



zen words

by Stuart Emlin

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

Sharp Blue / Breath (1985)
edge of water (1989)
the kingfisher's testimonial (1992)
Case Notes Poems (1995)
foundlings (1995)
Blue's Song of the Earth (1996)
angels under the carpet (1997)
Umbrian Images (1997)
Brother Spirit Brother Soul (1998)
sounds, sights, smells, soft, sweet (1998)
the kingfisher's bequest (2001)
the sea poems (forthcoming 2003)
the alice conversations (forthcoming 2003)

FICTION

the butterfly principle (forthcoming 2003)

NON FICTION

Working with Archetypes (2003)
Coming through Change (forthcoming 2004)

Zen words

A collection of poems by

Stuart Eglín

blue*water* books

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Website at: <http://www.stuarteglin.com>

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the camera never lies



1 - Monday a.m.

Because the sky was orange, lilac and pink
early morning held some promise
then tiresome drive to work
began again, like all others
huge outcrops of hillsides slide by

then the radio reports of earthquakes
and the west doesn't care
forty deaths isn't a big enough number

in the car park
and hesitating now, from the routine
it's all too easy
breaking the pattern is hard
sometime come newness, come the search
the depth
the roots that need pulling

manufactured as a flag pole
holding forth the feelings
if only

no, this is hidden, all screeching
screened off behind pleasant valley
beyond the care and gratitude
of another week.

11 - Monday p.m.

darkness now
slight flashes of car head lights
as they pass the office window

my head is filled with emptiness and silence
waiting for the energy to rise
to head for home

when the nights fall in so easily
the rush for home calls to
and I join the queues of people

one per car
all in lines
each one waiting

for what?

music, words and all
radio, tapes and phones
to distract

hold back the thinking
until the escape
can take effect.

III - Tuesday a.m.

the face now staring
has blue eyes
and lines that show life well lived

is this the face
that will take me to my purpose
or just some other fool's errand?

when the seasons ease
and spring unfolds
the dark moods of winter will pass

until then I am left
holding onto whatever can pass
as a moment of hope

in spite of the solace of darkness.

IV - Tuesday p.m.

glint
since the last time I looked
since the first time I watched
since there is more to life than
since

once the red cloaked regal
then the wind as it surges, then dies

finished now
whatever you say
wherever you go
whoever you may mean

nights fall in so easily now
there is only rainfall to stop
then all will be still as a moment

the sun's light rays will pierce
gently
since I look more carefully
at the
glint.

V - Wednesday

people
are as unavoidable
as the cracks in the pavement

having spent all day
in permanent exchange, the need
for just a little silence

is an unplumbable depth

then
all evening passes with distractions
each one designed to avoid the facing

up to
the settling down
with no-one to talk to

just my own thoughts

naked
stark
and yet

an appearance
not so overwhelming
after all.

VI - Thursday

the universe began thirteen and a half
billion years ago

and the earth will be swallowed up
by the sun
in five point seven billion years time

so we'd better hurry up then
so much time with
so little to achieve

what would you do with five thousand
seven hundred million years flying by
you'd blink and civilisations would flit past
you'd yawn and the temperature would rise

then
near the end
the sun a dull disk covering the sky
you'd review your stellar life
and just want to know what it all means

no random reply
no wondering how
just stare at the sky
and wonder about other universes
and other realities
if possible.

zen words



zen one

word flows
are the expression of poetry
an unwritten tradition carried forwards in time
through our hearts

each gentle tug
will be another flow of language
another message carried through
for the easing lull and fall

it's more than form
or structure

it's because the agonies and ecstasies
mean more than any whistle or pipe
lifting, liting on the wind, catching moods.

