

Poetry Series

Ralph Vaughan
- poems -

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Ralph Vaughan(September 16th)

Writer, poet, artist, historian, political commentator, editor, book collector, freedom fighter.

Beltway Darkness

Beltway darkness erupts tsunami
Flooding ruined marble buildings,
Blood-dimmed tide swelling,
Corruption waist deep in Congress halls,
Clotted waters brimming;
Jackals howl atop walnut desks
While drowning hyenas laugh.
The Emperor has his lunch.

Ralph Vaughan

Blackout: 8 September 2011

The Doctor escapes the Space Rhino Cops,
But then the sucking octogenarian plasmavore –
Here the grid cracks and fractures,
Spindled folded and mutilated
Without so much as a warning flicker,
Zapped afar, under a watery sun
And a too-bright turquoise sky:
Chaos!
Pandemonium!
Massteria!
Panic in the streets!
Someone yells: "Zoot suit riot! "
It was me; I could not help myself.
But people are running back indoors,
Satisfied, more or less, it's not the Rapture;
Still – no television, no radio, no (OMG!) internet...
End of the world maybe,
But my date-planner is already marked 12/21/12:
How inconvenient!
Relax, you are not dying, the battery voices tell us;
But when purple twilight fades into indigo night,
How dark are the streets,
How quiet are the houses,
How deep the darkness as we are swallowed by a tsunami of silence;
And inside a candle flickers,
And the dogs rest, their eyes bright,
Their breaths even as they listen
To the Alpha read Byron and Yeats and Tennyson,
Just as humans used to tell them stories
Around the smoky campfires,
The primal fires where magic was worked
And spirits lingered in passing to hear the tales;
When we made our final journey into the night
The silent tombs of the apartment-dwellers rose above us,
Framing a cloudless sky,
And we thought - the stars, how cold, how bright,
We did not know they yet burned in the primeval night.

City Of Wonder

In vast microscopic lands without number,
Digital clouds scud through pixel skies, unseen
Except by electronic multitudes who wander
Flickering stone roads, exalting unknown king or queen
In robe and bunny slippers before mesmerizing quicksilver screen,
Petty tyrant, or aspiring godling counting silver, cursing gold all too lean,
Hoarding points of experience to attain higher levels of being.

They train or trade, these citizens of morphing towns; sometimes fight
With bow or spear, or cast magic spells, or nuclear bombs in a virtual world,
At behest of irresistible calls, not so unlike the kind that came to Paul at midnight
On the road to Damascus, a summons that changed a misspent life which swirled
Around hate, to one never imagined, to usefulness and purpose like a banner
unfurled
To flutter in winds wrought not by twins in boreal realms but occult binary hurled
From arcane processors forged in a valley of silicon, a chambered nautilus curled.

They might be giants, these pixilated people following chartered leys,
Bereft of angel or demon, needing naught but what they find in the maze
Constructed at the whims of carbon-based users who at screens gaze,
Both happy without a history, nor shining future, but days of endless plays
Where interlaced hours are never without a quiet thrill,
Where every city is the city on the hill.

Ralph Vaughan

Fast & Furious Fail

Glittering skeletons, bone-men with fireball eyes,
Slip from out the shadows, dark capes obscuring famous faces
That would be instantly recognized under flickering blue skies,
Lightning-lashed heavens as Quetzalcoatl thrashes
Fearful of an eagle claw that slashes to the bone;
So he watches the bone-men, brown death-boys
Return with their deadly chrome-and-licorice toys
And celebrate with poisoned tequila,
Even swallowing the deadly worm
Before beginning their harvest of souls.
And the Emperor dines.

