

This Side

of

No

Return

Poems by Muriel Marvin



This Side of No Return

Many, but not all, of these poems relate to the ten key values guiding the Green Party in its efforts to bring about a more humane, just, and peaceful society in America and worldwide.

As poems are by their nature personal, the reader is reminded not to take them as the official word of the Green Party.

Acknowledgements:

Current, publication of the American River Conservancy: "This Side of No Return"

Because People Matter: "Manifesto"

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Hunt n' Peck Press
2396 Storybook Lane,
Placerville, CA 95667

CONTENTS

This Side of No Return	3
<i>“And let them have dominion . . .”</i>	4
What Goes Around . . .	5
Clear-cut	6
Giant Redwood	7
Serious Business	8
Buried Alive	9
Charity	10
Midway	12
In Retrospect	13
Taken Care Of	14
Unfree	15
Footnote to History	16
Rancheria Flag	17
A Good Life	18
Islanders	19
A Perilous Focus	20
Guilty, as Charged	21
Topkapi Palace	22
The Empire Strikes	23
A Vain Endeavor	23
A Matter of Kindness	24
Christmas in Kathmandu	25
Wouldn't We All	26
Manifesto	27
<i>“undimmed by human tears . . .”</i>	28

THIS SIDE OF NO RETURN

Look well upon this world that lies
before your unregarding eyes.
Look long and well, and memorize
the cobalt blue of alpine skies.

Breathe deep the scent of mountain air,
but touch the upland bloom with care,
and on the trail become aware
of cautious creatures hidden there.

Observe the flash of fin and fur,
recalling living things that were
and are not now. Record the whirr
of downy wings when field mice stir.

Lend ear to call of mourning dove,
of quail below and hawk above,
and keep a while the memory of
a world that dies for lack of love.

"AND LET THEM HAVE DOMINION. . ."

Genesis I, 26

When John Muir walked, enchanted,
across the central plain
of unspoiled California,
his every step crushed flowers.
Where once had lain an inland sea,
a sea of colors met his eyes.
None of us will ever know
the like of it again.
Its vernal pools, wild gardens,
would soon give way to fields,
to orchards, and to vineyards,
from ancient shore to shore.

Now once again the valley
accepts another flood,
a rising tide, engulfing
farmlands in its way.
A spreading sea of rooftops
overflows among our hills,
and settles on the slopes
of John Muir's "Range of Light."
If we, in our dominion
over all upon the land,
can boast of this as progress,
what, then, is decline?

WHAT GOES AROUND. . .

*"I'd rather have a mall
than a red-legged frog."*

– young Placerville woman,
interviewed on Channel 3

You said that,
but I can't believe you meant it.
You'd consign a species to extinction,
a rare and lovely creature with a history
more ancient than our own,
with every right to occupy
its age-old habitat,
a frog that fills its place in Nature's web
as we've forgotten how to do –
you'd do him in,
so you could hang out at a mall?

Don't be surprised if a mosquito,
allowed to live by absence of the frog,
alights upon your arm one summer evening
as heedlessly you saunter toward the mall.

CLEAR-CUT

When a mountain, after fire,
lies naked, like a mangy dog,
we shake our heads and turn away,
dismayed at such a waste.
Yet when we pass a clear-cut patch
ringed by standing trees,
we're told this is good forestry.
Never mind that from the air
the mountain, helter-skelter scalped,
takes on the look of one
who's had a bad haircut,
and we would like to ask,
"good forestry for what?"

GIANT REDWOOD

Tourists swarming at its feet,
Sequoia stands, unmoved,
caring nothing for the crowds
using it as background
for endless photo-ops.
Sequoia has it own agenda
and needs us less
than we need it.

SERIOUS BUSINESS

While Rome burns,
a guest on the noon news
shows us in detail
how to decorate
an Easter-bunny cake
with jelly beans
and coconut.
How cute,
her interviewer purrs,
while we wonder
what's going on
in the real world,
still burning.

