyoto Downpour

The Sacred Valley Of The Incas

Machu Picchu

La Pampa de Anta

Izcuchaca

El Condor Pasa

The second part is called TRIPTYCH beginning with another travel fragment followed by my two longest sentences:

Uncouth Youth

Spring Green

Global Hero

DISTANT PASSAGES

Nine Travel Poems By J.S. Christensen

Inland Sea

When leaving the quiet, pine clad islet
where we'd rested overnight at an inn,
we walked down the shoreline trail to
a landing dock and waiting boat --
glimpsed through the trees -- while
averting our eyes from the sun just
rising over the intensely sparkling
surface of fragrant salt water, and
we needed to be extra attentive on
our way, so as not to be stepping
inadvertently upon any of the many
plump caterpillars crawling in their
oddly humping manner across the path
matted with dried tree needles and
strewn with fallen cones, and then
later that day, after entering the
metropolitan center of Hiroshima,
we came to a solemn standstill,
facing a polished granite stone
indicating Ground Zero where --
with a fierce flash overhead --
the fireball of an atomic bomb
unleashed its lethal energies
upon a civilian population.

Miyajima

To see the famous view, we rented a skiff and rowed away from the Sacred Island of steep ravines safeguarded by evergreens, out to The Great Gateway with wing-like crossbeams atop two tall pillars hewn from the trunks of single trees painted vermilion and placed adjacent to the seashore's "floating" Shinto Shrine that now seemed to be rising upon its pilings as the tide subsided, and here we let our skiff drift in shallow water while we ate big blue grapes from a paper bag, also noticing a large deer crowned with stumps of sawed-off antlers, wading our way from a cove and presently placing his head into the boat, brazenly tame, receiving from us a few cordial pats -- when suddenly that fat stag's yellow teeth started ripping our bag apart -- so we fed him enough grapes to satisfy his stubborn voracity and skiff-rocking persistence until we finished the bunch, whereupon our obstreperous guest quickly nabbed the bag and turned shoreward -- still chewing on the remaining stems and paper stained with grape juice.

Ise

We stood among inquisitive, mystified people looking through the transparent silk curtain covering the entrance to the fenced enclosure, as near as you may peer at the inner precinct of Japan's highly venerated Geku Outer Shrine protected by four ranks of tall wooden walls, unpainted because no building in the successive courtyards is touched by preservatives, since all structures are replaced every twenty years, their cypress and cedar surfaces finished to a velvet smoothness by expert craftsmen -- there being alternate sites, side by side, one in use and the other an empty expanse of marbled stones from a pristine river -- and nobody enters either sanctified ground except Shinto priests, purified workers or exalted emissaries of The Imperial Family, although I saw a crow and some butterflies allowing themselves unrestricted access, and when I remarked on a cluster of weeds and fir sprouts growing out of a moist spot on a gabled roof of reeds and thatched grass, our erudite guide replied, "Wild things are always honored here as natural ambassadors and divine messengers coming from the gods."

Kyoto Downpour

A few upright rocks amidst plain gray pebbles, carefully selected to form a border surrounding the garden tea house, now gain surface details, previously unseen, when pelted by raindrops and washed by silvery drippings from the eaves, while on a nearby side street, some children under umbrellas and wearing short rubber boots begin stamping and splashing through puddles, intently collecting random leaves, twigs and abandoned bits of litter which the youngsters drop into a flooding gutter, then race beside these pieces of rubbish that careen against the concrete curb and gyrate away -- until the kids tire of this game and just stand, spinning their glistening umbrellas and gazing after the last traces of buoyant trash passing rapidly out of sight --

but across town a renowned museum keeps, in a climate-controlled space behind glass, priceless examples of Japanese screens aglow with gold leaf and miniature scenes depicting traditional activities and historic events, all sorts of separate subjects and settings, each picture enclosed by dream-like clouds, painted in this classical manner by artists who keep changing their point of view!