Ralph Vaughan

Green Sun Rising

Green sun rises over pyramid's electrum cap
Eclipsing stars scintillating in lightning-laced skies;
Papyrus reeds wave, twilight goddess sighs
A thousand-thousand tropical breaths
From unremembered alien climes;
The royal barge golden cuts violet waters that lap
Up a black rich shore, deep black silty earth;
Falling glyphs glow numinous silver, crackling white,
Soaring stones murmuring of Pharaoh's might
Sunsetting into a coalsack night; but, still, light;
The crocodile-headed woman screams giving birth
In the chamber, the chamber of stars and secrets;
Isis sits stiffbacked on a slow train to Lebanon
Seeking dismembered members and his cedar chest;
Black Egypt people,
Red Egypt blood,
White Egypt of sheening limestone reflecting
Infinite images of a staring tealish eye
Turning inward, the centre will hold, there blistering cold
Down in the awful darkness
Down in the whispering solitude
Down where Osiris holds court, chambers deep
Underwater, where even gods cannot weep.

Ralph Vaughan

Last Hydrofoil From Atlantis

The god of blue grottoes, with beard of foam,
Breaker of horses and keeper of secrets,
Gazes wildly across the rippling deep;
His eyebrows are the dolphins that leap
From the shuddering steaming waters that keep
Rising, as have been inundating with such persistence
That would make even the stubbornest god weep
Salty tears, hot molten rivers driven by such fears
As merely mortal men can never comprehend;
He doesn't stand a chance, not really,
This old god who rose to such lofty prominence,
Who with bloody brothers resorted to patricide
To rid themselves of the gnarled, gaunt and ghastly
Monster of the primordial sky, rather than wait for him to die;
Now, the maritime fiend who took his place can only sigh
As the waters inexorably rise, pulled down by dead men,
All the sailors drowned merely to amuse a bored god,
Men colour-leached and adorned with seaweed,
Who found strength in numbers good when pit against a god; odd
That it hadn't dawned on them sooner, to pull this island down,
To bring an end to terror, at least terror not of their own making;
The god and his concentric lands go down at last,
Lost in the blue, consumed by the tenacious goo, leaving no clue
Even to fleeing survivors seeking another sacred grove,
Who little know that all the gods are falling everywhere;
They know not yet the gods are having nightmares,
That it is an era passing and not burnt offerings tinting the air.

Ralph Vaughan

Midnight In Byzantium

Blood falls, a light summer rain,
A hot summer rain at midnight
That sends sexless faceless forms
Scurrying to arabesque doorways
Traced with quicksilver fire,
Interrupting a night of sighs and thighs,
Silencing all the very sincere lies
Whispered in the cold blue aftermath;
Down the jackal-haunted cobbled alleys
Sweeps the burning rain, the crimson pain,
Always the monarch's bane that prevents any eternal gain
Of progress, of certitude, of true advancement of the human spirit,
The soul which by rights should burn diamond bright
In the endless awful maddening terrifying night
Which but glimmers feebly, a dying ember too weak
To even wrought a passing shade upon the unraveling tapestry;
Constantine and Attaturk walk the winding gossamer streets,
Saddened spectres with bowed heads, chin to chest,
Bowed with woe that their sacred dreams depended,
In the end, the final accounting, the totting of souls,
Upon folk whose minds were haunted by lust and fear,
By brains that grew more torpid when death drew near,
And whispered in their nautilus ears they were only men,
And men dying slowly at that, crumbling even as they walked;
The pale shades stand at the quay, watch as the terror ships slip lines,
Set off into the blood-dark sea, cleave through floating bodies;
Where once trim craft smacked the waves weighted with wares and the Word,
Now ply dread vessels with cargos of death and hate;
The two sad shades now turn from the terror-laden fleet,
And vanish into the city of dreams lost to the nightmares of others.

