

# A World Less Paved

Rick Kilpatrick



TRANSCURRENT

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Rick Kilpatrick

Long Beach



2009

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## Foreword

“The poet turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession. For, through that better perception, he stands one step nearer to things, and sees . . . the passage of the world into the soul of man.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

A distinct quality evident within Rick Kilpatrick’s poetry seeks to unlock and interpret the mythic spirit innate in nature. Kilpatrick’s creative process reveals the anxieties that shore up human fears, desires, and truths. As an Emersonian type seer, Kilpatrick guides the reader beyond the realm of the living and into the imagination of the mythic. This type of poetic gaze serves as a medium that bridges human imagination to the known world.

Throughout this collection, Kilpatrick’s perforating vision demonstrates how a poetic seer has the capacity to look beyond the natural world and furnish the reader with a mode of expression and a means to communicate and tolerate the unanswerable, for the imagination seems, at times, to be our only hope of finding answers and ourselves.

The complexity of Kilpatrick’s work stems from the unrefined beauty a reader experiences through the raw, yet powerful images hidden within the compressed brevity of verse. Although levels of ambiguity are contained within the simplicity of the poems’ subjects, Kilpatrick’s myths will remain timeless, for the straightforwardness of his text will be understood by any audience, living in any time period.

Jason G. Casem

January 14, 2009



## A World Less Paved

The places I bring you are not  
in the guidebooks—

here, they are more naked; here,  
the women smother their bodies

with warm red clay, the full-dress  
apostrophes of their uncovered flesh delinquent

with desire—how I long for their embraces. I hear  
their tongues flutter, hisses or moans or tremolos,

throats beaded and feathered with ambers  
and mystery, breasts boisterous, eyelashes

tiny whips against cheeks, fetishes  
jingling from their waists, blood mixing with fire

and dance—who knows what curses beat down  
on the straw roofs of their huts at day's end,

what blessings rise from the hard  
dirt floors? The miasma of voodoo

bloats night like a corpse, gravewinders ululating  
from termite mounds of powdery frass,

dead snakes of their hair flapping  
amongst bones, curling

around gray sounds drawn from the shadows.  
I've learned to crouch near the earth

when sundown collapses, a desert flower  
fearful it will die before the rain.

## A Picture

A woman, kneeling  
as if to weep,  
cupped hands  
to her  
face,  
her feet, bared, crossed  
barely at her toes,  
but no, perhaps a drink?  
She sips  
water from a  
basin: shaped from china clay,  
shaped like  
a birdbath among  
plants and sprays.  
But wait, she's splashing,  
I think she's praying – you  
know, a Buddha thing.  
A garden  
of rocks and a stream  
with bamboo sprigs.  
A tranquil space  
in soft sounds.           And  
now    I see  
a butterfly, on wing,  
near her hair,  
such a quiet place.

**p.s. Wish You Were Here**

*Uganda, 1977*

Guns grow reticent in Kampala.  
A truce is shattered by daylight  
where I wait  
for the other side of night  
and a promise of stillness that holds  
no promise.

The city's ragged edges  
disappear  
to a softer land of red  
ochre soil and swamps  
thick with papyrus

and prophesy as I wait,  
crouched by the side of the road,  
for the bullets  
aimed at my head

in this land of false bottoms  
where the drift of ghosts  
float upwards and the White Nile  
turns red.

Where naked and vulnerable  
I fall through  
one more roadblock,  
angry metal,  
the broken day inside my mind.

Africans huddled together  
avoid my eyes and those of the  
battered others while soldiers,  
their gun barrels  
against my face and ribs, wait  
for my trembling  
stumble

alongside the blood-  
colored shadows walking  
toward me laughing, while  
crocodiles hide among the leafy  
rafts of water hyacinth.

