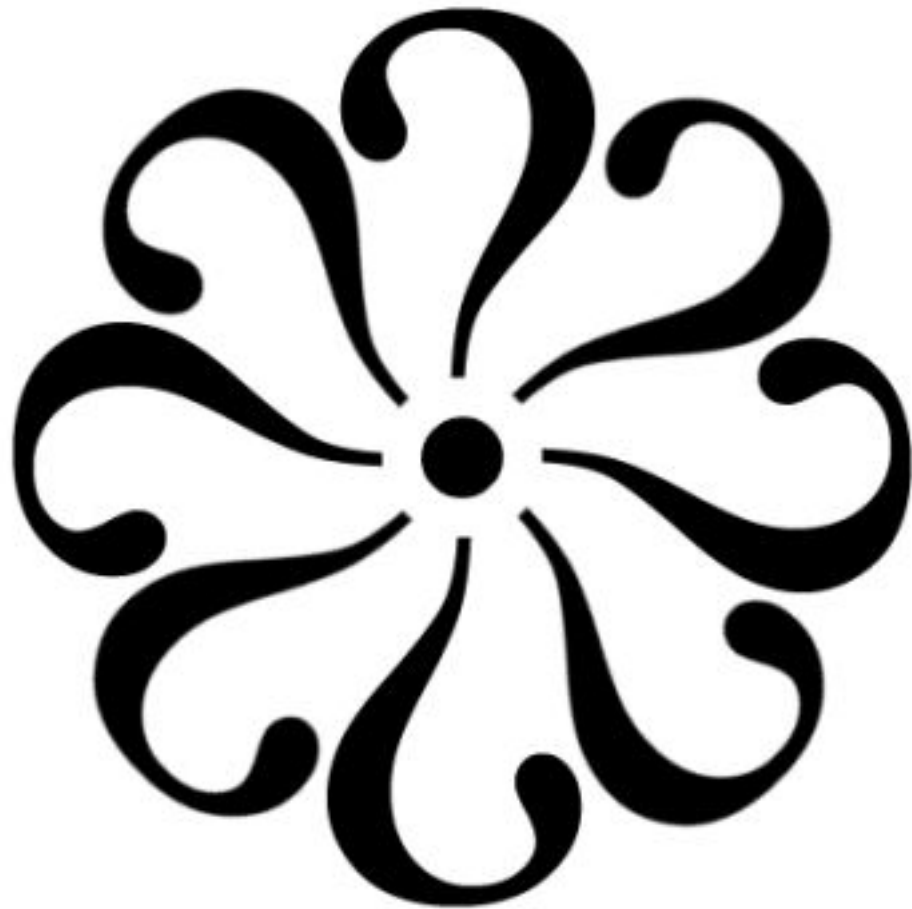


Poems That Search
and
Poems That Question



Poems of 1982

by Alan Harris

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and
Poems That Question*

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Dedication

**To all who search and question:
May they find and know.**

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Contents

(Alphabetically)

Continuity	1
Divine Priorities	2
Excuse Me, God.....	11
God's Spirit Dwells.....	9
Hope and Love.....	14
I, Not It.....	12
Mary and the Moderns	16
My Soul Is Something	8
The Only Christian.....	6
Symposium	3
These Scales Tell Tales	13
Three Gingerbread Men.....	4
To a Telephone Pole.....	10
To Sister Marjorie	15
The Tortured Joy	7
Two Songs.....	5
About Alan Harris	17

Continuity

Yesterday the sun went down;
this morning it came up—

as it has,
as it will.

A nagging question plagues philosophers:
why does the sun rise in the East at dawn
instead of rising in the West at eve?
They meant to solve this problem yesterday;
they met with failure once again today—

as they have,
as they will.

While one wise solver contemplates,
twelve folks toil to fill their plates.
Some produce, some sell their wares;
all seek exit from their cares—
one of which is not the sun
(save that their day's work is done).
West or East or Dawn or Eve
to philosophers they leave—

as they have,
as they will.

Divine Priorities

Why build the Church cathedrals?
Just pile up grains of sand
if you've a mind to do some thing
to occupy your hand.