Ralph Vaughan

Monsters Amongst Us

The skull is small, precious, fragile;
It is delicate as a raven's egg
Fallen from a nest of encircled thorns,
Now half-buried in the loamy swamp,
Far from the haunts of Man...
But in view of where in life she ran;
One hollow eye peeps playfully through the leaves and rising mist,
Slyly, coyly watchful for a mother's skulking return;
A daughter's toothy grin is now calcium grinning toothily,
But only to heaven's eyes,
For angels cannot turn away.
Cannot escape the Earth's myriad horrors,
Cannot turn deaf ears to whimpers in the night
Cannot claim the ignorance that is Man's nature;
How they yearn for hearts of stone!
Basalt clouds vent angry scalding rain,
Flaming tears freighted with karmic ire,
Avenging angels can only rattle and scream,
Just another storm from out the much vexed Atlantic,
With fiery swords slashing, but never making any gain,
No march toward Truth, sacred or profane,
Certainly no victory pyre,
No absolution.
No consummated vengeance,
No justice all around,
No grinning girl with cotton candy dreams;
And, worse of all, not even the Mark of the Beast upon the beast
Who walks away smirking,
And drinks sparkling champagne.

Ralph Vaughan

Neon Nights In Pallywood

Shamozzle, get yourself out of Egypt,
Quit the curling neon avenues of Cairo Town;
Leave Mahmoud weeping at the blaze gay café
Swilling that sugar-laced spoon-breaking coffee
That keeps Egyptians arguing as Nephthys arcs above limp minarets;
Run your Ford up great black way, across the howling wastes,
To that shimmering twinkle-sprinkled glitzy Gaza;
Lights!
Raise the set!
Camera!
Cue the music!
Action!
O the poor little fellows, see how they run;
Smoke! Fire!
Throw the babies now.
Cut! Pick up the plastic tykes and thrown them like you mean it.
Bring in the Bad Hats!
Abdul, Anwar, Mo, Ham and Ed – starred t-shirts for all.
For Allah's sake try and look mean while the cameras are rolling.
Bullets spray from plastic Uzis (make the sounds, you camel sons!)
And now the Palleys, thrown your pebbles.
Blood packs exploding,
Fake guts falling;
Writhe like you got a purpose!
Cut! Print! Take five!
Babies and Uzis back to Props,
All clothes back to Wardrobe,
Next time everyone reverse roles.
Gotta get the film edited – MSNBC, Al Jazeera and CNN await;
Shamozzle, give us the money we need
And get yourself back to Egypt
And give Mahmoud a little kiss for us, darling.

Ralph Vaughan

Rivertown At Midnight

Dusk settles upon a serpentine river,
Layers of musky gauze,
Mist rising, flowing down rivertown's narrow streets,
A roiling sighing river itself;
Tiny hands rise from the drifting haze,
Tapping faintly, rapping gently
At diamond-paned windows,
Calling a soft siren call to sleepers,
But only dreamers answer,
And, of them, but a special few are fully roused;
Velvet midnight gives slow way to a copper day,
The mist retreats before the searching ray,
To the rum-haunted riverfront where vessels sway
In gentle tides that yearn to join the sea;
The rivertown awakens by slow degree,
Sensing something of strange portent has passed near
Yet never quite knowing they have lost something dear.

Ralph Vaughan

Seven Days In November

The day of anointing looms as a disc of bronze;
Smoke rises from myriad cities,
Habitations of jackals and fine young cannibals
Who smote the midas merchants at leaping pyres,
Pierce them with envenomed quires
And dine upon their fatty flesh;
The streets of the republic's heart,
Are now rivers of lava blood,
Scoriac floods that take the weak and timid
To the yawning bog that devours as it digests not;
And the Emperor laughs upon the eternal throne secured.

Ralph Vaughan

The Canal

The canal is thronged with party barges
Fairy lit for the season
Laced with laughter
Floating in the deepest night
Beneath stranger stars
Alien constellations themselves

Ralph Vaughan

The Gods Of Mars

Darkling mountains
Rising misty and time-stained,
Touched by the change-winds
Sweeping through the old places,
Where the red gods slumber and remember:
 They dream of crystal cities by sparkling blue canals,
 Where now is naught but dancing dust.