you see, I've been writing words to you
down all these mystified years
looking for meaning wherever it hides
within, without
in a whisper or a shout

hunter
seeing language as the music that will find
the seeking for the answers
to the questions I have yet to think

please
remember that every moment in your gaze
is a sheer second of mystified secret

until the glare of memory
brings back the familiar

but just for that second in between
we are left wondering whether the purpose
coupled with the remonstrations
will leave only empty sounds from voices echoing
without meaning

and only then
we will realise that the depth of meaning
is no meaning at all
the answer within is without
and the filling of the void is endless
until we realise that emptiness is the goal.

zen two - first variation

expression
the unwritten tradition
hearts open to anything
that bounds in

language will tug then tuck
messages carried through the intricate connections
that bind us all, one to the other
hated and loved

the structures of agony
the ecstasies that give life
the winding moods that catch
all meaning

mystified words that hide
the whisper becomes shout
hunter finds answers
questions as such music

every moment of gaze
seconds that become sheer memory
back to the familiar
forward to the strange

the seconds in between
purpose of empty sounds
voices without meaning
filling voids of emptiness in goals.

zen three – second theme

when flower unfurls
then the true meaning of light can reveal itself

when my thoughts flow out
then the blocks can be pushed down

as I hover in air, snapping scenery
like a frenetic instamatic
then look back later
remember detail whether it was there or not
the sun, less the cloud, less the rain

hearing tugs at the pieces of sound that fall upon my head
because it is only when they are shuffled into a co-ordinate
that I can truly understand what they communicate

then, as the light sparkles and crackles as a bonfire
I can see through each moment of reality
as my breath slows down and quietens, I can hear it
listening carefully to each crest and trough

I find the essence of true care
the wisps of steam that rise, then disperse
the sense that we are all connected
all part of the same
in pain as well as laughter

for the smiling spirit is attached to the dour soul
and the message between the two is the balance,
the secret that we harbour

a dare that we keep
a shadow that we can see.

zen four - second variation

hearts flow in great traditions
messages carried like secrets that we keep

meaning is whispered by the hunter
who lulls the agonies into a question

waits for an answer, hears nothing
then lets the structure go

empty sounds endless
familiar yet not known

without meaning, the voices that we hear
fill the void that is the goal

words flow unwritten
traditions, expressions.

zen five - concrete colour

red is as real
as the lavender bush that stanches the garden

blue is as felt
as a sad night alone

the heron's lumbering flight across ladybower reservoir
remains a sight long after it has gone

and pine trees falling in the woods
keep sounds lingering long after they are at rest

the inner reality makes the outer
and the strength of will makes the mood we feel

and all in between is a shard of sunlight
that I put in my pocket for later

it's the knowing that makes the difference
even though we know less as we learn more

for green is as living
as the infinite shades that we see around

and yellow is as light
as the moods that I swing to

the strength to see,
the power that will fall.

zen six – listen to colours

“knock on the sky
and listen to the sound”

the sound will resonate until the clouds have shaken out
then there will be a strange feeling deep in the pit of the stomach
for that is what was meant

eating a piece of raw red chilli
until the tears in the eyes are real

trickle down the morning like a special moment
watch the hawk hover in the sky, body motionless
wing going like the devil, as a contrast

how to listen to the colours all around
and see a melody as a painting that appeared

how to sit at the top of a mountain and believe
that you are at the bottom all at once
watching grass blades shake in the wind

each instance of nature another thing that we look for
all these epiphanies, so many missed.

zen seven - colour variation

the sound of clouds being squashed
drying like raw chilli peppers hung by a thread
tears in the eyes are a strange feeling
in the trickle-down morning of light

wings that listen to the colours
melody of the hawk, body like the devil
a painting that appeared, sat at the top
where glass blades shake themselves alive

light changes as it blends and senses
at the bottom of every speck or strand
fragments of uniqueness now
each cloud a changing chaos

all these epiphanies of nature
all these colours in a melody
all the light that weaves together
all the sensations that we speak

and a knock on the sky, no reply
only the deep pit of the stomach.