Why dress up for the service?
Why serve the holy stuff
in gold and silver chalices?
An old tin cup's enough.

If quality's in rareness,
as silver's hard to find,
how great then must be humble folks
who've cleared doubt from their mind.

If every brick in every church
were mortared end to end,
that row would never leave the earth,
but we could still pretend.

If God wants us to dress up,
let's save fine clothes until
the day we give this place up,
then in them lie quite still.

But if God does want cathedrals,
let's hurry and get more made.
Let's build them fine, but keep in mind
the inner ones, homemade.

Symposium

I sing a song of joyous life,
Tra-lee, tra-la, tra-lee;
I dance about my dainty wife
and tip a glassful of glee.

* * *

I tell a tale of mine olden age,
and there, and so, and thus;
life's wisdom is my single wage,
and I can't see who's driving the bus.

Three Gingerbread Men

Three gingerbread men had a talk
in which they searched each other's souls.
The first one stated frankly that he had no soul,
the second that his soul was pure goat's milk.
The third gingerbread man had no bones to pick
nor any goats to milk. He said his soul
was pure gingerbread.
The others laughed and ate him up.

Two Songs

Song of Doubting Logic

What an incongruity
that in this flesh a soul can be!

* * *

Song of Spiritual Revelation

What an incongruity
that in this flesh a soul can be!

The Only Christian

He went to church one cloudy morn,
somewhat forlorn.
He was the first one there, he guessed,
and sat to rest.
He studied all the stained-glass art;
soon church would start.
The clock swung round to half past eight—
the folks were late.
No organist was there to play,
no preacher to pray;
no choir stirred the air with song—
what could be wrong?
Twelve worn-out candles stood unlit
(this wasn't fit),
and Bibles, hymnals, all were closed
in silent rows.
A full half-hour he waited there,
then said a prayer.
He prayed that God would gird his heart
to do his part
and asked forgiveness for us all—
then felt his call.
He took his Bible from his pew,
for now he knew
the only Christian left was he;
he held God's key.
His work now would be hard and long,
but he'd be strong.
He prayed that Christ would live again
in hearts of men,
then opened wide the large front door
and stayed no more.
He stepped outside without remorse;
he knew his course.
The door through which crowds once had flocked
he left unlocked.
Then, "Wait!" he spoke out with a start,
"I'm not so smart."
Today, to his profound dismay,
was Saturday.

The Tortured Joy

The company had sent its pamphlets on ahead, so everyone in town knew of that spring's event. The drift in barber shops and telephones foretold a green success.

That night a grandstandful looked on as marching marchers marched in song onto the field. Speculators in the stands kept up a wide-eyed buzz, out-answering each other.

“My God, look what they're doing now, Ethel! They're going to raise the cross that man brought in. It must have been about like this last year—I hope he has the same amount of luck.”

They nailed him to the cross, each hammer-stroke inviting groans and shrieks from lookers-on. The band was playing the national anthem, keeping time with the pound—pound—pound.

At his last words (picked up by microphones) each person fell down on his knees and bowed his head—but most eyes peeked to see the rest. Crews dimmed, then doused the floodlights—all was still.

They let him down and locked him in a room behind the grandstand for a mournful hour. Then Jove (the stadium's janitor) unlocked the door to get a broom—and let him out.

Darkness enabled him to cross the field and shinny up the cross, but now, instead of hanging by his nails, he stood with one foot on each side of the crossbar, arms raised.

They switched the floodlights on and aimed some searchlights deep into the spangled sky; the band broke into stirring patriotic tunes, and the crowd let forth a cheer of tortured joy.

The marching marchers marched back whence they came and everyone filed out, remarking how it was the best they'd ever seen or how they thought it might have been improved.

My Soul Is Something

My soul is something like a train,
switching, speeding, crawling, switching back.
It backs up sometimes to remind itself of forwardness.

My soul is something like a prism,
bending God's light in a billion-colored spectral show.
Choose your color and live with me in a rainbow.

My soul is something like a bucket,
collecting fluidities of thought,
holding the heavier, splashing out the light.