Ralph Vaughan

The Stars Fall On Yemen

The djinns are restless in their sandy beds
And fitful in their blue-lit mountain grottoes;
But the always-insomniac urban djinns,
Swilling too-strong coffee and smoking black russian cigarettes,
Are the first to hear the falling stars hit the cobbled roads
And pale sandstone towers of ancient cities
Dreaming they are in the twenty-first century;
How the djinns tremble, how they yearn for the old pagan way,
The simple carefree god- and demon-filled paradisiacal day
Before the mad and murderous prophet began to bay
About a fanged and blood-lusting god, submit and slay;
Or even had they been adopted by the god of the mount,
For even to the supernal beings who throve before the rising of the sun
Surely he would yet be gentle, ever the good shepherd,
Making them the least of the angels, or the most minor of demons;
There would then be no yankee lunatic in the hills
Shouting for death and murder and endless warfare,
No new mexican crazed killer whose electronic voice shrills
For eagle's blood, for the blood of lambs from his mountain lair;
And then a sleepy peace might settle on the slow southern sands,
With no need for iron behemoths to ply the arabian sea
And send shooting stars that fall upon yemeni lands,
Disturbing sleeping djinns who dream the dreams found in opiate tea.

Ralph Vaughan

The Terrible Solitude Of The Cross

Burnished sky, gleaming; a flaming
Bronze shield battered by relentless foes,
Yet shining still, polished by bloodied hands;
A swollen copper sun reflects and stains,
Coruscating corona licking a city of domes.
Below, a narrow street is choked and choking,
Thronged with polyglot multitudes
With neon backpacks and bindles on gnarled staffs;
Darkness clashes with the bludlicht,
Wafts the dust and ashes swirling;
Soldiers stand at appointed stations,
Grim and gaunt, silent and grey-eyed,
With pale spears, tips gleaming and dark,
With scarlet cloaks undulating, a sanguinary tide;
Measured claps of thunder bring shudders,
Sparks flying as iron hammer strikes iron nails;
A woman with dying eyes screams into silence,
Bloodless hands clasped to horror-gaped mouth;
Slaves pull on hempish ropes, calloused
Hands bleeding, three trees rising
Atop a grinning, staring hill
Ringed by bronze men with bowed heads.
A darkness at noontide, the earth moves, the curtain rips;
Then we saw a man broken on a cross,
Alone and faceless, bleeding probably;
And then we moved on,
Looking for another party.

Ralph Vaughan

The Wall

The wall is cracked and broken,
Wire atop just coiled rust,
Potentially falling dust
At the touch of brown fingers
Grasping; but a sigh lingers,
Whispers of fearful yesterdays
Murmurs of unknown tomorrows,
A flood unrestrained,
Of people, of blood, of bullets, of flame.
The Emperor smiles.

Ralph Vaughan

Then Mr Poe Purchases Me A Glass Of Absinthe

He kindly laughs at my twice-told tale, though poorly recounted it was;
Then Mr Poe purchases me a glass of absinthe,
Which gaily catches the flaring gaslamps, shimmering,
Glittering as if distilled from effervescent emeralds;
Manly seeming, though terrified, I toss it down my throat, and it transforms
into...

▣hissing jungle snake

▣seething river of green fire

▣fever-dream that boiled my blood;

Men's faces run as if wax on a searing summer night,

Their eyes huge as full-sailed galleons freighted with gold,

Or leprous pale moons crashing to earth;

▣Your apocalyptic eyes! "

No more a smoky Baltimore tavern,

No more salty mists or soulful Negro dirges,

Just sad sighs from a glassy Atlantic ruled by Kronos,

Where wizened men with meerschaum pipes smoke coarse shag

And sail the tideless sea in high-prowed caravels

Beneath stars no brighter than dying embers;

And the only sound is the measured beats of ravens' wings

Ranging along the sere plutonian shores;

And Mr Poe asks if I'd like another:

▣Yes, please! "

Ralph Vaughan