## Sinking Under Down

I've slept with jazz and death  
in this termite city, insomnia's fingers

strangling my nights, unzipping shadows  
of hypnotic impulses, the bruised lips

of consciousness learning  
the language of the saxophone

tracing loneliness onto a sky  
mad with irrelevance. I make a dark path

to the midnight river,  
the staccato bass of traffic slow-

growing like a virus. I live,  
like one of the damned, to appease

the ferryman's wrath  
when I come seeking my own

Eurydice, always  
about to arrive. I engage wives of nightfall,

the percussion of their heels  
gunfire against the sweaty black cobblestones

as they climb away  
from slumberous depths.

Here, everyone is  
a missing person—abandoned,

like the footprints of those who don't  
look back. Here, all my truths are someone else's

lies. I have seen my death  
traveling towards morning. The stars are different, here.

## Ituri, Pygmy Forest

*Zaire, 1974*

Maybe birth is like this.  
The twilight undergrowth  
erupts, burns  
through pin-holed canopies  
deep, red shafts that spatter the sodden  
leaves like flecks of lava  
constellations  
shifting, falling, fire  
against leaf shadows glowing  
the way colors in dreams  
gather weight, create  
sound, stop time—

the jungle is blue,  
suffused with a calm, almost  
glacial cleanliness  
dipped in shivery silver

the moment, a thousand or more  
years old. Crouched with a spear

behind the swollen roots of a fig tree  
a warrior turns himself  
into water, arrows  
will pass  
through him, harmlessly.

Above, monkeys grow still, fall  
silent; an invisible bird flaps away as the sky

cleaves apart, calves  
like glaciers shearing off, crashing  
the forest with reverberate booms  
dislodging a confetti of leaves  
diluted in water-rinsed colors of indigo ink,  
shadows deep as the bluing on a gun,

the rhetoric of storm.

## Mal' Aria: Bad Air

The nightmares have returned:  
a man  
drowning, who cannot  
drown, crazy  
with fever and speaking  
a language I've never heard, my tongue held  
together by narratives  
whose words taste wrong.

I'm a memory of myself,  
an intimate friend  
of insects & venom my forehead  
black steam sweating  
black delirium  
a hallucinated subversive understanding  
as far away from myself as possible.

Which demon should I thank  
among the junipers?

I shiver the dizzy room  
the sun  
the disdain and temerity  
of a self deconstructing  
as night shadows me  
to the walls.

Sometimes my dreams refuse the night,  
the empty, empty sky.

It is raining now in Africa.  
It is still raining.

## Discursive Thirds

This is jazz for me: a low sky  
stained nicotine and rust,  
where the sun recalls nothing

but the fugitive signs of the insomniac,  
night coagulated and claimless  
as the silence hanging heavy

over the city like a dense fist  
of fog, vaporous as perfume.  
The toxic twilight

of heroin lurks in this moment,  
and the moment to come. Everything else  
collapses with the end—

a welcoming tongue, time  
between two words, voices calling  
the language of twisted

spoons over flames, my feet  
dragging my legs, perpetually drowsy  
like cobwebs of smoke, sullen, stoned.

The saccharine walls and hollow smells  
of the sticky streets; the sucking sound of tires  
on wet pavement; the hooker slowly traversing the black

puddles and shadow pools, her lovely swing making  
her hips seem thoughtful like  
venom wine—

these are my blues.

## A Postcard of Ruin

*Bombay, 1979*

*This pipe of opium; rage, remorse, despair;*

*This soul at pawn and this delirious heart.*

—Arthur Symons

Recumbent, I become part of an old man's  
narcotic  
ritual—sedately massaged; stirring  
my existence into impulse and lethargy,  
rosewood and sap:  
molten opium from a clay bowl of fired  
earthenware, small bolus, cylindrical stem;  
long bamboo pipes and tiny pilled  
opium over stream of heat, ruby flames;  
jade lamps vaporize  
fumes now dawdling  
my head, tampering  
my clichés—  
anonymous but symbolic hands  
guide me to that soft moment between sleep  
and slumber, a stygian darkness  
where my worlds collapse, where  
my memories become legends,  
or lies—invisible, pervasive; become myth:  
Oedipus and Sphinx. And there wanders  
  
my imagination, there  
it diminishes.