The Sacred Valley Of The Incas

Happily chattering women and girls carry loaded laundry baskets up the grassy bank of the Urubamba River, and after reaching level land they set the heavy burdens down, then begin flapping and spreading their saturated fabrics over the branches of a cactus hedge, its thick pads entirely covered by sturdy spikes which pin the cloth securely in place, creating a shapeless and fantastic patchwork of abstract, multicolored mounds that remain unmoved by buffeting breezes.

Machu Picchu

As I hiked along an ancient passage overlooking a plunging jungle ravine, not far from the architectural wonders constructed atop ingeniously engineered terraces supporting edifices of immense proportions, all connected by tiers of narrow stairways -- these colossal ruins now overrun by a midday invasion of groups brought on the tourist train from Cuzco -- I came alone to a wayside boulder shaped like an Inca throne, suggesting I sit and preside over this undisturbed site, but I quickly relinquished my intention of occupying that splendid seat -- just then preempted by a black snake.

La Pampa de Anta

Yesterday's weather left watermarks
darkly down the rugged adobe wall
that enshadows a still-muddy road
where a dog with a mottled coat
lies asleep beneath a Saybo tree,
its muzzle pointing into the wind
scented by wet soil, from fields
of potato plants neatly cultivated
in low lanes which sway and ripple
with fluttering leaves of rich green,
highlighted by wildly bobbing dots of
vibrant white and violet-hued blossoms,
but now this pleasant vista is disturbed
by hissing air brakes and the skidding,
squishing tires of a delivery truck
from the limestone fertilizer factory
at Cachimayo -- as the alert driver
stops to avert hitting a skinny kid
trying to ride a dilapidated bike --
these noises awakening the shaggy dog
that scampers off, around the corner
of a new building with its prominent
roadside face recently emblazoned by
yet another of the multitudinous signs
blatantly advertising COLA drinks --
a visual bane and nationwide blight.

Izcuchaca

Passing through this Peruvian
mountain town, I momentarily
glimpse a typical village lad
sitting on a plank bridge
with his bare feet dangling
over a silt-filled stream,
who eats an ear of tan corn
with ocher-colored speckles,
and the boy's dusky skin
and his monotone clothes
and those worn boards
and that flowing water
are all the same shade
of tarnished copper
which pervades this
Andean farming area.

El Condor Pasa

At dawn in Arequipa our hired driver took us on a tiring high-altitude ride over horrendously rough, dusty roads until darkness fell as we reached a rustic hotel close to Colca Canyon where we went late the next morning to the edge of a precipice, to watch the condors lift from cliffs and soar on supporting updrafts generated by sun-warmed air, when somebody said that a bold bird might come closer if one of us went fifty paces away and played dead, so I volunteered to go lie down, facing upward and watching till a hungry condor did glide silently above me, gracefully circling near enough that I could see individual feathers outspread at its wing tips -- while my companions madly snapped pictures -- and when I returned home from this trip, I soon learned that a dear lady and a good friend had died, and checking my calendar, I discovered she had passed away on the day I played dead under the gloriously soaring condor.

TRIPTYCH

Three Rambling Poems By J.S. Christensen

Uncouth Youth

It's chilly midnight, not the best
time to be standing alone on the
westbound side of a highway where
vehicles are seldom passing while
I hitchhike homeward, so I take
a piddle out here in the middle
of nowhere, then wait another
hour before catching a ride
through this widest stretch
in the State Of Texas --
thumbing my way across the
southland from Key West over
to Los Angeles -- traveling
with empty pockets in 1950
after a summer in Manhattan
and New Jersey, then down
to Florida, thus finishing
this last year of my teens
with a final fling, expecting
notification from Uncle Sam's
Draft Board, saying it's about
time for me to see more of the
world -- possibly a group tour
overseas to the Korean Peninsula.