zen eight - second theme first variation

wisps of steam
disperse

the pain of laughter
spirit smiling

the balance of a secret
then a dare
hiding in the shadow
the gleam of teeth

special spaces in between
the wonder

the tug of sound
a bonfire

frenetic scenery crowds my thoughts
no peace
the detail smudges and stains
in the meaning of light

then thoughts flow out
a sound become a shout.

zen nine - war famine and drought

a boy standing by a garden wall
facing it, very close
repeating the same words over and over

"I'm sorry that I broke it.
I'm sorry that I broke it.
I'm sorry that I broke it."

no-one hears his words

empty sounds are endless
words flow unwritten
gestures fall away

"I'm sorry that I broke it."

the boy stands by the wall
a thousand years pass
through wars, famine and drought

"I'm sorry that I broke it."

no-one hears his words

until a woman walks towards him
fills the void that is the goal
then gestures fall away

words flow as traditions of expression
their hearts a gentle tug
the agonies and the ecstasies

more form than structure.

zen ten - coda

remembering

a place
rain come in swarthes
estuary
hills barely visible as spits of orange lights
then
stillness with darkness
a holding of the breath
before
the slip into night

tense now
why can't the voice extend?
say the innocent?
repeat the desperate?
say what was meant?

willing the thoughts to rise
lift with lightness
settle
as the tide flows to and fro
as often as at will
rain now let go
this place.

forgetting

The best times
are the quiet times
or the sigh at times like these

half light
half rain
nothing quite entire

or the rambling ease
of the speck in time
that forgets

all the worries
all the cares
just now.

silence of emptiness



just remember

Just remember
that the lapping of the waves on the shores of life
makes enough noise for the ears to hear
the endings which are found in the embers.

The lacking of the wonderment which falls to us all
is something which we expect
like the rainfall on the window pane
at the end of the day.

And each time we look into the firmament
we see the spinning and giddy signs
that we have come to expect like the music
which brings us right back to a place from years ago.

Just one phrase of music is enough
to reach back to that moment
bring recall of the exact sensual moments of association
like childhood brought back to life sometime when.

- 23rd November 2000.

Language is reality

Words coming fitfully like they know the way
And have been here before

There's something different about this journey though

The last time I looked
You had a tear on your face
Now it is gone
I'm left holding wisdom in my hands

Waiting for the smiling face
To capture all the meanings which we trace

Like a melody turning into something sweet
Before the descent into agony, into grime and grief

There's a memory that's plain

Take the face, take the gain

We've tried this before
And each time the words are left out
Because they construct no sense.

Words - the basis on which we put together all existence
Language just is reality.

- 2nd March 2001.

hollow moments we recall

The time spent in between is nothing to the splitting of hours
which you gave since we waited

The moments in your memory are the ones which I engraved
before the sun was set completed

Inside each memory was a flower that grew out of the seeds
when there was nothing to be unopened

New forms capture everything in my notebook like the painting on the wall
by Bonnard, where she stands on the balcony waiting

Each moment gone as far as the moment before echoes down streets
along alleyways and into the back windows, where the children lay

Every time we wait here, we find something beyond the first signs
outside, where the last specks of dust turn into speeches

And, so we wondered that the sense of splendour was so sour
hollow moments we recall, like a victorious soldier returned from war.

playing with words

trying to find the state of mind
where the marvellous words flow forth
from the conscious state
capturing something down below

the special memories of my ageing mind
where the harmony merges with the melody
and your method wants to be
something which it's not

there are words to be found
it's just a case of digging
searching out the feelings that prevail
finding the message in the speeches

the things that need to be said
the tiger wanting to be unleashed
the middle c waiting for the chord that binds
inside the notes that twist

for there we will find
(who is we, who am I)
what we seek, like the flowing of the words that take too much
of a line, ha ha.

