

# EAVESDROPPING IN PLATO'S CAFÉ

(Web-preview Version)

Jack Ramey

*Springwood*  
P R E S S

First Edition

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Change is my theme. You gods, whose power has  
wrought all transformations, aid the poet's thought,  
And make my song's unbroken sequence flow  
From earth's beginnings to the days we know.

— Ovid

# Contents

## *World-Soul*

Another Day in Paradise	3
The Spiral Destiny	6
* Vanity, All is Vanity	8
Earth Day	10
Glad Day	11
Mother's Day	12
A Wish	14
Meditation 9	15
All Creatures Great and Small	16
Ode to the Tao in Winter	18
* Resurrection and Ascension	20
One Easter Sunday	22
One More Time	23
The Light from their Eyes	24
Wind in Autumn	26
The Widowed Fields	27
Morning Snowfall Sutra	28

**\*These poems are in this web-preview version book.  
You can click or tap the title to jump to the poem.**

## *Ghost-Dance*

Nineteen Lines for the Czarina's Children	31
* Kali Yuga	32
Fragments from the Gone World	34
Ghost Road	48
Event Horizon	49
Crow Poem	50
Eavesdropping in Plato's Café	51
<i>Prologue as the Curtain Rises</i>	51
<i>Act I</i>	52
<i>Act II</i>	64
<i>The Discourse of the Ashtrays</i>	66
<i>Act III</i>	70

## *End-Games*

The Angel of Time	81
* To Age Slowly Without Pain	82
Two Hundred and Six Bones	84
Through a Glass Darkly	86
Memento Mori	88
Prisoner of Hope	89
* Song of Gog	90
The Psychic Torment of Dreams	96
Lines for the End of the Mayan Calendar	98
* Freedom Day	100
Gun	102
Fandango	103
Poem at the End of a Deadly Year	104
Gabriel's Horn	106
Desideratum	107

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# *World-Soul*



## *Vanity, All Is Vanity*

Sometimes

I want to be like Wang Wei  
or any other Chinese poet  
silent on a cold mountain top

looking down on corrupt  
civilization and the brutality  
of all species struggling to live  
out their days feeding on others.

Sometimes

I want to be like Bruce Wayne  
with a dark secret identity  
using my mind and pop-techno-toys  
to fight evil and crime.

But what is evil? And who  
decides what acts are crimes?  
The hive-mind? Or the unseen  
rulers of the world who have  
held us all in thrall for centuries?

Sometimes

I want to be like Jesus  
walking sandaled across the land  
healing the sick and raising the dead  
but then again I do not want to die hanging  
on a cross after flogging and torture  
and all your friends deserting you  
because they do not want to die like you.

Sometimes

I want to be like Orpheus or Saint Francis  
with birds landing all over my head  
and shoulders and fingers and arms  
all the dark gentle creatures  
of the forest come around to talk to me,

to walk with me as I tell them  
about the joys of poetry  
and meditation, the devotion  
of ecstasy and rapture – things that they  
actually already know in their furry  
feathered minds, and they then teach me

how to be in the world,  
simple and holy and pure,  
without wanting to be someone else.

## *Resurrection and Ascension*

*After reading the morning news*

Such properties as these do make me funk.  
I shall go outside and become one with ducks,  
  
who must for now remain invisible,  
even though they seem indivisible  
  
from my poor twisted psyche today  
in a world full of grand plans and final disarray.  
  
The drama and dharma of the purple iris  
petal, and the innocence of the wild daisy's kiss  
  
all attest to this: there is a power deep down things  
a leafy testament from grass to trunk to bird wings  
  
lighting on branch tips swinging in the breeze  
of spring's morning lifting light alike to ants and me  
  
and all of creation. A rare honey bee at my window  
becomes an ageless Blakean angel reborn in aura-glow  
  
of all seven colors of chakra's rainbow :  
her buzz a mantra hymn to what is holy now  
  
and always will remain so: the tidal flow  
of connected electrons that spin and show  
  
how vital and how sacral is the soul of earth  
the grand cycle of birth and life and death  
  
here on this plane of existence where we  
wrestle with sorrow and joy, doubt and belief.

Are we really here on this struggling planet or  
do we dream this brief butterfly dream for  
only a moment, mate then with the pleading  
cry of our mother; die, and rise up again, bleeding,  
whole and free? Will we discover a new creed,  
a covenant covered in green leaves that breed  
forth regeneration, resurgent song sprung from  
the great well of divine imagination spun from  
the words and mind of the holy multiverse that dives  
and swims through all planes of existence, thrives  
on the blood of the poet, the aura of angels, the high  
and low call of all thrumming, humming, trumpeting life  
seen in the heart of a flower, the vein of a leaf,  
the blood-filled arteries in lungs that breathe with the beat  
and pulse of the heart of the stars, fire of our godlike sun,  
our goddess moon that shine down their brilliant sum  
of enlightenment upon our heads, ready to wed, to meld  
with earth, with air, with water, with all things living, cold  
with all things dead, in the mold of clay we are shaped with  
in the crystalline air that is our stairway that we escape with :  
one at last with the encompassing matrix of existence.