Spring Green

I was invited to meet the master architect Frank Lloyd Wright for a private conversation at his remote farmstead residence on a hillside near Spring Green in southwestern Wisconsin -- this appointment arranged by mailing to him a letter of introduction from a former secretary of his -- and the date granted was Tuesday, June 8th, 1954 that happened to be Wright's eighty-seventh birthday, when I was in my twenty-third year, but during the first minutes of our time together, it seemed to me the six decades that separated our ages miraculously disappeared from the room of local timber and limestone, uniquely designed and harmoniously decorated, where I had been taken to await Mr. Wright who presently entered, immaculately dressed and smiling and cordially asking, "Well, young man, just what is it you need to be talking with me about?" and so we sat and I told him of my upcoming

discharge from military service and my present indecision about pursuing higher education, and then he rested both hands on the knob of his cane and said, "Colleges are in business selling diplomas as endorsements of a student's long preparation for a certain kind of career, and this pigeonholes many individuals who are more imaginative and creative and possess a poetic temperament that naturally resists being laced into an academic straitjacket, but you can skip a cap-and-gown degree and instead just buy the classes you think might offer guidelines for developing your own personal interpretation of life, and then you can proceed as we do in my field of architecture, learning the basics of your chosen work, such as the laborious mixing of earthen slush with straw, and molding this into bricks needed for building some kind of plan, from a mud hut, up to a towering cathedral," and although I later

found out that this brick-making metaphor was the favorite advice Mr. Wright often gave to admirers arriving at his door -- no matter what their line of endeavor -- I decided to follow his suggestion, also keeping a clear recollection of that grand old man pointing the handle of his cane to indicate a solitary painting hung high on a nearby wall -- the portrait of a stately matron -- and saying, "America still needs pioneers, like my mother there, as our nation continues to enter all sorts of newfound frontiers that challenge individuals to rise above the commonplace and become uncommon, which in this democracy is actually our Constitutional Right" and then he stood and extended to me a firm hand of the irrepressible builder-thinker-radical-patriot who showed people the world over how to cultivate the supreme art of living in accord with Nature.

Global Hero

Charles Lindbergh, an unknown aviator, was popularly labeled "Lucky Lindy" and "The Lone Eagle" in 1927 when at age twenty-five he became the first pilot to fly solo in a single-engine aircraft nonstop over the Atlantic, from New York to Paris in 33 hours and 30 minutes, landing well after dark, to be greeted by an estimated throng of more than 50,000 Frenchmen mobbing the airport and lifting the American on their shoulders, carrying him to his new life as a world-famous personage, but that tumultuous public scene was not anything like the quiet setting of his death at seventy-two, on the opposite side of the planet, far out in the vast Pacific, at the peaceful eastern end of Maui Island where the terminally ill patient was staying in a modest cottage with his wife, writer Anne Morrow Lindbergh, because the attending doctor didn't have time for driving back and forth along the narrow, zigzag, coast road between his hospice in Hāna village

and the Lindbergh place at Kīpahulu, a rock-walled house they built on a bluff overlooking the sea -- beyond some abandoned fields of banana trees which had become a wild, meandering jungle that people out there called The Banana River -- this picturesque property bartered from a friend who traded five acres of tropical terrain for a priceless collection of ethnic costumed dolls the intrepid flier had acquired during his many international trips -- their residence located near the vacated little Palapala Ho'omau Hawaiian Church which they had helped restore, including the addition of a tall stained glass window across the space of an unused side door, a touch of colorful contemporary art for the otherwise austere rural chapel where Lindbergh said he wanted to be buried in the small adjoining cemetery, and so immediately after he died, he was lifted by a sturdy Polynesian into a plain wooden coffin handmade in Hāna from a sketch drawn by Lindbergh -- and which local legend says may have

contained his leather helmet and the goggles worn throughout that historic transatlantic flight -- and then he was laid to rest, without a eulogy, as less than ten people witnessed the casket lowered into the grave, and according to his last request, heavy lava boulders were piled into the pit, and finally the surface was covered with smooth gray beach stones, in the Hawaiian Christian tradition, and afterward a rectangular slab with its memorial inscription was placed horizontally upon the site, as the inconspicuous marker for this always unassuming and reclusive celebrity.

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