I wait

I wait
There is nothing

I wait
There is nothing

I wait
And then the sounds that I was seeking
Come through

The grass now cooling from the sun, darkness come

I wait
Because the muse has gone
The cause has flown

I wait
There is nothing

I wait
For something

Nothing comes

steps and stops

steps that stop
the heart from lifting
stops that step
like souls are shifting

i sit up on the grassy bank
each flick of the wood pigeon's wing
calling me back, winding me on
like the memories i held when i
wandered and wondered.

in my memory now
the spirits of those who have left me
may be walking beside me
but their face is all but gone
i cannot hear their voices

speckles of light remind
leaves rustle like so many pieces of paper
splendid now in this cardboard fortress
this place where i come to sit

one year it all burned down
but now the spring's energies have
made new growth surge to an untidy overgrowth
so much of life for me to remember
so much of death.

- Monday, 28th May 2001.

insomnia and the aftermath

friday 5.0 a.m.
when we knew that the best we could find
would be the fitful spells of the last shower of rain
replying like some explicit feelings you have in mind

Friday 6.0 a.m.
and the last thing you have in mind
is the deepest thoughts reconciled like some number counter
ticking away at the feelings on an adding machine

- late afternoon
that's the best we can do now
putting the beast to work, to hold onto the skin deep meanings
unwrapping you like the skins of an onion.

Accidental

speckles of light remind
like the collision underground
through this tunnel
and then
car bumper strikes
motorcycle
rider

shifts from adult in control
to puppet springing into the air
then
slumps over bike
holding chest
image turning back into real people
real pain
real.

- Thursday, 31st May 2001.

letting go - then gripping

rushing rapidly down snow-clad slopes
like a snow ball growing and gaining pace

the feelings which come with this
are flowing down so fast
the glacier which cannot be stopped

and not heat, no, colder than can be imagined
spaced out like standing stones
looking as though they were there when the earth first formed

a canopy of sensations
something which captures it all
as though time has come to a stop

then rushing back, up the hill clad with snow
shrinking back down from hatred to hurting.

- Thursday, 31st May 2001.

the longest day

format and frequency
flying in the face of safety
in case it becomes something that
i just let go of

the words have no reply
when my insides are closed down
inward and onward to the edge of
the box that holds it all

leaves thicken on trees
the longest day heavy now with cloud
light will stay with us here well
into the later hours

warm repose we close
i know that this will not reply
show why there is something to show
for the bitterest of sighs

when the baby goes
out with the bath water in with
the short fuse that fizzes and phuts
until it sparks

starts to stutter
like the owner knows where
it's going in spite of some real
sense of spectacle

receptacle that's steel
that's a meal we feel.

- Thursday, 21st June 2001

Alice searching

Whatever pours out.
The secrets are hidden well, she said.
For she knew that the standard
myths of which we spoke
were buried deep inside the soul.

She hesitated before acting,
and then set out along the pathway that
leads between the two mountains.
There was something which she needed to find,
something which she would not recognise until she saw it.

Speak forth now,
for the soul has opened
and waits for the words
to give guidance.
And the waiting
continued.

As she walked she heard the running of water, a tiny stream half-buried
beneath the overgrown banks, awash with wild flowers and nettles.
Birds made loud calls in a way that left her
unable to find a moment of silence within
the banks of air through which she passed.

The animal-less landscape
was strangely familiar,
and yet here she was for the first time,
unable to distinguish between one route and another.

Which way to go, which way to turn?
The sky was covered in a thin coating of clouds,
so that it was not possible
to work out anything from the sun in the sky.
Still, she did not know which direction she was walking in.

out of the clouds

out of the clouds
from the heights
spinning tirelessly, as though I've lost my head
wondering when these images -
violent and bloody -
will subside

the plastic-coated rain drops
have caused some sort of
relapse
an explosion in the night
leaving me waiting

for the words to come through me
speaking directly to me
before they speak to you
and anger
becomes a word for the unspeakable

like some bastard dog
unknown to those you've rated
unspoken now, the language of discontent
replenishing all the knotted signs
inside your stomach

whose chance is it now?
whose side are you on?
when will the talking end
and the silence return?

when will it all
become just a bit of nothing.

