

Shadow and Exiles - Made to Receive All the World
Redemption Poems, 2006 and 2007

26 poems, 78 pages.

Introduction

These passages, from ten years ago and more, are like the lines in my hand. Age and wear may cover them, but today's stories move through what came before.

Like a lot of people, one of the reasons I write things down at all - poetry or prose - is to try to re-member the light we have in us, or that comes to us at times. Revisiting these poems today then is like meeting an old friend, someone I struggled with, had adventures with, and who was a teacher to me. I recall where I was when I wrote them, the people I knew, and the things I suffered through. I also remember the sense of wonder when something would at last become clear to me, the ecstasy of coming through a difficult passage, and the need to write.

All the struggle, all the celebration, the things learned, the mystery of what cannot be named, these continue in me now in a new way. Perhaps they appear in me today as more kindness, an appreciation for our diverse paths, and a dedication to giving whatever I can.

When gathering these 26 writings, it only later came to me to title them, Shadow and Exiles - Made to Receive All the World, which is from one of the poems, and to call them Redemption Poems. Only later could I see that aspect as central, and as common to these experiences. As soon as I saw them this way, I thought, of course, how simple that is. May they bring comfort and encouragement to the people I know now, to new friends, and to those I will never meet, except through these pages.

Jason Espada
San Francisco,
December 7th, 2017

My heart is

busted open and is
spilling light everywhere

on thinking how many people are misled by false teachers
themselves ignorant

Something in me started to wail, and will never stop
crying like a parent who's lost a child
like someone whose dearest has been taken from them

and in the same instant I see in me
there is one who dances and claps
and has left his home
and who couldn't begin to tell how to ever get back –
he's not looking for return

and he sings out a full throated crazy song,
full of pain and whim and logic and grace

anyone lacking a radical solidarity with the poor
is worse off than dead – they are death itself
withering crops or making the earth itself recoil

I sing, I dance, I mourn – what else can I do?

It goes on like this with me all the time, all the time I tell you
and usually I swallow verses such as these
(with no ears to listen – what's the use? I know myself)
but this much fell out, so here it is –

a sanity making incantation
 a joy in these netherworlds
 like some eternal seal
 burning through the mist - armies that pose
 as real and lasting,
 but that fade as my honeyed laughter dawns

Sing:

O Princes and Empresses – don't think yourselves less than this!
 Every lie about you, one day will have to be seen through
 la la la
 Hark! Why not today? Why not now?
 Even if we've been in the wrong forever,
 now's a door, eh? waddy say?

I bribe, I cajole, I threaten, I lie, I lure, I seduce,
 I leave trails of whatever gems people regard

I talk to children like they are adults
 knowing they understand full well
 and I talk to those who appear to be adults
 like they are in the first grade
 (we're none of us that far along)
 knowing they understand too
 and are grateful
 and take the step that is in front of them

To the extent even of the horizon
 I set a meal
 and play and sing to you sweetly a chorus to join in
 What else can I do?

I turned myself upside down and shook
and am surprised (surprised still)
at what we can do together

Winter dreams

On the cold pavement
I sleep fitfully,
dream of palaces
with fountains and gardens in the sun,
with music and friends
a soft bed to rest in
and more than enough food

buried
but beating on the coffin lid
this is the rrap of my knuckle-blows:

skin and bones
and from my delirium
spreading in space,
a banquet with friends and family

I am a man on fire
such that I am all flame
dreaming of gentle breezes blowing on my skin,
and shining pools beneath a waterfall –
these two halves in me meet like a thunderclap

poor, ugly, frightening,
I dream though of a celestial queen for me
here on earth
What can I do?
it's nature herself that dreams
that speaks
but she does so
in such extravagant terms!

so far from where I am

I am dull as stone
but still, some spark hides in my belly
and dreams of being a fountain of knowledge
for endless generations to come
and quench their thirst

a fading sound,
and from my broken form, a heap the
sight and sound of me leaping,
running fast and far
heart racing, skin glistening in the sun

outcast, scorned,
in an alley alone
I mutter something about
taking my place at the family table
golden with renown

such dream sounds come from me at times

and then
for a moment
a single-eye sense of what I am
and who I am rises above all this
want and crying out
in me and in the world
and at once
I have many mouths
all calling
calling
calling for rain
with nothing left out

My part of the dream-cry somehow finds
the greater voice
the greater prayer
with no one and nothing left out

a creative word
a vast call

and I am everything not yet born

I am the power of hope

I am the power of prayer

I am the tide in the chest

I am a blazing message

*I am the peace that calls out
right in the midst of wars*

*I am the secret prayers spoken by millions
the sound of rending the shell of earth
for new earth to appear*

I am the will to be born

These things move and turn in me
and such is this world
upheld,
and turning
on the axis of prayer