BURIED ALIVE

Entombed, our spirits lie,
surrounded by the artifacts
our culture manufactures
to satisfy distorted appetites.
Amid the greatest death
of species since the dinosaurs'
last gasp, amid the waste
of violated farm and forest,
immured by sterile malls,
by asphalt, theme parks, video arcades,
a world of only virtual reality,
we lose ourselves in trivia.

Who among us now can stir himself
and rise to push away the stones
that block him from his rightful
human state?

CHARITY

The fashion comes,
the fashion goes.
The child who makes
our fashion clothes,
who sits all day
to stitch our seams,
without a chance
for play or dreams,
is beaten if
she dares to doze.

A button lost,
a tiny tear,
not good enough
for us to wear,
for we're convinced
that how we dress
can matter much
in our success
but haven't time
to make repair.

And so we give
our clothes away,
to make someone
a bargain day,
and after they've
passed hand to hand,
they're shipped to some
forgotten land
to those who slave
for little pay.

That's how our fashion
clothing ends —
a backhand way
to make amends.

MIDWAY

From these weedy runways bombers roared
on missions long since written
into history books.

Memorials to heroes remind the visitor
of war's grim price in human lives.
Now, in the shadow of rusting guns,
a million courting albatross
make love.

IN RETROSPECT

The Good War, we liked to call it,
as if such a thing could ever be,
when nightly at our plant we reamed
and drilled the parts for Flying Forts
and wore our letter E's with pride.

The planes we helped to build were meant
for bombing factories like ours
with workers in them much like us.

At end of work we tallied up
production of our late-night shift,
pulled on our coats, went home to sleep,

a sleep untroubled by the thought
of tallies in those other factories,
where other shifts untimely closed their day.

TAKEN CARE OF

Once, in a fit of generosity,
our county supervisors
declared the bridge on Weber Creek
a Vietnam Veterans' Memorial
and had a little sign put up
to tell us so. That done, they went on
about their business. No one could say
our men had been ignored.

So now our vets have their own bridge,
its usefulness twofold:
a shelter in bad weather,
or, if the going gets too rough,
a height to jump from.

UNFREE

Who are we
that we may not
determine how
to use our lives?
Are we mere puppets
on a string?
Our masters
make us do their will,
whatever fits their plan.
They stuff our heads
with straw, till we forget
what it was like to think.
We kill for them
and soon forget to feel.
It makes no difference
then to us whose blood
is on our hands.

When our usefulness
is done, they throw us,
broken, on a heap.
They will find more
to take our place.
Puppets come cheap.

FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY

Here, in the Modoc War,
Captain Jack's few ragtag men,
holed up in a maze
of lava outcrop,
held a company of troops
at bay for months.
Soldiers killed in this last
official Indian war
lay here a few years
in shallow graves
before exhumation
and proper burial
at the Presidio.

The native grass grows taller
where they once lay,
staining the land
with silhouettes
of their alien forms.

RANCHERIA FLAG

If their flag flies
over this enclave
of a Native nation,
if it flies higher
there than our own,
what harm?

Let their flags fly
in defiance of conquest,
while we remember
how many of them
have died to uphold
the meaning of ours.

A GOOD LIFE

Though we have never had the Midas touch,
and gaining wealth has never been our aim,
to us it hasn't mattered very much.

Contented, living in our simple hutch,
our life is not monotonous nor tame,
though we have never had the Midas touch.

For you and I, who have no need for such
as many seek, are happy just the same.
To us it hasn't mattered very much.

In social situations we go Dutch,
yet go without embarrassment or shame,
for we have never had the Midas touch.

If money in excess is but a crutch
supporting those emotionally lame,
to us it hasn't mattered very much.

It all comes down to this, that in the clutch
there's more to life than affluence and fame.
Though we have never had the Midas touch,
it really hasn't mattered very much.