- Friday, 8th February 2002

demon light

Light passed by dead but orange light,
The haunting of moments in the memory of chimes

You were waiting by the sea-wall
I was wondering when the time would come

We melt together, you and I
Just separate options of the same self, separate opinions

On one side, the sure clasp of future
On the other, the desperate clinging to past

Then, when there is an emptiness inside
A gnawing away that leaves a void

That is the time when we will hold onto
Passing moments as they glide

It is a long time since we held it together
Past and future melding like compatible ingredients

Feeling the spray from the water as it catches the back of our throat
Thrown up by another strong wind that unsettles

It's the thought of you, the very deep and shattered thought of you
That I will always hold onto

Not this slight moment, but the endless times when there is no noise
Just the specious after-effect of another looking inwards.

- Wednesday, 24th April 2002

a definition for cash

so, what is the real meaning of money
how can we know?

It's more than just a nagging question
There's the feeling that we have when holding it
The feeling that we have when letting it go
All showing the underlying meaning of money in our lives

What does it do?
Is it something we can understand, or is it a meaningless symbol
Looking for something to give it context and purpose?

All I do know
Is that the sparkle of it is enough
To distract the thoughts of us all
And the way in which it leads to the feeding of the emptiness
That can never be filled
Gives it value beyond its worth.

- Wednesday, 24th April 2002

light goes through curves

it's the way the sky curves on hot sunny days
or maybe it's just the way I drink
when I'm thinking about these things

it's the talking through me
that comes when judgement
is left suspended in the air by a trace of hair

the sheer over-awing disgrace with which everything is reshaped

- Wednesday, 24th April 2002

The silence of emptiness

“Life never goes forward, except at the point where it has come to a standstill”
- Carl Jung

I

The trees are bending now
under the tension of the winds that blow
there is a simmering focal point that stops
then turns about on itself

at this point then
I can see the island across the gullies of water
and the rain that splashes my face

this is the moment
where the meaning of nothing comes through
the whole oblivion of no reply

then the shadows deepen
my heart beats sluggishly in the fading light
and the emptiness of it all
becomes as clear as laughter on the wind.

II

blisters
sand and seaweed
crashes
space filled with need.

the pilot
wanders lonely and lost
the captor is held
sea fills the void.

the space between
is more important
than the notes
that make the tune.

flip back on itself
a crash
fish dead on the surface
a whisper.

III

Don't just remember me
Don't just cling to me

Take care when handling
Take a share of the proceeds

Make the best you can
Make it through the wildness

Don't take, just make
Don't make me take.

IV

The large figure of a man
was lying prostrate on the ground
arms stretched out beside him
not dead, breathing through the sanctity

the chapel was so silent
that the lack of noise was ringing in the ears
the space within filled with a clawing air of
complete and utter void

it caught my breath
threw it to the back of my throat
left me gasping
I came back out – fast

outside, the presence was still there
yes, but not as strong
emptiness makes room for soul and spirit
even as the sun burns the back of my neck

the way the presence of mindfulness
over centuries making its mark in this place
can leave a huge scarring identity
without physical mass, but present still

the silence of emptiness causes absence to
become presence, become essence
become all that we seek in the long dark night
then find, with the terror of wonder, of light.

bluewater books

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a collection of poems which explore language, landscape and the self, each poem captures the indefinable and attempts to distil it in words. These poems create vivid moments, with their use of language.

In the first section, 'the camera never lies', observations as a week passes provide the backdrop to a landscape. In the second section, 'zen words', explorations of living in the present moment are developed, using variations and improvisation techniques derived from music. In the final section, 'silence of emptiness', the combined experiences of silence and sound are the context for a set of poems.

stuart eglin - zen words

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