## A Postcard of Ruin

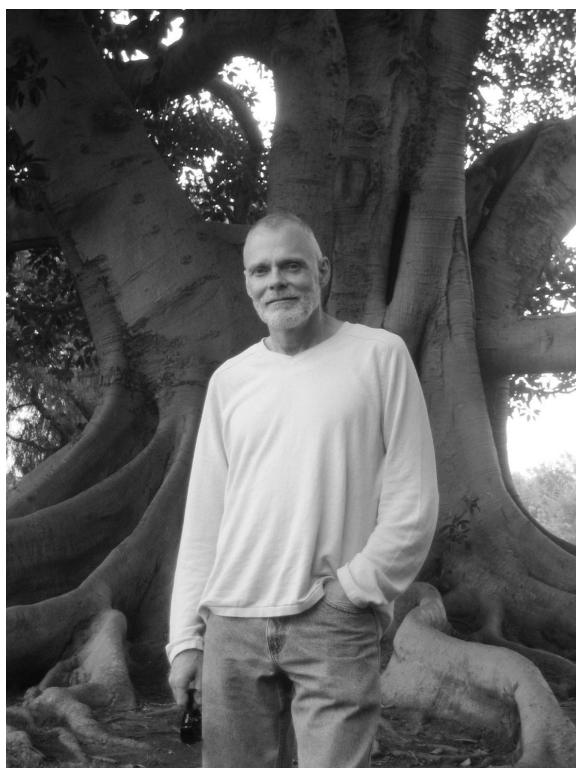
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**R**ick Kilpatrick draws much of his inspiration from experiences accumulated during decades of travel that included seven years in Africa during the 70s and numerous other years in Europe and Asia. “While my poetry doesn’t dwell on the past, it most assuredly is informed by it, and my hope is that others will also be inspired to explore—vicariously, even—through what I write.” Rick’s poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Northridge Review*, *Paper Wings*, *Avocet*, *Urthona Magazine*, *Spot Literary Magazine*, *RipRap*, the *San Pedro River Review*, among others. He is a recipient of the Academy of American Poets’ Honorable Mention award, the Rachel Sherwood Award for Poetry, and an earlier recipient of the Patrons Association Award for Writing.

“Memorable poetry is not a guessing game, anymore than a life dedicated to passionate consciousness. One immediately recognizes the concurrent, genuine presence of both; Rick Kilpatrick's commitment to an accurate, imaginative rendering of his voyages in these remarkable poems will capture your attention, repeatedly.”  
—**Bill Mohr**

“Rick Kilpatrick's poems buzz with haunting detail—a milked moon, inky mouth, powdery frass. Here is a landscape that is as shadowy as it is exact, a lyrical permutation of a journey into the unknown. These poems exist in the ether world of the foreign, a place marked by sensual distance, where certainty must be wrestled out of ‘night bleeding into night.’”  
—**Leilani Hall**

“The bumpy ride that Bette Davis predicted in *All About Eve* had nothing on the journeys undertaken in Rick Kilpatrick's nuanced poems. Face and place that have rarely been given voice are rendered articulate by Kilpatrick's gift for image and narrative, meditation and interrogation of memory and identity.” —**Patty Seyburn**

“Rick Kilpatrick's poems are illuminated as sacred texts once were. His imagery, exquisitely detailed and drawn from nature, aches toward true spirituality: it seeks and inscribes new paths into heart, eyes, mind. This is world poetry as secular prayer, organic and charged with a stirring restlessness.” —**Dorothy Barresi**

“Rick Kilpatrick has fascinating tales to tell. And he has the lyric gift. Do yourself a favor. Read these poems aloud.”  
—**Charles Harper Webb**



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