ISLANDERS

Proud cocks of Kauai,
scratching and strutting free by the road,
husbanding polychrome harems of hens,
your plumage displaying in brilliant array
bloodlines transported from faraway lands,
how like you are to the folk of Kauai,
spawn of all races, sons of all nations,
scratching a living together in peace.

A PERILOUS FOCUS

The eye of the frog
is on a fly.
He takes no heed
of such as I,
while corporate care
for bottom line
takes no account
of cares of mine.
Big frogs and small
might better see
the wider view,
including me.

GUILTY, AS CHARGED

*“Guns don’t kill people..
People kill people.”*

— National Rifle Association

People do, indeed they do:
parents of small children,
who keep a gun about,
the dealer down the street,
who’ll sell to anyone,
stockholders in the firms
that manufacture guns,
apologists like you,
the NRA. Oh yes, it’s true.
It’s all too true.
People do.

TOPKAPI PALACE

Here, in perfumed gardens,
sultans took their leisure,
strolled about in satin trousers
and turbans, jeweled, peacock-plumed,
as fingering emerald rosaries,
they calculated how to rule
an empire held together
by the Faith, enforced
by martial might and wile.

In that building over there
they met with bearded viziers
and studied how to wring
from subject lands the maximum
in levies, the constant flow of wealth
required to keep court cooks,
caretakers, gardeners,
weavers, tailors,
goldsmiths, jewelers paid,
to say nothing of maintaining
four hundred harem ladies
and pampered offspring
in opulence appropriate
to their station.

Of all that lavish splendor,
no living thing remains
except this ancient plane tree,
now bursting into leaf.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES

Without their oil, we'll surely die,
Condoleeza cries in fear,
to which, undaunted, I reply,
Speak for yourself, my dear.

A VAIN ENDEAVOR

Floating on a stone
in defiance of gravity,
our nation launches
across dark waters,
determined to prove
it alone has the power
to make the world
a safer place —
if only for itself.

Yet, in time,
it, too, must sink,
descending
into the graveyard
of failed empires,
brought down by hubris
and their own
unwieldy weight.

A MATTER OF KINDNESS

If, unaware, a child aborted
is spared a life of misery,
mind and body undernourished,
early death its fate --
what have we denied it,
but the right to death-in-life?
Each child at birth deserves
our iron-clad guarantee
of wise and loving care,
if not from parents, then
from our community.
Lacking this, let no one speak
of every foetus' Right to Life.

CHRISTMAS IN KATHMANDU

A bundle of rags lies in the street,
in the way of crowds hurrying home
to dinner and warmth.

What matter if they know
the bundle of rags shelters a child
from the chill of the night?

It is only another thrown-away child
in a world of too many children.

Better to leave it to die in its sleep,
they say, better to leave it
to die.

WOULDN'T WE ALL

She did not want to leave the world
while there was more to learn
and do. New plants to grow
in her garden, new recipes
from her shoebox full of clippings,
exotic places she had heard
about and longed to see
kept her alive.

But most of all she wanted,
she told me once, straight-faced,
to stay around so she might know
how "everything"
turned out.

MANIFESTO

We are the little people of the world.
To you we're only shadows on your walls,
who tend your aged and your ill,
who clean your homes, serve your meals,
and pick the grapes to make your wine.
We've sewn the clothes you wear,
made your shoes, your children's toys,
while struggling to survive, if only
to work like this again tomorrow.

In our homelands, when your interests
and our own collide, we hide in terror
of your bombs. When our children
lose their limbs to mines you've made,
you look the other way And yet . . .
we learn, we stir, we feel
movement in our midst. Passive
though we seem, we will not sleep
forever.

“UNDIMMED BY HUMAN TEARS”

Let us be true
to the dream
that all may live
with dignity,
their persons and
their minds set free.

Let none be pawns,
in someone else's
game of chess,
at risk to die
to serve a cause
that is a lie.

Let us affirm
the power of peace,
the fruit of justice,
to realize the dream,
when Earth will smile,
and cities gleam.