# *Ghost-Dance*



## *Kali Yuga*

On cracked ancient krater  
painted red, men black-  
bearded wrestle,  
hoist spear and penis  
or recline in drapery  
drinking wine  
from shallow cups

restating thus this vessel's  
earthly purpose. Keats' purple  
bubbles winking at the brim  
and yes they are all  
fixed in, forever slim  
forever holding the same positions;

and yes the maidens always loath,  
the runner always wins,  
the wrestlers frozen along the rim,  
the satyrs always priapic.

But what does it prove?  
That art is eternal? Immutable?  
Essential? Death  
in the end does not conquer,  
does not shatter?

A silver helmet found  
at the bottom of a river,  
beside rusted sword blades,

dog and horse bones,  
human bones  
dung-flesh and blood ghosted away

centuries ago. A warrior,  
gore-hero buried here,  
strong-blood-and-death lover,  
ring-giver, sent to Odin  
with his weapons  
his torcs, his women,  
his slaves, his beasts

in a savage age  
not unlike our own :  
the age of Kali Yuga,  
the age we are trapped in  
like still figures  
on a painted vase.

And is this too Art?  
Is this the stuff  
mankind's dust is  
son and father to?  
Shards in time,  
slime breaking down  
to slime.



## *End-Games*



## *To Age Slowly Without Pain*

The insubstantial beauty of smoke  
lilting upwards from an unseen stack  
on a clear winter morning,

lifts the heart as briefly as it rises,  
and then fades away with the wind;  
attacks the senses with acute demand

as sharp as battle lances brandished  
centuries ago in long forgotten China,  
where the Confucian texts of war

first were caricatured on slim sticks  
of bamboo strung together with silk cords  
that crumbled in time, leaving only

confused and jumbled accounts, full  
of splintered wisdom about high ground,  
bloodless coups, and counter counterspies.

The insubstantial beauty of a sunrise  
as it clears the eastern horizon  
spreading fingers of golden light

through bare boughs, across frosted roof  
tops covering untold joys and sorrows :  
nightmares and waking dreams,

forgotten the moment light pales through the window,  
never to be recalled until the moment when death  
calls, and all forgotten dreams are remembered.

The insubstantial beauty of morning's river,  
placid and green, clear and clean, as though  
one could walk across its mirrored surface

to the other shore, where the night before  
gold and red lights slashed the tide like knives  
glittering out to the center, where dreamy boats

flow upstream pushed by the steamy breath  
of river spirits, and river gods, who watch us  
from the fourth dimension and shed frozen tears

over our ignorant sins, and our transient beauty.  
They watch as children wake from fitful sleep  
to see air-to-ground missiles explode all around them,

shattering roofs, and walls, and bodies, in their village  
sending mushroom clouds of golden fire spiraling upwards  
into the black mountain night, beautiful, beautiful

the sight of death who comes roaring down from above  
from million dollar flying machines flown by deadly angels,  
who are agents of the Dark Star disguised in Christ's apparel.

The insubstantial beauty of life as it morphs into death,  
that precise moment when the moth leaves the mouth  
and flies to we know not where, to some other dimension

where other frightened children sing one eternal note of dismay,  
where bands of white light hum in unison mantras of reckless joy,  
forever flying above golden rivers, glowing from endless sunrise.

## *Song of Gog*

*And when the thousand years are expired,  
Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,  
And shall go out and deceive the nations  
Which are in the four quarters of the earth,  
Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle:  
The number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*

*Revelations 20: 7-8*

Living in the Land of Gog  
we see but dimly  
as through scrim of fog.

So much is hidden  
from our privy  
view, daily we are bidden

to rise up and listen long  
to our leaders talk  
as they talk through strong

martial voices, intermediaries  
on screens chalked  
with pie charts and actuaries

whose heads bob and prophesy  
war, disaster, horror for  
a future we must prepare for by

making sacrifice, keeping ever  
vigilant eye out for terror  
planned by dark, silent neighbors,

spies of our enemies, the dogs  
who live in the Land of Magog  
and worship the false god.

Living in the Land of Gog  
we must bow to the One God  
who knows and sees all: Aygog.

Aygog the All Mighty, who chose  
to live among us as common sod  
who nightly burned like us and daily froze

and bled Himself for us so that we  
lowly might eat and drink of Him,  
suffer with Him to make ourselves free

of all that is earthly, all unclean  
unseemly habits, unprescribed behavior,  
all action not writ down from His dream :

the Great Dream of Aygog that screams  
out the awful name of the Savior  
while we are shaken awake, the teaming

multitudes down on their knees  
facing the West while the heathen choir  
of Magog bow down to the East

and we all chant as one our prayer,  
our plea for cleansing war and fire :  
for the legions to sweep down where

the forces of Magog gather  
and to drown them all in a sea of blood,  
a burning sea from the mouth of our Father.