My soul is something like nothing,
appears invisible, absent, no-where,
but these thoughts form in its shadow, now-here.

God's Spirit Dwells

God's spirit dwells
in private hells
where broken dreams
cause curdling screams.

Our souls God lifts,
and of His gifts
the most obscure
cause cleanest cure.

We rant, we rave
for God to save,
but God saves all
who prostrate fall.

Away by Christ
our sins were sliced;
now His great reign
rids Death's domain.

Dear God, we pray
that all we say
and all we pen
be Thine. Amen.

To a Telephone Pole

You, sir, with triangular brace,
have more common sense than the whole human race.

Excuse Me, God

Excuse me, God,
I didn't see you there.
To my nearsighted eyes
you looked like air.

You cleared your throat
with jarring thunderbolt,
but I heard nothing deep,
just felt a jolt.

I built my house
with quite a clever plan,
but didn't see the sign
that said, "God's land."

I walked through woods
and thought the cool smell
was only natural,
from trees that fell.

I thought it quaint,
the orange western stain;
I thought it nice that clouds
wrung out their rain.

I saw the stars
through shallow telescope,
and saw eternity
as just a hope.

I meant no harm—
I had my glasses off;
so next time, if I'm near,
please cough.

I, Not It

“It makes me sad, or mad, or glad,”
says my friend Marge.
“This It is all in life I’ve had,
and It’s quite large.

“My It brings in my every mood
and guides my thoughts.
It even guides my choice of food,
makes shoulds and oughts.

“This It is pulling all of me
down toward the ground
with unrelenting gravity
as if I’m bound.”

Then one tells Marge to take the “t”
away from “It”—
that Christ expired on the “t”
to make us fit.

When all that’s left of “It” is “I,”
there’s no excuse
to blame an “It” or question why
you get abuse.

The “I” is God as much as you
and is pristine.
Your freedom all to God is due,
serene, unseen.

These Scales Tell Tales

These scales tell tales of gravity
against our mortal frames.
They weigh who choose to step on them
and have no use for names.

But let us weigh the scales themselves
against more subtle things.
Is heavier or lighter weight
the chief divide life brings?

Do souls have weight? Do angels fall?
Will goodness tip the scales
a little more than ill repute?
Just here gravity fails.

Hope and Love

As the earth spins into day and night,
so the human soul basks in light
and quivers in darkness.
And as the earth sometimes has foul weather,
the soul too has it hurricanes and rains.

Hope and love are, were, will be.
Hope is God's eternal nudge in our ribs.
Something is ahead
and, knowing not its shape,
we push toward it nonetheless.
Hope pulls us.

Love is everywhere, and always has been.
Love existed before we came to join it.
Love made us.
Love makes us make more of us.
Love is God's radiant comfort in our souls.
Love binds us.

With hope to pull and love to bind,
we need not fear.

When all is seemingly lost,
when it is nighttime in the soul,
when there is wind and rain,
there are yet two forces to sustain us.

Hope.
Love.

To Sister Marjorie

For this may God be praised:
our Christ was raised,
the temple is secure,
we shall endure.

The fellow with the tail
can make us fail,
can give us loneliness,
grief, shame, and stress.

There will be sobs and tears
and barren years
and prayers that won't take wing
and stares that sting.

The Father sees it all
and hears our call.
He sees our sorest needs,
our hunger feeds.

Since food and clothes are sure,
since love is pure,
since prayers are always heard,
trust in the Word.

Mary and the Moderns

Her name was Mary
and she was regional and regal,
and Gabriel whispered to her, beautifully—
swift Gabriel, God's holy messenger.

Reconvening Congressmen
besiege each other with
how are each other, fine.

And hearing the prophecy of Jesus,
she began to prepare her heart and mind
and immaculate body for holy duty.

Oklahoma will do, said one.
Where will the rest of you be?

Rounding her hips toward God
she was able to receive and conceive
in a glorious burst of almighty love
from above.

Catch any fish? Well, not
very many big ones. We just
missed the heavy season.

She murmured hymns thoughtfully
to herself during the growing
of all that was in her.

