

PANDEMICS

Witten 1993, but even more germane now!

**While Marge and Flo were drinking tea,
and school children were doing what school children do,
and folks were working or making love, it happened.
No time or date or place can be recorded, but simply put-
as quickly as you can say, "God bless you,"
the HIV virus mutated.**

**In the twinkling of a double helix
it learned to ride the waves of sneeze and cough.
The Center for Disease Control, the Army, the KGB quarantined,
then killed 30 million people, but in a few months-
everyone was HIV positive.**

**The media blamed the politicians.
The politicians blamed each other.
The TV evangelists blamed the gays.
Many blamed the CIA, the intercity poor,
the Jews, the scientists, God.
Some few learned to love themselves and others.
They blamed no one.
Some few learned to love themselves and others.**

My Desert

He made his words soar
like the rapture of courting eagles,
dance like the Western Grebe,
crash like the thunderclap of June's cumulonimbus,
and weep like the sad Indian
whose gods had failed to save his sacred lands.

Parentless like the one-celled algae or Harlow's monkeys,
his baby arms reached out to touch the nothingness.
He kissed and hugged the cactus flowers of his youth,
their nourishment so little, so infrequent
that like the desert tortoise with so little desert left,
his life was tunneled in the despair he called his home.

A child without a cradle, a boy without heroes,
a man without God- he witnessed the cycle of his life
unwind like the apartheid black or Indian shaman
whose faith was fractured like those once great boulders,
and now lay, a million separate grains,
awash toward the sea.

My Desert continued

With anger more impotent than the jumping cholla,
And despair more silent than the prickly pear,
He worded his way through a personal desert,
and here he lies like the once towering saguaro-
a skeleton whose flesh has joined the sky,
and joined the sea,
and joined the sand.

Soap Opera Sonnet

A frog jumped in my bathtub.
Two Lilly pads shown through-
like pyramids in soap suds,
like castles meant for you.

The frog climbed up a pyramid.
I felt the fond embrace,
then thought of dirty dishes-
my life's messed-up disgrace.

Water, bubbles, titillation-
almost asleep, and feeling groggy-
I pushed this vision of flirtation,
and smiled, and sighed, and mused on froggy.

Sir Froggy caught a damsel fly. Yes, I imagined so-
I'd fly away with charming prince, and leave the suds below.

LEAPS of FAITH

A flea, a frog, a flying fish
all faithful ones, had just this wish
to leap from sorry earth and sea
to another world more heavenly,
and each believed his leap more godly
than others who leaped more oddly-
so each one danced toward transcendence
leaping his leap of ascendance.
The flea leapt from floor to dog,
and froggy jumped from shore to bog,
and flying fish leapt oh so high-
a seagull caught him in the sky

What Should I Tell My Child?

A child watched a kingfisher catch a minnow.
Then, as it rose above the pond's reflection,
an eagle caught the kingfisher in its talons,
and carried it off to the sacred mountain-
or so the child imagined.

And the child told her parents,
“we are minnows swimming in the king's sea,
and the gods carry us off at their pleasure.”
“No”, said her mother, looking up from her weaving-
“We are the grasses, the warp and the woof.”

The father put down his bloody arrow and thought-
“What should I tell my child about the kingfisher,
about the spirits that dwell in the pond, the fish,
the eagle, and the grass.” He began to speak,
then noticed the child had fallen asleep in her mother's arms.