Living in the Land of Gog, we  
are lucky to have thinking machines  
that do our cleaning, our fighting,

sweep clear the battlefields of bomb  
and enemy, sweep our homes clean  
from dirt, dust, and sin that come

from the skins of our children  
whose lives are fraught and lean  
who sweat through the thin

seconds of demand and duty  
we must perforce lay upon them  
to make them brave and worthy

to run the machines that drop  
death upon the heads of the dogs  
of Devil-worshipping Magog,

pilotless drones whose eyes  
are the fingertips of our offspring  
flipping the switch, clicking the keys

that drive our robotic justice over  
heathen terrain to do His will,  
for we are Aygog's servants forever

and forever will we bend the knee  
in duty, in obeisance, vow to kill  
all those who, in enmity, follow His enemy

and we greet each morning as the crow  
caws gladly his orison shrill,  
his prayer to Aygog cleansing his crow,

as the great vulture circles the sky  
gliding, ceaselessly watching,  
silent of cry, glittering red eye

wide open, dilated nostril breathing  
always alert to do Gog's bidding  
above the river of Gog, bequeathing

such quietus to morning's gray chill  
like a battlefield after the drones  
and droids have left it clean and still.

There is a river that flows wide  
and long through the Land of Gog,  
a river of blood whose high tide

washes up the bodies of those few  
who are unholy, unfaithful; traitors who  
have not washed themselves in the true

life's blood of He Who Bleeds For All  
He Whose Blood is a River:  
Aygog, the All-Knowing, vengeful

God of Gog who will destroy  
the False God of Magog  
like a child who steps on a toy.

And we are all so lucky  
living in the Land of Gog  
to be democratic and free

unlike the enemy infidel who dwell  
in sand beside no cleansing river  
whose red tides may dispel

the pall of the mortal curse  
by baptism in eternal water.  
We sit by these shores and rehearse

the final coming of the Lord  
Aygog unto this earth  
to free our souls by fiery sword

to raise us up after the final battle  
when our killing machines give birth  
to Death for our enemies, hot metal

spitting forth righteous grape-shot  
and two hundred rounds per second  
bi-cameral eye scanning parking lots

and blind alley ways; apartment  
hallways, office corridors beckon  
them forth to the final judgment,

the bloody reckoning foretold  
as it was etched on golden pages  
by the gray prophets of old

now in the land of shadow and fog,  
the land of shades where holy sages go  
after faithfully serving great Aygog :

our reward to see as through scrim  
or dark glass the visage grim  
of eternity glimpsed through a curtain.

## *Freedom Day*

*– Early morning thoughts on July 4th*

We hold these truths to be self-evident:  
all white men who own property are created equal –  
this of course excludes black people and Indian people  
and women and poor white whiskey tangos  
who have no pot to piss in.

Nonetheless, it is a beautiful morning this morning  
when all Americans are freed from work  
(except those who work at Walmart and MacDonald's  
and Burger King and Pizza Hut and Kroger  
and Safeway and Piggly Wiggly)  
freed to pursue barbeque picnics by the lake  
and drunken relatives  
and loud firework displays  
that proclaim with colored gunpowder our freedom.

Oh say can you see? Those rockets bursting over your villages  
for the past ten years in Iraq and Afghanistan,  
the cluster bombs and napalm exploding in jungles  
forty years ago in Vietnam, just look at the beautiful tracers  
shooting out from the sides of ironic helicopters  
bearing the name of those we have subdued –

Apache! Geronimo! shouted those paratroopers  
who leaped out of planes on D-Day  
two years or so before I was born  
into this land of freedom and gory.

The list of those we have invaded to protect our freedom  
is too long to tell: hello Philippine Islands, hello Nicaragua,  
Guatemala, Panama, Grenada, Cuba, Tunisia, Libya,  
Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia,  
Japan (and all the islands she laid claim to)  
Germany, Italy, Mexico, the Korean Peninsula,  
the Five Nations, the Creek Nations, the Cherokee Nation,  
the Chickasaw Nation, the Shawnee Nation, the Sioux Nations,  
the Comanche Nations, the Yuma, the Pomo, the Ute,  
the Cheyenne, Blackfoot, Crow, the Mandan, the Sauk and Fox,  
the Navajo, the Hopi, Apache, Pueblo, all those half naked  
starving savages we small-poxed and grape-shot out of existence  
and gave the remaining few their freedom on reservations  
in Oklahoma where the wind comes whippin' cross the plains,  
freedom to be Americans just like you and me.



*Eavesdropping in Plato's Café* is a collection of lyrical, elegiac, and dramatic poems that are at once philosophical and personal, encompassing the broad sweep of history from ancient Greece to post-millennial America. The title poem and others in the collection touch on the intellectual and aesthetic history of the West, while others trace a highly personal spiritual evolution incorporating both eastern and western spiritual thought. The poems, both the long ones and the shorter lyrics, are filtered through an understanding that we as human beings are all temporal creatures striving toward some understanding of why we are here and where we are going. They speak through a highly charged musical idiom that touches the intellect as well as the heart.

*Jack Ramey*