Around by the back fence—
you know how my yard's
laid out. Well, I dug up
a little patch there for
Myrna's flowers this spring.

She prayed calmly during the warm
weather in her country that bade noise
and fear to cease.

Truly, friends, the Lord shall
forgive you if in deepest awe and
reverence you approach his
holy throne and enter this house
of worship and give generously
of your possessions.

And by the time the welling was large
enough to attract innocuous attention

and friendly suspicion, she was in love
with her own womb and what it contained,
so that no calumny could burden her
conscience and no suspicion her calmness.

Found this little place
back off the highway where
the truckers all eat.
Really a sharp little place.

The sun shone upon her and the son
grew within her and she was with pun
without laughter with joy without pride.

Jenny will be a senior
next year if she ever gets
going on her algebra. You
know, she just cannot grasp
mathematics—it must be
her weak spot or something.

She bore an infinite rebel from her
own bone cage and sent him into the
torn world to mend and heal it
before it should devour itself
in greed and fear and sloth.

When speaking in public, one
should never consciously or
unconsciously alienate
the listeners, or one will not
succeed in communicating
one's message to them.

And respect for him was not there,
but since he was truly a vibrating
human with a divine mission,
he asserted and healed and
gently brought stones down
upon him which had been reserved for
such a rebel and agitator, and he
died with a brilliant aura about him
and without tears and with love.

It is my firm opinion
that our city government
cannot long survive without
an increase in the sales
tax percentage, and the time
to act is now, without delay.



About Alan Harris

When Alan Harris was born on Sunday, June 20, 1943, his father, Keith E. Harris, was piloting a B-17 in bombing missions over Europe while his mother (Margie) worried about Keith lovingly from Illinois.

Schooling in Earlville, Illinois (Alan's home town) was interesting, useful, and generally free of creativity (do what the teacher says, get the good grade). From 5th through 12th grades he played the trumpet in the school band and enjoyed the contest trips. His father drove a school bus as part of his living (farming was the other part), and if Alan happened to ride on his father's bus, he had to very much behave.

Illinois State University was where Alan became chagrined over how a student with a full class load could possibly keep up with all of the assignments given in said classes.

He felt he was a pawn in a game, but with judicious time-shuffling and corner-cutting he plowed along and made respectable grades amidst all the worries.

A bright spot at ISU was taking a contemporary American poetry class with Dr. Ferman Bishop. Through him Alan discovered depths in poetry that he had never dreamed of while in high school. E. E. Cummings took him for zingy flights of in-your-faceness. T. S. Eliot, whose symbols even had symbols, fully baffled him. Robert Frost was slyly charming. Emily Dickinson's mastery of rhyme and meter for conveying soul and spirit made the young poet's heart go funny. Alan started "being a poet" in his sophomore year (1962) at ISU. Poetry had been previously unneeded in his life but now was available to contain parts of his soul that he hadn't realized were there.

After graduating from ISU in 1966 there was the little matter of having to earn a living, which took the form of two years of high school English teaching, three years of tuning and repairing pianos, and (after a 1976 MS in Computer Science at Northern Illinois University) about 25 years of computer work (mainly programming, in-house computer teaching, and Web development—for Commonwealth Edison Company in Chicago).

During most of that vocational stint before retirement, Alan continued to write poems. Even with the whirl of commuting it was still possible to emote at home. He launched his current Web site (www.alharris.com) in 1995 with a few poems, and eventually has populated it with almost everything he has written. As a poet, essayist, story-writer, and photographer he has spurned the print publication route, having seen the excruciations gone through by other writers trying to make a big name and big money for themselves via magazine and book publishers. With the Web, there's instant publication, moneyless communication, and a worldwide potential audience. Of course, the literature has to stand on its own feet to get readers, but it's always there for those who seek it, or just happen in, or get sent in.

Alan met his wife Linda at ISU in 1962 and they were married in 1966. Linda has worked as a school speech therapist, insurance medical office worker, and medical transcriptionist, in addition to being a conscientious wife, mother, and grandmother. They have a son, Brian, who is a Tucson percussionist.

